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INTERCULTURAL MARRIAGES IN NORWAY:  
NORWEGIAN – KOREAN CASE

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## ABSTRACT

Intercultural marriages have become popular due to globalization and mobilization. This qualitative research is an attempt to explore the social phenomena of intercultural marriages among Norwegians and South-Koreans.

This study about whether the cultural differences can be regarded as main challenges for the intercultural marriages; which challenges do intercultural marriages face, and how they deal with the challenges. I employed semi-structured interview to obtain rich and deep information with the individuals of intercultural marriages via their experiences of daily life. I discovered that the cultural differences can be main challenges at times, with language and communication, collectivism and individualism, high-context and low-context cultures, raising children and financial management issues. Intercultural competence, admitting and accepting difference and agreeing to disagree can be an essential element to maintain constructive marriages lives for the intercultural marriages.

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

The number of intercultural couples has increased because of globalization and mobilization. Advanced technology has allowed travel around the world to be in less than 24 hours, and the borders of nations are inconclusive. More and more people travel, study, and work abroad, the chances of intercultural relationship are higher and the number of intercultural marriages has indeed increased. This study is about intercultural marriages, focusing on Norwegian and Korean couples residing in Norway.

#### **1.1 Topic and research question**

“I have been married for 35 years, but I have still some challenges.”

When I attended a meeting for Koreans in Norway, by chance I heard a story about a Korean woman’s marriage with a Norwegian man. They have lived together for 35 years, yet some remaining challenges are caused by intercultural perspectives. I thought that the years of living together would make them understand each other well enough even with different cultural viewpoints. At the Korean meeting, there were a few more Korean women whose spouses were Norwegian who had similar experiences. I assumed that before the intercultural couples decided to be together, they knew about the cultural differences. Nevertheless, it might be different when it comes to the reality of daily life, where challenges can show up with unexpected aspects. It motivated me to select the topic of intercultural marriages among Norwegians and Koreans in Norway.

A partner in an intercultural marriage can perceive their spouse according to their own points of view. They could look upon each other with different worldview and standards. A couple’s relationship is based on love and affection, and they might admit they have many differences. I assumed that the intercultural marriages knew about their different backgrounds before their marriage. I wondered how the different cultural backgrounds affected their

marriages. The main research question is whether different worldviews is a major difficulty for the intercultural marriages, and related questions are:

- Which challenges do intercultural marriages face?
- How do intercultural couples overcome these challenges?

I desire to identify central challenges for intercultural marriages and how they overcome these challenges. My assumption was that intercultural couples have some issues with among others language and communication, raising children, extended family etc. Throughout this research, I discovered that intercultural difference at times is a main challenge, and I got an understanding of how these challenges are dealt with in intercultural marriages.

### 1.2 Intercultural marriages in South- Korea

According to Korea national statistics office (2015), there was a total of 305,500 cases of intercultural marriage that were registered in 2014. Among these intercultural couples, 70% of marriages were between Korean men and foreign women, 30% of marriages were Korean women married to men from other countries. Currently, the number of intercultural marriages has declined because of stricter regulations for intercultural marriage and required visa. Hence, compared to 2013, the number of intercultural marriages between Korean men and foreign spouse fell by 11.8%, and the number of intercultural marriages with a Korean woman declined by 6.4% (see figure 1).

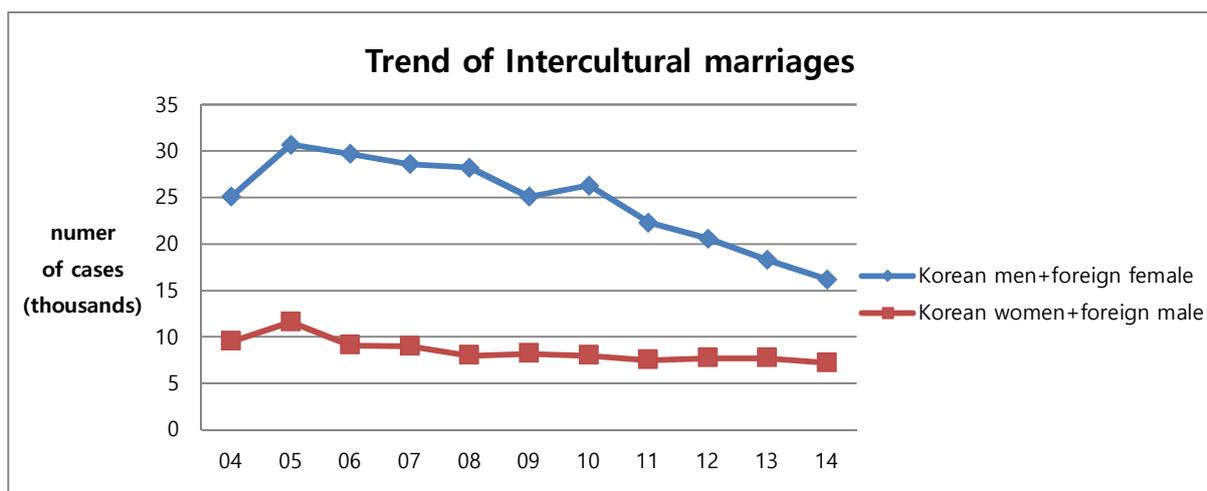


Figure 1– Trend of intercultural marriages in South-Korea, by Korea national statistics office

The largest group of foreign wives by nation was from China, including ethnic Korean Chinese with 34%, and the second biggest percentage was Vietnam with 29.4%, followed by Japan with 8.3%. 24.4 % of Korean women's foreign spouses came from the U.S.A and the second largest group was China with 22%, and Japan was the third biggest nation of foreign husbands by 16.4% of Korean women's intercultural marriages (Korea national statistics office, 2015).

Regarding how the intercultural couples meet in South Korea, 40.2% of Korean females met their foreign spouse on their own, but only 19.3% of Korean men met the non-Korean spouses in the same way. The most common way of meeting foreign spouses was introduction by friends or colleagues for Korean men with 29%. 24.1% of the foreign wives were found through international marriage agencies, mostly to those who were not able to find a spouse in Korea because they live in rural areas (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2013). I found that Korean informants also met their Norwegian spouses on their own, during an overseas trip, at the work place, or introduction via friends. None of the informants applied to an intercultural marriages agency to find their spouses.

### **1.3 Intercultural marriages in Norway**

According to Statistics of Norway (2001), the number of intercultural marriages has increased during the last decade (see figure 2), particularly Norwegian men's marriages with foreign women, the most common being to marry women from Thailand, Philippines, and Russia. Marriage patterns show that Norway is increasingly becoming an international and multicultural society. There are more and more Norwegians who find foreign spouses. In 2001, one in five marriages was between a Norwegian and a foreign spouse. In 1990 it was one in ten. Marriage between Norwegian men and foreign women has increased the most, but there has also been an increase in Norwegian women's marriage with foreign men. The total

number of marriages in Norway increased from 22,000 in 1990 to nearly 25,000 in 2001.

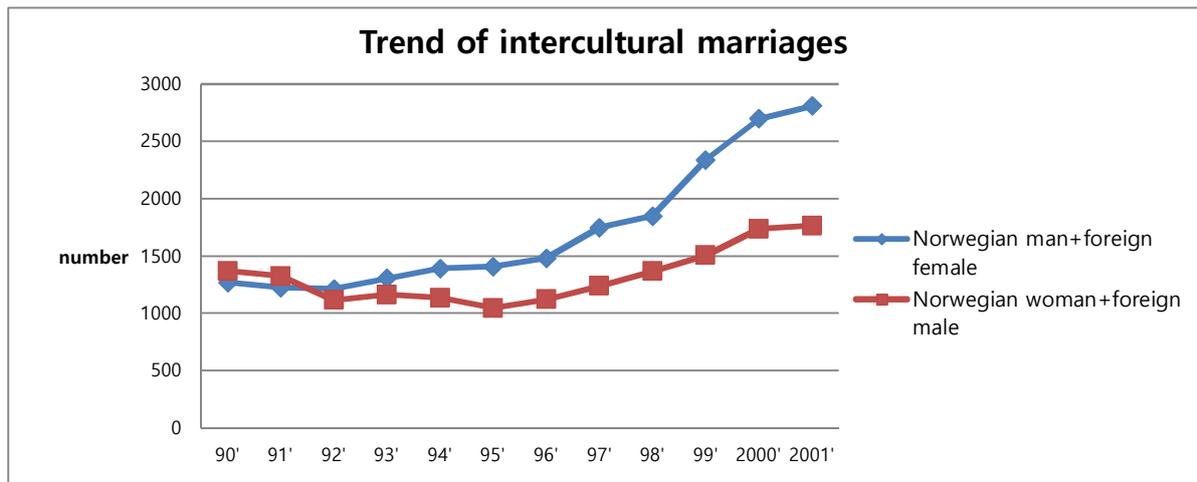


Figure 2– Trend of intercultural marriages in Norway, by Statistics of Norway

In 2001, 2900 Norwegian men and 1800 Norwegian women entered marriage with a foreign partner. These marriages accounted for 11.4% and 7.2% of all marriages, respectively. In the early 1990s there were more Norwegian women than men who married a spouse with a foreign background, but during the 1990s, there were more and more men who married foreign women. Norwegian women's marriages with foreign men has increased from the mid-1990s, but not nearly as much as for Norwegian men. The number of intercultural marriage between Norwegian men and non-Western women has increased. In 2001, there were nearly 2,000 Norwegian men who married women from non-Western countries, representing 69% of foreign spouses. 24% had a background in Western countries (Statistics of Norway, 2001).

Norwegian women's marriages with foreign men had a different development. The number of marriages with foreign spouses has not increased as much for Norwegian women as for men. The proportion of spouses from non-Western countries is different. 69% of Norwegian men's intercultural spouses came from non-Western nations, while 42% of Norwegian woman married non-Westerners. Norwegian women, more often than Norwegian men, married a spouse from Western countries.

#### 1.4 Stages of intercultural marriages

Intercultural marriages could have different worldviews by cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions. I assume that the differences can function as attractive features and as challenges. Perhaps, the difference is part of the appeal that brings partners into

intercultural couples, but when it comes to reality in daily life, the cultural difference brings some challenges. Romano, Dugan (2008) stated the three general stages of adjustment that most intercultural couples experienced:

1. The honeymoon phase, when everything new and different is a wonderful enriching gift (for our purpose we are considering this phase as beginning with the courtship and decision to marry)
2. The settling-in phase, when some of the differences can cause major disagreements.
3. The life-pattern phase, when the differences are either resolved or accepted, when a pattern of negotiation is determined or the conflicts become habits. (Romano 2008, 18)

At the first stage, the honeymoon phase, the differences are seen as romantic, unique, and exciting. The atmosphere of the partners is one of optimism and confidence, as “they feel exhilarated and approach their marriage with the enthusiasm of two people who are creating a wonderful, exotic cocktail, using all the best ingredients of their two worlds: different traditions, customs, language, food, and so” (Romano 2008, 18). In the settling-in phase, the partners begin to fall back into old habits and manners and expose sides of themselves, both personal and cultural, that, while not necessarily hidden, were not obvious or given much importance before. The third phase is life patterns. What happens at this point in the marriage depends entirely on the particular couple. Some end the marriage, having decided that their differences are insoluble, while many intercultural couples believe that their marriage actually has a great potential for success. I assume that the heterogeneous cultural background appealed to the intercultural couple as an exotic cocktail, with the possibility to create an amazing world together with optimism and confidence. When they settle down to reality, they are exposed to the differences both personal and cultural. After the first two stages, the intercultural couples meet the last phase, life patterns.

### **1.5 Worldview**

Generally, couples have differences due to gender and personality. For intercultural marriages, intercultural differences can be regarded as an extra challenge. Many couples face gender and personality challenges and difficulties. As people age, their culture, environment, family and so on influence their worldviews and mindsets. Although culture is not a single aspect of formation of personality, it is an important factor of developing character. According to Clifford Geertz (1973, 303) the definition of worldview is a “picture of the way things, in

sheer actuality, are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order.” A people’s ethos, on the other hand is “the tone, character, and quality of life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is underlying attitude themselves and their world that life reflects.” Geertz argued that although we can distinguish between worldview (cognitive assumptions) and ethos (affective and evaluative assumptions), the two are fundamentally congruent in that they complete each other and lend each other meaning. Thus, the definition of “worldview” can be defined in anthropological terms as “the foundational cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions and frameworks a group of people makes about the nature of reality which they use to order their lives” (Heibert 2008, 24). The worldview is integrated through cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions, so I think that it is not unusual that an intercultural couple has different worldviews and even a homogeneous cultural couple could have diverse worldviews.

The thesis is structured as follows: In chapter two, methodological approaches to this research are presented. In chapter three, theoretical approaches are presented and here I also include a presentation of former studies of intercultural marriages, intercultural competence, cultural differences, gender relationship, and power that have inspired me in my work. Those theoretical perspectives and literature are related to the topic and assisted me in analyzing my data. This chapter is followed by the analysis where the main issues elaborated on are how intercultural differences can be main issues at times, and how the intercultural marriages had some challenges with language and communication, raising children, and financial management. Moreover, the analysis chapter includes the issue of the extended family and sharing of house work in the intercultural marriages. The last chapter is the conclusion, where the main findings of this research are summarized.

## Chapter Two

### METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study is about intercultural marriages between Norwegians and South-Koreans in Norway. The main research question is whether different cultural backgrounds can be considered a major challenge for intercultural marriages. In order to shed light on this issue, I employed the qualitative research method, and semi-structured interviews. According to Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (2007), qualitative research is mostly applied for ethnographers, “the studies in everyday contexts, the focus is usually on a few cases, generally quite small-scale. This is to facilitate in-depth study (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 3). A semi-structured interview has an interview guide with questions that are open-ended and follow-up questions are also acceptable to obtain comprehensive data. I conducted individual interviews with eight people, three Norwegian husbands and their three Korean wives and one cohabitant couple. These informants have experiences of living together as intercultural couples, and I sought through the semi-structured interviews their experiences in order to qualitatively analyze the research questions.

#### **2.1 Qualitative research**

There are two main types of research methods, quantitative and qualitative research methods. According to Hammersley and Atkinson(2007), qualitative research seeks to discover the meaning that motivates men’s actions. Meaning, character and quality are valuable for qualitative research, most of ethnographers use qualitative research for data collection. (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 3). In more detailed terms, ethnographic work usually has most of the following features:

1. People’s actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher. In other words, research takes place ‘in the field.’
2. Data are gathered from a range of sources, including documentary evidence of

various kinds, but participant observation and asking questions through informal and formal interviews are usually the main ones.

