

International marriage in East and Southeast Asia: trends and research emphases

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This paper gives an overview on international marriage in East and Southeast Asia. It first reviews the available data on the incidence and trends of transnational marriage. It then discusses the factors generally cited as contributing to the rising incidence of international marriage in the region: the increased mobility of population, particularly with respect to tourism, business travel, short-term employment and international study; and marriage market issues in a number of countries of the region, leading to deliberate and targeted search for spouses in other countries. It also reviews the types of international marriages in the region, including the national, ethnic and social characteristics of spouses in such marriages. Finally, it discusses the issues and problems covered and not (or inadequately) covered in the literature of international marriage in East and Southeast Asia in relation to the questions of rights and of the boundaries and sovereignty of the state.

Keywords: International marriage; state; citizenship; migration; gender; East and Southern Asia

Introduction

International marriage has a long history in East and Southeast Asia. Its recent growing scale, however, has drawn increasing attention from governments, non-governmental organizations, and scholars. This paper gives an overview of trends and research in international marriage in East and Southeast Asia. It maps the recent developments in international marriage in different countries in the region and explores the issues and questions that are covered and those that are neglected in the existing scholarly research. We argue that there is a need to strengthen empirical and theoretical research on governmental policies and regulations on international marriage in the region and on how these policies and regulations shape and are shaped by individuals, families, and societies involved in these intimacies.

Trends of international marriage in East and Southeast Asia

In a number of countries of East and Southeast Asia for which data are available, the proportion of international marriages in total marriages has been increasing over time. In South Korea, remarkable changes have taken place over the past five years in all aspects of the country's demography: decline to ultra-low fertility, delays in marrying and

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Table 1. South Korea: international marriages as percentage of all marriages, 2001–2005.

2001	4.8
2002	5.2
2003	8.4
2004	11.4
2005	13.6

Source: Micro data from Korean marriage and divorce registration statistics; see Kim (2006).

spectacular increase in divorce rates. The increase in international marriages has been equally dramatic. Between 2001 and 2005, the percentage of international marriages in total marriages increased from 4.8% to 13.6% (see Table 1). In 2004, among a total of 200,000 foreign spouses in Korea, 65% were women (Lee 2006). The most popular foreign brides for Korean men are those from China – especially ethnic Koreans from Liaoning, Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces – accounting for 7 in 10 such unions, followed by Vietnam, with much smaller numbers from Japan, Philippines, Mongolia and Uzbekistan (Kim 2006). Matchmaking is a legitimate trade in South Korea, and there are hundreds of marriage brokers, advertising in daily newspapers and through notices stuck on lampposts and subway station notice boards (*Straits Times*, 7 February 2005).

The situation in Taiwan is even more dramatic, with international marriages accounting for 32% of all marriages in 2003 (see Table 2). International marriage is overwhelmingly Taiwanese men marrying foreign brides – the group of immigrant spouses is 92% female. About two thirds of these foreign brides are from China, and the rest overwhelmingly from Southeast Asia. Among the latter group, Vietnamese constitute 69%, followed by Indonesians (15%), Thais (6.5%), Filipinas (4.8%) and Cambodians (3.5%). There are major differences in the patterns of marriage between Taiwanese men and women from China and Southeast Asia. The Chinese brides tend to be much older (mean age at marriage 31.3) than the Southeast Asian brides (mean age at marriage 23.6). However, both the Chinese and Southeast Asian brides were typically marrying men 10 or more years older than themselves – 55% in the case of the Chinese and 67% for the Southeast Asians (Tsay 2004, Table 5).

Table 2. Taiwan: registered number of marriages by nationality of spouses, 1998–2005.

Year	All marriages (1)	Nationality of foreign spouse					
		Total		Chinese ^a		Other foreigners	
		No.	As % of (1)	No.	As % of (1)	No.	As % of (1)
1998	145,976	22,905	15.7	12,451	8.5	10,454	7.2
1999	173,209	32,263	18.6	17,589	10.1	14,674	8.5
2000	181,642	44,966	24.8	23,628	13.0	21,338	11.7
2001	170,515	46,202	27.1	26,797	15.7	19,405	11.4
2002	172,655	49,013	28.4	28,906	16.7	20,107	11.6
2003	171,483	55,116	32.1	35,473	20.7	19,643	11.4
2004	131,453	n.a.		n.a.		20,338	15.7
2005	141,140	n.a.		n.a.		13,808	9.8

Source: Department of Population, Ministry of the Interior, Taipei, Taiwan.

^aIncluding those from China, and from Hong Kong and Macao.

Table 3. International marriages as a percentage of all marriages of Singapore citizens and permanent residents, 1996–2005.

Year	% of men marrying foreigners	% of women marrying foreigners
1996	19.1	4.7
1997	16.0	4.1
1998	20.1	5.2
1999	18.3	5.5
2000	19.9	5.8
2001	21.5	6.1
2002	21.2	6.0
2003	20.1	6.4
2004	23.5	6.8
2005	27.2	6.9

Source: Department of Statistics, Singapore.

