

Attitude of the Local People to Foreign Brides

A Research Project by the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM)

Supported by the Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst e.V. (EED)
February 2007

Introduction

Cross-border marriage, excluding feudal norms and practices, is usually pictured as having undergone the same normal process wherein a man meets a woman or vice-versa, they fall in love and decide to get married. But in this day and age of advance technology and globalization, and as the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen, the nature and character of cross border marriages changed -- it is used as the answer and means for survival. As such, it has become a relevant social issue today. Along with the phenomenon of massive out-migration of people from poor countries to more affluent ones in order to get jobs which cannot be found in the home country, more and more women from poor and poorer countries fall in the web of cross-border marriage that is processed by the corporate world, particularly those involved in the marriage business.

In the 80s, the number of women from poor countries like the Philippines and Indonesia marrying men from First World and developing countries rose. These women came to be known as “mail-order brides” – or brides who were “ordered” and paid for by foreign men looking for wives overseas. Their marriages to foreign men from more advanced countries were facilitated by marriage bureaus or matchmaking agencies serving as conduits in the marriage business. Just like food being ordered from a restaurant menu or an item from a product list, these brides were “ordered” from a list of photos and videos of women gathered by marriage bureaus who, in turn, ask for fees, for the matchmaking services they render. As years went by, the process and routes became more sophisticated and more exploitative for these women who are now colloquially called “foreign brides”. Since then, the term “foreign brides” implies a derogatory connotation by virtue of its being “foreign” and other aspersions casted on them.

Just as foreign workers (migrants and immigrants) who are often seen by local workers as “competitors to local jobs available”, foreign brides have their share of the stigma. Negative attitudes are reflected as they are seen as “pariah”, “mere servants to service all the families’ needs”, “a servant who can give birth and raise child(ren) for them (husbands)”, “wives (who were) bought” (underscoring supplied). Others refer to them as “dependents” or “passive participants” to migration.

These are some of the stinging remarks accorded the foreign brides by the local or host peoples. More stinging and traumatic is the part when separation or divorce comes in and they find out that they have “no rights” whatsoever over their children. Worse, if they also lose their “right to stay”, “right of abode” or “citizenship” and the “right to work”, when the divorce or separation is finalized.

Have the attitudes of local peoples changed over the years? If so, what are these changes? Are there positive images of local peoples regarding foreign brides? If so, what are these? Do local peoples see their contributions? Do they see that foreign brides should have equal rights as they do? How are these rights manifested and expressed in legal and practical terms?

These are some of the points that this research want to look into. Specifically, the research will attempt to look on how local nationals from different countries in Asia – namely Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and Taiwan -- see the negative and positive effects of having immigrant brides in their society. Whether they can identify the contributions of immigrant brides in their society and how these reflect on the overall development of the society where they are.

It will also try to look on how locals (both men and women) interact with immigrant brides and whether they see them as one of the positive forces that can shape their society in general as well as in shaping future generations as mothers and as women. It is also good to look on how local women perceive the existence of foreign mothers and how they view foreign brides as immigrants and as part of the local women's movement.

It is hoped that the study will provide insights on how locals see immigrant and foreign brides as well as the social relations that exist between them. The results of this research shall provide the seed for a forward plan, framework and approach that will serve as a guide for advocates in their quest for better treatment and a just environment for the marginalized such as the foreign brides.

Methodology:

The study entailed two methods of gathering data: one, from conducting interviews among local peoples, and two, from secondary literature or written studies and materials. A guide questionnaire is used for the interviews.

Four countries in Asia were identified, namely: Hongkong, Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Fifteen (15) local interviewees were targeted from different social standing: (3 from women's organizations, 2 housewives and 2 single women, 3- trade union leaders/organizers, 2-business, 3-social workers).

The interview schedule (questionnaire) is composed of three parts: 1) short demographic profile of interviewees; 2) their attitudes on immigrant issues such as contributions of foreign brides to local economy; and 3) their attitudes regarding integration of foreign brides to society.

Limitations of the study:

One of the limitations of the study is language. Many locals, when approached, refuse to be interviewed because they do not and cannot understand nor speak English. This was remedied, however, by getting interviewers who can speak the language at the same time know the nuances of the issue being studied.

The time factor and openness to be interviewed on the subject matter also posed some limitations. Some target interviewees would not easily have the time to sit down and discuss. Interviews had to be scheduled or re-scheduled. That is why, it took some time to finish or almost finish the interviews. Hence, local interviewees who were randomly selected, are mostly those who have time, are willing to be interviewed and have some things to say on the issue at hand.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

1. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Local Interviewees (N=56)

	HK	KOREA	JAPAN	TAIWAN	TOTAL (%)
AGE					
21-35	5	6	6	6	23
36-45	6	5	2	5	18
46-55	2	1	5	3	11
56-65	0	0	2	1	3
N.A.	1	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	14	12	15	15	56
GENDER					
Male	4	2	5	5	16
Female	10	10	10	10	40
TOTAL	14	12	15	15	56
CIVIL STATUS					
Single	5	5	5	6	21
Married	8	7	9	9	33
Divorced	0	0	1	0	1
N.A.	1	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	14	12	15	15	56
OCCUPATION					
Businessman	3	2	2	2	9
Trade union member	0	1	3	4	8
NGO worker	7	3	3	0	13
Social service	1	4	2	2	9
Housewife	1	2	3	2	8
Health service	2	0	0	0	2
Women	0	0	1	4	5
Student	0	0	1	1	2
TOTAL	14	12	15	15	56

As mentioned earlier, the study interviewed 56 locals from Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Based on data gathered (please refer to Table 1), 41% of local respondents belong to the younger age group – ages 21-35, while about 32% come from middle-aged group 36-45 and 20% belong to the age bracket 46-55. Seventy percent (71.5%) are women, while 28.5% are men. Majority of those interviewed or 59% are married while 37.5% are single.

