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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).

Such a high proportion has made cross-border marriage an important social issue in Taiwan. In the past few years, there are more than eighty theses discussing cross-border marriages in Taiwan and the number is still increasing. Those studies have focused on immigrant spouses, their children, and families; research on the Taiwanese men who married overseas women has so far been very limited. We wonder why those men want to marry overseas women, a procedure that would cost them much money, and would also cause them to have to put much effort into getting over the language and culture barriers. This paper tries to contribute to the research gap in this neglected issue.

A common explanation of this question in East Asian literature is disadvantaged socio-economic status hypothesis. During our fieldwork, the male interviewees also gave the same answer: it is hard to find a wife in Taiwan. Some Taiwanese scholars, basing themselves on this assumption, use political economy approach to explain this cross-border marriage phenomenon. For example, world system theory is applied to attribute the phenomenon to unequal economic development between Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Globalization of capital flow means the shut down of domestic factories, and production lines move to lower labor cost area, as we find in the East Asia region, i.e., capital flows from Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore to Southeast Asia and China. In addition, capitalists also import guest workers to replace domestic high cost labor; it exacerbates the poor situation of the working class and farmers. Therefore, in the marriage market these people are in a disadvantaged position to find a partner, and finding an overseas spouse becomes another choice (Hsia 2000; Chang 1996).

This hypothesis is subject to criticism from many empirical findings in Taiwan. Most Taiwanese men marrying overseas spouses have stable jobs. Calculated from the survey done by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) in 2002, the unemployment rate of Taiwanese males marrying foreign spouses was only 5.9%, though a little higher than the national rate of 5.1% in that year. In these recent years we find more and more white-collar workers, who are not economically disadvantaged at all, marrying foreigners. Besides, according to MOI survey, 38% of interviewees knew their spouses through profit-oriented agencies. Though 48% reported that they knew their spouses through introduction by acquaintances, many of them still have to pay these acquaintances not less than the matchmaking agency (Wang and Chang 2003). The prospective grooms have to pay as much as US\$10,000 for a successful

marriage. After marriage, these Taiwanese men also remit money to wives families to help them to renovate house, to buy durables or to repay debt. It is very unlikely that those unemployed or on pretty low incomes would be able to do such things (Hsiao 2000; Cheng 2000; Wang and Chang 2003). A grand theory like world system theory is not adequate to explain why people in a society across different classes make the same choice.

Tsai said that the chronic weakening in the status of men in Taiwan marriage market can be attributed to the rise in the female labor participation rate, which gradually narrows the economic gap between man and woman (1996). His work reminds us that economic factors in the marriage market should be put in the gender relations basket to understand its effect. Applying this idea to cross-border marriages, we do not deny the importance of economic power in the process of finding an overseas spouse, but we would rather put this factor into Taiwan social and gender context to understand its influence. Some recent researches on international marriages have shed light on this issue by exploring the relationship between international marriages and gender culture.

Constable finds that most white American men marrying Asian women had had unhappy marriage experiences. They complained that American women were too independent, career-oriented and feminist, so that they could not be a good wife. These American men are attracted to Asian women who are imagined as good traditional family partners (Constable 2005: 166-186). Hung Cam Thai also documented Vietnamese American men who went to Vietnam to find their female partners. These men are low income wage earners, and of low socio-economic status relative to American white men, even to American women, and it pushed them to seek wives in Vietnam. Though the socio-economic factor is important in his explanation of cross-border marriages, he also found that Asian and Confucian traditional gender ideology strongly influences their attitudes to marriage. Western women are regarded as not owning traditional Asian merits, and therefore are not ideal wives for them (Thai 2005: 145-165).

Both Constable and Thai researches point out that there are connections between cross-border marriages and gender culture, but they do not explicitly explore the effect of gender culture on the development of international marriages; especially not enough attention is given to the men decision of going overseas to marry. In this paper, we would like to

argue that international marriages in Taiwan are framed by a gender culture which supports and legitimizes men marriages from Southeast Asia.

II. Theoretical Framework: Masculinities, Gender Culture and Social Networks

In Chinese culture, marriage is never an individual choice such as neo-classical economics depicts (Becker 1972). The hegemonic masculinity culture influences certain groups, and through different mechanisms and institutions disciplinary powers are exercised to place Taiwanese men in the right social position. In marriage we can find different social discourses and powers imposed on the actors, and not the actors freedom of choice. Social relations with parents, friends and relatives exercise constant surveillance over an unmarried man to find a good wife through the act of marriage. In this paper we single out the family system and capitalist business as two major institutional powers to affect men to choose a traditional woman from Vietnam.

