

Opportunities and Risks for Migrant Brides in the Matchmaking Industry: The Case of Taiwan

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Summary

Over the last decades, marriage migration through matchmaking agencies has become an increasingly prominent trend in the Asian region. Women from Southeast Asian countries, such as Vietnam or Indonesia, are migrating to marry men from higher-income countries in East Asia, such as Taiwan or South Korea. This is one of the very few channels through which migrants may move permanently to the so-called “ethnically homogeneous” East Asian societies, due to the prevalence of restrictive immigration policies in these states. Within this context, the mainstream discourse portrays migrant brides as victims of trafficking and domestic violence, and marriage brokers are represented as exploiters and abusers of these women. The negative image of these matchmaking processes has led to greater restrictions on migration as well as the prohibition of for-profit marriage agencies in most countries within the region. Based on the case of Taiwan, this report will analyze the consequences of these measures and attempt to determine what really makes these migrant women vulnerable to exploitation. In contrast to the mainstream discourse, migrant brides will be recognized as active subjects with bargaining power and capacity to overcome existing challenges. Avoiding moralistic or paternalistic judgement, the focus of inquiry will be the specific needs and aspirations of these women involved in marriage migration.

Introduction

In the contemporary period, almost 50% of the global migrant population consists of women¹. With increasing frequency, women are migrating independently from their families in search of employment opportunities and self-empowerment. For this reason, over the past few decades, the term “feminization of migration” has become commonplace among scholars and policy makers. It reflects an increasing social and scientific interest in the issue of gender and migration. This recent trend has, in particular, motivated the academic study of female marriage-related migration, a social phenomenon that requires further research attention.

According to the UNDP (2009: p. 12), “marriage migration is increasingly significant in international migration by women, and this often takes place across social, cultural and linguistic barriers”. Within the East Asian region, for instance, cross-border marriage migration over the last decade has been growing at unprecedented rates to the point where it is now one of the most prominent forms of migration (Asian Century Institute, 2014). Over 90% of the marriages in this region take place between a foreign-born woman and a native-born man, thus revealing the role that gender plays in this type of migration (International Organization of Migration, 2010). Typically, women from lower-income countries in Asia, such as the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia, migrate for marriage to men from higher-income countries in the region, such as South Korea, Taiwan and Japan. Most of these brides undertake marriage migration through transnational marriage agencies, a business growing in popularity in the region and throughout the world.

Nevertheless, the increasing number of Southeast Asian women engaging such matchmaking agencies has brought about serious dilemmas and concerns. On the one hand, the mainstream discourse strongly criticises these enterprises for treating women as mere “commodities” and for perpetuating gender stereotypes within deep patriarchal structures. Thus, these brides are usually portrayed as victims of domestic violence and human trafficking, which has favoured restrictive immigration policies and bans on for-profit marriage brokerage. On the other hand, a growing number of scholars affirm that depicting migrant brides only in terms of trafficking obscures the rich complexity of the phenomenon (Tseng 2015, Zug 2015, Constable 2009, Schrover 2014, Lu & Yang 2010, Faier, 2007, Wei-Zhen Chong, 2014). These scholars have conducted ethnographies and in-depth interviews showing how migrant brides are active

¹ <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTABOUTUS/Resources/Gender.pdf>

subjects with the ability to challenge power structures and find new channels for empowerment.

In order to clarify the above-mentioned challenges and controversies, the present report aims at understanding the relation of migrant brides to these agencies and, thus, how they experience marriage-related migration. The paper will begin by explaining the context in which these women migrate and their main reasons for doing so. Subsequently, it will examine the main features of the transnational marriage industry in the region and how mainstream discourse portrays the women engaging in such businesses. Through consideration of the case of Taiwan, where for-profit marriage brokers have been banned since 2008, the report will try to answer the main research question by showing what foreign brides have reported in different academic studies. Finally, the last section will provide the main conclusions and a list of recommendations in this field.

