

South Korean “New Wild Geese” Mothers Studying in the U.S.:
Balancing between Studenthood and Motherhood

By

Ji-Yeon Lee

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Chairperson: Dr. Kyoim Yun

Dr. Maggie Childs

Dr. Dongbin Kim

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The Thesis Committee for Ji-Yeon Lee
certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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Chairperson : Dr. Kyoim Yun

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Abstract

Over the last few years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of female Korean students in U.S. colleges who are married, have children, and whose husbands are in Korea. This unique phenomenon has few parallels represented by Korean men or other ethnic women in the U.S., and little is known about these Korean women's overseas lives as mothers and students. This qualitative study based on participant observation and interviews with four such women explores the causes of the emergence and increase of so-called Korean "new wild geese" mother students, and their achievements, challenges, and coping strategies while studying abroad. The emergence of these women speaks to the issues of gender, family, and education in the neoliberalizing South Korea where middle-class families cannot any longer afford full-time mothers accompanying their children's early study abroad. While enjoying relative independence in the absence of their husbands and free from their obligations as daughters-in-law, these women who make double investments in their own education as well as in their children's scholastics for the sake of their family's upward class mobility, also struggle between motherhood and studenthood.

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Chapter I Introduction

Despite unstable economic conditions worldwide, many international students continue to come to the U.S. to study English or to pursue academic degrees. These international students are an integral part of U.S. higher education not only because of their 13 billion dollar contribution to the U.S. economy every year, but also because of the research and teaching they do as well as diverse perspectives they contribute to their universities (IIE 2009).

Among the 784,481 international students in the U.S., the number of South Korean students is the second largest after the number one group, the Chinese, closely followed by students from India, according to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement as of June 30, 2011.¹ The University of Kansas (KU) International Scholar and Student Services statistics also shows a similar trend, with 166 Korean students enrolled in KU in 2011. Given that the population of Korea is less than one twentieth of that of China or India, Korea being second in attendance in U.S. colleges highlights the popularity among Koreans of studying abroad.

One of the most interesting changes I have noticed since coming to the U.S. in 2005 is the increase of married Korean female students who come here with their children to pursue a post-bachelor degree while leaving their husbands behind at home. This unique phenomenon has few parallels. Other ethnic women usually do not leave their husbands at home and Korean men do not accompany their children while leaving their wives at home. There have been few studies about these Korean women's overseas lives as mothers and students. This ethnographic study based on participant observation and in-depth interviews with four such women thus explores the causes of the emergence and increase of so-called Korean "new wild geese" mother students, and their achievements, challenges, and coping strategies while studying abroad. These women make double investments in their own education as well as in

¹ Based on the number of registered students in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System.

their children's, and they represent two important aspects of the contemporary Korean society: the popularity of sending children overseas for the sake of their (English) education and the competitive social atmosphere in Korea, where individuals require endless self-development for upward class mobility.

The four new wild geese mothers in my study are different from traditional wild geese mothers in that they are pursuing graduate degrees while raising their children in the U.S. Korean development of transnational families for the sake of children's education began to appear around 1993. It was at this time that Kim Young Sam's government implemented a new policy of globalization and planned compulsory English language education as early as the third grade. A number of K-12 Korean students started to fly overseas in order to be educated in English-speaking countries, and usually the mothers accompanied their children to take care of them while their fathers stayed in Korea and worked to support their families overseas. These fathers are called "wild geese dads" (*Kirŏgi appa*), named after a bird which shows fidelity to his mate and migrates every year, because these fathers often travel a great distance to see their families overseas once or twice a year.² The mothers are called "wild geese moms" who take care of their children as full-time housewives in most cases. Some mothers enroll in community colleges primarily in order to get the benefits of F1(student) visa holders: permission to stay as long as they are students and to enroll their children in public schools in the U.S. (whereas visitor visa holders, such as stay-at-home mothers, are allowed to stay only for several months at a time and have no choice but to send their children to private schools, which cost a lot). In other words, the primary purpose for the wild

² The father who is affluent enough to pay for frequent visits to see his family is called an "eagle dad," and the father who cannot fund his travel abroad is known as a "penguin dad" because he cannot fly and may go without seeing his family for years, thus reflecting the difference in status of the top-tiered eagle versus the less rare penguin.

geese mothers in my study to come to the U.S. is to pursue their own academic degrees and their secondary purpose is to support their children's education in an English-speaking country.

Previous research on wild geese families has focused on the socio-cultural meanings of these Korean transnational families (Cho Uhn 2004, 2005, 2008; Ahn Kwang-bok 2004), the fathers left in Korea (Choi Yang-Suk 2008, Kim Sung-Sook 2006, Uhm Myong-yong 2002), and the children's lives as foreign students studying overseas or as returning students studying in Korea (Cho Eun Suk 2011, Park Jinkyu 2010). Despite the fact that it is the mothers who leave Korea to face the challenges of creating a home for themselves and their children in a foreign country, little academic research has focused on the lives of wild geese mothers who play double roles as full-time students and mothers. It is thus worthwhile to examine these women's lives overseas because it provides insight into this new phenomenon and sheds light on key aspects of Korean society, such as family, gender, and education in terms of traditional values versus modern trends. With these issues in mind, this study aims to answer the following questions: What makes it possible for more Korean mothers to study abroad than before? How are their lives played out as mothers, students, heads of household, and members of their church and local community in the U.S.? What are their achievements, challenges, and coping strategies?

Pre-college study abroad

The emergence of Korean wild geese families is closely related to pre-college study abroad (PSA) (*chogi yuhak*). This term can be defined as the study abroad of first through twelfth grade students who have not yet graduated from a high school, which lasts more than six months (Kim 2005). This phenomenon has been deeply rooted in the powerful status of

English language skills in Korea. It is appropriate here to discuss the background and impacts of PSA on the Korean society in order to better understand my study.

“The Republic of English” is a nickname for Korea, where English language mastery is believed to be one of the most important keys to a successful career, from entering and graduating from prestigious universities to getting a job and surviving in the job market longer than competitors. This competition starts as early as kindergarten for the cultural reason of getting ahead in society. English-language kindergartens are very popular nowadays, despite the cost being several times as expensive as ordinary kindergartens. Interest in private English institutes and tutoring has only increased nationwide, despite the enormous expense involved. Chun and Choi (2006) reported that Koreans spent 15 trillion *won* (approximately 15 billion dollars) for English education in 2005 alone. Moreover, several cities and provinces have competitively built English-language “villages” where Korean learners of English can experience “America” in their home country. Some politicians in Korea have proposed huge investments in public English education in order to gain the popular vote, and various private English education markets keep thriving while taking advantage of this English-language fever (Shim and Park 2008).

Moreover, many Korean families, if they can afford to, have been jumping on the PSA bandwagon by sending their young children to English-speaking countries since the mid 1990s. Usually the students’ mothers go with their children to a foreign country and take care of them while their fathers stay in Korea and work to support their family overseas. If the students are older, around high school age, they are often sent by themselves where they stay with a host family or attend a boarding school. In the past, PSA students had mostly upper-class family backgrounds, but the trend has spread to less well-off classes, resulting in dramatic increases in the number of these students in the 2000s, as shown in Figure 1. Even

though there were PSA students before the 1990s, the number of students was far less than in the latter part of the decade, and these were mostly from upper-class families. It was not until the mid 1990s when PSA programs started attracting the general public's attention with the increase of globalization, in general, manifested by Kim Young Sam's government and with the introduction of English language as a required subject in elementary school in 1997, in particular.

The number of PSA students declined in 1998 because of the Asian Debt Crisis³ that occurred in 1997. Since then, the number of these students increased drastically up to 2006, when nearly four out of every one-thousand Korean students (29,511) traveled overseas for study, fifteen times the figure in 1999 and 0.38 percent of the total first through twelfth grade students in Korea.

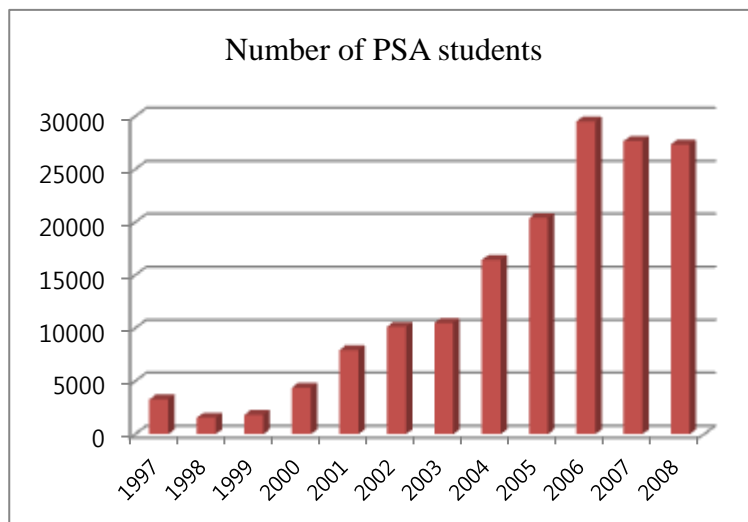


Figure 1. Number of PSA students (1st -12th grades) in Korea from 1997 to 2008 (Kim 2005; KEDI 2010).

³ Koreans are more familiar with the term, IMF (International Monetary Fund) crisis, than Asian Debt Crisis.

More than learning English

The question that remains to be answered is why that many Koreans travel abroad for study. Obviously, the first reason is to learn English more intensely and earlier than others and the best way to learn a foreign language is believed to study it in an immersion environment. Research supports the benefits of early exposure to foreign languages – the earlier, the better. For example, according to the Critical Period Hypothesis, once one passes puberty, it is very hard, if not impossible, to attain a native like fluency in a target language (Lenneberg, 1967). Moreover, people learn from their own experience that younger children learn a foreign language better than older ones or adults. Especially when they witness good proficiency of PSA students returning to Korea they confirm their belief. Sending young children to English-speaking countries for schooling is thus regarded as the best option for parents to secure their children's success in English language proficiency, ideally well before puberty. This view also supports the concept that English language should be taught earlier than the middle school level and. Indeed, in Korea, in 1997 English became a required subject starting from the third grade.

English education in public schools, however, is very limited in terms of class hours. Only three to four hours per week is not enough for students to acquire English skills at the level they need for competitive college and work requirements. Because students need more exposure to an English-speaking environment, students seek private English education. It can be extremely expensive to study English with native speakers of English *in* Korea. Studying abroad in English-speaking countries is therefore not a bad option at all because it provides students with a cultural experience as well, which is hard to get in Korea.

In response to this problem, there was a boom in the construction of English Villages, where people can experience a simulated western environment with restaurants, houses, post

offices, shops, and even immigration offices, without leaving Korea. This project seems to be financially and politically motivated as much as linguistic in nature, because their inception was targeted to address the dilemma faced by parents who could not afford their children's PSA (Shim & Park 2008), and to reduce the investment of these citizens in overseas schools. For example, in 2002, Son Hakgyu, a candidate for the *Kyōnggi* province governor, captured many parents' dilemma by saying, "Sending your child overseas is too costly, and not sending your child breaks your heart," and proposed to "build an English village where one can live with foreigners speaking only English, so that your children can receive an English education that is as practical as sending them overseas" (Son 2002, cited in Shim & Park 2008:151).

It turns out, however, that such English villages have not been successful. Due to the enormous cost of construction and maintenance and low usage by citizens, many English villages have been suffering from a huge deficit. For example, among the three English villages run by the *Kyonggi* province, two have already been taken over by private companies and the last one is very likely to be in the same situation soon because the government cannot afford to deal with the continuous deficits of as much as 4.1 million dollars in 2008, 6.3 million dollars in 2009, and 2.9 million dollars in 2010 (Kim 2011). Shim and Park (2008) claimed that the low usage of English Village by citizens indicated that, through learning English, Koreans are seeking not linguistic competence itself, but the socio-economic and cultural advantages that can be earned through "the symbolic capital of English" (152). Therefore, Koreans do not consider English villages as a workable alternative to PSA because the villages do not provide the prestige of studying overseas. Foreign cultural experience is a key component of study abroad, as is the prestige associated with this level of sophistication and ambition in pursuing an education overseas.

No pain, no gain?

