

# **MARRIAGE MIGRATION BETWEEN VIETNAM AND TAIWAN: A VIEW FROM VIETNAM**

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### Abstract

*There has been a substantial increase in the number of Vietnamese women marrying Taiwanese men and moving to Taiwan via introduction agencies. There is also an increasing similar flow of Vietnamese young women to marry Chinese men in Southern China. The women are very young and mostly from rural areas and have low levels of education. There are age gaps between wife and husband as well as language gaps. In the destination, some girls are virtually treated as slaves by their husbands' relatives; some have been sold to brothels by their husbands or have become victims of domestic violence. This international marriage migration is attracting research attention of both Vietnamese and international experts. They have looked at the matter from different viewpoints. This paper differs from most in that it provides a view of this trend from the sending place. It uses data from a large-scale survey, which was conducted by the Institute of Population, Family and Children collaborating with the Department of Sociology at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, National University in Ho Chi Minh City. It included 1084 structured interviews with 624 households and 460 young people in 6 provinces in Cuu Long River Delta, Vietnam where most of the brides come from. Also, 110 in-depth interviews with 82 brides and 28 local authorities were completed. Moreover, 23 focus group discussions were conducted. Low socioeconomic status in the family of the young women was found to be a chief determinant of the marriage. Nearly all brides have chosen marriage to Taiwan men as a way to improve their life conditions and to help their families get out of hard circumstances. However, low level of skill and language barriers have let to many if not most of the brides facing difficulties in the destination. In the origin community, there is a growing concern about imbalance between the number of men and women in the marriageable ages because nearly 50% of girls aged 18-30 have married to foreigners in some villages. On the other hand, the areas where many of these women are moving to also have a deficit of young females although that is not the only structured factor, which underlies the migration.*

## Introduction

The last two decades have seen a massive increase in the scale and complexity of international migration in Asia (Hugo, 2003). Among the most striking features of the burgeoning of migration in Asian countries is the fact that in many important flows, women outnumber men. Research into this mobility has focussed strongly on that associated with labour migration. (Lim and Oishi, 1996). A smaller but none the less significant flow has involved the migration of Asian women in order to marry men resident in other countries and this has received somewhat less attention from researchers.<sup>1</sup> Usually this movement involves commercial transactions in which intermediaries play an important role (Wang and Chang, 2002) and it often results in women moving from a less developed, to a more developed, country.

Marriage migration between nations has a long history. For example, throughout the history of European settlement in Australia there have been periods when males have significantly outnumbered females and as a result there have been programs to bring in women. Historically, however, they have tended to be women from the same origins as the males they emigrated to marry. Contemporary international marriage migration of Asian women, however, is different in a number of ways.

- It usually involves women moving to a country where their husband is from a quite different ethno-linguistic origin.
- The countries of destination do not experience a significant imbalance between the numbers of males and females of marriageable age. Although in a few cases, the women may move to regions within those countries where there is an imbalance such as mining or agricultural areas as is the case with the Filipino women moving to Australia (Hugo, 1995).

The increase in marriage migration of women in Asia has raised a number of important issues. In particular some evidence of exploitation of the women involved has been an issue of concern. In addition, it has considerable consequences for the make up of population in both origin and destination areas. Similarly, the migration develops networks between origin and destination along which flow remittances, information and other forms of migration.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be mentioned, however, that the distinction between labour and marriage migration in Asia is by no means complete and there is a considerable overlap (Piper and Roces, 2003)

The present paper focuses on one of the fastest growing streams of marriage migration in Asia – that of women from Vietnam moving to marry Taiwanese men. The perspective adopted is largely from the origin and draws on primary research conducted in Southern Vietnam. The paper begins by outlining the main levels of, and trends, in marriage migration to Taiwan and explores some of the structural factors shaping that migration. It then draws upon the field study to examine the process of migration and some of the impacts of the movement on the families and communities of origin. It concludes by examining some of the policy implications of the findings.

### Marriage Migration To Taiwan

While there has been substantial Asian migration to many developed countries, no country has been more influenced by it than Taiwan. Table 1 draws together data from a number of sources regarding the number of marriages to foreigners in Taiwan over the 1994-2003 period. The substantial scale of the phenomenon is indicated by the fact that in 2003, the proportion of all marriages of Taiwanese that were to a foreign spouse was one third.

Table 1: Taiwan: Marriages to Foreign Spouses<sup>1</sup> 1994-2003  
Source: Wang and Chang, 2002, 96; Tsay, 2004; Do, *et al.*, 2003, 38

| Year | China  | Southeast Asia | Vietnam | Total  | Percent of all Marriages to Foreigners |
|------|--------|----------------|---------|--------|--|
| 1994 | 7,885  | 4,899          | 530     | 12,784 | na                                     |
| 1995 | 9,180  | 6,574          | 1,969   | 16,754 | na                                     |
| 1996 | 9,349  | 11,212         | 4,113   | 20,561 | na                                     |
| 1997 | 8,951  | 16,009         | 9,060   | 24,960 | na                                     |
| 1998 | 12,451 | 10,454         | 5,035   | 22,905 | 15.7                                   |
| 1999 | 17,589 | 14,674         | 8,482   | 32,263 | 18.6                                   |
| 2000 | 23,628 | 21,338         | 13,863  | 44,966 | 24.8                                   |
| 2001 | 26,797 | 19,405         | 12,417  | 46,202 | 27.1                                   |
| 2002 | 28,906 | 20,107         | na      | 49,013 | 28.4                                   |
| 2003 | 35,473 | 19,643         | na      | 55,116 | 32.2                                   |

<sup>1</sup> 1994-7 inclusive data are for visas granted to foreign spouses.  
1998-2003 data are for registered marriages.