The Context of Migration of Southeast Asian Brides

Traditionally, most East Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea or Taiwan, have been considered “ethnically homogeneous” societies due to their efforts at preserving cultural and ethnic uniformity within their borders. As argued by Lu & Yang (2010), the concept of citizenship in these contexts still cannot be separated from nationality or ethnicity. Over the course of many years, ethnic homogeneity has been achieved through the application of profoundly restrictive immigration policies (Castles & Davidson, 2000 cited in Lu & Yang, 2010). Frequently, such policies have been targeted at preventing the entry of migrant workers to labour markets, or restricting it to a temporary basis (Lee, 2008a cited in IOM, 2010; Lu & Yang, 2010). Therefore, “in most of the East Asian countries, marriage is almost the only means for a foreigner to obtain citizenship or long-term residence” (Toyota, 2008 quoted in Lu & Yang, 2010: p. 18).

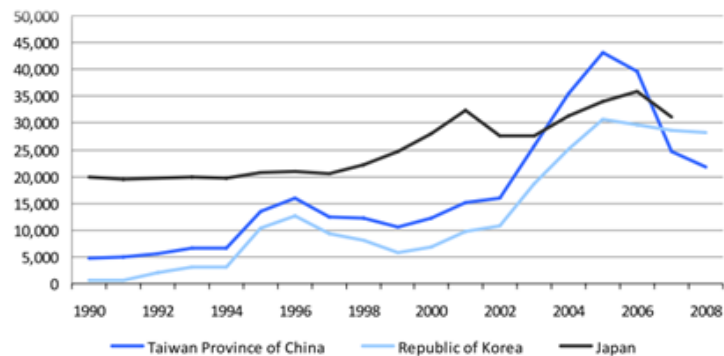
Indeed, the preservation of an “ethnically homogeneous” society already denotes that the process of adaptation for migrants is far from easy in these cases. Even though Taiwan and South Korea have promoted some integration policies, the public persistence of patriarchal and racialised conceptions of migrant ‘others’ have prevented these measures from fully materializing. In this regard, it is no surprise that ethnic similarity and cultural affinity are influential factors throughout the process of “electing” a foreign bride. This is exemplified by “the widespread belief in both Taiwan and Korea that Vietnamese make good wives both because their appearance does not differ greatly from that of Taiwanese or Koreans, and

because a Confucianist heritage makes them more able to fit in with the local customs” (Jones, 2012: p. 16).

Until a few decades ago, marriage migration was virtually non-existent in the East Asian region. Japan was the first country to receive Southeast Asian brides in the 1990s, followed by Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. Likewise, even though marriage-related migration in East Asia began as a rural phenomenon, it is currently a widespread practice, not limited to a single region or social class. According to the Korean Statistical Information Service, in 2008 the percentage of international marriages out of total marriages was between 5 to 6 % in Japan, 20 to 32 % in Taiwan and 11 to 13% in South Korea (IOM, 2010). Figure 1, extracted from a background paper of the IOM, shows the number of foreign brides in the latter three East Asian countries from 1990-2008. Among them, Taiwan has by far the highest ratio of males to females contracting international marriages. In 2003, the rate of international marriages on the island hit a historic high when almost one out of three marriages involved a foreign spouse (Tseng, 2015). In general terms, women coming from mainland China (69%) and Southeast Asian countries (26%) migrate for marriage with rural lower and lower-middle class Taiwanese men (Chen, 2011; Wang, 2010 cited in IOM, 2010; Kuo, 2011). According to the Taiwan Ministry of the Interior (2006), Indonesia, Thailand and, most notably, Vietnam (70%) are the top Southeast Asian countries sending brides to Taiwan (Lu & Yang, 2010).

Considering the reasons why women might embark on marriage migration, the search for a better life with greater opportunities for self-empowerment and independence is a common explanation. For these women, marriage is one of the few legal channels to move permanently to higher-income countries within the region. They might choose this option in the hope of finding better economic, educational and labour opportunities; to escape from rural life; or to avoid particularly restrictive and patriarchal ways of living in home communities. Moreover, the need to help families at home financially by sending remittances and the cultural and social pressure to get married, also play a key role. In this light, the distinction between a “wife” and a “worker” also tends to be unclear, since love and labour coexist in fluid states of partial substitutability and complementarity (Piper & Roces, 2003 cited in Jones, 2012).

