

**Cross-border Marriage Migration:
Experiences of East Asian Migrant Women in Norway**

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

EU – European Union

EEA – European Economic Area

IMO – International Organization for Migration

KMD – Fakultet for kunst, musikk og design (Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design)

NAV – Arbeids- og velferdsetaten (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration)

NSD – Norwegian Centre for Data Research

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

UN – United Nations

UX – User Experience

Abstract

As the field of gender and migration advances, the implications of gender on transnational migration and how migration affects gender relations transnationally require more nuanced investigation. This study seeks to understand how gender relations in the origin country affect East Asian women's cross-border marriage, to what extent their gender perceptions are influenced by the Norwegian gender equality ideal, and what constraints they face in Norwegian society.

This study adopted gender structure theory with an intersectional analytical perspective to investigate how gender, as a multilevel and multidimensional structure, intersects with class and ethnicity in shaping East Asian women's experiences in Norway. The concept of empowerment was used to address the (dis)empowering effects and agency the participants have in various aspects.

This is a qualitative study with an ethnographic approach. Data was collected through 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews with eleven participants who were originally from China, Korea, and Taiwan and now live in Bergen, Norway. The collected data were coded and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis.

The findings suggest both cultural norms and gender role expectations in the origin country and structural factors such as child welfare, egalitarian values, and migration rules in Norway play a role in the formation of East Asian women's cross-border marriage migration. Overall, there is a more egalitarian relationship in their familial structures, but their immigrant status limits migrant women's agency. Further, the change and continuities between traditional gender role expectations and gender equality ideals reveal an iterative process in which negotiation and redefining of gender roles and femininities take place. The participants' narratives demonstrated that Norwegian gender equality ideology and social norms can be empowering in one aspect but constraining in another. Finally, a common pattern of underemployment, experiences of structural discrimination, and exclusion in employment and workplace are found among these highly educated East Asian migrant women. However, some cases also show their resistance of using social resources and traditional gendered roles strategically to operate agency and prioritise their aspiration.

By examining the interplay of structural factors and individual's agency with an intersectional and gender perspective, this study contributes to a more complex and nuanced account of East Asian women's life experiences beyond the dichotomous assumptions of reproducing versus transforming traditional gender relations and oppressed victims versus emancipated/empowered women in the discourses of cross-border marriage migration.

Key Words: *gender, migration, cross-border marriage, East Asian migrant women, Norway, intersectionality, empowerment*

1. Introduction

1.1 Gender and Migration

There are an estimated 281 million international migrants in the world today (IMO, 2021); namely, one in every 30 people are migrants and live in a country other than their born countries. This number counts threefold the number in 1970 and around half of it is female migrants (UN, n.d.). Some scholars referred to the increase in numbers of women migrants as the “feminisation of migration” (Castles & Miller, 1993; Oishi, 2005); others suggested that there has been a similar percentage of women on the move, but women were overlooked as they were regarded as followers of men, instead of active actors in the early migration studies, which largely adopted an economic reductionist perspective (Giorguli & Angoa, 2016; Kofman, 2000). The meaning of “feminisation” here lies not only in statistic numbers but in the reasons behind it and its implications on gender relations (Lutz, 2010).

Women migrants started to gain attention in the 80s following the advancement of the women’s movement and Women’s Studies, although much research was criticized for its “add and stir” approach that only “adds” women as a variable or sole focus on women with the underlying logic of essentialism (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 2006). It was not until the paradigm shift from women to gender did a more relational and intersectional perspective become central. In the “Gender and Migration” approach, gender is not about the sex binary or the monolithic notion of “male” and “female”, but a set of social relations and an organising principle that interplays with other relations of power, such as class, race/ethnic, sexualities, nationality, etc (Connell & Pearse, 2014; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013; Morokvašić, 2014). Migration, therefore, is both a gendering process and of gendered nature. Gender is embedded in migration patterns, discourses and representations, as well as migrants’ experiences, obligations and expectations in the migratory process. At the same time, migration impacts and reconfigures gender power relations (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003; Morokvašić, 2014; Nawyn, 2010).

1.2 Marriage Migration

Apart from the escalating growth of female labour migration, marriage migration is another highly gendered and female-dominated migration type. Traditionally, in many patrilocal and patrilineal societies, women migrate to their husband’s locations (Bélanger & Flynn, 2018). Nowadays, globalisation and increased mobility result in a raising number, greater geographic distance, and more diverse trajectories of marriage migration. “War brides” of World War II

and “mail-order brides” in the 80s where overseas American soldiers married local women in Europe and Asia are among the earliest large-scale border-spanning marriages (Charsley, 2012). “Commodified” transnational marriage migration has become a phenomenon in Asia since the 90s when men in East Asian countries who are left behind in the domestic marriage market turned to marriage agents and brokers for the Southeast Asian brides (De Haas et al., 2020; Hsia, 2007). In Europe, “homeland” marriages that involved second-generation immigrants married co-ethnics and bringing spouses from their parents’ home countries have been under the political spotlight (Charsley, 2012). There are also culturally arranged marriages and marriages arising from travel, education, professional activities, and the internet (Bélanger & Flynn, 2018).

The number of global marriage migrants is hard to quantify due to an unclarified definition of marriage migration. Cross-border marriage migration usually fits into the sub-category “family formation” under the “family migration” (Williams, 2012). Existing literature uses “cross-border”, “transnational” and “international” marriage interchangeably to refer to the intimate union of two people of different nationalities that involves migration of one member of the couple, namely, migrating as a spouse of a citizen or permanent resident of a country (Bélanger & Flynn, 2018, p. 184, 187). Whilst “cross-border” and “transnational” emphasise the dynamic movement of people, ideas, and resources that cross borders with marriage and migration (Constable, 2003), “international marriage” stresses how marriage is governed by the sovereign laws in the host countries (Bélanger & Flynn, 2018). Williams (2012) further differentiated transnational marriages as those that “take place within established, transnational communities maintaining or developing links with their overseas compatriots” and are “part of broader group processes” (p.25).

Some scholars posited the increase in scale and number of cross-border marriage migration is tightly connected to globalization and uneven development of political economy among countries – especially for the combination of men from affluent countries and women from lower-income countries (Hsia, 2004, 2007; Piper & Roces, 2003; Sassen, 2002). This type of transnational marriage migration is often perceived as suspicious and associated with not only commodification, exploitation and potential trafficking, but the reification of global political-economy power relations (Bélanger & Flynn, 2018; Lu, 2005). Another perspective refutes victimisation and argues that marriage migration is a way of “spatial hypergamy” (Constable, 2005). It is a social strategy or a rational choice for gaining social and economic mobility. Care and domestic work in marriage can be seen as an exchange for benefits such as remittance and visa (Plambech, 2008). Women’s agency has gained centrality in a great amount

of research in the past years. The diversity of migration trajectories and complex motivations behind migration revealed that marriage migrant women are not a homogeneous group. They are actors that pursue modernity and autonomy through cross-border intimate relationships despite structural constraints and inequality (Constable, 2005; Robinson, 2007).

1.3 Marriage Migration in Norway

In Norway, 312,700 family immigrants from non-Nordic countries have arrived since 1990, which accounts for about one-third of the total immigration (Molstad & Steinkellner, 2020). 67 per cent of them migrated for *family reunification*, mostly to reunite with migrant workers from EEA or with refugees. Polish immigrants are the majority of this category. The other 33 per cent of family immigrants came for *family establishment* (i.e., marriage migration), of which Thai immigrants are the largest group. Cross-border marriages in Norway mostly consist of marriages between two persons both born in another European country than Norway, a Norwegian-born person married to someone born in another European country, or a Norwegian-born man married to a woman from a country in Asia (Thorud, 2020). The number of Norwegian men who marry foreign women has almost tripled from 1990 to now. In 1990, foreign women who married Norwegian men were mainly from Sweden, Denmark or USA; nowadays the majority are from non-EU countries (Tyldum & Tveit, 2008). In 2018, 3,500 Norwegian-born men married foreign women. 37 per cent of the foreign woman were from Asian countries, and 31 per cent were from the rest of Europe (Thorud, 2020).

1.4 Research Objective and Research Questions

The objective of this research is to understand East Asian migrant women's migratory experience of cross-border marriage in Norway from a gender and intersectionality perspective. To achieve this objective, I formulated the following research questions:

1. In what ways do gender relations and cultural norms in the origin country affect East Asian women's cross-border marriage and their relocation experiences in Norway?
2. To what extent are gender perceptions and expectations of gender roles of East Asian migrant women influenced by the Norwegian gender equality ideal?
3. How do East Asian migrant women perceive their migratory experiences in Norway? What are the constraints and challenges, and how do they respond to them?

1.5 Thesis Structure

As regards the organization of this thesis, this introductory chapter set the scene with larger research and theoretical context of gender and migration and the background of cross-border marriage. Hereafter the theoretical framework of gender structure theory, intersectionality perspective and the concepts of empowerment are outlined. Chapter 3 includes literature review focusing on the gender aspect of marriage migration, gender relations in the context of transnational migration and the relevant research in the Nordic context, complemented with the contextual overview of gender in Norway and East Asia. Chapter 4 describes the epistemological foundations and the research design of this study, followed by the practical process of data collection, management, and analysis. Ethical considerations, trustworthiness and reflexivity are addressed at the end of this chapter. Next, Chapter 5, 6 and 7 present the empirical findings and discussions. Chapter 5 highlights the structural and cultural factors in the formation of cross-border marriage, immigrant motherhood and division of housework. Chapter 6 details the change and discontinues of East Asian marriage migrant women's gender perception and gender role expectations between socio-cultural values from origin country and the gender ideology and gender norms in Norway. Chapter 7 examines the structural constraints and challenges these women face in the labour market and workplace. Lastly, the thesis is concluded with an overview of the main findings and recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This research adopts *gender structure theory*, *intersectionality* and the concept of *empowerment* as theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Gender structure theory provides an inclusive and multi-level framework to examine gender relations in public and private spheres of East Asian women's marriage migration on the individual, interactional and macro levels. In parallel, a perspective of intersectionality assists in understanding the complexity of how different social categories shape the social positions and the experiences of East Asian marriage migrants in Norwegian society. The concept of empowerment identifies migrant women's agency and the resources in the opportunity structure, illustrating how East Asian women are empowered or disempowered by the migratory experience.

2.1 Gender Structure Theory

The theories of sex and gender have evolved since the 20th century from a focus on sex roles and sex differences to a shift towards the social context. Nowadays, it is a consensus in sociology to define gender beyond individual traits and the dichotomy of women and men or feminine and masculine. Rather, gender should be seen as a set of social relations, a pattern in the social arrangements that shape people's everyday conducts, and thus a social structure (Connell & Pearse, 2014). In West and Zimmerman's doing gender theory (1987), gender is what we perform in accordance with what we are held accountable for, i.e., the presumed "sex category", through social interactions. Thus, it can be made and re-made. On the other hand, structuralist theories tend to emphasize the structural explanations and argue structures and cultures predominantly determine human behaviours and create inequality (Risman, 2018). However, gender is not made randomly, and freely as human actions are shaped and conditioned by social structures; vice versa, structures do not completely determine human action, either (Connell & Pearse, 2014). In the gender structure theory, Risman (2004) built on Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, highlighting the dynamic and recursive relationship between social structure and human agency. While social structures organize possibilities and constrain human choices, people can also act on social structures – structures are brought into being, sustained, and modified by human activities. In other words, the power of gender structure inherently defines people's possibilities and choices, but changes can take place when people reject to conform to gendered paths. (Connell & Pearse, 2014; Risman, 2018).

Moreover, conceptualizing gender as a social structure also means it is multidimensional (Connell & Pearse, 2014; Risman, 2018) – it exists beyond individuals but

also explains human action to some extent; it is being maintained and modified through social interactions, and it has implications on the distribution of resources, as well as the cultural logic that organizes people's life. In this regard, acknowledging gender as a stratification system embedded in all aspects of people's life, Risman (2004, 2017, 2018) proposed an integrative and multi-level framework to analyse gender in both cultural and material dimensions at the individual, interactional, and macro (institutional) levels, as well as the interrelations among them:

At the *individual level*, the analysis looks at how gender structure shapes individuals' selves – how people develop identities, personalities, and choice-making. Despite biological factors, i.e., genetics and hormones affect part of our experience of the body, gender socialization plays a critical role in forming gendered selves (Risman, 2018). In this vein, it is important to look at how cultural ideologies and social expectations on the interactional and macro levels affect individuals' identities and sense of self. In addition, how individuals develop and operate agency while acknowledging potential structural constraints, and how they respond to the structure through resisting or reproducing a social phenomenon are also to be examined at this level (Risman, 2018).

At the *interactional level*, in the material dimension, disadvantages and inequality in access to resources, power and social network for underprivileged groups, such as women, gender non-conformists and people of colour are to be analysed. It is those who disrupt the homogenous settings and act against cultural expectations the ones subjected to negative consequences (Risman 2018). In the cultural aspect at this level, we should investigate how gender ideologies shape social expectations and dictate people's behaviour through everyday routine interactions. For example, how people “do gender” to conform to the cultural stereotypes and social norms that are based on sex category, i.e., the presumed gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). It should also be noted that cultural expectations and social norms are situational in a given moment in history. The ways people “do gender” intersect with race, class and nationality, therefore, they are contextual and not fixed, and so are masculinities and femininities.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasized, “masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting” (p. 836). Therefore, masculinities (and femininities) are social constructs and are subject to change with individuals, regions, and time. As gender is relational, masculinities and femininities should also be understood relationally in the gender hierarchies. For example, the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity

(Connell, 1987) demonstrated the asymmetrical power relations in a patriarchal system; likewise, multiple masculinities (hegemonic, complicit, marginalized, and subordinate) identified by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) display a hierarchy of masculinities. Importantly, much empirical research has illustrated the agency of subordinated and marginalized groups is possible to resist, challenge and create mutual conditioning effect on dominant groups (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848).

Lastly, analysis at the *macro level* focuses on social institutions. In many cases, the legal system, social policies and regulations that shape people's material reality are sex-based and gender binary. Therefore, how the (racialized) gender stereotypes embedded in the institutional rules make resources and power allocated towards certain privileged groups should be scrutinized (Risman, 2018). It is not uncommon that men and women have disparity in laws. Furthermore, there is a universal lack of recognition for people who exist beyond the gender binary as they are discriminated against in the institutional rules in most countries in the world (Risman, 2018). In the cultural aspect, the ideational process is emphasized on this level as cultural beliefs are gendered, and gender ideologies affect different aspects of our lives ranging from individual choices to institutional rules in private and public spheres (Risman 2018).

2.2 Intersectionality

To gain insights into one's lived experiences, it is essential to look beyond a single social division and take into account various socially constructed categories such as race/ethnicity, class, and nationality. Intersectionality is adopted in this research for the purpose of investigating the complexity of migrant women's social positions and how the interplay of multiple social categories shape their migratory experiences.

The concept of intersectionality stems back to the 80s when black feminist scholars reacted to "white feminism", which is predominantly constructed by white, western, middle-class, and heterosexual feminist scholars. They challenged the presumption of "western women represent all women" and considered the universalization of women's experiences marginalises the interests of women of colour (Collins, 1990; Mohanty, 1988). With this contention in the backdrop, Crenshaw (1989) proposed "intersectionality" and used the analogy of "intersection" to describe the overlapping structures of domination and the multiple disadvantages women of colour face. There are various terms revolving around the similar concept, such as "matrix of domination", "axes of oppression", "multiple jeopardy" and "triple marginalization" (Amelina & Lutz, 2019; Collins, 1990; King, 1988). These multi-dimensional approaches all acknowledge that social inequality cannot be explained by single-axis analysis as different

social divisions intersect with others. Therefore, the analysis should be inclusive, not only within but also among the social categories (Anthias, 2001).

The intersectional perspective recognizes the simultaneity and interrelations of different social divisions in shaping one's social position and multiple identities (Lutz, 2018), which implies the fact that a person does not belong exclusively to one identity/group. When we look at the convergences of various social categories, we gain an understanding of "how each individual and group occupies a social position within interlocking structures" (Collins, 1997, p. 74). Crenshaw (2011) highlighted, "intersectionality represents a structural and dynamic arrangement; power marks these relationships among and between categories of experience that vary in their complexity" (P. 230). Social inequality can take place at any level and interrelate simultaneously; thus, when analysing the experiences of individuals, the structural contexts in which power relations are embedded and influence individual life chances should not be overlooked (Lutz, 2018; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

It should also be noted that social division is not immutable but situating and contingent – one social category can be salient in a certain context but not another. Intersections of social divisions do not simply "add up", but rather cause results differently in different contexts (Anthias, 2013; Staunæs, 2003). Hence, intersectionality is best applied with a relational lens, examining how multiple power relations work interactively on a social position (Staunæs, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

In this research, the intersectionality perspective is used to understand East Asian women's migratory experiences by examining how the implications of power relations in gender, class, and race/ethnicity at different levels interplay in shaping their social positions, empowering or disempowering them in Norwegian society while recognizing that East Asian women are by no means a homogeneous group.

2.3 Empowerment

As this research aims to understand the gender relations in the marriage migration experiences of East Asian women and adopts gender structure theory with an intersectional perspective, the concept of empowerment helps to look further at how migrant women perceived themselves as empowered or disempowered in the context of migration, moving from the original socio-cultural environment to the new one in Norway.

There is a range of definitions and applications when scholars refer to the term empowerment. It is mostly associated with the ability of an individual or a group to make choices that they are previously deprived of and being able to transform the choices into actions

(Alsop et al., 2006; Kabeer, 2005; Mosedale, 2005). Drawing on the social theories of power, Alsop et al. (2006) posited agency and opportunity structure are the two components that influence people's capacity to make choices effectively and decide to what extent a person or a group experiences empowerment.

Alsop et al. (2006) adopted an asset-based approach to address agency. They posited that psychological asset, among other types of assets, enable actors to use opportunities around them. The capacity to choose other options in life is connected to people's psychological asset as it is related to the life possibilities that they perceive themselves to have. When a person or a social group consider themselves in a lower hierarchy than others, they may make choices that trap them in a disadvantageous position (Alsop et al., 2006). This is similar to what Kabeer (2005) called the *sense of agency* or *power within* (Mosedale, 2005). Empowerment cannot be "given" by others (Mosedale, 2005, p. 244); it begins from within – the feeling of self-worth. Agency, in this sense, should be interpreted more than "decision making", but the change of certain beliefs and values that leads to challenging or questioning of power relations (Kabeer, 2005).

At the same time, Alsop et al (2006) argued that agency itself does not necessarily result in empowerment, if the opportunity structure is restrictive, people's ability to act is likely to be impeded. The opportunity structure refers to the institutions and social relationships which people rely on to exercise agency, namely, to transform choices into action successfully (Kabeer, 2005). Institutional contexts include laws, public services, firms as well as cultural norms and values. It is important to note that as culture and tradition are often made "naturalized", power asymmetry may be internalized or even supported by the oppressed people (Kabeer, 2005; Mosedale, 2005). Therefore, as Kabeer (2005) stressed, a "real choice" requires not only the existence of alternatives but also the alternatives being acknowledged and seen as possible by the actors.

With a gender perspective, Kabeer (2005) argued that women are especially constrained by the cultural framework and ideological norms in the social orders that differentiate between women and men (p. 22). Similarly, Mosedale (2005) defined women's empowerment as "the process by which women redefine gender roles in ways which extend their possibilities for being and doing." (p. 252). Accordingly, this research investigates how East Asian migrant women are affected and adapted to the change of socio-cultural contexts in the migratory process. Through identifying their individual positionality and cultural capital, as well as their positioning as a social group in the Norwegian society, this research attempts to understand

how their agency is developed and exercised in the interaction with the new socio-cultural contexts, and to what extent they feel empowered or disempowered.

3. Literature Review

This chapter will start with the literature on the broader context of different approaches to marriage migration and the discussion of the gendered aspects of marriage migration patterns. In the second section, I will first present literature regarding gender relations in the context of marriage migration, including reconfiguration of gender roles and reconstruction of gender identities. Next, I will focus on gender equality in the context of migration and immigrant integration and the relevant research in the Nordic countries. Lastly, the contextual backgrounds of gender in Norway and East Asia will be outlined before addressing the research gap.

3.1 The Gendered Nature of Cross-border Marriage Migration

This section focuses on how gender affects motives, decision-making and drives behind marriage migration. In recent years, researchers have shown there are complex motives and multiple factors that cause women to choose to migrate for marriage. More attention has been paid to migrants' agency while recognising existing structural constraints (Charsley, 2012). Earlier, the globalisation perspective stressed women's subordination and vulnerability in the context of global political-economic inequality between countries. Hsia (2004) commented on the heavily commodified transnational marriages between Southeast and East Asian countries as "not only the product of capitalist development but also concretely manifests the abstract structure of the international political economy in interpersonal relationships. Unequal relationships between societies are thus realized in everyday life" (pp.193-194).

