

## 1. Introduction

The study of migration patterns has been a central topic of interest for demographers and economists for decades. The assimilation and welfare of migrants also often come under the scrutiny of social scientists. This study focuses on the particular pattern of migration that results from cross border marriages. This form of marriage has gained popularity in parts of Asia starting from the mid 1990s. Most of these transnational marriages consist of arrangements made between a bride from one of the less developed countries and a groom from a relatively developed country. Commercial marriage brokers, who charge a large lump sum from the prospective groom and organize an oversee meeting between the groom and bride, may or may not be involved.

Between 1989-2008, there have been more than 399,000 foreign marriages registered in Taiwan (US Human Rights Report, 2008). In South Korea and Singapore, this form of cross border marriages has slowly gained in popularity over the last few years. Given the magnitude of these marriages and the sensationalism of the topic, this phenomenon has received extensive media attention in the Western World.<sup>1</sup> However, few papers on the topic have been published in the peer-reviewed academic literature. Most of the articles have been limited to smaller-scale interviews and analysis concentrated in specific locales due to the lack of data (Hsia 2005, 2006; Hsu, 2004).

This study, based on datasets from Taiwan, is one of the first to examine the phenomenon using a micro-level dataset. We created the merged dataset using several different sources. We begin with the registry of universal marriage and divorce records, which has individual information on brides and grooms from 1998 to 2003. We then link this dataset with recent birth records and a follow-up household survey conducted by the government in 2006. This effort allows us to further tab into the family life of these foreign brides subsequent to their weddings. The main goal of this paper is to provide a descriptive

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<sup>1</sup> See New York Times report on February 22, 2007 and March 30, 2008. BBC

overview of the mail order phenomenon in Taiwan as well as the impact of foreign bride on the divorce of local women.

## **II. Characteristics of Transnational Marriages**

Table 1 presents the trend of foreign bride marriages broken down by the origins of brides. By 2003, the transnational trends reach a peak. Nearly every one in three couples getting married that year is of foreign origin. There was a sudden drop of brides from China in 2003. This drop was as a result of policy change in granting visas to brides from China. Some of the Chinese brides were arrested by law enforcement officials in Taiwan in early 2000s, accused of using marriage as an excuse to enter Taiwan and be involved in the sex trade. Their husbands are found to be men who are retired from the army, and who received a lump sum of money from human traffickers. The illicit activities have certainly made the marriage brokerage business more complicated, and thus government has imposed more strict rules in granting visa to Chinese brides.

In Table 2, we present the breakdown of brides and grooms' ages, by the origin of brides. Grooms with foreign brides are typically older compared to the grooms who get married to a Taiwanese bride. This corresponds to the observation that many of those who marry a foreign bride could not find a suitable mate in Taiwan. Especially since, on average, Chinese brides tend to marry older men as compared to Southeast Asian brides. In a separate survey done in 2003, brides were asked to rank their husband's health condition in one of four categories ranging from no problems to severe problems.<sup>2</sup> Among the brides who were married between 1994-2003, 8.3% of Chinese brides reported their husbands as being in the worst health condition, while 5.1% reported their husband in the next to worst health condition.

In Table 3, the breakdown by education level of brides and grooms are presented. A few stylized facts can be drawn from this table. First, in Taiwan, younger generations receive

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<sup>2</sup> These retired soldiers usually refer to any soldiers who have served for 10 years and retired from the military. However, most of them had fled with Chiang Kai Shiek to Taiwan in the early 50s. Therefore, they are considerably older.

more education than older ones. Secondly, women have benefitted from this increase more than men; by 2005 the Taiwanese women who get married receive more education on average than their husband (this is also true in the general population).

As for the marriages involving foreign spouses, in 1998 most of the grooms that marry foreign brides (China excluded) have completed only a middle school education (9 years), which has been consistently less than the average education of Taiwanese brides. Again, this reinforces the anecdote that, on average, the grooms involved in cross border marriages were less desirable in the local marriage market, and therefore they turned to the foreign market.

The difference in education between Southeast Asian brides and Chinese brides is not so apparent. However, one fact that cannot be observed from this table is the language issue. Although Southeast Asian brides on average have completed a middle school education, most of them arrive in Taiwan without knowing how to speak any of local languages--Mandarin Chinese, Hakka or Taiwanese Hokkien dialect. Brides from the mainland could at least communicate in the official language, Mandarin Chinese. The language issue becomes apparent in the 2003 survey, which asks brides about a training lesson that they wish the government would provide. Nearly 70% of foreign spouses select the language training lesson.