FIGURE 1: Female Marriage Migrants to North-East Asia (thousands), 1990-2008



Sources: Japan: Itsuko (2008:3); Taiwan province of China: <http://www.immigration.gov.tw/aspcode/9803/我國人與外籍人士結婚統計.xls>; South Korea: Korean Statistical Information Service: <http://www.kosis.kr>

Extracted from the International Organization for Migration, Background Paper WMR 2010 (2010) 'Family Migration Issues in North-East Asia', Korea: IOM.

There are two potential reasons why East Asian men increasingly marry Southeast Asian brides. The first is related to the perception of women's achievement of higher educational standards and improved job opportunities in wealthier East Asian countries. With increasing frequency, women in these countries are opposing patriarchal expectations that women should remain in housework roles or take care of the parents-in-law, and often choose to delay marriage or remain single². Thus, men who are not "attractive" to locally based women, especially those with traditional mentalities or low socioeconomic status instead look for brides in the international marriage "market". The second reason relates to demographic trends relating to dwindling youth populations and the reduction of the female population at "marriageable ages"³.

The Asian Experience of "Transnational Matchmaking"

A large proportion of international marriages in East Asia are organized through commercial brokers. In South Korea, for instance, "there are 1,000 agencies and two in five couples who married between 1998 and 2003, met through matchmakers, according to the Korean Institute for Health and Social Affairs" (Straits Times cited in Jones, 2012). In contrast to the

² Kawaguchi and Lee (2012) confirm that a college-educated woman in these countries is 50 to 200% more likely to remain single than a less-educated counterpart.

³ <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/how-does-son-preference-affect-populations-asia>

organisation of the “mail-order bride” industry in other parts of the world⁴, most matchmaking agencies in Asia do not provide mail correspondence services due to language limitations between the male and female counterpart, as well as the women’s limited access to Internet. Therefore, courtship between future brides and grooms is non-existent or very brief in these cases (Constable 1995; Piper 2003; Wang & Chang 2002 cited in Lu & Yang, 2010). In addition, since online dating services are often not readily accessible in the brides’ communities, the local matchmaker and the potential bride usually have a close relationship.

In general terms, the arrangement procedure is as follows: firstly, international marriage brokers organize female and male recruits to meet collectively in the prospective bride’s home country. There, the men and women selected go on a series of group dating sessions where they eventually find a partner to marry. Since they often do not speak the same language, communication usually takes place through interpreters. After approximately 10 days, the couple applies for a marriage license and the groom goes back to his country in order to apply for his bride’s visa, which will be issued in a period of six months. Generally, the total costs involved in the marriage arrangement (brokerage services, legal applications, payments to the bride’s family, etc.)⁵ are paid by the groom (Kawaguchi & Lee, 2012; Scobey-Thal, 2015). There are some brokerage companies that even offer a “free replacement” if the bride “runs away” within the first year of marriage (Tseng, 2015). Nonetheless, there are also other cases in which the process is less structured, involving informal social networks, such as friends or relatives, travel agents or other organizers. In fact, since all these intermediaries can take on many forms and are often intertwined, the resulting web is fairly complex (Wang & Chang, 2002, cited in Lu & Yang, 2010).

Furthermore, racialized and gendered stereotypes are clearly noticeable in advertisements promoting such agencies. For instance, the 2007 CEDAW Shadow Report from the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE)⁶ notes that foreign brides in Singapore are usually portrayed as “being dutiful”, “virgins with medical certification”, able to “keep one happy” and “slim and pretty” (p. 25). They are characterized as submissive and attentive women who idealize men from wealthier nations as more liberal and less traditional with respect to women’s roles and rights than men from their home countries (Kusel, 2014). Simultaneously,

⁴“Mail-order brides” is the colloquial term used to refer to a wide range of international marriage agencies aimed at introducing men and women from different countries for the purpose of marriage, dating or correspondence. These institutions usually arrange marriages between men from higher-income countries, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, and women from lower-income countries, such as Belarus or Ukraine. In contrast to the “Asian” model, these agencies require correspondence before the male and female clients directly meet and get married.

⁵ The total costs are approximately between \$ 6,000 and 10,000 USD.

⁶ http://www.aware.org.sg/downloads/CEDAW_2007-Report.pdf

male customers are usually portrayed as middle-class men who seek a partner to fulfil the traditional role of wife, mother and housekeeper.

