

Interethnic Marriage

The social exchange and gender hierarchy of new immigrant women in Taiwan

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Introduction

While many have noticed how globalization has shaped our material world, it is inevitable to observe that our spiritual world is also influenced by the changes brought by globalization. With increasing trading and traveling around the world, people meet with their potential mate through their everyday interactions at work, community, and social network that was shaped by their close relatives and friends. Globalization extends one's niche and goes beyond the traditional geographic bounds. Moreover, traditional mate matching through social network has been challenged by the materialistic society and a commercialized matching service has become popular than ever. The traditional ideal of marriage by love is still reserved by the majority of the society but some men in the relatively richer societies have sought for such new commercialized matching service to find their mate from relative less developed countries. In the U.S., foreign brides (or commonly called "mail-order brides) were brought to the U.S. to their grooms who are often much older than them. According to the U.S. immigration statistics, there were roughly 200 international marriage agencies in 1999 that coordinated between 4,000 and 6,000 marriages. By 2010, the number of agencies has been doubled and the number of couples has grown to between 10,000 and 15,000.

In Taiwan, a similar trend followed since the late 1990s. The increasing business with southeastern Asian countries and China gave a new perspective in marriage market for Taiwanese males. Especially, the elevated female education attainment and competency in job market make Taiwanese females able to be independent and less likely to view marriage as a necessary choice. Traditionally, Taiwanese females would expect to get married in 20s and start their families or they would be viewed as failure. Unmarried while reaching 30s was considered a face-losing condition and parents and relatives would pressure these young women to find a mate, by herself or by a local matchmaker. This pressure is gradually lifted as women got much better education and job comparing to males in the past two decades. On the other hand, Taiwanese males who are not equipped with higher education and a professional job began to find themselves difficult to find a mate with local Taiwanese women.

As the marriage squeeze for Taiwanese males, there is an open marriage market where thousands of young females from southeastern Asia and Mainland China are interested in married with these Taiwanese men for a better future. The push and pull factors in marriage market encourage more and more commercial matchmaker agencies to help promoting intermarriages between Taiwanese men and foreign-born women. In reality, Taiwanese men who lived in countryside without competitive quality in marriage market found these foreign-born brides as their life-saving straw. Scholars have been interested in how these marriages influence the population dynamics and its future implications in Taiwan (see reviews by Yang, Huang, Tsai, & Wang, 2012).

In this paper, we follow the similar interest in the intermarriage families in Taiwan, but we turn our focus to more in-depth analysis from social exchange perspective to explore the gender hierarchy and the decision-making within these marriage relationships in Taiwan. Through the empirical data and interview on foreign brides, we attempt to shed a light to the literature to learn the intermarriage trends and implications for the next few decades in the new Taiwanese society.

Women's Movement and New Immigrants' Status in Taiwan

From 1970s and on a series of significant changes took place in Taiwan which also transformed women's social and economic status, and further changes women's traditional life course. In Taiwan In the early 70s the first waves of Taiwan women's movement arose after Sheow-Lien Lu declared her "New Feminism" which brought the public's attention to the unequal treatment of the society to women. The "Awakening of Women" magazine agency founded in 1982 by Yuan-Cheng Li that was the only women's organization focus on the gender issues during the enforcement of national law (Chang, D. T., 2009).

Fraser (1997) analyzed the women's movement and divided it into three stages

1. From 1960s to mid-1980, the debate of gender differences or equality vs differences;
2. From mid-1980 to mid-1990, the differences among women, or right vs wrong;
3. From 1990 to current, stresses multiple interesting differences "anti-universalism, anti-essentialism.

Starting late 1980s is also the time that many women pursued higher education and career. Eventually they delayed their marriage and child birth. Starting in the 1980 many foreign brides married in Taiwan. They were part of Taiwan society yet still foreigners to the movement and excluded from the movement. According to Simmel (1908, in Juan, 2007) stranger as "the one that comes today and stays for tomorrow". Many immigrant wives in Taiwan seemed to

experience feelings as strangers even after they have resided in Taiwan for many years. Consequently, most of these new immigrants though included in domestic chores and labor, yet excluded from political participation, economic accomplishment, even educational chance (Juan, 2012). Therefore, women's movements do not seem to affect nor add any benefit to the new immigrants.

