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1**Gender, Family and State in East Asian
Cross-Border Marriages**

Hong-Zen Wang and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao

I. Introduction

After several decades of an economic boom, East Asian societies have experienced many aspects of rapid social changes; and of these, a major change in "population composition". Societies which had imagined that they were of a homogeneous type, and had consisted much the same ethnic group, had long ignored the fact that they actually comprised many different ethnic groups; each residing in the same geographic space (Lie 2001). It was not until late 1990s that they began to perceive this diversity of differing ethnic groups living together. Such a demographic compositional change had been the result of increasing interconnections, the development of inter-regional economies, and the frequent travel of the peoples in this region.

After the Plaza Agreement of 1986, mass capital from the three East Asian countries, Japan, Korea and Taiwan, poured into Southeast Asia and China. Accompanying this capital flow, skilled labour from these countries moved back and forth between the homeland and host countries, thus creating a cross-regional highly skilled labour market (Wang 2008). In addition, better developments in communications also facilitated the movements of people to other countries either for travel or study (Jones and Shen 2008). By the close of 2007, the above three East Asian countries had mutually exempted travel visa requirement for short-term tourist visitors, which was to become a future basis for possible free labour movement throughout the region. After the appreciation of the Yen, in the 1980s, increasing numbers of Japanese tourists travelled to neighbouring countries, and likewise Taiwanese and Korean tourists in the 1990s. In early 1980s, the Taiwan government lifted

its overseas travel restrictions, and also restrictions on capital investment in Southeast Asian; and thence Mainland China in the late 1980s. Thus was created the opportunity for contacts between the peoples of East and Southeast Asia. The Japanese government tended to increase the numbers of students coming to Japan for study, and to relax its regulations governing overseas student visas and employment requirements, in the late 1980s (Nakamatsu this volume).

Contacts among the peoples of the region also resulted from the labour-shortage problems in the three countries, thus began the importation of "cheap" labour from such poorer bordering countries as Mainland China, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia. Both Korea and Japan had adopted "trainee schemes" so as to hire cheap labour, and thus to void the effects of their respective government's local minimum wage protection policies. In addition to the trainee schemes, a preference to import "same blood" ethnic groups, like *Josunjok* or *Nikkeijin*, whereby it was imagined cultural and language barriers to the low-skilled workers in the domestic markets of the host societies, would be avoided. In Taiwan, although Chinese migrant workers had been proposed by domestic capitalists in the late 1980s, and the early 1990s, it had been ruled out by the government upon the basis of national security (Tseng 2004), but in the end the "guest-worker scheme" as employed by the Singapore government came to be adopted. Yamanaka (this volume). This demonstrates how in the 1990s, the global economic restructuring in this region, contributed to the influxes of migrant workers. Increasing contacts between local citizens and foreign nationals, were also to result in cross-border marriages.

Though the changing global economic and social contexts help the increase of contacts among people in this region, it did not necessarily always give rise to cross-border marriages. Two major domestic factors, i.e., marriage squeeze, and an ageing society, increased the need to widen domestic marriage markets. A man (or, a woman) may suffer the effects of a marriage squeeze when they are excluded from the marriage market; these may be due to a variety of reasons, e.g., imbalance sex ratio of births in China tend to squeeze marriage market for males, there resulting thence an insufficiency of marriageable females. Or a society sees the mate-matching should be of a higher social economic status: the male marrying a female of a lower social economic status female, will disadvantage males of a lower social economic status in the marriage market, and so might they be squeezed out the market. As the data

shows, most cross-border marriages in these countries are those of men of lower social economic status, marrying women from less developed countries like China, Vietnam or the Philippines. It might be the result of a marriage squeeze of men, who could not find "suitable" women in the domestic marriage market, no matter the reason thereof. (Kojima this volume) points out that in East and South Asian countries, including China and India, sex ratio imbalances at marriageable ages is beginning to occur; this being the result of imbalances in the sex ratio of births that have continued since the beginning of the 1980s. Accordingly, the marriage squeeze for men is expected to persist well into the future throughout the whole of Asia.