Occupations of respondents are varied with those working in NGOs as the most numerous (23%) while businessmen come in second (16%). Housewives and social service workers comprise about 14% and 16% respectively. Interviewees who are health service workers and student comprise a much smaller percentage -- with 4% each. Trade union members/organizers comprise 14%. About 9% are members or staff of women's organizations.

2. ATTITUDE OF LOCAL RESPONDENTS ON IM/MIGRANT ISSUES:

As can be gleaned from the table below, most of the respondents have overwhelmingly positive attitudes on foreign brides. Specifically, the results are as follows:

- About 89% consider that foreign brides contribute to the local economy, while only about 7% think otherwise. The rest did not reply.
- About 96% of the respondents have the view that migrants and/or immigrants should have the same rights as locals. Except for two interviewees who answered partly but in the main, agreed to the question posed. Only 4% replied negatively.
- About 93% also agree that migrants and immigrants, including foreign brides, should be considered part of local society. Majority of them reveal, however, certain requirements in order to maintain and sustain: a) so long as they stay with the husband and children, and, b) learn the language. On the other hand, 7% did not think so.
- Close to 87.5% of the interviewees think that migrants and immigrants should be part of local organizations. Only 5.3% have a negative view on the matter. About 7.2% had no reply.

Table 2: Results of Interviews on the Attitude of Locals on Im/migrant Issues

	A. Do foreign brides contribute to local economy?		B. Should immigrants have the same rights as locals?		C. Should immigrants be part of local society?		D. Should immigrants be part of local orgs?	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
HK	12	1	14	0	13	1	14	0
Korea	11	0	11	1	12	0	12	0
Japan	15	0	15 (2, partly)	0	15	0	11	0
Taiwan	12	3	14	1	12	3	12	3
Total	50	4	54 (2 partly)	2	52	4	49	3
N.A.	2		0		0		4	

Positive views on women immigrants and foreign brides vary. Many respondents put value on the contributions of foreign brides to the family and host society in general – a pool of human resource in order to solve the “marital need” of their “single population” and thereby raise new generations of children. One factor they recognize is the decreasing and ageing population as more and more local women prefer to marry late or stay single. Here are some of their views:

- ... they give family life to middle-aged men who have low level of education (*housewife, HK*)
- the existence of foreign brides can solve the marital need of single population in local society. The brides can also human resource to the society. (*social service worker, HK*)
- In current Korean society, these women's contribution to mitigating problems of low birth rate and ageing population is critical. (*social worker, Korea*)
- They help raise new generations of Japanese children. (*housewife, Japan*)

- Japan needs women from other countries because younger Japanese women seem more interested in earning money than raising a family. We need to nurture young Japanese children to become responsible citizens. Many foreign brides are now guardians of Japanese children. *(student, Japan)*
- The population of Korea is decreasing, and many people cannot find someone to marry. It will prevent Korea from losing its population. *(businessman, Korea)*
- Many males in Taiwan can't find their mate easily, some are due to the economic, health or age factors, and some can't find a stepmother who is willing to take care of his child. They can only go abroad to find their mate. So whether (they) bring up the birth rate in Taiwan, or take the most part of these domestic works, they do lots of contribution to Taiwan. *(businessman[marrriage bureau], Taiwan)*
- Women in Taiwan are more independent now, most of us may get married late or even stay single. Foreign brides help Taiwan to make a balance of marriage proportion. Plus foreign brides are not so rejective to have babies, which contributes a lot to the newborn-declining problem in Taiwan. *(social worker, Taiwan)*

Others view foreign brides' contribution in breaking the mono-culture or the "myth" of ethnic homogeneity. Says one respondent from a women's NGO in Korea:

"There has been a "myth" of ethnic homogeneity in Korean society, which limits many people's thoughts. The increase of international marriage challenges the myth, and will generate positive influences if dealt with well."

Majority of the respondents view that foreign brides should be treated equally as locals. One respondent even expressed the "potential crisis" to the host society if women immigrants are not given equal treatment:

"I think immigrants in Taiwan should be treated equal by all means.... If immigrants can not take care of their children properly, there would be a potential crisis for Taiwan society." -- *social worker, Taiwan*

3. ATTITUDE OF LOCAL RESPONDENTS ON INTERACTION WITH FOREIGN BRIDES:

Just like the previous results, local respondents demonstrated a consistent overwhelming positive attitude on all questions asked pertaining to interaction with foreign brides.

- More than 93% feel comfortable with the presence of immigrant women in the community, organization or at work.
- About 82% (46 out of 56) view that immigrant women married to locals must be integrated to society while 12.5% (7 out of 56) think negatively about it. All those who replied positively, however, think that the local language should be learned by the foreign bride since language is the key to understanding between husband and wife, between the foreign bride and her local in-laws and children.
- More than 95% also agree that immigrant women married to locals must maintain their own cultures and merge it with the local.

- Almost all or 98% of the respondents think that women immigrants need to be treated equally with local workers as well as in the business field.