The Mainstream Discourse: Prejudices and Trafficking of Brides

Mainstream discourses found in the media and government statements have typically highlighted the most dramatic side of these arranged marriages. In general terms, “public attitudes in the country of destination view the country the bride comes from as relatively backward and underdeveloped, and the motivations and character of the brides are stereotyped in negative ways” (Jones, 2012: p. 14). For example, they are often depicted as women who do not know how to raise children properly. In that sense, Kuo (2011) states that female marriage migrants coming to Taiwan are often depicted by the media, government, and school as being “incapable mothers”, based on their cultural-linguistic difference and “low” socio-economic status (Kuo, 2011: p. 383). Moreover, due to the stigma derived from their participation in the marriage industry, migrant brides are often blamed for “selling themselves for money” and, thus, losing their “women’s dignity” in the host societies (Lu & Yang, 2010).

Above all, however, scholars highlight how women involved in the matchmaking industry become potential victims of human trafficking and domestic violence (Kusel, 2014, Bowes, 2012, UNDP, 2009 and AWARE, 2007). In some cases migrant brides are deceived under false pretences, coerced or even sold into marriage against their will by family members or trafficking organizations. For example, in July 2015 the Foreign Ministry of Cambodia announced that they had already “rescued” 48 Cambodian women cheated into marrying Chinese men by brokers since the beginning of the year⁷. Therefore, the popular portrayal has endowed migrant brides with little or no agency (Huang, 2006 cited in Jones, 2012).

Social and linguistic isolation, fragile immigration status and low earning power could be crucial factors in increasing the brides’ likelihood of suffering exploitation or abuse (Jackson, 2007). In this light, it is difficult to prevent situations of abuse when matchmaking agencies do not demand exhaustive personal information from prospective husbands. While female customers are generally required to undergo background checks and medical examinations, male customers are rarely asked for more than a credit card (Bowes, 2011-2012; AWARE, 2007). In fact, even when the broker provides complete information, very often the female client cannot judge the reliability of the information due to language and cultural barriers

⁷ <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/rescued-bride-tally-nears-50>

(Tseng, 2015). Lastly, the lack of substantial statistics on the domestic abuse or trafficking of foreign brides seems to complicate the matter even more.

In response to this situation, most countries in East Asia have started restricting marriage migration “not only by applying immigration policies to screen who is eligible to marry foreigners, but also by sets of population, social welfare and labour policies that determine differentiated citizenship towards foreign spouses of different nationalities and ethnic and religious backgrounds” (Toyota, 2008 quoted in Lu & Yang, 2010: p. 18). For instance, the latest regulations in South Korea require these women to pass language proficiency tests and Korean partners to show an annual income in excess of \$17,400 USD⁸. Moreover, in order to prevent marriage migration as a “side door” for labour migration, in many circumstances dual nationality is not allowed (Lu & Yang, 2010: p.39)⁹. Other countries, instead, have directly banned the operation of commercial matchmaking agencies, as is the case of the Philippines¹⁰ (1990), Vietnam (2003), Cambodia¹¹ (2008) and Taiwan¹² (2008).

Case Study: The Ban on Commercial Matchmaking in Taiwan

The benefits that commercial (for-profit) matchmaking agencies gained from cross-border marriages in Taiwan has long been in the spotlight of many women’s groups and international human rights organizations. According to them, these businesses were the main cause behind the exploitation and trafficking of migrant brides. It was therefore suggested that prohibition was the only way to “rescue” these women from being objectified and commodified. It should be noted that these groups were not opposing the matchmaking service *per se*, but the profitable manner by which the broker pursued benefit at the expense of women’s dignity and interests. Since the broker and the male client managed the contract negotiation, the prospective brides were seen as particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Likewise, those advocating the ban also revealed the fact that in many circumstances, the broker charged the male client a considerable amount of money, but only a very small amount of this fee went to the bride’s family in the name of the so-called bride-price (Tseng, 2015: p. 115).

Due to domestic and international pressure, Taiwan progressively changed its policy direction from recognition and regulation of commercial marriage agencies to eventually banning them.