International marriages are also on the increase in Singapore. In 2004, over a quarter of male Singaporeans and permanent residents married foreigners, and 9% of women married foreign males, according to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (*Straits Times*, 22 February 2006). The Prime Minister, commenting favourably on the trend, said it was natural, given that more Singaporeans now live and work abroad and many foreigners live and work in Singapore. Table 3 gives the detailed figures, which show that international marriages, while turning up over the past few years, have been prevalent for the past decade. In 2005, 27% of Singaporean men married foreigners, compared with 7% of Singaporean women.

Table 4 shows the situation in Japan. In 1970, only half of 1% of marriages in Japan were with a foreign spouse, and in 1980, still less than 1%. But over the 1980s, the proportion leaped to 3.5%, and by 2000 a further rise to 4.5% was observed. The kinds of marriages making up this increasing number of international marriages were also changing. Although in the 1970s, the number of foreign wives and husbands was more or less in balance, after that, the share of wives from foreign countries marrying Japanese men began to greatly outweigh the share of husbands from foreign countries marrying Japanese women. By 1990, the ratio of foreign wives to foreign husbands had increased to

Table 4. Japan: trends in international marriages, 1970–2004.

Year	No. of marriages ('000)	% of marriages with one foreign spouse	% of marriages with wife from foreign country	% of marriages with husband from foreign country
1970	1029	0.5	0.3	0.3
1975	942	0.6	0.3	0.3
1980	775	0.9	0.6	0.4
1985	736	1.7	1.1	0.6
1990	722	3.5	2.8	0.8
1995	792	3.5	2.6	0.9
1997	776	3.6	2.7	0.9
1998	785	3.8	2.8	1.0
1999	762	4.2	3.2	1.0
2000	798	4.5	3.5	1.0
2001	800	5.0	4.0	1.0
2002	757	4.7	3.7	1.0
2003	740	4.9	3.8	1.1

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare, Japan.

Table 5. Origins of foreign wives marrying Japanese husbands, 1990, 1995 and 2000.

Country of origin	1990 (%)	1995 (%)	2000 (%)	2003 (%)
Korea (N or S)	44.6	21.7	21.9	19.1
China	18.0	24.9	34.9	36.7
Philippines	^a	34.6	26.5	28.0
Thailand	^a	9.2	7.5	5.2
Brazil	^a	2.8	1.2	1.1
Other countries	37.4	6.8	8.0	9.9

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare website, Japan.

^aIncluded in 'other countries'.

3.5:1, and although it fell slightly over the 1990s, by 2000 it was back to 3.5:1, where it remained in 2003.

International marriages are particularly prevalent in the big cities of Japan. In 2000, one in 10 marriages in the Tokyo area were between a Japanese spouse and a foreigner and in Osaka the figure was one in 12 (Curtin 2002). But there are also certain rural areas of Japan where international marriages are prevalent.

Where did the large number of foreign wives of Japanese over the 1990s originate? As shown in Table 5, three countries dominated: Korea, China and the Philippines. The Philippines accounted for over one third of foreign brides in 1995, but this had dropped to a little over one quarter in 2000, the decline being offset by an increase in brides from China, whose share continued to increase up to 2003.

In the case of China, two things are clear. First, international marriages have increased sharply over the past two decades. Second, their numbers remain tiny as a proportion of all marriages in China. It has been estimated that at least 150,000 Chinese (90% of them women) have married foreigners over the past two decades (Liu and Liu 2004), which would amount to less than 0.1% of all marriages in China over that period. These marriages are often between Chinese women and men from Japan, overseas Chinese societies of Hong Kong and Taiwan and other Western societies (Liu and Liu 2004). These marriages can be divided into three categories: well educated single women, divorced or widowed women, and low educated women (Liu and Liu 2004, p. 4). However, 'foreigners' in this analysis do not include Taiwanese. The number of Chinese marrying Taiwanese over the five-year period 1998–2003 alone totalled 144,844 (Tsay 2004, Table 3).

Unfortunately, we do not have good data on trends in international marriages in other countries of the region. It is clear from the data on the foreign spouses of Japanese, Koreans, Taiwanese, and Singaporeans that countries such as China, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia are supplying many brides to these countries. The term 'brides' is used advisedly, because women from China, Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia marrying foreign men heavily outnumber men from these four countries who marry foreign women. For example, marriages between Filipino men and Japanese women constitute only 1% of all Filipino-Japanese marriages (Suzuki 2003, fn. 1; Valencia 2006). Unfortunately, the picture of marriage movement is incomplete for these countries which are mainly 'senders' rather than 'receivers' of marriage partners. First, the data are incomplete and not readily available; second, there are all sorts of other movements, on a smaller scale, for example, that of Vietnamese women into southern China (Thi and Hugo 2005, p. 14). Third, the 'sending' countries send not only to other parts of Asia, but also to other parts of the world.