This compares to substantially less than 5 percent a decade earlier. It is apparent that the bulk of these marriages are of Taiwanese men to foreign brides (Wang and Chang, 2002, 95). Of all foreign marriages up to 2003, 91.4 percent were of this type but 96 percent of those to Southeast Asians and 99.8 percent of those to Vietnamese involved foreign females (Tsay, 2004, 185). The table indicates that the main source of foreign spouses were from China where the ethno linguistic linkage is obviously important. It is true too that some of the marriage migration from Southeast Asia also involves spouses of Chinese ancestry. Nevertheless it is apparent that the majority of the Southeast Asians are of different ethno linguistic background to their Taiwanese partner. In the Vietnamese case, Tsay (2004, 185) says that there...

“... is the strong feeling among Taiwanese of the similarity between Vietnam and Taiwan in terms of the people, culture, religion and way of life. It is often mentioned that the appearance and complexion of Vietnamese are close to Taiwanese. They also have similar religious beliefs and ways of ancestor worship. Most critically, Taiwanese have the deep impression that Vietnamese women were bought up in patriarchal families and were socialised well in forming their attitudes toward the family, children, parents and husband.”

Statistics on the marriage of Vietnamese women to Taiwanese men, at the Vietnam end of the process, are maintained by the Taipei Economic and Cultural Offices (TECO) in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Data are only currently available from the latter although the bulk of women involved are recruited from the Southern part of the country. Between 1995 and September 2002, there were 58,279 such visas issued from the TECO in Ho Chi Minh City (Do, *et al.*, 2003, 38) and in 2003 officers reported that the running total was in the vicinity of 72,411.<sup>2</sup> In addition, it is believed there are about 5,000 visas issued at the Hanoi TECO (Do, *et al.*, 2003, 38). The bulk of all these visas have been issued in the last five years with the numbers reaching a peak in 2001 of 12,417.

The brides are not recruited from all areas around Vietnam as Figure 1 indicates but are overwhelmingly from rural areas in the Mekong Delta region, which have some of the poorest communities in Vietnam. Only 5 percent of the women come from Ho Chi Minh City itself (Do, *et al.*, 2003, 39). More than half of the women (56 percent) are drawn

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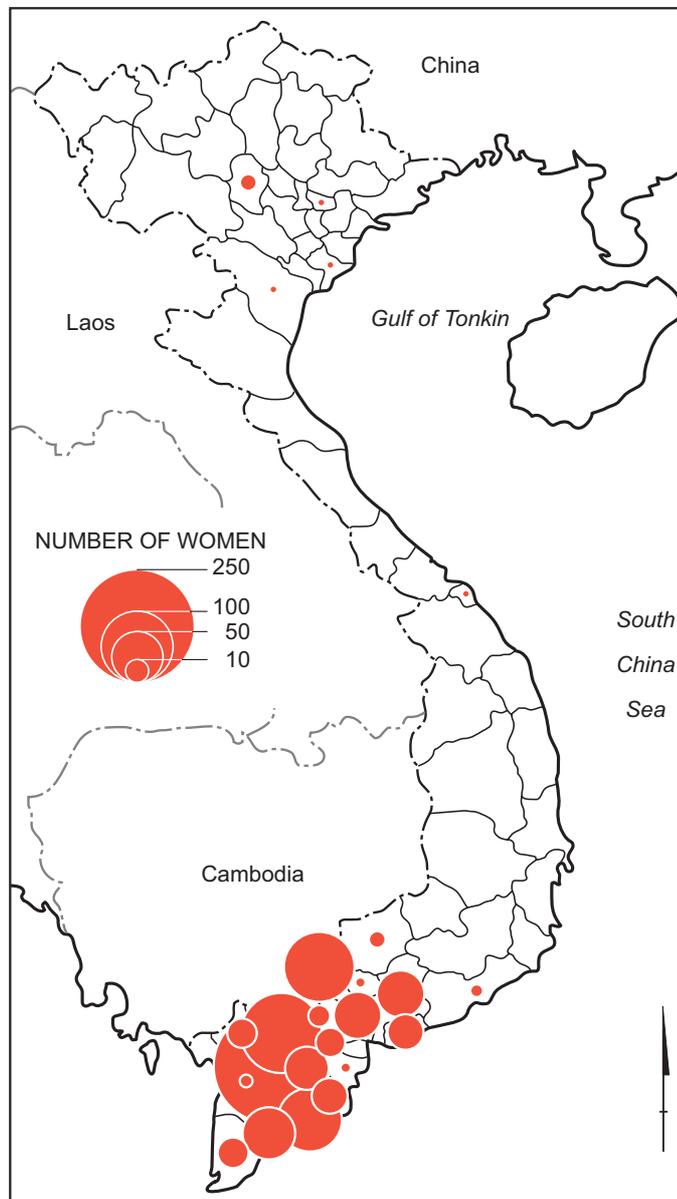
<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork by the Department of Sociology.

from just three rural provinces in the Mekong Delta areas – Can Tho (30 percent), Dong Thap (15 percent) and Tay Ninh (11 percent). This reflects the operation of two elements...

- The activities of recruiters are concentrated in particular poor communities where it is believed poverty would make women more ready to engage in marriage migration.
- There are also strong network effects whereby when some women from a community are recruited they act as leaders to others.