⁸ <http://features.insing.com/feature/s-korea-regulates-marriage-with-foreigners/id-9e3f3101/>

⁹ In such cases, when women wish to return to their home countries, they have to spend large amounts of money in order to regain former national entitlements.

¹⁰ <http://es.scribd.com/doc/101174721/RA-6955-and-RA-9710>

¹¹ <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2010/03/31/to-prevent-human-trafficking-cambodia-bans-international-marriages-to-koreans/>

¹² <http://taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xItem=56384&ctNode=454>

First of all, in 2004 the government adopted a restrictive screening system based on the completion of in-depth interviews of those mixed married couples coming to the country (Lu, 2008 cited in IOM, 2010). Subsequently, in 2006, the government annulled the national business registration of marriage brokerage and, in 2007, announced that all existing commercial matchmaking companies had to be transformed into non-profit agencies/organizations within a year to avoid being closed down. Finally, in 2008, all commercial marriage brokers were officially prohibited in Taiwan. As a result of these political measures, more than 400 registered brokering companies were closed down and only 41 non-profit transnational matchmaking organizations are currently allowed throughout the island. Therefore, the proportion of marriages of Taiwanese men to foreign brides has fallen sharply from 28.4% in 2003 to 12.8% in 2010 (Asia Research Institute, 2012).

However, the number of foreign spouses in the country continues to be significant. According to the joint report from the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR), “by September 2012, there were about 470,000, mainly from mainland China (about 316,000), Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand” (p. 21). Likewise, in many cases commercial matchmaking agencies have simply changed their location or continued their practices in another, often more covert form. For instance, foreign brides can opt for going to other countries, such as South Korea or Singapore, where these businesses are regulated in a less restricted manner (Tseng, 2015). Moreover, many of the current non-profit matchmaking organizations in Taiwan “just changed the names of their businesses from “company” to “association” and retained their earlier business model of cooperating with local matchmakers” (Tseng, 2015, p.127). Interestingly, Tseng (2015) challenges the perception that commercial brokerages were increasingly gaining material benefits from marriage arrangement. Due to greater demand and competitiveness within the “marriage market”, Tseng shows how the brokers’ profits dropped dramatically during their last years of operation in the country. In the case of Taiwanese- Vietnamese matchmaking agencies, for example, since the late 1990’s, the brokers’ profits decreased from \$5,000–6,000 USD to \$900–1,200 USD.

The prohibition of commercial brokerages in the country does not seem to solve the problems women encounter, nor does it substantially decrease the demand for matchmaking services. Instead, this measure pushes these businesses underground, where they remain unmonitored. As several scholars point out, it is precisely the lack of legal grounding that makes these brides even more vulnerable (IOM, 2010; Tseng, 2015; Wei-Zhen Chong, 2014). Since foreign brides

enter the country legally and can obtain conditional permanent residence, they are more likely to report abuse than, for instance, undocumented migrant women (Zug, 2015). Likewise, it seems obvious that whenever there are women or men seeking foreign spouses, there will always be a business opportunity for matchmakers. In fact, society has witnessed on more than one occasion how stricter immigration controls, instead of preventing human trafficking, have enhanced its proliferation (Andrijasevic, 2008 cited in UNDP, 2009).

The context in which women embark on marriage migration should be the starting point during any process of policy making, especially when cases of human trafficking or domestic violence have been identified. The consequences of restrictive immigration policies and extent to which they promote the existence of human trafficking organizations should be determined and taken into account. By reducing the current channels for migration and, thus, the opportunities to improve one's life, governments make these women more vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers or smugglers. Furthermore, bearing in mind that migrant brides tend to be considered a "social problem" in Taiwan (Jones, 2012), authors such as Wei-Zhen Chong (2012), Schrover (2012) and Constable (2009) argue that it is precisely the ideology of brides as trafficked victims without agency that has promoted the application of policies that restrict or ban commercial matchmaking agencies in both receiving countries and the brides' country of origin. For all these reasons, according to the IOM (2010), a regulatory approach would be preferable, with the added requirement that agencies be held legally responsible for providing accurate information to the potential bride and groom.