However, the political-economic approach was criticized for victimising migrant women and underestimating their agency and is insufficient to explain the diverse trajectories of contemporary marriage migration (Robinson, 2007). Constable (2003, 2005) highlighted the role of human agency and argued that transnational marriage as a means to gain upward social and economic mobility. Thus, migration is a rational choice and a social strategy of individuals or a household and reflects gender relations in the sending societies (Constable, 2003, 2005). In relation to this perspective, much research has illustrated how migrant women are part of the "global care economy", exchanging their care and domestic work – both in the family and in the labour market – for economic resources to supply their natal family (Parreñas, 2001; Plambech, 2008; Sassen, 2002; Turner & Michaud, 2020). Statham (2020) adopted a life-course approach and gave a nuanced account on Thai women married to older Westerners. He identified multiple factors – including the acquisition of formal rights, age differences between

the couple and the care responsibilities from the natal family – that impact the extent of agency migrant women can develop and their ability to be empowered.

Other than the motivation of overcoming economic constraints, researchers also found women use marriage migration to escape from oppressive patriarchal structures (Kofman et al., 2005). Inequalities for women in social, economic and political aspects in the original societies, as well as tensions caused by changing gender roles, both contribute to women's desire to migrate (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015; Riaño, 2011). Similarly, Hamano (2019) pointed out that conventional gender perceptions of femininity and feeling of marginalisation are among the factors that “push” Japanese women to leave their homeland. In societies where cultural norms tend to stigmatize and exclude divorced or widowed women, remarrying foreigners and marriage migration becomes an alternative option (Tosakul, 2010). Thai's (2005) research revealed that highly educated, middle-class, Vietnamese women who have difficulty in finding a match in their local marriage market often choose to marry less educated, working class, Vietnamese immigrant living in the U.S., despite their differences in class and educational level.

At the same time, besides the structural conditions, literature indicated that personal choices such as seeking individuality and a new lifestyle in Western countries also drive women to travel overseas initially and become a marriage migrant subsequently (Hamano, 2019; Plambech, 2008; Riaño, 2015). In relation to this, research indicated that gendered imagination and desire for tradition and modernity have an impact on marriage migration when people look for potential partners based on gendered assumptions of foreign cultures and desired attributions that are not mainstream in the local marriage market (Pflugfelder, 1999, as cited in Constable, 2005, p.7; Charsley, 2012). For example, some ethnic minority immigrants in Western countries prefer “traditional” wives from the “homeland” (Constable, 2005; Charsley 2012). Similarly, studies revealed Western men assume women from Asia or the former Soviet Union more submissive and family-oriented, in contrast to the “demanding” local Western women (Flemmen & Lotherington, 2009b; Johnson, 2007; Jones & Shen, 2008; Sims, 2012). On the other hand, studies showed that women possess quite different assumptions and expect Western men to be more modern, progressive and egalitarian (Constable, 2005; Plambech, 2008; Riaño, 2015). In particular, those with higher educational and occupational attainment typically find local men who hold traditional values and expect conformity to traditional gender roles less preferable over Western men (Jones & Shen, 2008).

In Riaño's (2015) study of Latin American marriage migrant women in Switzerland, she argued, in addition to the idealized perceptions of Western men and aspiration for egalitarian relationships, how societies construct gender roles also impacts women's decision

to migrate. The traditional ideas that “women should follow men” and “men’s careers are more important than women’s” often facilitate women’s decision to migrate for their spouses (p.53). Another study similarly suggested that women are more subjected to moving for their partners’ jobs, especially for those who are non-egalitarian and support traditional gender roles (Brandén, 2014).

3.2 Gender Relations in the Context of Migration

Erdal and Pawlak (2018) argued that the shifting dynamics of gender relations and identities in the context of migration should be understood in a flexible continuum of change and continuities. The reproduction, transformation and contestation of gender relations are not either/or but produced spatially and temporally and can occur in parallel. Factors such as the degree of embeddedness in a place and an individual’s social class should be examined when analysing continuities and changes in gender relations. Similarly, Mahler and Pessar (2001) suggested migrants’ social agency and their social positioning within multiple hierarchies of power should both be considered when analysing gender relations in the context of migration. The analysis thus involves multiple levels and is historically particularistic and situational (p.447).

3.2.1. (Dis)continuities of Gender roles and (Re)construction of Gendered identities

Many studies have investigated how traditions and gender roles from a home country are continued or discontinued as migrants negotiate through the daily practices in the new socio-cultural settings of the host country. Some research has shown that migrant women moving from patriarchal societies where gender relations are more rigid experience a sense of emancipation from traditional gender norms (Ghimire & Barry, 2020). For example, in Tosakul’s (2010) research, Thai migrant women in cross-border marriages with Western men reported the experiences of being more conscious about their bodily rights and sexual autonomy. Ghimire and Barry’s study (2020) revealed that the gender perceptions of Nepalese migrant women shift after living in Australia, where the gender relations in their marriages and co-ethnic communities are disrupted and transformed as they start to renegotiate daily routines of housework and childcare responsibilities. However, research on intra-Asian marriage migration and commodified transnational marriages indicated that patriarchal systems may be reinforced, as migrant women are restricted and oppressed in the conventional gender system in destination countries and face additional vulnerabilities (Bélanger et al., 2010).

As gender is relational, so is the (re)construction of gendered selves in the transnational context. Hamano's (2019) ethnography of Japanese marriage migrants in Australia found that, being in a new environment where migrant women are subjected to social exclusion and limited to the role of "wife" and "mother", they retrieve conventional socio-cultural values of Japanese femininity in daily practices both in the private sphere and within the wider local community. He argued that this process of wilful "feminisation" of the self is a strategy that enables marriage migrant women to establish tangible social identity and situate themselves in the new society. However, he also pointed out that, paradoxically, the traditional values of Japanese femininity which are reproduced and strengthened are in fact what these Japanese migrant women initially attempted to rid themselves of prior to the migration, and this situation reflects the vulnerability and certain power relations marriage migrant women face in the new society. Similarly, Seminario's (2018) research on Peruvian graduates and their binational marriage in Switzerland further revealed the influence of structural factors on individuals' gendered selves. She demonstrated that Peruvian migrant women negotiate between their "desirable" profession-oriented femininities and the care-oriented femininities resulting from the male breadwinner/female caregiver family model, as their career aspirations conflict with the restrictive migration and care regimes in Switzerland. Her findings not only showed that continuities and changes in femininities and masculinities take place beyond the tradition/modernity dichotomy but how they are affected by the existing structural framework.

Besides research on marriage migrant women, there are increasing studies on how migrant men negotiate their gender perceptions and self-identity in cross-border marriage. Charsley (2005) portrayed the image of "unhappy Pakistani husbands" in the UK, which is distant from the common "Muslim male perpetrator" image in mainstream discourses. These men struggle to perform ideal masculinity and adapt to a weaker position in the power relationship with their British wives. Similarly, Kosovo men who move to Austria and Germany through marriage migration also negotiate gender roles while finding themselves in multiple dependencies upon their wives, and marginalized by the majority society, as well as within the ethnic-minority communities (Leutloff-Grandits, 2021). Such cases highlight the complexity when gender, social class and ethnicity intersect with each other.

3.2.2 Adopting Egalitarian Gender Ideologies and Integration

Another strand of literature addressed how gender structures in the destination countries impact marriage migrants' social, cultural and political integration and to what extent they acculture more liberal and egalitarian gender ideologies. Researchers proposed that social and cultural

dimensions such as adopting gender values and norms in the new society should be considered when discussing the immigrant integration (Röder & Mühlau, 2014; Rodríguez-García, 2015). In this vein, some researchers argued that whether and how migrants are exposed to more equitable gender systems and adopt more liberal gender ideology in the host society affect their social status and life trajectories (Chang, 2020; Maliepaard & Alba, 2016). In Chang's (2020) comparative study on Vietnamese marriage migrants in Taiwan and Korea, she found that even though both Taiwan and Korea have predominantly patriarchal gender systems, the relatively equitable gender norms in Taiwan create more possibilities for upward social mobility and better cultural integration for migrant women. However, in Korea, they experience more challenges in integration under the rigid gender structure and expectations of traditional gender roles from the marital families. Chang (2020) also revealed that civil participation raised migrant women's awareness of gendered and ethnicised discrimination, which consequently improve their cultural integration.

Röder and Mühlau's (2014) quantitative research on immigrants in Europe acculturating egalitarian gender ideology found that gender relations from the country of origin play a role in how they adopt gender-egalitarian attitudes in the host countries. However, they also found the influence decreases along the residing time, and the origin-country factors become insignificant within one generational succession. In addition, the gender differences in adopting egalitarian gender ideologies were highlighted, as they argued that women are more open to egalitarian ideas and often empowered by gaining control of resources and power. However, Parrado and Flippen (2005), on the other hand, emphasised the influence of structural factors and the positionality of immigrants in the host country. When they compared gender relations of Mexican marriage migrants in the U.S. and their counterparts in Mexico, they found gender inequalities were hardly changed by migration. Mexican marriage migrants in the U.S. comply more with the traditional gender roles than those residing in Mexico. They argued that rather than the traditional gender ideas from the original societies, it is the structural positions where migrant women are situated within the US society, i.e., legal status, work conditions, and social support, that fail them from adopting egalitarian norms and hinder their socio-economic development and power relationships in the gender structure.

3.2.3 Migrants in the Context of Nordic Gender Equality Ideal

Research indicated that minority migrant women are usually perceived as victims of the patriarchal system in their country of origin in the gender equality policies in Nordic countries, and the intersections of gender, ethnicity and class are overlooked (Sümer, 2009; Williams,

2008). Many studies have discussed the tension between cultural diversity and gender equality in the Nordic countries and researchers considered multiculturalism as a challenge to further realizing gender equality, especially among minority groups and the immigrant population (Cudjoe et al., 2021; Lotherington, 2009; Siim, 2013).

Cudjoe et al.'s (2021) research on immigrants' view of Norwegian gender equality revealed the tension and contrast of different gender cultures from origin and destination societies. Although some immigrants identify more equal housework division and job opportunities, and higher labour market participation of women as indicators of gender equality in Norway, those who are from countries where gender equality is not the norm find it difficult to integrate into the gender-equal Norwegian society and have incompatible views regarding housework division, child's upbringing, etc., which are influenced by their socio-economic backgrounds, cultural norms of collectivist and individualistic countries and gendered power relations.

Lotherington (2009) found while some Russian marriage migrant women shape their "Norwegianness" through doing gender in the family and presenting themselves as equivalently free and equal as Norwegian women, some others perceived Norwegian gender equality notion as a demanding and dominating gender ideal that imposes constraints on them while they are not identified with such "Norwegianness". Thus, she stated, "Gender equality is a power they [Russian marriage migrants] relate to (...) a discourse with disciplining effects" (p.92). It can be a resource and a marker of integrating into Norwegian society, or a threat of lack of recognition for these marriage migrant women. In addition, she also highlighted the class stratification when some migrant women struggle to comply with Norwegian egalitarian gender norms and meet the perceived gender equality ideal. She said, "The way the foreign born do Norwegianness is measured towards an ideal of gender equality in the family, not towards a Norwegian reality" (p.92), which implied a middle-class character of gender equality that not everyone can achieve.

Another research elucidated how Russian marriage migrant women manoeuvre between Russian and Norwegian gender ideals. Wara and Munkejord (2018) found that middle-class Russian women married rural Norwegian men (re)shaping their gender identities and gender hierarchy between the couple by establishing the "expert-novice" relationship. They argued that through "re-masculinisation" – labelling their husbands as "experts" who are strong and skilled in outdoor activities whereas themselves as "novices", the Russian migrant women strengthen the relationships of heterosexual couples and in this way, situate themselves, as well as the distinct Russian femininity within a contrasting Norwegian gender equality ideal.

In the discussion of gender, diversity and migration, Siim (2013) employed an intersectional approach and argued that the relative inclusion of native ethnic majorities and the relative marginalization of migrant women from ethnic minorities lead to inequalities in the labour market, politics and society in the Nordic countries. The multiple inequalities and the portrayal of contrasting “gender equality/ethnic majority families” and “patriarchal oppression/immigrant families” in public discourses and policies reveal challenges for the Nordic welfare system and the gender equality ideal. Chang and Holm’s (2017) study echoed this argument as they found that Taiwanese migrant women, despite having high educational attainment and native-born spouses, face great structural inequality in finding jobs in Finland. They argued that being a non-Western immigrant woman, these Taiwanese women suffer gendered stereotypes and ethnicized power differentials – double marginalization at the intersection of ethnicity and gender. Similarly, even in migration within the Nordic countries, Guðjónsdóttir and Skaptadóttir’s (2017) research revealed that Icelandic migrant women have weaker connections to the local labour market in Norway and are more inclined to take up caregiver roles. They posited that the gender-segregated labour market and the prevalence of traditional gender roles persist and contradict the gender-equality ideal in the Nordic countries.

3.3 Social and Institutional Contexts of Norway and East Asia

3.3.1 Gender Ideology and Gender Equality in Norway

Norway, along with other Nordic countries, is identified as a social democratic welfare state in which the state is a key actor and actively involved in implementing social and gender equality across the social, economic and political aspects of the society (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Sümer, 2009). Underpinned by the egalitarian model and social equality, gender equality is a normative ideal and an essential part of identity and belonging in Nordic countries (Siim, 2013).

To achieve gender equality and ensure that men and women have equal access to opportunities, the state facilitates women’s participation in the public domain, i.e., education, the labour market and politics through legislation, state institutions and gender equality policies (Cudjoe et al., 2021). According to Nordic Council Statistics (Møller et al., 2021), with quotas and affirmative actions, Norwegian women take up more than 40% of board members of the larger listed companies, and a similar proportion of the seats in the National parliament. In 2019, women’s employment rate in Norway is 73%, almost as high as men’s 77%, although there are twice as many women as men who work part-time. In the meantime, research also showed that disparity still exists in working hours and salary given that female-dominated occupations usually have lower wages and rotation shifts (Seeberg, 2012). In the private

domain, Norwegian women also perform a larger amount of unpaid domestic work compared with men (Møller et al., 2021).

Shifting from the traditional male-breadwinner model to the dual-earner/carer mode entails not only women's high participation in the labour market but men's engagement in sharing care work and household tasks. In Norway, gendered division of labour and family issues, such as parenthood, is highly political (Sümer, 2009). The government introduced policies, such as subsidized childcare and parental leave to ensure that both men and women can contribute to the labour force and take on the carer role in the private sphere (Cudjoe et al., 2021; Sümer, 2009). Institutionalized parental leave in Norway started in 1978. Now Norway has 49-week parental leave with full compensation (59-week with 80% coverage of salary). The father's quota has been implemented since 1993 and increased from four weeks to the current 15 weeks (NAV, 2022). In 2011, 79% of Norwegian fathers used the father's quota (Kitterød et al., 2017). This policy has a direct impact on men's share of childcare and contributes to altering the traditional gendered division of labour (Sümer, 2009). However, research also indicated that while the "involved father" ideal prevails and fathers' participation in childcare and household work has been perceived more positively than mothers' in the labour market, the notion of traditional gender roles persists and women are still considered as primary caregivers (Brandth & Kvande, 2015; Farstad & Stefansen, 2015; Guðjónsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2017).

While gender equality is strongly promoted and achieved in Norway, challenges exist. As mentioned earlier, despite the high employment rate of women, the labour market is nevertheless highly gender-segregated and the gendered division of care work persists (Guðjónsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2017). In relation to that, research indicates that immigrant women have a weaker connection to the labour market and are susceptible to upholding the traditional gender role (Fossland, 2013). Other researchers indicated that Norwegian egalitarian values which are associated with social homogeneity and "sameness" bring tension between gender equality and cultural diversity/multiculturalism (Sümer, 2009; Cudjoe et al., 2021). More attention is needed to the intersection of gender and other social categories (Borchorst & Teigen, 2010). At the same time, immigrants and minority groups should be further included in family policy development and the gender equality movement (Cudjoe et al., 2021).

3.3.2 Gender and Trends in Family and Marriage in East Asia

This section provides a brief view of the gender orders and gender norms in East Asian countries (i.e., China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan) that share the cultural root of Confucianism.

Although contemporary China has a divergent development due to its political structure and demographic policies, the focus here is on the similarities in the gender relations underpinned by Confucian cultural values across these countries.

In Confucian traditions, social relationships are governed by the hierarchy of generation, age, and gender in which women are situated in a systematic subordinative position based on the notion of being obedient “to the father, the husband and the son” (Sung & Pascall, 2014). The patriarchal and patrilineal family systems emphasize extended families and family ties – sons are expected to take responsibility for elderly parents through financial support or co-residence, while married women belong to the families-in-law and are subject to the parents-in-law (Raymo et al., 2015). Notwithstanding women’s increasing participation in the labour market and gender equality legislation resulting from the economic development and social change in the past few decades, scholars argued the engrained gender division of labour within the family and traditional gender ideas persist in the East Asia region (Brinton, 2001)

Statistics show that women’s labour force participation rates (aged 15-64) among East Asian countries are around or above the OECD average (63.8%) in 2020 (OECD, n.d.). However, gender wage gaps remain continuously high especially in Japan and Korea, at around 22.5% and 31.5% respectively (OECD, n.d.). Researchers argued that large pay gaps lead to the priority of men’s employment in the family and hinder women’s pursuit of careers. Combined with other factors, such as low social security for unemployment and parenthood, long working hours and low pay, mothers are more subject to withdrawal from the labour market and harder to return (Sung & Pascall, 2014). Long working hours and gendered division in unpaid work are still prevalent in East Asia. Japan, Korea and China are among the countries with the longest working hours where women work 60-70% of the length of men’s hours. However, time spent on unpaid work is severely imbalanced. Japanese and Korean men share only 18% and 22% of women’s time spent on unpaid work (OECD, n.d.). Even in Taiwan where men and women work almost equally long hours, men only spend 30% of the time women spend on unpaid work (Gender Equality Committee of the Executive Yuan, 2022). In relation to this, all four countries have parental leave policies and give rights to both mothers and fathers. Nevertheless, fathers’ uptake of leave stays low. In Taiwan, male applicants increased to around 18% in 2020 (Gender Equality Committee of the Executive Yuan, 2022), but only two per cent of fathers take parental leave in Korea (Lee, 2022). As Sung and Pascall (2014) pointed out, although there are social policies promoting men’s responsibility for care work, gender differences change relatively slowly in practice, and women’s possibilities to reconcile work and care are limited.

At the same time, following economic and social changes, a trend of later and less marriage and low fertility rates appeared in East Asian countries. Raymo et al. (2015) argued that “a conflict between changing attitudes about women’s roles across the life course and limited change within the family sphere (e.g., strong expectations of childbearing, limited domestic participation by men)” (p.480) can contribute to this trend (see also Kristensen & Semba, 2022 for the case in Japan). Marriage and family life become less attractive for women, especially those with high educational attainment and economic independence, as East Asian marriages entail asymmetric domestic work division, intensive mothering, and expectations of traditional roles of wife and mother for women (Bumpass et al., 2009). In addition, large wage gaps, inequality in the labour market and low employment security create higher opportunity costs for women to enter marriage and parenthood (Raymo et al., 2015). In the meantime, similar situations also happen to men, particularly for the low socioeconomic status groups, when they cannot fulfil the provider role under the breadwinner model (Nemoto et al., 2013). Besides, parental factors also play a role in later and fewer marriages. As the cultural norm of co-residing with the husband’s parents and obligations to take care of parents-in-law become undesirable today, married couples can lose parental (financial) support and burden the heavy cost of the household or have a more limited selection of marriage partners without such obligations (Raymo et al., 2015).

Governments in East Asian countries adopted a series of pronatalist policies aiming to help women reconcile employment with motherhood. However, the attempts have had little effect (Raymo et al., 2015). Similar to Raymo et al.’s (2015) explanation of the tension between limited attitudinal changes in family expectations and individualism followed by economic and social changes regarding late marriage and low fertility trend in East Asian countries, Sung & Pascall (2014) posited that traditional Confucian cultural assumptions which are not conducive to gender equality, although changing, continue to influence not only individuals’ choices but also political ideology and social policies.