Another piece of evidence that can be used to support the differences between grooms involving foreign brides is a 2003 survey on all marriages involving a foreign bride. In the survey it was asked whether the spouse receives a disability booklet, which indicates that the groom is receiving disability benefits from the government and is certified. Between 1993 to 1997, approximately 13% of the Taiwanese grooms who married a Southeast Asian wife are disabled.

In summary, the men involving in a cross border marriage are more likely to be less educated, older, and in worse health condition.

#### **IV. Regression Analysis**

Our next step will be analyzing the divorce rate of local Taiwanese marriage. Conditional on getting married, would the influx of foreign bride have an impact of probability of divorce? If we model husband's decision about whether to stay in a marriage or get divorce. The probability of divorce would depend on the outside option. With the influx of foreign bride, the outside option could be better. We would like to set up a formal model for husband's decision to divorce and we will test the model by performing regression analysis.

**Table 1: Number of Wedding Registration with Foreign Brides Over Time**

<b>Bride Origin</b>	<b><u>1998</u></b>	<b><u>1999</u></b>	<b><u>2000</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2002</u></b>	<b><u>2003</u></b>	<b><u>2004</u></b>	<b><u>2005</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2007</u></b>
Southeast Asia	8,879	12,338	18,552	16,354	17,022	16,855	17,338	10,159	6,371	6,500
China	12,645	18,034	23,840	28,665	29,099	32,278	10,567	14,041	13,900	14,595
Other Foreign Countries	322	2,036	--	296	314	336	352	398	359	464
Foreign (missing origin)	1,820	1,588	--	2,366	1,647	709	1	--	--	--
Taiwan	113,671	142,535	139,226	118,838	124,298	122,808	103,319	117,062	106,069	113,482
Foreign Brides	23,666	33,996	42,392	47,681	48,082	50,178	28,258	24,598	20,630	21,559
Local Brides	113,671	142,535	139,226	118,838	124,298	122,808	103,319	117,062	106,069	113,482
(%) Foreign/Local	17.23%	19.26%	23.34%	28.63%	27.89%	29.01%	21.48%	17.36%	16.28%	15.96%

Note:

Southeast Asia includes Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.

Statistics of Southeast Asia brides between 1998 to 2000 are from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was responsible in granting visas to Southeast Asian brides.

2007 statistics are from a different data source, Ministry of Interior, Department of Household Registration

**Table 2: Age of Brides and Gloom**

By Bride Origin and Year of Marriage	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>
<b>Southeast Asia</b>									
Brides' Age	25.19	24.25	24.18	23.33	23.52	24.43	24.83	25.85	26.16
Grooms' Age	36.84	36.57	36.31	36.87	37.22	38.30	38.90	38.34	37.95
<b>China</b>									
Brides' Age	29.96	29.56	29.45	30.00	31.32	32.20	31.26	30.74	30.59
Grooms' Age	43.71	43.51	42.28	42.53	44.35	44.48	43.01	41.90	41.18
<b>Taiwan</b>									
Brides' Age	27.90	28.06	28.22	28.59	28.95	29.27	29.50	29.59	29.98
Grooms' Age	30.93	31.00	31.13	31.48	31.78	31.98	32.27	32.22	32.54

**Table 3: Education Level of Brides and Grooms**

By Bride Origin and Year of Marriage	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>
<b>Southeast Asia</b>									
Brides	8.58	8.72	9.53	8.67	8.70	9.03	8.96	9.17	9.28
Gloom	9.31	9.60	10.13	9.96	10.09	10.32	10.51	10.76	11.09
<b>China</b>									
Brides	10.41	9.51	9.50	9.45	9.36	9.10	9.87	10.16	10.39
Gloom	9.63	9.68	9.75	9.80	9.67	10.01	11.17	11.57	11.87
<b>Taiwan</b>									
Brides	10.65	11.52	11.97	12.26	12.57	12.97	13.32	13.56	13.62
Gloom	11.04	11.76	12.11	12.37	12.61	13.03	13.34	13.54	13.59

Note: Earlier data on foreign brides are noisier because of many missing reports. Southeast Asia includes mostly brides from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam.

2007 and 2008 statistics are from a different data source, Minister of Interior, Department of Household Registration