Table 3. Results of Interviews on the Attitude of Locals on Interaction with Foreign Brides:

	A. Comfortable w/ Immig. Women in community, org, or work?		B. Immigrant women married to locals must be integrated to the society?		C. Immigrant women married to locals must maintain their own cultures and merge it with the local cultures?		D. women immigrants need to be treated equal with local workers as well as in the business field?	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
HK	12	1	13	0	14	0	13	0
Korea	11	1	6	6	11	1	12	0
Japan	15	0	14	0	15	0	15	0
Taiwan	14	1	13	1	13	1	15	0
Total	52	3	46	7	53	2	55	0
N.A.	1		3		1		1	

Some of the positive responses given are as follows:

- I feel comfortable living with them. They're polite. *(NGO worker, HK)*
- I have no problems about foreign brides. They are also fun to work with. *(housewife, HK)*
- Being immigrant doesn't mean making you a less human being that is why you must have the rights like the locals *(businessman, HK)*
- I don't look at them as foreign brides or immigrants but as human beings. I look at them as friends and how they contribute to the local society because they bring some foreign experiences on issues that help the society. *(NGO worker, HK)*
- Foreign Brides fill in a lot of low-salary jobs that local nationals are unwilling to do, which help to balance our economic structure. *(single woman, Taiwan)*

But not everyone from the respondents believe wholly in integrating immigrant women married to locals into the society of host country. Says one local interviewee:

"I don't think the foreign brides would care about their culture too much because they come here for making money." -- *trade union organizer, Taiwan*

One respondent, while basically agreeing to giving equal rights and equal treatment to foreign brides, felt a bit ambiguous on the matter:

"we should be more scrupulosity (sic) because it is about to vote."
--businesswoman, Taiwan

SOME ISSUES AND CONCERNS REGARDING ATTITUDES OF LOCAL PEOPLES ON FOREIGN BRIDES AND WOMEN IMMIGRANTS:

The results of interviews conducted on the local respondents show to a large extent positive attitudes on immigrant women and foreign brides. Their individual insights reveal “*what should be*” or “*what must be*” the attitude towards the subject matter. Their individual insights reflect on their beliefs about equal rights, protection and treatment of immigrant women and foreign brides as human beings. The insights and attitudes they shared during the interviews show their consciousness on the matter.

But this does not mean that the social realities that exist currently are the same. The positive attitude or views that they shared on foreign brides or women immigrants are not generally shared by most of the local peoples. (*underscoring supplied*). From the respondents’ own reflection and analysis, there exists in their respective societies a generally negative attitude on foreign workers, immigrant women and foreign brides. And these negative attitudes are manifested in racist and discriminatory thinking and practices; feudal views on women (i.e. low status, reproduction, etc.), unfair labor practices, and discriminatory policies and laws by the government.

1. Existence of racial discrimination

Many of the respondents have expressed their grave concern about the existence of racial discrimination, and other forms of discriminatory acts and practices. Following are some of the views gathered:

- For the other nationalities, the concern is racial discrimination. Usually, they are discriminated by HK people because of their culture, their language and their job. So it’s a bad situation for them and the government does nothing to improve this. Since they are coming from other countries then their status is the same. They have to wait seven years before they become permanent residents. During this period they have to pay tax when they earn enough money. After completing 7 years then they can avail of the social system in HK. Because of language barriers, they are discriminated for example they go to the hospital or use public facilities. (*Church/NGO worker, HK*)
- In our building the landlord does not allow South Asians to rent the building. The government should have a discrimination policy to help the foreign bride or family to stop discrimination. (*NGO worker, HK*)
- Many locals do not accept foreigners like the South Asians because majority of Chinese people grew up in a mono-culture. The mindset of majority of locals if they have dark skin they don’t want to have relationship with discrimination really does exist here. (*NGO worker, HK*)
- They must share the same rights and benefits as local workers but sadly this is not always the case. (*female nurse, HK*)
- They are already part of the local society as they are living here . But due to prejudice and discrimination, they seem not visible most of the time. (*NGO worker, HK*)
- Discrimination is very common among foreign brides like mainland Chinese brides. We think that because they are poor. They are also competitors with the local grassroots women. (*NGO worker, HK*)
- The legislation on racial discrimination elimination has to be enacted. This has been postponed partly because of the employers and business. (*NGO worker, HK*)
- I think there should be a little bit of discrimination to some extent before they get citizenship, because they are not Korean yet. (*social worker, SKorea*)

- my colleague, a foreign bride from Malaysia.... She is an accountant in our organization, every time she accompanied with her husband went to his homeland (a village in Tainan County), she has to bear the whispering from the neighborhood. (*women's organization, Taiwan*)
- ... the misunderstanding between the new immigrants and local people indeed exist, so they are discriminated by the locals. (*social worker, Taiwan*)
- The so called "understanding their cultures" is nothing more than a slogan. The general attitude towards foreign brides in the society is not very friendly. (*social worker, Taiwan*)

2. Other "Unfriendly" Attitudes and Issues:

Interviewees also shared the existence of other "unfriendly" views and issues about immigrant women or foreign brides. Such views are attributed to: a) the low status of women; b) the prevailing view that foreign workers, including immigrant women and brides are competitors to local jobs; c) unfair labor practices existing; and d) discriminatory government policies. Some of these views, the interviewees say, come from ordinary local people, and even the husbands themselves.

a. Low Status of Women

- Asian women are always looked down on by Japanese. (*NGO worker, Japan*)
- A key point here is those who have to find brides abroad, all are based from low-income, low-achievements male in Taiwan, but they often think and treat their wives were being bought, rather a servant who can give birth and raise child for them, it is awful. (*housewife, Taiwan*)
- Even though they're married to local people but the husband doesn't encourage them to integrate and expect them to stay at home and take care of the children then they cannot contribute to the society. (*NGO worker, HK*)
- they (foreign brides) don't really help ... but meet the old men's need or those who have problem of their body function. There are many retired soldiers that never married and want to marry young woman, and this is the role that foreign bride is. (*trade union organizer, Taiwan*)

b. Labor competitor of local workers

- About the foreign brides, ... some of them come for money(job), and others are for marriages which for giving birth.... there are some good immigrants and bad immigrants, if they keep staying here in Taiwan and not to make trouble, at least giving birth and help some household, that would be their contribution. **But as foreign workers, ... they would exclude the working right of the local workers.** – underscoring supplied -- (*businesswoman, Taiwan*)

c. Unfair labor practices

- I heard from many of them saying unequal payment is very usual in the factories. Immigrant women can only receive salary daily, not monthly, and without any labor insurances. This is very unfair to immigrant women who have less education attainment. Every work environment has its own risks, we should ensure their rights. What is even worse is although the problem does exist, they don't have enough power to overcome it by themselves. Our government is giving more and

more welfare services to them. However, in my opinion, as long as they can not be fully guaranteed on life rights, any welfare is in vain. (*social worker, Taiwan*)