3.4 Gaps in the Literature Review

While the field of gender and migration has flourished over the past decades, literature about migrant women in cross-border marriages in the context of Nordic countries is relatively few. The existing literature on marriage migration often focuses on the migratory pattern of women moving from middle- and low-income countries to marry men from affluent countries. In the context of Norway, Russian-Norwegian cross-border marriage and Thai marriage migrants are the major groups in scope, and the topics are mostly related to life adaptations and health issues

(Flemmen & Lotherington, 2009a; Straiton et al., 2019; Tschirhart et al., 2019; Tyldum & Tveit, 2008). Research on how marriage migrant women negotiate gender identity and shift of gender perception between their origin country and the new socio-cultural context is insufficient. In addition, research adopting an integrative and multilevel gender analysis with an intersectional perspective is also lacking.

This study explores a distinct group of marriage migrants in Norway, i.e., women from East Asia. This group is often seen as more resourceful compared to marriage migrants from other regions in Asia, and thus under-investigated. To add to the existing knowledge, gender and intersectionality perspectives are adopted to understand the gender relations in the East Asia-Norway cross-border marriage migration, including the interrelations of gender relations on different levels, how gender identity and gender roles are (re)constructed and how migrant women are (dis)empowered in the new society.

4. Methods and Research Design

In this chapter, I will first present the research design, including the philosophical standpoints of this research, the research approach, and the strategy of inquiry. Then the practical process of data collection will be described, as well as how collected data were managed and analysed. Lastly, I will reflect on my role as a researcher, and end with the evaluation of the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of this research.

4.1 Research Design

Epistemological Standpoint

This research sets out to understand migrant women's experience with an epistemological position in which the world is socially constructed; humans, as social beings, create social realities and construct meaning through interaction with each other in specific contexts (Neuman, 2014). Thus, there is no absolute objective reality "out there", but multiple social realities depending on which social position one is situated in (Neuman, 2014). In this vein, this study does not aim to be "independent" and "objective", instead, it is unavoidably subjective and value-laden (Neuman, 2014). In addition, critical and feminist approaches have their influence on this study, as women's experiences and perspectives are the focus, and this study attempts to unravel the power relations, structural limits, and human agency using analytic categories of gender, ethnicity, and class. Knowledge is co-generated in a more socially-interconnected, empathetic and inclusive way, as opposed to the patriarchal, dominating and hierarchical manner. The feminist perspective also highlights contextually situated experiences and different perspectives to avoid the simplification of the heterogeneity of marginalized groups (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004).

Qualitative Research

I chose qualitative approach to conduct this study. In contrast to the quantitative approach that uses measurable variables to explore causal relations, and pursues generalization and prediction, qualitative research aims to grasp the complexity of socially constructed realities through interpretation, and contextualization (Yilmaz, 2013). The purpose of qualitative research is to gain insight into participants' experiences, and the approach is emergent, inductive, and naturalistic (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312). Align with these characteristics, this research sets out with general and exploratory questions, attempting to find patterns and develop interpretation through the thoughts and perspectives participants share in the interviews, with the examination of their situated contexts. While the quantitative approach uses a large sample and

predetermined tools, this study is dedicated to working with a small group of East Asian migrant women to gain an in-depth understanding of their meaning construction and experiences. I, the researcher, am the instrument of the inquiry myself, and intend to build an empathetic relationship with the participants, for this closeness not only facilitates the participants to voice themselves but helps researchers to observe and interpret information in the cultural-social context where the participants live in (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neuman, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013).

Ethnographic Design

Creswell and Poth (2018) identified five qualitative approaches to inquiry. These approaches inform the research procedure, from the research focus and problem to the practicality of collection, analysis and reporting, differently. Ethnography is considered the most suitable approach for this study. Firstly, this research concerns a culture-sharing group, meaning the East Asian women who marry Norwegian men and migrate to Norway. In the ethnographic approach, the focus lies in not only the group itself but each individual's story within the whole group. Therefore, both the broader context of shifting from a relatively patriarchal society to a more egalitarian culture in Norway, as well as the subjective-cultural factors each participant has considered. In addition, the collection takes place where the participants live their everyday life, and the patterns and themes of how the migrant women experience and adapt to migration are interpreted and analysed in a holistic cultural manner.

4.2 Study Site, Participant Selection and Recruitment

Study Site

The study was conducted with East Asian migrant women who reside in Norway. The study site is in Bergen, Norway where most recruited participants and the researcher live. Three interviews with participants living in the Oslo area were conducted online, via WeChat App or Zoom.

Participant Selection Criteria

The selection criteria of participants for this study include nationality, marital status, place of residence and reason for migration. The recruited participants are women who were born and raised in East Asian countries – China, Korea, and Taiwan are among the ones who are recruited. They married Norwegian men (two of the spouses are adopted), migrated to Norway because of the relationship or marriage, and now live in Norway. Undoubtedly, there are complex motives and various trajectories of how the participants migrated. Some came with a fiancée visa and got married in Norway; some married in the country of origin and moved to

Norway afterwards. One of the participants initially came with the jobseeker visa when she moved to Norway with her then-boyfriend after they graduated together. In addition, although some of them have obtained permanent residence or Norwegian citizenship now, in the beginning, all participants went through a waiting time while they applied for the family reunification visa.

Recruitment

In this study, both purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used since the goal of this research is to explore and gain insights into the experiences of a certain group, instead of generalization (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). Therefore, I did not intend to select “average” or “typical” cases which mean to represent the entire population, but those specific ones who fit the selection criteria mentioned earlier.

At first, I tried to recruit participants through the language course and language-exchange sessions held by different organizations that I attended regularly. However, most responses connected me to Southeast Asian migrant women. In the end, I was introduced to the first few participants by common friends via my social network. The potential participants were then contacted through social media platforms, with the information letter and consent form. Some participants became referrals afterwards and connected me with other participants.

During the recruitment, I noticed many participants showed high interest in the research topic and accepted the invitations quickly. Some others did not show particular interest in the topic; rather, they expressed a sort of willingness to “help” out. I assume it can be related to my “insider” positionality, which they might feel close to, as I am in a similar social group. Besides, the scheduling with the participants went fast – interview appointments were usually made within a few days and accomplished within about a week; the same situation even with those who had a tighter schedule and higher uncertainty due to childcare or call-in jobs. One participant got back to me after a month after our first contact to inform her availability. Therefore, I consider there was an overall interest and willingness among the participants, and it is obvious that the participants hoped to express and share their stories.

There are different voices on how many participants/interviews are enough. In this case, the interviews were long and recurring topics gradually emerged when there were ten interviews. However, to have the number of participants from each East Asian country more even, and to not reject any affirmative responses, if possible, 13 interviews were conducted in the end.

One conducted interview is not included in the analysis process hereby because I realized during the interview that the interviewee (age 38) moved to Austria when she was a

teenager and later migrated to Norway at age 28 because of a job offer. Although she was born and spent her early youth in an East Asian country, considering most of her living experiences was outside East Asia, I considered that she has a divergent positionality compared with other participants in terms of experiences of negotiation of settlement place, unemployment issue, and the dependence on visa attainment. Thus, the data from this interview was not included in the analysis (but managed in the same manner regarding safety and ethical considerations).

In the end, there are five participants from China, three from Korea, and four from Taiwan, with ages ranging from 26 to 44. The number of settling years varies from one to 14. Seven participants have children. Eight participants are employed. Table one below presents the overview of the participants. Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identities.

Table 1: Participant Profile

Name	Age	Education	Years of Residency	Employment Status	Children	Spouse's Age and Occupation
Yani	26	Bachelor**	2	Unemployed, applying for study programs	N/A	30, consultant
Umi	27	Master**	1	Unemployed, waiting for Residence Permit	N/A	25, engineer
Wen	36	Bachelor*	4	Employed (full-time, permanent)	1	45, public sector
Zhizhi	40	Bachelor	8	Unemployed, student	2	41, shipping industry
Nikki	36	Master**	3	Employed (full-time, permanent) Part-time student	1	44, previously oil industry, now full-time student
Seona	30	Bachelor*	4	Unemployed, student	N/A	32, consultant
May	36	Bachelor**	4	Employed (1y contract) Part-time student	N/A	35, engineer
Yun	44	Bachelor*	14	Employed (part-time, temporary)	1	47, oil industry
Kylee	42	Master**	10	Employed (part-time, temporary) Part-time student.	2	47, engineer
Fei	32	Bachelor*	5	Employed (part-time, temporary)	1	39, chef
Ning	33	Master**	8	Employed (full-time, permanent)	2	34, oil industry

*Short-term (1-2 years) study or residency abroad **Degree obtained abroad

4.3 Method of Data Collection

Aligning with the research design, I used in-depth semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection. I conducted 13 interviews with 12 participants in the period between the end of August and mid-October in 2021. Ten of the interviews took place face-to-face at various locations in Bergen city centre, the other three were conducted online, via WeChat APP and ZOOM platform due to the inconvenience of travelling during the pandemic. For language, the interviews were conducted in Chinese mandarin with the participants from China and Taiwan, and the quotes used in this report were translated into English by me. For the Korean participants, the language used in the interviews was English. Most of the interviews last about 2-2.5 hours; all of them were sound recorded with consent from participants.

In the attempt to understand individuals' perspectives and experiences, in-depth semi-structured interview involving asking questions and listening to what one has to say at length and in detail is a powerful and straightforward method. By using a semi-structured approach and open-ended questions, I created more space for the participants to develop the conversation and elaborate on what they considered more significant (Punch, 2014). I could elicit their viewpoints by asking follow-up questions and further clarification. One-to-one and face-to-face interview is preferable as the topic of this study is personal and might trigger emotions. In addition, as I am the instrument of the inquiry, physical presence helped me to build rapport and closeness with the participants, in the meantime enabled me to observe participants' subtle reactions directly.

The interview guide (see Appendix A) was used as a reference while the real interviews were conducted in a more flowy manner and closer to casual conversations. Influenced by the feminist perspective, I intended to create a more open and equal relationship between me and the participants during the interviews, in which I gave genuine feedback and self-disclosure. Reciprocity, trust, and emotional engagement are encouraged as they help to avoid "hierarchical pitfalls" and improve data quality (Punch, 2014).

4.4 Data Management

Information letters and consent forms were given to the participants prior to the interviews. Before the interviews started, the participants were informed again about their rights to withdrawal, confidentiality and data management. The request for sound recording was included in the information letter, and oral consent was acquired each time recording was conducted. All the signed consent forms were collected on paper or digitally before or shortly after the interviews.

The recording was conducted by a password-protected device, and the sound files were transferred to SAFE system of UiB immediately after the interviews. The interviews conducted in Chinese were transcribed on <https://sight.youdao.com/>, a platform run by Chinese company NetEase, and English ones were transcribed on <https://otter.ai/> under my university account before I finalized the transcripts in Microsoft Word. All the transcripts were anonymized and deleted from the websites after they were transferred to the SAFE system. For data analysis, NVivo 12 software was utilized. The participants were also informed that the transcripts and recordings will be stored in the SAFE system until the thesis is submitted and deleted after the evaluation completes.

4.5 Methods of Data Analysis

I adopted the reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019) to organize and analyse the data. The thematic map (see Table 2) was developed by using the following steps iteratively:

1. Familiarization with the data: This phase was mainly to prepare for the actual coding. I worked on transcribing, re-read the transcripts, and formed preliminary ideas for coding.
2. Coding: In this step, I started to process texts into meaning units with the guidance of the theoretical framework and research questions.
3. Generating initial themes: After the coding process, I identified broader patterns within the codes and combined them into potential themes.
4. Reviewing themes: In this stage, themes created from the previous step were re-examined against the whole dataset to ensure coherence and accurate representation. Themes were refined and mapped for further steps.
5. Defining and naming themes: As analysis advanced, each theme is defined by its core elements and details.
6. Producing the report: To present the analysis involves a coherent narration of the themes with meaningful and rich quotes extracted from the data. The analysis related back to the theoretical framework and the research questions, alongside literature.

Table 2: Thematic Map

Theme	Sub-theme
Gendered marriage migration and gendered practice in cross-border marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Entering Cross-Border Marriage ● Motherhood identity and motherhood practices as an immigrant woman in Norway ● Negotiating gender roles in the division of housework
(Re)construction of gender perceptions and gender identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Manoeuvring between gender ideologies and gender norms in Norway ● Relational femininity and masculinity
Challenges of finding a job in Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Structural inequalities and exclusionary experiences in the employment process and labour market participation ● Negotiating at the intersection of gender and immigrant status

4.6 Trustworthiness

There have been debates about how to evaluate qualitative research. In contrast to the standard criteria for quantitative studies, multiple criteria have been developed for qualitative research, for example, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability are among the indicators of trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yilmaz, 2013). *Credibility* refers to how accurate the findings are, and how much they link to reality (Neuman, 2014). *Dependability* assesses if the researcher follows a rigorous process and if all parts of the research are coherent. *Transferability* refers to the extent that findings are applicable to other similar settings. *Confirmability* asks if findings are grounded in data and if there is strong evidence between interpretations and conclusions (Yilmaz, 2013).

To enhance the trustworthiness and quality of this study, first of all, I used “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) to present my findings, with abundant details and contexts in an understandable language, as in-depth and context-specific understanding helps the readers to empathize the participants’ experiences and thus more likely to compare and transfer findings to other situations (Tracy, 2010). Besides, “member checking” is critical for credibility as the participants help avoid misinterpretation and ensure the accuracy of the findings. Thus, I

invited the participants to read, correct and clarify the transcripts, analyses, and interpretations. Peer co-coding and discussions of findings and analyses in the course seminars, alongside the external evaluation from my supervisor, were also incorporated to improve the credibility of the analysis.

Lastly, in line with the reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun et al., 2019), while striving for the qualities mentioned above, I acknowledged my “subjectivity” as not only unavoidable but also resourceful (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 334). I provided a detailed and open account of the research process, decision-making, faced challenges and personal positionality to enhance “transparency” and clarify possible bias. My self-reflection in the next section also makes it clearer how this research is shaped by my position.

4.7 Reflexivity and My Role as a Researcher

Coming from East Asia and marrying a Norwegian man myself gives me an insider role as a researcher in this research. Acknowledging this helps me to see my position in the research and with the participants with reflexivity. I considered that the insider role assisted me to approach the participants in recruitment and data collection. However, this role made me pay more attention to possible biases resulting from my own life experiences. For example, I noticed that some of my instant questions were directive and reflected the presumption I gained from my own cross-border marriage, and sometimes I focused more on the topic I was interested in. Besides, I also noticed that as some of the participants had the mindset of helping me conduct the research, sometimes they are concerned with if their engagement was contributory enough, and if their answers were relevant and beneficial to the research, which might affect the quality of data.

Otherwise, the insider position indeed brought me closer to the participants, which can be seen from the long interviews and an abundance of data they shared. I noticed that through being interviewed, the participants had the chance to review their forgotten life experiences, unfold their feelings, and even gain new perspectives. In one of the interviews, the participant first replied that she had not thought deeply about one question. However, after some further probing and follow-up questions, she said that her thoughts and opinions were clarified. There was another participant who messaged me after the interview, saying the interview helped her discover something about herself that she never noticed before. Yet another time, while the interview ended hastily before the participant rushed to pick up her child, she told me in an emotional tone that I was the only person to whom she has ever told her life story. In the end, we both agreed to have a second interview to deepen some of the topics. While we had the

second interview, she told me that the emotions triggered the previous time led to a long talk with her husband, in which they together retrieved some positive memories that were forgotten for a long time. Lastly, one participant whom I briefly met before, expressed at the end of the interview that our conversation inspired her so much and reminded her of the kind of interpersonal connection that she missed in Norway. Consequently, she even proposed to make a podcast with me.

These experiences and feedback from the participants were meaningful and inspiring. It also showed that this positive effect worked mutually. I saw the meaning of being able to tell their life stories through a connected and empathetic research-participant relationship. However, having a good relationship and friendship with the participants is not without ethical risks and pitfalls. For example, how to handle the friendship resulting from the fieldwork during and after the data collection (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002), issues of confidentiality and strict data protection in relation to the friendship, and the “data gathering hunger” in the friendship without a clear boundary for the participants to know when the data is being collected. Apparently, there are no easy answers to these questions. In addition to adhering to the ethical considerations described in the next section, I tried to make the whole research process transparent and make the participants informed as comprehensively as possible.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

4.8.1 Ethical Principles

This research followed general requirements regarding informed consent and autonomy; privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity; risks and benefits in research (Punch, 2013). I am aware that ethical issues may occur at different phases throughout the research process, and thus should be considered comprehensively from developing the research topic and questions, collecting data, analysing and interpreting data, to reporting and publishing (Creswell, 2009).

4.8.2 Informed Consent and Protection

Signed informed consent was obtained in paper form with signatures. The purpose of the study, the level and type of their involvement, relevant risks and benefits, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw anytime without explanation (Creswell, 2009) were informed both verbally and on paper. The consent form was in English and it was confirmed that every participant understood the content. Before the interview started, confidentiality and issues regarding the usage and storage of data were emphasized again. The consent of using a digital voice recorder was obtained verbally. It was mentioned that the participants have the right to ask for a pause

of recording anytime they want. The participants were also informed of the start and finish of each interval of recording.

Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured to protect participants' privacy and keep them from any potential harm. Information containing contextual clues that can be identifiable is avoided; pseudonym is used, and some data is presented in an aggregate and composite form (Neuman, 2014; Punch, 2013) to increase safety.

4.8.3 Ethical Clearance

Apart from considerations of ethical principles, formal ethical clearance from the Norwegian Centre for Data Research (NSD) was obtained before proceeding with data collection. This research is also registered in UiB's system for risk and compliance (RETTE) automatically as it is approved by NSD.

5. Migrating for Marriage and Family Practice

This chapter will address the research question: *In what ways do gender relations and cultural norms in the origin country affect East Asian women's cross-border marriage and their relocation experiences in Norway?* I will start by contextualising the participants' gendered experiences in their origin country. Then I will demonstrate how these experiences shape their gender perception and affect their decisions of entering a cross-border marriage. Next, the implication of motherhood identity and how it affects the participants' early motherhood practice as an immigrant woman in Norway will be explored. Further, division of housework reveals various experiences of the participants. While feeling liberated from traditional gender roles as it could have been in the origin country, some participants negotiate in the immigrants' reality and compromise with unequal share. In addition, the constraints and resources at the structural level, as well as the intersection of immigrant status and gender are investigated in the discussion of marriage formation, motherhood, and division of housework.

5.1 Entering Cross-Border Marriage

5.1.1 Prior to Marriage Migration

When discussing their thoughts about marriage, about half of the participants showed their uncertainty and resistance toward getting married in their country of origin. Most of them pointed to the issues regarding gender roles, especially the obligations of daughter-in-law. The patriarchal ideas of men and the discrimination toward women were also among the reasons. **May (36)** said the obligation toward in-laws is the reason why she thinks she would never get married in her country of origin. **Yun (44)** said that she never had long relationships with Korean men, and she disliked that *“there's gender discrimination in Korea. The hierarchy that man is more outside. Some have this wrong idea that man is better than women.”* **Nikki (36)** described,

With my personality, I would probably stay single forever in China. I don't want to trap myself in the Chinese type of family cycle, so I don't think I would get a husband in China. (...) I have to work, [in addition to childcare] also need to take care of his parents, plus his emotions. (...) For many men, their parents come first. Everything we do should prioritise “filial piety”. But at the same time, this “filial piety” is unreasonable because he doesn't perform it properly himself. Instead, it only becomes a moral shackle for me.

This remark, along with the statements from May and Yun echo the arguments of Raymo (2015) that the tension between women's attitudinal change on gender roles and the limited change in gendered expectations and obligations in the family sphere leads to a significant trend of later and less marriage in East Asian countries. In addition to the obligations to serve parents-in-law, the inequitable share of domestic work, as well as how egalitarian partner's perspective on gender were also mentioned by the participants when they expressed their unwillingness to enter marriage with their co-ethnics.

However, being uncertain about marrying a co-ethnic does not mean that the participants intend to find a foreign partner. Only few of them specified their preference of having relationships with non-co-ethnics. Rather, the cross-border marriage and following permanent migration is the result of their international travels and short-term migrations. A sense of marginality in the original society and a desire to experience a new lifestyle are both found as the reasons why East Asian women leave their countries initially (Hamano, 2019). As **Yani (26)** said,

I went abroad [to study] at 17. I had a desire to see the world outside. In my country, the West and the developed countries are always depicted so well (...) I wanted to see what the difference is. Fortunately, my family can afford to send me to study abroad.

Umi (27) admitted,

I felt I didn't fit in in China. Everybody is working so hard, fighting for a better life. I am not like that (...) Living in the East Asian context, I felt out of place. Here [in Norway] I feel more comfortable.

Although there was only Umi who affirmed her tendency of migrating directly, a similar feeling of not fitting in resonated among other participants.