Another key factor promoting cross-border marriages in this region is the rapid ageing of the population, and this together with a declining fertility rate. A low fertility rate is due to a lower marriage rate, and it also relates to the marriage squeeze; here men of lower educational, or lower social economic, status are unable to marry, or do not seek to marry women of a higher level of education. The narrowing educational gap between men and women in this region means that those men with "traditional hypergamy views" of marriage would not be able to find a mate matching their expectations. Regarding the rapidly ageing population, governments of this region still expect that the elderly care should be the responsibility of the family. As a result is the newly-rich middle classes may employ domestic helpers to alleviate the burden of caring of the elderly, but low income families have no means to resort to such measures, other than to seek marriage with a "traditional wife" in order to help with domestic work and so cope also with this deficiency in the caring of the elderly.

II. Common Features of Cross-Border Marriages

Cross-border marriage is not new to the history of East Asia, nor does it differ in this respect in the cultures of other regions. At least three common features generally characteristic of East Asian cross-border marriages, i.e., co-ethnic marriages, hypergamy marriages, and the masculine culture in cross-border marriages.

In the three East Asian countries there is a high percentage of co-ethnic marriages (Jones and Shen 2008: 13, table 6). In Taiwan, more than two-thirds of the immigrants are from Mainland China (or PRC),

and most of the female immigrants from Indonesian are ethnic Hakka Chinese, viz., the cross-border marriages amounts to 75% ethnic Chinese. In Korea, Chinese "Josunjok" (overseas ethnic Korean) constitute the major group to seek marriage with South Korean partners, amounting to two-thirds of the cross-border marriages. Cross-border marriages with Japanese also constitute an important role; many are Japanese Koreans who were forcibly moved to Japan before 1945. Such co-ethnic marriage phenomena are not particularly different from other cross-border marriage areas, where people seek partners from the same overseas ethnic groups (Thai 2008).

Hypergamy seems to be a common phenomenon world-wide, thus we find more women from the less developed countries seek to marry men in the economically better-developed countries, e.g., Chinese or Filipina women seek to marry Japanese or Taiwanese men. In year of 2006 the GNP per capita of Japan, Korea, and Taiwan totaled, respectively: US\$24,431, US\$18,164, and US\$15,565; while that of Vietnam, the Philippines and China, respectively, totaled: US\$673, US\$1,356, and US\$2,055 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2008). Such an income gap naturally explain in part the reasons why some women in these countries decide to move and seek cross-border marriages in the expectation of a better life, whether or not for the betterment of their own situation, or for that of their natal families. The economic development gap allows men in regions of a more developed economy, considerable advantages in their search for potential partners in a much wider marriage market outside their national boundaries. However, we might be cautious when cite this concept, as Constable (2005) says: it is useful only insofar as it can be used to raise questions rather than to foreclose on them. The female movement through marriage is the outcome of mixed motivations that are embedded in quite different social structures, these cannot be reduced to a single economic factor.

If we look at cross-border marriages from feminist perspective, we will find out that gender culture plays a key role in the process. Like the concepts in literature, to the effect that Western men tend to seek "traditional woman with their characteristic feminine traits". Men of East Asia also imagine that women from less developed countries have not yet lost such "merits", as the man who married a Chinese said "when I return home after work, my wife will bring a basin to wash my feet." What Taiwanese woman would stoop to do that?" (Wang and Tien, this volume). Masculinity can also be expressed in other ways, for instance,

the Japanese man who decided to marry a Filipina entertainer when he learned that she did not save money for her kidney problem, but instead had sent money home to help her natal family, and so was willing to sacrifice her health; he felt, "I really need to help her" (Suzuki, this volume). A man with such a gender view is not actually searching for a native woman or a foreign woman, but, rather, a traditional woman. Such a masculinity culture exists both in the West and in the East, and should be found to constitute an important factor in the promotion of cross-border marriages which, up to now, has not been widely discussed in the literature.

III. Cross-Border Marriages with Asian Characteristics

So one might ask "what are the features of East Asian cross-border marriage—if they are not so different from those of other societies?" Here we would like to point out which factors are East Asian specific, and which lie behind the currents of cross-border marriages in this region.

The most salient feature of East Asian cross-border marriages that differs from Western marriages, is that marriage is not solely an individual choice, but is one embedded in the family and is also one with a long-established place in the community. Though these countries have experienced rapid industrialization and the family structures seem to converge towards a "nuclear" family: the ideal life of the individual is to marry a partner along with family members and to live jointly with them. In Chinese tradition, it is important to have a son to inherit family property, and to worship his ancestral forebears, as Confucius says "without a child is the most unfilial thing" in one's life (*buxiao you san, wuhou wei da*). Both in Japan and in Korea, men are expected to inherit the family property and status. Therefore, marriage in East Asian societies is not only the individual's preference, but also that of the family.