As discussed above, there are benefits that PSA can provide to visiting students, largely English proficiency, global experience, and sometimes improved chances of entering good American universities. On the other hand, it causes some problems. For one thing, it is very expensive. According to Kim (2005), 49.25 percent of survey respondents said that they spent 10,000 to 20,000 dollars per year for PSA and 23.1 percent said they spent 20,000 to 30,000 dollars per year. In addition, 26.2 percent of the respondents replied that their PSA expense is 21 to 30 percent of their annual income. Only those children whose parents can pay these expenses are able to join the PSA programs, whereas other children rely on less-expensive ways of learning English, such as English institutes, worksheets (Park and Abelman 2004) or on-line tutorials. This phenomenon has led to the intensification of the class divide in Korean society. By sending their children abroad with PSA programs, upper-middle class families secure their children's English proficiency, essential to entering respectable universities and getting a good job, while the students from lower socio-economic family backgrounds are likely to have lower English proficiency, and, as a result, it is very difficult for them to find a way to move up from their parents' social class.

Another problem is the enormous difficulties that young students go through in adjusting to the new environment without someone who can adequately take care of their needs. From the analysis of extensive interviews with PSA students, parents, guardians, and teachers in Canada, Cho (2011) found that Korean international students who are doing PSA without parents were suffering from emotional difficulties. She pointed out the main sources of these problems include parents' ignorance about PSA life and unrealistic expectations on their children's performance, lack of quality care by guardians or host families, and the absence of communication between teachers and parents. It should be also noted that PSA

students' difficulties do not just disappear when they return to Korea and to their parents' care. They face the challenge of adjusting themselves back to the highly competitive and intensive Korean school system, which also exhibits a strict attitude about teacher-student relations. In addition, especially for younger students, it is a big problem for these returning students to catch up on their Korean language skills (Park 2010).

These PSA students are not the sole "victims" of this extreme pressure to succeed. Their parents and family members also suffer. For example, after mothers move to English-speaking countries with their children, the fathers are left alone in Korea working to support PSA expenses. It is estimated that there are 500,000 wild geese fathers in 2010 according to *Statistics Korea*. (Kim Kihun 2013). Due to the loneliness and stress involved in managing one's life without a wife, some wild geese fathers have health problems or extramarital affairs, and some in extreme circumstances even commit suicide. It is thus not uncommon in Korea to witness family breakdown caused by the PSA programs. Cho (2005) described emotional toll they take:

A central paradox in the maintenance of Korean *gireogi* [wild geese] families is the fact that the achievement of security for the sake of the children goes hand-in-hand with an increase in emotional insecurity between couples, as well as between fathers and children. As such, parents discuss the sacrifices they make for their children, they eventually reveal their anxiety over the highly volatile Korean economy, as well as the uncertain future of their family relations (25).

These Korean families are seen to willingly embrace hardship for the sake of their children's education, regarding it as insurance or a worthy investment for their future in the unstable Korean economy. This reveals the extent to which neoliberalism is prevalent in the Korean society nowadays. Song Jesook defined neoliberalism as "an advanced liberal mode of governing that idealizes efficiency and productivity by promoting people's free will and self-

sufficiency” (2009: x)⁴. Under this prevailing neoliberal ethos, in which one should assume the responsibility of being a capable citizen in order to secure one’s well-being under less government control and support, Korean wild geese families live apart and send their children and mothers overseas to pursue not only the children’s education, but also the mothers’ advanced education, as is the case with the four women in my study.

Participants and research methods

Among nine possible candidates (Korean female graduate students at KU who are married with children while their husbands stay in Korea), I chose four women based on how well their lives and backgrounds represent the characteristics of new wild geese mothers and how willing they are to share their stories with me. We can classify these four subjects into two groups: one with M.A. students who have full time jobs as English language teachers in Korea and took two years of study leave to come here with their school age children, and the other with Ph.D students with preschool age children whose husbands have finished their degrees earlier and returned to Korea for work.

The two primary methods for this research are participant observation and in-depth interviews. Because the four women in my study and I attended the same university (and even majoring in the same subject in the case of three of them), resided in the same on-campus housing, sent our children to the same elementary or preschools, and (in case of all but one) went to the only Korean church in town, I was able to observe many of their life

⁴ By examining the emergence and practice of the neoliberal welfare state in Korea at the time of the Asian Debt Crisis (1997-2001) and the Kim Dae Jung presidency (1998-2003), she argued that the neoliberal regime divided people into those individuals who were “deserving” and “undeserving” of welfare benefits: the former are those who could become self-sufficient and independent citizens, usually males and youths (who can work for the high technology-information fields, for example), and the latter are those who have been already marginalized, mostly homeless women, who are not surprisingly regarded as irresponsible wives or mothers. That is, even the public assistance system is designed mainly for the people who can quickly rehabilitate and become independent and self-sufficient, not for all citizens who are in need of help to achieve minimally decent standard of living.

events from the first day they arrived until their last day here, when they left for Korea or another state. I had a relatively close relationship with them and built a rapport which allowed me to interview them about their personal stories in a candid manner. All interviews were semi-structured and conducted in Korean.

In addition to the four interviewees, I have been interacting with several other wild geese mothers, all of whom helped me with this research. Korean words in the text are transliterated using the McCune-Reischauer system, with the exception of proper names for whom alternative spellings are well established. Korean names follow the standard order with family name first. The English translations are mine unless other sources are identified.

Chapter outline

This study consists of five chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter Two features the background and experiences of these four wild geese mothers in detail, including their demographic information, motivations for study abroad, and their distinctive characteristics and commonalities. Chapter Three examines these women's lives in the U.S. as mothers. Their satisfaction with their children's education and their status as "mother-at-home" is highlighted. However, they considered their role as a mother to be insufficient, and some even felt guilty about the situation. On the other hand, without their husbands, and in staying away from the in-laws for a period of time, they felt relieved from some traditional obligations as wives and daughters-in-law. Finally, how they coped with the challenges of being "single" mothers in the U.S. is illustrated. Chapter Four presents these women in their own sense of themselves outside of being mothers. Focusing on the three new roles that they assumed when they became wild geese mothers studying abroad, I explore their achievements, difficulties, and coping strategies as full-time students, heads of household and

active members of the Korean church community. In the last chapter, I conclude that although these women are struggling between motherhood and selfhood in order to accomplish their mission of upward class mobility in the neoliberal Korean society, they have also experienced some of the benefits of being independent and in control of their lives. Future research topics are also suggested.

Chapter II “New” Wild Geese Mothers: Killing Two Birds with One Stone

The trend of wild geese families (or Korean transnational families in which the mother and the children live overseas while the father stays in Korea to provide financial support for the family abroad) began to attract Korea’s mass media’s attention and it has been widely covered as an important social and cultural issue since the late 1990s. The elements of the wild geese families that attract media attention include the excessive costs, children’s ill-adaptation to new environments, and family breakdown. Researchers from various academic fields also examined the socio-cultural meaning of the wild geese families, the fathers left in Korea, and the children’s lives as foreign students studying overseas or as returning students studying in Korea. Little academic research has focused on the lives of wild geese mothers who play double roles as degree-pursuing students and as primary homemakers and caregivers. In order to better understand these mothers, it is essential to examine their social circumstances both in Korea and in America. This chapter therefore closely examines who these women are in terms of their social status, motivations, and challenges they face living and studying abroad.

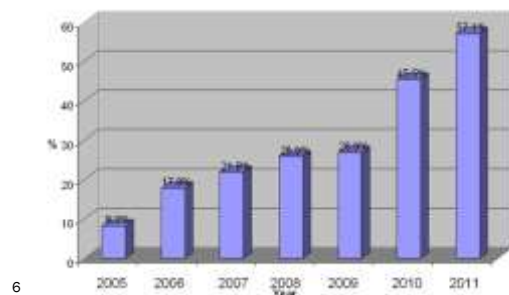
1) “New” Wild Geese Mothers

As Cho Uhn (2004) described, most wild geese mothers are full-time housewives who stay with their children overseas.⁵ They generally have middle- or upper-middle class family

⁵ Based on motivation and backgrounds of the families, Cho (2004) divided wild geese families into five types: (1) The parents have no experience living abroad, but the mother is able to get her own admission in a U.S. school and the father is able to provide financial support for the family living abroad; (2) The fathers and/or mothers have studied or lived abroad previously, where the fathers typically come to the U.S. as overseas branch managers or visiting scholars with their families, and then return home, leaving their family in the U.S.; (3) The children come to the U.S. first to study English, and their mothers visit them with a traveler’s visa and stay with them in the U.S. until the end of their study; (4) The fathers have a business/branch office in the U.S. while living in Korea, and send their wives and children to the U.S., allowing them frequent visits to the family; and (5) The mothers hold permanent residency status and/or the children were born in the U.S., granting them U.S. citizenship.

backgrounds with stable sources of income from their husbands, and most of them are college graduates. Unlike these mothers and other “name-only student” mothers discussed in the previous chapter, my subjects are much more serious about their own education and personal development. The primary purpose for these mothers to come to the U.S. is to pursue their own academic degree while also supporting their children’s English education. As a study-abroad student in the U.S. myself, I noticed that the number of this type of student has increased significantly over the last eight years at my institution. When I came here in 2005, the majority of Korean married women were full-time housewives, whose sole mission was supporting their student-husbands and/or their children. Since then, the percentage of this kind of family has continuously grown among the Korean student-families on campus (Lee 2011).⁶ These student-mothers are aware of the difference between themselves and the more typical wild geese mothers. For instance, one of my interviewees shared her experience of encountering one of these mothers, who enrolled in college yet only worked enough to avoid failing grades and subsequent expulsion:

My family is not a typical wild geese [family]. When we say wild geese [family], that means men work alone to provide financial support and they send the rest of the family overseas. Usually mothers enroll in a school so that the children get a F2 visa and they don’t have to pay tuition, you know. I heard that that’s why there are many mothers who enroll in community college to learn English. ... Here in Kansas, we have only a few of those mothers because it’s not a popular place [for wild geese families, compared to East or West coast regions], but when I traveled to the NASA Museum in Houston, Texas last summer, I met some Korean women.



The percentage of Korean wild geese mother-students among Korean students with family living on campus.

While we were chatting, they told me about how many times they can miss their classes without getting a failing grade. Since I am in an M.A. program, I didn't know about that. A little bit later, they said "Ah-ha! It is you [not your children] who came here to study." They were just trying to keep their [student] visa status by carefully and strategically monitoring the number of absences [to avoid failure]. Paying the mothers' tuition at a community college seems to be cheaper than paying the children's. (Interview with Ms. B on Dec. 2011)

In sharing her experience, Ms. B clearly distinguishes her own case from the case of "name-only student" mothers. The surprised reaction of the "name only-students" toward Ms. B's atypical dual purpose in coming to the U.S. indicates that they too perceive the difference between their motivations and that of Ms. C and others like her.

It is understandable that regional differences in the U.S. are related to the various populations of wild geese mothers. Typical wild geese families prefer to stay in East or West coast regions, largely because of the large Korean communities present on the coasts. This makes it easier for newly arrived mothers to get information, help, and support while living abroad, and to find a community of friends. In addition, many of these established communities are near prestigious universities. The children of these families also benefit because areas near prestigious universities generally have high-quality K-12 schools and test prep schools. But my subjects prefer the benefits of attending a reputable public university in small Midwestern college towns, such as relatively low living expenses as well as a safer environment. Even though they are academically capable enough to pursue a graduate degree at a university in the U.S. of their choice, they are not as affluent as typical wild geese mothers. So these serious student-mothers have family backgrounds and personal motivations that demand they make double investments in both their own education as well as their children's, largely for purposes of upward class mobility.

The four interviewees of this study are divided into two types, mothers with school-aged children and mothers with preschool-aged children. As summarized in Table 1, the

mothers with school-aged children are students in M. A. programs who took a two-year study-leave from their jobs as English language teachers in Korean public schools. They both won a very competitive national scholarship to support their study and expenses abroad, where they use these funds not only for their own study, but also to support the living costs of their school-aged children. The two mothers with preschool-aged children are doctoral students whose husbands were also students in this same institution. Their husbands finished their doctoral degrees earlier than the interviewees either because their program required fewer years to finish than that of their wives (Ms. C), or because they started the program earlier than their wives (Ms. D) and thus returned to Korea for employment.