Migrant Brides: Agency and Bargaining Power

The common perception of migrant brides as mere powerless "victims of trafficking" therefore appears too narrow. Potential brides should not be treated as incapable of understanding and evaluating potential risk beforehand. However, only recently has women's agency started to be recognized positively (Freeman 2011; Constable 2003, 2005; Thai 2008; Lu 2008, Tseng, 2015). As the feminist philosopher Maria Lugones maintains in relation to "mail-order brides", these women are subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions and not just victims¹³.

At the same time, as Wei Zhen Chong (2014, p. 399) notes, "there is evidence that migrant brides are calculating the levels of coercion they are willing to put up with, and actively working to mitigate the effects of these circumstances". Within the household, these women often manage to negotiate a space in their marital life or a position in the husband's family

¹³ Lugones, M. (1987). 'Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception', *Hypatia*, 2(2), pp. 3-19.

(Wang 2007, cited in Tseng 2012). Moreover, there are also many cases in which the woman works outside of the home and provides remittances to her family in her respective country of origin (Lu and Yang, 2010). As Amrith (2015, p. 18) points out, “they also perform the labour of caring for family enterprises, adopting particular roles and tasks that sustain these businesses and families in their day to day functioning”.

Research conducted by Kuo (2011)¹⁴ shows how female marriage migrants play an active role in shaping their own unique adaptation strategies. The author identifies four main strategies: resignation, resistance, negotiation and empowerment. Therefore, migrant women may not simply resign themselves to the host society’s discrimination, but also take the initiative to change local perceptions or to use negative stereotypes to challenge the structures of discrimination, and therefore find empowerment. Kuo illustrates this by noting that a great number of brides were participating “enthusiastically” and “actively” in their children’s education, even though they were constantly stigmatized as “incapable mothers” within the host society. Indeed, migrant brides may also be important cultural intermediaries between families and the wider neighbourhoods and societies within which they live (Amrith, 2015).

The relationship between the broker and the women cannot be simply regarded as the “perpetrator” exploiting the “victim”. For instance, Tseng (2015)¹⁵ conducts an in-depth analysis of the power dynamics embedded in transnational marriage brokerage in Taiwan. Through this study, the author shows how Vietnamese brides continuously negotiate difficulties, in many cases through cooperation with brokers. In particular, Tseng talks about “active submission as agency” when she finds that many Vietnamese brides changed their behavioural patterns to meet the patriarchal expectations that the brokerage company and the male clients were seeking and, therefore, maximize their chances of being “selected”. At times, the brides took advantage of their supposed virginity in order to make their transnational marriage more likely.

Interestingly, Constable (2009) critiques the typical illusion of marriage as just a culmination of an “idealized romantic relationship” and, consequently, critiques the general perception that any commodification of love or intimacy means exploitation. Matchmaking very often involves material exchanges, primarily care or affection in return for money; nevertheless, this does not mean that all prospective brides engaged in such agencies will suffer abuse or trafficking. In

¹⁴ The author undertakes in-depth interviews and participant observation to Southeast Asia and Mainland China brides in Taiwan.

¹⁵ Her study is the result of a participant observation undertaken in several commercial marriage agencies from Taiwan, Vietnam, China and Ukraine.

fact, for those opposing the ban, it meant a limitation of the individual's choice of different types of marriages and mobility, as well as an imposition of the middle class "romantic" conception of marriage (Wang 2007, cited in Tseng, 2015). By the same token, as Constable emphasizes, love and money are not necessarily opposites: in many cases, intimate relations are linked to reproductive labour or care work, as well as entertainment or sex work.

Zug (2015) goes further and uses the term "Mail-Order Feminism" to describe the practices of mail-order bride companies and compensate for the negative mainstream discourse surrounding them. For example, she points out that "despite the widespread discussion regarding the antifeminist characteristics of mail order marriages, many mail order brides seek foreign husbands precisely because they see them as less patriarchal and more egalitarian than their male countrymen" (Zug, 2015: p. 179). In fact, according to a 2000 UN report on masculinities, "it is this experience of disempowerment that potentially connects some men and women across the patriarchal divide, and offers the possibility of linking a gender politics that challenges patriarchy with a wider politics and social transformation" (Simons, 2001 quoted in Zug, 2015: 179). There are empowering possibilities for women, as well as men, in these situations.