Group pressure to marry not only comes from family, but also from the society. Any deviance from the norms will soon be noticed and discussed, and in daily interactions the individual will feel the pressure. Some men might not like to marry, but after the "suitable marriageable age", their family members, friends or colleagues will keep on asking them "why not marry". In Japan, a man not marrying after marriageable age is regarded by his surrounding people as "nureochiba", man who is useless and gets in the way like wet dead leaves (Suzuki, this volume).

Or a mother might be crying to beg her unmarried son to find a woman to marry in Taiwan. In addition to personal social networks and pressures, the local governments in Japan and Korea regard the non-marriage phenomenon as a social problem, and have tried to organize match-making tours to foreign countries to help bachelors to find brides—just as if they were social services providers. The Japanese central government has begun to draft a scheme for the match-making industry, which reveals a the kind of collective paternalism prevalent in East Asia (Nakamatsu, this volume).

Related to family system is the situation of co-habitation with the husband's parents. Though the social welfare systems in these countries have been in the nature of on-going establishments in recent years, the responsibility of the care of elderly people is still regarded to be the duty of the members of the family. In Taiwan, the family members of a female Vietnamese migrant constitutes, on the average: 3.87 persons. This includes the husband, the wife, a child, and a parent (Wang 2001). Lim's village survey in Taiwan also shows that 64% of the international families constitute an extended family (this volume). The Japanese government has inherited the ideal concept of a *samurai* household structure, and considers that elderly care is one of the major functions of the family (Suzuki, this volume). Many men marrying foreign wives think that filial piety is a very important virtue in the case of women. Thus 38% of male respondents in a Korean survey chose "filial piety, or obedience to parents", as the reason they elected to marry foreign wives (Lee, this volume). Wang and Tien (this volume) show that the pursuit of a woman with "traditional" virtues is an important incentive for some Taiwanese men who go overseas to seek wives.

Such a family system is the product of the East Asian Confucian culture, and its ideology of gender relations which influences daily practices in the treatment of immigrants in the family, and in the public sphere. It is almost impossible in these societies to imagine that anyone would change one's family name, since it is given by birth, thus it is not the one that can be acquired. In Yamanaka's paper, she described how difficult it is for a Nepalese-Japanese couple to register their child's name in father's surname (when spelt in Japanese *Kana* script). The Taiwan government has regulated that foreigners will need to choose a "commonly used" Chinese name as their family name when they apply for a household registration number, even if they have already got such *Kanji* Chinese characters like Ueno or Tanaka as their surname. Such a

cultural back-ground strongly influences immigrants' daily life, and is an important East Asian characteristics deserving of a greater degree of attention.

The third characteristics is the absence of a migration policy in these countries, or more precisely, these countries do not allow any form of immigration except via marriage (Seol and Skrentny 2009). Though they have imported millions of foreign workers into this region, they do not grant these blue-collar workers the possibility to obtain citizenship. These co-ethnic workers are welcome to work, but not entitled to become citizens. The Taiwanese government even employs the derogatory term "low population quality" to describe such migrant workers (Wang and Belanger 2008). Under such circum-stances some people who want to work in these countries would find marriage an alternative way to move in; and thus it may become difficult to say who is wife or who is worker (Piper and Roces 2003). Some migrant workers might marry local citizens and become wives, like Filipina entertainers who meet their husbands in the hostess bars, and then marry. Or some wives might work for a certain period, and divorce, and return to their countries of origin, as in the cases of some divorced Vietnamese migrant women who had experienced domestic violence (Tang and Wang 2008).

Another prominent feature in this region is the role of commercial match-making companies in bridging cross-border marriages. The business model is very different from the Western international match-making model. In the West, the commercial match-making company only provides information from both sides, to international marriage seekers. They may then correspond with each other by themselves, or with the help of the translation facilities provided by these companies (Glodava and Onizuka 1994). However, in East Asia, match-making is an industry wherein the different players involved are out to make profits, and to work closely with each other, so as to maintain a bride and groom recruitment system. They bring prospective grooms to foreign countries, either individually or by group, to meet their future brides face to face. In a very short time East Asian men can find their Miss Right and then marry (Nakamatus 2003; Wang and Chang this volume). Men and women do not have a long-term engagement before they walk into the church/temple to marry.

