A Narrative Analysis of the Labour Market Experiences of Korean Migrant Women in Australia

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies
The Faculty of Economic and Business
The University of Sydney

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March 2005
Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree at this or any other university institution.

March 24, 2005

Jane Gyung Sook Lee
# Table of Contents

Declaration ii  
Tables xii  
Abstract xiii  
Acknowledgements xv  
Abbreviation xvii  

1. Introduction 1

1.1 Purpose of the Study 1  
1.2 Issue 1: Existing Literature & Conceptions 3  
1.3 Issue 2: The Paucity of Qualitative Studies 4  
1.4 Issue 3: Categorisation 6  
1.5 A Narrative Analytical Approach 9  
1.6 Thesis Structure 10  

2. Literature Review 13  

2.1 Theories of Labour Market Disadvantage 14  
2.1.1 Labour Market Segmentation Theory 14  
2.1.1.1 Non English Speaking Background Migrant Women 16
2.1.1.2 Asian Migrant and Labour Market 19
2.1.2 Human Capital Theory 22
2.1.3 Critiquing Human Capital Theory: The Cultural Aspect 26
2.1.4 Summary 30
2.2 Anti-Discrimination Legislation 31
2.2.1 Anti-Discrimination Legislation and Women in Workplace in New South Wales 31
2.2.2 Anti-Discrimination Legislation and its Effectiveness 34
2.2.3 Anti-Discrimination Legislation and English language ability, race and gender 35
2.2.4 Anti-Discrimination Legislation and Unpaid Domestic Work 40
2.2.5 Summary 42
2.3 Historical and Cultural Background of Korean Migrant Women 43
2.3.1 Historical Background and Korean Migrant Women 43
2.3.2 Modern Korea and Korean Migrant Women 46
2.3.3 Summary 49
2.4 Determination of Propositions 50

3. Narrative Analysis and the Study of Korean Migrant Women 52

3.1 Narrative Analysis 52
3.2 Practices of Power and Narrative Analysis 55
3.2.1 Language 55
3.2.2 Race, Gender and Culture 59
3.3 Organisations 61
3.4 Narrative and Antenarrative Analysis 68
3.5 Boje’s Antenarrative 72
3.6 Conclusion 78

4. Research Methods 79

4.1 Research Methods: Key issues 80
4.1.1 Issues of Truth 81
4.1.2 Issues of Reflexivity 82
4.2 Data Collection 84
4.3 Characteristics of the Sample 86
4.4 Data Analysis 90
4.4.1 Taxonomy 90
4.4.2 Grand Narrative and Microstoria Analysis 96
4.5 Conclusion 99

5. Group I: Never engaged, nor wishes to engage, in the paid labour market 101

5.1 Young-hee’s story 102
5.1.1 Grand Narratives 105
5.1.2 Grand narrative applicable microstoria 107
5.1.3 Grand narrative independent microstoria 109
5.1.4 Summary 111
5.2 Eun-ji’s story 112
5.2.1 Grand Narratives 114
5.2.2 Grand narrative applicable microstoria 115
5.2.3 Grand narrative independent microstoria 117
5.2.4 Summary 119
5.3 Discussion 119
5.4 Conclusion 126

6. Group II:
   Career oriented but do not participate in the paid labour market 128

6.1 Yung-ok’s story 129
6.1.1 Grand Narratives 132
6.1.2 Grand narrative applicable microstoria 134
6.1.3 Grand narrative independent microstoria 136
6.1.4 Summary 139
6.2 Kong-ji’s story 140
6.2.1 Grand narratives 142
6.2.2 Grand narrative applicable microstoria 144
6.2.3 Grand narrative independent microstoria 146
6.2.4 Summary 147
6.3 Sun-jung’s story 147
6.3.1 Grand narratives 149
6.3.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria 150
6.3 Summary 152
6.4 Discussion 153
6.5 Conclusion 157

7. Group III:
Not career oriented but participate in paid labour market 159

7.1 Gyung-suk’s story 160
7.1.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria 163
7.1.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria 165
7.1.3 Summary 168
7.2 Jin-seng’s story 169
7.2.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria 171
7.2.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria 173
7.2.3 Summary 175
7.3 Eun-sook’s story 176
7.3.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria 178
7.3.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria 180
7.3.3 Summary 182
7.4 Discussion 182
7.5 Conclusion 185
8. **Group IV:**