Over the past two decades, many young females were involved in mediated marriages, through a third party. In Taiwan most of the foreign-born brides are from Mainland China and South Asia. These young females married into Taiwanese families to seek a better social-economic status and to support their natural families in their home countries (Win, 2011). Due to the low birth rate and postponed age of marriage of females in Taiwan, most of these immigrant wives are expected to give birth within the first year of marriage (Sheu, 2007). Coping with a new environment, new family and motherhood created many issues and problems for the new immigrants.

Chow's (2007) study indicated these new immigrants have low self-esteem and a crisis of self-identity. Therefore, they have little contact and interaction with the neighbors and the community in order to avoid misunderstanding. The lack of representation of their cultures, opportunity to be included in local community and positive reports further hinders their identifying with the local culture.

Social Exchange Theory

Three major concepts for social exchange theory are *rewards*, *costs*, and *resources*, which are considered as the major components for interpersonal exchange. Rewards and resources refer to the benefits exchange in social relationship. *Rewards* include the pleasures, satisfactions, and gratifications a person enjoys from participating in a relationship (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959). *Resources*, on the other hand, are any commodities, material or symbolic, that can be transmitted through interpersonal behavior (Foa and Foa, 1980) and give one person the capacity to reward another (Emerson, 1976). The costs of social exchange relationships can involve punishments experienced, the energy invested in a relationship, or rewards foregone as a result of engaging in one behavior or course of action rather than another (Blau, 1964). The outcomes of a relationship are equal to the rewards obtained from a relationship minus the costs incurred, and the satisfaction level simply comes from the evaluation of the outcomes. Although it is generally the case that the higher the level of outcomes available, the greater the satisfaction, nevertheless, these concepts are not equivalent. The expectation for the interpersonal relationship should also be taken into account. Individuals come to their relationships with an awareness of societal norms for relationships and a backlog of

experiences. Therefore, the information reflects what individuals feel is deserved, and what individuals feel is important for them to experience within a relationship are also influential to maintain the relationship.

Normally, when the outcomes derived from a relationship exceed the comparison level (CL), the level of satisfaction will be higher (Nye 1979; Sabatelli 1984; Thibaut and Kelley 1959). Nevertheless, satisfaction with a relationship alone does not determine the likelihood that a relationship will continue. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) developed the concept of comparison level of alternatives (CL_{alt}), defined as the lowest level of outcome a person will accept from a relationship in light of available alternatives, to explain individuals' decisions to remain in or leave a relationship. When the outcomes available in an alternative relationship exceed those available in a relationship, the likelihood increases that person will leave the relationship.

Hence, staying in or leaving a relationship is not simply a matter of how rewarding that relationship is. Relationships that are rewarding are more likely to be stable because a high level of outcomes reduces, in terms of expectations, the likelihood of a better alternative existing. Unsatisfactory relationships, in turn, may remain stable for the lack of a better alternative. These relationships have been conceived of as *nonvoluntary relationships* by Thibaut and Kelley (1959). Married individuals who stay in violent relationships can be thought of as participating in a nonvoluntary relationship—that is, the relationship stays stable in spite of the violence because of the absence of better alternatives (Gelles, 1976).

In addition, Merton (1941) and Davis (1941) argued that interracial marriages would frequently involve an exchange of status characteristics. In their studies, highly educated blacks would trade their educational status in order to reap the benefits associated with the racial status of a potential white spouse. Similarly, whites with low levels of education would trade their racial status for the educational status of a potential black spouse. Consequently, a black-white marriage was likely to involve a black spouse with greater education than the white spouse because these types of individuals would each have something to gain from the union. Interracial marriages involving white spouses with greater education than their black spouses would be much less likely because blacks would have nothing to offer their potential white spouse in return for the white spouse “marrying down” in terms of race. Both Merton and Davis believed that this process of status exchange was applicable only to black male–white female unions because a black man’s educational background would be more closely tied to future potential earnings and prestige than would a black woman’s education.