This point is best illustrated by the case of the Philippines. Marriage migration from the Philippines is considerable: an average of 16,000 to 19,000 Filipinos leave the country annually as spouses or partners of foreign nationals (Valencia 2006). Although this

number represents only about 3% of total marriages taking place in the Philippines each year, it could be considerably underestimated, as it refers only to those marriages registered in the Philippines. Although these include marriages of Filipinos abroad if they are registered with the Philippines embassy in the country concerned, there will no doubt be many marriages that are not so registered. Aside from the marriages of Filipinas to men in other Asian countries, already referred to, there has been a steady flow of Filipina brides to the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and parts of Europe.¹ Females significantly outnumber males among Filipino immigrants to all these destinations. A large proportion of Filipino women migrating to Australia (approximately 70%) have been sponsored as the fiancées or spouses of Australian men (Jackson 1993), many of whom are significantly older than their brides and have been previously married (see also Cooke 1986, Robinson 1996, Roces 2003). On a smaller scale, similar patterns can be observed among overseas migrants from Thailand.

However, in this paper, we will concentrate on international marriage within the East and Southeast Asian region, as this is where the bulk of the international marriages involving nationals of these countries – with the exception of the Philippines and possibly of Thailand – are taking place.

The incomplete statistical information on international marriage is summarized in Table 6. The countries of East and Southeast Asia with the highest proportion of international marriages are Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea, in that order. Japan is well behind these countries, though the proportion of international marriages there is slowly increasing. China, Vietnam and the Philippines are supplying a large proportion of the women marrying men from these and other countries, but in relation to the very large population numbers in these three countries, international marriages do not constitute anywhere near as large a proportion of all marriages as in Taiwan, South Korea or Singapore; indeed in China, international marriages remain infinitesimal as a proportion of all marriages.

The interpretation of the figures in Table 6 needs to take into account the figures in brackets for Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea. These figures show that the proportion of international marriages *not involving persons from the same ethnic group* is much lower in these three countries than the overall proportion of international marriages. In the case of Taiwan, most of the marriages are with spouses from China; in the case of Singapore, with spouses from Malaysia, Indonesia, India and China, most of whom would be of the same

Table 6. International marriages as a percent of all marriages around 2005.

Taiwan	32 (10)
Singapore	17 (7*)
South Korea	14 (7)
Japan	5
Philippines	4 (*)
Vietnam	3 (*)
Indonesia	1 (*)
China	0.1

Note: The figures in brackets for Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea are the percent of international marriages not involving a foreign spouse of the same ethnic group (Chinese in the case of Taiwan, Chinese, Malays or Indians in the case of Singapore, and Koreans in the case of South Korea). Asterisks indicate that the figures are very rough estimates. (In the case of Singapore, it would be helpful to know what proportion of Singaporeans involved in international marriages are citizens and what proportion are permanent residents; also, the nationalities of the foreigners they are marrying. This is because many permanent residents are likely to be marrying people from their country of origin, and in that sense are not marrying 'foreigners'. However, none of this information is made available by the Singapore authorities.)

general ethnic group as their Singaporean partners (Chinese, Malay or Indian); and in the case of South Korea, with ethnic Koreans (Chosonjok) from China.

When modified in this way, the figures for Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea are not so far above the figures for Japan and the Philippines. In other words, although the proportion of international marriages is high in these countries, the proportion of international marriages *with a partner from a different ethnic group* is not nearly as high. This is not to say that the adjustments needed in the case of ethnic similarity are necessarily very much less. Adaptations to the country to which they or their ancestors migrated may have left such ethnic Japanese or Koreans far removed culturally from Japan and Korea, respectively. See studies on marriages of Chosonjok in Korea (Freeman 2005) and the cultural distance and identity crisis faced by Nikkeijin (overseas people of Japanese descent) from Brazil who migrated to Japan (Tsuda 2003, Perroud 2006).

One other general point to make about the incidence of international marriage is that even where such marriages are only a very small proportion of total marriages, as in Indonesia or Vietnam, the geographical concentration of those marrying internationally may make it a much more important phenomenon in certain regions or among certain ethnic groups – for example, among Chinese Indonesians from Pontianak (reputed to be important among Indonesians marrying Singaporeans) and in certain places in North Vietnam.

Factors that contribute to the increasing number of international marriages in East and Southeast Asia

The most basic factor underlying the increase in international marriage in the region is the widened contact between people through travel and developments in communications. Put very simply, two people cannot marry if they have never had direct or indirect contact with each other. In village societies in the region, before rapid urbanization and advances in communications, contacts with other people were typically restricted to the village of residence, nearby villages and perhaps wider contacts through relatives and villagers who had migrated elsewhere. The marriage field was thus greatly restricted geographically. In modern society, mobility is much greater, opening up a greater field of contacts, technological developments such as the internet have opened up possibilities for marriage arrangements between people who have never met each other, and the commercialization of international marriage also elevates the volume of these marriages. It is reasonable to hypothesize that increased contact leads to greater incidence of international marriage if there are no barriers to such marriages. Such barriers do exist, however, in two main forms. The first is the strength of notions of unsuitable marriage partners based on nationality, ethnicity, social class, religion, etcetera. Thus the increasing availability of communications tools by no means ensures that the tools will be used to widen marriage fields. The second is the intervention of the state to prevent certain kinds of international marriages, perhaps best exemplified by the regulations adopted by the Singapore government to ensure that labour migrants (for example, Bangladeshi construction workers and Filipino maids) do not marry either Singaporeans or each other while they are working in Singapore.