Expression of masculinity is highly related to the roles of the family bread winner, strong sex partner and responsible father (Pingol 2001). In Taiwan, the hegemonic masculinity is similar. A survey done in 2002 shows that more men than women agree with the statement that man duty is making money, while woman duty is taking care of the family. In the mid-1980s, Greenhalgh found that even after twenty years of rapid economic growth and after women had become major economic providers in the family, their status in the family was not significantly changed, and they were still expected to fill the traditional role (1985). In the beginning of the new millennium, Taiwanese women educational levels are getting closer to men, and their economic power in the family is raised, but the gendered division of labor in the family has not changed too much (Wang 1997; Chen 2000; Hsu 2002). Though both men and women (53% of both male and female respondents) agreed that men should share more domestic work in a 2002 survey, and about the same percentage (59%) agreed that men should share the responsibility to take care of children, when we check the facts about who does the domestic work, e.g., laundry, shopping, house cleaning or cooking, which are traditionally defined as women domain, we find that these are done mostly by females (see Table 2.2). This gap between attitude and

behavior implies that Taiwanese men are still embedded in the traditional hegemonic masculine gender culture. Their view towards gender relations is shaped within their social relationships with others in the social field, and this supports and legitimizes their pursuit of a traditional wife. If an ideal traditional woman does not exist in Taiwan, why not seek an imagined good wife from Southeast Asia? It is our main argument that marrying overseas women is a decision based on this gender culture.

Table 2.2 Division of Labor in Domestic Work, by Gender (2002)

	Male	Female	Together	Others	Unanswered	Subtotal
Laundry	6.69%	71.57%	15.12%	5.35%	1.26%	100%
Simple home repairs	69.92%	7.56%	9.29%	12.44%	0.79%	100%
Taking care of sick family members	5.51%	34.33%	49.61%	5.43%	5.12%	100%
Shopping for food	6.85%	65.91%	16.61%	8.43%	2.20%	100%
House cleaning	6.22%	58.43%	26.61%	7.56%	1.18%	100%
Cooking	4.80%	70.31%	13.31%	9.37%	2.20%	100%
Daily shopping	7.87%	49.45%	34.57%	6.54%	1.57%	100%
Average	15.41%	51.08%	23.59%	7.87%	2.05%	100%

Source: Calculated from the General Survey of Taiwan Social Change 4-3, Social Research Data Archive, Academia Sinica.

Masculine and feminine cultures are not produced by ideology, but by many social institutions that inscribe their power on individual bodies. Family as a key institution in Confucian society has witnessed such an inscription. Marrying a wife or husband to have a "normal" family reproduces such an ideology and social institution. Marrying a foreign wife is a part of the whole reproduction process, and reaffirms the hegemonic masculinity culture. In her research on cross-border marriages, Chen found that three out of seven interviewees admitted that they have foreign wives because of "low self-esteem". They think that their education and economic power in Taiwan society is not good enough to pursue a good wife (2002: 13). Such a self-description expresses the

deep-rooted patriarchal ideology that men should have a higher social status than women.

Besides, the main purpose of marriage in Chinese society is to "get" a daughter-in-law for the husband's family, and this is regarded as more important than to have a "wife" for the groom. Family is organized by the patriarchal lineage principle, and other relations are not as important as the paramount "parents-children" axis. To have a male descendant is the responsibility of a married couple, to keep this lineage going on forever. To remain childless is the most unfilial thing (*buxiao you san, wuhou wei da*). Therefore, one duty of a filial daughter-in-law is to have a boy (Seaman 1981: 383). Centrality of family, kin and friendship networks are still the most important part of social life in contemporary Chinese society. These networks constitute important significant others to exercise power on Taiwanese men to practise hegemonic masculinity, i.e., to be material providers, to work hard, to believe in the traditional division of labor among men and women (Hibbins 2005).

In addition to Chinese tradition, many business people use matchmaking as a kind of business for profit. To attract more buyers into the Taiwan-Vietnam marriage market, they try to produce an image of "traditional" Taiwanese women, an image which has been lost in Taiwan society and can only be found in Vietnam, where Vietnamese society is like Taiwanese society of the 1950s. The Vietnamese women are portrayed as "docile, pure and even stupid" traditional wives to satisfy Taiwanese men's imagination. This image conforms not only with these men's imagination, but also with the imagination of their family members and relatives so that social pressures can be collectively exerted on unmarried men.

After the marriage, though there are many institutional powers to discipline the body e.g., state regulations, academic research or NGO's integration programs (Wang and Belanger 2006), we confine our analysis to these two institutions, i.e., family and capitalism, to know how a female immigrant spouse is disciplined to be a good wife, good mother and good daughter-in-law. Within the family, the reproduction of man authority and woman submission is supported through the economic power and social discourse of Southeast Asia. If a wife is expected to take care of the family and not to have a job of her own, she will be more likely to be dependent upon her husband; Nyman research reveals that the power relationship between wife and husband is a function of each one contribution to the household economy (2002). In Taiwan

cross-border marriages, the husband as the major material provider would have dominant power to command, and it also consolidates the authority-submission structure. The last important factor is the uneven global development whereby Taiwanese view Vietnam as an inferior other, like the orientalist gaze on Asia by Westerners (Singh and Greenlaw 1998). This cultural ideology reinforces Taiwanese men hegemonic masculinity, and gives them the impression that they can dominate those racially inferior women from the less developed society.