Table 1. Two types of Korean mother-students in this study and their characteristics
(The information regarding age and the years is as of the time of interviews)

Type	Mothers with school-aged children		Mothers with preschool-aged children	
Subject	Ms. A	Ms. B	Ms. C	Ms. D
Pursing degree	M.A.		Ph.D.	
Academic program	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages(TESOL)		Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS)	TESOL
Age	42	43	36	39
Children's age	9,12	7,11	1,4	3, 7
Job	Elementary school English teacher	Middle school English teacher	Ministry of education (in the past)	Private institutes (in the past)
Work period	15 years	16 years	6 years	A few years
Employment	Taking a two-year study leave		Quit their job to raise a child and/or support husband's study abroad	
Financial aid	Government scholarship from Korea		GRAsip	GTAsip
Years in KU	2		3	3

Who initiated their study abroad?	self	husband
Major reason for parents-in-law's support	Children's English study abroad	Not favorable situation for study abroad but expect to get a good job

The importance of examining these mothers is closely related to the understanding of changes in Korean society in recent decades, many of which reflect worldwide trends regarding women's roles and rights. Was it possible in the 1960s or the 1970s for Korean wives to leave their husbands alone and travel with their children to the other side of the world to advance their own academic degrees? The chances were indeed very slim, if not impossible, given that the demarcation between traditional women's roles as housewives and men's roles as breadwinners was very clear. The most popular ideology of an ideal womanhood in society was presented as being a "wise mother and good wife," a concept promoted at the turn of the twentieth century through what has been identified as a "convergence of Chosŏn Korea's Confucian notion of *pudŏk* ("womanly virtue"), Japan's Meiji gender ideology of *ryōsai kenbo* ("good wife and wise mother"), and American Protestant missionary women's ideology of domesticity in mission schools" (Choi Hyeweol 2009).

This emphasis in Korea on women's obedience to the head of the family and confinement within the domestic sphere was challenged in 1990s during the blossoming of Korean feminism, as more and more women pursued their own professional jobs and expanded their boundaries to opportunities outside of the home. But this blossoming of women's rights ended shortly after it began, when the International Monetary Fund's economic crisis struck Korean society in late 1990s. As Song Jaesook (2009) argued, "The feminist discourse on women's independence was severely contested ... in the face of the

national emergency” and “[women were] forced to retreat to private domains” (51). Even though many more women than men were laid off during the national crisis, the loss of the fathers’ jobs and, in turn, their economic power were considered more serious while the traditional women’s role as subservient and obedient individuals promoted in Confucian patriarchal ideology was emphasized (Park So Jin 2009).

So what made it possible for more mothers to study abroad than before at the expense of their roles as wives? How did they get “permission” from their husbands, parents, and even parents-in-law, who could not even imagine their sons cooking for themselves after marriage? One of the most important factors that enabled women to travel abroad was the increased importance of their children’s English education. Other family members thus came to support these women’s education in English-speaking countries because it provides their children or grandchildren with a pre-college study abroad (PSA) opportunity, and a chance to learn English in an immersion setting. As discussed above, PSA with an F1 visa-holding student-mother costs much less than general PSA, making it appealing to families of lesser means. Moreover, it is agreed among family members that the mothers’ advanced education would greatly benefit the family by enhancing her value in the job market, and in turn, the family’s upward class mobility.

2) Mothers with School-aged Children

From interviews with mothers who have school-aged children, I see PSA as an important factor for their emotional support from family members. They secure their extended family members’ endorsements more than mothers with preschool-aged children. The mothers with school-aged children thus take advantage of the PSA boom in order to benefit their own study-abroad experience. In the case of Ms. A, who worked as an elementary school teacher

in Korea for fifteen years, her husband had been present during the first year of her two-year study at KU. At the time of the interview, she lived with their ten year-old son and seven year-old daughter, as her husband, a university professor on sabbatical leave, returned to his job in Korea. Ms. A's study abroad was funded by the Korean government. She described how fortunate she was because she could study abroad with her family, especially with her two school-age children:

I was lucky because my husband took his sabbatical year at the same time I started my study abroad. He helped a lot in the first year when I needed to adapt to the new environment. And my children's ages were just perfect [for PSA]. So many people were envious and jealous of me . . . Any objections from my parents-in-law? Why would they disagree with this great opportunity? Most of all, this is good for my children. They can improve their English. (Interview with Ms. A)

Regarding the ideal age for PSA Ms. A noted, it is widely believed that elementary school children benefit the most. If a child is younger, he or she may not retain his or her English language after returning to Korea, but it is much more difficult for an older student to acquire a foreign language.⁷ More importantly, it would be very hard for them to prepare for the very high standards of the Korean college entrance exams if they studied abroad during middle or high school. Right after mentioning the benefits of her children's English education in the U.S., Ms. A clearly addressed another reason for her study abroad: personal and intellectual development in understanding more about her field:

Also, this opportunity is a good stepping stone for self-realization. I have studied English on my own for a long time, but it was not effective. Therefore, I really wanted to have an academic and theoretical foundation for studying and teaching English. I wanted to find out what the professors here are thinking about English education. (Interview with Ms. A on Dec. 2011)

⁷ According to the Critical Period Hypothesis and studies in brain development, older learners of a second language rarely achieve native-like fluency.

According to Cho (2002), this generation of women is well educated and has a strong desire for personal development as scholars and professionals in their own right, while their grandmother's generation is described as "motherly women" and their mother's generation as "modern wives."

Like Ms. A, Ms. B is also pursuing her M.A. in TESOL and has been teaching English in Korean middle schools for sixteen years. She came here in the summer of 2010 with her nine- and five year-old sons while her husband was working in Korea. She won the same kind of scholarship as Ms. A, where her tuition and living expenses were covered by the Korean government. She explained that other family members agreed that she should study abroad, but only because of the strict two-year time limit granted by the government scholarship policy, and the importance of her children's English education:

It seems that I am a little bit different from other wild geese families. Usually they said that they planned to stay for one or two years when they came here, but as time goes on they think that if they stay a little longer their children's English will be a lot better, so they extend their period. One year becomes two years and two years becomes three years, like that. And sometimes this causes social problems, such as deterioration of the family. But in my case, I *have to* go back to Korea in two years, and am required to work at least two more years in the same institution where I used to work. If not, I will have to reimburse all the money I received from the government. Therefore, my husband said that he would be okay with me going as long as it was only two years. My parents-in-law also allowed me to study abroad because I brought the kids, I guess. If I had said I wanted to study abroad by myself, they would have opposed it. (Interview with Ms. B on Dec. 2011)

It is not uncommon for wild goose families to extend their stay in the U.S. for a year or more than they planned (Cho 2004). As Ms. B distinguished herself from a "name-only student," she also differentiated herself from other wild geese families who extend their stay overseas for the sake of their children's English language improvement. Regarding her own self-development, Ms. B expressed her aspiration of "cosmopolitan striving" (Park and Ablemann 2004) or acculturation, whereas Ms. A showed her strong desire to study

English educational theory and practice in the U.S. in addition to advancing her children's English language skills:

Personally, my first purpose for studying abroad was not studying [per se], but living in a different culture. ... I have always wanted to live in a culture other than Korea before I die. That's why I came here, and plus, English training for my kids. (Interview with Ms. B on Dec. 2011)

These mothers clearly show their double desire during their study abroad: their children's English training and personal advancement. As an English teacher, Ms. A wants to build a firm academic foundation about English education, and Ms. B mentioned that she always dreamt of living in another country.

3) Mothers with Preschool-aged Children

Ms. C is a doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies whose four-year-old daughter is living with her in the U.S. and her eight month-old son, at the time of the interview, was living with her husband and parents-in-law in Korea. She came here in 2009 with her daughter and her husband, a doctoral student in law school. Her husband went back to his job in Korea with their infant son in the summer of 2011 after finishing his degree. Her two sisters-in-law had been doing PSA in a boarding high school, which is located one hour from KU in Lawrence, Kansas. Ms. C started her study abroad because her husband encouraged her to study and, importantly, she won a scholarship to cover her tuition and living expenses. But unlike others interviewed, she did not gain her parents-in-law's approval to study abroad. If she had a school-aged child, it would have been easier for her to gain their support:

My parents-in-laws do not understand why I want to study abroad. In fact, they did not know that I was also studying here [as well as her husband] in America for the past two years until my mother-in-law visited here [last year]...Because she did

not know I was studying, she sent my sisters-in-law as PSA...Now my parents-in-law are raising my baby boy and it's very hard, you know. So they don't like me. They said that I'm cold-blooded and I have no maternal instinct. (Interview with Ms. C on Dec. 2011)

Without school-aged children who can benefit from PSA, Ms. C is struggling with the traditional patriarchal system that is revered by older generations and influences younger generations. Her parents-in-law expected that she would work hard as a housewife in order to take care of her husband, children, and even her two sisters-in-law, who visit her home in Lawrence every weekend. Even though her parents-in-law sent their daughters as PSA students, it seems that they did not think that their four year-old granddaughter's English training is a good enough reason to support Ms. C's study abroad. Ms. C also seems to be skeptical about the effectiveness of her daughter's English learning:

I think she is too young. People say that she will quickly forget English when she goes back to Korea because she is only four years old. At least one should be able to *read* or be an elementary school-aged student [in order for their English learning here to be effective]. (Interview with Ms. C on Dec. 2011)

Ms. C explained how she started to study abroad and emphasized that it is not easy for Korean women to do so:

I came here to study abroad because my husband came to study abroad. Even though what I am majoring in now is not what I studied for my M.A. degree, which is adult education, I had no choice. This school is the only university that both my husband and I have been accepted to. I earned my M.A. degree in 2001 and worked for the Ministry of Education for six years until I quit the job because of delivering and raising my daughter. So I have longed for my own self-development. Other single friends keep building up their careers, but I couldn't. Of course, it was not easy to decide to study abroad. But fortunately, I got a tuition waiver and scholarship, so I started. If I had to pay all the money, only my husband would have studied because, you know, men's study is more important than women's. After all, it is men who need to get a better job. That is what Koreans believe. Men are breadwinners. No man would follow his wife and come here just to support her study. (Interview with Ms. C on Dec. 2011)

Ms. C's narration clearly describes the reality of patriarchal Korean society. Without the PSA premium, it is difficult for a married Korean woman to study abroad. Unlike their female predecessors, whose two primary functions were to produce sons and to provide domestic labor under Neo-Confucian patriarchy, modern Korean women, along with others outside of Europe and the U.S., have been influenced by the "Western model of courtship, marriage, and gender relations" such as "the ideology of gender egalitarianism and of romantic love as a basis for a marriage" (Chong 2008:63). It does not take long, however, for them to realize that changes in ancient and embedded traditions do not come easily, and the Neo-Confucian patriarchal family system still remains in place. And there are many burdens placed on their shoulders as soon as they get married.

Ms. C's story presents two patriarchal thoughts prevalent in Korea. First, the family structure is male-centered and their success is prioritized over women's. Secondly, women's primary role is to take care of the family inside the confines of the home, where parents-in-law often exercise more authority than in Western cultures. For example, Ms. C quit her job after marrying in order to raise a family. She had no choice of universities except the one her husband attended, because she is expected to remain with her husband so she can take care of the family. It is due to these traditional social norms that there is no male counterpart to the wild geese mothers. Usually no fathers are expected or supposed to study abroad with their children while their wives stay in Korea to work in order to support the family financially. It is taken for granted that mothers, not fathers, should stay with and care for their children. There have been a few father-students study abroad at KU, but in these cases, their school-aged children stay in Korea with their working mothers. It is the same structure in which one spouse is pursuing an academic degree abroad while the other is working in Korea for financial support, but the children still always stay with their mothers. Thus even though PSA

is a critical factor for married women's study abroad, it does not override the typical gender norms in Korea.

Ms. D had been a full time housewife who took care of her husband and her children until she resumed studying in America in 2009. Several years ago she and her husband were in the same M. A. program at another university in the Midwest, but the family could not afford to continue financing Ms. D's study along with that of her husband and their two children. Only her husband continued to pursue his Ph. D degree. A few years later, however, when her husband had almost finished his degree, he encouraged her to begin studying again. In fact, he was "more actively pushing her to return to school than she was herself." For example, he babysat their daughters for a month and a half in order to give her time to study for the GRE. Yet despite her husband's unusual level of support, Ms. D did not feel comfortable enough with the arrangement to inform her parents-in-law:

I did not tell my parents-in-law that I was going to begin studying again because I knew they wanted us to come back to Korea as soon as possible. My husband is the only son, so, you know. Moreover, like most Korean parents [of study abroad students], they had been worried a lot about him securing a job in Korea after he finished his degree. But he got a job, so now they think something good will happen for me when I finish my study, too. [Without his success] I could have not told them that I planned on continuing my studies. (Interview with Ms. D on Dec. 2011)

Like Ms. C, Ms. D's study abroad after marriage was initiated by her husband. Yet this wasn't considered until his degree was almost finished. Her case confirms Ms. C's remarks that men's studies are prioritized over women's. In addition, Ms. D also was reluctant to let her parents-in-law know about her plan to continue her studies. Most parents-in-law would not be pleased if their daughter-in-law spent time, energy, and money on her own studies that could be used for caring for their son, grandchildren, or themselves. This is particularly potent in Ms. D's situation, as her husband is the only son in his family. In this context, Kelly

Chong (2008) stated that “the traditional ties and mutual obligations between parents and sons still remain quite strong” (78) in contemporary Korean society—particularly the obligation for sons to take care of their aging parents. Being a wild goose mother-student, it is even more difficult for Ms. D to meet her parents-in-law’s expectations as the wife of their only son. But they did not oppose her studying abroad after her husband secured a job, hoping that the investment in her studies will also bring a worthwhile reward. This aging generation in Korea is therefore adapting to the idea that it is the family, not a society or government, who is responsible for maintaining or upgrading its own socio-economic circumstances.