*Career Oriented (Post-migration)*

8.1 Eun-sun’s story

8.1.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

8.1.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

8.1.3 Summary

8.2 Sue’s story

8.2.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

8.2.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

8.2.3 Summary

8.3 Monica’s story

8.3.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

8.3.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

8.3.3 Summary

8.4 Discussion

8.5 Conclusion

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9. **Group V:**

*Career Oriented (Pre-migration)*

9.1 Ji-won’s story

9.1.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

9.1.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria
9.1.3 Summary

9.2 Hyun-sun’s story

9.2.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

9.2.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

9.2.3 Summary

9.3 Sun-myung’s story

9.3.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

9.3.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

9.3.3 Summary

9.4 Discussion

9.5 Conclusion

10. Narrative Analysis of Two Propositions

10.1 Proposition 1 and Grand Narrative Analysis

10.2 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

10.2.1 Housework and childcare are women’s responsibilities

10.2.2 Labour market participation depends upon family circumstances

10.2.3 Middle class women must do ‘decent’ women’s jobs

10.2.4 Which culture?

10.2.5 Proposition 1: Interpreting Results

10.3 Proposition 2 and Grand Narrative Analysis

10.4 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

10.4.1 English, it’s my problem
10.4.2 My workplace problems are English problems

10.4.3 Communication technology exacerbates my English problems
    in the workplace

10.4.4 Good English gets me a bad job

10.4.5 Proposition 2: Interpreting the Results

10.5 Discussion and Conclusion

11. Beyond the Existing Propositions

   11.1 Limitations of Existing Propositions

   11.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

   11.2.1 Orientalism and Authorised Discourse

   11.2.2 Conceptional Problems of ‘Barriers’

   11.2.3 Better futures in Australia

   11.2.4 Developing myself

   11.3 Grand narrative independent microstoria: Interpreting the Results

   11.4 Alternative Understandings

   11.5 Conclusion

12. Conclusion

   12.1 Results of Narrative Analysis

   12.1.1 Analysis of Proposition I

   12.1.2 Analysis of Proposition 2
12.2 Alternative Understandings 326
12.3 The Significance of the Research 327
12.3.1 The Significance and Implications of Narrative Analysis 328
12.3.2 Equity not just Access 331
12.3.3 Identity 333
12.4 Further Research and Policy Implications 334

Appendices 338

Appendix 1 Research Questionnaire: Demographic Details of Participants 338
Appendix 2 Interview Schedule 340
Appendix 3 Respondents 343
Appendix 4 Subject Information Statement 344
Appendix 5 Consent Form 345

Bibliography 346
Tables

Table 4.1: Five Groups of KMW Identified in the Study 91
Table 10.1: Grand Narrative Applicable Microstoria 263
Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of Korean migrant women (KMW) in the Australian labour market. A review of the extant literature leads to two propositions, both of which assert that KMW are likely to experience labour market disadvantage or barriers to entry. These propositions take into account two significant theories of the labour market: segmentation theory and human capital theory. Segmentation theory argues that unchangeable gender and racial / cultural differences have the greatest impact upon labour market value, human capital theory describes the labour market value of individuals as based upon apparently objective and attainable skills (here English language skills).

Using narrative analysis and, more specifically, antenarrative analysis, the study examines the life stories of 33 Australian KMW. In so doing, it identifies hitherto unheard discourses concerning the experiences of KMW in relation to the Australian labour market — discourses that challenge established academic thinking regarding this issue.

Identification and analysis of these new discourses generates a number of alternative understandings of the labour market experiences of KMW. These alternative understandings both demonstrate the limitations of, and go beyond, the existing two propositions. In particular, the research shows that the impacts of gender and culture (segmentation theory) vary over time for KMW, do not always prevent labour market
participation, and are experienced in terms of identity within a gendered Australian labour market. The research also demonstrates that while many KMW are in fact sufficiently skilled in the English language (human capital theory) to enter the Australian labour market, they nevertheless experience a sense of inferiority about their English language capacity that discourages them from entering, and limits their opportunities to participate in, the labour market. This in turn contributes to their social isolation.

The thesis concludes that within the Australian academic literature, KMW have either been given little space and voice or have been misrepresented, reflecting and contributing to an ongoing ignorance of the experiences of Asian women in Australian workplaces. The KMW examined in this study are subject to numerous forms of subordination in Australian workplaces and society that cannot be adequately explained in terms of their human capital or their gender and cultural differences. The covert nature of the politics of difference within the workplace makes exclusionary practices more difficult to identify and discuss. The thesis argues that in order to overcome these problems new policies of multiculturalism and productive diversity need to be developed. It asserts that narrative analytic techniques are an important means by which to inform such policy development.
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## Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Affirmative Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>ADL</td>
<td>Anti Discrimination Legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMES</td>
<td>Adult Migrants English Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIEA</td>
<td>Department of Immigration &amp; Ethnic Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIMIA</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEO</td>
<td>Equal Employment Opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEOWW</td>
<td>Equal Employment Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESB</td>
<td>English Speaking Background</td>
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<tr>
<td>HREOC</td>
<td>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMW</td>
<td>Korean Migrant Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>KWDI</td>
<td>Korean Women’s Development Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMD</td>
<td>Labour Market Disadvantage</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMST</td>
<td>Labour Market Segmentation Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSIA</td>
<td>Longitudinal survey of Immigrants to Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAATI</td>
<td>National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>Non English Speaking Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODS</td>
<td>Organisational Discourse Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONS</td>
<td>Organisational Narrative Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIS</td>
<td>Translating and Interpreting Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>WAP</td>
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