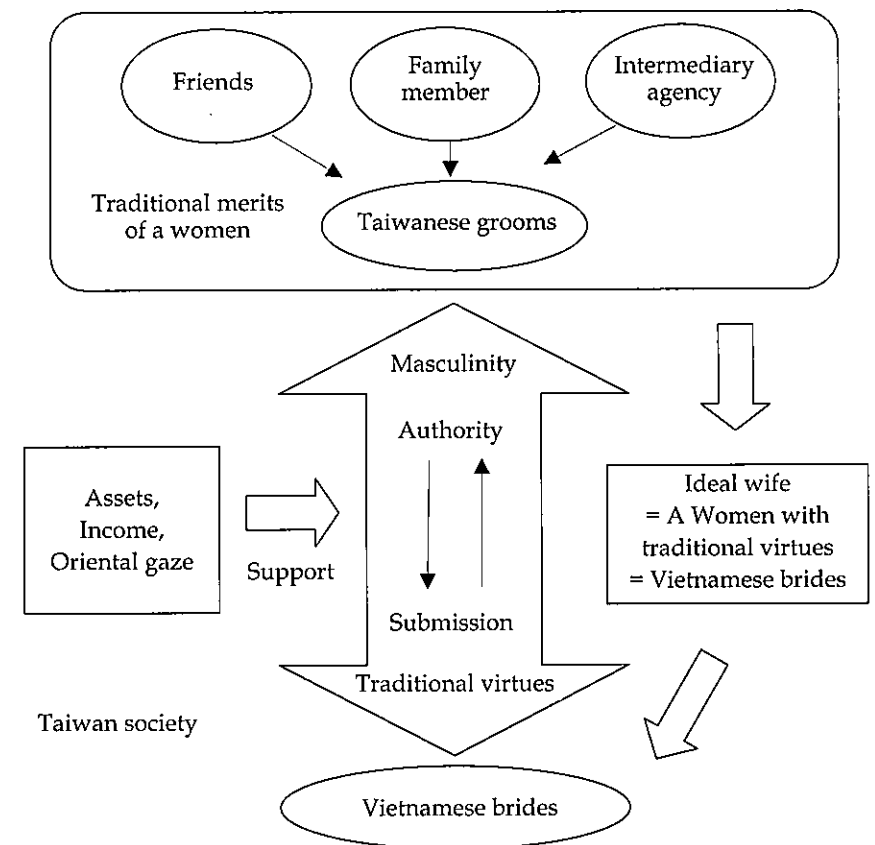


Figure 2.1 The Reproduction of Hegemonic Masculinity in Taiwan

Our argument is illustrated in Figure 2.1, which shows the social reproduction of a masculine culture with the act of going overseas to marry, supported by the family and capitalist institutions. In the following we will firstly describe Taiwan gender development history briefly, and then discuss those important factors in reproducing the socially hegemonic masculinity. The field-work for this study, including in-depth interviews and participant observation, was conducted in ChangHua, in July, August and November, 2004. The age of these thirteen interviewees is between 28 and 55 years old, the average age being 37.7 years old; they have been married for more than four years, and their occupations concentrate on self-employment and workers.

III. Cultural Experience of Social Network and Cross-Border Marriages

An important decision, such as getting married, would not be made by one person in isolation. Before a Taiwanese man goes abroad to Vietnam, his cultural experience in a specific social network has taught him a lot about "marriage". The most important referential groups are his family, relatives and friends, who are influenced by and then reproduce the traditional Asian and Confucian ideas. Besides, the images of Vietnamese women constructed by profit-oriented agencies have a deep influence on men decisions on marriage. So how do those men think about their marriage?

1. Groom' Expectations

In the fieldwork, when asked why they wanted to marry a foreign wife, the most common answer was that they are not rich, not handsome, so nobody loves them. Interviewee Mr. H, remarried at the age of 58, said:

"I'm old, to marry a Taiwanese wife, she would care about if I have house, car, and money. Besides, to run a restaurant is very hard, she would not want to work with me."

In fact, Mr. H owns a house, car, money, and three restaurants, but he did not believe that a Taiwanese wife would like to work with him. If he marries a Vietnamese wife, she has to help him. Compared with "hard-to-deal" Taiwanese women, Vietnamese women are regarded as much better.

"When marrying a Vietnamese wife, you should provide her security, treat her well, give her some money to send to Vietnam, and then she would never leave you. Using only half energy spent on Taiwanese woman would be quite sufficient for Vietnamese wife."

Another interviewee Mr. S owns a factory and has been married for 8 years. He engaged in trade but his business failed when he was 28, and then he decided to marry a foreign wife who should be able to help him take care of his family members. He said,

"Generally speaking, man would suppose that it is much more difficult to provide economic materials for Taiwanese wife than foreign wife. Otherwise, Taiwanese woman does not need man."

Such a perspective is common among my interviewees. Another interviewee, Mr. W, also expresses the same viewpoint. At that time he was thirty years old, his father and grandmother both fell with serious illnesses and needed someone to look after them all day. So he broke up with his girlfriend, moved back to his hometown in the countryside, and married a Vietnamese wife who could look after his father and grandmother.