It is easy to cite factors that have contributed to the increased incidence of international marriage in East and Southeast Asia, but not easy to sort out the relative importance of these factors. In summary, the factors can be divided into two main kinds. The first is the deliberate and targeted search for spouses outside their country by those disadvantaged in domestic labour markets. This pattern of transnational marriage typically involves, on the

one hand, men from wealthier countries of the region who are poorer, less educated, and/or resident in rural areas, and on the other, women from the poorer countries of the region (Constable 2005). Some sort of commercial, mediating agencies, mainly run by private enterprises, but some officially promoted, are likely to be involved in arranging these marriages. This first kind of international marriage is almost certainly responsible for the greater part of the increase in international marriages in the region, as documented in the first section. The second factor relates to the increase in marriages arising in a less targeted way from the increased mobility of people in the region and beyond: through tourism, business travel, international study and student exchanges, short-term temporary skilled migration, unskilled labour migration, and other forms of international mobility. We will summarize the evidence briefly.

Transnational marriage driven by the need to widen domestic marriage markets

Transnational marriage is driven by the needs of certain groups of people to widen domestic marriage markets in terms of the number and the characteristics of potential partners. In terms of sheer numbers, there is little doubt that this is the most important form of transnational marriage in the region. In the wealthier countries of the region, there is considerable disparity between males and females in this kind of marriage. It is basically a search by males who face problems in domestic marriage markets for brides from poorer countries, who are not in a position to be as 'choosy' as local women. Table 1 shows the situation for Japan. More than 90% of the foreign spouses living in Taiwan in 2004 were females (Tsay 2004, Table 1). The basic facts are that while there is a positive correlation between education and proportion remaining single in the case of women in the region, there is an inverse correlation in the case of men. There is clear evidence of this inverse correlation in the cases of Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar and Taiwan, indicating that it is a common pattern throughout the region.² The likely reason is that it is less educated men, who are over-represented in rural areas and agricultural occupations, who face difficulties finding suitable partners in the marriage market (see Jones 2006, pp. 13–16).

One result of the problems less 'marketable' males experience in finding a marriage partner locally is a striking increase in transnational marriage as men seek brides in other countries. A significant number of Hong Kong working-class men, mainly construction workers, manual labourers, and truck drivers, looked to China for wives after the border control were relaxed and the economic difference grew rapidly between Hong Kong and China in the 1980s (Lang and Smart 2002, So 2003). The figures for Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore have already been presented. In both Taiwan and Korea, the main factor seems to be the difficulty of finding local brides for many men with lower education, income-earning capacity, and rural background (compounded in the South Korean case by the strong excess of males in the age group 24 to 30, due to sex selective abortions in the 1980s: see Kim 2004). In rural regions of South Korea, it is reported that in 2005, 35.9% of men married foreign women (Yasuharu Dando 2006, internet source at <http://dandoweb.com/e/marriage.html>). However, most of the foreign brides are actually settling in the cities: in 2004, 55% of them were located in the Seoul metropolitan area, though in the case of brides from Vietnam and the Philippines, over half lived outside the large cities (Kim 2006, Table 5). The 1997 economic crisis in Korea led to unprecedented unemployment for many men and uncertain economic prospects for many others. At the same time, women were prolonging their education, seeking greater independence and raising their expectations about the characteristics of a suitable marriage partner (Eun 2006).

Another factor contributing to the need to widen domestic marriage markets is that some men and women are seeking in other lands those qualities that they think are increasingly hard to find in local men and women. This pattern is most familiar in the international marriages between Western men and Asian women. Among many Western men there is an 'orientalist' view of Asian women which has many elements, including their exotic appeal, their strong commitment to family and to marriage, and their willingness to be submissive wives. The pattern of bride-seeking by Australian and other Western men in countries such as the Philippines or China appears to exemplify this (Constable 2003a, 2003b). The men engaging in this form of bride-seeking appear to be over-selected for having already been in a failed marriage.

The stress on the search for traditional qualities perceived to have been forsaken by local women is also prominent in accounts of bride-seeking by South Korean, Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and Singaporean men (for example, see articles in *Straits Times*, 30 January 2005; also see Li 2001, So 2003, Abelman and Kim 2005). Complaints that local women are selfish, calculating, consumerist, career oriented, and unwilling to entertain the traditional female roles of producing and raising children are widely reported among men from these countries seeking brides elsewhere. In the context of rapid change in the educational and employment situation of women in the East and Southeast Asian countries, the spread of feminist norms and ideals in the region, and the glacial pace of change in male attitudes, it might not be pushing reality too far to claim that there is a substantial group of men (both less educated and with reasonable levels of education) in these countries who are 'unmarriageable' in the sense that they hold to traditionalist views of women's roles and appropriate behaviour. There is a shrinking pool of women who meet their expectations of what a wife should be, or (viewed from the women's side) who would entertain the prospect of marrying such men.

The search for the ideal partner overseas is not confined to men. While men are looking for 'traditional wives' abroad, some women are also looking for 'modern husbands' from afar (Constable 2005). Men from wealthier countries are often imaged by some women from less developed countries to be more sophisticated, civilized, romantic, and open-minded than local ones.