3. Data collection is mostly 'unstructured'. It does not involve following through a fixed research design specified at the start

4. The focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale. This is to facilitate in-depth study.

5. The analysis of data involve interpretation of the meaning, functions, and consequences of human actions. (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 3)

According to Quinn Michael Patton (1990), qualitative research produces deep and rich information about a smaller of people and cases, "approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry" On the other hand, the quantitative research can be used to measure the reactions of a many people to a limited set of questions, facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data. (Patton 1990, 14)

Qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail. Quantitative methods, on the other hand, require the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fit into a limited number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned. This gives a broad, generalisable set of findings presented succinctly and parsimoniously. By contrast, qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. This increases understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability. (Patton 1990, 14).

This research is focused on a social phenomenon, intercultural marriage, between Norwegians and Koreans in everyday contexts. I conducted qualitative research methods for this study which is focusing on how people think. Qualitative research provides in depth and rich information based on a small number of people. Qualitative research enhances understanding of the cases and situations, and thorough the fieldwork, the research can collect valuable data through informants' experiences.

## **2.2 Semi-structured Interview**

Interviewing can be thought of as a range of types between unstructured and structured. Unstructured interview does not stick to a strict set of questions. In contrast, structured interview is conducted by prepared questions, and the interview follows a strict order of set

questions. According to Sonia R Wright (1979), “Unstructured interviewing tends to resemble conversation style with no questions, following a broad outline of topics. In structured interviewing the interview follows a strict order of set questions with respondents picking their responses from among series of alternatives offered by the interviewer” (Wright 1979, 51). The main use of unstructured interview is to provide illustrative materials and give a sense of the topics. Structured interviews usually produce systematic treatment, and results can be transformed into quantitative forms. Semi-structured interview is arranged in an interview guide which contains a number of questions. Most of the questions are open-end, and follow-up questions are allowed:

In Semi-structured interviews, interviewers prepared an interview guide that includes a number of questions. These questions are usually open-ended, and the interviewer follows up with probes seeking further detail and description about what has been said. Although the interview guide provides the same starting point for each semi-structured interview given that it assumes a common set of discussable topics each interview will vary according to what was said by individual interviewees, and how each interview structures, interviewers using semi-structured interviews must have highly developed listening skills to be able to both ascertain whether the research topics have been addressed by interviewee, and when and how it is appropriated to follow up on the accounts given. (Roulston 2010, 15)

I applied semi-structured interviews, as it was appropriate for my research question. Open-ended questions gave a sense of topic and offered a variety of answers from interviewees. Follow-up questions made it possible to collect more precise and comprehensive information from each informant’s reply. The interview required highly developed listening skills. I had to be aware that the interviewees mentioned the important issues, and I had to add follow-up questions if I required. The interviews were conducted with eight spouses individually.

The interview started by asking the interviewees about their background and non-threatening questions such as asking them to introduce themselves, about how the couple met, what they thought about the spouse’s country or culture before meeting the spouse etc. Beginning with those questions provided an opportunity to build up a rapport with interviewees. Then, the interview continued with questioning about intercultural interactions, integration of two cultures in marriage life, communication, the way of raising children, challenges within the couple, and so on. During the interviews, I asked complementary questions in order to get more accurate, and comprehensive information.

During the interviews, I operated active listening ability and verbal prompts to encourage the informants. The interviews were conducted in two languages, Korean and English. Operating interviews in Korean with the Korean spouses had the benefit of making the interviewees comfortable as they could speak their own mother language and it avoided language barriers. On the other hand, it was a potential disadvantage that the informants might presume the interviewer could know the background to the related issue without explanation. Fortunately, I did not have to ask the cultural background about the issues and examples that Korean spouses talked about. With the permission from the interviewees, all interviews were recorded. The records were transcribed for data analysis.

### **2.3 Participants**

Interviews were conducted with three Norwegian and Korean intercultural marriages and one Norwegian and Korean cohabitant couple. I regarded that cohabitant couples also has a situation similar to that of married couples. Since cohabitant couples also live together and share their daily lives, so intercultural cohabitant couples had the same setting as intercultural marriages. Especially, in Norway, cohabitation and marriage are not considered very different from another. When it comes to age, the period they had been married, the number of children and the way they met, there were differences among the couples that were interviewed in this project.

In intercultural marriage #1: The Korean spouse and Norwegian spouse are under 40 years old, and they have a baby. They have been married for between 5 and 10 years. They met for the first time in South Korea. The Norwegian spouse was visiting family member, and the Korean spouse was her friend. Additionally, one of the Norwegian spouse's family members is ethnically Korean, so the Korean spouse assumed that the Norwegian family felt a bit familiar with Korea compared to other Norwegians. Before they married, they visited each other several times. They did not fall in love at first sight, but as time went by, they knew each other better and better. The Korean spouse graduated university and she worked for a while in Korea. In Norway, she got a higher education and she had a work experience in a Norwegian company. The Norwegian spouse graduated university and he has master degree. Now he works in a company.

In intercultural marriage #2: The wife and husband were about 40 years old respectively. The Korean spouse had children from a previous marriage, and for the Norwegian spouse it was his first marriage. Now she, her daughter, and he live together in Norway. The Korean spouse graduated university, and she went to postgraduate school. She worked in a couple of big companies in South-Korea before coming to Norway. The Norwegian spouse also has both bachelor and master degree, and he works in a related field.

Intercultural couple #3 consisted of Korean and Norwegian cohabitants, both of them about 50 years old. They had been dating for between 5 and 10 years, and they had lived together for about 2 years. Both of them had own their children from former marriages. They met through work. The Korean partner has lived in Norway for over 20 years. She was educated in Norway, and also got her master's degree. She has many work experiences in Norway. The Norwegian partner graduated university.

In intercultural marriage #4 both spouses were over 50 years old, and they had two children. They met in South Korea during work. The Norwegian spouse worked in a Norwegian company in South-Korea. They lived in other countries for several years. Now they live in Norway. Except one Norwegian spouse, three of the Norwegian spouses have both bachelor and master grades. All of the Korean spouses graduated university, and three of them also have master degrees.

#### **2.4 Interview procedure**

This study obtained permission from Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste (NSD) prior to conducting interviews. Before the selection of the thesis's topic, I attended a Korean's meeting in Norway. Via the Korean meeting, I was able to get acquainted with Koreans who married Norwegians. After I got the permission of this study from NSD, I asked to the intercultural couples to have an interview. Fortunately, they allowed to me to conduct the interview. I explained to participants the purpose of this study and obtained signed informed consents. I provided the interview guide to informants in advance of the interviews, except for the first interview. I felt that interviewees tried to answer all the questions as much as possible. Most of the interviews were carried out at the interviewees' houses. Locations were based on participants' preference as interviews are more suitable in a natural setting, where the interviewees feel it is comfortable and convenient.

## **2.5 Interview reflection**

Interviews were conducted with three Norwegian and Korean couples in intercultural marriages and one Norwegian and Korean cohabitant couple. I planned to have an individual interview with 8 spouses. I assumed that the informants could speak more freely and frankly when the spouse is not next to her or him. The researcher brought some small gift to the interviewees, for instance a candle, hat for a couple's baby, and a cake. Even outside the interview setting, it is not very unusual to bring some small gift when visiting someone's house in Korea. I assumed that it can be a token of thanks to interviewees for offering their time and providing valuable information.

Most of interviews were conducted at the interviewees' house. Interviewees seemed more comfortable with their places, and I considered it was a good place to conduct the interviews. Once, the researcher met an interviewee in a café, where there were too many people to hear the interviewee's voice and it made the interviewer distracted. So, the interviewee and I went to a park to avoid meeting many people. However, it was too cold to continue the interview. In all except one occasion was it easy to interview at a home. I planned individual interviews, but the wives had a tendency of correcting husbands' responses such as the year of their marriage or first time of meeting. In the first interview, I was not able to ask the wife to make the place for individual interviews, since it was their living area and I was afraid of being rude. However, for the remaining interviews, the researcher moved the interview place from the kitchen to the living room to prevent the wife from correcting her husband's answers. One of the interviewees volunteered to go outside for the interviewer and her husband. I received the impression that when the Korean wives were not in the same place, the Norwegian husbands were able to speak more sincerely and candidly. All of the interviews with the Korean spouses lasted for about 2 hours or more than 2 hours. I assumed that in general, the females would be a bit more talkative than the males, since Korean spouses used their mother tongues for their interviews, so no language barrier hindered them to express and explain their thinking and stories, and they met the interviewer a couple of times before the interview. These aspects resulted in the long interviews with the Korean spouses. On the other hand, some of the Korean spouses were concerned about revealing their marriage life to other people, even though they knew that in the final thesis

their identities were completely anonymous and confidential. According to one of the interviewee's comment, Korean society in Norway is too small to have a secret. Although I did not put their names, by describing the informant's situation, people could recognize who they were. Yet, Korean spouses tried to be honest in an implicative or roundabout way. I believed that they told the difficulties to me as much as they could reveal.

Norwegian informants allowed me to have interviews through their Korean spouses. Thus, Norwegian spouses and I had never met before the interview took place. I got the impression that the Norwegian spouses tried to offer useful information to the researcher. Whenever the interviews were finished, they asked if their answers helped the research or not. Even though they did not remember as many examples of difficulties about cultural differences, I felt the Norwegian spouses were frank during interviews, most of time. In addition, I did a self-introduction, in order to build rapport and a comfortable atmosphere to have a conversation. Although they had accepted to be interviewed, I assumed that generally people don't want to talk about personal things with a person who they have never met before. Therefore, I attempted show that I also was willing to share some of my personal story.

During the first interview, I was obsessed with the thinking of obtaining responses to all questions on the list. So, I was holding the paper and checking the questions to ask next question. After the first interview, I made adjustments for the next interview to set me free to obtain the answers. After the second interview, I showed the interview guide via paper or e-mail (if the interviewee asks) before starting interview or few days before. When the interviewees were aware of the questions, they answered more actively and they checked the list of questions to make sure if they had replied to all the questions.

## **2.6 Self-reflection**

According to the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1998), when people meet a new text, prejudices assist in understanding the text. Prejudices are not necessarily positive or negative, but they may help to read the text in different ways (Gadamer 1989, 299). The importance is to be aware of our prejudices, and how they may have an influence on our understanding. This is also relevant when we do research. When doing this research, I had to be aware of my background, and how my experiences influenced the way this work

developed. I grew up in South-Korea for most of my life and I am married to a Norwegian. Personally, it was easy to understand the Korean spouses' viewpoints and what made them feel sad or upset during their daily marriage life. At the same time, living in Norway for about 2 years and being married to a Norwegian helped me understand the Norwegian spouses' standpoints. Yet, I presume that if the researcher had a different cultural background, it may have led to a different approach and analysis of this study. Growing up in South-Korea, having experience of living Norway, interviewing Korean and Norwegian spouses, and analyzing related literatures help me understand the informants' perspectives. I cannot deny I had my own viewpoint throughout, but I was aware that they did not limit the standpoints and I tried to be open to discover what was there.

## Chapter Three

### THEORETICAL APPROACH

My study is about intercultural marriages, especially in the Norwegian and Korean case in Norway. Intercultural marriages have become more frequent, and there are some studies about cross cultural marriages. I believed that the literature and secondary studies could offer an essential background knowledge which is related to my subject and how they categorized to the themes about intercultural marriages. Referring to the literatures, I obtained some perspectives; intercultural competence, collectivism and individualism, high-context and low-context cultures, gender relationship, and the aspect of power.

I did not find any research on intercultural marriages between Norwegians and South-Koreans, but I found a study about intercultural marriage between Korean and Americans. Bascom, Harriett, and Gwendolyn (1978) worked as social workers, and they did counseling of Korean- American intercultural marriages. After the Korean civil war, many American soldiers married Korean women. From 1962 to 1974, the number of intercultural marriages increased dramatically. Bascom, Harriett, and Gwendolyn's study argued that "It is important to understand that these Korean women must adapt to a strange new lifestyle and give up a great portion of their cultural heritage" (Rarliff, Moon and Bonacci 1978, 221). Rarliff demonstrated that the relationship between the spouses in intercultural marriages rely on how they negotiate difficulties of language, culture, and expression of feelings. Those categories represent the main challenges for intercultural marriages. However, this study has limitations of time and relationship settings. Between 1970's and the 21th century's socio-economical conditions has radically changed. This intercultural marriage between American soldiers and Korean "business girls (prostitutes)", in the word of the author (Rarliff, Moon and Bonacci 1978, 222) might be seen as a unique case. The American soldiers were young, between nineteen to twenty three years old, and of low military rank. For most of them this Korean trip was the first experience far away from women. The "business girls (prostitutes)" were not well educated, and they supported their family economically. Thus, many of the

Korean women married to the American not only for love, but also for a better economical state. I believe that this study has a noteworthy point of view of intercultural marriages, in that the intercultural marriages rely on how the couple deals with and negotiates the factors of challenges such as language, culture, and expression of feelings. Especially, Rarliff mentioned that the Korean women who moved to the USA with her American husband had to adapt to an unfamiliar lifestyle and give up her own cultural heritage. I assume that the factors of difficulties that the American and Korean intercultural marriages faced are still relevant as challenges for current intercultural marriages. According to Rarliff, inability of language skill often brings frustration and hostility into the marriage. Once the couple is living in the United States, it places the woman in a childlike position, fully dependent on the man.

I presume that language ability can be an issue for each spouse, the relationship, and also their social statuses. The language is a method of conversation and connection of the world. Thus, for a person who has inability of language, it is not easy to have a conversation and it may hard to get a job. The language ability can link with financial issues. The person who has language inability can feel lonely, discouraged, and isolated.

In this case study, the social workers indicated that “the greatest conflict in regard to family ties is the Korean wife’s adherence to the Confucian ethic, which requires that the child be faithful to her parents. For instance, the parents need help, the daughter should supply it” (Ibid., 223). Miss Y, the Korean woman supported her poor mother, and her mother requested sending money to her when she started living in the U.S.A. But her husband John refused. This Korean wife was placed in conflict of cultural values. She was obligated to help her mother, but she needed her husband’s love and support. My assumption is that perhaps supporting the spouse’s parents or family is not very common in current Korean society, but the important point of this example is that the Korean wife and American husband were not able cooperate with intercultural values. For an intercultural marriage, it might be inevitable to face cross-cultural difficulties within their daily lives. When they face challenges, how they negotiate and deal with them can be an important matter for intercultural marriages.

Another intercultural marriage study is Yuliya Pashchuk’s master thesis about intercultural marriages in Norway, in the Norwegian – Ukrainian case. In this study, Yuliya

highlighted intercultural communication aspects (Pashchuk 2012, 6-12). According to Yuliya, an intercultural marriage's conflict can be divided into constructive and destructive conflict (Ibid., 33-35). Constructive conflict is based on admitting and accepting that each spouse is different, and they discovered how to deal with difficulties through time and experiences. They did not avoid the challenges, but they were open to listen to each other's opinion and perspectives. Eventually, they achieved resolution by acceptance to agree to disagree. According to Yuliya, Intercultural communication competence is an openness and acceptance of differences' for each other, it brings constructive conflicts and the intercultural marriage is able to handle the challenges.