- There are more underprivileged like the Thai cleaning workers. Thai women when they marry HK men they usually end up as cleaning workers and they are always bullied by their foreman because they cannot read Chinese and they are forced to sign documents that are new to them. Even if they can speak Cantonese sometimes they cannot find work that is sufficient for their living and in many cases they have two jobs like during the day they have cleaning job and at night they go to another building to collect the garbage. So many of them have very low pay. In terms of salary, there is very little difference in their wages but in the treatment, the foreman sometimes send them to very far place or give them very difficult positions or ask them to shift work and they cannot complain. (*NGO worker, HK*)

d. Discriminatory government policies

- Now the Chinese spouses have to wait for 2 years to apply the working Visa, or they don't need to apply after stay there until 6 years. I think it's quite unfair, these regulations only make more illegal workers in Taiwan. Ironically, they are living in the family that with low socio-economic status (*housewife, Taiwan*)
- The immigrant policies in Taiwan now treat foreign brides and mainland brides differently. It takes foreign brides 3 years to get legal citizenship which is reasonable in my point of view. However, it takes mainland brides 8 years to acquire legal identity. I think it may consider to be too long. In spite of different living habits, they have the same lineage and even speak the same language with us. Even with the consideration of political problem, I personally think 3 years of identity restriction is quite reasonable. (*social worker, Taiwan*)

3. The Language Factor:

Many of the respondents, while taking the positive view on women immigrant's contributions, integration to local society and equal rights and treatment, see language as an important factor in alleviating the situation:

- By working hard at learning the Japanese language. This is very important for accepting them by most Japanese. (*shop owner, Japan*)
- Language is important for them to integrate in the society (*NGO worker, HK*)
- if she wants to be considered as a part of the family, she should learn to speak Cantonese first. (*housewife, HK*)
- To be integrated, education is important. They have to learn Chinese because if they do not know the language they have difficulty to find a better job and income. This will improve their living standard. (*NGO worker, HK*)
- If they want to communicate with us, of course they have to learn Chinese. Especially because in most local families, it's very difficult for the elderly to learn their language. (*social worker, Taiwan*)

4. Other Insights:

Apart from the abovementioned concerns, some local respondents expressed clear positions on the foreign brides and related issues such as commodification, using them as development tools, and relating it to the issue of independence. These are as follows:

- ... foreign brides shouldn't be used as tools to boost local economy or development. (*NGO worker, HK*)
- The foreign brides should not be treated as products. (*NGO worker, Japan*)
- Foreign brides has to give the bigger effort. They can maintain their own culture, but they should not also reject learning the Japanese way of life. (*businessman, Japan*)
- I am so worry about that if there are too many brides who are from Mainland China, and it would be impossible for Taiwan to be independent. (*trade union organizer, Taiwan*)

CONTEXTUALIZING THE FOREIGN BRIDES ISSUE AND THE ATTITUDES OF LOCAL PEOPLES

In order to understand the issue of foreign brides and the attitude of local peoples on them, it is necessary to take a look at why the issue evolved and the factors that shaped these attitudes.

A. Root Cause of Migration of Foreign Brides

The issue of foreign brides is essentially a part of the phenomenon of massive migration of peoples from so-called Third World countries. The root cause of this massive migration is their countries' underdeveloped and backward economies, resulting in poverty, unemployment and underemployment and other economic and social problems. Women and men from lower strata of society have been forced to leave their countries and families in order to find work abroad in order to survive. On the other hand, governments of such backward and underdeveloped countries developed and intensified the export of labor as a national policy in order to gain revenues from it, thereby keep the sagging economy afloat, and in order to adhere to the much-ballyhooed "globalization strategy for development."

Foreign brides usually come from poor class background. In many cases, they come from impoverished rural areas. Their problem is how to overcome poverty. Their objective is to help their families survive and somehow provide their basic needs. They also want to have a better future for their children. This internal factor is the principal problem why "foreign brides" migrate.

On the other hand, foreign brides were lured to bite the bait of becoming a foreign bride in order to solve this problem of poverty. Inside their own home country, the forces who lure them and run the industry are: the owners of marriage bureaus or matchmaking agencies, and their agents, the state and allied agencies of the state involved in the process. These forces have conduits or collaborations with businesses and governments in foreign countries or countries hosting foreign brides.

B. Factors Affecting Foreign Brides in Host Countries

Now that we have established the root cause of migration of foreign brides, *it is important to look into the factors that perpetuate their rise in numbers, and contextualize how the attitudes, views and preferences of local peoples were shaped.* These factors are: 1) the economic crisis that happens in host countries; 2) the role of matchmaking agencies and marriage bureaus; and 3) the role of the state.

1. Crisis in host countries have socio-economic-political and cultural effects on the host people.

Just as neoliberal globalization has rendered poor countries of the Third World to succumb to its dictates, it has also spawned economic crisis in more advanced or affluent countries where foreign brides dream of going to. The crisis in countries like Japan, and the so-called “tiger economies” of Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong have resulted in thousands of peasants and workers leaving the countryside. Moreover, in the case of Hong Kong, young professionals are looking for opportunities in mainland China.