Turning to the key bride-supplying countries – China, Vietnam, and the Philippines – economic motivations feature prominently among the reasons women from these countries are marrying men from countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan. Incomes in this latter group of countries are 10 or 20 times higher than in the former group of countries, and the supply of potential brides from poor, rural families is almost limitless. While it is important to avoid stereotyping and oversimplification (for example, many of the Filipinas marrying foreign spouses are as well educated as their husbands, and appear to be driven by factors much more complex than mere economic betterment: Constable 2003a), the difference in economic circumstances between countries in the region can hardly fail to play a major role. In this situation, marriage brokers operate effectively, supplying about 10% of marriages between Chinese women and Taiwanese men, and probably a much higher percentage of marriages of Vietnamese women with men from Taiwan, Singapore and Korea. Despite protests from various women's groups in Taiwan, some marriage brokers regularly run commercial TV advertisements showing Vietnamese women's pictures and listing their backgrounds for those Taiwanese men who are looking for foreign brides. Marriage bureaus in Singapore operate bride-seeking tours to Vietnam, but in recent years, a pattern has emerged whereby they bring the Vietnamese women to Singapore. This is somewhat cheaper than going on bride-search tours – around S\$10,000 as compared with S\$13,000.

Bride-finders are employed in Vietnam, who supply details on the would-be brides to the Singapore agency, which then selects from the list. Brides are guaranteed to be virgins, and rural girls are preferred.³ They are brought into Singapore on a social visit pass, which only entitles them to remain in the country for 14 days, sometimes extendable to 30 days. During this period, they are scrutinized by bride-seekers, and if they are not chosen within this period, they will be sent to Malaysia, from where they can re-enter Singapore (*Straits Times*, 27 November 2005).

In the Singapore context, when asked whether they found this method of seeking brides degrading, some clients said it was really no different from other kinds of matchmaking. However, as noted by Ms Braema Mathi, president of women's advocacy group Women for Action and Research (Aware), 'in traditional matchmaking, the husband knows he is answerable to the bride's family. But when these brides are removed from their communities, they are vulnerable. Who are the husbands answerable to? Nobody' (*Straits Times*, 27 November 2005).

Though this point cannot be developed in detail here, it is important to mention that in future, these will be a massive stimulus for increased international marriage arising from distortions in domestic marriage markets. In South Korea, it is projected that the sex composition of the population eligible for marriage will reach its most distorted situation in the period 2015–2020 (Kim 2004). In China, in the period between 2010 and 2025 a developing excess of males (see Poston 2005, Goodkind 2006) will lead to 'an increasingly intense, and perhaps desperate, competition among young men for the nation's limited supply of brides' (Eberstadt 2000, p. 230).

Increased travel for tourism, business, and study

Where international travel for tourism, business purposes or study increases, people from different countries are put in contact with each other, and in some cases romantic relationships which lead to marriage can be expected to arise. The statistics on international arrivals and departures in different countries of the region attest to the rapid growth in population mobility in the region. For example, the numbers of Chinese travelling abroad for business and tourism skyrocketed from two million a year in the mid-1990s to more than 14 million in 2003 (Hugo 2005, Figure 4). The number of international tourists departing Thailand and the Philippines in both cases increased about fourfold between 1980 and 2000 (to about two million a year in each case), and in the case of Singapore ninefold.⁴ Asian-born short-term arrivals in Australia increased from 256,000 in 1984–1985 to 2.6 million in 2003–2004 and long-term arrivals from Asia increased more than sixfold over the same period (Hugo 2005, Table 7).

The number of students involved in international study and student exchange in the region and beyond has increased enormously over time. In 2005, there were just under two million students from Asia (excluding West and Central Asia) studying abroad (Hugo 2005, Table 8). Most of these go to OECD nations, but increasing numbers of foreign students are also studying in Universities in Asia – particularly in Japan, China, and Singapore. Given that most such students are young and unmarried, the potential for development of romantic relationships while abroad is high.

Medium-term business migration also appears to lead to many international marriages. There is clearly a positive correlation between foreign investment from more developed countries to developing countries and the emigration of women from these developing countries as 'foreign brides' to the more developed countries. For instance, from the time Taiwanese investment in Indonesia began around 1991, the number of Indonesian wives

dramatically increased in Taiwan. Similarly, the number of Vietnamese wives in Taiwan increased significantly following Taiwanese investment in Vietnam in 1994/1995. Given the importance of investment from Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Western countries in South East Asian countries and in China, many businessmen from these countries live medium- to long-term in Southeast Asia and in China, including of course both married and unmarried men. The married men frequently leave their wife and children in the home country, so that the children can continue their education there. In many cases, they strike up liaisons with women in the country where they are working, some of which produce children and some of which result in formal marriage.

In Indonesia, for example, Japanese and South Korean businessmen have their own entertainment networks of restaurants, massage parlours, and karaoke bars, where liaisons with Indonesian women often occur. Data on this are scarce, but long-term relationships with Indonesian women are not infrequent, some of them resulting in marriage and children. Given the lack of stability in many of these marriages, the Indonesian wife can be left in very difficult circumstances if the marriage breaks down, as (until an important change in the regulations in mid-2006) children to the marriage were registered as foreigners, and had to study in private schools (which are generally more expensive) rather than in government schools. Similar liaisons also occur between Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and Singaporean businessmen and Chinese women in China, and between Taiwanese businessmen and Vietnamese women in Vietnam (Lang and Smart 2000, Kung 2004, Yeoh and Wills 2004, Shen 2005). In the case of Taiwanese businessmen in China and in Vietnam, some of them not only enter such marriages themselves, but also become agents to promote commercial marriage markets between Taiwan and these two countries, using their local connections at home and abroad (Wang and Chang 2002).