I guess that many elements can be issues for intercultural marriages, such as language, culture, values, and so on. Those aspects are regarded as challenges for intercultural marriages. Nonetheless, some intercultural marriages accomplished cooperation, and some others do not. I cannot simply state what made this difference, but Intercultural communication competence is a central and essential aspect to successful negotiation of intercultural marriage life. Through those two studies I was able to discover that different cultural background could be a difficult aspect for intercultural marriages. In addition, there were some elements that the intercultural couples could regard as issues. In this project, I aim to know how the spouses in these marriages related to these challenges, and whether they tried to understand each other with intercultural communication competence. In order to do that, we need to describe what intercultural competence is.

### **3.1 Intercultural competence**

Øyvind Dahl (2006) explained several approaches to intercultural communication, such as the functionalist approach, the semiotic approach, and the hermeneutic approach. The functionalist research tradition has tried to *predict* how culture would influence communication. One of the pioneers of the field was the American anthropologist Edward Hall. Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs (2006) introduced Hall, "In several books he points out how culture influences on communication, often in an unconscious manner (Hall 1959, 1966, 1976). He also introduced the concepts *high-context* and *low-context*" (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 10). The Dutch management researcher Geert Hofstede's work, *Culture's Consequences* (1980), has had an enormous influence on the research tradition in

intercultural communication. Hofstede defines culture as ‘the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another’ (Hofstede 1980:21).

Most countries’ inhabitants share a national character that is more clearly apparent to foreigners than to the nationals themselves; it represents the cultural mental programming that the nationals tend to have in common. Hofstede is known for his suggestion that four dimensions could be used to quantify and compare nations, thus giving a measure of cultural differences, and these are Power-Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism/Collectivism, and Masculinity/Femininity. (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 10)

The observance of the complexity of intercultural encounters has increased, leading to a critique of the functionalist trend: “According to criticism of the essentialist concept of culture, culture is not something that a person has, but something the person makes relevant in the meeting with others. Culture is neither in its social surroundings independent of people, nor is it possessed by a group of people” (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 11).

The semiotic approach bears its name from Greek, the meaning being ‘sign’, in this approach, communication is seen as the production and exchange of meanings. Communication in the semiotic sense does not mean ‘sending message’, as is the case in the process school. According to Øyvind Dahl (2006), “Communication is a social and mutual ‘act of sharing’; it refers to the sharing of concepts, mediated by the use of signs. Dynamic communication is, according to this school, about negotiating meanings and how people produce (not merely transmit) meanings in a social context (Dahl 2001:41f)” (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 12).

Since the focus in this aspect is not on the process of transmission, but on the production of meaning, the semiotic school will not claim that a communication is breaking down when the interlocutors ascribe different meanings to a certain event. On the contrary, such behavior must be expected, since different communicators have different social and cultural backgrounds. Their interpretation is based on different cultural reference frames, different social experiences, and different cognitive universes of signs and meaning. According to semiotics, different understandings can be very fruitful. (Dahl 2001:48) (Ibid.,13)

Dahl asserted that communication often reveals different interpretation of the same event. Different interpretations and misunderstandings are not necessarily negative. “If the

communicators are aware of a lack of understanding and possible misunderstandings, these situations may represent ‘*golden moments*’ of potential new discoveries! (Dahl 2003)” (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 13)

Although the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989) did not study intercultural competence, many hermeneutic approach researchers employed his approaches to study intercultural communication. “His concept of *horizon of understanding* sees interpretations as being related to the experiences of the actors. ‘The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point’” (Gadamer [1975] 2000:302).

When the individual moves into a new context, or meets other people in a communicational setting, the horizon is extended or opened in relation to the new, strange, or foreign horizon, the interlocutor in a communication can negotiate language, meanings, and the accepted reference frames. Gadamer has labeled this process fusion of horizons (Gadamer [1975] 2000:306). This happens at the individual level and can be explained as change of understanding (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 17)

Dahl addressed that the variety of different approaches presented are not only one bridge, but several bridges of understanding to be constructed, and all represent different perspectives when facing the challenges of intercultural communication in different areas of life (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 18).

In Yuliya’s master thesis, intercultural communication competence is a standard to approach constructive conflicts to obtain resolution for the difficulties for intercultural marriages. Intercultural communication competence is to agree to disagree and acceptance of differences. I assumed that Yuliya’s perspective on intercultural communication competence is a significant factor of forming cooperation in intercultural marriages. In my study, I would call it “intercultural competence.” As many researchers employed Hans-Georg Gadamer’s approach, I was inspired by his perspective from one of his books called “Truth and method.” According to Gadamer (1989), when people try to understand a text, people use their own interpretation with particular expectations to extract a certain meaning.

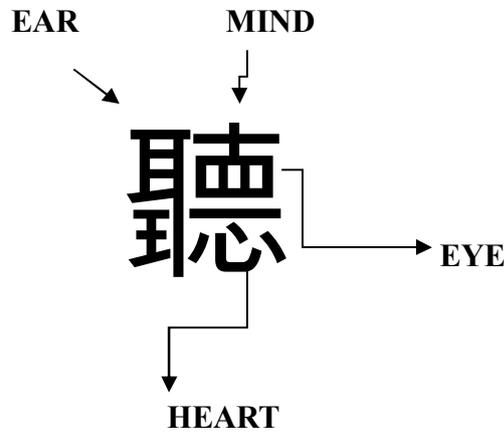
A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is

understanding what is there. (Gadamer 1989, 267)  
The fore-projection is *the concept of prejudice*. Prejudice is a condition of understanding. The meaning of “prejudice” is a judgment that is handed over before all the aspects that determine a situation have been finally examined. Thus prejudice cannot be said to be positive or negative, but simply involves not having determined all aspects. Hence, Gadamer asserted that without questioning, prejudice can be dangerous. “The essence of *question* is to open up possibilities and keep them open” (Gadamer 1989, 299). A person has an own bias when understanding the text, but it should not be the final judgment. With the same context, the other person can have a different interpretation. The significant point is that to have open-mindedness to any other possibilities, and keep the prospects open. Gadamer also addressed that text should be understood with the whole text: “The movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to whole” (Ibid., 291).  
An interpretation of text can be regarded as representing a whole community, and also an individual. I think a person could be understood as a whole community, and also an individual. A person is a member of a society, at the same time s/he is an individual.

According to Gadamer (1989), having a particular view point can be seen as a concept of *horizon*: “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. The meaning of having a horizon is not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond” (Gadamer 1989, 302). People see the world through their own horizon, and is able to see beyond. In order to understand, we should put ourselves in the others situation. It does not need to be reached an agreement, only discovery of the other person’s standpoint and horizon. Hence, *fusion of horizon* is encountering others as a subject not an object, and understand and discovering the other’s standpoint.

I assume that listen carefully to the spouse’s comments can be beneficial to discover his/her perspective. According to Dugan Romano (2008), “Researchers have found that the ‘average person spends 50 to 80 percent of his day listening, but hears only half of what is said, understands only a quarter of that, and remembers even less.’ If listening is inherently such a difficult task, it is not wonder that intercultural couples have such a struggle with it” (Romano 2008, 125). Romano brought Man Keung ho’s scheme to explain its complexity.

Man Keung Ho, in building a Successful Intermarriage, uses the Chinese word ting (listen) to explain its complexity. Ting is a composite of four vital parts.



The ear is necessary for hearing the words spoken; the eye, for seeing the message conveyed by the body; the mind, for interpreting the meaning of what has been seen and heard; and the heart, for being able to feel what is wanted and needed from the relationship. In order for intercultural couples to overcome their communication handicaps, they have to work harder at listening, using the heart and mind as well as the eye and ear to avoid misunderstanding. (Romano 2008, 126)

I think that Yuliya's understanding of intercultural communication competence has a lot in common with Gadamer's *fusion of horizon*. In Yuliya's study, the intercultural marriages who made constructive conflict were open-minded, and they did not try to pursue an agreement, but they respected their spouses as a subject. I presume that *fusion of horizon* is a fundamental element of intercultural competence. It is respecting the others as a subject, not necessarily reaching an agreement, just discovering and understanding what the other's standpoint is.

### 3.2 Collectivism and individualism

*Collectivism* and *Individualism* is one of the dichotomous concepts of culture.

Harry C. Triandis (1995) described *collectivism* as a pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of one collective. On the other hand, the definition of *individualism* is a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who see themselves as independent of collectives. I assume that intercultural marriages face some

difficulties from cross-cultural backgrounds, and those two dichotomous concepts may help to understand easier what kind of different cultural concepts might cause challenges.

Collectivism may be initially defined as a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of one or more collectives (family, co-workers, tribe, nation); are primarily motivated by the norms of, and duties imposed by, those collectives; are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals; and emphasize their connectedness to members of these collectives. A preliminary definition of individualism is a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives; are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others; give priority to their personal goals over the goals of others; and emphasize rational analyses of the advantages and disadvantages to associating with others. (Triandis 1995, 2)

As Triandis (1995) addressed, from a collectivistic perspective, *collectivistic* individuals might see themselves as a member of collectives. Once they have a relationship with collectives, they are willing to keep the connection in the community, even though it requires some sacrifices. For the collectivist, the priority goal of collectives is weighted than personal goal. In contrast, *individualistic* individuals link loosely to collectives. They regard themselves as independent, and their own preferences, needs, rights promote their motivation. They rationally analyze the benefits and disadvantages, and they are not afraid of detaching from the collectives. Latin America, Asia, Middle east, Southeast Europe can be regarded as *collectivism* countries. Northern America, Western Europe, and Northern Europe can be classified to *individualism* countries. Every country has both *collectivism* and *individualism* with different degrees. This dichotomy has been criticized, which will be discussed later in this thesis. I used these dichotomous concepts for simple understanding. According to this separation, South-Korea is one of the collectivism countries, Norway is an individualistic country. Triandis addressed other differences between *collectivism* and *individualism*: “Collectivists are more sensitive to shame, individualists to guilt. Another way to think about it is that individualists pay attention to internal process, such as principle, and collectivists pay attention to the situation(public/private) and to saving face” (Triandis 1995, 34). Triandis saw *collectivism* versus *individualism* in terms of affiliation versus achievement, respectfulness versus self-assertion, hierarchical versus equalitarian, other-orientation versus self-orientation, mutual dependence versus autonomy, fear of rejection versus fear of failure. I was able to find a description of Norwegians, according to Ridnick (1955): “Norwegians are

egalitarian, shy, inhibited, and independent, and they conform to the expectations of others. They give little praise and are oversensitive to criticism. They do not accept strangers easily and raise their children to be fairly obedient. The independence is individualistic, but the other traits are collectivist” (Triandis 1995, 99). This explanation can bring disagreement among Norwegian, but interesting point is that although Ridnick looked upon Norwegian culture as a mix of individualism and collectivism. Norway is regarded as one of the individualistic countries by the independence trait. The separation of *individualism* and *collectivism* is independence and interdependence.

South Korea is one of the collectivistic countries which has been influenced by Confucianism. A Korean word, *Chemyon*; the meaning of mutual face saving through guilt and shame, demonstrates the notion of the Confucian ideal of interpersonal relationships. The major function of *chemyon* is mutual face-saving, a crucial value embedded in Korean culture.

The Korean concept of *chemyon* is due primarily to the complex socio-psychological implications of the concept of self and inter-relational concerns with others. Members of the family of an individual may share *chemyon*, both in cases of pride or shame, in an individual’s achievement or in wrong doings. Hence, face-work to maintain *chemyon* is involved in settings with in-group members of out-groups than when one is involved in setting with in-group members who have multiple layers of relationships; face is flexible, a dynamic self/society metaphor in which personal, relational, and group boundaries are negotiated and redefined(Chang&Holt,1994). As a consequence, maintaining, protecting, and saving *chemyon* play the major role of inclusion and approval of one’s social and relational statues one possesses ad perceives. Hence, as we recognized through our interviews, Koreans are concerned about social recognition and how they are seen by others. (Shim, Kim and Martin 2008, 73)

A simple example of this concept is a high school student applying to colleges. If an American student does not get into a prestigious university it does not necessarily reflect negatively to their parents. On the other hand, for Koreans, if the offspring does not get the admission from a prestigious university, it can bring embarrassment to their whole family. Thus, to regain “face”, the child will may have to continue retaking entrance examinations.

There is another concept that is important in understanding traditional and contemporary Korean culture, which is called *kibun*. The meaning of *kibun* is setting the mood for interaction. According to De Mente (2004), *kibun* literally means “feelings,” but its

implications and importance go well beyond this English term. For Koreans to develop and maintain harmonious relationships they must be able to accurately “read” the *kibun* of others. *Kibun* is a highly influential concept when engaging in interpersonal relationships. Preserving the *kibun* of one or more parties in an interpersonal communicative exchange or relationship takes precedence over all else (Crane, 1968). Due to the Confucian emphasis on harmony and hierarchal order in relationships, an individual should always express respect and concern for another’s *kibun*, as well as express a concern for the *kibun* of the entire group/situation (Oak & Martin, 2000). For Koreans *kibun* is when an inner, peaceful environment is maintained: “By being able to maintain one’s *kibun* you are being able to communicate effectively showing a mutual understanding” (Shim, Kim and Martin 2008, 78).

For instance, if a Korean child got a bad grade from the school exam, the child could first check her/his mother’s *kibun* at home. If the mother’s *kibun* is not good, the child should wait until mother’s *kibun* becomes better or for another day to tell the result of the exam. Depending on mother’s *kibun*, it can bring different reactions from the same result of the school exam. If the mother is in bad mood, she would be angry with the exam result. I assume that sometimes, the situation or *kibun* can be regarded more important than principles in Korea society. To try to comprehend a person’s *kibun*, mood, feelings, or state of mind can be considered a sign of respectfulness.

There is another word explaining a core of Korean culture, *jeong*, which refers to “feelings of fondness, caring, bonding, and attachment that development interpersonal relationship.” It is considered a feeling that exists between people - rather than within the heart or mind of one individual, according to UCLA psychiatrists Christopher K. Chung and Samson J. Cho (Tudor 2012, 92). A critical aspect of *jeong* is deep interdependence, for the cord is both tie and bond. Two people who share *jeong* should have a relationship of mutual give and take, assisting each other when needed. It is considered a feeling that exists between people- rather than within the heart or mind of one individual according to UCLA psychiatrists Christopher K. Chung and Samson J. Cho – it requires a very strong sense of “we”, which other cultures may not feel can exist. “Among Koreans, ‘we’ is not just a plural pronoun, rather it is a collective ‘I.’ When a Korean talks about a person close to her, she will precede their name or title with “our” rather than “my.” “My mother” becomes “our mother” in this perspective.

