

Abstract

Cross-Border Intimacy: Marriage Migration and Global Families in East Asia

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The most striking migratory pattern of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in East Asian countries is that of women from poorer countries marrying men from wealthier nations after having been introduced by marriage brokers, friends, or relatives. This trend of arranged transnational marriages has caught the attention of scholars, and has also been the subject of a growing body of literature. However, how this migratory marriage pattern is formed, what its impact is on societies, and the individuals' marital lives have largely been overlooked. This book analyzes the historical process of formation and current trends in the arranged transnational marriage migration. Through a multi-sited ethnography conducted in Japan, China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, it sheds light on the interactions between nations, social changes, and intimacy. By focusing on the migration stories of married couples, their family members, and marriage brokers, this book aims to contribute to a new understanding of the relationship between individuals' agency and the political, legal, socio-economic structures.

This book consists of seven chapters. The introduction provides an overview of the theoretical framework, research purpose, and methodology. Chapter 1 explores how arranged transnational marriage migration takes place in East Asia. By tracing the history of marriage migration flows from China to Japan, China to South Korea, and Mainland China to Taiwan, it demonstrates that people are moving through transnational networks rooted in the Japanese Empire. However, in contrast to most postcolonial labor migration patterns, migration in East Asian countries results from arranged marriages. Comparing marriage migration to the *Nikkei* labor migration from Brazil to Japan has revealed that the key factor is the "otherization of relatives" constructed in the historical-political-economic context of East Asia.

Chapter 2 examines arranged transnational marriages through the narratives of transnational marriage migrants who later became marriage brokers themselves. Once the marriage migration flows were established, some of the transnational couples started introducing the same type of marriages to their friends and relatives, eventually becoming professional marriage brokers. With the cooperation of the broker's own family members, as well as international students, trainees, and travel agencies, the arranged transnational marriage developed into a global marriage industry.

Chapter 3 presents the global scope of marriage migration in the East Asian context, involving communities in varying processes of socio-cultural and politico-economic transformation in Vietnam, China, Taiwan, and Japan. By focusing on the "Global Family" and its members' involvement in marriage migration across several countries, this chapter presents a vivid picture of the current developments in the arranged transnational marriage migration. This in-depth case study of the transnational replacement marriage portrays the specific patterns and gendered dynamics of marriage migration. Being very much a gendered process, it not only affects women's lived experiences, but also shapes men's lives through constructed and constrained women's agency.

Chapter 4 theorizes the situational and context-bound performance of women, men, and marriage brokers in the matchmaking meetings by using Erving Goffman's metaphors "front region" and "back region." In the front region, the setting of the meetings and the appearance and manners of men and women enhance the hierarchy of their original countries. Meanwhile, there are two kinds of back regions: team back regions and individual back regions. In the former, the brokers play a key role in training the women and men to ensure the matchmaking will be successful. However, in the latter, the men and women exhibit their lack of trust in the brokers and express disappointment about the stigma associated with their marriageability in their original societies. Thus, it is concluded that the arranged transnational marriage is a strategy for the men and women to be seen as "normal human beings" in their societies.

Chapter 5 focuses on the marital relationships in arranged transnational marriage couples. Based on marriage experiences

(including divorce and remarriage) of women marriage migrants living in Japan, Taiwan, and China, it shows that marital relationships are strongly influenced by both marital intimacy and the degree of social integration achieved by the immigrant women in the host societies. Marital satisfaction in transnational marriages is highly influenced by the “quality” of the marriage, specifically the intimacy of the couple — including sexual relationships. Another important factor is the social integration of the immigrant women, as determined by the political, social, and economic barriers that they face in their host societies.

In the conclusion, the dynamics of the arranged transnational marriages in East Asia is theorized by the concept of “cross-border intimacy,” which is built and maintained in a landscape of social inequality. In the case of East Asia, the changes in the national borders caused the separation and otherization of relatives, which affected people’s private sphere. Meanwhile, people have used the cross-border networks to seek ideal intimacy, marriage, start businesses, and attempt to restructure their identities. Thus, as shown in this book, while intimacy is an important factor in both the matchmaking process and the subsequent marital life, cross-border intimacy is also strongly influenced by disparities between nations and societies.