Lacking empirical data to confirm this hypothesis, Merton provided a framework to test the theory. He compared the relative frequency of three types of interracial marriage: educationally homogamous unions (Group A), white hypergamous unions (Group B), and white hypogamous unions (Group C). Group B was expected to be the most frequent type of

interracial marriages, but the test failed by many follow-up studies. Numerous scholars have proved that the educationally homogamous unions (Group A) is the most common type (Bernard 1966; Heer 1974; Porterfield 1978). In 1993, Kalmijn introduced the hypergamy ratio test to test this theory. A hypergamy ratio is calculated as the number of people in a certain group marrying up in education divided by the number of people in that group marrying down. Using vital statistics data from 1970 to 1986, he found that both white men and white women are more likely to marry up in education within interracial unions than would be expected if educational assortative mating were independent of racial combination. Qian (1997) found similar results in his analysis of interracial marriage in the 1980 and 1990 censuses.

Marriage Migration in Taiwan

Migration to marry a foreign partner is known as “marriage migration”, is on the rise in Taiwan. One factor behind this trend is the continuing urbanization in high-income economies, coupled with low fertility and aging populations. Many Taiwanese men obligated to take in charge of family farms are unable to find brides because local prefer urban work and lifestyles. Instead of hire a laborer, which they can barely afford, they rather to marry one. In Taiwan, the annual wages for a foreign domestic laborer is about 8,500 U.S. dollars, and around 12,500 U.S. dollars for a local domestic laborer. To hire a foreign laborer, you need to be qualified and evaluated by the government agency, and very possibly, these workers can only work for you for limited time. Comparatively, it costs only 12,000 U.S. dollars to marry a foreign bride. For many Taiwanese men who are not competitive in marriage market, they need a woman to take care of his families; marrying one is undoubtedly a more economical choice. A foreign bride will bring in higher value than a hired laborer: sex, childbearing, care giver, daily labor, and long-term commitment.

For women, international marriage can be a chance for economic security and social mobility. Chen and Chin (2008) find that Thai women who migrated to marry Taiwanese men did so to escape poverty in rural Thailand. Obtaining secure and legal residence, including status for work, in the host country was an important factor in international marriages between Taiwanese men and women from many Southeast Asian women, including Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, and China. Therefore, the international marriage relationship is built upon the exchange of men’s social and economic status, secure living environment, and legal residence in Taiwan with the labor, sex, childbearing, and loyalty from foreign women.

Data

The data used in this study was collected in Pingdong, Taiwan in Spring 2012. It was a face-to-face survey of 66 female immigrants who came from China or southeastern Asian countries, including Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Philippine. The survey used snowball sampling to interview 72 foreign born mothers; 66 of them had completed the whole interview. The formal questionnaire contains 139 questions, which cover basic demographic information, level of acculturation, family relationship, parenting style, social expectation, son preference attitude, and fertility behavior. Each interview takes approximately 2 hours to complete, which include the survey questionnaire and in-depth interview. Before the survey, all subjects received consent forms and agreed to provide contact information for follow-up contact. After completion, all participants received gifts for participation.

Discussion and Implication

In our study, among 66 foreign born women, 31 were from Vietnam, 14 were from China, 14 were from Indonesia, 6 were from the Philippines, and 1 was from Cambodia. Subjects' age ranged from 21 to 54, with an average of 35.1. The age difference between subjects and their husbands ranged from 0 to 30 years, and 68 percent of them marry to husbands who are 8 to 30 years older than them. Majority of interviewed women have middle school or high school degree (70%), and over half of them affiliate either with Buddhism or Daoism (59%). About 70 percent of them have either full-time or part-time jobs, and over 76% of their husbands are either in blue-collar jobs or small business owner.