Margaret Hayford O’leary addressed that equality is very important values for Norwegian. “Norwegians are fond of pointing put that the Norwegian word for equality, *likhet*, also has the meaning of sameness or similarity” (O’Leary 2010, 9). Compare to other countries the gap between rich and poor is small. Another illustration of the value of equality is that a CEO of large Norwegian corporations does not receive the massive bonuses seen in the U.S.A and elsewhere. The distance between the people and the government is also small. The evidences are government officials taking public transportation or drinking cup of coffee in a café. I assume that Norwegian look upon themselves as an independent individuals rather than members of collectives. However, Norway has tendency of collectivism regulating behavior more tightly in family and social settings than in the United States. Conformity is another significant value for Norwegian, and “it seems that in-groups are more important in that part of the world than in the U.S.A” (Triandis 1995, 98). The total information suggests that Norway has two kinds of elements is present.

I consider that Norway is an individualistic region, with many collectivist elements. Family bond is one of the collectivistic elements, but the major element of individualism that is independence makes Norway look like an individualistic country. In Norway, most children move out when they become the age of 18 to 20. In South Korea, most of children live with their parents until they get married. In general, Korean students are supported from their parents, if the parents can afford the college tuition. Some Korean parents save money for their offspring’s wedding ceremony expenses. Most Korean parents expect their children to obey the parents, and children are willing to show reverence for parents.

### **3.3 High-context and low-context cultures**

There is another dichotomous illustration of culture which is *high-context* and *low-context*. Sarah A. Lanier (2014) described it in her book called “foreign to familiar.” According to her, in *high-context* societies everything matters. In contrast, in *low-context* societies, nothing is matters. At the end of the chapter, she organized differences between *high-context* and *low-context* cultures.

High-context societies (everything matters):

- Who you are related to matters.
- Who you know matters.
- It is better to overdress than to under-dress.
- Watch to see how others respond in a situation in order to apply appropriate behavior.
- Remember to honor the people you are dealing with; too casual is insulting.
- Use manners.
- Respect the rules.
- Give attention to appropriate greetings

Low-context societies (nothing matters; anything goes within reason).

- Who you know matters, but not as much. What you know is more important.
  - Do not be offended by the casual atmosphere.
  - Lack of protocol does not mean rejecting, nor is dishonoring.
  - Address people by their given names unless other use titles.
- (Lanier 2014, 103)

Edward T. Hall, in his book “Beyond Culture”, referred to formal culture as *high-context* and to informal culture as *low-context* (Lanier 2014, 79). A *high-context* culture has built tradition through time. There are many protocols and manners; how you eat, how you greet (particularly the way young people address older people), wedding traditions, table manners, and who you know. Another thing that distinguishes *high-context* cultures is that they have not significantly mixed with other cultures. Villages, consequently, tend to be higher context than cities, as cities tend to collect mixes of cultures” (Lanier 2014, 80). Lanier gave an example, where in New York, an Italian immigrant family may have its important traditions to raise children, but outside of the home, such as school or on the street, they may mix their own culture and the new environmental culture. In the city, people can often see new things and there are many opportunities to access new things. Thus, it makes people less feel strange when they meet something new.

I consider that the concept of *high-context* relates to *collectivism*, and *low-context* is linked to *individualism*. For instance, in *high-context*, it matters “who you know” rather than “what you know.” When an individual has a connection with a person who is already belong to a group or community, an individual can easily get into the group. One of the traits of *collectivism* is that individuals look upon themselves as a part of collectives. Thus, a new individual has association with a member of the group, the individual easily gain entry through connection with a member of the group. In *individualism*, individuals are

independent in a community. Hence, it is more important that “what you know,” rather than the connection. I believe that “who you know,” is still matter in low-context, like a school ties, and personal connections can help open the gate to a community. Perhaps, the level of impact the personal connection is lower than *high-context* culture.

Lanier addressed power distance, as many *high-context* societies are known to have a greater “power distance” than more casual *low-context* cultures. Power distance, a term given by Geert Hofstede (*Cultures and Organization, Software for the Mind*), refers to the lack of familiar relationship between the levels of authority, such as teacher and student, officer and soldier, boss and employee, even parent and child. Usually, the more formal the society, the greater the distance between authority figures and their subordinates. Addressing authority with titles, respect and deference is expected (Lanier 2014, 93).

Korea is can be regarded as *high-context* culture through five thousand years of history. Korean students called their teacher “teacher,” or “professor” in school and university. Additionally, they did not ask many questions, and most students never speak up in disagreement with professor’s lectures. They assume that the act of opposing with professor during the classes can be regarded as being rude. On the contrary, I discovered that Norwegian students have freedom to have opinions different with the professor’s view. They assume that the freedom to give their opinion, to one (professor) whose opinion is equal value. Additionally, many Norwegian students call their professor by their first name.

Another difference between *high-context* culture and *low-context* culture is the way of communication. According to Edward T. Hall (1998), “High context transactions are more on the feeling, intimate side while the low-context ones are much less personal and oriented toward the left-brain. Germans and North Europeans in general can be said to operate lower on the context than the Japanese or Asian, for example” (Hall 1998, 61). Lanier described this difference as indirect communication versus direct communication, the way of communication in *high-context* culture and *low-context* culture. Indirect communication is more relationship-based, and a way of avoiding offending the other person. Thus, the answer “yes (or no)” may not really mean “yes (or no).” It may be the first step in beginning a friendly or verbal compliance maybe required by the culture. I found a Korean word *nunchi* which is explains well *high-context*, indirect communication. Koreans define *nunchi* as “the sense of eye,” or “mind-reading.”

As Samovar and Porter (2003), *nunchi* is used to discover another's unspoken "hidden agenda," paying close attention to the speaker's nonverbal cues. *Nunchi* is a form of high-context communication and is often used to interpret and comprehend another's thoughts, intentions, feelings, and desires which are seldom verbally expressed. In Korea, *nunchi* means grasping the situation in a holistic manner. It is practiced in every aspect of Korean daily life to some extent so that they can communicate in a socially acceptable manner and act in a manner appropriate to the situation. It means putting self into the context of the situation with others and the environment. In communicating with others, one has to abstract from and project to that which one wishes communicate in an appropriate way: direct or indirect, verbal or non-verbal, in selection of language and tone used. Both speaker and listener need to understand their claim of who he/she is in context. (Shim, Kim and Martin 2008, 74)

In Korea, the word of *nunchi* is used very commonly, and *nunchi* is regarded as a sense of the appropriate way to communicate. It require paying attention to the speaker's nonverbal signs, and through this people interpret and understand another's thinking, purpose, moods, and wishes. Additionally, Shim (2008) added the communication process in Korean value, "(1)understanding without speaking(*nunchi*), (2)saving and preserving each interactant's face(*chemyon*), and (3)setting the right mood for a communication interaction(*kibun*)" (Shim, Kim and Martin 2008, 79). Thus, it is possible that the answer of "yes" implies "no" depending on the context.

In contrast, in *low- context*, direct communication accuracy is a more important value. Mostly, a "yes" is a "yes", and "no" is a "no." There are no hidden meanings. In direct communication saying "no" is not a rejection, it is information. In general, in indirect communication, the goal of the speaker is friendliness, and making feel-good atmosphere. On the other hand, in direct communication, goal of the speaker is information. A direct answer is information only. It does not reflect on how the person feels about the person, and when people say what they think (nicely), it will usually not be take personally.

In order to demonstrate potential possible difficulties by intercultural background, I applied the dichotomous concepts of culture, such as *collectivism* and *individualism*, and *high-context culture* and *low-context culture*. Yet, those polar opposite notions of cultures cannot justify all intercultural marriages' challenges. I conveyed those concepts to understand

more easily, but it does not mean that those illustrations of culture are always true. There are some critical comments about the dichotomous concepts of culture:

“The notion of culture is a living and changing human phenomenon, not a petrified constant (Illman and Nynäs 2005:42f). Making persons into statistical variables and sorting them into simple categories according to ‘cultural belonging’ is to reduce their complex world into a mere shadow of itself” (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 105). Additionally, understanding of culture should be regarded from the whole to the part and back to whole:

“The movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to whole” (Gadamer 1989, 291). Surrounding environments can affect building a person’s cultural mirror, but in a same cultural background, a variety of perspectives is possible. Thus, those dichotomous concepts of culture can be a challenging element for intercultural marriages. Nonetheless, I assume that characterizing people according to like those dichotomous classifies of culture can be dangerous, without considering its complex, dynamic process.

### **3.4 Gender relationship**

In general, *collectivism*, *high-context* culture has greater power distance. In *high-context* culture, everything matters, including the strict adherence to gender-defined roles. South Korea has been influenced by Confucianism, especially since the *Joseon* dynasty which lasted about 600 years. In the *Joseon* dynasty, within the home, the father held authority: his wife and children were expected to do as he commanded, and he was to be a ruler and provider.

Males in Confucian order were privileged over females, to the extent that a woman who had given birth was referred to simply as “X’s mother.” In a house where the father had died, the firstborn son rather than the mother became the new head or master. This was a consequence of the “three obediences” of the later Joseon period: daughters were obedient to their fathers, wives to their husbands, and widows to their sons. Women were denied all inheritance rights (prior to the Joseon era, women had equal right to inherit property, as well as noble titles), and restricted from access to education. (Tudor 2012, 47)

*Joseon* mores built up gender discrimination over six centuries, even the upheavals of Japanese colonialism, division, and war did not correct the unequal balance of roles. From 1950s onward, the government started provision of schooling for all children regardless men and women. Yet many girls were not allowed to go to school by their own families. Some

grandmothers said that if the girl is educated, she won't listen to her (future) husband.

South Korea was ranked low in Gender Empowerment index: "South Korea's Gender Empowerment Measure rank in 1995, according to UN, was 90<sup>th</sup> out of 116 countries surveyed, only marginally better than Arabic countries" (Tudor 2012, 302). As time goes, more women have been educated and reached high positions in workplace. Between 2002 and 2006, for instance, the number of women at the largest ten business groups rose by 47.9 percent (though seven out of ten of their new hires still are men). People are realizing that talent should not go to waste. But the supporting system for females is not very systemized and working mothers cannot use their holidays for maternity leave in work place. According to a Korea correspondent for *The Economist*, Daniel Tudor (2012), "Lack of supporting for working mothers and the gender pay gap, which at 35 percent, is the highest in the OECD. The result is a so-called M-curve pattern, in which young women begin working after school or college, give up after having children, then return to work after their children grow up, but in low-paid, low value-added jobs" (Tudor 2012, 306). Gender equality, and condition or supporting for working mothers are improved compare to the past, but still there exists sexism in people's mindset.

*Individualism*, and *low-text* culture have less power-distance, and less strict adherence to gender-defined roles. For instance, Norway and other Nordic countries are seen as leading the world in gender equality.

Norway and other Nordic countries are seen as leading the world in gender equality. Women have had the right to vote since 1913, and they are entitled to more than a year of paid maternity leave. According to the UN Human Development Report 2009, Norway ranks second behind Sweden on the Gender Empowerment Measure, which includes such measures as number of female legislators, senior officials and managers, and female professional and technical workers, and the ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income. It also ranks second behind Australia on the Gender-Related Development Index, which includes life expectancy, adult literacy rate, and estimated earned income for females and males. Norway appears at the top of Save the Children's 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Mothers' Index in 2010. (O'Leary 2010, 57)

Equality is important value in Norway, and its welfare system maintains working mothers' career. In Norway, fathers also can get parental leave. It does not seem strange for fathers to pick up their kid after work. Yet, female-dominated jobs tend to be less well paid, which

contributes to the pay gap that still exists between men and women. Compare to South Korea, Norway has much better condition for female employees or working mothers to get maternity leave. In Korea, sometimes working mothers does not use their maternity leave, considering working place's atmosphere. Most of working mothers know that colleagues don't like long periods of parental leave, and they don't want to lose job or lose the opportunity for promotions.

### **3.5 The aspect of power**

Ibsen Jensen (2006) discussed the aspect of power in intercultural communication practice: "It is argued that a theory of social practice demonstrates how culture is embodied and is also a fruitful way to address the complexity of power in communication" (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 85). Based on Foucault, Power is not something you possess or receive – power is everywhere – produced in relations between actors in society.

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And 'Power' insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement. Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (Foucault 1976 in Lemert 2004:466) (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 91)

A social practice is a routinised type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other. The job interview is an excellent example of a social practice:

I see power produced in our social actions and especially relevant for job interview – the experiences of power are embodied in every actor and relations to the actor's positions in society and in the actual context. From this perspective the key focal points in a job interview become the organization of the intercultural communication practice. It is no longer a question of 'the right person at right place' but about which job interview practices are seen as appropriate. It is about how the bodies of the applicants are socialized and how this fits in with the status of the job in the hierarchy of the labour market. (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 96)

According to the practice theory, intercultural communication is the perspective of the body and bodily activities. According to Jensen, "Our practices are routines, our bodies are socialized in the societies were we have grown up in, but it is changeable and possible to

negotiate” (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 98). As Jensen mentioned, according practice theory, culture can be regarded as our routines and practices, and culture is embodied. Hence, the intercultural couple may feel the cultural differences, even though they had a communication and understanding of the spouse’s viewpoint. Additionally, intercultural marriages could see the power in many social actions, when they encountered different cultural environments.

### 3.6 Summary

My study is about intercultural marriages, especially in the Norwegian and Korean case in Norway. I sought to find relevant studies for essential background knowledge and data analysis, approach of the topic and classification of the themes in intercultural marriages. There was a study about an intercultural marriage, between Americans and Koreans. After the Korea-war, many American soldiers married Korean women. Rarliff, Moon and Bonacci mentioned some difficulties these intercultural marriages faced due to language, culture, and expression of feelings.

In Yuliya’s master thesis she interviewed Norwegian husbands and Ukrainian wives who live in Norway. According to her, the intercultural communication competence is distinctive point of constructive and destructive conflict. I assume that Yuliya’s intercultural communication competence has much in common with the Hans-Georg Gadamer’s perspective of *fusion of horizon* that discover each other’s viewpoints, not purchasing agreements. Admit and respect their differences. Although Gadamer did not study intercultural competence, many researchers were influenced by him. According to Gadamer, prejudice is the condition of understanding, without having determined all the aspects. Hence, without questioning, prejudice can be dangerous, and the vitality of questions is to open up to other possibilities.

In order to more easily to understand cultural differences between Norway and South-Korea, I employed couple of concepts of cultural dichotomies, such as *collectivism* and *individualism*, *high-context culture* and *low-context culture*, and definitions of gender roles, despite of criticism. Culture is neither in its social surroundings independent of people, nor is it possessed by a group of people. Norway can be seen as *individualism* and *low-context culture*. Additionally, Norway is one of the leading countries for gender equality. Banding

family and social settings are quite collectivistic, since conformity is a strong pressure for Norwegian. Yet, Norway is classified as *individualism* country because of its independence trait. Personal aim is weighted more than a community's goal, and individuals regarded as independent individuals. South Korea has been influenced by Confucianism over five decades, and it still maintains a collective people's mindset. Nowadays, most of female go to school and college and get higher position in work place. Nonetheless, after giving birth, many mothers quit their job. Working mothers work at a company and also do most of the housework at home. Many husbands are doing housework to help his wives, but they don't consider the housework as their duty. Parental leave period is shorter than Norway, or although the company policy guarantees parental leave, working mothers cannot use all of the time because of fear of losing their job or losing a chance for promotion.