Figure 1: Vietnam Province of Origin of Vietnamese Marriage Migrants to Taiwan, 1994-2002

Source: Do, et al., 2002, 39

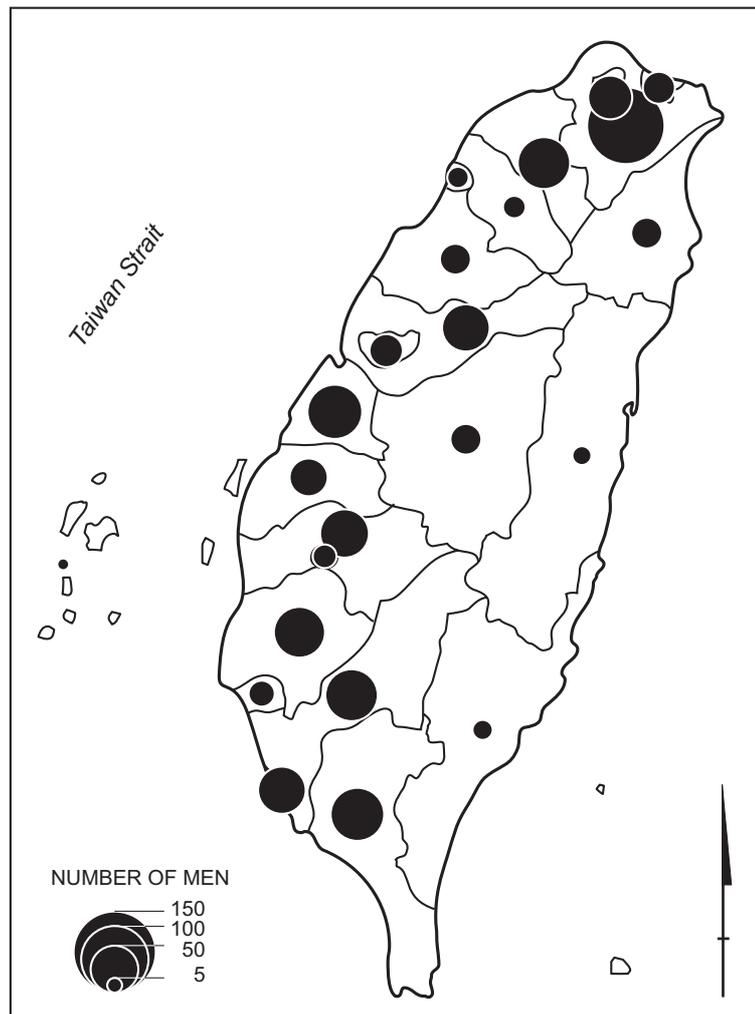


These two effects are common in all labour migration recruiting across Southeast Asia and means that the impacts of labour migration in origin countries is quite spatially concentrated (e.g. Hugo, 1995).

In contrast, Figure 2 indicates that the men who the Vietnamese brides join are more widely distributed throughout Taiwan.

Figure 2: Province of Origin of Taiwanese Husbands of Vietnamese Marriage Migrants, 1994-2002

Source: Do, *et al.*, 2002, 39



Tsay (2004, 182) contrasts the regions of origin of husbands of Chinese brides and those of Southeast Asian brides. He shows the husbands of Chinese brides are concentrated in major cities while the latter are more from rural areas and widespread throughout the country. He maintains that this reflects a substantial difference in socio-economic status of the two groups of husbands. While all men taking foreign brides are drawn

disproportionately from the less educated and disadvantaged, this is especially the case for those marrying women from Southeast Asia.

One of the significant impacts of the marriage migration phenomenon in Taiwan is that an increasing proportion of births in Taiwan are born to mixed marriage couples. In 2002, 12 percent of all births in Taiwan were in this category (Eyton, 2003) but by 2003 this had already increased to 13.4 percent (Tsay, 2004, 198). It would be interesting to establish the extent to which there is higher fertility in mixed marriage couples in Taiwan given the very low levels of fertility that prevail in that country.<sup>3</sup> The proportion of births to mixed migrants doubled from 7.6 percent in 2000 (Tsay, 2004).

Before examining the process of marriage migration from the perspective of sending communities we will examine some of the structural elements underlying the process.

### **Demographic Underpinnings of Migration?**

Historically, marriage migration of women has been strongly influenced by an imbalance between the numbers of men and women in the marriageable ages – a so-called “marriage squeeze”. Reactions to a marriage squeeze can be for the age gap between husband and wife to increase as those in the larger group are forced to seek partners in younger and younger age groups. However, they also can seek potential partners in other countries as was the case in the traditional migration countries of Australia, the United States and Canada where males dominated in most migrations up until the early postwar years. Hence, a marriage squeeze can operate as a “pull” factor to marriage migrants. However, also an excess of one gender can also provide potential for a “push” of emigration as well. To what extent are such imbalances evident in Taiwan and Vietnam?

Goodkind (1997) has demonstrated that the Vietnamese are currently experiencing a “double marriage squeeze”. On the one hand, in Vietnam females, due to impacts of war and male dominated emigration, outnumber males. On the other, the *Vietkieu* based overseas are dominated by males and have a shortage of females. Of relevance here is the shortage of males in Vietnam evident in the age-sex pyramid depicted in Figure 3. Females outnumber males in all ages over 30. In the ages 30-49, the sex ratio is 93.5 while overall it is 97.5. It is apparent, however, that this factor is of less significance than in the past since in all ages under 30 in Vietnam, males now outnumber females. On the other hand, in Taiwan there is a larger number of males than females in all age groups under 55 (Figure 4). Hence, there are some marriage squeeze effects in Taiwan.

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<sup>3</sup> TFR – 1.24 in 2003.