"Taiwanese wife's demand for living standard is different from foreign wife." I earn only NT\$30,000 monthly (US\$900), and there would not be much money saved after daily expenses. People always compare with each other, and man, too. If he has no house or deposit, he will lack confidence and hesitate to marry a Taiwanese wife."

Mr. D, a friend of Mr. W, described his ex-wife as an independent woman with a bachelor degree but used his money to invest in the stock market and lost everything, so he has had enough with independent women. Remarried two months ago, he delineated how traditional his wife is:

"Every day after I finish my work, my wife will serve me, washing my hands and feet. Taiwanese woman is impossible to do this. No matter which Southeast Asian country they (overseas wives) come from, as long as they are from a poorer country, they would have traditional virtues, do not require too much, can look after husbands very well, unlike Taiwanese women who always demand gender equality and unwilling to take housework."

When further asked to explain "traditional virtue", he said:

"Hard-working, thrifty, and submissive, which Taiwanese women do not own any more. They spent you thousands dollars to buy one clothes and always demand gender equality. They (foreign brides) are the ones who respect their husbands."

These men always referred to the "economic factor," but this kind of economic factor is not "too poor to marry a wife" but "incapable of providing materials for a wife." What do they mean "incapable of providing"? In their concept, it is natural for a man to support his family and what a wife should do is to do all the house work and take care of the family. If a man cannot afford his family, he should look for a woman without high material demand as his wife. In other words, family life should be mainly supported and managed by the husband, while the wife should play a passive role and seek her husband support. Vietnamese wives here are portrayed as dependent and low material demand women. In addition, housework carried out by wives is not considered by these men as an economic contribution, and this in turn can manifest the value of men pecuniary contribution.

Another equally important factor in persuading Taiwanese men to marry overseas brides is the stereotype on Vietnam. They think that Taiwan and Vietnam have a similar cultural background, so Vietnamese females would be traditional, taking their husbands and family as the centre of their lives, just as Taiwanese females did in the 1950s. Thirty-year-old Mr. Z came from a well-to-do family and was a construction subcontractor. When asked why he wanted to marry a Vietnamese wife, he replied at first that it was "because I am not rich, not handsome, and nobody loves me." Later, he said that:

"They are traditional women, family-oriented and submissive, because they live in the agricultural society, which is like the old Taiwan. Career-oriented Taiwanese women who hire guest workers to do housework are not suitable for my family."

Those men believe that husbands should provide the whole family with material goods, while housework, serving parents and taking care of children are wives' duty. It indicates the cultural factor besides the economic cause.

2. Opinions of Family Members and Friends

In Chinese culture, marriage is never an individual choice but a familial great event. The complicated formalities and public ceremonies of marriage aim to announce to kith and kin that their family is going to have a new member. "Men tang hu tui," means marrying into a family well-matched in social and economic status, and this clearly illustrates marriage concerns with the whole family. After marriage, not only do the newly-weds need to adapt to a new life, but also other family members who live together. Thus, the idea of marriage of the family members, especially in cross-border marriage, is an important reference for Taiwanese men.

In the fieldwork, it was common to hear that some parents zealously looked for a matchmaking agency and encouraged their sons to go to Southeast Asia for a bride. Their attitudes play an extremely important role; their insistence and pressure often make the man go abroad for matchmaking unwillingly. Mr. B, unmarried till his forties, had a girlfriend but broke up with her because of the objection of her parents to his economic situation. He was hurt, depressed and did not want to marry.

"In fact, I did not want to get married, but my mother was very anxious. She always worried I would be lonely, live along with no body, have no child if I am getting old. She required me strongly to go to Vietnam for a bride, so I submit to her expectation."

Cheng's research also finds the same situation. She points out those cultural forces have a great influence on Taiwanese men. Her interviewee said that "I did not want to get married, but my parents believe that one's life would not be complete without marriage. Having offspring is a paramount responsibility and aspiration for parents, so what can I do is to comply with them." (2000: 50-51). For these parents, to push their sons to marry is based on the reason of having offspring, and after the decision is made, they would like to have "a good wife, a good daughter-in-law", which could be found in Vietnam, they suppose. Thirty-seven-year-old Mr. A is an oyster wholesaler who got married because he could not resist his parents insistence. He described the situation at that time:

"That at is the lifestyle in countryside. They (parents) tried to know more about cross-border marriages from others, and analyzed,

compared with domestic marriages. Afterwards, they believed that Vietnamese wife is good, and then started to push me to have cross-border arranged marriage enthusiastically."

It is clear that those men are not actively searching for matchmaking information from their social networks or by commercials on the television, internet or newspaper, but are driven by their family members in accordance with the traditional ideology of having offspring as the most important way to extend a family life eternally. So the opinion of the family members on "what kind of wife is good for him" is very important to make a decision to go overseas to marry.