Ibsen Jensen (2006) said about practice theory that culture is our routines and our practices through social actions. Our body is socialized in the societies we grew up. Jensen mentioned that an intercultural job interview is a good example of the power produced in our social actions, and how the experiences of power are embodied in every actor and relations to the actor's position in society and in the actual context.

I believe that these theories and secondary literatures can assist in analyzing the result of interviews in the following sections, and providing some idea of cultural concepts.

## Chapter four

### DATA ANALYSIS

Conducting qualitative interviews provided data about 4 intercultural couples as seen from the perspective of 8 informants involved. Interviewees demonstrated the intercultural marriage phenomena by telling about their daily life and experiences. Based on the interviewees' comments, I made several categories to analyze what kind of factors that especially affect intercultural marriages. I found the following issues of main importance: language, collectivism and individualism, high-context communication and low-context communication, intercultural competence, family, raising children, finance management and sharing housework. There was a diversity of stories and perspectives in the data provided by the informants

#### **4.1 Language and communication**

Language is an elemental method to communicate for an intimate relationship and a connection between an individual and a society. In most of the intercultural marriages, language skills were good enough to have a conversation. Two intercultural marriages employed English to communicate. English is not the interviewees' mother language, so sometimes they misunderstood because of different translations of vocabulary or grammar. In intercultural marriage #2, the Korean spouse said that her English was not fluent, so occasionally she did not understand her spouse's English. Yet, she assumed that because of her non-fluent English, she listened carefully to comprehend her spouse's speaking, and the time consumed to make a sentence is beneficial to avoid speaking out negative words (Korean spouse #2). The Norwegian spouse assumed that misunderstanding happened sometimes due to his Korean spouse's character, not due to her language ability. He thought that his spouse was a bit fast to speak, but a bit slow to listen. The Norwegian spouse #2 thought that the Korean spouse assumed that she understood what he said, but he did not think she understood. He presumed that she did not have time to understand all that he said (Norwegian spouse #2). According to Dugan Romano (2008), "Researchers have found that

the ‘average person spends 50 to 80 percent of his day listening, but hears only half of what is said, understands only a quarter of that, and remembers even less.’ If listening is inherently such a difficult task, it is not wonder that intercultural couples have such a struggle with it” (Romano 2008, 125). Romano brought Man Keung ho’s scheme to explain its complexity (see chapter 3).

As Romano mentioned, it is understandable that spouses in intercultural marriages misunderstand each other. I assume that the Chinese letter *ting* implies the ideal way to listen with four vital parts, such as ear, eye, mind, and heart. It is not only about physically hearing the word; the ear is for hearing the words spoken, the eye is for seeing the message expressed by face and body, the mind, interpreting the meaning of what has been seen and heard, and the heart, for being able to feel what is needed for the relationship. Humans may need to spend time to hear and listen carefully with full senses, ears, eyes, minds, and heart.

The Norwegian spouse asserted that he had some misunderstandings in English, but nowadays it happens less (Norwegian spouse #2). He assumed that when they used more time to have a conversation, a common vocabulary developed.

She explain something, but kind her English, I don’t understand. I speak English better than her, but a little bit different language. So, sometimes she understood totally different meaning from actually meaning.

When I was a young, I played many computer games. I met a Dutch friend online, and we made our own language, like we mixed some of English, Norwegian, and Dutch words. We understand it, but for someone else, it maybe strange. Somehow I think it is similar, even it is just English, and you get used to, like what kind of vocabulary the person usually use, have this common platform of language. At the beginning was difficult, but when you get to know then less and less. Nowadays it does not happen often. (Norwegian spouse#2)

As the Norwegian spouse mentioned, spending more time to have a conversation helps expanding the common vocabulary. Conversation helps to better get to know the person and their personal language. Communication is sharing meaning and includes everything we use to exchange meaning with one another. More time to have conversations enable better communication between the two parts in the intercultural marriage by building up a common platform of language.

In intercultural marriage #1 and #3, they employed Norwegian to communicate with each other. In the intercultural marriage #1, the Korean wife and the Norwegian husband are under 40 years old. She has lived in Norway for several years. When she started to go to Norwegian class, her Norwegian husband stopped speaking English to her. Not only her husband, but the whole Norwegian family also spoke Norwegian to her. She stated that “Occasionally, I was frustrated in misunderstanding, at the beginning of time, but it was really helpful to improve my Norwegian skill rapidly” (Korean spouse #1). She started the Norwegian class, when it had been about one year since she came to Norway. This intercultural marriage demonstrated how important language skill is. The Norwegian spouse addressed that “In Norway, to get a job, English capability is enough, but if you want to integrate with the society and Norwegian people, Norwegian is required” (Norwegian spouse #1). In fact, in order to get a job, the Korean spouse required the ability to speak Norwegian. The Korean spouse #1 had several job interviews, which was conducted in English. One of the manager said that “I really like you, and I am so sorry. Most of office work is available for who can speak English. But, we cannot work all day, we are having lunch, and having some break time, then we speak Norwegian.” Hence, at that time, she did not get the opportunity to work at the company. Later on, she got a job, when she had a job interview spoken in Norwegian.

Iben Jensen (2006) explained how power is produced in intercultural communication processes. Particularly, intercultural job interviews turn into a demonstration of power.

The experiences of power are embodied in every actor and relations to the actor's positions in society and in the actual context. From this perspective the key focal points in a job interview become the organization of the intercultural communication practice. It is about how the bodies of the applicants are socialized and how this fits in with the status of the job in the hierarchy of the labour market. (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 96)

I assumed that the Korean spouse #1's job interview can be regarded an example of power dimension by inability of language. As the manager said, the Korean spouse's English was good enough to work. However, her Norwegian was not good enough to speak during lunch and break time. In personal perspective, if I were a manager, I would prefer an applicant who can speak my mother language. However, then the company should advertise a position for a

candidate who can speak two languages, English and Norwegian.

According to the Norwegian husband #1, she seemed very different after getting a job. Since then, she did not need to study by herself, alone. The language skills conveyed another benefit in daily life. She said that when she and her husband watched a Norwegian TV program, she asked him to translate into English. At one point, she was able to understand the TV and she can laugh with her Norwegian husband. There was a similar case in secondary literature, *social casework: the journal of contemporary social work*. Ratliff discovered that “An inability to communicate verbally often brings frustration and hostility into the marriage and, once the couple is living in the United States, places the woman in a childlike position, wholly dependent on the man. It increased her feelings of isolation and loneliness” (Rarliff, Moon and Bonacci 1978, 223). I presumed that the Korean spouse may count on the Norwegian spouse, and I could imagine her frustration and loneliness because of the language barrier. I assumed that the frustration and loneliness promoted her to learn Norwegian fast.

In intercultural marriage #2, the Norwegian spouse felt frustration and loneliness due to language barrier at home. The Korean spouse and her daughter spoke Korean with each other. He said that “like today, coming here by driving, they spoke Korean all the time, I was not able to understand. I was a bit frustrated” (Norwegian spouse #2). He said that he was considering learning Korean. I was a bit surprised that the Norwegian spouse felt the isolation because of language. I assumed that the Korean spouse could feel frustration and loneliness by language barrier in Norwegian society, but I did not expect the Norwegian spouse could feel the same at home.

Intercultural couple #3 has lived together about a couple of years and they have been dating for several years. This intercultural cohabitation couple is about 50 years old. The Korean woman has lived in Norway for a long time. She was educated in Norway, and has a master’s degree in Norwegian. Except for her time in education, most of time in Norway she worked in several places, and now she works in an association. When she divorced her ex-husband, she worked two or three jobs at the same time in order to pay for the house. The house was joint-ownership, so they made agreement that if she paid half of the house’s price, the ownership belonged to her. She said that “Language (Norwegian), and work experiences were my asset. Hence, it was not very difficult to find a job, when I needed more money to

pay the house to my ex-husband” (Korean partner #3).

I assumed that because of her ability of language she was able to find a job, and the job experiences brought easier chance to get another job.

Language ability is a significant advantage, especially for those who can speak the mother language in the host country. As intercultural marriage #1 stated, and the Korean partner #3 mentioned, language ability brings more opportunities. Most of the interviewees did not face critical language barriers. In the intercultural marriage #2, the Korean spouse looked upon her own English as not fluent, but she regarded this point in a positive way. The Norwegian spouse felt excluded due to Korean, since the Korean spouse and her daughter who spoke Korean most of time at home. It might be a good motivation to learn the partner’s first language, as intercultural marriage #1, the Korean spouse was able to improve her Norwegian by her husband and all the Norwegian family’s only speaking Norwegian.

In the intercultural marriage #2, the Norwegian spouse assumed that his wife had a tendency to be a bit quick to speak, and slow to listen. Hence, he thought she did not have time to understand all through his comments. As Romano (2008) asserted, listening is not an easy task. An average person listen only half of what it said, and he brought Man Keung ho’s scheme to explain its complexity. The Chinese character *ting* illustrated that listening is not only the hearing by ear. Ear, eyes, mind and heart should operate together to comprehend the words that the speaker say, see what the facial and body language express, catch the intention or neediness, and feel the speaker’s mind. I assume that the attitude of listening carefully is a fundamental element of attempting to understand the spouse’s perspective.

When I asked the Korean female in intercultural couple #3 about language barrier or misunderstanding, she responded that “well, I don’t think I have a big problem with language barrier. I guess, some of the cultural concepts do not existed in Norway, so it was hard to explain to him” (Korean partner #3). The absence of cultural concepts was hard to explain. I am going to discuss more about the concepts of cultures in the next part.

## **4.2 Collectivism and individualism**

Geographically, Norway and South- Korea has a long distance. It takes at least 13 hours by airplane. Thus, it would not be unusual to have different cultural backgrounds. I will convey

some dichotomous cultural concepts to understand cultural differences. Additionally, some of the cultural concepts may not exactly be included in collectivism categories, but I assumed that some Korean cultural concepts are closer to collectivism than individualism, or some of the Korean cultural concept does not exist in the Norwegian culture. In this part, I present some cultural concepts that the intercultural marriages regarded as cultural differences. Except intercultural marriage #1, the other marriages expressed that they had some difficulties with intercultural differences. According to intercultural marriage #1, the Korean spouse “of course, we had some episode of about it, but I don’t remember what the biggest conflict was by intercultural background” (Korean spouse #1). In the intercultural marriage #1, they did not consider that they had very different cultural backgrounds. The Norwegian spouse addressed that “in general, I don’t think Korea is very different from Norwegian or European countries compare to Africa, they have a big family, Korea is not like that. Korea has influenced by the U.S.A a lot” (Norwegian spouse #1).

In the intercultural couple #3, the Korean partner said that sometimes she felt the cultural differences between the Norwegian partner and her. For instance, after dinner, the Norwegian man only brought his plate to the kitchen. Once, they had dinner together, the intercultural couple and the Norwegian partner’s two daughters from previous marriage. When the dinner finished, everyone brought only the plate they used, except her. She thought that if everyone brought two or three plates, then it would not be necessary for a person to bring many plates alone. According to her, a home is a community where a family lives together. Thus, they can help each other when they need. For example, once, the Norwegian partner was too tired to clean up what he ate, and she said that “it is totally okay. That is family. When you are tired, I can do it for you,” (Korean partner #3) and she cleaned up for him. She also brought up another example about one time that she drank a cup of coffee, and forgot to bring it back to the kitchen. After about one week, she found the coffee cup at the same place. She was a bit upset, since she brought some stuffs back several times although she did not use them. She had an impression from the Norwegian partner like “if there is not mine, it is not my business” (Korean partner #3). She assumed that Norwegians might not have the notion of collectivism. She said that the ex-Norwegian husband learned the sense of collectivism after quite long time period of experiences with her. According to her, her current Norwegian partner has improved, but even his children acquired this sense faster than him (Korean partner #3).

I assumed that the Korean felt the Norwegian partner is lacking in *jeong*. According to Daniel Tudor (2012), *jeong* is the invisible hug.

*Jeong* refers to feelings of fondness, caring, bonding, and attachment that develop within interpersonal relationships. A critical aspect of *jeong* is deep interdependence, two people who share *jeong* should have a relationship of mutual give and take, assisting each other when needed. (Tudor 2012, 92)

*Jeong* requires a sense of “we”, or *woori* in Korea. “We” cannot include everyone in the world; “if one is to extend one’s greatest warmth and kindness to certain people with whom one share *jeong*, then there must also be a larger, outside group of people whom one treats less well. The word for such unknowns is *nam*” (Tudor 2012, 95). For instance, family is *woori* and a person living down the street *nam*. The expression of *woori nara* or *woori umma* in Korean means that “my country,” or “my mother” in English.

I presumed that the Korean female looked upon her partner, and his children as *woori* and a family. Thus, she cleaned his plate or she brought back the children’s cup to the kitchen. My assumption is that she expected some mutual give and take as an action of interdependence, but the Norwegian partner did not know the cultural code of *jeong*. He may estimate that she liked cleaning and organizing stuffs, he did not know her expectation of “mutual give and take.”

In the intercultural marriage #4, the Korean spouse said that they did not have serious challenges due to different cultural backgrounds, but once she was embarrassed in front of their children. In South-Korea, mostly parents expect that children obey in front of the parents, even if the offspring do not really agree. She said that “well, he did not show it explicitly, but somehow he gave an impression that children don’t need to agree on mother, or parents. Mother can be wrong, like this. I don’t know why I felt like that at that time, but I wished my husband had tried to save my face in front of my children” (Korean spouse #4).

I presume that the Korean spouse has been influenced by Confucianism. Tudor (2012) introduced Confucianism as not a religion but rather a system of moral philosophy that originated in China in the teaching of Kong Fuzi (558-471 BCE).

In Confucianism context, Family loyalty is very important. The concept of filial piety, or *xiao*, commands children to respect and honor their parents and ancestors above all others. There was no higher virtue in Confucianism-influenced cultures than this. (Tudor 2012, 42)

According to Confucianism, children should obey what their parents say, and it can be a sensitive issue to save your face. Korean spouse #4 could expect their children to listen to her, and she did not want to lose her face in front of her children. There is a word in Korean *Chemyon*, which means mutual face saving through guilt and shame, that demonstrates the notion of the Confucian ideal of interpersonal relationships. “The major function of *chemyon* is mutual face-saving, a crucial value embedded in Korean culture” (Shim, Kim and Martin 2008, 73).