Another mobile group of long-standing is that of entertainers. For example, Filipino bands and musicians have long been in demand throughout Southeast and East Asia, and many 'entertainers' (sometimes a dubious category, serving as a front for engagement in the sex trade) from Southeast Asia, especially the Philippines and Thailand, work in Japan and Korea. Affairs and marriages take place between some of these women and local men.

Temporary skilled migration and contract labour migration

The numbers of temporary migrants, both skilled and unskilled, in the Southeast Asian region has increased sharply over time. The likelihood that this kind of migration will lead to international marriages differs sharply according to the kind of migration and country of residence. There are few, if any, barriers to professional and skilled migrants contracting marriages in the countries where they work, but in the case of contract labour migrants, this possibility differs widely by country. There are stringent rules preventing contract workers marrying – either other contract workers or Singaporean citizens or permanent residents – while in Singapore, although there are occasional exceptions in the case of transnational domestic workers who marry Singaporeans. In Malaysia, too, such marriages are strongly discouraged. Malaysia's Home Ministry parliamentary secretary Abdul Rahman Ibrahim said foreign workers thinking of marrying Malaysians to secure citizenship risk losing their jobs and being repatriated. 'They are here to work. Period', he said (*Straits Times*, 19 February 2006).

The role of government policy

It is clear from the preceding paragraph that governments can and do play a major role in either encouraging or discouraging international marriages between their nationals and

particular categories of foreigners. In both Korea and Japan, there is concern to maintain ethnic homogeneity, which leads to a basically conservative stance by the government with regard to international marriage, but at the same time in both countries, there are groups of men who are seen to be missing out in the domestic marriage market (in particular, the low educated, and farmers in certain regions of the country) who are seen to require assistance in finding brides internationally. The end result is interesting: the promotion in Korea of marriages between Korean farmers and Korean Chinese women who, although foreigners, are at least of the same ethnicity (Lee 2005, p. 352); the involvement, in Japan, of local government in mail order bride programmes in areas such as rural northern Honshu where there was a perceived crisis in the marriage market (Piper 2003, Suzuki 2003).

A different situation prevails in Singapore and Malaysia, the mixed-race populations of which are largely the result of migration flows over the past 150 years and where ethnic homogeneity cannot be an objective. Nevertheless, their policies on international marriage are complex. Their governments seek to ‘quarantine’, as it were, contract labour migrants from the possibility of marrying citizens, though they make it very easy for professional or skilled workers to contract such marriages. This has to do with the need for labour market flexibility, and the ease of repatriating ‘expendable’ foreign workers should labour market conditions require it. However, both countries provide the curious paradox whereby those seeking brides through commercial bride-seeking arrangements often bring brides into the country from the same socio-economic background as those who are stringently prevented from marrying if already working in the country as maids.

The governments of Hong Kong SAR and Taiwan see increasing cross-border, international marriages between their residents/citizens and Mainland Chinese as threats to their social and national security and take stands discouraging such unions. Mainland spouses and their children of Hong Kong residents typically have to wait for 10 years to be granted a one-way permit to enter Hong Kong for family reunion (So 2003). As a result, many Hong Kong working-class families are split across the border between Hong Kong and Mainland China. In 1991, it was estimated that 95,200 Hong Kong residents had Chinese spouses unable to join them in Hong Kong from Mainland China (So 2003). Because of nationalist disputes between Taiwan and China over Taiwan’s future political status and because of China’s military stand on solving this issue, the Taiwanese government has implemented special regulations on cross-Strait marriages under the ‘Regulations on Relationships between People of Taiwan and China’ (Shen 2003, Chao 2004). Issues of residency, work permits, and citizenship are treated differently for Chinese spouses than for other foreign spouses in Taiwan. Chinese spouses are able to apply for residency only after they have married for two years or have had children. Since 1992, the Taiwanese government has set annual quotas on the numbers of Chinese spouses granted residency in Taiwan. It generally takes eight to 10 years to gain residency in Taiwan and another two years to earn Taiwanese citizenship (Shen 2003). In addition, Chinese spouses are not allowed to hold jobs before they become residents in Taiwan, unless their Taiwanese spouses are over 65 years or disabled with young children under the age of six.

Issues and questions covered and not covered in the literature on international marriage

Trends, scale, causes, and motivations of international marriage

The most documented and analysed issues in the existing literature on international marriages in Southeast and East Asia are the trends, scale, and motivations of these

marriages, as evident in the first part of the paper. Rapidly increasing numbers of international marriages between Asians, rather than merely between Western men and Asian women, and the predominance of relocation by women in international marriage migration are two frequently examined issues. On motivations, the emphases on those men from wealthier countries who seek wives from poorer countries tend to be on their economic and/or cultural inability to acquire local wives and on their specific preferences for feminine qualities perceived to be found in those 'other' women. Women from poorer countries become the available subjects for compensating the economic, gender, and sexual frustrations and fantasies those men face in their societies. In contrast, studies on Asian women who enter international marriages tend to focus on the seemingly 'contradictory' motivations of either economic/status considerations or human emotion in search of love globally. In this case, lower-class men from wealthier countries become desirable channels of mobility and romance for women from poorer countries.