Of course, it is not a new development and it has been always the case that Korean families put considerable efforts on “rising in the world and gaining fame” (*ipsinyangmyǒng*). However, this idea of family’s responsibility for success has been intensified during and after the Asian Debt Crisis. Many fathers lost their job overnight and Koreans realized that they cannot rely on their fathers, the company or the government, who will not and cannot take full responsibilities on individual families any more. It turns out that, therefore, all family members try to maximize their commodity values, even though sometimes that means sacrificing a traditional gender role.

4) Capable and Practical “Education-manager” Mothers

Even though each subject interviewed has a different family background, motivation for studying abroad, and experiences living overseas, they share characteristics in terms of their financial security, residence type, and children’s education. They are all capable of managing

their financial needs, make a choice of living on campus, and practice the role of children's education manager, as most Korean mothers are expected to do.⁸

Financial Security:

All of the four mothers were able to secure financial resources for their studies by winning a very competitive national scholarship from Korea or a GRA/GTAship from the university. This stable financial status, though not making them affluent, is a very important factor for their studies abroad because, as Ms. C mentioned, the husband's study is more important than the wife's in a Korean family. In fact, all the educational investment in a household with limited finances is usually for the father and the children, and if there is still remaining funds, the mother can pursue her educational opportunities. Yet despite the increase in the number of women pursuing higher education, and the improvement in women's status in society, married Korean women are still expected to be a "wise mother and good wife" rather than a successful person outside of the home.⁹ It is generally accepted that husbands need a higher academic degree and a better paid job, while the children need to be enrolled in a good test prep institute and have good tutors. Mothers are the ones who ensure these family members' success in order to maintain or enhance the family's social and financial status.

Yet it should also be noted how hard these mothers have worked (Ms. A and Ms. B) or have been working (Ms. C and Ms. D) to earn those competitive scholarships. Regarding the two mothers' Korean government scholarship for teacher's study abroad, it is awarded to only one teacher per province or metropolitan city each year. The recipients have excellent English exam scores, more than fifteen years teaching experience, and outstanding

⁸ Park So Jin (2007) named contemporary Korean middle-class mothers "Education manager" mothers, who play the newly intensified maternal roles for children's education in the context of Korea's neoliberal transformation.

⁹ Chong (2008) reported that the rates of formal workforce participation by Korean married women are the lowest among the East Asian neighbor countries, Japan and Taiwan.

achievement in their careers, such as winning class teaching or research contests. Ms. A, for example, said she had to successfully “accumulate all the points possible for five years in order to win the scholarship.” As doctoral students, the other two mothers work as graduate research assistants or teaching assistants. This pays for their tuition as well as providing a bi-weekly stipend. The competition to get these jobs is very intense, and it is even more challenging to keep these positions throughout their studies. These mothers have no choice but to keep working hard in order to secure this financial resource, as well as to work on their own studies, take care of their children, and do the housework.

Living on Campus:

My four interviewees lived in apartments for married students on campus. Despite some drawbacks of these living conditions, such as old buildings with low-quality insulation and no washers or dryers inside of the apartment, they chose to live there because of three particular advantages. Firstly, an on-campus apartment provides a safe and child-friendly environment. The safety of their children is the primary concern for these wild geese families because the fathers, who are regarded in Korea as the protector of the family, are not present. On-campus housing is an ideal place because all their neighbors are married and/or graduate students and most of them have children. In addition, there are large lawns and several playgrounds available for their children to play freely and safely outside the home.

Secondly, married-student housing is located near the main campus where they have classes. It takes very little time for these mothers to commute to classes, which is a huge benefit, as they are always juggling their time between studying, child care, and household chores.¹⁰ Moreover, there is a university-affiliated preschool right next to the apartment

¹⁰ Wild geese mother-students’ time management issues are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

complex. Ms. C and Ms. D send their daughters to this daycare, where they are very satisfied with the service, especially with the proximity as well as the quality of care.

Finally, wild geese mothers can find a compatible community. They help each other, notably by taking turns babysitting after school. All of my interviewees are students in the School of Education, which offers many evening courses to accommodate full-time teachers. It is therefore necessary for these mothers to find a dependable babysitter while they attend classes. Wild geese mothers thus take turns babysitting each other's children based on their class schedules. It is obviously very convenient to drop off their young children and pick them up from a location within walking distance. The children also feel comfortable in these home environments and enjoy spending time with other Korean children. Another important consideration is that these shared babysitting options do not cost money.

“Education manager” Mothers

Challenges most married Korean women face in their own country are numerous, and include serving their parents-in-law, taking on the heavy responsibilities of ancestor worship, and living up to the expectations of deference to their mother-in-law concerning family matters. In addition, as Kelly Chong (2008) pointed out, most married women have new responsibilities in contemporary Korean society, that of “status-production” and “intensive mothering.” This is exemplified in the strong emphasis on their children's education. Based on the Confucian value of emphasis on learning, Korean mothers have an unusual zeal for education, which is commonly called the “diploma disease.” Having a good educational background or attending a prestigious college is a, or often “the,” key to success in Korean society, as is the case in many cultures. As soon as they give birth, many middle class Korean mothers' primary interest is how to facilitate their children's education to the point that they

can gain admission to Seoul National University. Even elementary school students' mothers are supposed to be aware of up-to-date information about the college entrance exams and private exam preparatory institutions, as well as how to access exceptional English and math tutors.

My interviewees are no exception. They are all very concerned about their children's education. As public school teachers, Ms. A and Ms. B are well aware of the problem of Korean mothers' excessive zeal for education, but they are also worried about the complications for their children caused by a two-year "gap" in the curriculum between Korean and American schools, where U.S. standards are not as rigorous. These anxious mothers carefully monitor their children's self-study for core subjects according to Korean schools' curriculum, as well as the improvement of their English. Ms. C and Ms. D were very doubtful that their children, who have not experienced the Korean education system (unlike Ms. A and Ms. B's children), will be able to adapt to Korean school standards and make friends easily once they return to Korea.

5) Conclusion

In summary, my subjects are Korean wild geese mothers who are serious about their own education as well as their children's. Two of them are M. A. students taking a two-year leave from their jobs as English teachers. With school-aged children, they take advantage of PSA by "killing two birds (their children's English education and their own self-realization) with one stone." The other two mothers are doctoral students whose husbands encouraged their wives to obtain degrees at the same time, or after finishing their own degree. Because they do not have school-aged children, they do not get benefits from PSA. These mothers are even more struggling with the pressures of traditional patriarchal norms without much "approval"

of their parents-in-law, but their studying abroad is not necessarily opposed by their families. Even if their pursuit of a degree is not supported by their parents-in-law, the hope of upward class mobility is enough for their parents-in-law to accept their study abroad. Their commonalities in terms of financial support, choice of residence, and concern about their children's education also show various aspects of patriarchal and neoliberal Korean society, where all must adjust to the new realities of global economics, the increasingly important role of English language, and the norms of equality for women that are part of modern culture.

Chapter III: Motherhood

All four of the wild goose mothers in this study are married. They all have two children, are economically stable with their and their husband's incomes, if not affluent, and they are academically capable of pursuing a graduate degree in the U.S. Based on traditional gender norms, Korean women are expected to marry, have children, and raise a family. In addition to these expectations, contemporary Korean society expects women to work outside of the home for additional but indispensable family income. While conforming to these responsibilities, many women also have the desire for self-realization, which often translates as getting more education. This may include pursuing a graduate degree and/or study abroad. Given these expectations and aspirations, being a mother-student in the U.S. demonstrates the potential or ability to achieve major socially and personally constructed goals early in life. I have found, however, that these mothers have made even more achievements while staying in the U.S. At the same time, they struggle with new challenges with their children being away from their native Korea. These achievements, challenges and coping strategies, particularly as a mother, are highlighted in this chapter.

1) Children's Education

In Korea, one of the most important roles of a mother is to "manage" her children's education (Chong 2008:79; Park 2007, 2010). It is true that most Korean mothers' "glory" depends on their children's academic success. In Korea, academic success is measured largely by which prestigious university one attends and, in turn, what career one practices. Working as a professional such as a medical doctor, lawyer, university professor, high-ranking government official, or working as a white color professional for a big conglomerate like Samsung or LG are highly valued. In order to enter the top-tier universities and get a job to start a desirable

career, English language skill is one of the most important factors, therefore, one of the key achievements for these wild goose mothers is that their children's English significantly improves after a few years of residing in the United States. These mothers carefully observe their children's English progress. They make detailed statements rather than just offering a general impression about their children's English acquisition.

Ms. A, mother of a 9 and 12 year-old, was very proud of her children's success in English, particularly in terms of speaking and listening. She attributes this accomplishment to the amount of time that her children spend daily using English in the U.S. She stated:

I knew that PSA would improve their English before I came here. But after one year passed, I was suspicious, and thought, would it work? It seemed that my children's English didn't improve. However, after one and a half years had passed, they started to speak English without hesitation, very naturally. So I realized that, a-ha!, we need to "fall into the sea [of English]."¹¹ In fact, it is not possible that their English would not improve given that they have to use English for seven to eight hours per day in order to manage school. (Interview with Ms. A)

Ms. A continued to describe her children's improvement in English in detail with great joy:

My younger one wanted to say something in English and started to imitate the sounds of English within six months [after we came here]. I know that my older one does not easily adapt to a new environment and does not try something unless he is one hundred percent sure, so he was reluctant to express himself. But one day, when I happened to be listening to his conversation with friends, he said everything he wanted to say [in English] even though he has some accent. So I realized the value of our two years here. (Interview with Ms. A)

Ms. A even analyzes the reason for the children's success and indicates the importance of "falling into the sea of English" or studying English in the immersion environment. Ms. B also articulated in detail how her two children's English had improved, but unlike Ms. A, she focused on reading and writing skills and suggested other reasons for their improvement:

¹¹. *Yōngdōūi padae ppattūryōra* (*Push the children into the sea of English*) (Ha Kwangho 1995) was a bestseller in the mid and late 1990s when the interest in PSA began to blossom in Korea.

emphasis on creative self-expression in American elementary schools and her own effort to develop the children's schemata¹² in the past. She stated:

My first son used to attend an English institute in Korea, and he hated writing in English. But I found he wrote two thirds of a page [of something in English] one day, and sometimes more than one page! I understand that one of the important characteristics of American education is the emphasis on self-expression. I'm glad that it works since he didn't like to express himself before. His reading has improved, too, even though it's not as much as I want. He said he can understand Harry Potter books.