Figure 3: Age-Sex Structure, Vietnam 2000

Source: International Data Base, International Programs Center, U.S. Bureau of the Census

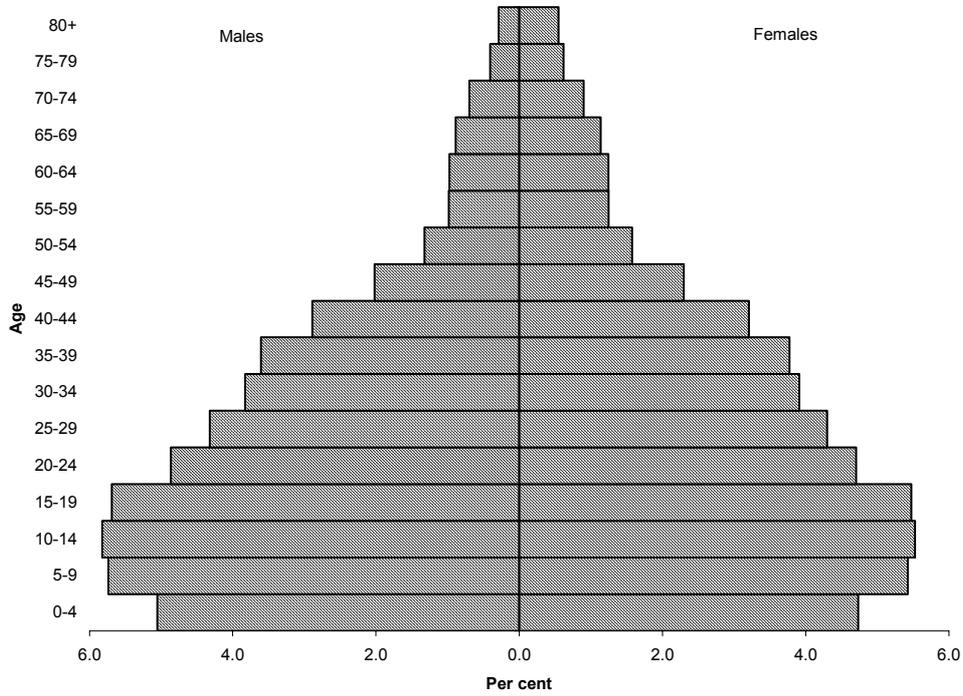
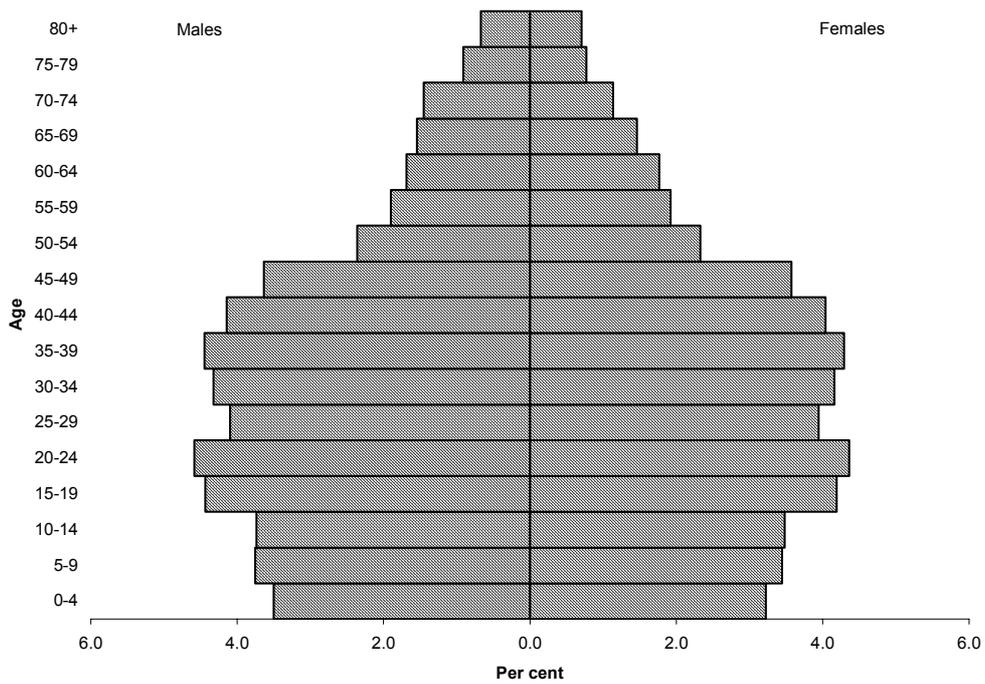


Figure 4: Age-Sex Structure, Taiwan Population 2000

Source: International Data Base, International Programs Center, U.S. Bureau of the Census



While demographic “marriage squeeze” factors are an element in the marriage migration between Vietnam and Taiwan, there are several underlying forces which are influencing the rapid expansion of the phenomenon some of which can be briefly referred to here. One such element is that the marriage migration has partly resulted from the strong transnational

al linkages established by Taiwan with other East and Southeast Asian countries through expanded investment in those areas and a strong pattern of interchange of people, goods, finance and ideas developed. In addition to changes within Taiwan, changes in the role and attitudes of women have been influential. It is apparent that contemporary young Taiwanese women are less willing, than their mothers were, to enter into marriages whereby they are constrained by traditional patriarchal structures to remain at home, have children, look after aged parents-in-law and to give up many of the freedoms they enjoyed as educated young single women. This is particularly true in rural communities and is exacerbated by heavy outmigration of young women to cities. Dowry prices have also risen sharply in Taiwan. As a result, Eyton (2003) points out...