The Korean concept of *chemyon* is due primarily to the complex socio-psychological implications of the concept of self and inter-relational concerns with others. Members of the family of an individual may share *chemyon*, both in cases of pride or shame, in an individual’s achievement or in wrong doings. Hence, face-work to maintain *chemyon* is involved in settings with in-group members of out-groups than when one is involved in setting with in-group members who have multiple layers of relationships; face is flexible, a dynamic self/society metaphor in which personal, relational, and group boundaries are negotiated and redefined (Chang&Holt,1994). As a consequence, maintaining, protecting, and saving *chemyon* play the major role of inclusion and approval of one’s social and relational statues one possesses ad perceives. Hence, as we recognized through our interviews, Koreans are concerned about social recognition and how they are seen by others (Shim, Kim and Martin 2008, 73).

I assumed that the Korean spouse expected the children’s respect of her comments according to Confucianism perspective, and she was embarrassed by what the Norwegian husband said. I thought that it could be an example of practice theory, as Ibsen Jensen (2006) mentioned: “Culture is embodied, our bodies are socialized in the societies were we have grown up in” (Dahl, Jensen and Nynäs 2006, 98). The Korean spouse #4 may understand the point of the Norwegian spouse’s perspective, but her body was socialized in Korean

society, so she may feel embarrassed.

### 4.3 High-context communication and low-context communication

Another dichotomous illustration of culture is high-context and low-context culture.

Collectivism and high-context can be categorized in a same cultural values spectrum.

One of the differences of high-context and low-context cultures is the way of communication.

Sarah A. Lanier (2014) described high-context as indirect communication and low-context as direct communication. Indirect communication is more relationship-based, and a way to avoid offending the other person. Thus, the answer ‘yes (or no)’ may not really mean ‘yes (or no).’ It may be the first step in beginning a friendly or verbal compliance, sometimes required by the culture. I found a Korean word, *nunchi* which explained well *high-context*, indirect communication. Koreans define *nunchi* as “the sense of eye,” or “mind-reading.”

*Nunchi* is used to discover another’s unspoken “hidden agenda,” paying close attention to the speaker’s nonverbal cues. *Nunchi* is a form of high-context communication and is often used to interpret and comprehend another’s thoughts, intentions, feelings, and desires which are seldom verbally expressed. In Korea, *nunchi* means grasping the situation in a holistic manner. It is practiced in every aspect of Korean daily life to some extent so that they can communicate in a socially acceptable manner and act in a manner appropriate to the situation. It means putting self into the context of the situation with others and the environment. In communicating with others, one has to abstract from and project to that which one wishes communicate in an appropriate way: direct or indirect, verbal or non-verbal, in selection of language and tone used. Both speaker and listener need to understand their claim of who he/she is in context. (Shim, Kim and Martin 2008, 74)

I heard this word *nunchi* from two Korean informants during the interviews. In intercultural marriage #1, the Korean spouse assumed that Korean men had some *nunchi* compared to Norwegian men. “I think Korean men have more ability of understand female...like *nunchi*?” (Korean spouse #1). In intercultural marriage #4, the Norwegian spouse had lived in South Korea for several years. When I asked “have you ever felt any cultural differences?” to the Korean spouse, she answered:

Since my husband has lived in Korea for a long time. So, I did not feel he was a westerner when we visited my family. I think that I did not notice any special behavior because he was a foreigner in Korea. I assume that he has *nunchi* by Korean

daily life, and he saw the other Koreans' behaviors. My mother really liked my husband. When we lived in South-Korea, he prepared a breakfast for my mother and brought it to my mother's room. Although they were not able to have a deep conversation, he knew how to treat elder people with respect. I guess, he realized that in Korea, showing respect to seniors and elders is important. (Korean spouse #4)

I assume that the meaning of *nunchi* is mind reader, a form of high-context communication and is often used to interpret and comprehend another's thoughts, intentions, feelings, desires, and situations, which are seldom verbally expressed. A person should consider and observe all those factors. In South Korea, it is practiced in daily life, putting a person's self into the context of the situation with others and the environment. It may be difficult to understand the notion of *nunchi* for foreigners, especially westerners who have no experience this cultural notion. I presumed that the Norwegian spouse #4 who had lived in Korea for 8 years, he acquired the sense through daily life and observation of Koreans' behavior. For instance, when you have dinner with grand-parents in South Korea, the grandchildren should wait until the grandparents start having dinner, and then the kids can start eating. It may be possible that the grandparents say "Take if first" to grandchildren, but children should wait for the grandparents before starting to eat. If you just start eating after "take it first" comment from grandparents, you might to be told that "you have no *nunchi*".

In intercultural marriage #2, they had the biggest challenge when they had been married for 3 weeks. The Norwegian spouse lived with a cat before he got married. They live with the Korean spouse's daughter and the cat. One day, the cat scratched the daughter's leg during her sleep. The daughter got a wound with a little bit blood, and she was very surprised. The Korean spouse was also surprised and upset about her daughter's injury. Moreover, she was angry with her Norwegian spouse's comment that "cats have a nature of attacking an object which is moving, and the injury is not very serious, so it will be better soon" (Norwegian spouse #2). Even though a cat has the nature and the daughter's injury was not serious, she did not expect this response from him. She said that "I guess it could be a sensitive matter a child gets hurt either by animal or by quarrel with friends, the parents would be upset the child get scar on the child's body"(Korean spouse #2). The daughter was also displeased at the Norwegian spouse comment. Perhaps, the Korean spouse and the daughter expected the Norwegian spouse's empathy such as "are you okay?" or "are you all right" rather than providing the fact about the cats' nature. I assume that the Norwegian spouse did not intend to be mean, he was worried and felt sorry about what happened to the

daughter. My assumption is that it can be related to high-context and low-context communication. According to Edward T. Hall (1998) “High context transactions are more on the feeling, intimate side while the low-context ones are much less personal and oriented toward the left-brain. Germans and North Europeans in general can be said to operate lower on the context than the Japanese or Asian, for example” (Hall 1998, 61).

I guess that the Korean spouse and the daughter expected his initial reaction was empathy and showing of concern. In fact, the Norwegian’s statement was not wrong practically, and he may not know his comment would make her and her daughter upset. According to Hall’s theory, high context is more on the feeling, and intimate side, in contrast low-context one is less personal and oriented toward left-brain such as logic and rational functions. Perhaps, the Norwegian spouse’s logic and rational functions worked faster than the intimate side.

In Intercultural marriage #4, they had lived in several countries, including in Korea for several years. To the question of “have you ever felt some differences with your marriage and Norwegian-Norwegian marriages?” the Norwegian spouse’s answer was that:

If you marry any Korean, there is a big gap which you have to be aware, because Korean, their personalities compare to Norwegian’s personality is very different. Korean, they have temper. If you are not aware of that, then it can easily be a big obstacle. I have plenty of examples, that is, maybe the biggest obstacle. Korean women is very persist in...very strong in that way, persist in... Korean women’s temper is very different with Norwegian women. When they show their temper, it can be a full of war. Small things can suddenly became big things. (Norwegian spouse #4)

The Norwegian husband assumed that Korean women’s temper can be a big challenge for intercultural marriages, and some of his French friends who married to Korean females complained about the Korean women’s temper. Hence, he thought that it is very important to know about Korean women’s temper. The gap of up and down is bigger than Norwegian, and the trivial things suddenly became big things. He said that if the spouses do not know the temper, the spouses are not able to handle it. However, he knew it, so when he thought he deserved her temper, it was okay, but if he thought it was not fair, then he took the fight. Mostly, the Korean wife did not stop, but eventually she was tired of being upset. Yet, he

thought that the Korean women's temper is not a substance to change, and he realized that his Korean wife has not changed, so when they have some arguments, he went out and took a walk about one hour, then she became calm.

He described Norwegian culture like this "Norwegian are good at cooperating, Norway is small nation, and homogenous. We are doing things mutual agreement. We don't do thing by force or yelling, the process is smoother and individual-wise based on mutual agreement" (Norwegian spouse #4). He did not like some of the Korean wife's behaviors such as yelling at him, and slamming the door. He addressed that "I know Korean woman's temper, I think Korean should be aware of the Norwegian's culture somehow" (Norwegian spouse #4). He said that he also has the hot temper, so he got married to the Korean spouse. According to him, Norwegian and Korean culture both have advantages and disadvantages, like Korean women's temper is very dramatic, but it lasts very short. On the other hand, Norwegian one is smoother, but it lasts quite long. He said that it is very important to be aware of the Korean women's temper in intercultural marriages. I was able to understand the Norwegian spouse #4's perspective, but I was a bit wonder that only Korean women have temper. Since, some of my Norwegian female friends told me that she yelled and threw a pillow to her spouse. In addition, I saw many arguments with yelling at each other or slamming the door in many Western movies.

#### **4.4 Intercultural competence**

In intercultural marriage #2, the Korean spouse said that it would not be unusual if a couple is different.

At the beginning of the marriage period, I think I was trying to find the reason why we are so different. But, later on, I realized that we are just different. People get married like in the late 20's or about 30 years old. They grew up different environment and they lived own their ways. I assume that is not unusual a couple is different, just we are different. (Korean spouse #2)

Consistent with Øyvind Dahl (2006), different interpretations and misunderstandings are not necessarily negative.

If the communicators are aware of a lack of understanding and possible misunderstandings, these situations may represent 'golden moment' of potential new discoveries! (Dahl 2003). If the individuals are aware of it, confusion, lack of understanding, and even misunderstanding can be considered as new starting points for new questions, a new exchange of signs, new negotiation, and new insights. (Dahl 2006, 13-14)

I assumed that "we are just different" is a signal that they are "aware of a lack of understanding and possible misunderstanding." Partners in intercultural marriages grew up in different environments until they met and decided to be together. Hence, it is no wonder that they have different perspectives and it cannot be guaranteed that the spouse is able to understand the difference viewpoints. "Because of the difference, I may not understand you appropriately" is not necessarily negative. It can be an open-minded approach and an openness to admit misunderstandings.

According to the Korean spouse #2, intercultural marriage has an advantage. In the intercultural marriage, the couple admits that they are fundamentally different. If something happens, they could think that there is a certain reason for their spouse's behaviors (Korean spouse #2). When I asked the Norwegian spouse #2 about the different cultural background, his response was that it was not difficult for his marriage life. His answer was "something different is interesting for me" (Norwegian spouse #2). He said that he did not care about other marriages, but that he knew what he was going to do for his wife (Norwegian spouse #2). As Korean spouse #2 mentioned, the openness and respect to differences are significant elements for intercultural marriages. Moreover, the Norwegian spouse looked upon the differences as an interesting factor. I guess that these mindsets apply lubricant to their marriage life.

In the Intercultural marriage #1, the Korean spouse thought that conversation is a central key to have a good relationship for marriage life: "If I don't understand some of my spouse's behavior, I ask him what made him did like that, and listen. After then, I assert my view points, and he also did like that. I think without conversation, a couple cannot know each other's thoughts" (Korean spouse #1). It is not doubtful that the conversation is a predominant element of intercultural competence. Based on Hans-Georg Gadamer(1989), Chen argued that by constant questioning and answering will truth be revealed:

Truth emerges only from a 'genuine' dialogue between the text and the reader. He believes that only by participating in a 'genuine' dialogue, by constant questioning and answering, will truth be revealed. Gadamer does not seek truth by relying on the subjective meaning that the author intends to convey to the reader, but rather by engaging in close conversation with the text and being open to the possibilities of meaning that the text generates.(Chen, 1987) (Roy and Starosta 2001, 10)

I believe that the process of communication is a procedure of discovering viewpoints. Before asking to the spouse's perspective, the assumption cannot be revealed. As Gadamer (1989) asserted, when people meet a new text, prejudices assist in understanding the text. In the same context, people can be read in a different way. Hence, people should be put in an encounter to discover the other's viewpoint, and a process of discovering viewpoints is a conversation.

In the intercultural marriage #1, the Korean wife thought that gender difference was bigger than cultural background differences. "Because of I am a woman, and he is a man, so we felt difficulties or differences, sometimes. But, I don't think it is easy to make a border of gender differences and intercultural background differences" (Korean spouse #1). As she referred to, the boundary of cultural difference and gender difference can be ambiguous. Additionally, difference in personality can be regarded another dissimilarity of partners in intercultural marriages. Hence, for intercultural marriage's, individual differences are compounded by personality, gender, and cultural background. The spouse's behaviors and statements are not only due to the fact that s/he is Korean or Norwegian, but also to personality and gender. Hence, the spouse should be understood from the whole to the part and back to whole.

The movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to whole. As the single word belongs in the total context of the sentence, so the single word belongs in the total context of the sentence, so the single text belongs in the total context of a writer's work. At the same time, the same text, as a manifestation of creative moment, belongs to the whole of its author's inner life. Full understanding can take place only within this objective and subjective whole. (Gadamer 1989, 291)

I assumed that a person is a part of a community, and at the same time an individual. Moreover, as Jensen(2006) discussed, our culture is embodied through the social practice, the body socialized where we grew up. Thus, formulating a person's worldview is complexity of many elements, and a person should be understood with all the factors.

In fact, it is not an easy task to be open for misunderstanding and look upon the different experiences as parts of a whole. I presumed that experience of the spouse's culture is an advantage that makes understanding easier. The intercultural couple #3 has been to Korea several times. The Norwegian man declared that the Korean trip was helpful to understand the Korean partner:

In Korea, I met her friends and family. She was very happy. I liked to see she is happy. I guess she was happier than being in Norway. I understand, since her family is far away, unlike I can meet my family in 20 minutes. Sometime I feel sorry about her. But she is a strong woman, she never gives up. It was very interesting, and impressive. She learned Norwegian, and English. I know that how much she put effort to be a part of this society. I tried to learn Korean, but it's not easy. It was good to know how the parents do, and the sister does, and so on. I was able to know what she left in Korea, when she wanted to eat Korean food, I support her. I like Korean food also. (Norwegian partner #3)

I assumed that through the Korean trip, the Norwegian partner had empathy for the Korean partner, and he realized that she put a lot of effort to learn Norwegian through the trial of learning Korean. I think that it can be a good example of seeing partner as a part and also a whole.

The Intercultural couple #4 also had the same thought, since the Norwegian spouse had lived in South-Korea for several years. Mostly, Korean spouse #4 did not experience big challenges due to cultural differences. The Korean spouse stated that while they were living in Korea, she did not feel any special behaviors because her spouse is a foreigner in South-Korea (Korean spouse #4).

In the intercultural marriage #1, the Korean spouse assumed that being open-minded makes a difference. She told me that she heard many times that the way of thinking was not typical Korean or it was very international. I guess, her way of thinking was wide and opened. Personally, it found the Korean spouse's comment very impressive: "If you are looking for differences, it would be never ending. We are just different. Since we grew up differently, even you (interviewer) and I, we come from same country, but we are still different" (Korean spouse #1). My assumption is that due to this mindset, this intercultural marriage did not face serious intercultural challenges. It is quite close to Gadamer's hermeneutic approach,

*fusion of horizon* which is encountering others as a subject not an object, and understanding and discovering the other's viewpoint. She understood and accepted their differences, and with open-mind she was willing to find her spouse's viewpoint by conversation.