At the same time, it is worth noticing that having international experiences before migrating to Norway is a common trait among the participants – ten out of eleven had lived overseas; six of them acquired their educational degrees abroad. This trait can be seen also in how these couples first met each other. Among all eleven couples, one met through a dating app online, three met when they were both students in a third country, two couples met in Norway, when one of the participants visited her family member and the other was a student, and the rest five couples met in the participants' original country when the Norwegian men visited for study, work, and general visits. The couples kept the long-distance relationship for 2-9 years after they first met and before the participants moved to Norway permanently. These

facts reflect a high level of mobility, resource, and capability to travel. It also means that most of the participants and their partners are in a higher position in the social class stratification.

5.1.2 Marrying a Foreigner – Structural Constraints and Cultural Norms

Regarding the decision to get married, two aspects were mentioned by the participants. One is the Norwegian migration law that regulates immigrants and marriage, the other one is the gender norms in the country of origin. As a citizen from a non-EU country, the participants are restricted to a 90-day stay every 180 days in Norway. Most participants and their partners took a trip or two to visit each other mutually. However, the costly back and forth travels are not sustainable and thus drive many couples to opt for marriage as “a solution” for being in the same place. **Yani (26)** got married and moved at 24 after a two-year long-distance relationship. When I asked her thought about getting married and if she considered hers too early. She replied,

I felt I had to get married to stay in Norway. If I had had a choice, I would not have wanted to marry. To me, marrying or not has no difference, so why getting married? The reason that I got married was that I wanted to stay in Norway [to be with her husband]. The only and easiest way is marriage. I felt a bit forced (...) I felt I lost the right to decide.

During the two-year long-distance relationship, while her boyfriend was still studying, she applied for seasonal work in Norway and used the seasonal work visa to visit him and stay together for a longer time. Nevertheless, the structural constraints from the migration regulations limited her agency and pushed her to marry in the end.

In addition to getting married itself, the income requirement in the migration regulations also imposes constraints on these cross-border marriage couples, especially the local ones, since they need to prove a certain amount of income as one of the requirements to qualify their foreign spouses for the residence permit application. Consequently, some participants' Norwegian spouses ended up prioritising employment and income earning over their aspirations. **Siona's (30)** husband was one of them. She said,

Actually, that's why he got a job after his master's. He wanted to go directly to the PhD. But then, you know, we have to have a certain amount of money. He had to, not me. He had to have a certain amount of income. So he had to get a job first so that we can apply for the Fiancée Visa.

The income requirement creates and strengthens foreign spouses' dependency, as well as the power dynamics and tensions between the couples. For **Umi (27)**, she acknowledged that it was the support and income from her husband that eventually made her able to move over. In the meantime, she recalled the tension between them, "*Yeah, I pressured him. I was quite worried at that time because it was under pandemic when he graduated, and it was harder to find a job when the economy was weak.*". Interestingly, instead of interpreting the income requirement as a constraint, she considered it necessary:

If there was no economic requirement, wouldn't it be harder after you move? If your partner doesn't have a job that can support you (...) first two years you will likely be unemployed unless you don't mind doing any kind of work. (...) This requirement is meant to secure the couple's life.

She continued that even if there was no such restriction, she would "absolutely" not move to Norway provided her boyfriend was unemployed and not economically secured. On the other hand, when I asked if she would rather prefer him to move to her location since she had a job there, she denied it by saying that she cannot guarantee her salary to be enough to provide for him without him having a job.

In **Yani, Siona** and **Umi's** cases, apparently both members of the cross-border relationship made some compromises due to the migration rules, which limited their choices of whether to enter a marriage or career planning. Nevertheless, despite the couple's agency being restricted, they had the resources and capability to meet the requirement of the regulations and lessen the unwanted consequences. Furthermore, in Umi's case, her statement revealed that instead of seeing herself as a dependent who relies on her husband to meet the income requirement that allows her to acquire the residence permit, she takes it for granted that the local members, or the men – given her hesitation towards the suggestion of her being the provider – should take the responsibility of the provider role. In this way, having the perception of traditional gender roles makes her in favour of the law restriction.

Gender relations and gender norms in the country of origin also played a role when the participants consider forming the cross-border marriage. As Lutz (2010) proposed, discourses and practices on gender in both countries of arrival and origin should be examined. Research has discussed the negative and stereotyped images associated with women who married Western men in Asia (e.g., Tosakul, 2010). **Siona's (30)** experience demonstrated the existence of such influence. She was aware of the different meanings of marriage for her and her boyfriend. She said the decision of getting married might let her boyfriend feel "*a bit forced*

because it is not normal in Norway to go directly into marriage life. (...) They live together for a long time. They don't have to get married.” However, for her, she added,

But as an Asian, I need something certain. (...) In fact, my mother was a bit worried that what if I marry or live with a foreigner, and it doesn't work out? Then I have to move back to Korea, and then people will know that I lived with a Norwegian in Norway, a foreigner. Korea is still a very conservative society. People are really traditional. She was afraid that people might talk behind me, gossiping and giving me a bad reputation. Of course, I don't care that much (...) But she was still worried.

Similarly, **Yun (44)** mentioned premarital cohabitation was still regarded as shameful at the time when she first visited her boyfriend one and a half decades ago. She had to hide the truth that she lived with him from her family. Besides, they were also sceptical about her relationship with a foreigner. Meanwhile, she further pointed out *“Westerners, Europeans, Caucasians are not that discriminated in Korea. They get benefits. It's more positive. (...) If it was African Americans, it would be a big problem for East Asian women to marry.”* Both **Yun** and **Siona's** remarks show how gender norms and gender discourse in their country of origin impact their choices of relationship and marriage. Although they are conscious that those gender norms are changing, as Yun emphasised it was the observation long time ago and Siona distinguished her stance from her mother's and she does not care about the norm so much, one can still see the influence of the discourses and cultural norms.

5.2 Motherhood Identity and Mothering in East Asia and Norway

5.2.1 Implications of Motherhood Identity

Children is one of the primary considerations when it comes to the decisions of moving, staying and returning for the participants. **Nikki (36)** had a promising job in her country of origin while in a long-distance relationship with her husband. She intended to let him move over before she discovered her pregnancy. She asserted if she had not been pregnant, she would not have moved to Norway. *“Only considering me, staying in my country was a better option for my [career] development. But when I found out that I got pregnant, there was no more hesitation about moving. For the sake of the child's welfare and education.”* What Nikki said here implied a primacy of the identity of being a mother. That is, once she realized that she would become a mother, the consideration for the benefits of the child outweighed her own career prospect. However, at the same time, this factor stands out and has a decisive influence on the decision-making on moving because Norway is regarded as a better place to raise children. Similar

accounts were made by many other participants, including *“if I could choose, I prefer to live in my country of origin with my husband. But at the same time, I really hope that my children can go to school here in Norway”* (Yani, 26), *“Now that I have a child, it is more impossible to return. I do not think the environment in my home country is suitable for children”* (Fei, 32) and *“I thought about going back to my country. Then I think about my boy. Norway is a better place for him to grow up”* (Yun, 44). Arguably, in these cases, Norway’s beneficial environment for children reinforces the significance of mother identity and thus facilitates migrant women’s decisions in moving to and staying in Norway.

In this study, all the participants, whether they have children, expressed a preference for raising children in Norway. The main reason mentioned repetitively was the high level of competition and stress for children in their home countries, i.e., China, Korea and Taiwan. Many said they did not want their children to experience what they have been through themselves. Umi (27) reckoned that the education environment in Norway, as opposed to the high pressure and tension in schools in her home country, allows children to enjoy learning more. In addition, Fei (32) suggested that the society in her home country is not friendly toward children overall. She talked about her experience of being overtaken on the road and not given space in the lift while driving the baby stroller and posited that the living environment in her home country is unfriendly, if not dangerous, for children. For May (36), she does not have a plan to move back to her country of origin *“unless the society changes”*. She further pointed out, *“I don't want my children, if I have one, to live in my home country (...) And if it's a girl, then definitely not. I think it's better to grow up in Norway. The inequality there is too big.”* Judging from all the statements above, both the push factors from the participants’ home countries and the pull factors from Norway contribute to the participants’ positive attitudes in raising children in Norway. It also shows that these participants recognize Norwegian cultural values and structural advantages regarding child-rearing, and perhaps their capability in using these resources.

While there was a unanimous preference for raising children in Norway among all the participants, some stressed the importance of maintaining the connection of their children with the culture of where they are from. Concerning this, Wen (36) said she and her husband had discussed it before they got married. They hope to have some short-term stays in her home country every year to maintain the connection between the child and her friends. Meanwhile, Norway is their main residence, as they considered it a better place for the child to grow up. In the same vein, Yani (26) hoped that the child can receive education in both countries. She said,

I hope my child can experience the kind of freedom Norwegian children have, growing up in a stress-free environment, but I also hope my child can receive some years of primary school education in my home country, at least learning the language and some culture.

In addition to the participants' expectation of maintaining the connection between their children and the culture of their home countries, both Wen and Yani's remarks also implied that these couples are assumed more resourceful, as it costs to maintain transnational connections. Furthermore, it also reflected that they have a certain level of power or a more equal position in decision-making as to their husbands in the marriage, although, it is equally doubtful to which extent these expectations can be met in practice.

5.2.2 (Early) Motherhood in East Asia and Norway

When the participants compared child-rearing between their home countries and Norway, one of the main distinctions and challenges mentioned by all of them is the lack of family support. Many stated if they had had children in their home countries, they would have received support from their parents; when the parents are not available, there is always an option of hiring domestic helpers. This distinction, according to most participants, would have made a significant difference, as they meant the help from their in-laws was rather limited, and it was demanding in raising children in Norway. **Kylee (42)** pointed out the divergence between parents' attitudes regarding helping their children with childcare. She said, "*My in-laws would help if you [I] asked them. But they do not think it is their duty (...) They do it when they can.*" **Ning (33)** is the mother of a four-year-old and a one-and-half. She described herself as burnout and had no time for herself. When I asked if she thought it would have been less challenging to raise children in her home country. She said,

My parents would have helped us. Here it is only us two. His parents helped very seldom, perhaps one or two hours maximum. But the working hour in my home country is longer, so it is hard to say. But it is easier to find an hourly nanny there, which is not the case in Norway.

Ning's statement reflected the constraints East Asian women face nowadays – the parental leave system is not implemented properly, and women are expected to take the main responsibility of childcare and housework while having a job. As a result, childcare responsibility relies heavily on outsourcing and familial support. On the other hand, in the context of Norway, although the structural conditions, such as the parental leave, kindergarten

system, and other child welfare services are better, it is obvious that the participants feel they do not receive enough support for birth-giving and childcare as they could have gotten in the home country due to different cultural norms and family relations.

Zhizhi (40) echoed Ning's remark and emphasized that it is "unusual" for couples with new-born to cope with everything alone without getting help from either their parents or domestic workers. In fact, her mother has been to Norway twice when she gave birth and helped with her postpartum recovery. This is not an uncommon situation for East Asian migrant women. It reflects not only the close family relationship and high involvement of parents helping with children's birth-giving and early childcare but also the resources and social class of the families these migrant women come from. In addition, it seems that for Chinese participants, parents' involvement is higher than participants from other countries. Apart from the cultural norm, the one-child policy can be relevant too. As the Chinese participants are the only child in their families, they usually receive most of the resources, as well as pressure from their families.

Yani (26), for example, was certain that it would be easier for her to give birth and raise children in her home country. She said,

My family would be by my side and take care of me day and night. While in Norway, you can only stay at the hospital for a day or two (...) all the hard work will fall on you. It is unlikely that the in-laws come to take care of you. Impossible.

As she was aware of the different cultural norms and what constraints she might encounter, Yani's consideration of when and whether to have children was affected correspondingly. For example, she reckoned that job security and financial independence are essential for her before she plans to have children, considering her status of being an immigrant with a lack of family support. However, if she was in her home country, having a job would not be a necessary condition because of her family support. This is what she had to say,

If I were in my home country, I could have had children without a job. My family provides me with a great sense of security. I know even if I don't have a job, my parents will support me. Besides, cost is also relatively low in my home country, so there is less economic pressure.

Although Yani's remark was based on her well-off family background and close family relationship, it illustrated the potential constraint perceived by the marriage migrant women and the role of family support plays in their planning of having children.

In fact, in the context of East Asian countries, the flip side of family support is the pressure parents impose simultaneously on their children of getting married and having offspring when they reach marriageable age. Regarding this, I asked the participants whether they experience similar pressure from their in-laws in Norway. Few participants mentioned there was some unserious probing, but not to the extent of pressure. **Yani (26)** was the only one who had negative experiences. She became upset when her father-in-law's asked why she has not had children, and she explained why she felt offended by his jocose inquiry:

In my home country, if your parents pressure you to get married and have children, they would at least buy you a property, which makes it a fairly equal trade. "I buy you a house, please hurry to get married and have children." But here in the West, parents do not do that (...) They do not sacrifice their life quality for their children. Without helping us, his father even asked me to make him grandchildren, although jokingly. I was so upset. A completely unfair trade.

What dissatisfied Yani was the background refusal from her father-in-law in helping the couple with part of the down payment of the house, while her mother sponsored them with a sum without asking them to return. In her perception, parents' pressure and urge are justified when they contribute correspondingly. Her individual choice was thus shaped by the interaction based on such cultural values. However, when this tacit agreement does not function in the context of Norway, the expectation of having grandchildren became unreasonable and caused conflicts. This disparity in family relationships and cultural norms might also influence the married couple's power relations.

5.3 Division of Housework – Negotiating Gender Roles in Immigrant's Reality

5.3.1 Liberating from the Traditional Gender Roles Back home

Concerning the division of housework, many participants expressed that they felt relief from the traditional gender role they could have had if they married and lived in their countries of origin. Some of the participants from China mentioned they would have been expected to fulfil the obligations of doing most of the housework and childcare as it is in the traditional cultural norms most Chinese men subscribed to. Now they do not feel the same pressure in the relationship with their Norwegian husbands, and they do not consider housework or childcare as only their responsibility. In fact, most of the Chinese participants, as they were the only child in their families, did not experience sharing much housework responsibility during their upbringing. On the other hand, the Korean participants who have male siblings reported the

phenomenon of “favour of son” in their families and the experiences of differential treatment when they grew up – although a generational change was also mentioned. **Seona (30)** recalled her experience of being demanded by her grandmother to cook and serve her brother on a national holiday. Although she was strongly offended, she followed the demand and left the house angrily afterwards. When I asked about her mother’s role in the incident, she said,

She was there, and she was not happy with how my grandmother treated me. She also expected me to do housework, but she expected my brother to do it, too (...) My father is very conservative. He thinks he brings income, and my mom is just a housewife (...) He of course expects my mom to cook dinner for him after he comes back from work. My grandmother also. My grandmother is also female, right? It was really funny that she discriminated against me even though she's female. I don't think she's aware of that. She's a very old, conservative grandma that thinks women must serve men.

With such experience and reflection on her upbringing, she found her current relationship entirely different. She said,

I married a Norwegian and moved here. I have never experienced that women have to do certain things, like doing laundry, making food, or taking care of their children – everything, basically, housework, the typical stereotype that women have to do housework. My husband doesn't ask me to do housework all by myself. But my grandmother is totally different.

5.3.2 Negotiating in Immigrant’s Reality

In addition to the relief from the traditional gender role and obligation, the division of housework between couples (and childcare) is considered fairer and more egalitarian according to the responses of most of the participants. It is noticeable, nevertheless, that it does not mean the work amount was distributed equally per se. In the cases of many participants, the division of housework (and childcare) was diverse and dynamic, varying along different stages of resettlement of the immigrant women. In general, in the preliminary stage when the participants waited for the residence permit or went to the official language course, they did most of the housework at home. After that, as the participants became more established and gained more opportunities, the situation may change. In **Nikki’s (36)** case, she described at the time when she went to the language course, she did 80 per cent of the housework. Now she has gained a full-time job besides a part-time study, while her husband decided to quit his job and go back to school, the situation of housework division was reversed. For this reason, she felt the housework division was fair.

The unemployment and time availability of marriage migrant women at the beginning stage of the resettlement seems to provide a justification and contribute to the traditional gendered division of housework. Many participants took up most of the housework responsibility and considered that was fair since they did not have a paid job. **Umi (27)** agreed with this idea. She was waiting for her residence permit when interviewed. She said,

Now I am at home all the time, so I am doing most of the housework. I think it is not a problem considering he has a job. I think doing housework and earning income are both contributions to the household. They are equally important (...) But if we both have jobs, then I will ask to share the housework equally.

Umi was not the only one who had this perspective of the trade-off between housework responsibility and cash-earning. **May (36)** recalled that she felt “sorry” for her husband because even though he had a job – while she did not – he did much housework at home because he was faster. Similarly, **Yani (26)** also said, “*maybe he feels it was unfair that I spend the money he earns, and he still has to use his only free time on the weekend to do housework...*” What lies behind these statements is the idea that the ones who own a paid job are entitled to be exempted from sharing housework, and the immigrant wives who are not employed should do most of the housework. It is for this reason that May felt sorry and Yani felt it was unfair for her husband when they did not fulfil most of the housework responsibility. This idea, on the one hand, seems to be pragmatic and reasonable for the functioning of household; on the other hand, tends to place these marriage migrant women in a disadvantageous position in housework sharing.

It is worth noticing, however, that these East Asian migrant women still have a relatively high agency to negotiate the housework sharing with their husbands. For example, in **Yani’s** case, although she felt it was “unfair” for the husband, she kept on saying “*but he knows that is what he should do. If he let me do housework all the time, I will complain. You need to express your discontent. He would not know if you do not say it.*” Moreover, in **Umi’s** case, her emphasis on the equal importance of her unpaid housework and her husband’s waged work in the contribution to the household economy, as well as the request for the equal division of housework once she gets a job both revealed a sense of equity and fairness between the couple.

In the same line of discussion, a more equal power relation and egalitarian gender perception can be seen in Seona’s response. Contrary to Umi’s perspective, **Seona (30)** argued

that being unemployed did not provide sufficient ground for her to take up more housework responsibilities. She said,

I can do more just to be nice. But I don't feel pressured, or I don't think it's mandatory for me to do more housework because I'm not working. I also have my own work to do, like studying and other things. Basically, cleaning the house and housework is not our priority, in general. (...) *I told him clearly that I don't want to do housework alone. We live here together.*

Apparently, Seona is not convinced by the trade-off between paid jobs and unpaid housework. Rather than trying to fulfil the traditional role of wife and prioritizing household responsibility or feeling obliged of doing most housework because of not gaining income, Seona is more aware of developing herself and establishing her life in the new society for a long-term prospect. In relation to this, she also has a more forward position in requesting a more egalitarian relationship in sharing housework.

5.3.3 Compromise to Unequal Housework Share

Overall, most participants meant the housework division was fair and reasonable. No one expressed particular dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, as some participants had a more egalitarian relationship in terms of division of housework and were more active in requesting equal sharing, some others felt they have done more than their husbands and compromised more in the relationship. **Wen (36)** described that the couple did not have a specific task distribution, and it has worked smoothly. However, she was certain that she spent more time on housework since she paid more attention to the details. For this situation, she commented, *“But I would tell him. It was not like he did not want to do. He was just not aware.”* **Kylee (42)** also affirmed that she did more housework and stated that *“he only did it when I asked him, otherwise, he could not see it.”* Then she attributed it to the sex difference,

Women and men see different things. Women are more thorough; men are not. Men do not necessarily see what women see. What women think should be done, men think it is okay without it being done. At the end of the day, we think we do a lot, but men doubt it. They think it is only some dishes and some laundry.

Both remarks implied a tendency of justifying the unequal division of housework and attributing it to sex differences. They revealed an imbalanced relation both in the division of work and in the effort of communication and emotion.

When talking about tension and conflicts resulting from the dissatisfaction with housework sharing, **Kylee (42)** described,

He has changed, but it was because of communication, constantly. If it was in my home country, I would not bring it up so often (...) Many things would be stable. [My] economics would be stable, and your [my] tolerance would probably be lower. If my husband was from the same country, you [I] would tolerate [her husband] less. But here in Norway (...) as an immigrant, you [I] need to tolerate more and get used to things that you [I] were [was] not used to...This goes also beyond marriage...

What Kylee said here pointed out how the status of being an immigrant affected her agency in negotiating housework – potentially also in other aspects – in the marriage. The instability of personal economics and thus, the dependence resulting from the migration made her compromise with what she would have not, had she not been an immigrant and lived in her original country.

In addition, Kylee also mentioned the difference between Asian women and Norwegian women when she addressed the imbalanced division of housework. She said, *“I feel we Asian women do not fuss about it that much. We turn a blind eye and just do it ourselves. So, we end up doing more.”* And when I asked about what could have been different in terms of the division of housework had her husband been married to a Norwegian woman, she said,

I think it would be the same, but perhaps they would end up divorced. In marriage, either one makes some changes, or the other turns a blind eye. All I can say is that we women from the East have a higher tolerance, so we think, “Okay, then we have to do it on our own.”