Status Exchange. It is rather clear that the majority of these women are young and well-educated (compared to the majority women in their own countries). Similar to Merton and Davis's studies, we found that many highly educated foreign brides would trade their *educational status* in order to reap the benefits associated with the *ethnic status* (more specifically, the *national status*) of a Taiwanese spouse. Similarly, Taiwanese men with low levels of education would trade their ethnic status for the educational status of a potential foreign spouse. The process of mate selection is just like shopping behavior in marriage market. For the international marriage, the exchange dynamic is even more obvious.

Out of a total of 66 foreign-born women, 68 percent of them married to a man who are eight years or older than them. And in fact, over 18 women (27%) married to their husbands who are 20 years or older than them through the services of brokers and agencies. Before getting married, they only met their husbands once or twice. Similar to the "whiteness" value in Black-White intermarriage, these women carried a belief of "living in Taiwan will secure better social and economic standard". Hence, these young, well-educated women traded their youth and educational status with the secure living and legal residence from their Taiwanese spouses.

Expectation of Gender Role. The role of Taiwanese women used to be limited in the domestic sphere, doing household chores, taking care of elderly, and bearing children. This stereotype on female gender role is now taken over by the foreign women. The trends and phenomenon of foreign brides reinforces the already embedded sexism in Taiwan. The marriage certificate is like a contract they have signed, not only represents the loyalty and commitment of a marriage, but also based on the deprivation of women's autonomy; and unlike the most Taiwanese marriages, there is no room for bargaining for foreign brides. Mrs. Wang, an Indonesian married to a retired Taiwanese man who is 18 years older than her. She has been in Taiwan for 25 years, is one of our interviewees whose marriage relationship exemplifies the gender inequality imposed on these women. "I feel like I've marrying his whole family, and my status in the family is no more than a servant without payment. I'm responsible for cleaning, cooking, and taking care of my parents-in-law," said Mrs. Wang. "I feel like my daily work is a never-ending process.... and it is the jobs they expected me to do." She also complained that she "normally gets up 5:00 in the morning to prepare everything for families, while her husband slept till 10am and start working in their family store."

However, it is surprising that even though these foreign women seem to be oppressed in the role of wife, they tend to be grateful and positive when talking about their husbands. For example, Mrs. Wang commented about her husband that "he is a decent man, he gave me a lot of freedom and never blames me for anything I do." "He also cares about children, and gives me good enough money when I need to buy something ...". However, the family finance is controlled by her mother-in-law, so she was not paid for the household chores or helping family business. This unequal family structure somehow reflects the derivative marriage relationship.

Almost all foreign brides in our study were expected to have children as soon as they married to Taiwan. So, the average time for these women have their first child after married is 15 months. Although the gender preference of children was not strongly emphasized, most of them stated that boys are still preferred by their husbands' parents or relatives, but not from their husbands. Fortunately, they were not pressured by their husbands or parents-in-law for having sons, or having more children. And indeed, the number of children among the subjects of this study is not as high as interpreted in the media. Most women have only 1 or 2 children, and only two women have 3 children. So, this finding in fact clears the myth of foreign brides with high fertility in Taiwan.

Unequal Exchange and Stable Relationship. Although near 70 percent of these foreign brides have either full-time or part-time jobs, most of them are helping small family business, doing cleaning works, or temporarily labor for community. Most of them did not have legal citizenship to be hired in the regular company. Mrs. Tsai, a Vietnamese woman who has been in Taiwan for 17 years. She married to a man who is 16 years older than her and she has two

children, 16 and 14. She complained, "I used to believe that I can get a job and start a new life after my child grows up. But language barrier and the required degree block my way. When I applied for jobs, even those jobs requiring no professional skills, I was asked to provide a local degree. The college degree I got in Vietnam was not accepted by most companies here in Taiwan." "Even getting a driver's license is hard for me.....because all tests are in Chinese. We recently have places to learn Chinese in our community last year.... So till last month, I finally received my driver's license." During the interview, Mrs. Tsai described her marriage with a great frustration.