In addition to family members and friends, those people who married Vietnamese women are also the significant others to influence Taiwanese men decisions to marry overseas brides. They show up as experienced ones with authority to explain why one should marry Vietnamese women, and in turn reinforce the stereotype of gender relationship. Mr. Z mentioned that:

"I could not find a wife then, so my neighbor gave me this suggestion to marry Vietnamese woman. Because he also marries a Vietnamese wife and they get along very good, it encourages me to follow him."

Mr. R said,

"My friend also married a Vietnamese wife and their marriage seems quite good. So when I considered about marriage I asked him to introduce one woman for me. My wife and my friend wife knew each other, so they arranged the matchmaking for me."

"Taiwan grooms" are influenced by significant others in their social network and also become a significant other to other people after marriage, like Mr. U. He is a flower grower who works hard with properties but suffers from slight poliomyelitis. He has been married for three years and his wife is described by him as a female with pretty good traditional virtues, who not only deals with daily chores and takes care of the child, but also earns and saves money. Everybody believes that she is a wife hard to come by. An unmarried friend of Mr. U mentioned:

"I am over thirty years old. There is no girl like to marry me, and if they would, they would not want to live here. As you can see, Mr. and Mrs. U are happy. His wife is so nice and they have a pretty daughter. So I decide to marry a Vietnamese wife. I will ask Mrs. U to

help to introduce one."

These stories tell us that marriage is not only the business of the newly married couple. Significant others in the couples' social networks also have influence on them, providing advice or support in their emotional life (Osman 2004: 136). Taiwan men are strongly influenced by their friends and relatives, and if there is any lived evidence to prove that cross-border marriage is superior to domestic marriage, marrying a Vietnamese woman becomes a "rational and reasonable" option.

3. Female Vietnamese Image Produced by Matchmaking Agencies

Around these males are family members and friends with gender stereotypes; they constantly produce an ideal image of women with traditional virtues and normalize the Taiwan males imagination on gender relationships. Under such an image, profit-based matchmaking agencies use a female stereotype as a marketing tool to get buyers.

Most of these Taiwan grooms said that their marriage was arranged by friends or relatives. They think that their marriage is just like a traditional arranged marriage, not a market transaction, and the money they paid was like the traditional red-envelope to the matchmaker. The oyster wholesaler, Mr. W, started to run his Taiwan-Vietnam marriage business after he married a Vietnamese wife. Mr. W is not the only groom who has entered this business. Mr. A, a reluctant groom, said:

"We are arranged by one of my friends. He also married a Vietnam wife and began to introduce others to marry Vietnamese women since then."

Mr. R, who was planning to marry a Vietnamese woman as his most recent "life goal", said that "A friend with Vietnam wife helped me a lot on my marriage." The friends mentioned above, however, were mostly marriage agencies. The Taiwanese men and the marriage agencies scarcely knew one another; they had had very little contact. When we asked the date and marriage arrangements in detail, we found that it was the standard arrangement procedure of agencies. Mr. A said:

"It totally cost me ten thousand U.S. dollar to marry, including three return air-ticket, accommodation and matchmaking red envelope. When I met my wife in the beginning, I could not understand what she said and vice versa, and we needed a translator to accompany us when we went out dating. There were five new arranged couples with

two translators in the park."

Their contradictory statements show that those men were not willing to admit that it was a commercial marriage. The arranged marriage process is like the traditional arranged marriage, but it contains a strong element of commodification in the marriage, which will affect the domestic power relationship in Taiwan.

Agencies produce the obedient representation of Vietnamese women, and claim absurdly that Vietnam society is matriarchal, and therefore Vietnamese females are industrious, docile and could contribute to the family better than Taiwanese females. In addition, they also assert that Taiwan is a developed country, and the Taiwanese females are very snobbish, and in this way they contrast the merits of Vietnamese women with those of their own, like the following advertisement put on a website:

Higher education, better economic power and more information available make Taiwanese women have more options and more picky in choosing husbands. Good looking, income, properties and the number of elder members in a man's family are the considerations of a Taiwanese woman when she wants to marry, and thus it results in the increase of single bachelor. The large economic gap between Taiwan and Vietnam makes Taiwanese man can select a satisfying, young and beautiful bride with little money! Vietnam is a matriarchal society, and it is natural for a woman to be responsible for her family, to help her husband, to bring up the children and to serve her parents-in-law with respect. These virtues regarded by Vietnamese woman as natural! So the Vietnamese bride is highly praised for their loyalty to the family and husband among Taiwanese. (Romance Vietnam Website 2004.12.18)

Vietnam opens up its door only in recent time; people there are simple, honest and kind. Vietnamese woman's characteristics to respect and to defer to their husbands are close to Taiwanese women with traditional virtues in early times. While when one dates a Taiwanese woman, and even after marriage, it costs a man a big fortune, and in addition, feminist consciousness has made Taiwanese male lose leadership in the family. Many men become secondary citizenship in the family, and that often leads to divorce. Taiwanese women are

fastidious, demanding, inept and material-oriented; how many of them can bear hard work? (Matchmaking Lily 2004.12.18)

"My experience told me that the more rural and poorer area the girl is from, the closer of her thought and behavior to the generation of our mothers – the traditional women. But if she comes from a city or a complicated environment, or her parents are not right on, they could be more likely to mine gold from Taiwan,"

said Mr. W, who became a matchmaking agent after marriage.