Fei (32) had a similar account. While she hoped her husband to take initiative and contribute more to housework and childcare, she expressed an unwillingness to request it. She said,

Fei: Yes [to expecting more contribution], but I am lazy. Think that I didn't need to do any housework when I was little. Since I came to Norway, I have had to do everything on my own.

Me: It sounds like you would hope him to do more.

Fei: Yeah, but it depends. I asked only when I was too busy and exhausted. Maybe I am a bit proud. I feel if I can make it, why do I ask him...

Somehow echoing what Kylee has mentioned about the difference between Norwegian women and Asian women, Fei relayed what her husband has said, *“He has told me that had he been*

together with a Norwegian woman, his life would not have been as good as now.” When I questioned how she felt about this statement and if she felt unfair, she commented,

Then they wouldn’t have children together. Had he been together with a Norwegian, he would not have got married or had children (...) Think about it, in the scenario of one [woman] with extreme feminism, and a guy refuses to accept it, I think it is likely that they just yell at each other.

In Kylee and Fei’s accounts, they were both aware that they shared more housework, and they were not necessarily happy about it. In the meantime, Kylee emphasized that Asian women do not fuss about more housework and turn a blind eye; Fei mentioned the contrast amount of housework she had to do before and after marriage, and her choice to accomplish domestic tasks alone. These depictions seem to meet a more traditional gender role for women in the household and relationship. Highlighting what they did and contrasting it to what Norwegian women would have done also implied an awareness of being divergent from the norm and some uncertainty. However, both Kylee and Fei used the negative consequences such as being single, conflicts and divorce that could take place, should their husbands be together with Norwegian women as a counterexample. In this way, they defended the compromises they made and gave meaning to the traditional gender division of women doing more housework.

5.3.4 Gendered Division of Tasks

In regard to gendered division of housework and childcare, I asked the participants how they divided work, and if they considered any work that should be done by men. As mentioned earlier, there are various ways of sharing within the couples, depending on the practicality, and it seems that some participants have more power to negotiate what they do not like to do, such as cleaning the toilet. Other than that, repairing, maintenance and heavy lifting were the kinds of work that some participants considered should be done, or naturally be done by their husbands. Many mentioned that their husbands offered to help lift heavy items or do maintenance work. Concerning this, there are different explanations from the participants. For example, **Seona (30)** said,

To be honest, women can also do such work if they want to. We can also chop. But I think that’s a really tricky question. We have to be treated equally, but at the same time, we also have to admit that we are different (laughter).

In **Umi’s (27)** case, she meant that she could do work such as shifting bulbs and lifting heavy things, and she tried to be involved with everything. However, her husband was more proactive

in doing such work. She said, *“it is not that I do not want to do it. I am really not good at it, and since he is good at it, then I should do other things. I can do cleaning or cooking.”* Similarly, **May (36)** said her husband does the repairing work because she cannot do it. She argued, *“if I can do it, I will do it. But I just don't know how to do it. He likes fixing.”* When I asked if she wanted to learn or was expected to learn to, she answered,

May: He likes to fix furniture. He likes it if I come and watch and help a little bit. He likes it. But he doesn't ask me if I have time. He likes it if I show interest in what he is doing for the house.

Me: So, for he does the heavy stuff?

May: Yeah. And he likes it. It's like his hobby of fixing things.

What Seona, Umi and May said all suggested a gendered division of housework which fits the gender stereotype that certain types of work, such as fixing and maintenance are seen as “men’s job”. Meanwhile, they explained the situation differently. Seona and Umi both affirmed women’s capability and responsibility to share heavy work while Seona stressed the physical difference between men and women and used it to justify women not doing heavy work. Umi, on the other hand, used the perspective of “skillfulness” to argue that she should stick to what she is good at, which, in this case, corresponds to typical women’s work. In May’s case, she appeared a more distant attitude from the work in question, while emphasizing her husband’s interest in doing maintenance work. A commonality here is all of them displayed a willingness to do “men’s work” and agreed that ideally, it should be more equal. Nevertheless, in practice, the division still conforms to the traditional gendered pattern due to the habitual perception, gender stereotypes and the interactions between the couples.

6. (Re)construction of Gender Perceptions and Gender Identities

In order to answer the research question “*To what extent are gender perceptions and expectations of gender roles of East Asian migrant women influenced by the Norwegian gender equality ideal?*”, this chapter will first explore East Asian migrant women’s views on gender equality in Norway and how they adapt to Norwegian gender norms. I will illustrate the participants’ ambivalent and dynamic process of acculturating and contending Norwegian gender equality ideology. On the one hand, they adopt egalitarian values at the attitudinal level; on the other hand, traditional gender role expectations persist. The findings also show that for some participants, the gender equality ideal becomes a constraint and causes tension when they struggle to conform to the gender norms. The second part of this chapter will delve into how participants redefine femininity and masculinity, and how they reconstruct gender roles in a new socio-cultural context in Norway. An empowering case will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

6.1 Manoeuvring between Gender Ideologies and Gender Norms in Norway

6.1.1 *Being a Woman in Norway – Perceptions of East Asian Migrant Women*

When the participants addressed their experiences of being a woman in their country of origin and Norway and when they articulated what makes gender equality in Norway, in line with the findings of Cudjoe et al. (2021), topics related to labour market participation and the reconciliation between career and motherhood are central. Raymo et al. (2015) argued that inequality in the labour market and difficulties in work-family balance make the opportunity cost of marriage and childbearing especially high for women with high educational attainment and economic independence. This point is evident when the participants highlighted the discrimination women (mothers) face in the workplace and the traditional gender role women take regarding childcare in the family in East Asia.

Despite being forbidden in the labour laws, the participants mentioned many companies back home refuse to hire women, especially those of marital and child-bearing age. In addition, it is not uncommon that women cannot return to their job positions after giving birth. In contrast, some participants expressed that employment is one of the aspects they considered the most gender-equal in Norway. **Yun** (44) said,

If a woman wants to be the leader of the group, she has to sacrifice her private life, not having a baby. That is the reason why I stay here and I was trying to get a job because it's fairer, I can get the same as men.

Besides, the lack of supportive social policies regarding childcare and maternity leave and asymmetric division in the family sphere leave women with dilemmas between work and children, which is one of the major reasons causing the low fertility rate in East Asian countries (Raymo et al., 2015). Several participants mentioned such struggles. **Seona (30)** said, “*at least one person has to sacrifice work for a certain amount of time, around one year, and normally it is mother’s job to do that.*” **Umi (27)** pointed out the role of public childcare systems:

One-year-old can be sent to kindergartens in Norway, even earlier if arranged. But in my home country, it is three-year-old. That means if I don’t have support from my parents, I have to look after the child from pregnancy to three-year-old (...) It means you must choose between a career and family. This is not the case in Norway.

Similarly, **Yun (44)** praised the advantages of being a woman in Norway. She said,

It’s much better and much fairer here. Society understands women who give birth and go back to work. Everything is systemized very well and organized (...) When I worked and took care of the kid, my experience differed from my friends in my original country (...) The mother can deliver and pick up the kid if the husband cannot do it because there is rarely overtime. However, it is impossible there because we work overtime all the time.

Again, her statement emphasized the significance of maintaining jobs and motherhood for the participants. The remarks of the participants showed how the structural framework impacts individuals’ choices. At the same time, they also unravel the participants’ idea of traditional gendered roles in childcare and motherhood.

Another contrast highlighted by the participants between being a woman in the country of origin and Norway is the difference in gender hierarchy and gender norms in a patriarchal and egalitarian society. Many participants articulated how they observed and experienced women being in a lower position in society, both in the public and private sphere. They identified the cultural norms that women are requested to use the respectful form to call their male colleagues in the workplace and male taxi drivers being rude and verbally harassing female passengers to young female passengers. **Seona (30)** concluded her unpleasant upbringing as a daughter and the negative experiences she had as a young woman in her origin country,

When I was younger, or maybe still now, I thought, “Hah, I think it is better for me to be a man.” I think I will have a more comfortable life. I do not know why I thought like that, but I thought it would be much more comfortable for me to live as a man than a woman, especially in my home country.

She recalled being demanded by her grandmother to cook and serve her younger brother because of the “favour of sons” and the lower hierarchy women are situated. She contested, *“my grandmom is also female, right? It was funny that she discriminated against me even though she is also a woman. I don’t think she was aware of that. She was very old, conservative and thought women should serve men”*. Besides, she talked about her unpleasant experience of being emotionally pushed to have sex with an ex-boyfriend, where she then contrasted it with her current marriage:

Those things happened several times and I really didn’t like it. It felt like I have to do it anyway to keep the relationship. That is not nice. But I have never felt that way with my husband now. Respect. Everyone has to be respected in that way. Sleeping together is not just like grabbing a beer.

Her case unravels the submissive and constrained position women face in the power relation in a society of patriarchal gender relations.

Related to this, on the other hand, many participants viewed their experience being a woman in Norway more positively. Some of them talked about the feeling of being respected as a woman as they contrasted the cultural norms in the two countries. **Seona (30)** gave an example,

Here at least people don't make dirty jokes to women. People really try to avoid that. It's not good. In Korea, I feel like people are aware that they should not make those sexual jokes, but they just do it, because we were doing that since our parent’s generation.

Yani (26) commented on the relationship with her husband,

He doesn’t intervene in my freedom. [In Norway,] generally speaking, men encourage what women want to do. They don’t go against you. If I say I don’t want to have children, my husband can understand me. However, most Chinese men will not understand and accept that I don’t have children.

These two examples are significant for Seona and Yani because for them the cultural norms are deeply engrained and seemingly unchangeable in the context of East Asia. However, they see an alternative in the new socio-cultural context. A similar situation happened when **Yun**

(44) visited her Norwegian boyfriend for the first time. Feeling oppressed and treated unequally back home, she was shocked by the great distinction. She said,

I visited his family. The family treated my husband's mother like a queen. My mother-in-law was treated by her husband, his son...everyone is really... I thought, “oh, that’s really the right picture that I always imagine.” When I was there, it was the same. Always lady first. We talked, and they listened (laughter). They respected our opinions. It is more ideal for me. If my husband grew up in this kind of family, he would be a good person (laughter) – the same as his father, nice and respectful to women.

Yun’s statement gave a vivid description of the cultural shock and according to her, although with some romanticization, this promising scenario she experienced indeed contributed to her decision of moving to Norway.

6.1.2 Contending Gender Equality in Norway

While the participants identified several positive points of being a woman in Norway, many of them showed an ambivalent attitude when discussing the concept of gender equality. In line with Cudjoe et al.’s research, most participants agreed that it is relatively gender-equal in Norway. They identified the double-earner model, more equal opportunity for women in the labour market, and women’s political participation as indicators. However, some participants suggested the idea that “women’s rights have gone too far in Norway” when they responded to the question of what they think about gender equality in Norway. A common reason they brought up to support their opinions was the quota system, which they expressed uncertainty of its fairness. One participant pointed out that there are many social programs specifically for women, but not for men. Similar findings were also shown in Cudjoe et al. (2021). They argued it is challenging to engage immigrants from different cultures where gender equality is not the norm.

In the research on how immigrants’ acculture gender-egalitarian values, Röder and Mühlau (2014) found that immigrants' attitudes are correlated to the gender relations in their origin country. On the other hand, the remarks of some participants disclosed the impact of their local spouses may also play a role in their perceptions and the discourses they adopted in the new society. For example, **Wen (36)** said,

To be honest, I think women’s rights in Norway are a bit extreme. My husband joked that women are taking over the whole country. They are concerned about the issue of

whether it is equal specifically for women because feminism is an essential part of Norway.

Likewise, **Fei (32)** relayed to her husband, *“he thinks women’s rights go too far. He thinks men are in disadvantageous positions in Norway and often lose lawsuits. For example, if we divorce, he will lose more, and the custody of children usually goes to mothers.”* On the other hand, **May (36)** also pointed to the quota system she knew of from her company, which she called *“a kind of reversed discrimination towards men”*, but she explained that she is not against it. She said,

I like the fact that they are voicing these issues. I am sure many women fought to get to this point, so I don’t want to somehow get back to 100 years ago. Maybe I’m still..., but I feel comfortable voicing those needs here that I want equality.

She also compared gender relations in Norway with the situation in her origin country and she stated that women there should voice more. Clearly, May has adopted the gender-egalitarian values better, although there seemed to be some back-and-forth dialectical process.

It is indeed a dynamic process of how the participants' perceptions of gender shift between their country of origin and the new social-cultural context in Norway. **Umi (27)** articulated her uncertainty about gender equality ideology in Norway. She contested,

In the Norwegian social context, women are expected to be the same as men, doing the same labour work. It is not considered that maybe women do not need to do it, or that those who do not do the same labour work are also normal. It seems that to achieve gender equality, women should do the same as men. (...) The ideal to me is that women can decide if they want to stay home or work (...) But in Norway, they push you to go to work and take family responsibility. It is not only for men but also for women. I understand they want to diminish the division of labour between men and women, but some women prefer to stay home and take care of children. In this respect, Norway does not provide a tolerant social environment.

Similarly, **May (36)** associated the double-earner model with a constraint for women. She said,

Norwegian women have no excuses for not being productive. They cannot just say it was hard for me to find a job. I do not think it works for them here. (...) They will be labelled as a less productive member of society.

Sohl (2019) used the concepts of “emphasized femininity” and “gender-equal” femininity to analyse the narratives of Swedish return migrant women in Sweden. After experiencing being housewives in the period of accompanying their husbands' work migration overseas, some of

them found it problematic to “fit in” the double-earner model which is part of the ideal of “gender-equal femininity”. Like these returning Swedish migrant women, **Umi** and **May** also contested the core concept of individualization common in family laws in the Scandinavian context, meaning every citizen, regardless of woman or man, should work (p.89). In addition, as Sohl (2019) pointed out that the privileged social positions (class, race, sexuality) enabled the Swedish returning migrant women to negotiate within the social norms in Sweden, in the case of the participants in this study, there is also a class factor as their husbands earn enough to provide them if they prefer to stay home without working (see 7.2.2). Furthermore, critiques of Norwegian gender equality ideal from immigrants were also found in Lotherington’s (2009) research on Russian marriage migrant women in Norway. Some Russian migrant women meant that the double-earner model conflicts with the gender norms they were used to in Russia, and it was hard to comply with. The gender equality ideal is seen as dominating and demanding for them, as it also has a normative discipline effect in which these women and their families risk being seen as lacking recognition and not “Norwegian” enough. In this context, Lotherington argued that the gender equality regime dwarfs the culture diversity regime (p.98).

On the other hand, the participants simultaneously acknowledged the egalitarian aspect of the gender equality ideal. **Umi (27)** commented,

There are easy and not easy aspects. From a practical point of view, you have to do a lot of things that you do not need to do, or you are justified not to do in the East Asian culture. For example, any work that is considered heavy or difficult.

When **May (36)** talked about gender relations in her origin country, she took military service as an example to illustrate her thoughts about gender equality:

May: They should [voice more]. And they should take more responsibility.

Me: In what way?

May: Like accepting that maybe women should serve army service...

Me: Do you think that is equality?

May: I think so. If you want equality, I think you should do the [heavy] part as well.

Considering how Umi and May interpreted the notion of gender equality here, alongside their critique quoted earlier, it is obvious that they manoeuvre between the East Asian gender norms and the Norwegian gender equality ideal, both referencing back and forth in which their perceptions of gender roles are reconstructed. **Zhizhi (40)** further pointed out the inconsistency when East Asian migrant women practice gender equality ideal, which she called “*fake equality*”:

For some specific things, we follow the Norwegian way. We make use of the rhetoric of gender equality. When talking about making food, we say, “it is your turn, you Norwegian men cook.” (...) But for heavy labour work, even though women can do it, too, I can say, “I cannot manage. I am Asian.” I think many migrant women use “gender equality” selectively to choose what they (don’t) want to do.

Her observation revealed a gap between attitudinal shift and daily life practice, and it also reflected how East Asian migrant women could strategically use gender equality and ethnicity relationally to negotiate their gender roles. This point is further demonstrated in the next section in light of how East Asian migrant women adapt to Norwegian gender norms.

6.1.3 Negotiating Gender Roles in Norwegian Gender Norms

The recurring example of “*Norwegian men don’t help women carry heavy things*” was highlighted by the participants regarding contrasting gender norms in their origin country and Norway. Through discussing these topics, the participants addressed their perceptions of gender/sex differences, comparison with Norwegian women, and adaptation to the gender norms in Norway. I argued that the participants performed “emphasized femininity” (Connell, 1987) in the relational contexts of men and women, and East Asian and Norwegian women to situate themselves in the contrasting gender norms in Norwegian society.

Several participants reported that they were told and personally experienced that Norwegian men do not help when they see women lifting heavy things. If they offer to help, it can be considered offensive and disrespectful to women in the context of gender equality. Most of the participants reacted to this gender social norm while adapting to it as it is part of the Norwegian gender equality ideal. **Seona (30)** indicated that in her origin country, women expect men to carry heavy things, and she believed, “*from my observation, [Norwegian] women are pretty much the same. They also want to avoid carrying things.*” On the other hand, **Zhizhi (40)** shared a similar stance, but on men’s perspective. She posited,

Men have a sense of superiority. They think men are men and women are women. There is always a distinction (...) Perhaps Norwegian men believe they are stronger, but they behave in a manner of equality (...) I observed that there are things they think they can do, but out of respect, they do not offer help (...) They do not dare to ask even if they want to because it can be deemed insulting unless you request it yourself.

The statements of Seona and Zhizhi first implied the idea that due to the (biological) difference between men and women, considering men are stronger, presumably they would want to help and should help, whereas women naturally would desire to be helped. In their perceptions, this

idea is universal, regardless one is Asian or Norwegian, but Norwegians act against it because they conform to the gender equality ideology.

Relating to this, **Kylee (42)** reckoned that gender equality should not contradict the gender roles that men are supposed to help because they are biologically stronger. She said,

In my origin country, women's rights are increased, but men still take the initiative to ask if women need help if they see women lifting heavy things (...) I think there should be flexibility. Women have less strength than men, biologically speaking. It is good that men can take the initiative to help.

Wen's (36) case is interesting as she considered herself *"not the kind of woman who conforms to the traditional gender role and mainstream feminine image in East Asia"* while favouring the gendered social norm and expecting men to offer help regardless of whether women actually need it. She further distinguished herself and Norwegian women as she referred to them as "extreme" and they do not attach the same meaning to "being offered" as she does. This is what she had to say,

What is interesting is that maybe I still have...to men in my mind. I am not as extreme as Norwegian women. When I pull a big heavy suitcase, I ask my husband to take it. (...) I expect my husband to offer, whether I answer yes or no. I hope to be offered. I am not sure if it is cultural. I think it is a way of showing love (...) I feel Norwegian women do not have this idea. They think they can handle it themselves.

Zhizhi (40) also emphasised the distinction between Asian and Norwegian women. Instead of attributing the disparity to cultural factors, she appealed to biological differences:

I am an Asian woman. I cannot compete with Norwegian women in carrying things (...) It is normal to me. If I can't lift, then I just ask for help. Every woman is different. Some women, like me, like Asians, are exactly weaker. We do not need to hide it and pretend we are strong. They will help you because you need help.

Zhizhi was not the only one who had this sentiment, **Nikki (36)** talked about her personal experience of moving things in the office with her colleagues. She said,

My colleagues, those girls presented they were strong by showing their muscles. I doubt it's the best way (...) I think we should use equipment to assist, but they said, "why do we make it so complicated?" I had pain for two days after carrying things with her (...) Sometimes I think we don't need to emphasize how strong we are.

In Nikki's view, she thought, "*Norwegian women show muscles to demonstrate that they are as strong and they can perform the same kind of heavy work as their male counterparts*", and she associated this (perceived) social gender norm with the gender equality ideal in Norway.

I argued that the narratives above demonstrated "emphasized femininity" which the participants used to negotiate their gender roles in a different social norm they faced in the new society. The concept of "emphasized femininity" formulated by Connell (1987) is a structural understanding of femininity that acknowledges the power of men and subordination of women in a patriarchal gender order (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Sohl, 2019). In this case of adapting to the Norwegian social gender norm, a relation of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity was revealed in the participants' narratives as they are compliant with the power relations between men and women based on the sex differences in terms of physiology, reinforcing the gender role of men/strong/provider and women/weak/being provided in the patriarchal gender relations. Furthermore, a gender relation analysis should go beyond men and women; while femininity is a process of gendering, it is also distinguished by other social stratifications such as ethnicity and class (Skeggs, 2001). The participant's remarks echoed this point as they contrasted the physio-biological difference not only between men and women but also between women of different ethnicities. They emphasised the disparity of physio-biological and cultural differences between Norwegian women and Asian women, and thus the relation between Norwegian/strong and Asian/weak is narrated. I argued through narrating emphasized femininity, the participants challenge and resist this social norm that represents the Norwegian femininity and Norwegian gender equality ideal. At the same time, the word "compete" and a sense of comparison in **Zhizhi** and **Nikki's** statements emanate a tension that can happen when they, as migrant women and minorities are expected to adapt to the native majority's dominant ideology and cultural norm while finding themselves struggle to achieve it. In this sense, the egalitarian norm instead becomes a constraint and stress imposed on them (Lotherington, 2009; Siim, 2013).