Such a process has evoked much criticism in the region, and some feminist groups in Taiwan advocate a ban on this form of business. They oppose the commercial marketing of female body, and sometimes even

imply the match-making industry is the "arch-criminal in women trafficking". Under the pressure, the Taiwan government had to ban such business activities in 2007.¹ However, Nakamatsu (this volume) and Lu (2005: 298) have already pointed out that "commercial operations should not be singled out as the only cause of women's vulnerability in cross-border marriages", let alone human trafficking. It is too easy to find scapegoats for the problems that have arisen from cross-border marriages.

IV. Overview of the Book

This book focuses on the characteristics of East Asian cross-border marriages, and each of the papers therein have, indeed, demonstrated different aspects and special characteristics attending the subject. The contributing scholars derive from the three Asian countries and have collectively contributed their research findings.

Firstly of all, they have paid special attention to the gender culture in this region. In Chapter 2, Wang and Tien explore why Taiwanese men seek overseas brides. They contend that the disadvantaged social economic status can only explain the mass cross-border marriages phenomenon to a limited extent, whilst an important factor often overlooked is the East Asian gender culture, which is rarely addressed in the current literature. Some Taiwanese men who want to marry overseas women do so in the belief that Vietnamese women are more "traditional" than are Taiwanese women. Situated in different social contexts, including family and social pressures, and the lure of matchmaking agencies, they then seek their "ideal wives" overseas. They hope to gain an "authority-submission" relationship between husbands and wives in global marriages, and therefore their masculinity can be affirmed and even strengthened.

Such a masculine culture resonates well elsewhere in the world, and also in Japan, as Suzuki depicts in Chapter 3. The Japanese male's desire for an overseas marriage has the combined imagination of "feminine attentiveness", and a masculine identity, achievable through the direct provision of money, as well as the bodily protection, for the weak women, as they imagine them to be. One salient "Japanese characteristic" of cross-border marriages is the sizable portion of Japanese men who had met their spouses at nightclubs. Another feature is that Japanese men are

under more pressure to marry than are their Western counterparts, such are the findings presented in Wang and Tien's chapter. One more specific Japanese character is that marriage with "Americanized" Filipino women could be positive for their children's education.

In Korea, the important reasons to marry a foreign woman as reported by Hye-Kyung Lee in Chapter 4 are: obedience to their parents, similar appearance to Koreans, and a love for foreign women. The first reason is very Confucian-like, in that family ideology of filial piety plays an influential role in shaping the marriage attitudes in Korea. Korean men also want to marry "traditional" women, and the self evaluation of their marriages tends to be more positive than that of their wives, although different educational backgrounds and the way in which they met their wives does make some difference. The wives, through the aegis of match-making agencies, are less satisfied with their marriages than are those who married through regional organizations or as a result of personal encounters.

When foreign women arrive at their destinations, and live with their husbands and families, they have to learn entirely new cultural concepts, so as to adapt to different social relations in the family, and thence to negotiate the problems attending power relations in daily practices. Lim Khay Thiong in Chapter 5 explores one of the household chores, in the family: meal preparation, which is a site wherein different power struggles are activated to dominate one over the other. Meal preparation in these immigrant families is not an identity marker, but instead, is confined to the members in the husband's family, thus immigrant women are not permitted to cook their own ethnic food for themselves, let alone for their new family members. However, as this Chapter shows, these Vietnamese women have tried to smuggle the "Vietnamese flavour" into the "Taiwanese dish", and which might in the end transform the local appetite and taste little by little, quietly.

The increasing number of cross-border marriages in East Asia is normally related to population issues. However, we know very little about the determinants of family formation behaviour of couples in international marriages. Using microdata of population surveys in Japan and Taiwan, Hiroshi Kojima in Chapter 6 finds that the preference for a son in Taiwan is likely to be more of an important factor for the pursuit of cross-border marriages, than it is in Japan. The proportion of sons of the first birth in Taiwan is 54.5%, and of the third birth increases to 55.9% (sex ratio is 126.8), which is a significant deviant from normal rate. Japan

has a more normal sex ratio rate. He also points out that the fertility rate of international marriage couples is lower than that of the natives, which is again observed in Western Europe, too. Universal factors such as poor adaptation to the host societies, anxiety of future divorces, etc, contribute to this behaviour, but East Asian specific factors such as elderly care work shouldered by family, or by foreign female spouses' desire to participate in the labour market, might also play important role.