The description of Vietnamese females presented by agencies expresses the role of women that Taiwan society expects. *"Who you marry must be a traditional good wife, taking care of your family and bearing hardship without complaining"* (Vietnamese Brides 2005.04.15). The statement that Taiwanese women have already lost the traditional virtues means that Vietnamese women are more desirable and worth marrying on the one hand; and it also consolidates the legitimacy of man ideology on gender relations.

From the statements from "Taiwanese grooms", their families, friends, and the agencies, we can discover that an ideal wife whom a Taiwanese man searches for is a woman with "traditional virtues". Higher education or economic independence becomes the drawback of Taiwanese women. *"We cannot help but to marry the foreign brides because the women in Taiwan really lack the traditional virtue,"* said one respondent. When one refers to the virtue of Vietnamese women, it is simultaneously enumerating the "worsening morals" of Taiwanese females.

The research of Chen notes that *"the wives Taiwanese want are neither Taiwanese women nor foreign women, but the traditional women"* (2002: 52). In the interviews, we can often hear Taiwanese men saying that the Taiwanese women with independent consciousness have lost the "traditional virtue: deference." Mr. Z strongly emphasized the merits of traditional women in his interview:

"Current Taiwanese women are too independent, and their concepts are quite different from those in the old days. Women in agricultural era had traditional women merits, but women nowadays do not have."

It is somewhat weird to ask current Taiwanese women to maintain "traditional virtues", but when cross-border marriage becomes one of the

ways to find a spouse, this kind of "traditional virtue" is again publicly discussed and highly appraised by some people, using it to prove the "drawbacks" of Taiwanese women. Marriage to Vietnamese brides reproduces the hegemonic gender culture; Mr. D, who is satisfied with his traditional wife, said:

"The girls with good knowledge and high education are hard to deal with.... They (the foreign brides) are relatively less developed. In spite of this backwardness, they keep the traditional virtues. It is really hard to find a woman with traditional virtues in Taiwan now. Taiwanese woman does not want to depend on men, they want to earn money and self reliance. They are afraid of losing freedom if depending on man."

The values that modern society treasures, like higher education, independence, and gender equality, become negative characteristics in the eyes of these men, their relatives and friends. Tradition and modernity are juxtaposed to compare and to rank, and the evaluating criterion is 'traditional virtue.' But the goal of this juxtaposition is neither to show Vietnamese woman as superior to Taiwanese, nor to indicate the superiority of traditional women over modern ones, but to express the relative superior position of men in Taiwan gender culture. The modernity of Taiwanese women becomes the dangerous factor that men find hard to handle. From a hegemonic masculinity perspective, "girls with good knowledge and high education are hard to deal with, and such women would make it difficult for men to manifest their masculinity. Hence, they should be excluded as possible marriage targets.

IV. The Power Relationship within the Family and Masculinity

After marriage, a Taiwanese man and his family members would expect the arrival of "an ideal wife with traditional virtues" For Vietnamese women, because of the language barrier, cultural differences, and restrictions from their husbands and other family members; they can hardly expand their social relationships or gain their own resources from a social network. In addition, they cannot find a job in the labor market easily and normally lack economic capital. Combining these factors of disadvantage, the authority-submission relationship between the couple is firmly established. Taiwanese men stand in a superior position

supported by their social and economic capital and the symbolic capital originating from the difference in economic development between Taiwan and Vietnam; this legitimizes Taiwanese grooms' masculinity, and reproduces the stereotype of Vietnamese and the image of the other.

1. Expressions of Taiwanese Man Masculinity

When Vietnamese women come to Taiwan, they cannot set up social relationships of their own immediately because of the language barrier and cultural differences. Furthermore, husbands and family members often restrict their movement; they prevent them from making friends and contacting the outside world for fear that they will become "running away brides" or will become "being corrupted by bad persons." Under these circumstances, most of them have to depend on their husbands.

Ms. W is easy to talk with, but her behavior after the language learning class is quite different. At home, she does not talk too much, and whenever the interviewer visited her, she was always washing clothes or cleaning up the house, or just sitting in front of the door with her daughter and doing nothing. When Mr. W was asked whether he was willing to let his wife go out to work, he replied "it is up to her, as long as she is not corrupted." However, Ms. W said in private that "I do want to go out to work as well, but they would not let me go. My father-in-law is keen on face-saving, and is afraid of being known by other people that I am a Vietnamese. So I have to stay at home to please them."

Giving up going out to work shows her obedience, but it is also a sign of helplessness. She knows the expectations of her conjugal family well, and as a daughter-in-law, she makes a great effort to conform to the image of an ideal wife and mother. Another interviewee, Mr. U, a flower grower whose marriage is greatly admired by his friends, said,

"Do not treat them (the foreign brides) as foreigners. They are the same as us. If they do not understand, we can teach them, and vice versa."