6.2 Relational Femininity and Masculinity

6.2.1 Perceptions of Femininity and Masculinity

To understand how the participants perceive femininity and masculinity and how their perceptions and practices may be reconfigured, I asked questions such as what they think is considered femininity and masculinity in their country of origin and Norway, how people perform femininity and masculinity, and if they notice any changes on themselves after moving to Norway.

Several participants found it difficult to pinpoint features of femininity and masculinity in the Norwegian context as they considered there is a lower level of gender stereotyping in Norway. On the contrary, they could easily reply to the same question, identifying the characteristics which are associated with femininity and masculinity in East Asia. According to many participants, femininity in the context of East Asia is primarily related to a “beautiful” appearance with a normative beauty standard (see next section). Next, the characteristics such as being quiet, gentle, and submissive, prioritizing family, i.e., husband, children and in-laws, and not being too powerful, e.g., earning more than men were mentioned. On the other hand, when the participants talked about masculinity in East Asian countries, they considered a strong and muscular appearance most likely to be identified as masculine. Further, masculinity is associated with taking the responsibility of supplying the household, leading positions and being proactive in showing oneself. Overall, the participants’ depiction in terms of femininity and masculinity in East Asia fits the stereotypical images of a patriarchal society (Sung & Pascall, 2014).

Two participants reflected on the questions of femininity and masculinity which revealed a diversity of gender perceptions among the participants. **Seona (30)** grew up in a family and society with strict gender hierarchies between men and women (see 6.1.1). However, to my observation, she seemed to receive a higher extent of influence from egalitarian gender values which could be related to her contrasting experiences between her origin country and Norway (see also 6.2.2). She reflected,

I don't like the words femininity and masculinity because then you already have the stereotype that women have to behave in a certain way, and men, too. So, it's more like an individual's capacity (...) Men can also be weak. But people expect men to be stronger than women, at least in my origin country. Probably some men feel pressured that they have to be stronger than women. Otherwise, women or other men will tease and bully them, like “are you a woman that you cannot hold it?” It's also discrimination. So, I don't really like the words femininity and masculinity. For example. Baby, when you have a baby girl, they only wear pink things. Because that gives her more femininity. And baby boy wears blue or green.

Another example is **Wen (36)**. Different from other participants, except for the traditional gender role, it was hard for her to identify femininity in East Asia, although she grew up and lived there. To this, she explained,

This is hard to say (long pause). I am closer to the groups, such as the outdoor activity group. But the majority think women shouldn't do those dangerous and outdoor things.

Those are for men (...) But that is mainstream. My circle is on the opposite, so I am thinking about what is the opposite to me [in terms of femininity].

This is interesting because her statement implied that she did not relate herself to (mainstream) femininity in the context of East Asia, which also appeared in other participants as they suggested that they do not fit the “traditional” definition of femininity in their origin society. They differentiated themselves from the perceived traditional East Asian femininity and figured their disapproval of complying with gender social norms in East Asia hinders them to find ideal partners there.

Another point stood out when the participants compared masculinity and men’s gender role in East Asia and Norway. The participants’ emphasis on men’s role as provider in the family and their dominant positions in society is aligned with Ma et al. (2021) discussions on hegemonic masculinity in East Asia. In addition, Ma et al. compared China, Japan and Korea, and pointed out that despite different historical formations, “a standardization of hegemonic masculinity is supported through establishing legislation or directing public opinion” in all three countries (p. 2408). Such an image of hegemonic masculinity is explicit in not only the participants’ narratives regarding gender social norms in their country of origin but in their gender perceptions. Nevertheless, moving to Norway and living in a different social-cultural context, their perceptions of masculinity seem to shift. For example, in **Fei’s (32)** opinion, Norwegian men are more “manly”. Here is her elaboration,

Fei: Norwegian men are more independent. And they can fix the house. Asian dads, like my dad, has never changed diapers for their children in their whole life. The difference is huge (...) Norwegian men think men have right to the paternity leave. It is in their culture (...) I think Norwegian men are more dedicated to family life.

Me: “Manly” means taking responsibility, being independent and taking care of the family?

Fei: Yeah, just like you can take children out with you and handle everything alone.

Umi (27) also stressed this side of Norwegian men. She said,

Masculinity in Norway shows in their thoughtfulness. Their attraction lies in their willingness to take care of children, do housework, and communicate with you. I think many Norwegian men are very caring and thoughtful. They can work as kindergarten teachers and nurses.

Noticeably, now Fei and Umi perceive masculinity rather differently from what they used to in the context of East Asia. As Fei mentioned with her father, traditionally, masculinity is

associated with making money to support the family and has little relation to childcare and house chore which are regarded as feminine given that they are women's responsibilities. Likewise, being communicative, caring, and thoughtful are usually seen as feminine characteristics. In the Nordic context, however, masculinities related to "involved fatherhood" are constructed through social policies and public discourses and become dominant under the gender equality ideology (Farstad & Stefansen, 2015). Therefore, I argued that the participants' perceptions of masculinity are reconstructed accordingly and can be seen as part of the acculturation to Norwegian gender equality.

6.2.2 (Re)framing a Gendered Self – An Empowering Experience

Femininity and womanhood are the topics that caused much discussion and self-reflections among the participants. Many of them articulated their perceptions and personal experiences regarding femininity in East Asia and Norway. Distinctions about appearance maintenance, confidence, power and independence between women in the two societies were addressed most. From the participants' narratives, a process of reframing perceptions and performances on femininity is disclosed. For some of them, this process has been transformative and empowering.

For most of the participants, femininity back home in East Asia is largely defined by one's appearance, which entails a high level of social pressure, public governance, self-maintenance and material and psychological cost for women. The participants, like most women in East Asia, struggled to meet the (unreasonable) normative and homogeneous beauty standard promoted in the media and public discourses, meanwhile, this standard is sustained through institutions and social interactions in public and private spheres. In this vein, it is not surprising that some participants found the contrast between how people judge women's appearance between their origin society and Norway additionally significant and held a positive attitude when addressing femininity in Norway and Norwegian women.

As opposed to the social norm of how women in East Asia perform femininity through managing and focusing on appearance, **Kylee (42)** reckoned,

Norwegian women don't perform femininity intentionally. They only show they are women straight by how they look. They don't display on purpose by dressing up (...) I feel more comfortable being here. In my home country, I looked at what others wear and then shopped for clothes intentionally to dress up. Living here, I think it doesn't matter what we wear. Just be comfortable.

Nikki (36) echoed the response, she said,

Being a woman back home, you need to maintain [the appearance] all the time. In Asia, you need to always look like a porcelain doll (...) I spent so much on clothes and cosmetics. Here, it is okay to have enough clothes and the same cosmetics, and I don't need to have skincare and beauty sessions. I think it's *freedom*.

Both statements of Kylee and Nikki revealed the constraints imposed on women regarding appearance maintenance in East Asia which they “have to” live up to a certain appearance standard that is not to their wish but to conform to a feminine ideal in a patriarchal society. On the other hand, such constraints were much less in Norway, and they can just be “comfortable” and “free” from the burden and cost paid to conform to the social norms that govern women's appearance. Nevertheless, the influence of the social norm from the participants' origin society is hard to rid of as we can see from **Ning's (33)** statement: *“I feel I don't need to bother so much since people seem not to care here. But when I go back to my country, I still bother. Here, I am less anxious about my appearance.”* Here, the contrast between feeling constrained and released was demonstrated and she showed how one transitions between two socio-cultural contexts.

Next, **Umi (27)** and **May (36)** both compared how they and Norwegian women act and perceive selves differently, with a sense of envy and aspiration uncovered. When **Umi** searched for a word to describe femininity in Norway, she said,

Sexiness. They [Norwegian women] are confident and willing to show it. They feel good about themselves and feel sexy and beautiful, even if their body shapes are not so perfect (...) Unlike us, being extremely obsessed with wrinkles and pimples on our face, they think they are beautiful, and they are so full of confidence that they just look sexy.

May (36) resonated with a similar feeling when she reflected on how she and Norwegian women reacted differently when they were judged by their looks:

I'm way too self-conscious about what other people think about me. But I can see they [Norwegian women] really don't care. I am envious of that (...) [I changed] maybe a little bit, not a lot. I would like to be free from that thinking.

Clearly, through their own experiences, both Umi and May saw the distinction between themselves and Norwegian women despite an extent of generalisation. Their positive and envious tones revealed an aspiration to change.

The statements of all five participants above illustrated the constraints these East Asian migrants experienced back home in East Asia, which is underpinned by the cultural framework and ideological norms underpinned in the patriarchal gender relations. As Kabeer (2005) proposed in her conceptualization of women's empowerment, a choice is not a “real” choice until the alternatives are seen and considered possible (p.14). I argued that moving from East Asia to Norway and shifting between two different socio-cultural contexts, the participants are presented with different possibilities for being and doing, which leads to the possible change of some cultural beliefs and values in the individual level (Kabeer, 2005; Mosedale, 2005). How an initial sense of “feeling free” advances to the sense of agency – “the power within” – and empowers can be seen in **Seona’s (30)** case.

In the interview, Seona shared her unpleasant experiences about growing up in a traditional family having to serve her brother, being in a relationship where her body right and sexuality were not respected and being harassed verbally by random older men in her origin country. Regarding the social norms of how women’s appearance is judged and governed, she talked about how women are imposed with the unreasonable and unhealthy ideals of slim body shape, and how that once troubled her:

Seona: You saw how skinny girls from my country are. It is an Asian thing. More bone structure compared to Western people. But still, *if we train, we can also be strong*. Although I feel men prefer weak women in my origin country (...) Here they really respect women who work out a lot and are strong; or not respect, they think it is very natural that women work out and be sportier (...) Norwegian women are sporty. They are not ashamed of their body. Maybe some do, but in general, I think Norwegian women are more open to their bodies.

Me: When you were in your country, did you try to be slim?

Seona: I tried [to be slim]. I tried all the time.

Me: How do you feel when you are here?

Seona: I don’t have to think about it. That was a very positive side for me. And *that changed my mind. Why must women always be slim?*

Then Seona pointed to the social norm that women are expected to wear makeup in the workplace and in general. She described the experience that many other participants also shared – once a woman is spotted without wearing makeup at work, she will attract suspicion and inquiries because she breaks the norm. Seona said,

Seona: Before I moved to Norway, I always put on makeup because people will comment like “Are you sick?” if I don’t (...) It feels like social pressure for

women to put on makeup, and they think it is manners. [Here in Norway] I prefer not to wear makeup because it takes a lot of time and it's not good for your skin (...) If I feel like I want to put on makeup then I do, but now it's not a priority for me.

Me: And you feel confident?

Seona: Yeah, I feel "*why do I need to feel less confident?*" But people in my country feel less confident when they don't wear makeup.

These two pieces of conversations unveiled that "the power within" is growing in Seona, as she started to question "what has hitherto been taken for granted so as to uncover the socially constructed and socially shared basis of apparently individual problems" (Kabeer 1994, p. 245). Different from other participants only describing the contrast and their change, Seona further pointed out men's role in this social norm, acknowledging there is a relation between men and women behind "women's choice". Then she contested the norms. Her two rhetorical questions in the reply and the prioritisation of her own will over social expectation regarding wearing makeup implied a sense of self-worthiness and self-confidence, which according to Mosedale (2005, p.250) are the origin of power and the fundamentals of empowerment. In addition, her statements also uncovered a process of conscientisation where she gained awareness and re-analysed and re-assessed the norms that underpin women's subordination and inequalities in the structure (Kabeer, 1994), as Seona reflected on herself,

Even though I may be discriminated against because I am a woman, sometimes unconsciously, I discriminate [others] as well. When I see a big woman on the street, I think, "oh, she is really big." (...) I really shouldn't care about others' body types, right? But because I was discriminated against that way before, maybe I was brainwashed, and I thought women must be slim or fit. So, I made the same mistake.

Mosedale (2005) defined women's empowerment as "the process by which women redefine gender roles in ways which extend their possibilities for being and doing." (p. 252). From the participants' experiences, one can see this process is iterative and takes place on the attitudinal level and through social interactions in everyday practices. Regarding the social norm of "*Norwegian men don't help women carry heavy things*" (see 6.1.3), **Seona (30)** relayed a dialogue between her and her husband,

I didn't want to carry heavy things and I asked him [her husband], "Can you carry?" I remember he said, "Oh, you forgot your arms?" (laughter). I must admit that I was also brainwashed with women cannot do certain things and men being more capable of physical things. But that is not true.

Umi's (27) case as well demonstrated a process of reframing femininity and gender roles, although with a sense of ambivalence. Although holding a critical attitude toward Norway's gender equality ideology and criticizing the cultural norm that women are expected to do the same things as men (her quote see 6.1.2), she had a contrasting positive word about Norwegian women:

Norwegian women are *strong*. They can take on many tasks, not only taking care of children in the traditional way *but also many things that I thought I couldn't do before*.

For example, things such as laying floors, painting, and changing tires. I think they are very *powerful*, and they believe in their *capability*.

To her, it is hard to define femininity in the Norwegian context because Norwegian women do things that are not conventionally defined as feminine, but Umi found that “powerful” and sees Norwegian women as “strong and capable”. According to her description, she was not an “*active*” person and never liked being outdoor or any physical activities. However, it has changed since she became together with her boyfriend and more so after she migrated to Norway. She said,

I started to feel it is okay [to be outdoor and do physical activities]. Why not? Before, I couldn't imagine one day I would chop wood in the garden, but I actually did! Maybe my strength was not enough, but I helped. (...) We bought a lot of furniture when we moved earlier, they were so heavy that he couldn't move them himself, so we had to do it together. You can't expect to be only protected. *You need to take on responsibilities for many things that are supposed to be done by men in my home country*. (...) Now I don't see it as negative or choiceless. I think it's okay, not a problem.

From what she said, she defined the physical tasks she did as men's jobs in her origin country. In the first quote, she praised Norwegian women's strength and power as they can perform those kinds of physical tasks. However, the second quote revealed a sense of ambivalence because it seemed that it was more like an adaptation due to the practical need in her daily life. What is interesting is that in contrast with Seona's case, Umi did not express any negative experiences regarding feeling oppressed or discriminated against subjectively, instead, she contested the double-earner norm and the gender equality ideology and critiqued that women are expected the same as men. Therefore, I argue that Umi's redefining gender roles is an adaptation to the immigrant's daily life, which has a different implication from Seona's experience.

7. Challenges of Finding a Job in Norway

The experiences related to employment are a significant topic most of the participants addressed in the interviews. Almost all the participants stated that obtaining an ideal job is the biggest challenge since they migrated to Norway. This chapter draws on the welfare and gender regime outlined in the literature chapter (see 3.3), first discussing how work ideologies and structural factors affect marriage migrant women in entering the labour market and obtaining ideal jobs in Norway. The second part demonstrates how the gender perception of East Asian migrant women intersects with their immigrant status, and how they negotiate and operate agency between family and employment.

7.1 Entering the Labour Market

7.1.1 Work Ideology and Cultural Values of Work in Norway

Most participants in this study stated finding a (desirable) job was the biggest challenge since they moved to Norway, despite their educational attainment at bachelor's and master's levels alongside the various extent of professional experiences. At the time when they were interviewed, seven out of ten were employed, but only three of them had regular permanent jobs, while the other four worked as temporary call-in/extra-help workers or with a short-term contract. Among the other four participants who were unemployed, two of them were full-time students (4 and 8 years in Norway), one planned to apply for an educational program (2 years in Norway), and the other one was waiting for the resident permit. This composition is in line with the women's relatively high part-time employment in Norway (Møller et al., 2021) and reflected immigrant women's job precarity. As shown that women's labour force participation rates in East Asia are above the OECD average (OECD, n.d.), all the participants had work experiences and most of them had a job prior to migration, none of them expected to stay at home without a job, although there were various levels of eagerness and stress. **Kylee (42)** commented about moving to Norway and becoming unemployed,

Getting a job is perhaps the biggest challenge for many immigrants – to be economically independent and to give self-validation. Because you have been looking for the value and meaning of your life here [in Norway] (...) When I was in my home country, I constantly improved myself. After moving here, everything has been suspended suddenly. I wonder, what is the meaning of my life? What is my value?

What **Kylee** said here implied that both in her origin country and Norway, women working is a norm; however, the negative effect of not conforming to this norm is magnified with her immigrant status as being employed is an important part of immigrants' social identity and how they can position themselves in a new society. She kept on explaining what being unemployed and being a housewife meant for her. She said,

It's impossible [to be a housewife]. The society we grew up in didn't tell us that women should stay at home and be a housewife (...) For some Southeast Asian women, they married someone and moved here, maybe it's fine for them to just have a stable family and be a housewife. That's not the case for us. At least the Taiwanese and Chinese women I know, want to develop themselves beside the family.

In this statement, she refuted the possibility of being a housewife as it is not a desirable option in either her origin country or Norway. By contrasting herself with another immigrant group, Southeast Asian women, she indirectly replicated and buttressed the common discourse that frames (immigrant) women or families that do not conform to the mainstream gender equality ideology, in this case, the dual-earner model, as negative and inferior (Lotherington, 2009; Siim, 2013), although she is also an immigrant and can be perceived the same way.

Seona's (30) case demonstrated more closely how immigrants can be influenced by the mainstream ideologies and cultural values concerning work in the Norwegian context. She felt quite stressed about not contributing to the household economy even though her husband did not pressure her. When I asked her hypothetically how her husband would react if she does not want to work. She answered,

Seona: He probably will say okay, but I don't think he really means it. He is like "if you are healthy, then what's the reason that you stay at home?" To be honest, we have a very negative mind towards people who are just staying at home (...) If you're healthy and have an opportunity, it's good to work and contribute to society or whatever.

Me: Did you have this idea since you were in Korea, or are you influenced by the Norwegian system?

Seona: I feel I'm more influenced by the Norwegian structure now. It looks more natural that both people [in the marriage] work unless they have health issues.

With the similar notion of the "responsible citizen" in Seona's case, **Wen (36)** recalled being pushed by her husband to find a job. She held a master's degree and was an entrepreneur before moving to Norway. She said,

In the beginning, I only got to work in a shop or a restaurant. I had a hard time in my mind. I felt I could not get over it. I wondered if it could really help my career. Am I really making use of my talent? (...) However, my husband kept telling me that in Norway, people do not care if the jobs you have are all connected and relevant. The value of you lies in if you work at all. That's the most important. So, later I started a part-time job, and it went okay.

Both Seona and Wen's cases illustrate how they are influenced by the work ideology in Norway through their native spouses. To what extent do spouses' attitudes affect immigrants' job selection and career development is to be investigated, however, it is obvious that in Wen's case, she was pushed when she was told about the Norwegian cultural value of work and settled for less skilled jobs.

In addition to the influence of native spouses, stereotypical images of marriage migrants in the public discourses, such as "the materialist" (Tyldum & Tveit, 2008, p. 102) affect immigrant women's self-image and add their concern of fitting the stereotype of marrying for money or resources. This can be seen when **May (36)** said that her husband's family and friends "*could have been sceptical*" about her when he married her, a foreigner from faraway Asia. She also shared the story when she finally got a full-time job contract, her husband proudly announced it to the family and told them that she started to contribute to the household economy. Subtly, other than congratulations, she recognized a relief and validation from her mother-in-law. May said, "*Finally I am not only spending his money. I showed I can take care of her son. I am not a gold-digger*". Indeed, from May's experience, one can tell that the price immigrant women pay for not meeting the cultural norm (voluntarily or not) is likely higher than native women as they suffer the racialized stereotypes of marriage migrants.

On the other hand, some participants seemed to be influenced by the egalitarian ideal of jobs in Norway which contrasts with the distinct hierarchy of occupation status in their origin country. **Zhizhi (40)** was a middle school teacher when she lived in her origin country with her husband. She said, "*back home, schoolteacher is a lifelong job that is considered one of the most secured and best jobs for women.*" Hence, when she wanted to leave her job as a teacher and shift to the music industry, no one supported her, except for her Norwegian husband. She reflected on the cultural norm in her country of origin:

Why do we care which occupation we have? The point should be whether you are happy. In my origin country, people don't consider if they are happy doing their jobs. The most important is whether others consider the job as good, high status, or well-

paid. That is decency for them (...) Even though they are unhappy or struggling, they don't think about it.

