Abstract

This study explores how the Congolese refugee families live actually and change their cultural identities in Korea, based on the multi-cultural discourses recently raised in Korean society. The reason why especially Congolese families are chosen as research participants is because they had been in a relationship as students or friends with the researcher even before this study was begun.

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Using the ethnographic approach, the researcher found some interesting results in common among the participant families as followed. Firstly, they all escaped their country for a political persecution. Secondly, they experienced a ‘sudden’ and ‘unprepared’ migration commonly. In that process, they chose the airway to Korea, so the trans-migration term is very short. Thirdly, all the couples got married here in Korea after their migration and started their family, whether they had known each other from Congo or not. Fourthly, while the first refugee generation has a strong cultural identity as a Congolese, the second refugee generation has it as a Korean. This discrepancy causes some tension and conflict between two generations. Especially the Congolese mothers seem to consider it a serious problem. Lastly, they can keep their own culture in their small cultural community thanks to their geographical proximity.

From the migration perspective, various factors influence their cultural identities. There are relatively high social and economic status in Congo, political persecution, cultural diversity of Congo as the pre-migration factors, economic hardship from the shortage of language and skill, uncertainty from not being recognized as refugees legally, absence of public education on refugees in Korea, uniformity of Korean culture, double standard on foreigners of Korean people, conflict with children from the cultural differences, emotional support from their own cultural community as the post-migration factors. Among them, the last two factors seem to facilitate their gradual positive adaptation of the Korean culture. In addition to all of them, the dynamic of each family also should be considered. The fact that each member of these families has his/her personal resources, background, and temper to produce the distinctive dynamic results differences on cultural identities among these families.

From the mental health perspective, these Congolese refugee families lie in ‘emotional vacuum.’ They have no choice but to live in Korea as invisible people suffered from the moral persecution because they cannot go back to Congo in fear for the political persecution. They are in vague and ‘in-between’ because they can neither abandon their original cultural identity easily, at the same time they can nor accept the new one (Korean cultural identity).

주제어(key words) : 난민 가정(refugee family), 문화 정체성(cultural identity), 이주(migration), 문화기술적(ethnography)