Therefore, the binary question of portraying foreign brides as either passive victims or active agents seems inappropriate. As Leiba Faier (2007) remarks in relation to Filipina migrant women in Japan, migrant women may shift from one identity and role to another, oftentimes simultaneously (cited in Amrith, 2015). Indeed, market mechanisms (in this case the "marriage" market) can have a double character in that they may subject women to vulnerability and exploitation, while at the same time providing them with opportunities. According to Constable (2005), Asian migrant brides may have improved their economic position after migrating, while also experiencing a clear reduction of their social position in comparison with the one they had prior to moving (Lu & Yang, 2010). It should be acknowledged that there will be always nuances and their life trajectories will never be static.

Joint Conclusions and Recommendations

Inequalities, both in terms of gender and in terms of neoliberal political economy, are at the core of the transnational "marriage industry". Marriage migration is one strategy that women adopt to escape poverty or materially difficult circumstances, and to help their families financially through remittances. As Tseng (2012, p. 222) states: "only within this neoliberal context can we negotiate a way to understand the blurring of the binaries of freedom/coercion, agency/subjugation, and realness/fakeness in the configuration of migrant

women's subjectivity". We may, then, envisage these women as agents as well as victims, men may be powerful as well as marginalized, and marriage brokers may be helpers as well as perpetrators. It is clear from the examples discussed in this report that migrant women are subjects of change, capable of challenging stereotypical images and visions in both host and home societies.

Even though the risks and obstacles in this journey may be plentiful, these women still choose marriage migration as a manner to access better life opportunities. In these situations, migrant brides may not perceive exploitation in the same way as "middle class" women expect them to experience it. As Tseng (2012, p. 125) stresses, "what is considered exploitation from the perspective of many "First World" women would ironically be perceived as benevolence by many "Third World Women"". Instead of judging their morality, the focus of enquiry should be how the commodification of intimate relations is understood and experienced by those involved in such relationships and processes.

Concluding with the "big picture" of the research topic, it is possible to highlight ten general recommendations for policymakers:

1. To nuance the victimhood discourse prevalent in media and government statements that treats migrant brides as hopeless victims of domestic violence or trafficking. These channels should recognize migrant women as active subjects who can share their experiences and voices in consultations on these issues.
2. To ease the legal barriers constraining women's access to migration, such as gender-specific bans and discriminatory restrictions on women's migration on the basis of age, marital status, pregnancy, etc. In this light, it is necessary to regulate and monitor (instead of ban) commercial matchmaking agencies, assuring that they are responsible for providing accurate information.
3. To ensure that laws are sensitive to the needs of women who move under conditions of trafficking and provide special services for them (e.g. financial assistance, legal advocacy, psychological support, employment opportunities). Taking into account the complexities and specificities of human trafficking, it is necessary to avoid moralistic or paternalistic judgements and listen to the real needs and aspirations of these women.
4. To gather comprehensive official statistics on marriage migration and migrant women, including the monitoring of human trafficking and domestic violence in such cases. Policymakers can draw upon scholarly research that has been conducted on marriage

migration and support further in-depth, interdisciplinary and comparative research in this field.

5. To enhance international cooperation between the host and home societies in order to jointly adopt specific programs to provide support to migrant women. Information and training programs should be targeted at increasing their awareness about legal rights and entitlements, job opportunities, language and cultural knowledge.
6. To address structural factors that push women and girls into trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, such as economic vulnerability, gender inequality or prejudice. In this regard, the application of restrictive or differentiated immigration policies or weakened social policies in neoliberal contexts should be taken into account.
7. To increase the integration of migrant women in their destination's labour markets, ensuring the implementation of labour laws and codes, equal access to networks and the effective transfer of income remittances.
8. To provide legal, social and economic services for those women who wish to return to their countries or places of origin, facilitating their reintegration without coercion or discrimination. In order to fulfil this goal, the maintenance of dual nationality should be allowed.
9. To implement educational curricula promoting intercultural dialogue and interaction, to facilitate the process of mutual understanding and respect among the different cultures, traditions and lifestyles in one society. Stereotypical images of migrants should be challenged through public awareness.
10. To adhere to and implement international conventions that seek to guarantee the full respect of migrant women's rights. This includes longer-standing conventions such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families.

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