She reckoned it is a huge difference between Norway and her origin country, and she highlighted that “(...) *I just need to do a part-time for the necessary expenses (...) After all, Norway is a social democratic welfare state, so it is easier than if I live in another country.*” It seems that for Zhizhi, work is not an issue. She was not subjected to the mainstream work ideology, and at the same time, the Norwegian social welfare system gave room for her to do so. In relation to what Zhizhi reflected, **Yani (26)** said,

I feel it is much less stressful to be in Norway. *I can do anything or any job I want. No one will judge me.* If I say my dream is to be a hairdresser (laughter), in Norway, no one will answer: “Why would you do this kind of work?” It is very egalitarian. People think more or less equally in all the jobs.

Besides, she also highlighted the disparity in parents' involvement in children's job selection:

It's much freer in Norway. I feel Norwegian parents don't have much expectation for their children. (...) They don't ask much about their job selection or demand that they must find a well-paid job. (...) It is not like this in my home country. We are told to seek a leadership position, be a manager, not a waiter. Norwegian parents don't pressure their children in this respect.

It appeared that the Norwegian cultural norm about work affects Yani positively, at least at the attitudinal level, which arguably improved her agency in a way that she sees herself as less restricted and freer in terms of job selection. Also, there is a possible relation that younger participants (or who migrated at a younger age) with no children seemed more likely to have a similar idea as Yani. In the meantime, despite being influenced by a more egalitarian ideology, these marriage migrant women faced substantial structural constraints in finding ideal jobs.

7.1.2 Constraints in the Employment Process

Literature has shown that despite the egalitarian value and gender equality ideal, Nordic countries failed to include immigrants in the labour market, and non-western immigrant women are especially marginalised (Siim, 2013). Echoing what Chang and Holm (2017) have found in the research of university-educated Taiwanese women in Finland, the participants' high educational attainments do not guarantee a smoother job search. Underemployment appears prevalent among them, and the structural constraints and inequality these immigrant women

face reflect power differentials in the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender embedded in society.

Several participants mentioned they gained job opportunities that do not require high Norwegian language skills through the co-ethnic community or someone they knew from the official language course in the initial stage of resettlement. However, those jobs were mostly seasonal and short-term, bringing only unstable income. After they acquired a certain level of the Norwegian language, they would try to apply for a broader range of jobs, but soon they found themselves rarely receiving any reply. Several of them shared a feeling of unfairness and frustration as **Seona (30)** said,

Sometimes I felt it's not fair to me. I really put a lot of effort on looking for a job. It feels like I couldn't find a job because I'm not Norwegian. They don't even want to look at my CV because I'm not Norwegian, and I don't speak Norwegian.

Fei's (32) remark pointed out the contrasting experiences she faced in the origin country and Norway.

Back home, the possibility for me to get a job when I applied was 95 per cent. I was the one who chose the job, not the one being chosen. Here it's the opposite. They crossed me out immediately when they saw my foreign name.

Seona and Fei's claims are not groundless – discrimination against ethnic minorities in employment has been well documented and proven in field experiments in Norway (Midtbøen, 2015, 2019). Midtbøen (2015, 2019) indicated that immigrants from non-European countries and their children are disadvantaged in the employment process, not merely on the individual level, such as employers' negative attitudes or stereotypes, the influence of contextual factors shows that access to opportunity is unequal for ethnic minorities on the organizational level and institutional setting in the hiring process. Facing such disadvantages and inequality, the participants reached out to various resources for assistance in the employment process.

NAV¹ is the official unit most participants accessed quite early; however, only two participants who migrated in 2007 and 2014 were offered to attend NAV's occupational

¹ NAV (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) managed a third of the national budget and operates schemes concerning employment and work-related social benefit. NAV's services are provided through the central government unit (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service) and the local authority (municipality) with the main goal of higher labour force and lower people's reliance on benefit, and a well-functioning job market.

<https://www.nav.no/en/home/about-nav/what-is-nav>

training programs. Many others reported that nowadays they were rejected by NAV because of their higher education background. **Nikki (36)** described her experience:

I wrote several emails to NAV, saying that I need help with the first step in the beginning, but NAV kept replying “with your conditions, you should totally be able to get yourself a job in the labour market.” I argued with them and asked them to tell me how. I have been unemployed for so long time. Back then, I really felt the system was too inflexible (...) I told NAV that we were left out just because we were not refugees or for other sorts of reasons. I kept writing to the contact person (...) I was really frustrated. I thought the system has some problems.

Nikki was not the only one who faced this hardship, several participants shared the same experiences of being rejected by NAV. On the other hand, few participants said they did not turn to NAV because the types of jobs NAV usually arranges for immigrants do not match their expectations. In relation to this, **May (36)** criticized the passive attitude and insufficient help from NAV and the stereotypes of jobs for (female) immigrants in the public discourse from her experience:

I don't think [what NAV does is] enough, especially in Bergen. I believe it's a very conservative society, regarding the professions. I think they have this idea that where immigrants should work (...) It was my friend's husband and he got shushed. He said, “oh you can find a job in barnehage (kindergarten)...”, and my friend was like “Shush! May has a degree.” When we work at barnehage (kindergarten), we are not teachers, right? We are assistants. Even sykepleier (nurse), we are not sykepleier (nurse), we are assistants. I heard they get paid 160 kroner per hour. It's like in McDonald's.

What May said reflected the gender and immigrant stereotype that is constructed also through the official agency.

Jobbsjansen is another resource several participants have accessed. It is an official grant scheme for increasing the long-term employment and financial independence of immigrant women aged 18-55 who stay at home and have weak connection to the labour market. The programs include workplace participation (internship/apprenticeship), language courses and vocational training to improve the participants' competence in acquiring long-term jobs. All the participants who have attended *Jobbsjansen's* program gave positive feedback. **Nikki (36)** said, “*Jobbsjansen is the only organization we found that can help highly educated immigrants.*” **May (36)** considered her experience “*empowering*” and said that “*everyone should apply*”. Nevertheless, although *Jobbsjansen* is engaged in assisting highly educated

migrant women to find ideal jobs that match their educational background or professional experiences, it seems a certain percentage of the migrant women are channelled into female-dominated occupations with a lower salary, such as kindergarten assistant or health care. **Nikki (36)** mentioned, “*in Jobbsjansen, people found jobs quickly. After all, you have a high education background. If you can't find a company, they always help you find something like barnehage (kindergarten) or sykehjem (nursing home) ...*” However, **May (36)** refused such arrangements, she informed Jobbsjansen of her wish against entry-level jobs:

I had the experience of a basic level job in Norway already. Why do I need to do it again? (...) I know how payslips work and how to make reports. They didn't have excuses to send me to barnehage (kindergarten), sykehjem (nursing home), or Rema 1000 (grocery shop).

In general, the participants showed resistance to low-skilled or entry-level jobs, although as mentioned earlier, some of their perceptions of job selection and employment were influenced by the Norwegian egalitarian ideology. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the struggles, they usually lowered their job expectations, settled for underemployment, or chose to study in vocational training programs. **Umi (27)** gained her international master's degree in social psychology, she considered herself not likely to find a relevant professional job in Bergen. When I asked if she would rather accept an entry-level job or labour work, she answered,

I can because it's only a *starting point*. I won't do this forever. It doesn't matter so much to me, but it's hard to say how my relatives back home will see me. That's not what I can control.

Yani (26) also had her bachelor's degree overseas, and she could not see herself finding something relevant in Bergen either. She talked about her changing thoughts on the kindergarten job that is commonly offered to immigrant women:

I felt negative about working as an assistant in kindergarten. To me, it was like the *lowest job* (...) I heard her [someone who graduated from a prestigious university in the US working as a kindergarten teacher] talking about kids were cute, and I suddenly thought, maybe it could be an okay job. At least she said it's a good place to learn Norwegian, so I think it can be a *good start*.

Nikki (36) has a master's degree in business in the US and worked in a large company before she migrated. When she talked about her decision of applying for the nurse training program, she said she “*abandoned a master's degree and aspiration in the past*” and hoped to get a “*lifelong and secured job*” as a nurse. She articulated:

Nikki: I just accepted it gradually. It was hard for me to accept it in the beginning when I started to apply for the nurse education program. I told my husband, “In my country, it’s the profession for the *girls with the worst grades* who can’t enter university”.

Me: And your thought has changed?

Nikki: Indeed. I struggled for some time, but I had no choice. To be able to get a job, I had to go for it. For the future prospect, I rather chose this one. I didn’t consider how others would see me.

All these statements showed the compromise these immigrant women had to make because of the job availability and gender stereotype for immigrants. It revealed how their perceptions of jobs and occupations shifted to adapt to their reality in Norwegian society, as opposed to what people used to think in their country of origin. Besides, **Umi (27)** and **Yani (26)** had a relatively optimistic tone and perceived higher agency (as both mentioned “start” which implies temporality) in their statements, which is possibly related to their shorter length of residency year (one year and two years respectively) and the status of no children. In contrast, some other participants who have migrated for a longer period (e.g., 8-10 years) and with children, had a stronger expression of feeling constrained in terms of compromise with underemployment, loss of previous professions and aspiration, and the experiences of exclusion and discrimination in the workplace.

7.1.3 Discrimination and Exclusion in Employment and Workplace

Discrimination and exclusion in the employment process and workplace severely undermine the well-being of some participants. The language barrier is one of the challenges the participants suffered most in the workplace, even though most of them took the official Norwegian language courses and fulfilled the obligatory hours. **Ning (33)** passed the official language exam that qualified her for the language requirement of most of the jobs and obtained a permanent full-time position in the public sector a few months ago. She said even though she passed the interview in Norwegian, she still had a hard time working in the Norwegian-speaking workplace and struggled every day at work:

I can’t comprehend the meeting. And if I don’t understand, I don’t dare to express my opinions, because I am afraid that I misunderstand something or say something stupid that affects my work performance. Besides, I usually can’t follow what they say at lunchtime. At the end of the day, I just feel excluded. (...) The depression was caused by the stress in the workplace and the job-seeking process, the social pressure.

Similar to Ning, **Nikki (36)** also suffered from her Norwegian language skill in the workplace and was treated disrespectfully by her colleagues when they could not understand what she said right away. Surely she was upset and complained about their improper reaction, however, in the end, she commented,

If my language was okay, I don't think they would have that facial expression and the dislike attitude. I feel it is after all my problem. It is my language that becomes an obstacle to communication.

Her attitude towards the ill-treatment and the hardship that she has encountered can be further seen in the following conversation:

Nikki: There is a cultural shock every single day. Each day at work is like a new adaptation to this society (...) This is also why I feel I lack too much. Every day I wonder why the company hired me.

Me: You started by doing the internship, so they must have evaluated it carefully.

Nikki: No, there is luck. My boss himself is an immigrant. He is new, and he moved here in 2019. That is my luck. I do not think I stand a chance if the company is Norwegian.

In fact, judging from my personal knowledge and observation of Nikki, her capability and competence doubtlessly deserve any decent job, if not this one which she has gained through her own performance during the internship. However, it is not surprising that the prolonged hard time finding a job and constant challenges, including social exclusion at work undermine her self-confidence and self-worthiness and lead to an obvious self-depreciation. **Yani's (26)** remark further demonstrated this point, she said,

In fact, sometimes the problem lies in ourselves. Why can't we adapt? It is harder for foreigners to find jobs, but some people just give up (...) If I was the boss, I wouldn't want to hire someone who doesn't speak Norwegian well. So, just improve. I think Norwegian society is relatively equal. If we are good enough, we will not be unemployed. I think it is after all because I am not good enough.

In both Nikki and Yani's cases, instead of questioning little inclusion and empathy of the colleagues and the structural inequality immigrants face overall in the labour market, they blamed themselves, namely, the immigrant groups who suffer unequal powers embedded in the system. This situation seems to resonate Kabeer's (2005) conceptualisation of empowerment and agency. She argued, "Empowerment is rooted in how people see themselves – their sense of self-worth. This in turn is critically bound up with how they are seen by those

around them and by their society” (p.15). Therefore, when the cultural or ideological norms that legitimate inequality is too significant and seem impossible to change, even the ones who are oppressed by the inequalities of power and unjust are likely to accept or collude with it (p.14), as it is shown in Nikki and Yani’s cases.

Yun’s (44) story is another disempowered case. Prior to migration, she worked in a promising position in marketing at a top company in her country. After moving to Norway, she has had several job experiences, working as store clerk, accountant in the retail and oil industry and schoolteacher during her 15 years in Norway. However, she has also experienced much discrimination and exclusion. She described her job search experiences:

Yun: When I applied for jobs, they saw the name is strange. I never got called in for an interview.

Me: You think it’s because of the name?

Yun: I didn’t think so. I didn’t think about that. My husband was like “no, no, no. What are you talking about? No, it’s not like that. We are not like America.” But I talked to NAV and job specialists, and they said, “Yeah. I’m sorry, but it exists, because of the name.” So, I changed my name (...) After I changed my name, there were a lot of call-ins. I could see a difference (...) I just regretted that I didn’t change my name all these years.

As mentioned earlier, discrimination against ethnic minorities in the labour market in Norway was well documented and research has shown that applicants with a foreign name face more barriers when they apply for jobs than the ones with Norwegian names (Midtbøen & Rogstad, 2012). It was further indicated that this situation has not changed in the past ten years (Midtbøen & Quillian, 2021). Furthermore, the response of Yun’s husband to her claim of name discrimination also reflected the hesitation, if not the denial of the native majority in Norway toward “race” or “racism”, which is embedded in an everyday context in a more subtle way.

Although being in Norway for 15 years, Yun said she continually feels discriminated and excluded in the workplace and in other aspects of daily life. Here is one of the accounts she gave regarding what she called “*everyday racism*” in her workplace:

Despite I was one of the members that worked there for 4-5 years, I was only a foreigner – even though I speak Norwegian. They talked about China in a bad way, and then they looked at me, but I am not from China (...) They said hi, but they never came to me or asked something or talked to me. I was the one who always approached them and tried

to small talk. In the end, after so many years, I felt, huh, that's very strange. I never felt I was included.

Führer (2021) pointed out that “race” is not seen as a category of difference in the Norwegian hegemonic societal narratives, and “racism” is not to apply in the Norwegian context unless there is an explicit expression of “racial hierarchies” based on a narrow biological definition (Bangstad, 2015). However, subtle and implicit discriminative situations happen as shown in Yun’s case. In Essed’s (2001) concept of “everyday racism”, she understood racism as “routinely created and reinforced through everyday practices” (2001, p.177). She linked the structural and individual acts and argued that while the individual instances take place systematically and repetitively, they should be understood as the expression of activation of group power (p.179). Thus, everyday racism is how this power relationship is called on and activated in different situations (p.189). Similar to Yun’s experiences, other participants, such as Nikki and Ning mentioned earlier in this section, also had experiences of otherness, exclusion and alienation revolving around the differences in their language skills, appearance, and culture in which immigrants or minorities are constructed as different, less competent linguistically, and culturally inferior (Führer, 2021). These instances may not be as explicit as “racist slurs”, but they as well function as the enactment of power differences and exclusion.

As a result, **Yun** described the consequence of working in an environment of exclusion. She said, *“I could not fall asleep. I was a bit nervous all the time (...) It came with a stomach problem, stress, and depression. It has been much better after I quit the job.”* It was after years of struggles that she decided to leave her job because the cost of getting an ideal job for her was too high. She said,

I could have quit earlier, but it was difficult. I took an intensive course to get the job. It's not easy to just quit because I know how tough it was to get a job as a foreigner, an Asian. I just thought it was going to be okay. I tried to manage my mentality and my mind, but in the end, it was too much. I was isolated too much. No one came to me. It was daily. Little by little.

Just as it was difficult to resign, changing her name is a much more complicated decision to make. Yun did not adopt her husband’s last name and changed her first name officially for the employment concern until two years ago after she had long struggled with job-related issues and exclusion. While she eventually changed her name and found that it functioned well pragmatically, the name-changing seemed to have an implication for her self-identity, as she used her two names to explain how she feels living in Norway:

I just can't live here like in my original country. Very often I feel like (original name) doesn't exist here. Like two different persons. (English name) is here (pointing) – very quiet, working hard and smiling. (English name) here is not good enough. I just don't feel that in this community. (Original name) in the original country is educated, confident, and independent. It's totally different.

This self-disclosure succinctly illustrated the disempowering effect of living in an environment where one feels excluded and discriminated against regardless of her objective competence and well-off material living conditions.

7.2 Negotiating in the Intersection of Gender and Immigrant Status

7.2.1 Intersectional Constraints of Gender Role and Immigrant Status

Marriage migration is gendered in a way that can be seen in how cross-border marriage couples make decisions on settlement location and its implications on their career development. It is usually the East Asian woman who migrates, rather than their Norwegian husband. The motives of migration are inherently complex. However, when I asked the participants how they decided on the settlement place, the consideration of the husband's job often comes to the front. The recurring responses include that they earn less compared to their Norwegian husbands, the men cannot earn as much in the East Asian countries as in Norway, or "*it is difficult for him to find a job in the East Asian countries since he cannot speak the local language.*" These responses firstly indicated that the economic reason is a key factor in the decision making of the settlement place. Further, men are placed in the priority when jobs and economy are in discussion. The rationales behind these responses also imply the notion of traditional gender roles. It is certainly difficult for migrant women to find a job in Norway as well, but since men are the breadwinners according to the traditional gender role, it is considered more problematic when a man, rather than a woman is unemployed and staying at home.

The status of being an immigrant situates these East Asian women in a disadvantageous position in career development compared with their local Norwegian husbands. For the young couples who met when they were both students in the same study program, the gap in career development between them is major and can create an imbalanced feeling. **Yani (26)** met her husband when they were both exchange students in another country. After graduating, she travelled and worked as a seasonal worker in Norway before they got married. When I asked whether she felt their relationship is equal, she said "*I feel 80-90 per cent of it is equal. One part that is not equal is the difficulty for me to find a job because I am a foreigner.*" **Ning (33)** met her husband while they studied in the same master's program in England. Before that, she

already had one master's degree in her home country. Despite the hesitation, she moved to Norway with her Norwegian boyfriend after they graduated because he found a job back home. She said:

We thought it would not be too difficult to get a job as an engineer in Europe. At least that was what he thought. Since I didn't know much about it, I just came along. At that time, we thought it could be harder for him to find a job in my home country than I do here. But then, it turned out not easy. It was tough.

Notwithstanding two master's degrees she had; it took Ning eight years to finally get a permanent job contract.

During the period of eight years, she also gave birth to two children. Ning's case firstly shows how her immigrant status creates inherent barriers to pursuing a career for her. In addition, motherhood is another reason that delays or interrupts migrant women's career development. On the one hand, many migrant women hoped to get a job and establish their lives in the new society first; on the other hand, they also feel pressured by their biological condition in relation to having children. As **Ning (33)** mentioned "*It is in fact more ideal to get a job first [before pregnant], but at that time [at age 29], it felt like it will take forever. I thought I could not keep waiting, so I decided to get pregnant.*" Similarly, **Zhizhi's (40)** also chose to have her second child before she applied for her dream music school. When I asked her why she prioritised the child over her study, she said:

I can still study when I am pregnant. (...) It couldn't be postponed. I was over 30, and we thought it would be very difficult to have children after that. Age is vital for women, it's risky to give birth after 33, 34. (...) If I have my second child when I am over 40, I am done with my life, because I will have no energy. (...) I thought, never mind, I would have a child in my 30s and study after that. It is okay.

As a result, studying in a new field for the job consideration, the time limit to get pregnant and give birth, and seeking and maintaining employment as an immigrant converges to multiple pressures, costing heavily on migrant women's wellbeing. I interviewed **Nikki (36)** shortly after she obtained a full-time contract from the company where she did the internship. The first thing Nikki (36) brought up in the interview was "*I want to change [to a better company]. I'm a student at BI now. I use the extra time to study. So, now I am extremely stressed. I have to work, study, plus a kid.*" When **Yun (44)** realized she could not find a position matching her previous professional experiences, she took an intensive accounting course as NAV suggested. She said:

The course was very intensive. A lot of exams. It was analysis and finance. Those stuff I've never studied in Norwegian (...) It was tough. To study something I never learned before, while the kid was one year old (...) I thought I must do well in this course because maybe I can get a job after that. So, I used a lot of time at school and slept little.

