

IUSSP Seminar
on

Global Perspectives on Marriage and International Migration

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel, Seoul, Korea, 20-21 October 2011

This international seminar, organized by the IUSSP Scientific Panel on the Process and Dynamics of Cross-Border Marriage in cooperation with Statistics Korea and the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA), was held at the Ritz-Carlton in Seoul, Korea, on 20-21 October 2011. The seminar was funded by a grant from Statistics Korea. KIHASA also funded part of the costs relating to the travel expenses of participants and the logistical arrangements of the seminar. A total of 72 participants attended the seminar from various fields including demography, anthropology, economics, sociology, history, statistics and health science. Among the 72 seminar attendees, 9 were from Europe and North America, while 63 were from East Asian and Southeast Asian countries.

Marriage migration across borders has been pervasive all over the world in the past decades. Marriage immigrants increasingly constitute a significant part of the mainstream life in host societies. Issues related to transnational marriage, including its socioeconomic dynamics and cultural diversity, have all drawn the interests of scholars in both Eastern and Western societies. The processes of international marriage across nations, the immigrant experiences and related social conflicts, and the overall impact on host and sending societies have received the attention of not only scholars but also policy makers.

The aim of the seminar was to gather cutting edge papers on issues related to the relationships between marriage and international migration. By involving collaborative efforts from leading scholars and researchers with diverse perspectives and expertise on issues related to cross-border marriage and marriage migration, the goal of this seminar was to provide a constructive forum which goes beyond the boundaries of existing scholarly and political interests, to better measure, conceptualize, and theorize this contemporary phenomenon.

Papers providing a national or regional overview, specific case studies, quantitative

analyses, and small-scaled qualitative studies from various perspectives were presented at the seminar. Major themes of papers included the following: Historical background and demographic trends; individual characteristics of married couples; motivation and process of marriage migration; spouse dissimilarity; marital stability and divorce; post-immigration settlement and social integration; fertility of marriage immigrants; education and integration of the second generation; social and economic impacts in sending and receiving societies; gender and ethnicity perspectives; legal and citizenship issues; policy implications; and methodological considerations in terms of utilizing national census data. A total of 17 papers (including a keynote speech) and a documentary video filmed by a marriage immigrant from Japan were presented.

The seminar was covered by various domestic newspapers, magazines and internet media during the seminar period. A journalist from London, U.K. attended the whole seminar and individually interviewed many speakers whose research he was particularly interested in. These interviews and major contents of presented papers and discussions, along with a brief introduction of IUSSP and the seminar organizer, were published in 3 pages in the 12 November 2011 edition of the *The Economist*. A welfare policy expert under the Prime Minister's office in Singapore as well as 16 policy makers in the Korean government also attended the seminar.

Keynote Speech

With a focus on the East and Southeast Asian region, the speech aimed to update our knowledge of the trends in international marriage, categorize the kinds of international marriages taking place and their relative numerical importance in the overall international marriage picture, discuss factors contributing to the trends in international marriages, address some of the theoretical issues surrounding international marriage, and discuss some of the implications and in particular policy implications. Some comments on how international marriage trends in Asia differ from those in other parts of the world were made. Gaps in the literature were also discussed.

Session 1: Marriage Migration from Comparative Perspective with a Special Focus on Europe

International marriage in Europe is clearly not a trivial concern; more than one out of five marriages in 2006-2007 were international, and in a few countries, reached more than

30% of marriages. To present the latest trends of the changing patterns of international marriages and divorces, three papers provided a very thorough analysis of the available data, and assessed the value of different measures.

The first paper documented the sharp decline in international marriages in Austria and Belgium. In both countries the downturn from high levels seems to be related to legal changes: in the case of Austria, a more restrictive policy on naturalizations, and a longer period of residence required for the foreign spouse to apply for naturalization; in the case of Belgium, adoption of a more restrictive law on marriage to curb marriages of convenience. Three important questions were raised: Is intermarriage a good indicator of integration? (The author answered in the affirmative). Which source of data should be used, and which indicator should be computed? And which level of disaggregation should be considered?