#### **4.5 The extended family**

Mostly Korean spouses and Norwegian spouses were welcomed and embraced into each other's families. In the intercultural marriage #4, the Norwegian spouse said that his mother was pleased to receive the Korean daughter-in-law:

My father passed away, and my mother was very pleased with her. She was having a very good relationship with my mother. She was very kind to my family. She handled it in a very good way. My mother had a very good impression about her. So, it was very fine. I think my sister was a bit jealous, because my mother did to her a lot of feedback, and then maybe she felt a little bit lonely. But she is perceived very well. I would say. That was no problem at all. And with my friend also, she was highly treasure to my friends. In my hometown, she knew more people than I did. She had many contacts, particularly old people. It has gone very well. (Norwegian spouse #4)

In the intercultural marriage #1, the Korean spouse was warmly received by the Norwegian family. They met in South Korea, when the Norwegian spouse was visiting his sister. One of the Norwegian spouse's family members is Korean ethnical identity. The Korean spouse assumed that because of it, the Norwegian family was a bit familiar with South Korea. However, not only for this reason, she thought that the Norwegian spouse's family was very open-minded. According to the Korean spouse, the Norwegian family's concept of family is almost the same as in her family. The Norwegian family disagreed on cohabitation (*samboere*), believed that having children should come after marriage, and if a couple married, they should work hard to keep the family together. Hence, she felt that her parents-in-law had the same opinion as her parents. The Korean spouse called the parents in law, mother and father.

In the intercultural marriage #2, the Korean spouse mentioned that she felt comfortable with the Norwegian spouse's family. They went to a cabin (*hytta*) with the Norwegian family. She said that once she cooked for the family, the next day her sister-in-law cooked, and the day after her mother-in-law cooked for the whole family. She said that it was

pretty much opposite to Korea. “Usually, when we visit the parents-in-law’s place, the daughter-in-laws cooked during holidays, and husbands are sitting on the sofa and watching TV or so on” (Korean spouse #2). In South-Korea, there are two big holidays, Lunar new year’s day and Korean thanks giving day. Mostly, the wives visit first the husband’s family, and they cook and prepare the food during the holidays. While the wives are cooking, the husbands are sitting on the couch watching TV shows. According to Tudor who was a Korea correspondent for *the Economist* described the role of daughter-in-law in South Korea.

Previously, a wife’s role was not just to cook, clean, and raise the children, but also to deal with the constant demands of her mother-in-law – especially if they were living together in a *keunjip*. These days, most Korean wives only have to spend *Choseok* (Korean Thanks giving day) and *Seolla* (Lunar new year’s day) slaving away for their in-laws. Those who go away on holiday do not even have to do that. Korean women may not yet have equality, but they have a much better deal than their mothers and grandmother ever did. (Tudor 2012, 136)

The Korean spouse said that “I think that Norwegian parents don’t interfere much in their offspring’s life, I like that point” (Korean spouse #2). Tudor(2012) addressed that in Korea members of the nuclear family are still much more in mutual dependence compared to the West:

Most grown-up children still live with their parents until they marry, unlike Western Europe or North America. Parents have much more involvement in the choice of their Child’s degree and university, and eventual career. They also have plenty of say in their child’s choice of marriage partner; 70 percent of young Korean still say they would marry someone without parental approval. Koreans in their twenties and thirties typically continue to rely on their parents financially. Fees for advanced degrees such as MBAs and PhDs and costly *jeonse*(deposits on houses) for newlyweds are usually paid for by parents. A survey by online shopping site G-Market in 2010 revealed that 47 percent of married Korean women “often go shopping with their mothers,” and the reason for this is financial. Most women in that 47 percent do not pay anything when they shop with their mother. (Tudor 2012, 136-137)

I assumed that counting on financial support transported the involvement in choices of university, career, and marriage partner to Korean children. After marriage, probably most parents-in-law expect their son and daughter-in-law visit them first for the holidays. I read some newspaper articles that the percentage of divorce is increased after the holidays in

Korea. Many wives had to work a lot during holidays, and the wives were disappointed and upset with husband and mother-in-law tended to take the wives work for granted. I assumed that the Korean spouses may not need to fulfill certain expectations of mother-in-law in Norway.

#### **4.6 Raising children**

I assumed that raising children can be an evitable challenge for intercultural marriages, since parents wish to nurture the way they believe is best and understand with their philosophy of education. In the intercultural couple #3, the Korean female and the Norwegian man had different philosophy of education and nurturing children. The Norwegian man discovered the cultural differences between Norway and Korea through spending time in Korea:

As I have seen, in Korea, to be something is very important, 'oh my son goes.....university, maybe Seoul national university.' So, this way of think is different with Norwegian. Most of Norwegian, maybe some rich Norwegian family, maybe the same, but like most of Korean, ordinary people in Korean also think that the children, they should go, do this, study, study, study, and be something. But someone has to do the other works also, anyway, someone has to be a cleaner...Otherwise none of us get anything, then we have to do everything ourselves. I believe many Korean see like up, down. More than Norwegian does. That maybe I don't like Korean society. And when I met her friend, they were talking about what kind of job is good, or not good, in a way. Maybe Norwegian also does it the same, but don't spend a lot of time to think about it, in this country. It seems like Korea do much more like it.  
(Norwegian partner #3)

The Norwegian partner mentioned about the enthusiasm of education in Korea. In Korea, parents expect that children study hard and enter the elite university. The parents do not mind sacrificing their income for the children's private tuition. Tutor (2012) employed this description "Competition between individuals: Education is everything" to the enthusiasm of education in Korea (Tutor 2012, 104). This phenomena is a mixed result of the universal poverty after the Korean War and influence of Confucian legacy of civil service exam. After the Korean War, almost no one had money or major social advantage. People were eager to escape the poverty with equality of opportunity, particularly with respect to education. Careers in the civil services, law, medicine, and at the best large companies could pull a young man out of poverty and enable him to provide comfort and stability for his family, but the available positions were few. Hence, people had to be outstanding at work and at school

to achieve the opportunity.

When the first generation of elite graduates started having children, in the 1970s and 1980s, they were eager to pass their hard-won advantages on to their own sons and daughters. Their own experience and the Confucian legacy of civil service exam directed their focus to education, and they used *hakwons* (private after-school academies), private lessons, and overseas schooling to move their children to the front of the pack. Between school and expensive private tutors, their children might study for fifteen or sixteen hours per day, in order to enter elite universities and gain the best jobs. When their hard work and advantages paid off, a new elite was born, one may be termed “neo-*yangban*.” The original *yangban* maintained their status through their ability to excel in the test that provided by far the best opportunities for social advancement in *Joseon* society, the civil service examination. (Tudor 2012, 105-106)

The first generation of elites desired to turn over social advancement to their children. Moreover, the enthusiasm of education was widespread in Korea. 500 years of *Joeseon* dynasty’s Confucianism and the civil service examination still influenced Korean’s mind somehow. Compared to South-Korea, Norway may not be a very competitive nation. Su-Dale (1998) described one of the Norwegian’s characteristics as “a diminished spirit of competition.”

Some sociologists believe that success and achievement are not major preoccupations in their life because they grew up feeling secure and protected. There is no sense of struggle or a desire to compete at work, nor to excel in sports. Perhaps Norwegians are given a sense of omnipotence too early in their childhood by their parents. The Norwegian child is not required to excel in order to win a parent’s approval. The Child is left to grow up in an environment that promotes a sense of self-sufficiency and independence. (Su-Dale 1998, 197)

I assumed that this mindset is available based on free or inexpensive tuition:

No tuition is charged for the vast majority of postsecondary institutions in Norway, although there are a number of private colleges as well. Norwegian parents are not expected to support their students financially once they completed secondary school. Students are eligible for financial aid through the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund, which grants both loans and stipends to pay for living expenses, travel, and books. (O’Leary 2010, 67)

Price of tuition and the attitude of parents for financial support are different compared to Korean parents. In Korea, university tuition cost minimum about \$2000 for national universities, and about \$3000 for private colleges per semester (EducationNational 2008). Most parents do not mind sacrificing their income for their children's education fee.

Besides this diminished spirit of competition, Norwegian children respect their parents. Similarly, parents are supposed to respect their children.

Some Norwegian parents are very liberal and others are quite traditionally strict. But bringing up the children is perceived as a collective or joint responsibility, and parents usually agree on the ground rules together. Norwegian children respect their parents. Similarly, parents are supposed to respect their children. (Su-Dale 1998, 165)

Norway is probably one of the most democratic and classless societies in the world.

“Democracy is not just a catchword but is a deep-rooted philosophy. Norwegians take an active interest in political life – from the local municipal level to the national level. Hence, the notions of independence and self-governance are fiercely protected” (Su-Dale 1998, 11).

Norway is an egalitarian society and relationships are based on democratic principles of respect and familiarity:

The simple Norwegian is not impressed easily by names and titles. Don't think you can show how important you are by mentioning that you know some minister or their superior. Norway is an egalitarian society and relationships are based on democratic principles of respect and familiarity. The simple Norwegian will like you for yourself and respect you for what you are, not for whom you know. Don't show off your artistic sensibilities by rattling off the names of prominent artists. (Su-Dale 1998, 17)

I assumed that those values have influenced the perspectives of the Norwegian partners participating in this study. The Norwegian man believed that “children needs to follow their own paths, should not be pushed by the parents” (Norwegian partner #3). His daughter was a teenager, and she had lived with the intercultural couple for a while. The Korean partner was the one who had the strongest enthusiasm for her education. She was willing to assist his daughter to get better grades at school and graduation of high school. For instance, when his daughter got a low grade on a subject from her high school, she told his daughter that she was

willing to pay the tuition for extra or private lessons to get a better grade for the subject. But the daughter did not want to try the exam again. The Korean partner believed that better grades on the school exam, as well as healthier eating, could be beneficial to the Norwegian partner's daughter, but it was too many lessons for the daughter.

In the morning, the Norwegian partner's daughter did not get up several times. The Norwegian partner did not notice she did not get up, but I knew that. At the beginning of the time, I told her nicely 'Don't you need to get up? I can give you a ride to school.' Later on, I was a bit annoyed with it, since my daughter was industrious and I taught her tougher. One day, I told his daughter 'If you were my daughter, I would pick you up from the bed and let you go to school.' After then, she got up immediately, in the morning. (Korean partner #3)

The Korean partner #3 believed that "parents can guide to children. Parents can show that there are many possibilities go through experiences" (Korean female #3). The Norwegian man had a different philosophy, such as "parents can ask to the children what they want to be, but it is their own choice. Parents cannot push to choose something. Parents should respect the children's choice" (Norwegian man #3).

I assumed that the Korean woman's perspective was that education is very important and it will provide better opportunities for occupations and careers. This mindset would be an influence of Confucianism of legacy and also remembering of poverty. In contrast, the Norwegian man hypothesis was "all occupations are equally honorable," and children's choice should be respectful. I thought that it is based on egalitarianism, as Su-Dale described Norwegian's character. It does not matter what kind of occupation you have, it is just a job that you are working at.

In the intercultural marriage #2, the Korean spouse prepared some gifts for her daughter's school teacher and a music class's professor. When her Norwegian spouse saw the gifts, he asked her for the reason why she gave them different gifts. She said that "professor is in higher position than a school teacher, so I prepared a bit nicer one to the professor" (Korean spouse #2). The Norwegian spouse was surprised and addressed that "professor and teacher are the same, they have a same occupation of 'teaching'" (Norwegian spouse #2). She tried to speak against his opinion, but later on she felt ashamed of her thoughts.

The logical process of the Korean wives' mind could be understandable. As the Korean spouse #2 regarded, a professor is in a higher position than a teacher and she treated differently. Thus, the parents are looking for higher positions in the society (according to Korean spouses' perspectives). On the other hand, as Norwegian husband mentioned, a professor and a teacher have the occupation as "educator," and it is not necessary to have a high competition to achieve a high position. People can decide their dream job as they want.

#### **4.7 Financial management**

I think that financial issue can be an issue for every couple. I would say that money is an indispensable element for living, so how to manage finance can be a sensitive matter.

The intercultural couple #3 had different views of financial management. For instance, the Norwegian partner's thoughts were more focused on "live now." He assumed that they had enough money for raising children and house. According to him, the tuition of school in Norway is almost nothing, and it does not cost much raising children (Norwegian partner #3). In fact, there are several social services and welfare systems in Norway. "Child support (*barnetrygd*) which is the economic support the state gives all in Norway who are bringing up children under 16 years of age. The child support law of 1946 upholds the principle of financial allotment to parents" (Romano 2008, 210). As O'Leary (2010) mentioned, most of postsecondary institutions are no tuitions or inexpensive in Norway. Moreover, students are eligible for financial aid via the Norwegian State Educational Loan fund for the tuition and pay for living expenses, travel, and books.

The Korean partner #3 tried to save money for the future, just in case. She said that Norway is a rich society, but current Norwegian economic state is not very good, and an economic crisis happened in 1980's. She explained that 1980's Norwegian bubble economy collapsed and many people suffered from the debt. When they bought a house it cost a lot, after the economic crisis the price of houses dropped dramatically. Therefore, Norwegian government legislated a new law to write off a debt. She assumed that we cannot know what will happen in the future, so it is not a groundless concern and we may need to save money for the future. There was an online article in a British business newspaper site about "Norway and Sweden are in bubbles that 'may not be sustainable.'"

HSBC: Norway and Sweden are in bubbles that 'may not be sustainable'  
... Sweden and Norway: Both countries suffer from high levels of household debt, rising house prices and have central banks that have cut policy rates to record lows. This leaves them vulnerable to financial stability risks that could leave the economies exposed to any downturn or, at some later stage, a rise in rates. In Sweden, inflation remains very low (prompting negative rates and possible further easing to come) and investment has boomed suggesting that the recent run up in growth may not be sustainable. Norway's growth outlook is blighted by a lower oil price despite no fears over government finances or the current account. (Edwards, 2015)

As this article asserted, current Norwegian economic condition is not very positive. Her concern about saving money may not be an unsubstantiated thought. She thought that many Norwegians are quite laid back with save money. She mentioned that she saw many times that when Norwegians have money or sometimes got a loan, they go on a vacation. She added:

Maybe, because I was poor when I was kid, or my generation grew up in a poor economic state in Korea, but I think many Korean are more careful to spend money than Norwegian, such as buying a house or so on. Koreans try to save money for the future. Additionally, I knew some Korean women who married to Norwegian man, their economic conditions are better than Norwegian average's economic states. I think Koreans are good at saving money and managing the finance. (Korean partner #3)

In my personal opinion, both sides of perspectives make sense. I assumed that somehow the Korean woman was influenced by an element of collectivism such as “collectivists are more following duties, focusing on what they have to do.” In contrast, individualists pursuit more “personal happiness.” Yet, I don't think it can be simply justified by two dichotomous concepts of culture. I have seen some Norwegians who were very careful to buy a house and put money into saving accounts. Additionally, Norwegian social security system is more developed than South Korea. Norwegian government collects higher percentage of taxes from the citizen and the government offers the pension when citizens become old. I think that what kind of element is more important, or what is the priority aspect of life is a personal choice. The person may be affected by the environment, but still in a same cultural category individuals have diverse perspectives.