In relation to motherhood, another constraint for marriage migrant women to develop their careers is that they are usually the ones subjected to compromise job selection to childcare in the negotiation with the local husbands who already have stable jobs and developed careers. **Fei (32)** worked in television before she met her husband. When the relationship was established after some visits to Norway, she could see herself moving over one day. She said *"I started to think how it will be possible to get a job in Norway in the future. I thought the food industry could be easier, so I started to look for the related jobs in my country."* Despite her planning beforehand, Fei became pregnant a year after she moved to Norway, before she obtained a regular job. Consequently, she became the one who compromised for childcare and her husband's job. She said:

Given that the working hour of my husband is different from the normal working hour, I must take the kid's vacation into account – who is going to look after him during the summer vacation and winter vacation? If I choose to work in the food industry, I will be occupied those holidays, and no one can look after him (...) Our thought is, since he works full-time, to maintain the source of economy, I need to adapt on my side. (...) To look for something that finishes early so that I can pick up the son.

There are two implications standing out in her remark. Firstly, as a local, her husband has a job before she moved, which puts her in an unfavourable position to negotiate due to economic practicality. In the meantime, the notion of the traditional gender role – mother as the main caregiver – justifies this arrangement, making it seemingly unnecessary to be challenged. Her case highlights a disjuncture between beliefs that Norwegians are all for real gender equality and the persistent traditional gender arrangements and practices, especially related to motherhood, in immigrant women's experience when their immigrant status and gender intersect.

7.2.2 Prioritising Personal Aspirations over Motherhood

Beyond the constraints mentioned earlier, it is worth noticing, however, for the younger couples who met while they were both students, less age pressure and relatively close positionality in capital accumulation seem to create a larger room for the marriage migrant

women to negotiate gender role in the relationship and operate their agency. **Yani (26)** had travelled and worked seasonally in Norway for two years mainly for maintaining the long-distance relationship before she married and moved to Norway in 2019. As mentioned earlier, she felt she lagged in career development and realized herself situated in a disadvantageous position in the local labour market. Now she is trying to apply for business school. When she talked about motherhood, she said:

My husband wants to have children. He asked me many times, saying “Let’s make a baby!” Although in a joking tone, I feel disturbed. Making me have children, does that not mean making my life screwed? I feel my life will be screwed if I have children now. Think about it, children under three years old need mothers’ accompany. You cannot let go. Ten-month pregnancy plus two-year accompanying the kid – it is a waste of three years.

When I asked her to elaborate on why it is a waste, her reply is about employment and the life quality:

Although the kids can go to kindergarten at one, I will have a very busy life. Without a secured job, I must look for work after giving birth. When I found a job, I will raise the kid next to the job. It will be too busy (...) [To get a job before children] It will be a lot less stressful. There will be income during the maternity leave, and you know you can go back to work anytime, which lessens mental pressure greatly. If you have children, and you need to look for a job at the same time, both economic and mental pressure will be huge.

These statements depicted how young East Asian marriage migrant women construct the foreseen scenario of being a mother with(out) a job in Norway. It reflects their motherhood ideal derived from the patriarchal society in the East Asian countries and how they think it would not be compatible with their life as an immigrant in Norway. As shown in **Yani’s (26)** remark, the traditional gender role notion of “mother is the main caregiver” exists widely in the East Asian countries and still engrains in the perception of East Asian migrant women. The intimacy and intensiveness of childcare are emphasized, but the role of father is nearly invisible. Mother is the one to sacrifice most. Moreover, nowadays women are also supposed to have a job and have their career goals, being a “housewife” is no longer a desirable option. As a result, in the East Asian context, although married couples usually have family support for childrearing or outsource childcare duty, the fertility rate across East Asia is low. With the deep-rooted gender role ideal and unequal reality back home in mind, along with the awareness

of the structural constraint they face in job-seeking, these East Asian marriage migrant women are concerned with the consequences of entering motherhood and instead, choose to prioritize the job career.

Other participants contested the work ideology of social responsibility and good citizen and chose not to comply with the normative model of the dual-earner model (see 7.1.1) as they are provided by their husbands and prioritize their personal aspirations. **Umi (27)** moved to Norway around a year ago. While she was waiting for the residence permit and learning the language by herself, she hardly felt stressed about not getting a job and reckoned it was reasonable that her husband is the main provider. She disliked the inquiries from her in-laws about her employment plan. She disputed,

Why do I need to be stressed about using his money? It is totally unfair to expect someone in a new country to get a job quickly, without even speaking the local language (...) If we had economic problems, I could of course get whatever kind of job, in the restaurants, shops, or cleaning. I could accept it. But we don't have economic problems now.

Zhizhi (40) had a similar account. She and her husband married and lived in her home country before he moved back to Norway for more job opportunities. While the relationship ran into difficulty because of the separation, they started to negotiate on resettling. Zhizhi stated, *“the opportunity to attend music school was the only reason why I was convinced”*, she has never worked in the nine years since she moved to Norway. In the beginning, she went to language school and prepared for applying for music school; later she decided to have children and spend most of the time on childcare. She said, *“My goal [of going to music school] is clear (...) Being a mom is also one of my goals.”*

The Norwegian social welfare system also plays a role in facilitating marriage migrant women to pursue their aspirations while sharing the household economy. When I asked **Zhizhi** how she managed her economy, she answered, *“Just like you. Lånekassen (the student loan).”* She seemed not concerned so much about having only one income in the household, despite they have two children and her husband possibly being laid off due to the pandemic. She said,

Living in a social welfare country, of course, we are not greedy for getting the government's money, even if none of us has a job, we can rely on social assistance to go through a hard time. This is much better than in my home country.

In **Seona's (30)** case, being provided for and not contributing to the household expenses caused some pressure, but her husband supported her, and the student loan helped. She said, *“I'm more*

okay now because I have lånekassen (the student loan). Although it is a loan, I have income. Before that, I felt I was a burden for him because I didn't have any income.” For her, she would like to contribute to the household economy, as she mentioned *“I am not like, I will just be a housewife using your money. I am not like that. I want to work, and I want to have my own income and be independent of my husband's money.”* She worked as a shop manager for a few months before being laid off due to the pandemic. Now since her husband is willing to afford the household expenses, she prioritizes her education and aspiration. She said,

I tried to get into the master's program at KMD² (...) but it was very competitive (...)
Then I accidentally found UX design (...) My plan is if I can't find a job as a UX designer, then I might find another relevant study and apply for the master's program.
I don't mind how much time it will take to get me into the UX design field. For me, I want to be qualified for everything.

In Umi, Zhizhi and Seona's accounts above one can see how the gender ideology, state policy, the couple's social class and power relationship between the couple interplay in the participants' decision of operating their agency and prioritising personal aspiration over employment.

² Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen

8. Conclusion

The overall aim of this study is to understand East Asian migrant women's experiences of cross-border marriage migration in Norway from a gender and intersectionality perspective. In this concluding chapter, I will first summarise the main findings, relating them to the overall theoretical framework. I will then briefly discuss the implications of these findings and recommendations for future research.

8.1 Main Findings and Concluding Remarks

There are diverse trajectories of how the cross-border marriage couples in this study met each other. All the encounters resulted from one or both sides' international travels due to study, work, or family visits. The significantly high percentage of international experiences and the maintenance of long-distance relationships prior to the marriage migration revealed the socioeconomic class of the participants' backgrounds and their mobility to travel. At the same time, their discontent toward inegalitarian gender relations and patriarchal cultural norms, alongside their nonconformity to traditional gender roles in the origin country, are related to their hesitation for marriage and childbearing. In relation to this, however, the findings showed the structural constraints from legal practicalities (i.e., limited length of stay for non-EU citizens) and the gender discourses regarding premarital cohabitation and stereotypes of women who partner with foreigners facilitate their decision of entering the cross-border marriage. As to motherhood, the structural framework of gender equality ideology and the double-earner model allows the East Asian migrant women to reconcile between work and the mother's role and enhances their desire for childbearing. However, their immigrant status – which impedes career establishment and lack of family support for early childcare – is among the main concerns when they evaluate motherhood. Migrant women's unemployment also affects couples' division of housework, although in general, the participants consider the division fair. Nevertheless, in some cases, the immigrant status and the invisible, yet still existing traditional gender roles let the migrant women compromise with more housework sharing.

The findings in this study concerning East Asian migrant women's gender perceptions and expectations of gender roles show there is an iterative and ambivalent process of change and continuities on the attitudinal level as well as in everyday practices when these migrant women negotiate their gender role expectations within the gender equality ideal in Norway. On the one hand, most participants agreed it is more gender equal and women-friendly in Norway in terms of women's participation in the labour market and egalitarian relationships in family

life. On the other hand, some contested the double-earner model and the notion that women are expected to take on the same tasks as men become constraints. A similar ambivalence is found in the discussion regarding the gender norm that Norwegian men are not expected to help women carry heavy things. Although most participants recognized the egalitarian attitude and adopted the norm in practice, various contentions and resistance among the participants revealed persistent, traditional gender role expectations. In the meantime, tension emerges when these East Asian migrant women struggle to meet social norms. They distinguish themselves from native Norwegian women and contest the nation's dominant gender ideologies. Noticeably, despite uncertainty and critique towards the notion of gender equality, all the participants express a sense of liberation from the rigid East Asian normative femininity, particularly regarding women's appearance. The findings showed that some East Asian migrant women gained awareness, reflected and challenged the cultural norms in their country of origin that sustain the power relations in the patriarchal gender hierarchy by redefining femininities, masculinities and gender roles.

Failing to find ideal jobs is perceived as the biggest challenge among all the East Asian marriage migrant women in this study. Regardless of their high educational attainments and professional work experiences, multiple structural constraints and inequalities – such as institutionalised racial discrimination, difficulties in converting their previous expertise, ineffective help from the governmental service, and the gendered hierarchies in the labour market – hinder their performance in the local labour market. Some participants adopted the discourses of the “responsible citizen” and the “good immigrant” and settled for less skilled jobs or educational programs that assure job opportunities. In addition to the employment barriers, experiences of discrimination and exclusion in the workplace on the daily basis have a detrimental impact on these migrant women's well-being and affected their self-confidence. Their immigrant status and gender situate these East Asian marriage migrants in a double-marginalised position in relation to career advancement. Initially, men's job consideration is prioritised in the decision-making of the couple's relocation; later, motherhood and gendered division of childcare and housework can further delay migrant women's career development. In awareness of this consequence, some participants choose to prioritise their personal aspirations over underemployment and postpone childbearing. In these cases, these marriage migrant women show a higher level of agency and power to negotiate as they utilise the social policy (student loan) as a resource and adopt traditional gender roles (male-breadwinner model) strategically to achieve their aspirations. At the same time, these cases also reflect the couple's

socioeconomic class, by which such traditional gender arrangements can be afforded and maintained.

8.2 Implications of the Study and Opportunities for Future Research

This study adds to the existing knowledge in the field of gender and migration with empirical findings based on a particular group of East Asian marriage migrant women in Norway who are rarely the focus of research. I am aware that this research presents only one of the many realities perceived by me and a relatively small number of migrant women in a specific socio-cultural context. Rather than a “statistical generalisation”, the rich data and analysis of the findings in the Norwegian context can be relevant for understanding the experiences of other groups of migrant women in Norway or for similar groups living in different social contexts, and hence, makes “analytical generalisation” possible. Moreover, the complexity of these East Asian women’s migratory experiences provides an understanding beyond often simplified and dichotomous assumptions: especially those of reproducing versus contesting traditional gender roles; being victims and oppressed by the cultural norms in the patriarchal society versus emancipated and empowered through migration to the host society of egalitarian culture.

Moving forward, more research with an intersectional analytical perspective in the transnational context is needed. As the participants of this study are all highly educated and have middle- or upper-middle class backgrounds, the levels and aspects of “empowerment” in the context of cross-border marriage are shaped by these characteristics. I suggest more research is needed to explore the experiences of women from the working class and with less high educational attainment. Furthermore, accounts from men may complement a relational perspective in the analysis of gender relations in cross-border marriage migration. Lastly, this study identified some of the structural inequalities and exclusionary behaviours marriage migrant women face in relation to the employment process and labour market participation. Further research should, therefore, examine how this population copes with these barriers – documenting their access and use of official and private resources, as well as co-ethnic social networks – to establish strong policies and practices that empower marriage migrant women.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

I. Background information

1. Demographic information

- Country of origin
- Age/ Spouse's age
- Educational level
- Occupation (before migration and present)/ Spouse's occupation

2. Migration status

- When did you move to Norway?

3. Marriage status

- How did you meet your spouse?
- How long have you been married?
- Do you have any children? How old are they?

II. Gender norms and ideologies

1. The country of origin

- In your home country, what is expected as a woman/man in relation to career, relationship, marriage and parenthood? (prompts: work time, job type, paying on dating, sexual behaviour before marriage, the role of being wife/husband and mother/father)
- What are the positions of men and women in your home country?
- Regarding the last two questions, what has changed compared to the last generation and your generation, or even the younger generation? Could you give an example?
- Which areas of society do you consider having the highest levels of inequality? How?
- What do you like the most and the least as a woman in your home country?
- What does the public think about transnational marriage migration in your home country?
- Did you have any impressions, or have you heard anything about how it is like to be married to a Norwegian man or living in Norway before you moved to Norway?

2. Norwegian gender norms

- What do Norwegians consider femininity and masculinity? How do they express being feminine and masculine?

- Following last question, do you think there are differences between older and younger generations in terms of gender expectations?
- What do you think is the most different being a woman in your home country and in Norway?
- What do you think about gender equality in Norway? And how does it relate to you?
- Do you think you are affected by Norwegian gender equality or gender norms? In what way?
- Have you experienced any situation of gender inequality at work or in any social or cultural settings?

III. Transnational marriage and gender roles

1. Transnational marriage in the context of Norway

- What were the main concerns and expectations when you decided to marry and migrate to Norway?
- What would you imagine to be the biggest difference between marrying someone from your home country and someone from Norway?
- Is there custom of betrothal or dowry in your home country? How was it handled when you married your spouse?

2. Migration and residence

- How did you and your partner decide in which country to settle?
- Did your family or friends comment on your transnational marriage migration? How?

3. Housework and childcare

- How do you divide household chores with your partner? Who does what? How is it different from the way people usually do it in your home country?
- (If having children) How do you divide childcare duties with your partner? Who does what? How is it different from the way people usually do it in your home country in general?
- Do you think the division is fair? Were there any disagreements or conflicts caused by the division? *If yes*, How did you solve it?
- Do you think there is a specific housework supposed to be done by either men or women?

4. Parenthood

- Have your spouse, parents or marital family ever expressed expectations or urged you to have children? How?

- What do you think about, or what do you think it will be like, being a mother and an immigrant at the same time? How do these two statuses affect each other in your opinion?
 - What would be the differences in parenthood if you married someone from your home country and lived in your home country?
5. Job and economy
- How do you and your partner handle household economy? How is it different from the way people usually do it in your home country?
 - What role did your partner play regarding your career planning when you first migrated to Norway?
6. Marital family
- What are your relationship with the marital family? How is it different from the common situation in your home country?
 - How is the relationship between your spouse and your family in the home country?
7. General
- Overall, do you think you are in an equal position with your partner in the marriage?
If yes, what are the key factors that make you feel this way?
If not, in what way do you feel unequal or hope to improve?
 - What is the biggest expectation gap for you in relation to the transnational marriage? What are you most satisfied with your marriage or migration? What do you find the most challenging?

IV. Acculturation and integration

1. Challenges

- What challenges and hardships, if any, did you face after migration? (probe: employment issues, education access, challenges in private life, cultural differences/socializing with Norwegians, challenges in relation to language, the climate/weather, etc)

2. Coping and resources

- What did you do to cope? Did anything help you to cope with these challenges? (prompts: personal characteristics, religious beliefs and values, social networking, language, family and partner support, community support or any other support)
- Did you seek any support to get help? (prompts: friends, religious services, community centers, professional mental health services and so on)

3. Would you say you have more (or fewer) opportunities regarding education, jobs and personal development as a migrant woman in Norway than in your home country? Why?
4. What do you like the most and the least about living in Norway, and what do you miss the most about your home country?
5. Do you have anything to add?

Appendix B: Information Letter and Consent Form

Are you interested in taking part in the research project ” Gender relations in the transnational marriage of East Asian migrant women in Norway”?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to explore gender relations in the transnational marriage of East Asian women in Norway. The project is scheduled from approximately 1st August 2021 to 20th June 2022. In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

It is a master’s thesis which aims to understand the gender relations of transnational marriage migration of East Asian women in Norway.

Asian women account for a high percentage of marriage migrants in Norway. East Asian migrant women, in contrast to Southeast Asian migrant women, are often seen as more resourceful and less vulnerable as they are from the more affluent countries in the region. However, despite economic development, the gender systems and gender norms in East Asian countries remain highly patriarchal. Meanwhile, as marriage migrants, East Asian women may also face stereotypes and discrimination, among other challenges, in the settling and integrating process in the destination country.

This project aims to investigate the gender relations of the transnational marriage migration of East Asian women in Norway – how gender norms and gender ideologies in the country of origin and Norway affect the transnational marriage migration of East Asian women, to what extent are the gender perceptions and gender practices of East Asian migrant women affected by Norwegian gender equality, and how the migrant women perceive and exercise their agency in the integration process.

The research questions are as follows:

1. What roles do gender norms and gender ideologies in the countries of origin play in the
transnational marriage of East Asian women in Norway?
2. To what extent do gender perceptions of East Asian women change when they
migrate to
Norway?
3. How do Norwegian gender norms affect East Asian migrant women’s expectations of
gender
roles and gender practices in the family life of transnational marriage?

4. How do East Asian marriage migrant women in Norway perceive and exercise their agency in the integration process? What are the constraints and challenges, and how do they cope with them?

The collected personal data will not be used for other purposes than the thesis.

Who is responsible for the research project?

HEMIL, Faculty of Psychology, University of is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

This research project recruits interview participants who are migrant women from Taiwan, China, Japan, and South Korea, married to or in partnership with Norwegian men, and currently reside in Norway. The interview participants will be recruited through researcher's personal network, language courses and language programs in various organizations.

You receive this inquiry because your personal information (age and occupation) will be given by the interview participants, i.e. your spouse/partner during the interview.

What does participation involve for you?

If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that I ask your spouse/partner to provide information about you in an interview. It will be information about your age and occupation. I will record the interview and will take notes.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- Only the researcher (student) and the supervisor (project leader) will have access to the personal data.
- I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data. The sound recording will be first stored in a password protected device, and then uploaded to a protected cloud server of University of Bergen (SAFE system).

- Once the transcription of the recording is completed, personal data will be anonymized, and the recording will be deleted right away.

No participants will be recognizable in publications. All personal data will be anonymized and de-identified if published.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end 20 June 2022.

The collected personal data will be anonymized and the sound recording of the interview will be deleted once the transcription of the sound recording of the interview is completed.

Therefore, at the end of the research project, no personal data will be stored. The collected data will be in anonymous form.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- - access the personal data that is being processed about you
- - request that your personal data be deleted
- - request that incorrect personal data about you be corrected/rectified
- - receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- - send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with HEMIL, Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- HEMIL, Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen, via project leader – Haldis Haukanes, by email: Haldis.Haukanes@uib.no or by phone: +47 55 58 92 59, or by student – Tai-Ni Yang, by email: tya003@uib.no or by phone: +47 93036837.
- Our Data Protection Officer (assigned by faculty): NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: personvern@nsd.no or by phone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Haldis Haukanes Tai-Ni Yang Project Leader Student (Researcher/supervisor)

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project “Gender relations in the transnational marriage of East Asian migrant women in Norway” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

.. for my spouse/partner to give information about my age and occupation to this project

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 20 June

2022

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix C: Approval from NSD (Original and Extension)

[Meldeskjema](#) / [Gender relations in transnational marriage of East Asian migrant women in Norway](#) / [Vurdering](#)

Vurdering

☰ 30.06.2022 ▾

🖨 Skriv ut

Dato

30.06.2022

Type

Standard

Referansenummer

695570

Prosjekttittel

Gender relations in transnational marriage of East Asian migrant women in Norway

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Universitetet i Bergen / Det psykologiske fakultet / Hemil-senteret

Prosjektansvarlig

Sevil Sümer

Student

Tai-Ni Yang

Prosjektperiode

01.08.2021 - 31.07.2022

[Meldeskjema](#) ↗

Kommentar

Data Protection Services has assessed the change registered on 20.06.2022.

The period for processing personal data has been extended until 31.07.2022.

We will follow up the progress of the project at the new planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the rest of the project!

Contact person: Eva J. B. Payne

bad5d2785

[Meldeskjema](#) / [Gender relations in transnational marriage of East Asian migrant women in Norway](#) / Vurdering

Vurdering

☰ 30.06.2022 ▾

🖨 Skriv ut

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Student
Tai-Ni Yang

Prosjektperiode
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[Meldeskjema](#) 

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