Prof. Hsiao-Chuan Hsia, in her paper “Proactive Approaches to Preventing Violence Against Immigrant Women in Taiwan” described this crisis:

“...The poverty created by globalization was not as serious in Taiwan as in Southeast Asian countries, but agriculture in Taiwan was clearly hollowed out by the twin-forces of continued urbanization and industrialization, as well as international pressure on agriculture. Low-skilled workers have also been affected by the increasing threats of liberalization. These low-skilled agricultural and industrial laborers found survival more and more difficult and in an extremely disadvantaged position in Taiwan’s domestic marriage market.” (2005:79)

Linking this crisis to its effect on the local people, Prof. Hsia continued to state:

“In recent years, paralleled with the impending threat of the GATT and WTO to the agricultural economy and the exodus of labor-intensive industry, thousands of Taiwanese peasants and working-class men have been leaving the countryside in search of brides (2005:77) ...

Hence, in Taiwan, Prof. Hsia noted a change in the marriage market:

“... Starting in the early 1980s, men from rural areas in Taiwan began marrying brides from Thailand and the Philippines.... Since (the) early 1990s, Indonesia became the primary source of “foreign brides” in Taiwan. For each of the past few years, more than 2,000 women from Indonesia have left their homes, heading for the imagined “prosperous paradise” – Taiwan.” (2005:78)

In Korea, however, where most Korean men marry Chinese (66%) and Vietnamese (18.7%) women, the common belief is that “old single Korean farmers get married to migrant women.” But statistics show that “43.2% of the husband are (those) who married more than once. And more than 60% are addressed they are living in urban area.” (Kim, 2006). Tables 1 and 2 below reflect such findings:

Table 4: Nationalities of migrant women spouses of Korean men:

	'01		'02		'03		'04		'05	
	Person	%	Person	%	Person	%	Person	%	Person	%
	10,006	100.	11,017	100.0	19,214	100.0	25,594	100.0	31,180	100.0
Japanese	976	9.8	959	8.7	1242	6.5	1224	4.8	1,255	4.0
Chinese	7,001	70.0	7,041	63.9	13,373	69.6	18,527	72.4	20,635	66.2
American	265	2.6	267	2.4	323	1.7	344	1.3	285	0.9
Filipino	510	5.1	850	7.7	944	4.9	964	3.8	997	3.2
Vietnamese	134	1.3	476	4.3	1,403	7.3	2,462	9.6	5,822	18.7
Thais	185	1.8	330	3.0	346	1.8	326	1.3	270	0.9
Russian	157	1.6	241	2.2	297	1.5	318	1.2	333	1.1
Magnolias	118	1.2	195	1.8	318	1.7	504	2.0	561	1.8
Others	660	6.6	658	6.0	968	5.0	925	3.6	1,022	3.3

Source: Korean National Statistics Office (2006)

Table 5. The migrant women's Korean spouses marital history

Year	01	02	03	04	05
Total person	10,000	11,017	19,214	25,594	31,180
First marriage	6,676	7,739	11,175	13,667	17,277
(%)	66.7	70.2	58.2	53.4	55.4
remarriage	3,230	3,844	7,781	11,591	13,480
(%)	32.3	34.9	40.5	45.3	43.2
unknown(person)	100	92	258	336	423
(%)	2.0	0.8	1.3	1.3	1.4

Source: The National statistical office

The analysis mentioned here by Prof. Hsia and Kim Min-Jeong regarding the effect of globalization to the movement from rural to urban co-relates with the perception and views of respondents about "old single farmers" and "middle-aged men who have low-level education" and are unable to seek wives locally because local women prefer to "marry late or stay single." This co-relation is also linked to the reason why foreign brides are sought. The need is even more justified as there is also the notion that foreign brides "are not so rejective to have babies".

On the other hand, the economic crisis in these countries brought new social problems such as low birth rate and ageing population. These have led their male population to search for brides from other countries.

A study made by the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) reveal that:

"The recession is creating problems for Japanese immigration policies. Certain factors like an aging population and declining birth rate and the need for cheaper labor in various industries are pushing Japanese society to accept more foreign workers.

Japan is grappling with a demographic transition in a floundering economy. Japan has 26 million people over 65 in a population of 127 million, and their number is growing by a million a year. Japan's fertility rate is 1.3, the lowest since 1947. If fertility is 1.4 children per woman, and there is no immigration, the population is projected to shrink to 100 million by 2050- and to 500 persons by the year 3000.

Japanese men live to an average of 77, women to 84. About 17 percent of Japanese are over 65; 15 percent are under 15. Japanese tradition has always required the wife of the eldest son to care for her husband's aging parents as well as other disabled relatives until their deaths; 85 percent of those who care for elderly relatives are women, and over half of the caregivers are over 60." (*Japanese Overstayers, Migration News, August 2001, Vol. 8 No.8*)

The problem of decreasing and ageing population co-relates with this study's respondents who view that foreign brides provide the "human resource" solution to the "marital need of a single population in local society". Condescending as it may seem, foreign brides are reduced to being a reserve pool of baby-makers for an ageing population in a crisis-ridden society.

In another respect, no studies have extensively compared and concluded if there is already a shift from rural to urban men with respect to the need for foreign brides. Whether rural or urban or both, the point however is this: the increase of women migrants (including foreign brides) have put women in a different light. Analyzing the effects of the Asian financial crisis in the Philippines, a study made by Lim (2000)

concludes that *women become the providers of last resort in societies which do not have social safety nets in place* (underscoring supplied). (Zlotnik:2003) In this case, the absence of such “social safety nets” referred to is that pertaining to ageing population, low birth rate and needs of rural and urban male labor force.