“... rural poorly educated males in lack lustre jobs, possibly with unsociable hours and conservative views on what marriage should be ... are looking to mainland China and Southeast Asia for their prospective spouses.”

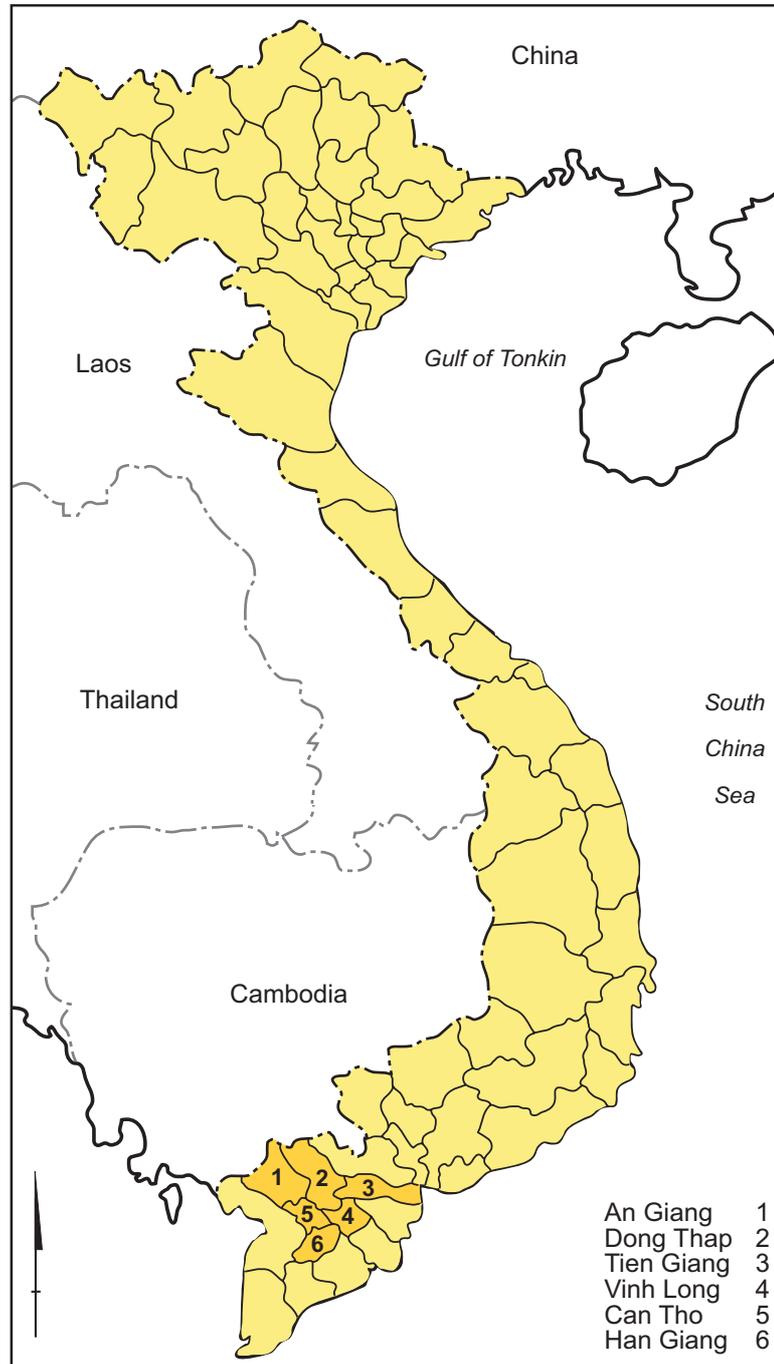
#### **The National University of Ho Chi Minh City Study**

In 2004, the Department of Sociology in the school of Social Sciences and Humanities at the National University of Ho Chi Minh City in the southern part of Vietnam initiated a study of the phenomenon of Vietnamese marriage migration Taiwan with the following objectives ...

- To provide an overview of marriage migration from Vietnam to Taiwan.
- To analyse the determinants of that movement.
- To analyse opinions regarding that migration.
- To analyse the process of migration.
- To establish the impact of the migration on the women involved, the families and communities of origin.

The study was focussed in six provinces as shown in Figure 5, which are the main areas of origin of Vietnamese marriage migrants to Taiwan.

Figure 5: Location of Survey Provinces



The study had a number of components. The centrepiece was a questionnaire survey of 635 households with one or more daughters who had been married to Taiwanese men. The parents or guardians of the women were interviewed. The questionnaire contained 67 questions both structured and open. The questions addressed household composition, the migration process, the links maintained with the marriage migrant and the impacts that the migration has had on the household and on the marriage migrant herself. In addition, there

were 460 short interviews with local youth aged between 13 and 25 in order to establish their attitudes toward the marriage migration to Taiwan. There were also a series of in depth interviews carried out with key groups. Some 40 were with potential brides who had found Taiwan partners and they were waiting to get married. Another 34 were with women who had returned from Taiwan to visit their families in Vietnam. There were 8 in depth discussions with women who had divorced their Taiwanese husbands and returned. In addition, there were 28 consultations with community leaders and local authorities in the region. Finally 23 focus groups were held with key groups to probe aspects of the marriage migration process, its impacts and the attitudes toward it.