Regarding the factors contributing to cross-border marriage in Japan, Chapter 7 by Yamanaka links it to global economic restructuring after 1980s. Labour migration from other less developed countries to Japan; or, Japanese who go overseas either to work, or to travel; increases the contact opportunities between people to get married. Using Japanese women and Nepalese men as case studies, she contends that transnational links of the ethnic community with their home, provide opportunities to marry foreigners. In her Chapter, she also discusses the difficulties that these immigrant families face. Japan, like other Asian countries, does not have the tradition of long-residing immigrants. Nor does it take the stance of issuing an assimilation policy. Thus different social and political institutional discriminations arise; these are hard to break, and the immigrant families have to develop different forms of everyday resistance in order to empower themselves.

Facing the increasing influx and outflow of native men and women, States always have interests in the control of their subjects' bodies, and the shaping of the ideal family. Both Suzuki's and Kung's chapters tackle population policies of the State, as well as those relevant to family and individual body issues. Kung argues that the Taiwan government, as a paternalistic state, produces different kinds of discourses to describe Vietnamese women in order to achieve "racialized distinction" between Taiwanese and Vietnamese, and at the same time to legitimize its intervention in people's intimate life, and to consolidate its paternalistic attitude in government.

The last two Chapters by Nakamatsu (Chapter 9) and Wang and Chang (Chapter 10) touch upon a heated debate issue, namely: the role of international match-making agencies in cross-border marriages. Nakamatsu writes in detail the historical development of the "match-making industry" in Japan, and how Japanese have regarded the industry in different periods. It was considered as a part of social policy to help those people who might have difficulties in getting married. Such an ideology further pushed local governments to encourage the young

men of villages to find brides overseas, and nowadays the central government views it as a tool to deal with ageing and low fertility problems. Nakamatsu strongly opposes the popular image of this industry as "being evil and concerned with women trafficking".

As an industry, the match-making business is regulated by the law of demand and supply. Global economic restructuring and market changes will affect the operation of the matchmaking companies, as observed in Nakamatsu, Wang, and Chang's Chapters. Wang and Chang have analyzed two different industrial organizational types that have emerged in the match-making industries to meet different market constraints in Taiwan and Vietnam. They find that as the cross-border marriage market matures, more and more people enter the market, thence competitive prices, good quality services soon become necessary conditions for a successful business. Such commercialized cross-border marriages are termed by them as "commodified", and together with migrant domestic workers and sex workers, it links intimate and personal relations to global political and economic processes. These are termed by Constable as "commodification of intimacy" (Constable 2009). Such a development deserves attention in our future researches.

Notes

1. About the debates on banning international matchmaking business, see Hong-Zen Wang's blog: Hunin meiheye yu renkou fanyun (Marriage matchmaking and human trafficking), <http://blog.yam.com/hongzen63/article/12906211> (Accessed on July 20, 2008).

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Who Marries Vietnamese Bride? Masculinities and Cross-Border Marriages

Hong-Zen Wang and Ching-Ying Tien

I. Introduction

According to the survey conducted by Ministry of Interior, from 2001 to 2005 in Taiwan, the total number of newly-married couples is 787,246. Among them, 26.7% are cross-border marriages; to put it clearly, more than 1/4 of newly-married couples is a cross-border marriage. Table 2.1 presents the information on the composition of the newly-married couples from 2001 to 2005.

Table 2.1 Registered Number of Marriages by Nationality of Spouses, 2001-2005

Year	All marriages (No.)	With foreign spouses*	With Chinese spouses**	All Spouses (%)
2001	170,515	19,405	27,342	27.42%
2002	172,655	20,107	29,545	28.76%
2003	171,483	19,643	34,426	31.53%
2004	131,453	20,338	10,972	23.82%
2005	141,140	13,808	14,619	20.14%
Total	787,246	93,301	116,904	26.70%

Notes: *Spouses from other than China.

**Including those from China, Hong Kong, and Macao.

Source: Department of population, Ministry of Interior, Taiwan.

<http://www.moi.gov.tw/stat> (Accessed on March 4, 2006).