In sum, the crisis created by neoliberal globalization and its evil effects on the local people and society provide the material basis for such negative and unfriendly attitudes on foreign brides and immigrants. The movement of peoples from rural to urban areas, the stiff competition for jobs in urban and industrialized areas, the decreasing and ageing population, the need to have two or more jobs in order to survive, or even the decision of local women to marry late or stay single – are all inter-related and can be rooted to this crisis. These problems brought anew new social problems – racial discrimination and discriminatory practices and views, unfair labor treatment and practices, magnified cultural differences, etc. Thus, negative attitudes generally prevail amongst the local people in host countries.

2. Role of matchmaking agencies, marriage bureaus and marriage brokers

Matchmaking agencies, marriage bureaus, and marriage brokers are important components of the industrial organization in cross-border marriages. They act as intermediaries or conduits between the foreign brides and local grooms and earn profit from the trade.

Kim, Min Cheong of the Human Rights Solidarity for Migration & Women in Korea reported in “Migrant Women through marriage in Korea”:

“These days, a Korean man pays around 11,000USD to the broker to marry a Vietnamese woman. With the money, the broker gives the Vietnam broker around 3,200-3,700USD, the rest is Korean broker’s.... Brokers usurp money ... Many people are interested in the business because of easy money-making system.” (2006)

Chang, Shu-Ming, in her paper entitled “International Marriages: Cross Border Marriage Business in Taiwan and Vietnam” wrote:

“In their role as intermediaries between overseas brides and Taiwanese grooms, agencies have increasingly dominated the cross-border marriage market in the past decade. With the prospect of high earning from arranged marriage activities, the number of agents has grown, creating a vast industry.” (22:2005)

It is this profit-making objective which differentiates cross-border marriages processed by business or a trade to a marriage of a couple who are in love and come from two different nationalities and cultures. Added Chang in her paper:

“... were there no mediating mechanism offered by profit-oriented agency, there would be no such mass personal movement.... The issue of international marriage in an institutionalized profit-oriented social context ... is ... “the commodification process’ (28: 2005).

Moreover, marriage brokers play as villains in the lives of foreign brides. Says Hairiah in his paper “The Problems of the Brokers on Migrants and Marital Immigrants in Taiwan”:

“... These people who work as brokers take advantage of low level of education among Chinese women in Singkawang (Indonesia), their unawareness of their legal rights, and the increasing of consumptive lifestyles in Chinese community. Those brokers are benefited by gender inequality, particularly, the strong patriarchy culture in Chinese community which values daughter less than son. All those factors have been manipulated by brokers to obtain parents’ permissions for marriages.” (Hairiah, 2005)

This explains the negative notion that foreign brides only marry local men “for money” so that they “can send money back home”. On the one hand, the real but sincere aspiration of immigrant women or foreign brides to help their families by “sending money back home” is placed in a bad light. On the other hand, the profit-making scheme of businesses in the field is not only obscured and hedged but transferred to the motivation of foreign brides to make money out of marriage. The blame is put on the immigrant women or foreign bride, and not the marriage businesses and brokers.

While there is a dialectical relationship between the desire of foreign brides or immigrant women to solve their economic needs even through cross-border marriages, and the desire of local men in host countries to marry and have children, the more problematic social concern is the commercialization of marriage and women -- when these immigrant women are practically sold and bought in the market just like products so that businesses make profits from it. In this way, immigrant women and foreign brides are further exploited.

3. Role of the state and its policies:

The state and its machinery generically enforces policies and laws of the nation or country they represent. The nations or countries of immigrant women or foreign brides for this matter are normally represented by the state or government which has its own sets of policies and laws that govern the country and its people. In most cases, immigrant women or foreign brides come from countries whose state has a national policy of exporting labor. Bilateral agreements are forged with other countries, economic and political policies are formulated and signed.

Moreover, the state has a role in defining the nature and economic mode of the country. By institutionalizing globalization policies, it directed people’s minds and attitudes to work and work, leaving family and social life behind. In times of economic and financial crisis, it perpetuates “protectionist policies” spawning attitudes such as “locals first” and putting immigration controls on foreign workers in order to pacify the view that the latter are “competitors for local jobs” and “undesirables”. In this sense, state policies shape the general view of locals that foreign or immigrant workers, including women immigrants and foreign brides, “are out to get their (locals) jobs.” It is no wonder then that the prevailing attitude is negative.

In another respect, host countries of immigrants and foreign brides have their own separate policies regarding treatment of foreign spouses and im/migrant workers. Most of them allow the incorporation of foreign spouses who migrated to their country through naturalization: 1) by descent (jus sanguinis); 2) by place of birth (jus soli); and 3) by place of residence (jus domicile). Policies of Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong regarding citizenship are principally based on jus sanguinis. This means that naturalization or citizenship status of foreign brides are only given if they are married to their locals.

For instance, Prof. Hsiao-Chuan, Hsia(2005:84) stated in her paper “Proactive Approaches to Preventing Violence against Immigrant Women in Taiwan”:

“Prior to changes in the Nationality Law in 1990, foreigners cannot be naturalized as Taiwanese citizens unless they are women married to Taiwanese men. Foreign women are seen as “naturalizable” because of their ability to continue Taiwanese “blood”. Over the years, the government has added “proof of economic abilities” as new requirements for these women to become naturalized. Thus, immigrant women who have not been able to fulfill the additional requirement are unable to access social services and welfare benefits.”

It is clear from the aforementioned that the state again has a role in shaping the views and attitudes of local peoples on immigrant women or foreign brides. Propagating the view that foreign women are “naturalizable” because of (the former’s) ability to continue the “blood” or racial descent, the state clearly defines its role in directing and shaping its people’s minds and offering to grant residency and citizenship to these foreign women.