#### **4.8 Sharing Housework**

The married couples and cohabitations are living together and they share a household.

Sharing the housework can be an issue for all couples. I wondered how the intercultural couples divided the household. Most intercultural couples were quite satisfied with sharing housework.

In the intercultural marriage #1, the Korean spouse said that she did more indoors housework, like doing dishes, cleaning home, doing laundry, while her husband was more responsible for the upkeep of gardens and repairing. If the Korean spouse cooked dinner, the Norwegian spouse did the dishes.

In the intercultural marriage #2, the Norwegian spouse said he did his part of housework except cooking. He described himself as a terrible cooker. According to the Korean spouse, he did much of the housework, and even he picked the Korean spouse's daughter up when the school is finished in the evening while the Korean spouse slept at home.

Intercultural couple #3 did not have any complaints about housework. The Norwegian partner was good at cooking and baking. The Norwegian partner made cakes for her friend's birthday and some special occasions, and he cooked dinner 3 times a week. The Korean partner ironed the Norwegian partner's clothes. She felt that they shared quite equally the housework. She added a comment that according to statistics of housework in Norway, in general Norwegian females did a bit more in the households than Norwegian men.

In Intercultural marriage #4, the Norwegian spouse said that it could be incomparable with younger generation's sharing of housework. According to him, he is old and sometimes his job is quite hard, including travel to many countries. Additionally, he was in charge of the economic part, income, at home. However, he did not expect the Korean spouse to cook every time. If there was no food, he could cook. The Korean spouse did not have significant complain about it.

My assumption is that in general, Norwegian husbands did more households work than Korean husbands. I may say that many of Korean men think "I do housework to help my wife." Korean husband do not consider the household as their duty, as something they have to do. My interpretation of "help" is doing it sometimes, when it is necessary, but it is not my responsibility. In gender equality, Norway and other Nordic countries are leading in the world.

I think that the average standard of gender equality is higher than Korea. Hence, the Korean spouses are mostly quite satisfied with sharing household at home.

## Chapter Five

### CONCLUSION

The topic of this study is intercultural marriages in Norway, focusing on Korean and Norwegian cases. When I attended a Korean meeting, I heard a Korean women's story about her intercultural marriage by chance. She offered me an opportunity to see from another perspective the social phenomena of intercultural marriage. Additionally, there were a few more Korean women whose spouses were Norwegian, and they also had some similar experiences. I presumed that before the couple decided to be together, they recognized some cultural differences and potential of influence. Yet, in reality, their daily lives are different from their expectations. The main research question is how intercultural worldview can be seen as challenges for intercultural couples.

-What challenges do intercultural marriages face?

-How do intercultural couples overcome these challenges?

I discovered that intercultural difference at times is a main challenge and some elements of the intercultural marriages appeared to be differences or difficulties due to language and communication, raising children, family, and financial management. I have gained an understanding of how these challenges are dealt with in intercultural marriages.

I think this study should not be generalized to all intercultural marriages. I employed qualitative research methods and semi-structured interviews with 8 individuals of intercultural marriages. The qualitative research is focusing on "how it works" rather than "how many." Hence this study cannot be generalized to intercultural marriages as a whole, but it provides some perspectives from eight individuals experiencing this social phenomenon in their daily lives.

Language is a vital method to communicate with each other within intimate relationships and it is also a connection to the world. In general, people listen only half of what it is said, according to Romano (2008), so it is not a wonder that the intercultural couples can misunderstand each other. However, spending more and more time having conversations can build a common platform of language by paying attention and listening carefully when the spouse speaks. Inability to communicate can bring frustration and isolation within a society. For instance, once Korean spouse #1 tried to get a job, but because of her inability to speak Norwegian, she was unable to take the job opportunity. As Jensen (2006) mentioned, intercultural job interview can be a good example of power aspect in social practices. In practice theory, culture is embodied. Hence, according to the practice theory, the company would prefer a candidate who can speak fluent mother language. I assumed that if so, the company should have a job advertisement for a position for bilingual, Norwegian and English. In intercultural marriage #3, the Norwegian spouse thought that spending more time to have a conversation can build the common platform of vocabulary. He assumed that the Korean spouse #2 was a bit fast to speak, but a bit slow to listen. As Romano (2008) mentioned, listening is not an easy task, so it is not wonder the intercultural marriages misunderstanding. However, listen carefully to the spouse's comment can be a vital factor of attempting to understand the spouse's perspective.

Norway and South- Korea are located in different positions of cultural value spectrum. Norway can be categorized as an individualism country, and South Korea is a collectivism country, according to Harry C. Triandis (1995). For the collectivists, the priority goal of collectives is weighted higher than personal goals. In contrast, individualists regard themselves independent, and their own preferences, needs, rights promote their motivation. Besides these collectivism and individualism differences, some of Korean cultural concepts gave a feeling of cultural differences in intercultural marriages. Korean partner #3 had the impression that Norwegian spouse believed "if there is not mine, it is not my business." She expected a concept in Korean culture called *jeong*. Tutor (2012) explained *jeong* as "Two people who share *jeong* should have a relationship of mutual give and take." For instance, she expected that the family brings each other's dishes to the kitchen after a meal, even if they did not use the dish or cup themselves. Instead, the Norwegian partner would bring only his own dishes and cups. I assumed that the Korean spouse expected

interdependent give and take from the Norwegian partner.

Another example of cultural difference was related to *chemyon*. According to Kim (2008), the Korean concept of *chemyon* is primarily due to the complex socio-psychological implications of the concept of self and inter-relational concerns with others. It can also be called saving face. Korean spouse #4 did not want to lose her *chemyon* in front of their children. Korea has been influenced by Confucianism, and according to Confucianism, children should obey what parents say, and it can be a sensitive issue to save face. The Norwegian spouse implicated that the children do not need to agree with their parents in front of her, and she was embarrassed with it. I assumed that it was related to *chemyon*.

Lanier (2014) described that high-context communication as indirect communication and low-context communication as direct communication. Indirect communication is more relationship-based, and a way to avoid offending the other person. I discovered that the Korean word *nunchi* is a good way to explain high-context, and indirect communication. Koreans define *nunchi* as “the sense of eye” or “mind reading.” Two of Korean spouses mentioned *nunchi* in their stories. Korean spouse #1 thought that Korean men had more *nunchi*, and the Korean spouse #4 asserted that after 8 years of Korean life, the Norwegian spouse obtained the sense of *nunchi* through daily life with Korean people.

In the intercultural marriage #2, the Korean spouse was a bit surprised and upset with the Norwegian spouse’s comment, when her daughter was injured because a cat bit her. The Korean spouse and the daughter expected empathy and concern as the initial reaction from the Norwegian spouse. Instead, they received a comment saying it is the nature of cats. According to Hall (1998), “high-context transactions are more on the feeling, intimate side while the low-context ones are much less personal and oriented toward the left-brain. Germans and North-Europeans in general can be said to operate lower on the context than the Japanese or Asian, for example” (Hall 1998, 61). I assumed that he believes that the Norwegian spouse’s logical and rational functions worked faster than the feeling and intimate side.

In intercultural marriage #1, and #2 mentioned that it is not unusual if a couple is different, since they grew up in different environments. According to Dahl (2003), “if the

communicators are aware of a lack of understanding and possible misunderstandings, these situations may represent ‘golden moment’ of potential new discoveries!”(Dahl, 2003)

Lack of understanding or misunderstanding is not necessarily negative; openness to admit misunderstanding can be a “golden moment” of potential new discoveries. Korean spouse #1 addressed that communication is very important for a couple. According to Gadamer (1989), constant questioning and answering will allow the truth to be revealed. I assumed that accepting and admitting their differences and open to disagreement is quite close to Gadamer’s *fusion of horizon* which is encountering others as a subject not an object, and understanding and discovering the other’s standpoint, but not pursuing the agreement.

Gadamer asserted that “the movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to whole” (Gadamer 1989, 291). I assumed that in intercultural marriages, the spouse’s behaviors and comments should be understood with the whole and as a part. For intercultural marriage’s, individual differences are formed by personality, gender, and cultural background. Moreover, our body is socialized by social actions and practices where we grew up, as Jensen (2006) discussed about practice theory. Admitting and accepting the differences as a subject, s/he is an individual and also a member of a community.

Whenever a couple gets married, they normally meet the family of the spouse. Most intercultural marriages were welcomed and embraced by the spouse’s family. In the intercultural marriage #1, the Korean assumed that the Norwegian family’s concept of family is almost the same as in her family. For instance, the Norwegian family disagreed on cohabitation (*samboere*), believed having children should come after marriage, and if a couple married, they should work hard to keep the family together (Korean spouse #1). In the intercultural marriage #2, the Korean spouse addressed that she felt comfortable with the Norwegian. Korean spouse #2’s description of the role of daughter-in-law is similar to Tudor’s one. “These days, most Korean wives only have to spend *Choseok* (Korean Thanksgiving Day) and *Seollal* (Lunar New Year’s Day) slaving away for their-in-laws” (Tudor 2012,136). Additionally, Korean spouse #2 thought that the Norwegian parents did not interfere much in their offspring’s life. According to Tudor, Korean families are still much more in mutual dependence compared to the West.

I assumed that raising children could be an inevitable issue, because parents are willing to do their best to nurture the children based on their philosophy. Intercultural

couple #3 had different philosophies on education and discipline. Korean partner #3 had experience in poverty and she may have had been influenced by Confucianism (Korean partner #3). According to Tudor (2008), after the Korean War, most of citizens were poor and no one had social advancement. In order to escape to poverty, people needed to stand out to obtain limited opportunities. Once the first elite generation obtained social advancement, they wanted to turn over the social advancement to their children, and the enthusiasm of education spread. Korea is a country that has been influenced by Confucianism for over 500 years, starting in the *Joseon* dynasty. During the *Joseon* dynasty, “The original *yangban* maintained their status through their ability to excel in the test that provided by far the best opportunities for social advancement in *Joseon* society, the civil service examination” (Tudor 2012, 106). I assumed that in Korean society, *yangban* still exists, and people are willing to compete to obtain social advancement. On the contrary, the Norwegian partner #3 thought “children should follow on their own paths” and “all occupations are equally honorable” (the Norwegian spouse #3). According to Su-Dale (1998), Norway may not be a very competitive nation. Su-Dale described one of the Norwegian’s characteristics as “a diminished spirit of competition” (Su-Dale 1998, 197). I assumed that this mindset is possible based on free or inexpensive tuition in Norway. On the contrary, in South Korea, the minimum university tuition costs \$2000 for national colleges.

Besides the diminished spirit of competition, Norway is probably one of the most democratic and classless societies in the world. According to Su-Dale (1998), “Norway is an egalitarian society and relationships are based on democratic principles of respect and familiarity, Norwegian is not impressed easily by names and titles” (Su-Dale 1998, 17). In intercultural marriage #2, the Korean spouse prepared different gifts; one for the daughter’s music professor, and other one for the daughter’s school teacher. The Norwegian spouse wondered why the gifts are not the same and asked why they were different. The Korean spouse asserted that the professor has a higher occupation than school teacher (Korean spouse #2), but the Norwegian spouse asserted that both have the same occupation as “educators” (Norwegian spouse #2). I concluded that there is still a neo-*yangban*, who achieves social advancement, existing somehow in South Korea, and Korean parents are willing to help their children in any way to obtain social-advancement. In contrast, as Norwegian spouse mentioned, a professor and a teacher have the same occupation as

“educator”. People can decide what their dream jobs are in Norway, even if it is not necessarily a highly competitive high position.

I assumed that the management of finance is an issue for all couples. In intercultural couple #3, the Norwegian partner was focusing more on “live now.” He thought that they have enough money for raising children and housing (Norwegian partner #3). As O’Leary (2010) mentioned, in Norway, the tuition is almost free or inexpensive, and the students can get financial aid via Norwegian State Educational Loan fund for tuition and living expenses, travel, and books.

Korean partner #3 tried to save money for the future, just in case. She said that Norway is a rich society, but current Norwegian economic state is not very stable, and an economic crisis could happen, just as in the 1980’s (Korean partner #3). She assumed that Norwegians are a bit laid back when it comes to saving money. She saw many Norwegians go on a trip when they have money or sometimes they borrow the money to go on a trip. She states that Koreans are a bit more careful on spending money. For example, saving money to buy a house or saving money for the future.

I was able to find an article about the current Norwegian economic state, and it is not very positive (see chapter 4). Thus, the Korean partner’s concerns and saving money may not be an unsubstantiated thought. In my personal opinion, both sides of the story make sense. I presumed that it may be related to collectivism and individualism. Collectivists are more following duties, and what they have to do. On the other hand, individualists pursue “personal happiness.” Yet, I don’t think it can be justified by two dichotomous cultural concepts. I saw some Norwegians who were careful to spend money and save money to buy a house. I assumed that it can be a personal choice, depend on what kind of aspects can be a priority value for the individual. Moreover, it is also possible diverse choices in a society.

I read an article that sharing housework can be a ground for divorce. Since couples share the space, it can be an issue how to share the housework for the intercultural marriages. Most of intercultural marriages were quite satisfied with sharing housework. They equally divided the household. For instance, if the wife cooks, then the husband did the dishes, or the Korean partner cooked 3 or 4 times a week for dinner, and the Norwegian

partner cooked the rest of days. My assumption is that, in general, Norwegian husbands did more housework compared to Korean husbands. I may say that many Korean men think, "I do some housework to help my wife." Korean husbands do not consider the household as their obligations, things they have to do. Moreover, Norway is one of the countries that are in the lead for gender equality. I think that the average of standard of gender equality is higher than Korea. Therefore, the Korean spouses are mostly quite satisfied with sharing household at home.

I found that intercultural difference at times is a main challenge and some elements the intercultural marriages appeared to be differences or difficulties because of language and communication, raising children, family, or financial management. I thought that openness to misunderstanding, agreement to disagreement can help to keep their marriage life happy. As Gadamar (1989) asserted, *fusion of horizon* to discover each other's standpoints by constant conversation without seeking agreement and looking upon the spouse as a subject and not an object can be an ideal way for intercultural marriages. The spouse has different gender, personality, and cultural background. The reason why s/he behaves and talks differently is because of who s/he is, not only due to different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, our culture is embodied, the body is socialized by social practices, as Jensen (2006) mentioned. Hence, the spouse should be understood from the whole to the part and back to whole. I assumed that open-mindedness, admittance and acceptance of the spouse the way s/he is can be a key point for the marriage life.

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