However, when he described his generosity to his wife, he said,

"I had told her at the time of marriage that if she could deliver a child for me, I would build a brick house for her natal family."

To build a new house for the wife's natal family, as a kind of exchange for the delivery of a child, would never apply to Taiwanese women. Most interviewed men expressed their understanding of their

wives' situations, and tried to express their consideration, but this kind of consideration is from the hegemonic masculinity cultural thinking that man should take care of the family, be a material provider, while woman should carry out housework, deliver and take care of children, serve her parents-in-law, and most importantly, be obedient to her husband.

Analyzing the gender relations in Taiwan soap opera, Lin concluded that he husband would feel bad if his wife is powerful (1996). The beloved female role in TV programs or movies always shows such characteristics: fitting the female social norms well (e.g., be a good wife and mother), smart, competent, and promoting family happiness with mother or wife proper roles, under the conditions that they do not challenge existing social norms on gender relations (1996: 192). It is like the relationship between Mrs and Mr U:

"Because my wife wants to earn some money, I introduce her to work in my uncle's farm with the pay of NT\$ 800 a day. Now, she can use her money to buy baby milk and diapers, and sometimes remit money back to Vietnam. I also give her some pocket money, and help her to remit money. She manages her work and housework very well, and she is highly praised by others in our community."

Mrs U is an exemplar of the beloved female role in Lin research and fits well with the image of a capable wife and mother. The money she earns is not only sent to her natal family, but also used to pay the living costs for the children. Coping with all the housework, earning money to remit to her natal family and to buy goods for her conjugal family, she is regarded as a model wife with traditional virtues by kith and kin who even asked Mr U to introduce Vietnamese women for them. However, what these friends praise is not Mrs U, but the success of Mr U in having such an ideal wife, and their praise is a kind of recognition of Mr U's success in exercising his hegemonic masculinity.

Paradoxically, on one hand these men often regard themselves as protectors of women, but on the other hand they are anxious about run-away wives, and therefore often try to restrict their wives from doing something. When Mr U was asked whether he agreed to let his wife go to language class, he, a man boasting that he loved his wife very much, said:

"I would not let her attend the class because it is not good for so many foreign brides being together. Someone might know how to buy air ticket, and these women may teach others how to buy tickets and leave

Taiwan. If my wife needs anything, I can help her. Besides, she has to work, and no time to go to the class."

The husbands do not like their wives' knowing how to remit money and how to buy airline tickets, so that their wives have to rely on them lest they might run away. They also interfere in their wives social networks in the name of "protecting" them. Mr B described how he educated his wife:

"When her friends came to visit her, I sometimes observe their interactions secretly. Afterwards I might ask my wife how she feels about something happened today, and then I would tell her what I feel. Life here is different from that in Vietnam. Taiwan is a world of sensual pleasures, and easy to corrupt."

To prevent their wives from running away or being corrupted, some husbands even restrict Vietnamese women from going out alone for shopping. Mr M said:

"I will buy anything needed myself, or take her with me to shop. I am not a cold hearted man, not let her make friends, or go out for shopping, but I have to filter out her friends first, and those corruptive friends are strictly prohibited to know."

Many of these husbands indicate that Taiwan is full of danger and vices, so they have to protect their wives from the enticement. Restricting their wives in the name of protection, these men display, behind the "protection" the anxiety that their wives will be run-away wives or that they themselves will be cuckolds. They fear that their wives would compare notes with each other, exchange information, and learn how to escape; hence they have to refuse their wives free contact with other people, keep them dependent, and dominate them in the name of protection (Shen and Wang 2003). This anxiety is also heard in the fieldwork research; Mr H, who remarried at the age of 55, said:

"If you marry Chinese woman, they can read and speak well, and they do not have to rely on you in Taiwan, and can go anywhere she wants, so the possibility of running away would be higher than Vietnamese. Since the cross-border marriage has no love foundation in the beginning, one has to make the wife have no other choice but rely on you, and then she will not be able to run away."

In the name of guardianship to control their wives, there is reflected the paradox of this hegemonic masculinity. These men are not able to express or confirm their hegemonic masculinity in Taiwan society, and they can only assert it through their control of their wives and the submission of their wives to their authority. Marrying a Vietnamese woman reproduces this gender culture.

2. *Reinforcing the Authority-Submission Relationship between Husband and Wife*

Though Taiwanese men marrying Vietnamese women belong to the lower social economic strata, their economic power vis-à-vis Vietnamese is still relatively better, and through cross-border marriages they can reaffirm their dominance over females in this respect. In the research of Zhong, some male interviewees mentioned that they did feel themselves as secular redeemers when these Vietnamese women eagerly expected to be picked up as wives during the arranged marriage process, and therefore they could escape from poverty (2003: 117). Those lower socio-economic status males now can regain the feeling of superiority in Vietnam just because of their economic power, as the interviewee R, who is a clerk, said, "no matter how poor it is in Taiwan, it is still much better than in Vietnam."