While this gender emphasis stresses the 'gendered geographies of power' (Pessar and Graham 2001) resulting from structural inequality between different parts of the world, recent scholarship has also argued that it risks simplifying the complexity of the decisions and experiences of these women and men on entering international marriages (Piper and Roces 2003, Constable 2005). 'Other' Asian women are no more 'traditional' and 'submissive' than any other women and while they may be marrying 'up' in terms of the international economic hierarchy, this is not necessarily so in terms of social status in host societies (Freeman 2005). The whole issue of 'global hypergamy' or 'spatial hypergamy' (to use Lavelly's 1991 term) 'fails to ask in any but the broadest level of social and cultural generalization how up might be defined differently according to one's social position' (Constable 2003a, p. 167). To understand this complexity, the issue of agency becomes an important aspect of inquiry in the literature of international marriage.

Means of promoting and facilitating these marriages

How international marriage is initiated, arranged, or promoted in terms of its trend and scale is another prominent issue in the literature of international marriage. As discussed in the first part of the paper, increasing mobility in the form of tourism, business travel, labour migration, or study has created favourable circumstances for international marriage to occur. For instance, Piper and Roces (2003) stress the direct and indirect connections between labour migration and international marriage among women. In addition, commercial agencies organized across borders in the forms of mail order bride or marriage brokerage (Wang and Chang 2002, Constable 2003a, 2003b), ethnic/family networks (Brown 1996), modern technology such as the internet (Liu and Liu 2004), and human trafficking are cited as common channels for facilitating these marriages.

The issue of agency in international marriage and its relation to gender and migration

The exploration of agency in the literature of international marriages is largely from women's experiences and perspectives – perhaps largely because women represent the majority of marriage migrants and overwhelmingly come from economically disadvantaged countries in comparison with their foreign husbands. Feminists are arguing that women who enter international marriage are neither simply victims nor totally free subjects. Marriage migration opens up some new opportunities for women and also creates new inequalities. The focus of inquiry rather becomes how, within social constraints, women actively make their decisions on entering international marriage,

negotiate their relations with their husbands, their husbands' families, the host societies and the families and communities back home, and reconstruct their subjectivities. As a result of feminist involvement in the scholarship of international marriage migration, numerous new research questions are emerging. The boundaries between marriage as a migration strategy and migration as a marriage strategy, between labour migration and marriage migration, and between commercial international marriages and trafficking of women into international marriage are re-conceptualized as fluid and inclusive (McKay 2003, Nakamatsu 2003, Piper and Roces 2003, Suzuki 2003, Burgess 2004, Chao 2004, Freeman 2005, Palriwala and Uberoi 2005, Schein 2005). These boundaries cannot be taken for granted and may only be meaningful within specific social contexts.

In examining women's experiences and agency in international marriage, scholars also note that men from less developed countries are less likely to migrate or experience international mobility through international marriage as compared with their female counterparts (Freeman 2005). Perhaps partly as a result, men's experiences with international marriage are less explored than women's. In order to fully understand how international marriage is gendered, it is important to compare the experiences and subjectivity of men who enter international marriage and those who do not, and to pay attention to the changing gender relations in both local and global contexts as a result of increasing numbers of international marriages.

Social consequences in sending and receiving countries

Social consequences of international marriage in both countries of origin and destination are other important aspects covered in the literature. Changing family and gender relations as a result of international marriage, negative representations of men and women who enter international marriage, and issues related to marriage migrants' relocation and adjustment in their destinations are key foci. Family and gender relations are shaped by international marriages because many daughters replace their fathers and brothers as breadwinners and are taking up financial responsibility for their natal families. This can change the ways in which sending communities perceive women and the role and authority of men in the family and community (Palriwala and Uberoi 2005). At the same time, the presence of foreign 'brides' and daughter-in-laws in receiving communities can also reconstruct family and gender relations in these families.

Women and men who enter international marriage, in particular the commodified ones, tend to come from low social backgrounds and are often represented as gold diggers and patriarchal actors respectively. Marriage migrants are likely to be discriminated against in receiving communities as economic, cultural, or racial 'others' (Roces 2003). Their presence, indeed, tests the social boundaries of these communities. Consequently, these marriages are seen as sources of social problems, thus creating great emotional, social, and legal obstacles for those needing acceptance and relocation into receiving societies (Chao 2004). The family, the community, and the state are the most direct agents and institutions that respond to these marriages and migrants. Their responses, in particular the legal regulations imposed by the state, become central to the ways in which international couples will resolve their marriage, family lives and their relations with others in both countries.