It is my younger one who has improved the most. He only knew the English alphabet and ten percent of the sound-letter correspondence in phonics before he came here. I talked with his teacher at the parent-teacher conference a few weeks ago. He is now in the last trimester of his first grade, but I am told that his reading level is that of the end of third grade. In fact, he is one of the only two students who are assigned to the advanced reading group in his class. That is great given that there are many native speakers of English in his class. I think that's probably because I have read a lot of books to him when he was a baby. I believe my reading helped him to create plentiful schemata, and, in turn, helped him to improve his reading in English. His writing is also good—though I noticed quite a few grammar errors. (Interview with Ms. B)

Ms. B closely describes the personality of her two sons and the degree and areas of English skill improvement for each child. Some may argue that these mothers pay close attention to children's education and observe their progress in detail because they are experienced English teachers in Korea. However, they are also very typical Korean mothers, in that they are practicing intensified maternal roles in their children's education in order to accomplish their mission of upward class mobility in the highly competitive Korean society (Park 2010). In fact, despite their children's significant improvement in English, both Ms. A

¹² Schemata are the underlying connections that allow new experiences and information to be aligned with previous knowledge (McCarthy 1991:168). Earlier ways of interaction with reading material are built upon connecting ideas from both first and second languages to facilitate understanding (Landry 2002). Here Ms. B believes that her efforts of reading books to her son when he was young helped him to achieve high proficiency in English reading skills.

and Ms. B are not sure that they are doing a good job as an “educational manager” mother. They worry about their children being able to adapt to the highly competitive atmosphere in Korean schools when they return. With this worry, Ms. A mentioned that she made their children study four major subjects (Korean, math, social studies and science) according to the Korean curriculum for two years in the U.S. Ms. B also wisely prepared for her children’s return to Korea so they would not fall behind their future Korean classmates. She stated:

When they return to Korea, math is the biggest problem. Korean students study not only what they learn in school, but also what they are going to learn in advance by mastering several workbooks. My older son is in fifth grade, but he is almost finishing a seventh grade math workbook now. I made him study materials at least two years ahead when we were in Korea, and I continued to do so after we came here. This winter he will start eighth grade math...I saw many [returning] students and learned that a two- or more-year gap is really challenging, so I brought every kind of book for my children, as many as seven boxes. Most of the books at home here in the U.S. are Korean books. (Interview with Ms. B)

As a school teacher, Ms. B is well aware of the problems of students returning from PSA. In particular, research shows that they face the challenge of readjusting to the Korean school system. It is common, especially for these younger students, to be behind in Korean language skills (Park 2010) and other major subjects. Therefore, it is not surprising that mothers of PSA students try hard to keep their children’s academic progress on the right track, conforming to the Korean education structure. As Kang and Abelman (2011) claimed, “PSA has thus been domesticated in that it is understood not as a discrete education field abroad, but instead an extension of South Korea’s highly stratified and competitive education market” (89). In sum, one of the most important achievements for these mothers is their children’s educational success not only in English but also in preparation for returning to Korea.

2) Mother-at-home

Despite their busy schedules and multiple responsibilities, these mothers have no choice but to spend evenings and the weekends with their children, because there are no other adults available when the children come back home from school or the daycare center. My interviewees revealed that they regard the opportunities to play the role of “mother-at-home” very highly. When these women were in Korea, they did not have much time to stay home with their children, primarily because they work full time and partly because children also stay outside of the home until late, due to extra lessons in private academic or art institutes. If the kids are not old enough to go to school, they are taken care of by their grandparents or a babysitter while their mother is at work. Generally, Korean children have very limited time to spend with their working mothers, let alone their fathers. The four interviewees’ children were no exception to this lifestyle before coming to the U. S.

Only after they came here were these wild geese mothers able to (or had to) arrive home before their children came from school and to greet them by saying, “Did you have a good time at school?” These mothers are very thankful for the opportunity to spend more time at home. Ms. D said:

I was very busy during the (past) summer semesters because I was taking three courses and teaching one class, but I was able to be with my kids in the evening. That was very good. If I had worked in Korea, I would have to work late and my kids would have been at their grandparents’ until nighttime.

As at-home mothers, they cook more often than they did while in Korea, where many restaurants or ready-made foods are always available at reasonable prices. As a result, they said that their cooking skills improved while in the U.S. Ms. B was told by her sons that she could even open her own Korean restaurant. In addition to being a hard-working student and education manager of her children, these mothers are satisfied with being a mother who waits for her children at home and serves them homemade meals.

These mothers' presence at home is important in that their children, like the mothers themselves, are also studying in a foreign country, speaking a non-native language. In fact, the mother's presence with their children overseas is a significant factor for children's success in PSA. From the analysis of extensive interviews with PSA students, parents, guardians, and teachers in Canada, Cho (2011) found that Korean PSA students without parents present suffered from emotional difficulties and lack of self-control, because it is very challenging for them to adjust to the new environment all alone. With her interest in PSA as her research topic, Ms. D discusses the importance of mothers or parents accompanying their PSA students:

Some PSA students are lucky if they come here with their parents, but some of them have just legal guardians. We don't need to worry or discuss the former case, in which the family has enough cultural and financial capital to support their children's PSA. But the problems lie in the latter, in which parents just jump on the bandwagon of PSA and send their children abroad without much information... When PSA students stay with their parents, the parents can be a bumper and protect them from lots of stress as a foreign student, such as culture shock. But many people regard PSA as a panacea, thinking "Even though you are not a good student in Korea, you can become a good one in America, or even though your English is not good, you will be fluent if you go to America." But you know that there are PSA students who have difficulties with their life overseas and some even committed suicide. Quite a few researches about PSA are out there and it seems that the appropriate care [from their parents] is the most important thing.

As Ms. D mentioned, not all PSA students' families can afford sending their children with their mothers overseas. Even though some non-student mothers try to stay in the U.S., their (travel) visa status does not allow more than a few months in the country, so they go back and forth from Korea and the U.S. or resort to asking guardians to take care of their children. As a student visa holder, however, the mothers in my study do not need to worry about this problem. They are able to stay legally in the U.S.

throughout their study while supporting and paying close attention to their children in the same place.

3) Not Enough

Even though the mothers interviewed feel good about spending more time with their children here than they could in Korea, at the same time, they feel that the current situation is still not enough. Especially, the mothers of preschoolers feel sorry that their children have to be in day care, whereas those with full-time housewife mothers or those who live with both parents are at an advantage.

Ms. D's own mother was a full-time housewife when she was young. She said that she is sorry for her children because she cannot do the same things for them as her mother did for her: always being available at home. Ms. D acknowledges that she does spend more time with her kids here than in Korea, and even the quality of their time together is much better. But she mentioned that it is still not enough when she compares herself with other housewives around her, who are committed to their student-husband and children's academic success and take care of all domestic matters. She wishes she could spend more time taking care of her children. Interestingly, Ms. D had been a full-time housewife for three years here before she started her studies. She fully supported her husband's study and raised her children like the other housewives around her. Ms. D started her graduate program only after her husband had almost finished his dissertation. At the time of the interview, her husband was working in Korea and she was pursuing her doctoral degree with two children. Even though she had worked hard at home for her family while even postponing her study for the past three years, and she was carrying multiple responsibilities as a student and mother of two children, she still felt concern for her children. She stated:

I am studying because I want to, but I am sorry for my children. For example, my older one does not like to go to the after-school program, but I told her to do so, saying that you should be there and you cannot be at home by yourself. You know, I have to secure a certain amount of time for my own study and work. But I'm sorry for them. Because of me [she does what she doesn't like to do].

It is not uncommon that Korean mothers feel regretful or even guilty when what they are doing (e.g. studying and/or working) does not conform to traditional gender norms: fathers outside the home as a breadwinner and mothers inside as a housewife. Even though contemporary Korean women are “literate, well-educated, and enjoying the rewards of postwar economic affluence and the technology of modern life” (Chong 2008:66), and more women are working outside the home than before, they are heavily influenced by “modern maternal ideology” (*hyōndaep'an mosōng ideologi*) in Korea. According to Kim Seseria (2009), this ideology forces modern Korean mothers to raise children who are smarter and more qualified than others, to the point they can be admitted to prestigious colleges, while emphasizing a direct and close relationship between mother and child. Under this ideology, the mothers always need to be a “good” mother, and especially those who work outside the home feel guilty in that they cannot fully support their children's education. Another preschooler's mother, Ms. C also shared a similar feeling when she described how her daughter has changed since her husband went back to Korea upon his graduation:

I'm sorry for her because I'm here with her sacrifice. ... For the six months after her father was gone, she became quiet and emotionally unstable. She was a loud girl last year, but this year her preschool teacher told me that she is very shy and not active. I think that's because her father is not here. I told the teacher that I'm studying here without her father and she almost cried, saying that it was very hard situation, and she said, “Don't feel too guilty.” Well, I didn't feel guilty before, but I realized that's how others think about me. I think it is right for a family to live together. I'm greedy. (Interview with Ms. C)

Both Ms. C and Ms. D think that their children could live in better circumstances if they were not engaged in their graduate studies. They attribute their children's “sacrifice”

to themselves (“Because of me...”-Ms. C, “I’m greedy.”-Ms. D). However, these women’s conflict between being a “good mother” and advancing themselves by pursuing a doctoral degree in the U.S. is ironic, given that they are studying for a better family future. As discussed in Chapter One, in the context of Korean neoliberalism, it is the family that should be responsible for their social mobility, not the government. Neoliberalism asks individuals to be self-managed citizens who are willing to take responsibility to regulate and improve themselves (Park 2007). For example, in the mid-1990s when the Kim Yong Sam government in Korea initiated the globalization project, the idea was prevalent that building up national competitiveness should be done by improving individual competitiveness. For Korean mothers, this social ethos translated as the importance of her ability to enable her children’s educational success (Park 2007). Park argued that “This is the meeting point between the South Korean neoliberal project of producing self-managed citizens and the emerging discourse of [education] managing mothers” (207).

Unlike those mothers, for whom committing to their children’s education means becoming a “good” citizen, these wild goose mothers with preschoolers are pursuing another path to achieve this status – developing themselves for upward social mobility. However, they are still not exempt from their other role as an education manager mother. On the contrary, they are expected to carry on the dual job of self-development and ensuring their children’s educational success, which causes them to worry and feel guilty.

4) Without Their “Other Half,” But Some Relief

These women’s “other half,” their husbands, are now staying and working in Korea. Even though these mothers agree that it would be better if their husband stayed here to raise their

children together, it does not seem that the absence of fathers from home significantly affects these mothers' role of working very hard on managing domestic work, including child-rearing. To the question of whether any difficulties arose due to her husband's absence, Ms. A answered, "It would be easier if two people divide the work, but it's not a big deal because I'm used to taking care of this alone. He was very busy with his work and usually came back home around eleven or twelve at night. If he had done lots of housework, it would have been harder for me without him, but that's not the case." Indeed, the patriarchal model is still in place in Korean culture.

Men's long work hours and extensive after-work socializing or networking with co-workers or associates have been often taken for granted throughout the industrial development and urbanization in Korea. Their "heroic, patriotic overwork" has been celebrated as a "historic fact." That is, middle-aged Korean men were the heroes of Korea's surprising economic progress after the Korean War (Lee 2002). As Yi (1998) pointed out, it is well recognized that a man works in order to support his family, but a man is not supposed to be bound to his family affairs: "Home is a place to rest" (Yi 1998: 168) for Korean men, who are expected to commit to the wider community outside the family. However, this does not apply for working women. They are not expected to put work commitments or personal fulfillment before family life. For married working women returning from work, home is not likely to be a place to rest, but another working place for their "second shift." In this vein, the physical absence of their husbands at home is not a critical obstacle in managing their lives here. Cho's case study (2005) on sixteen wild geese families in California also reported that the fathers' remoteness does not impede everyday life very much. In fact, interestingly, no husband at home means less work for most of these women, even though it gives them some psychological burden as a "single" parent at home. Ms. D puts it this way: "After my husband is gone, I feel more comfortable physically, but less comfortable psychologically."

In addition, it is worth noting that these mothers are actually released from some work they were obligated to do in Korea. These obligations include, but not limited to, serving the parents-in-law, managing relations with the husband's kin, carrying out onerous responsibilities of ancestor worship, and nurturing social networks (e.g. by attending weddings, funerals, alumni meetings, club meetings, or birthday parties) that are critical to the production and reproduction of class standing (Ablemann 2003). For example, as the wife of a first son, Ms. A expressed her relief in not having the responsibilities as a first daughter-in-law. She stated that it is good to be here because she does not need to celebrate Korean traditional holidays with parents-in-law, which creates heavy physical and psychic burdens on women. Given that it is not uncommon that most weekends are full of social events that one has to attend in Korea, exemption from these duties also gives a break to mothers living here. That is, the women in my study are struggling with the double mission of being a good mother without the husband, and a good student in a foreign country. They are therefore relieved to be free from some, if not all, responsibilities as a wife, daughter-in-law, and a member of various social and kinship groups while being away from Korea.

5) Coping Strategy: “Birds of a Feather Flock Together” and the Korean Church

In order to survive as a mother and graduate student overseas without other family members or kinship networks, these women need to get some help from somewhere else. I have observed that these wild goose mothers help each other while they live here. Their relationship often starts even before they meet in person. Before leaving Korea, newcomers often contact wild goose mothers who had been in the U.S. earlier, and learn useful information on housing, transportation, children's schools, items they should bring from Korea, and so forth. Once they arrive, the resident mothers help them set up, and naturally

their children may become good friends along with these mothers' relationships blossoming. For example, they take turns babysitting the children when they have an evening class or other commitment during the weekend, or give rides to children going to school or other places. They maintain their exchange of information on many shared or new experiences, such as taking classes (since all of them studied in schools of education), extra-curricular activities for their children, good shopping deals, and traveling tips.