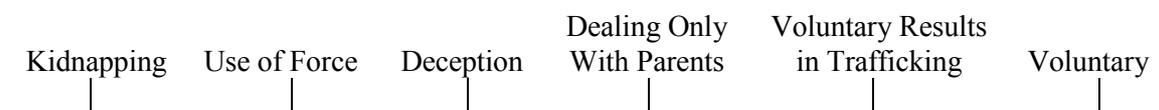
### **The Marriage Migration Process**

Wang and Chang (2002) have explained how the process of marriage migration between Vietnam and Taiwan has been commodified. The Taiwanese men seeking a Vietnamese wife pay a fee of between US\$7,000 and \$10,000. They then visit Vietnam where they are “shown” and introduced to a number of potential brides. They then select a bride and if it can be arranged, they marry and the bride moves to Taiwan. A key element in the process is the substantial involvement of intermediaries. Usually there is a local small scale sub-agent who is approached in Taiwan by the potential husband. The sub-agent usually works through a larger agency, which in turn links to a counterpart Taiwanese agency in Vietnam. At the Vietnam end a similar process operates with local sub-agents and match makers being connected with large Vietnamese agencies which in turn link to the Vietnam based Taiwanese agencies. In addition to these intermediaries there is an array of other stakeholders involved – travel agents, brokers, travel providers, officials, interpreters, etc. who are involved in the process at the Vietnam end. The TECO in Ho Chi Minh city reported in 1999 that they deal with around 250 matchmaking agencies (Tran, 1999).

This process of a complex web of brokers and intermediaries is typical of labour migration in Asian origin countries. The “industry” involved in the labour and marriage migration processes in the region is of key significance in initiating, facilitating and sustaining migration within the region. It is an important element, which is resulting in the embedding of migration into the economy and society of the Asian region. The migration industry remains an understudied part of the migration scene but it occupies a key position.

There is much discussion in the literature about the issue of trafficking of women in the Asian region. There is no doubt that it is of significance but there is a tendency to incorrectly dichotomise totally volitional moves and those where the mover is kidnapped and forced to move totally against their will. Figure 6 suggests in fact the reality is more of a continuum between totally voluntary movements on the one hand and forced migration on the other. Many migrants who are not kidnapped in the conventional version of trafficking are by no means fully voluntary movers. Many are not given accurate information about their lot at the destination (Hugo, 2003), others move purely at the instigation of their parents or other relatives, others are deceived and still others are kidnapped after their arrival in the destination. All of these scenarios have been observed in the marriage migration of Vietnamese women to Taiwan and elsewhere. There is considerable discussion in the media on the link between “mail order brides” and prostitution (Watkin, 1999).

Figure 6: Continuum Between Trafficking and Voluntary Migration  
Source: Modified from Do, *et al.*, 2003, 49



In the survey of origin households, parents of marriage migrants were asked for the reasons why their daughters had married Taiwanese men and the results are summarized in Table 2. It will be noted in two thirds of cases the reasons given were “to help the family” or “to make parents happy”.

Table 2: Reasons for Marrying Taiwanese Men (n=630)  
Source: 2004 Survey

| Reason                | Percent |
|-----------------------|---------|
| To help the family    | 61.6    |
| For a better life     | 10.8    |
| To make parents happy | 6.3     |
| Don't like local men  | 4.6     |
| Influence of friends  | 3.7     |
| Other                 | 12.9    |

This points to the strong patriarchal structure in the origin communities and the culture of children subordinating their own preferences to those of their parents. Indeed this is one

of the characteristics which is prized by the Taiwanese men seeking to marry Vietnamese women (Tsay, 2004). There is also some evidence from the results of the operation of social networks and cumulative causation whereby young women are persuaded to engage in marriage migration because relatives and friends have previously married Taiwanese men. Respondents were also asked who made the decision regarding the marriage migration. As Table 3 indicates, the bride alone made the decision in 40.5 percent of cases but in a context where there is a strong cultural imperative to accede to parents' wishes this can be interpreted as young women deciding to move in order to satisfy their family's rather than their own wishes. Nevertheless, there is strong parental involvement in the migration decision-making process with them making the formal decision in a third of the cases and being involved with their daughter's decision in another quarter. This isn't to say that many young brides don't see marriage migration to Taiwan as a way to improve their lives. Indeed several indicated this was the case. However, the reality is that the families, especially parents, are heavily involved in the process of marriage migration out of Vietnam. In the survey no cases were reported where parents have sold their daughters to traffickers against their will as was reported by Singhanetra-Renard in Thailand. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese parents generally receive US\$1,000 to \$2,000 at the time of the transaction as well as later remittances from Taiwan.

Table 3: Marriage Decision Maker (n=630)  
Source: 2004 Survey

| Decision Maker    | Percent |
|-------------------|---------|
| The Bride         | 40.5    |
| Parents           | 33.7    |
| Parents and Bride | 23.9    |
| Other             | 1.9     |

### Who Moves?

As Table 4 indicates, the marriage migrants were almost all aged under 30 at the time of marriage. Indeed over 70 percent were aged less than 22. This contrasts with some other marriage migration streams such as that of Filipino women to marry Australian men where the women are often older and have frequently been married previously and have children by that early marriage. This is not the case for the Vietnamese women moving to Taiwan, almost all of whom had never been married before. The average age difference between the brides and their husbands was 13 years (2004 survey). Indeed

some 82.2 percent of the Taiwanese husbands were aged 30 years or over. Tsay (2004) notes that Taiwanese marriage data for 2003 shows that while half of the brides from China were aged over 30, around 90 percent of those from Southeast Asia were less than 30. The mean age of Southeast Asian brides was 23.6 years while that of their husbands was 37.9.