Kung (2004) or Wang study (2004) of Taiwanese businesspeople in Vietnam finds that they often construct Vietnamese society as matriarchal, and women are portrayed as hard working, while men are always lazy fooling around the whole day. This discourse is also often found in cross-border marriages; interviewee Mr U said that most Vietnamese guys are lazy for work and have no ambition for career, and their economic capability is poor, so that if Vietnamese women marry these men, it would lead to an unfortunate life. Mr U, who has slight infantile paralysis, proudly talked about his relationship with his parents-in-law,

"I sent my father-in-law \$US1000 each year, and that is more than their ten years agricultural income! They don't have the habit of saving, and spend whatever they have even they are poor. They just don't know what savings means. They never think of urgent need of money, e.g., if they are ill someday."

The degree of financial contribution to a family would affect one's status in the family. The more the financial contribution, the more the authority a female could have in the family, and the power relation with

the husband is more equal. Correspondingly, the husband superior position would be guaranteed if his wife earns less or has no job (Basow 1992). Men in Taiwan enjoy higher status in traditional gender and marriage relations, which are the result of patriarchal ideology and the economic dependency of women who stay at home to take care of housework and children.

If Vietnamese women can participate in Taiwan's labor market, it will change the power relations in the family. She would be able to build up social networks with people outside the family. Domestically she would have some control of the family financial resources, and gain some rights to speak out. However, those Vietnamese interviewed admitted that there is a big power gap between themselves and their husbands due to the lack of an economic contribution to the family. They are expected to do housework or take care of babies, or work as unpaid family members, e.g., assisting in opening oyster shells. Even if they have a job, they can contribute very little to the conjugal family after the remittance of money to their natal family, for their jobs are normally poorly paid, providing only about 60% of the income of a lowly paid Taiwanese woman. In Taiwan hegemonic masculine culture, if the wife is the main material provider, the husband is often regarded as useless, with problems. Therefore, a Taiwanese man marrying a Vietnamese woman would normally follow the social norm to be the main bread winner, and not to want his wife to go out to work. Even if the wife is allowed to go out to work, her job should not negatively affect "family life", and it is better to take a part-time job. Her income is her own pocket money, and can be used for her natal family, but it in turn contributes much less to the new family, and would not change the husband-wife power relationship.

In summary, an image of "female virtues" is a part of the hegemonic masculine culture, which brings out the motivation to marry a Vietnamese woman. After marriage, different social forces operate in different ways to locate the husband-wife relationship thus confirming this hegemonic ideology. In our analysis, uneven economic development in the world system, lack of social connections and economic capital make a Vietnamese wife dependent on her husband, and it consolidates the existing hegemonic masculine culture, and reproduces the authority-submission relationship in the family. When a Vietnamese wife, under social pressures, conforms to what is expected of a traditional woman, the original image of a traditional Vietnamese woman becomes a

reality and it confirms the rightness of the patriarchal ideology among the people in this social network.

V. Concluding Remarks

There is general argument that, for some men, their low socio-economic status leads to difficulties in getting married in Taiwan. Little attention has been given to the cultural factor. The so-called disadvantaged socio-economic status is not in comparison with other men, but with Taiwanese women who are getting better education and are becoming more financially independent from men. Though Taiwan society has changed substantially, the traditional gender ideology still acts upon gender relationships. In the eyes of those with a patriarchal ideology, Taiwanese females have lost their traditional virtues, and thus are not marriageable. Cross-border marriages realize the ideology of finding a traditional woman with virtues, and reproduce the hegemonic masculinity culture in Taiwan.

To those Taiwanese grooms, it is natural that a man should be the main economic material provider for the family. From their viewpoint, Vietnamese women should be dependent, deferential and with low material desires, thus manifesting the value of his economic contribution. The family members and friends in the same cultural social context have the same image of an ideal wife, and exert great influence on the decision of marriage for other Taiwanese men in the network. Moreover, Vietnamese women are represented by matchmaking agencies as being like traditional Taiwanese women of the 1950s in order to attract potential grooms, and this fits well with the expectations of Taiwanese men and their parents. Furthermore, the impression of third world countries, and the higher income and living standards in Taiwan put Taiwanese men in a position to imagine an inferior other, or inferior female Vietnamese who is dependent and submissive.

In short, to make a cross-border marriage is not only a way for getting married, but also a way for some Taiwanese men to strengthen their masculinity. The reproduction of the hegemonic masculinity in a society is implemented in different ways, and when social change makes it impossible to continue the traditional gender relationship in Taiwan, the rapid globalization and human movement in the last two decades provides a new channel to consolidate and to realize the ideology.

Though hegemonic masculinity is constantly challenged by other discourses, it has its own way of continuing, and in East Asia, including Japan, Korea and Singapore with strong Confucian cultural backgrounds, this type of masculinity might still dominate in the coming decade if these "traditional men" can find, with their economic power, someone from another Confucian influenced area.

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