These mothers' efforts to get along and help each other are a relatively new phenomenon in this campus town. When there were only a few wild goose mothers studying with their children several years ago, they were "taken care of" by other Korean families, in particular, full-time housewives with school-age children and a student-husband. Most people were sympathetic to these mothers regarding their hardships of studying and raising children alone, and were very willing to help. For example, services to these women ranged from babysitting or sharing Korean dishes to making a claim to the insurance company. As a result, they formed close relationships among each other, and it worked better in a sense that they were well aware of other's needs and difficulties. As time passed, however, more wild goose mothers came to study here and, at the same time, more wives of student-husbands also are studying. That means there are fewer full-time housewives available to help these wild goose mothers.

Another source of help is the Korean church. Korea is well known for the unprecedented success of Protestant Christianity in the last century, where one fourth of the Korean population is reported as Christian. The five largest Christian churches in the world are all in Korea, and Korean churches are sending out the second largest number of missionaries globally, followed by those in the U.S.A.

The Protestant Korean church in this community was founded in 1987, and the current pastor has been serving here since its beginning. The congregation is about 100 people, including children, and most of them are students at the University of Kansas and their families from Korea. As the only Korean church or the biggest religious Korean community in town, it provides a comfort zone to the children in particular, who are struggling with adapting to the new environment, including new schools, new friends, new houses, new life patterns without their fathers, and learning English, just as their mothers are going through new challenges here (more challenges as a student and a member of community are discussed in Chapter Four). It is often assumed that children learn a foreign language and adapt to the new environment easily without much difficulty, but this is not necessarily true, as discussed earlier. The following comment from Ms. A speaks to the benefit of attending Korean church for the sake of the children, especially when first living in the U.S.:

My children liked going to the Korean church, especially in the early period when they were experiencing culture shock. It appears that they become stable emotionally when they speak Korean with other Korean friends at church. I was considering going to an American church to improve my English, but the children said no. . . . I chose here (Kansas), not the East or West Coast areas, because too many Koreans are there, but avoiding Koreans is not the best thing for young kids. They were anxious a lot at first [after we came here], but it helped a lot to meet Koreans at church and attend cell group meetings. Once they get used to their life here, they can enjoy by themselves watching TV or doing something else. But in the early period, I don't think it's a good idea to separate them from Koreans.
(Interview with Ms. A)

To these mothers, the Korean church is not only a place to practice their faith, but also an important community resource that provides a comfort zone for their own children, to whom even their wish to go to another church is willingly yielded.

6) Conclusion

This chapter has described the four women's lives here as a mother. The mothers with school-age children are satisfied with their children's successful improvement in English, one of their major goals while they stay here. As "education manager" mothers, they also keep pushing their children to prepare for their return to Korea by studying major subjects according to the Korean curriculum and pressure them to excel in their studies. Compared to their busy life in Korea where they had a full-time job, these mothers could spend more time at home with their children, and they appreciate this opportunity to be a "mother-at-home." However, they feel that it is still not enough. Especially, the mothers with preschool-age children feel sorry for their children, who they believe could be cared for better if their mothers were not studying outside of Korea, and lived with their husbands in Korea. The absence of the husband has given them some burdens in that they are raising children without a father, but these mothers are given some relief from their responsibilities as a wife, daughter-in-law, and member of traditional Korean social groups. Finally, we find that these mothers have created strong relationships by helping each other, and that the Korean church plays an important role, particularly as a place to alleviate their children's hardship as a foreign student especially in the early period of their residency.

Chapter IV: Studenthood

The four women in my study identify themselves as not only mothers of two children, but also as experienced teachers or doctoral students in the U.S. The first sentences of these women's self-introductions when I met them individually for the interview are as follows: "I have worked for fifteen years as an elementary school teacher" (Ms. A); "It has been almost sixteen years that I have worked as a secondary school English teacher" (Ms. B); "I am a third year Ph. D. student in ELPS" (Ms. C); and "I came here in 2006 because of my husband's school transfer to KU and two and a half years have been passed since I started my study in 2009" (Ms. D). They then talked about their educational background or work history, when and why they came here, and about their family members. By others, they are called not only "somebody's mother," which is the most common title used when referencing a married woman with children in Korea, but also a *sōnsaengnim* ("teacher"), a commonly used title for graduate students in Korea as well as for school teachers, and/or *chipsanim* ("deacon"), especially by other church members. Focusing on their three new roles (other than as wild geese mothers discussed in Chapter Three) after they came to the U.S., this chapter delineates their lives as (1) full-time students heads of, (2) household, and (3) members of the Korean community in this U.S. campus town and their church, 6,500 miles away from their home country. Questions addressed in this chapter include: How do they perceive their new roles here? For what accomplishments do they feel pride? I argue that the process of pursuing their studenthood is in flux with feelings of pride, various frustrations, and ambivalence.

1) As a Student– Compromise

Ms. A and Ms. B are M. A. students in Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and Ms. C and Ms. D are doctoral students in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and TESOL, respectively. In addition to being a full-time student, they have the full-time job of taking care of their families, yet all of them participate in other activities, like volunteering for their children's classroom (Ms. A) and the Korean church (Ms. B as choir member, Ms. D as head of the Sunday school, and Ms. B, Ms. C, and Ms. D occasionally serve lunch on Sundays). Despite these multiple responsibilities, all of my interviewees are successful students, especially in that they completed their program in a timely fashion.

For example, Ms. A and Ms. B earned their M. A. degree in two years, as scheduled. This time limit is very important because their (Korean) government scholarship requires them to finish their degree and return to their careers in Korea within two years; otherwise, they must reimburse the total sum of the scholarship they received. Ms. C and Ms. D completed their comprehensive exams in only two and a half years, which is impressive given that doctoral students studying in similar majors usually take at least three years or more to do so. Ms. C recently even defended her dissertation, which means that it took her about three and a half years to earn her Ph.D. degree. Timing is not the only barometer to measure one's academic success, but the importance of the time limit and how closely related it is to the financial and emotional support from their family is crucial (per Ms. B's comment in Chapter Two, where her husband would only allow her to study abroad if it would take no more than two years). In addition, it is not difficult to imagine the pressure imposed on Ms. C, whose baby is being raised by grandparents in Korea, to finish her studies and return home as soon as possible. In this vein, finishing their studies on time is considered one of these students' most significant successes as a wild goose mother studying in a foreign country.

This does not mean, however, that they did not have the same struggles that ordinary international graduate students go through. As international students, they share similar challenges as those struggling with learning English (not an easy task in any case), different cultural norms and expectations, and their required full-time enrollment (which means no leeway to lessen workloads or financial burdens), to name a few. As for all graduate students, and especially for doctoral students, they must keep up good relationships with academic advisors and pass the milestones such as comprehensive exams, and proposal and dissertation defenses. Moreover, as Asian female students, they sometimes struggle with the stereotype that Korean (and Asian) women are smart but less independent or less aggressive (Denise Green and Eunyoung Kim 2005) than their Western counterparts.

Ms. B recalled her frustration with learning English in her early period in the U.S.:

The language was the problem. It took me about two to three days to write a short two- to three-page paper at first. I have high standards. I was upset because I could have finished the assignment quickly and done another thing if I had it in Korean. . . Mr. Kim and Ms. Lee [her colleagues who recently came to KU from Korea] are also struggling with English a lot. I guess it is even harder for them. I mean, it was hard for me even though I am an English major. (Interview Ms. B in Feb. 2012)

Even though she is an English major and has been an English language teacher in a secondary school in Korea for sixteen years, she said that learning English was “*the* problem.” In fact, she was chosen as the government scholarship awardee among all teachers in her city that year, and I noticed her good English pronunciation and speaking skills when she communicated with other Americans and foreign students. In this regard, her problem was not so much her poor English, but the discrepancy between her high standards and her current level of English, which is better than most Korean students here, but (not surprisingly) still less proficient than native speakers of English.

Ms. B's high standards here are most closely related to the general idea about English language perpetuated among Koreans: English language proficiency is the key to one's success, and one should invest as much time and efforts as possible in order to equip oneself with native-like English fluency. As Joseph Park discussed, Koreans are pressured to engage in the project of improving their English in order to "engage in the maximization of one's human capital" (2010: 26). Analyzing the successful English learners' stories in Korean mass media, he claims that they disseminate the idea that the most important factor of one's success in learning English is their "will to continuous self-development," and the successful learner actually owes their competence to "nothing (neither class privilege, nor national education)" but themselves (33). As Ms. B had been already engaged in learning and teaching English language for many years, and with an obvious tendency for perfectionism, it may be inevitable for her to feel a lack of proficiency in English, a foreign language that requires endless effort and creates great frustration for Koreans and other learners trying to meet native-like standards.

Regarding the academic culture in the U.S. from the doctoral students' point of view, Ms. C's comment aptly compared educational expectations and opportunities between the two countries, where in the U.S. students are encouraged to pursue their own venues of study:

I think this is the difference between America and Korea. In Korea, the academic advisor clearly decides everything, saying, "Mr. X, do this and Ms. Y, do that, and we will publish a book that combines the two." So I didn't have opportunities to develop my own research interests. Lack of that kind of training makes it more difficult for me [to study here]. Korean academic culture is to follow the advisor, but not here. That's why there is clash between the two. (Ms. C on Feb. 2012)

This finding is confirmed in the study of Kim Youngjoo (2007), who discussed the discrepancies between expectations of Korean students and their American advisors, such as Korean students' passivity in initiating advisor and advisee relationships, and the perception

of the academic advisor as an authority figure instead of an intellectual enabler. In Korea the hierarchical relationship between professors and graduate students is very regulated, and it is not uncommon that graduate students are considered as “servants” of their academic advisors. Korean students are generally required to follow their advisors’ directions very carefully in order to earn a Ph.D. So it was hard for Ms. C (and other Korean graduate students) to overcome this passivity and to practice an unfamiliar way, taking the initiative for her own research, and accommodating less-formal or less-authoritative teacher-student relations.

Despite the challenges discussed above, my interviewees have accomplished their goals as students. The question remains as to how these women were able to accomplish their tasks as students under the challenges and pressures as “single” mothers within a limited time. The answer is their efficient time management. First of all, they accept reality and admit their limitations, where because of their familial responsibilities, they cannot secure as much time for study as male students or single female students can, those who do not have other “baggage on their shoulders.” These wild-geese mothers must concentrate on their work during given hours at school and spend evenings and weekends taking care of their children, keeping house, while they also feel obligated to volunteer in their community. Ms. C explained her attitude and how she managed her time during the school semester in comparison with other students’ circumstances:

I took comprehensive exams this semester and my time was limited, you know. I could study only while my daughter was in daycare. So I focused on my study during the day, and what happened was that it enhanced my concentration on my work. It seems that I am more efficient than other male students or single female students. I should admit my limitations and understand what I can do or cannot do. If I start to compare my situation with others, that leads me nowhere but to frustration. This is not only true when you study as a mom, but also when you work for a company as a woman.¹³ (Interview with Ms. C)

¹³ See Im, Kyöngsun (2007) *Life as a Working Woman in the Republic of Korea (Taehanmingugesö ilhanüm yöšöngüro sandanün köt)*

Although comparing herself with these students here, who generally have more hours of study without the responsibilities of taking care of children and housework, she has come to accept her limitations as a married woman and tries not to compare herself too much with others. Ms. D made a similar comment with a smile saying, “I dare not to compare myself with other single students.” These attitudes may be explained in terms of “satisficing” – a compound of “satisfy” and “suffice.” In the study of tenure-track female faculty members with children, Ward and Wolf-Wendel applied this term to their subjects (2012:42), which refers to their making decisions that are good enough, or adequate, if not the best, in the field of economics. They claimed that, “In the case of women with children, satisficing is used as a way to manage work responsibilities to the best of their abilities and in ways they might not have had to if there were fewer roles to play and responsibilities to juggle” (42). In that regard, these wild geese mothers are taking advantage of this (somewhat gendered and dismissive) form of “satisficing,” in that they figured out what they need to do and how much they can do under the given situation and managed their time and work as efficiently as they could accordingly.