Other criteria or requirements may vary depending on the country of domicile where the immigrant women resides.

- a. The Korean government allows even the foreign male spouses married to Korean women to acquire citizenship after living 2 years in Korea, according to the revised national law on December 13, 1997. The Korean government also provides free legal service through the Korea Legal Aid Corporation (KLAC) for female violence victims since 2003 and also domestic emergency phone 1366 for migrant women victims of trafficking. (Kim Min Jeong. 2005:64)
- b. Since they (foreign brides) are coming from other countries then their status is the same. They have to wait seven years before they become permanent residents. During this period they have to pay tax when they earn enough money. After completing 7 years then they can avail of the social system in HK. Because of language barriers, they are discriminated for example they go to the hospital or use public facilities. (*Interview: Church/NGO worker, HK*)

Granting of permanent residency or citizenship does happen but with requirements, of course. State policies reign –

- In Hong Kong, seven years before they become permanent residents; they also have to pay taxes even as temporary residents;
- In South Korea, two (2) years of being married and living in Korea;
- In Taiwan, 2 years with work visa or 6 years residency for non-Mainland foreign brides; for Mainland foreign brides, it takes more – 8 years residency. Naturalized citizenship, however, is only given when they stay married or if they stay on as the “wife” of the Taiwanese husband.

But when the marriage fails, no citizenship is granted. Foreign brides or immigrant women without citizenship in Taiwan can be deported. This is how the state sanctions the power of husbands over their foreign brides. This is why, many immigrant brides who are battered or are victims of domestic violence, suffer their pain in silence. Reports Prof. Hsiao-Chuan, Hsia (2005:84):

“Battered immigrant women without Taiwanese citizenship would be deported if they get divorced and can hardly return to Taiwan to visit their children, whose custody are almost always awarded to fathers by Taiwanese courts. Consequently, many battered immigrant women decide to endure domestic violence for the sake of the children. The husband’s power over immigrant women is sanctioned by the state. In (this case), Taiwan government does not grant foreign women citizenship in their own rights, but mediate their rights through their status as :wife”

But the role of the state does not stop in providing legal mechanisms through issuance of visas, citizenship and support structures to immigrant women and foreign brides. It also has a role in providing mechanisms for the existence of intermediaries such as international marriage bureaus and brokers (IMBs), matchmaking agencies and agents.

Take this example for instance. The Vietnam government officially bans matchmaking agencies and even conducts crackdowns on such (business) operators. (Chang Shu-Ming. 2005). But how can marriage bureaus and brokers transact business with Vietnamese women or foreign brides despite the ban?

Without the role of the Taiwanese government and marriage agencies, on the one hand, and the existence of Vietnamese agents who operate in secrecy to avoid legal problems, on the other, the whole industry won’t flourish. The Taiwanese government provides the legal mechanism and authority for IMBs and matchmaking agencies to operate. The IMB’s and agencies, in turn, pay fees and bonds to operate, and taxes to continue operating.

Vietnamese agents act as sales representatives of Taiwanese marriage bureaus and agencies in the country. They are the ones who scout, screen and deliver the “goods”, so to speak. They are the ones who find ways of eliminating bureaucratic red tapes in processing documents.

All told, governments in Taiwan and Vietnam monitor all activities of the players in the migration process. But unlike their response to international labor migration, however, the two governments claim that they do not play an active role in promoting or inhibiting cross-border marriages. Chang, Shu-Ming, in her paper “International Marriages: Cross-Border Marriage Business in Taiwan and Vietnam” stated:

“The officials interviewed from both sides all claimed that people must be free to choose whom to marry, and that governments should not interfere in the process. Governments do, however, continue to pay attention to the problems of illegal trafficking. (2005:22)

Such an understatement reveals that governments hedge the truth in claiming that they “do not interfere” in the marriage process. In many ways than one, be it in the form of a ban or a legal mechanism or control, they do have a hand in perpetuating the marriage business.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The issues surrounding foreign brides and the attitudes of local people are closely related to the existing socio-economic and political problems of the home country of the foreign bride and the host country of the local groom/husband. On the one hand, the root cause of migration of foreign brides is internal – the basic problems of her country/society that results in poverty for the majority of the people. Hence, the solution to the home country’s basic ills cannot be found by being a foreign bride. While migrating to another country can be quite understandable in temporarily alleviating economic woes or in giving something to hope for, the solution is in addressing the basic problems in the home country.

On the other hand, the perceived “need” for foreign brides by the local men is not the main problem but a result of the basic socio-economic ills of the host country. The root cause is also internal – the economic crisis in his own country is brought about by neoliberal globalization policies of liberalization, privatization and deregulation which are being pushed in his own country. Hence, as the crisis continues to worsen in the host country and the problems are not deeply analyzed and addressed, foreign brides will be perceived as the solution to their perceived problems of decreasing and ageing populace, and negative attitudes of local people will continue to prevail.

2. While the respondents to interviews conducted exhibited very positive views on the issues surrounding foreign brides and immigrant women, the general outlook and attitude of the local populace is still basically negative. The reason why such negative attitude exists and persists is this:

The perceived social problems such as movement of peoples from rural to urban areas, the stiff competition for jobs in urban and industrialized areas, the decreasing and ageing population, the need to have two or more jobs in order to survive, or even the decision of local women to marry late or stay single – are all inter-related and are brought about by the crisis of existing economic system in the host country. Such economic system espouses and adheres to neoliberal globalization policies which created other economic and social problems pointed out earlier. *These problems provide the material basis for the prevalence or existence of views and attitude (both positive and negative) on foreign brides. The root cause of these problems inculcated into the culture of host peoples that “foreign” workers, particularly immigrant women and brides are “competitors for local jobs”, “of low income-status” and are therefore just out to “get money” from the local husband, “pariah”, etc.*

3. The general negative attitude can only be changed if the material basis for such negativeness is also changed. This change will only happen if there is an organized social movement with a clear vision of a genuine pro-people program in the host country.