Table 4: Age When Married (n=630)  
Source: 2004 Survey

| Age   | Percent |
|-------|---------|
| 15-17 | 0.3     |
| 18-22 | 70.5    |
| 23-29 | 26.0    |
| 30+   | 3.2     |

The women were on average more educated than the average for rural communities in Southern Vietnam. Table 5 shows that over 60 percent had gone beyond primary school. They are also clearly more educated than their parents. The brides tend to have lower levels of education than their Taiwanese husbands but the latter tend to have lower levels of education than the average in Taiwan. Tsay (2004) maintains that the Taiwanese husbands of Southeast Asians, among which Vietnamese dominate, have lower education levels not only than those men marrying Taiwanese women but also than those men marrying women from China.

Table 5: Education of Parents and Bride  
Source: 2004 Survey

| Level of Schooling | Parents | Bride |
|--------------------|---------|-------|
| No schooling       | 9.4     | 0.9   |
| Primary            | 59.0    | 35.1  |
| Secondary          | 21.8    | 50.3  |
| High School        | 9.7     | 12.8  |
| Tertiary           | 0.1     | 0.9   |

More than a half of the women were employed outside the home in Vietnam before they became marriage migrants. In Table 6, 29.6 percent were in the “other” category in occupation prior to moving and a significant number of these were students. Most striking in the table is that the proportion who were involved in “housework” at the destination was three times higher than the proportion thus engaged before migration. This reflects the

imperative among many of the Taiwanese men seeking a Vietnamese bride that their wife fulfills the traditional role of women in Taiwan of being based in the home, caring for her husband, children and often the elderly relatives of her husband. It is also one of the complaints received from some of the women after their arrival in Taiwan that they felt they are excessively tied to the home and their wishes to improve their lives by migration were not being fulfilled. It will be noticed that while 15.3 percent of the women worked in farming in Vietnam only 1.6 percent did so in Taiwan. There were some women who found that the work expected of them by their husbands both outside and inside the home was excessive. Indeed there were several complaints of women being seen as house servants, caregivers and “baby making machines”.

*Phuong found that her life was as hard in Taiwan as it had been in Vietnam “My husband turn out to be a farmer. I was doing the same work I did in Vietnam. We started at 5 in the morning and stopped at two. I didn’t speak the language. I missed home and was very lonely.”*

Table 6: Occupation of Women after Marriage  
Source: 2004 Survey

| Occupation     | Percent After | Percent Before |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| Housework      | 52.4          | 16.7           |
| Factory worker | 17.9          | 16.4           |
| Farming        | 1.6           | 15.3           |
| Selling        | 7.3           | 9.1            |
| Services       | 2.4           | 12.9           |
| Other          | 18.2          | 29.6           |

The occupations of the Taiwanese husbands are presented in Table 7 and it is apparent that while there are a small number of professionals, the distribution is dominated by unskilled workers. This is reiterated at the Taiwan end where Tsay’s (2004, 181) analysis shows that the Taiwanese men marrying Southeast Asian women were drawn disproportionately from lower socio economic classes.

Table 7: Occupations of Grooms  
Source: 2004 Survey

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Servicer and seller in market | 77  |
| Worker                        | 244 |
| Business                      | 49  |
| Farmer                        | 39  |
| Driver                        | 67  |
| Owner of a firm               | 8   |
| Professional worker           | 53  |
| Officer                       | 30  |
| Director                      | 2   |
| Teacher                       | 4   |
| Unemployed                    | 5   |
| Engineer                      | 19  |
| Total                         | 597 |

### The Impact on Families of Origin

From the earlier analyses it is apparent that the *raison d'être* of much of the marriage migration from Taiwan is the support of Vietnam based parents. In the survey 88.3 percent of respondents reported receiving money from their daughters in Taiwan. Most of those not receiving remittances were cases where their daughter had left relatively recently. Households were asked about the economic situation of their household before and after migration and asked to classify it in very poor, poor, average, above average, well off categories. It is apparent that in most cases, economic conditions in households improved. Some 72.4 percent of households reported that they moved up at least one category as a result of the migration. Another 25.7 percent remained in the same category. Table 8 shows that 45.7 percent of households were lifted from poor to average economic status and a third (32.6 percent) were lifted from poor or average to above average status.

Table 8: Poor and Very Poor Households Change (n=387)  
Source: 2004 Survey

| Change                   | No. of Households |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Poor to very poor        | 2                 |
| Stayed poor or very poor | 43                |
| Very poor to poor        | 11                |
| Lifted to average        | 177               |
| Lifted to above average  | 126               |
| Lifted to well off       | 28                |

The survey also showed that before the marriage 126 households were very poor and 261 were poor; however, only 7 households were very poor and 52 were poor after that. This change is clearly visible to the people in the community. Indeed, from focus group discussions, people agree that they can see a noticeable improvement of the economic conditions in almost all of households who have a Taiwan son in law. They built new houses, bought expensive motorbikes. Getting married to Taiwan men is the quickest way the girl in this area has chosen so that her family can get out of poverty.

*“...in brief, most girls in this community married Taiwan men due to their poverty. To help their parents and relatives to be well-off they have to take a risk by leaving their own country and living with a person to whom, they had few chances of getting used.”* (A bride in Dong Thap Province)

### **The Experience in Taiwan**

While the study did not directly interview many Vietnamese marriage migrants since it was carried out in the origin area, a great deal of information was collected about their experience in Taiwan from their families. Most families kept in regular contact with their daughters, especially through telephone calls and there was some return movement of the women to visit their families<sup>4</sup>. This information while not direct does shed some light on the women’s experience in the destination. While there are several success stories there are also problems being experienced by many marriage migrants in Taiwan. It is apparent that one over-riding problem relates to language. In most cases the brides cannot communicate effectively with their husbands at least in the early stages of their marriage because they don’t speak Mandarin and their husbands don’t speak Vietnamese. Mandarin language classes are available in Taiwan but some women report that their husbands won’t allow them to attend. As Eyton (2003) points out...