Conclusion

International marriage has emerged as a visible social phenomenon in East and Southeast Asia and has attracted increasing scholarly attention. This paper reviews the trends in and

research on international marriage in the region. We found that the trend, scale, and influences on women's international marriage migration from Vietnam, Philippines, or China to Taiwan, Japan, Korea, or Singapore are the foci of scholarly investigation. While women as marriage migrants attract the most attention in these investigations, most studies concentrate on the processes and experiences of their arrival and relocation rather than paying equal attention to their departure process and to the consequences of their departure for the sending countries. As a result, studies on international marriage in Taiwan, Japan, Korea, or Singapore as receiving countries is rather over-represented in the existing research. Compared to female marriage migrants who are presented as dynamic agents in their processes of migration, men as 'receivers of foreign brides' are more likely to be labelled rather one-dimensionally as the ones who fail to find suitable partners domestically and who use their economic capacity to 'buy' women abroad. While some scholars (Suzuki 2003, Freeman 2005) have paid increasing attention to breaking down this homogenous image of men who take wives from less developing countries, the structural and personal factors contributing to men's decisions to enter international marriage and their ongoing negotiation in the marriage in different circumstances are still comparatively lacking in the existing literature.

Finally, although scholars are well aware of legal regulations and consequences of these regulations for international couples, there are somewhat few empirical studies on these issues. As world politics is organized by nation-state units, travelling subjects always carry their nation-state with them. Through international marriage, two individuals bring their nations into intimate encounter with one another. The rising trend of international marriage presents a number of profound issues for the states involved. These relate to the granting and meaning of citizenship for marriage migrants and their children, the question of rights and entitlements in married life and issues such as access to employment and public welfare services, and custody of children. International couples must deal with the issues not only of how to gain citizenship and rights upon entering a nation-state, but also on how to exit a nation-state if necessary. What roles do states play in promoting or discouraging international marriage? What are emerging policies, strategies, institutions, or legal procedures that states employ to actively manage and/or passively cope with the increasing number of international marriages? What are the social and political motivations behind these newly introduced state regulations or policies? How do state-imposed restrictions shape international couples' married lives, societal reception of these marriages, legal systems and international relations? Finally, how does gender figure in the formulation and negotiation of these regulations within the context of women-dominated international marriage migration?

These are important issues and detailed and comparative studies of these issues will enable us to contextualize international marriages in both specific and broader contexts. For instance, while many Asian governments have relatively relaxed policies toward international marriages between 'skilled', professional migrants and their local population, many of them tend to pose rigid restrictions upon potential unions between 'unskilled' labour migrants and their citizens. This shows that the 'social quality' or the socio-economic background of potential marriage migrants is crucial in determining many Asian governments' favourable or censorious policies toward those seeking to enter or remain in the country through international marriages. In the case of foreign wives in commercial bride-seeking arrangements, who often share similar low socio-economic background with labour migrants, such as domestic workers, the concern on 'social quality' of potential marriage migrants in receiving countries is reinforced by the concern on 'working related migration controls'. Under current governmental regulations in many

Asian societies, whereas skilled migrants are granted great flexibility in changing their migrant status from employee to spouse, labour migrants are often given no such rights.

In the case of international marriages between ethnic Korean Chinese women and rural Korean men, ethnicity and culture serves as a positive factor in the Korean government's marriage recruitment. Yet, the shared ethnic and cultural background between Taiwanese and Chinese does not yield positive responses from the Taiwanese government on international marriages between Chinese and Taiwanese because of its concerns over maintaining an independent Taiwanese sovereignty from China. The increasing number of Chinese spouses, mainly women, in Taiwan are considered to have the potential to lure their Taiwanese spouses to 'go Chinese' and produce a generation of Taiwanese children who may identify with their Chinese mothers' Chinese national identity (Shen 2003).

In addition, as discussed earlier in the paper, household residential arrangements of international couples, working status and social welfare of foreign spouses and their children, and the procedures for gaining residency and citizenship for different categories of foreign spouses and their children in both receiving and sending countries are important sites for exploring the influences of governmental policies on international marriages.

International marriage is an intimate site of global interaction, of global gender politics, of testing the state's capacity to work with global flows of people and their emotions, and of international politics. Extending the existing studies on the role of the state in international marriage will help us conceptualize complex relations between globalization, migration, gender, and nationalism within specific social contexts.

Notes

1. In 2003, of marriages in the Philippines involving a Filipina bride and a foreign husband, the largest number of foreign grooms were Japanese (5468), Americans (3002), Australians (569), Chinese (393), Germans (205) and Spanish (124). The largest number of foreign brides to Filipino grooms were Chinese (1999), Americans (514), Japanese (155), Spanish (129) and Australians (111) (NSO 2006).
2. The pattern does not hold in Japan, however, where, according to analysis of data in the National Survey on Marriage and the Family in Japan 2004, among males aged 25–69 those with tertiary education were slightly less likely to be married than those with lower levels of education. In Jakarta in 1980 and 1990, too, tertiary educated males were more likely to remain unmarried than those in other educational groups (Jones 1997, Table 3.6).
3. One Vietnam brides agency in Singapore advertises in the newspaper: 'Vietnam village girls. Medical by S'pore doctor'.
4. Source: <http://www.unescap.org/ttdw/statabs/index.asp>. The figure for Malaysia increased even more, but the absolute figures given appeared to be enormously inflated. Figures for tourist arrivals were not available in the database.

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