“Buffering” is another concept used to explain these and similar women’s achievements. It means in this case that the “negative effects of stress or failure in one role can be buffered by successes and satisfaction in another role” (Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2012:43). For example, the feeling of happiness or relief that my interviewees get while spending time with their children can ease their tiredness from school work. Or their sense of accomplishment from school work can help them to overcome their weariness from taking care of their children. However, these women can easily be trapped in what has been called “negative spillover” (44); for instance, stress from study causes impatience with children’s mistakes, or stress from housework can transfer to their study and yield an unsatisfactory product. By realizing and accepting their limitations and by employing a strategy of

maximizing their time efficiency, they survive and thrive in these two “greedy institutions” of motherhood and academia that demand “exclusive and undivided loyalty” (41). Given these, their academic success deserves much praise.

2) As a Head of Household– Independence

One of the big changes for these mothers when they become “single” mothers in the U.S. is their more independent lifestyle. Even though all of them mentioned some difficulties in raising children or taking care of everyday matters without their husbands’ presence in the U.S., they all valued this experience of standing alone. When Ms. C compared her life before and after her husband went back to Korea after finishing his degree, she counted a strong sense of accomplishment and freedom, and in turn, finding her own identity, as her first achievement:

My achievement is my strong independence. I found my own identity. When I lived with my husband here, I had no bank account under my name. The car is also under my husband’s name. Because only he drove, he bought what he wanted while grocery shopping. I lived just like a ghost [*yuryǒng in ’gan*]. He didn’t let me have a credit card, saying that I spend too much money. I didn’t have a driver’s license, and I didn’t have a personal checking account, unlike everyone else. I was completely financially dependent on my husband until I became a wild goose mother. [After he left,] I got my own driver’s license, and had my own checks made at the bank. I go grocery shopping by myself and buy what I want to eat. . . . Anyway, I have my own identity in the U.S. now. (Interview with Ms. C)

Even though Ms. C was pursuing a doctoral degree in the U.S., and she was even earning a salary as a graduate research assistant (GRA), she stated that she lived without a strong sense of self while living with her husband. With possessing her own driver’s license and checking account, and buying what she wants, she was enjoying independence from her husband.

Ms. A, whose husband returned to Korea upon completion of his one-year sabbatical leave, also mentioned that she did not have an opportunity to “study real life” when her husband was with her in the U.S. She answered the question on how things are different now that she is on her own in terms of involvement in daily activities:

When my husband was here, he took care of everything: all household matters, utility bills, and even ordering at a restaurant. I didn't like that. In fact, I thought that I was missing many opportunities to study real life [in the U.S.]. After he left, I was a little bit scared at first when I filled my car with gasoline because, you know, I just *studied* for one year. I mean, you can learn not only from books but also from your experience of everyday life, but he didn't give me a chance. Now he is not here and I have all these opportunities. (Interview with Ms. A)

In the case of Korean middle-class families, it is usually the wives, not husbands, who take care of household matters, along with their children's education. In fact, men's commitment to the wider social circles outside of the family are emphasized under Confucian ideology that pervades in Korea, which regards a man who cares only about his own family as “selfish” (Yi Eunhee 1998:184). On the other hand, modern Korean wives are perceived as “the managers of domestic consumption” (Kendall 1996:115). As budgeters, women manage the family income and expenditures, and as consumers, they purchase everything from milk to a new house (see Nelson 2000). In addition, as discussed in previous chapters, Korean women are actively involved in children's education as an “education manager mother” (a culture-based phenomenon recently dubbed “tiger mothers”) while they also take care of all family rituals or other kin-related duties, especially for in-laws as a representative of the family. Korean wives actively carry out housework not only inside the home (cooking, cleaning, caregiving, etc.) but also outside of home (banking, purchasing goods, arranging children's extracurricular activities, organizing family events, etc.)

When Korean women fly overseas to join their husbands in the U.S., however, their roles revert to more traditional duties inside the home, and men usually take over the

household matters requiring contact with the outside world. This is especially the case for full-time housewives, who come here to support their husbands' study abroad, where language barriers, lack of social networks beyond the family, and F2 (student dependent) visa status restricts their lifestyle options. With a lack of English proficiency, it is hard for them to communicate with people such as tellers, clerks, waiters, or customer service representatives, especially over the phone. Limited social networking also means they have fewer places to visit and people to learn new information from, or to get help with problems they encounter. Their visa status prohibits them from getting a job in the U.S., whereas F1 student visa holders, such as their husbands, can work on campus. Usually a man or husband who speaks English has more access to social networks, mainly through the university, and can bring in income and take care of household matters outside of home, while his wife cannot help being dependent on her husband much more than she was in Korea. He has a credit card, writes checks, signs rent contracts, deals with bills over the telephone, orders in a restaurant, and even talks to the children's teachers (if he were in Korea, it is very likely that he would not know even the names of the teachers). After a year or two years in the U.S., women usually take on tasks that involve leaving the house and interacting with strangers as they become accustomed to the new environment, even though what they can do is still much less than what they could typically do in their home country.

In reviewing the wild geese mothers in this study, one finds they are different from traditional full-time housewives in several regards: their English is proficient enough for admission into a U.S. university, they have many chances to meet people in school or in the community, and they may work and earn a salary as a teaching or research assistant on campus. If we assume that typical Korean housewives in the U.S. have a restricted role outside the house because their abilities are limited, then we should expect that my

interviewees, who have many skills, would be able to operate outside the home and enjoy their independence to some degree.

Yet Ms. A and Ms. C continued to be dependent on their husbands and yielded to him in his role of decision-maker, just like other Korean wives who were living here until their husbands returned to Korea. Korean wives' dependence on their husbands in the U.S. therefore does not stem solely from their lack of English skills, few opportunities to make money, or limited social networks. With all their capabilities, my interviewees were still playing limited roles and taking a lower place in the power structure at home. This reflects the common patriarchal structure of Korean families that is not easily changed within one or two generations, though some headway had been made. Regardless of the wife's educational background, income, or other capabilities, her husband is the head of household and her primary role is to support and follow him, and take care of the children. If a wife violates this gender order, she is often accused of being the source of family conflict (Chong 2008:137). My interviewees regard their independence that the absence of their husbands provides, and their assuming the role of the household head, as positive aspects of their life while staying in the U.S. as wild geese mothers.

But the other side of the coin is that independence or power is accompanied by responsibilities. My interviewees' common answer to my question about how their lives have changed after their husband's return to Korea was that they felt their lives were "less demanding physically, but more demanding psychologically," because they became responsible for everything here. So while the absence of their husbands means less physical work for these women because they are liberated from taking care of (or waiting on) husbands, managing what their husband eat, wear, and other necessities, these reduced physical duties come in tandem with more psychological pressure. If we adopt the view of

Stevens, Kiger, and Riley (2001) on domestic labor, which they claim includes not only housework but also emotional work and status-enhancement activities,¹⁴ we find that these women's overall burdens are generally consistent throughout their lives here, regardless of the presence of their husbands, because their responsibilities average out.

For example, even though these women were used to managing household matters as a *de facto* head of the house in Korea, living in a new environment on their own in the U.S. causes a lot of stress, as is often the case with single mothers in general. They are solely responsible for their children's health, safety, everyday routines, study, and emotional wellbeing. They manage affairs outside of household matters as well as inside, which often require good negotiation or communication skills with strangers. From my observations, for instance, one of the most stressful occasions is the moving-out process (considered one of the most difficult transitions of life in general) when they return to Korea. They need to take care of various things in a limited time, from selling cars to packing and closing utility accounts, to organizing farewell parties for their children, to name a few.

Nevertheless, my interviewees played their roles as a head of household quite well in general, like all other wild geese mothers that I have seen during the past eight years. With caution, I relate these women's capabilities or advanced self-confidence to their personality constructed from youth (Ablemann 1997). Ms. A talked about her strong personality and how she resisted her culture's gender stereotypes:

My parents-in-law are worried (that I am here alone with children), but they know me. They know what a strong-willed woman I am, so they trust me. . . . I have argued a lot with my husband over Korean women's stereotypes like the "wise mother, good wife" thing. I cannot stand it. I am the second daughter in my family with one sister and two brothers. My father liked me because I was a good student,

¹⁴ Emotional work is defined as "taking care of the emotional life of the relationship and status enhancement activities by one partner that enhances the employment status of the other partner (e.g., organizing and managing a dinner party for one's partner's boss)" (2001: 515).

but my mom only paid extra attention to raising her sons because she thought that they saved her, being the first daughter-in-law in her husband's family. I was just like a maid or servant in my family. I was sensitive about that. I thought I also had a right to be treated well. Even after I grew up, I hated to be regarded as weak because I am a woman or to hide behind a man. So I worked really hard.
(Interview with Ms. A)

While describing herself as a decisive and stubborn woman who does not like patriarchal Confucian ideology, Ms. A attributed her ambitions to succeed to her experience of her mother's blatant favoritism of her brothers from childhood on, which may also have encouraged her to pursue her studies. While not being content with her life as a daughter, she has been working hard in order to be a woman who is as capable as a man. It is worth noting that her mother thought that Ms. A's brothers "saved her." Preference to sons (especially by women) is a prevalent idea in Korea, as in other East Asian countries (along with the Abrahamic cultures of Christians, Muslims, and Jews), even though it is getting less prevalent than before these days. But in Korea, only male descendants can continue a family's blood line and perform the important ancestral rituals, whereas daughters become someone else's family members (and thus are subjected to servitude in many cases by in-laws) as soon as they get married. Given that Ms. A's mother is the first daughter-in-law (Ms. A's father is the first son of his family), she would have been considered highly inadequate if she had not given birth to sons. Ms. A thus suffered from gender discrimination coming from her mother, but she showed how she was a capable woman who could carry out the role of the head of family in the U.S.

3) As a Member of the Church Community – Ambivalence

Three of my four interviewees were the members of the same Korean church, the most important and biggest Korean community in town. They regularly attended the Sunday

service and were actively involved with other church activities, such as biweekly cell-group meetings, singing in a choir, preparing and serving meals, or teaching at Sunday school. Even though their motivation for conversion to Christianity and how long they practiced it varied, all three were Christians before they came to the U.S. Indeed, much of the educated classes of Korea have adopted the religion, although it is largely the evangelical (Protestants emphasizing personal salvation) forms that are popular, partly due to large mass-media television evangelicals that have gained ground in the last decades. For these women and for church-goers everywhere, the church is not only a place for spiritual growth but also a comfort zone and a source of information, help, and social exchange, yet at the same time a place of emotional conflict and cultural conformism.

Compared with their religious practice in Korea, these women spend far more time and energy in church and faith activities here. They spend at least three hours for the service and fellowship on every Sunday. When it is their turn for cooking or serving lunch, for singing as choir members, or for working as Sunday school teachers, they devote a few additional hours to those activities on that day. In addition, they join biweekly cell-group meetings, in which five or six families in the same group get together, study the Bible, have meals, and interact with each other at the home of a family, taking turns as hosts. It takes up all evening of a weekday or even a whole day if it is their turn to serve the dinner at their homes for the meeting. This is quite a commitment, given that they only attended one hour long church service on Sundays in Korea, and other additional church activities were generally taken care of by full-time housewives at home. While working full time, these women could not afford various church activities there as they can do here. The question thus remains as to why and how they can spend that much time for church despite their busy schedules as mothers, heads of household, and students. Obviously church activities provide serious benefits for these women, while on the other hand there is likely some form of social pressure to be part of this

community. Even in Korea, the weekends and the evenings are also full of events for married women with jobs, where they are required to prepare and/or attend events such as ancestral rituals (*chesa*), wedding ceremonies, social gatherings with friends or coworkers, and so forth. With fewer obligations and distractions beyond their children and themselves, housewives are expected to devote more of their time in serving the church and its members.

Ms. B really liked cell-group meetings for religious reasons in particular: “I was not able to attend a cell-group meeting in Korea because that is usually for housewives. But I actively participate in the meetings here. While studying the Bible and sharing our stories, I felt that the Holy Spirit came to us. It seems that I like the cell-group meetings even more than the Sunday service.” In addition to this spiritual aspect, cell groups play an important role for these women as a welcoming and resource place for gaining contacts and information. Korean church is also a good place for their children for similar reasons. The children feel safe and comforted when they play with other Korean friends speaking in Korean and sharing Korean food in church. While sharing their lives, joys, and problems, and getting help and useful information on a regular basis, cell-group members form another “family” for those who miss their family members living in Korea. This concept conforms to Chong’s findings about cell groups in Korean churches, where “for many evangelical women, cell groups often do serve as the center of their social lives, and as a locus for the formation of their closest friendships and non-familial bonds” (2008:119).