Clearly, the comparison level of her marriage relationship is not high enough because the costs she spent were overall higher than the rewards and resources she gained. Nevertheless, most foreign brides came from poor families, the level of alternative outcome they will accept from a relationship is relatively lower than others. Although comparison level (CL) is low, but it is still higher than the comparison level of alternatives (CL_{alt}). When the outcomes available in an alternative relationship does not exceed those available in a relationship, the likelihood increases that person will stay on the relationship. Although there are many unsatisfied experiences in the marriage relationship, with the limited resources most foreign women have, and lack of social network and language ability, these unsatisfactory relationships may remain stable for lack of a better alternative.

The alternative concept can be also related to the experience of *dependence*. Dependence refers to the degree to which a foreign woman believes that she is subject to or reliant on the other for relationship outcome (Levinger 1982). In the social exchange equation, dependence may be seen as one of the costs in a relationship, but this is probably determined in part by the level of satisfaction within the relationship. In many cases, even attraction is low, with increasing the level of dependence, it discourage foreign women from leaving their intermarriage relationship. The level of dependence can be influenced by either internal barriers or external barriers. Many internal barriers will increase the level of dependence, such as the feelings of obligation and indebtedness to their spouses, or the moral belief that children should be raised in a home with both parents present, etc. External barriers are things like community pressures, legal pressures, and material or economic considerations that foster dependence by increasing the social and economic costs of terminating a relationship. The majority number of foreign brides was expected to have children as soon as they married to Taiwan. With tied up by the new families and children, and no enough resources to obtain in the new society, both internal and external barriers certainly push these women to depend on their spouses more, and encourage them to stay in the relationship.

In addition, *norms* and *cognitive orientation* also play an important role in the exchange behavior. The exchange relationships are governed by normative and cognitive exchange

orientations that delineate acceptable and appropriate behavior. In other words, the societal norms, values, beliefs on acceptable and appropriate behavior will regulate the exchange behavior. These orientations serve as the standards for interpersonal behavior as well as for the interethnic marriages. Many norms and cognitive values involved in the expectation that within a close and intimate relationship. Very often, the traditional patriarchal values and its expectation on women's role in marriage relationship were brought into these orientations. When these norms or cognitive values are violated, as when a wife doesn't carry the household and care-given duties within a marriage, people are apt to complain more about the relationship and pressure the wife to restore a more just and fair patterns of exchange.

Of course, in the exchange behavior within a marriage relationship, we cannot undermine the factors of *trust* and *commitment*. All types marriage relationships must start with trust and commitment. The wedding ceremony and marriage certificate are not only treated as the material culture, but also seen as mutual commitment in the marriage relationship. When relationships conform to the norms of reciprocity and when the pattern of exchange is perceived as being fair, individuals are more likely to come to believe that they will not be exploited (Blau 1964; McDonald 1981). *Trust* is proposed to be important in relationship development because it allows individuals to be less calculative and to see longer-term outcomes (Scanzoni 1979). Put in a different way, through trust an individual is able to expect fairness and justice in the long-term and therefore does not have to demand it immediately. On the other hand, *commitment* involves the willingness of individuals to work for the continuation of their relationships (Leik and Leik 1977). Exchange theorists would expect commitment to develop within a relationship when partners experience high and reciprocal levels of rewards that facilitate the experience of trust (Sabatelli 1999). Commitment builds stability into relationships by increasing partners' dependence on their relationships (Cook and Emerson 1978; Leik and Leik 1977). During the interviews, although subjects complained about the family work and few unequal situations within their marriages, their attachments to the family, children, and spouses were not fading away. The mutual trust and commitment for their marriages do exist and it builds stability for their marriage relationship.

In sum, exchange behavior in a marriage relationship cannot be simply interpreted as the relationship between costs and rewards; this close, intimate relationship should also taking into account for the expectation, available resources, social norms and values, trust, and commitment. All these components provide us a better picture to learn the interethnic marriages among foreign brides in Taiwan.

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