*“Surveys show that most of them are quite willing to learn Mandarin, the problem is their husbands are often unwilling to pay for them to go to school to do so, and often the language their husbands prefer to use is the far more difficult to learn Minnan, spoken only in Taiwan and China’s Fujian province.”*

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed one common complaint was the great difficulty which Vietnamese families have in getting visas to visit their daughters in Taiwan.

Language barriers not only hamper the bride's relationship with her husband and his family but it makes it difficult to deal with bureaucracy and to access services. This forces their isolation especially during the early years and is a contributor to the loneliness that many report.

Several report that their daughters experience prejudice in Taiwan. Again as Eyton (2003) explains...

“Taiwan is a pretty homogenous society, its main antagonisms being historical and political among different groups of Han Chinese Settlers.

Taiwan is not a multicultural society by any means.”

The question also arises as to the experience of the mixed blood children produced by the marriages. Will they experience prejudice? Will they be allowed to maintain their part Vietnamese heritage? Many of the same types of “homogeneity issues” that are part of the public discourse on immigration in Japan are also found in Taiwan.

As alluded to earlier, there are also problems associated with what is often referred to in Vietnam as “Taiwan Disillusionment” (*Lao Duong*<sup>5</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2001). They are promised, or believe, that life in Taiwan will be different to that at home and that they will be better off. However, some find that their inferior position in the family, and the long hours of hard work expected of them are exacerbated by language barriers and by loneliness and they are very unhappy. So unhappy in fact that many return to their homes in Vietnam and obtain a divorce. In 1990-2000 there were over 170 divorce cases involving the foreign factor in Can Tho province along (*Lao Duong*, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2001). From 2001 to 2002, 253 cases were reported in this province (Women Union in Can Tho, 2002). In depth interviews with 8 such returnees in the present study indicated that this return phenomenon is becoming more widespread as the marriage migration increases. The main reasons of getting divorced of these women are that they have not met their expectations from the marriage. Some of them felt lonely because their husbands paid little or no attention to them, the others had fights with their partners and their relatives. The determinants of this marriage are economic, so all of brides tried to find a job when they went to Taiwan. Due to their low levels of education, few of them obtained a good job, most of them do low-paid work, and some do housework. Many women who stay home to look after children and the husband's relatives feel unhappy with the marriage because they do not have money to assist their families in Vietnam.

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<sup>5</sup> A Vietnamese newspaper.

*“I want to work outside to earn money because my relatives in Vietnam need my financial assistance. My child is 6 years old, but my husband does not send him to school because he doesn’t want to spend money for his school. Therefore he wants me to stay home and take care of the child, while he doesn’t make any effort to help my family.”* (A girl from Vinh Long Province)

Even a couple of brides were deceived by their husbands

*“When I met him in Vietnam, he said that he has 3 children and his wife died, so he was looking for a wife to share housework with him and to look after his children. He did not tell me that two of his children are very sick. When I went to Taiwan, in the evening he brought me to his house and introduced me to his children I was shocked because they were severely disable. They stay in bed and need a lot of care. It was very hard work, I stayed there 2 years and decided to go home.”*(a women from Can Tho province)

However, there are success stories,

From 51 brides interviewed, 88.9% were satisfied with their marriage because the life in Taiwan is better and in there they have more chance to get more income to help their families in Vietnam. Especially, 14.3% of the satisfied women were completely happy with their husbands and his relatives. The cause of their happiness was that they were treated with respect from both their partners and parents in law. They got greatly care from them, so they try their best to make them happy as well. The husbands of these brides discussed nearly every thing related to the family with them. Even some of them were permitted to make decisions in their families. They often were women who were more educated came from urban areas in Vietnam

### **Conclusion**

While the flow of marriage migrants to Taiwan is currently attracting most attention in Vietnam, there is an increasing number of reports of an upswing in marriage migration into Southern China. Some of this movement involves women being attracted by the promise of a better life and is arranged through intermediaries although the trafficking component is also significant (Ta, 2002). However, with the increasing imbalance between males and females in China as a result of the combination of the longstanding preference for male babies and the one child policy, the pressures for marriage migration from Vietnam’s massive northern neighbours will undoubtedly increase substantially. The commodification of the flow has created a significant transnational industry linking Vietnam, Taiwan and increasingly China in which large profits are being made by the

many people in the complex web of interlocking relationships that see Vietnamese women marry Taiwanese men. The drivers within Taiwan are unlikely to be reduced in the foreseeable future given the excess of younger males and the changing roles and attitudes of Taiwanese women. These will ensure the continuation and expansion of the marriage migration flows.

The whole process involves little intervention by government both at the Vietnamese and Taiwanese ends. Certainly there have been nothing like the efforts to control exploitative marriage migration as for example has occurred in respect to the flow of Filipino women to Australia. Non-governmental organisations are increasingly involved in both origin and destination areas to provide more balanced information to potential migrants, protect them from exploitation help them adjust to Taiwan and assist them if they wish to return to Vietnam. Others assist returning women with the difficult adjustment process when they return to Vietnam. It is clear that these flows will continue so it is imperative that policies and programs be put in place both in Vietnam and Taiwan which....

- Regulate the activities of the intermediaries to combat exploitation.
- Provide accurate information to potential brides and their families to help them make more informed decisions about migrating.
- Provide appropriate support systems to the women in Taiwan.
- Facilitate communication and travel between the women and their families of origin.
- Assist their adjustment to Taiwanese society.
- Provide protection for them in Taiwan

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