The positive views and attitude of the interviewees show the initial success of consciousness-raising endeavors by organized social movements in the host countries. This highlights the importance and greater need for more concerted efforts and work for the social movement in each country and the solidarity and cooperative efforts amongst them.

4. Two intermediaries – the state and IMBs or marriage agencies – both play a big role in the issue of foreign brides. The IMBs, on the one hand, provide the structural mechanism for the business in order to earn profits from the trade.

The state, on the other hand, while providing the legal mechanism (through policies and laws) for IMBs, derives a huge income from it in the form of fees, taxes, bonds and levies exacted on the marriage business entities and on the foreign bride (through visa fees and other levies).

The state, moreover, has the authority to control immigration, reject applications, deport foreign brides, enact laws which are usually discriminatory, exact exorbitant fees from foreign brides, etc.

In the final analysis, it is the state which acts as the engineers and stakeholders of neoliberal globalization policies, which brought forth economic and social problems in their respective countries. The state does not just enact laws, it creates them and engineers them to suit neoliberal policies and agenda. Changes, therefore, asserted by the organized social movements should also deal with matters concerning the state.

5. The major problem in the issue of foreign brides is not migration but the commercialization of marriage and commodification of women immigrants. By treating helpless immigrant women as products to be bought, sold and exchanged for huge profits by IMBs and their agents dehumanizes them and degrades the integrity of marriage.
6. The only solution to the issue of foreign brides which can guarantee strategic and lasting development of the people is this: address the root causes of migration and the basic problems of the home country of the foreign bride, and the root causes of basic problems of the country of host people. Both requires the development of a social movement in the home country of the foreign bride and the host people and for them to be organized.
7. As the people's movement develops and gains strength, the issue of foreign brides may still persist. Foreign brides need to be organized while they live in the host country and local peoples have to support them. Short-term demands to alleviate the problems they currently face must be struggled. A number of relevant strategies have already been presented and asserted by existing social movements and people's organizations fighting for their rights, welfare and benefit:

- Review of existing nationality laws in host countries to favor rights of foreign brides – right of abode/residence/domicile, right to work, custodial rights, etc. – and minimizing legal requirements and processes for applications (visa, etc)
- Provision of legal, welfare, and health services for foreign brides and their children
- Pro-active approaches to preventing domestic violence
- Repeal of discriminatory laws and policies
- Legislation on anti-sex trafficking and its implementation
- Organize! Organize! Organize!
- Education work/ consciousness-raising activities and programs
- Mobilization of forces on outstanding issues and demands
- Advocacy work

- Skills training & workshops
- Publication of a “Know-your-rights” manual for foreign brides: published by local advocates
- Establishment of education programs for children of foreign brides. This could range from language and cultural courses, daycare services to formal schools
- Campaigns

REFERENCES:

1. Hsiao-Chuan Hsia, Empowering “Foreign Brides” and Community through Praxis-Oriented Research, published in *Societies Without Borders* 1, 93–111 © Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden (2006)
2. Chang, Shu-Ming, International Marriages: Cross-Border Marriage Business in Taiwan and Vietnam, 20-29, published in *International Workshop of NGOs on Female Immigrants and Migrants*, 2005, Taipei.
3. Hairiah, The Problems of the Brokers on Migrants and Marital Immigrants in Taiwan, 30-34, published in *International Workshop of NGOs on Female Immigrants and Migrants*, 2005, Taipei.
4. Kim Min Jeong, Migrant Women in Korea through International Matchmaking, 60-74, published in *International Workshop of NGOs on Female Immigrants and Migrants*, 2005, Taipei.
5. Kim Min Jeong, “Migrant Women through marriage in Korea”, a comprehensive report for the Human Rights Solidarity for Migration & Women in Korea (2006).
6. Hsiao-Chuan Hsia, Proactive Approaches to Preventing Violence against Immigrant Women in Taiwan, 77-89, published in *International Workshop of NGOs on Female Immigrants and Migrants*, 2005, Taipei.
7. Emmi de Jesus, The Mail-Order Bride Experience – A Dream Turned into a Nightmare, 99-104, published in *International Workshop of NGOs on Female Immigrants and Migrants*, 2005, Taipei.
8. Bruce Liao, “Our” Laws, “Their” Lives – How Taiwan Law Discriminates Against the Newly-Arrived Female Immigrants, 105-108, published in *International Workshop of NGOs on Female Immigrants and Migrants*, 2005, Taipei.
9. Lualhati S. Roque, A Critical Perspective on International Instruments and National Laws on Women Migrants’ and Immigrants’ Rights, 136-148, published in *International Workshop of NGOs on Female Immigrants and Migrants*, 2005, Taipei.
10. Tenaganita, Foreign Brides in Sanctity of Marriage, 161-169, published in *International Workshop of NGOs on Female Immigrants and Migrants*, 2005, Taipei.
11. “Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action”, a report of the Global Commission on International Migration, 2005.
12. Hania Zlotnik, “The Global Dimensions of Female Migration” published in Migration Policy Institute. March 1, 2003.
13. Hsiao-Chuan Hsia, “Globalization and Resistance: The Case of Empowering “Foreign Brides” in Taiwan, presented in Korea. Sept. 27, 2006.
14. “Survey of Literature”, a report of Women Awakening Foundation. 2006