Ms. C also expressed how attending church benefited her, saying “I receive lots of emotional support from the church. There are quite a few single parents [wild goose mothers] and also many students, so the church gives me a feeling of togetherness [*yōndaegam*]. In the past, most cases are dad as a student and mom as a supporter, but you know, it has been changing and many moms are M. A. or doctoral students now.” So in foreign lands, the

church is not only a place for spiritual practice, but also a place for psychological relief among the people who share similar challenges or difficulties, or for those who want to enjoy their native language, food, and cultural norms with those from their own country. In this way the popularity of the Korean church in the U.S. is not surprising.

As noted by Ms. C, as the number of wild goose mothers and female students has increased, these church members may feel that they are not isolated. The situation was different when I came here eight years ago. There were only a few female students who were married with children, and these women often found themselves as “outsiders” in church, where housewives (who support their husbands who are studying here and raise a family) were considered as the “normal” group. People often felt sympathy about their dual responsibilities as a student and mother, and tried to help them in many ways. These women were also “exempted” from work (mostly in the kitchen) or other activities in church. But at the same time, they received some envious or even agitated looks when their unusual opportunities for self-realization, enhancement, or professional opportunities were evident, especially by stay-at-home housewives. In addition, their less-active involvement in church activities at times prohibited them from getting into the “inner circle” of the female group. Now as more wild geese mothers arrive, they are not regarded as a special group of people who need care or exemption as much as they were before, and are not considered non-conformists. But Ms. C’s comments on her discomfort as a wild goose mother suggests that there is still some gap between these women and other full-time housewives in church:

Mothers who are studying are kind of a gray color; we are neither black nor white. Our place is ambiguous, somewhere in the middle. I mean, when a husband is studying, his wife fully supports him as she plays the role of housewife. But when a woman is studying here, she cannot do a good job either as a housewife or as a student. I mean, she cannot study fully until midnight like a male student. So I feel sorry for both sides. Despite this, all housewives [in church] envy us. In Korea, they also used to earn money, graduated from college, and were *intelli*

["intelligentsia, intellectual persons"], but here, they stay at home. So I am told that I should not brag about my study because they are very sensitive to it, and that they are often frustrated thinking "I was on a roll in Korea. Now I am a housewife here, but she [the wild goose mother] is studying just as my husband does.' "

(Ms. C)

So many wild goose mothers, especially those with preschool-aged children, felt guilty that what they were doing as a mother is not enough compared with other full-time housewives. As graduate students who wish they had more time to study, feelings of anxiety or guilt are aroused in church where they interact with housewives and other students with fewer familial or academic burdens. So to get along in a tightly knit group, they tend to show some sensitivity and behave with caution in order not to hurt the feelings or create envy with these non-working housewives. These complex dynamics shows these wild geese mothers have some ambivalence toward the Korean church in the U.S: it is a place for support, relief, and welcome community interaction, yet at the same time, it is a place for comparison or a source of stress to themselves as well as other Korean housewives.

4) Conclusion

This chapter sheds light on Korean wild geese mothers' selfhood outside of their roles as mothers and wives. The three roles they now need to play in the U.S. are full-time international graduate student, head of household, and active member of the Korean church. Despite multiple responsibilities, these wild geese mothers are successful students, who completed their study in a timely manner. Going through difficulties such as foreign language acquisition or adjustments to academic culture quite different from their own, they achieved their goals by accepting their reality and employing the strategy of efficient time management. These positive results, while explained in terms of "satisficing" and "buffering," are not

limited to “making do” with available resources, for these women are also formidable in their goals and their achievements, which include personal enrichment and intellectual development that has been traditionally reserved for the privileged classes, most of which have been dominated by men.

After they left their husbands in Korea and arrived here in the U.S. or after their husbands returned to Korea, these women found that even though they were capable enough to carry on tasks both inside and outside of the household, they were still dependent on their husbands while their husband were residing here. Only after their husband returned to Korea, they felt independence. And even though this independence requires more responsibilities, and, in turn, more psychological burden, they managed this role well. This success could be attributed to their strong will, which propelled them to attempt these challenges and advance their education in the first place. Some of them have been inspired by unfavorable or gender-discriminatory experiences closely related to time-honored and still embedded patriarchal traditions in Korea. After all, they are exposed in modern culture to the women around the world who have taken leadership in many realms, and are also smart enough to know where they can advance and enrich their own lives as well as those of their families.

Finally, their lives as active members of the Korean church, considered the most important Korean community in town, reveals that these women have invested more time and energy in church activities than they can really afford, but the social support (or pressure), spiritual growth, and emotional relief they received from the church keeps them involved. Their ambivalent feelings toward the church, however, may be seen as reflective of the reality of social sensitivities and the nature of human psychology as well as their cultural traditions they must be aware of to be welcomed as full members.

Chapter V: Conclusion

This study has investigated a unique development in Korea starting in the mid-2000s, a dramatic increase of Korean wild geese mothers who pursue their own academic degrees as well as their children's education in the U.S. The emergence of this trend can be investigated on three levels: social atmosphere, familial support, and individual effort. The desire and necessity to learn English has led people to send their children to English-speaking countries to advance their educational and career opportunities. As more and more Koreans have their children join the pre-college study abroad (PSA) programs, more mothers fly overseas to accompany their children, leaving their husbands behind, or remain in the U.S. after their husbands finish their U.S. stay. This practice has created a more favorable social environment for study abroad than before for mothers with school-aged children.

Even though these women's parents-in-law do not welcome the fact that their sons cook and care for themselves for years for the sake of their daughter-in-law's education, they endorse this situation because they think that it provides a great opportunity for their grandchildren to learn English, and that these mothers' advanced degree in the U.S. will bring more income and prospects for the family. In the same way, the husbands of wild geese mothers allow, or sometimes encourage, their wives to study abroad with their children in spite of their own hardships, including loneliness. Finally, these women's own efforts also contribute to this trend of the Korean transnational family, in which women's roles and international experience have become more important. These wild geese mothers worked hard to gain admission to a renowned U.S. graduate school in their academic field and to earn highly competitive scholarships to support the costs of their education overseas.

Given the social atmosphere, familial support, and women's capability discussed above, it seems that Korea has made significant progress in gender equality. Now married women

fly with their children thousands of miles away from home, their husbands, and in-laws, to pursue their own academic degrees and, as a result, they enjoy their independence. The number of women in the job market in general and in CEO positions, in particular, has been increasing in Korea. The Ministry of Gender Equality was established in 2001¹⁵, the first female Prime Minister was appointed in 2006, and the first woman President in the history of Korea was elected in 2013. But these advances do not mean that contemporary Korean women are enjoying full gender equality, for which many have been longing for decades. Korea's high economic and technological accomplishments have not brought gender equality. These women's lives that I examined in this study have shown the still thriving, traditional patriarchal structure of Korean family in terms of relationships with their parents-in-law and husbands. For instance, Ms. A and Ms. B needed to get *permission* from their parents-in-law as well as their husbands to study abroad. Ms. C could not tell her parents-in-law about her own study abroad for the first two years, and Ms. D also felt uncomfortable about letting her parents-in-law know about her desire to start her Ph.D. program in the U.S. This need for permission and feelings of discomfort were because they knew that few parents-in-law in Korea would be happy with daughters-in-law who spend time, energy, and money on her own studies that could be used for caring for their sons, grandchildren, or themselves.

Another example of the patriarchy is that, as described in Chapter Four, these women continued to be dependent on their husbands and yielded to him in his role of decision-maker, just like other Korean wives who were living here. This situation continued until their husbands returned to Korea, when they needed to handle all responsibilities on their own, much of which was empowering to these women. Despite these women's proven capabilities to carry out tasks both inside and outside of the household, it was not easy for Korean

¹⁵ In 2005, the name was changed into The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family.

married women to jump out of their primary role of care giving for their children, husbands, and in-laws.

I have shown how these Korean married women's roles have expanded for the sake of their families' upward class mobility. Since these women cannot afford to be a full-time mother, they made double investments in their own education as well as in their children's scholastics. As "education managers," these mothers carefully observed their children's progress in English and pushed them to prepare for their return to Korea by studying major subjects according to the Korean curriculum while staying in the U.S. As "mothers-at-home," they devoted themselves to cooking, cleaning, doing chores, and taking care of children's well-being in a foreign country. As heads of household, they carried out all household matters without their husband's or other (extended) family members' help, which creates a psychological burden. As international graduate students, they also faced various challenges such as the language barrier, cultural differences (especially in academia) and less time to study compared to single students. As members of their church community, these women spent more time and energy in church activities than they did in Korea for the various benefits it provided, such as spiritual growth and social and emotional support, even if their schedules could hardly afford this time. Although some people find wild geese mothers impressive and envy them for their freedom and abilities, these mothers must assume multiple onerous roles to achieve their goals. In fact, as Cho Uhn aptly put it, "Motherhood was utilized to secure class mobility in the insecure global economy" (2008:37), thus highlighting the practical considerations in engaging in wild geese mother lifestyles, while underplaying the potential glamour or prestige of such status.

Moreover, this study has illustrated these women's struggles between the two desires or expectations to be a good mother and to be a capable individual. Even though these wild

geese mothers spent more time with children at home than they were able to in Korea, where they worked full time, they still thought that it was not enough. Comparing themselves with other full-time housewives around them or with their own mothers while they grew up, they felt sorry for their children, thinking that they were studying at the expense of their children. Mothers with preschool children especially felt guilty about studying abroad in the absence of their children's father. So from the students' point of view, they shouldered lots of familial burdens in addition to study. These high-achievers, who have been working very hard in order to be successful women (or even better than men), had no choice but to accept their realities, employing a strategy of efficient time management, and resorting to what has been called "sacrificing" and "buffering." Neither black nor white, in Ms. C's words, these women's identities are "gray colors." On the one hand, they wished that they were full-time housewives in order to meet the expectations of the traditional female gender norm of good mother, but they also envied single or male students, who could commit themselves to academic work with fewer distractions. These women are thus seen to keep pushing themselves to fulfill both traditional maternal responsibilities and self-sufficient, globally competitive citizenship by managing their children's education *and* developing themselves so they can improve the family's status and income.

By investigating the lives of Korean wild geese mothers who pursue a graduate degree in the U.S., I have tried to answer the two basic questions of why *Koreans* come to accept the wild geese lifestyle and why Korean *women* in particular pursue it. Whether realizing it or not, contemporary Koreans are immersed in neoliberal ideas, wherein they are expected to be self-sufficient citizens who are independent and not in need of government social services. And the most successful way to achieve this goal is to enhance their own value via advanced education, which well suits time-honored Confucian thought prevalent in Korea. In addition, it is on individual families, not the government or social systems, by which all these

responsibilities are placed. As a result, more and more Koreans choose to be transnational families for the sake of education, while committing themselves to social status maintenance, or upward class mobility, at the cost of the traditional or affective roles of family.

So the trend of Korean women who have willingly or unwillingly sacrificed themselves for their family's survival and eventual thriving within the turmoil of the modern Korean history continues. The wild geese mothers who struggle to establish themselves between motherhood and self-development may appear to be self-centered or selfish by some, but their efforts are ultimately done for their own family's prosperity as a whole, even if they experience some welcome benefits and self-confidence in being free from traditional wifely duties or limited female roles while studying in the U.S. with their children.

But I do not mean to underestimate these women's ambitions and achievements by describing them as "victims" of the neoliberal, patriarchal society. At the time of this writing, three of my interviewees have returned to Korea armed with a post-bachelor degree gained in a timely manner, their children's English proficiency has advanced to a satisfying degree, and their invaluable experience as mothers, heads of household, international students, and members of a church and local community away from their home country for at least two years has significant impacts on their lives, as discussed in previous chapters.

The outcomes of if and how their lives change after going back to Korea is not within the scope of this study, but a follow-up on these women is definitely worth pursuing. One consensus among scholars about the experience of Korean modernity is its "compressed" process (Abelmann 2003:281). Korea is surely a dynamic, fast-changing society, where education is highly regarded and academic discipline is unusually intense from an early age. Thus, it remains to be seen sooner or later as to how this new phenomenon of wild geese motherhood affects the status of women in Korea. Will this trend continue with more and

more wild geese mothers shouldering the double burden of motherhood and the pursuit of selfhood? Will and how does the story of Korean women change in their daughters' generation? How does this phenomenon affect the daughters and sons of these women, as well as their adult family members who go through the experience with them, and also other women who see the outcomes of their experience in the U.S.? And how will these women's experiences inform the educational institutions and workplaces they return to? These questions are all in need of further research, and I hope this study lays a foundation for such an important line of enquiry.

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