The second paper demonstrated the great value of assembling comparable microdata information from as many censuses as possible. The main purpose was to document patterns and trends in international marriage across countries and over time. Differences between countries were explained based on a selection of macro-level indicators: a) level of present and historical immigration; b) size, heterogeneity and gender-squeeze of the foreign-born; and c) gender-squeeze and other characteristics of the native-born.

The third paper examined the trends in intermarriage among EU migrants and the native population in four countries of settlement (Spain, Belgium, Netherlands and Switzerland), their changes over time and factors involved. The study was conducted by combining vital statistics, census and register data over the period from 1989 to 2009. Bi-national marriages between two spouses of different EU descent were assumed to be an important indicator as well as driver for social cohesion within the EU.

Papers in this session addressed several limitations of using existing data to measure international marriages. For the purpose of facilitating the comparability of marriage migration across countries, questions about which demographic characteristics should be used – between country of birth, citizenship, and race/ethnicity – were left open for discussion.

Session 2: Emerging and Reversed Marriage Migration among Japanese

Most of the literature on international marriage in the Asian context focuses on Southeast Asian brides marrying East Asian grooms. The three papers in this session explored rather less-observed types of international marriage between Japanese women and men from Southeast Asia, to men from sub-Saharan Africa, or to foreign Muslim men. Despite being small in numbers, these marriages matter because they challenge social norms, particularly family and gender norms that prescribe endogamy in race and origin, and often social background.

The first paper investigated marriages of Japanese women to spouses in Southeast Asian countries (Bali, Indonesia, Chiang Mai, Thailand and Cebu, the Philippines). The new kind of grass-root relationship with Southeast Asian society after their marriages was explored using a qualitative approach. The pattern observed was viewed as a “reverse” pattern (move from more to less affluent societies, move from urban to rural, and move from nuclear to extended family). The reverse pattern reflects a changing trend of feminization, increasing “global imagination” and “sites of desire” among Japanese women.

The second paper examined correlates of cross-border marriages among male Muslim migrants in Tokyo-Metropolitan Area. The author discussed the phenomenon of high incidences of intermarriage between Muslim men and Japanese women by taking into account different contexts and perspectives such as religious constraints of the Muslim group as well as the Japanese government’s regulation regarding residence status of foreigners. While contributing to a better picture and understanding of the marriage profile of Muslim-Japanese marital unions, this study also brought our attention to the impact of regulations concerning residence status of foreigners and the dire need for the government to give necessary support to Muslim–Japanese couples. It also attempted to derive policy implications for the social integration of migrant families into Japanese society.

Similar to foreign wives from developing countries marrying Japanese men, foreign husbands from the third world countries are also subject to discrimination and prejudice. They are seen as opportunity seekers, who use women to gain legal residency in Japan, rather than victims of globalization like Southeast Asian brides. The third paper provided insight into how both spouses benefit from these marital arrangements. Japanese women in Japan marry men from sub-Saharan Africa in part to escape a Japanese marriage that they perceive as oppressive, non-romantic and too gendered. This paper also discussed how couples negotiate childrearing practices, language and cultural transmission, and society's perceptions of their children. Children of Japanese mothers whose fathers are African are raised as quasi strictly Japanese in Japan. Yet, their physical appearance as Black-Japanese children subjects them to discrimination. Finally, this paper alluded to the absence of school curriculum dealing with issues of racism, exclusion, discrimination, an observation that raised important issues with respect to future policies and programmes to foster tolerance, understanding and even appreciation of differences.

Sessions 3 and 4: Legal, Cultural and Social Issues Involved in Marriage Migration

The papers presented in session 3 provided insight on marriage and migration from Europe (Portugal) and from two quite different Asian contexts (Indian Punjab and Malaysia). The first paper addressed the research question of how legal/illegal migrant workers make the

transition to foreign spouses in the context of a migration system between Indonesia and Malaysia. By investigating the process of marriages between Indonesian-Malaysian couples, of which a majority are Muslim, the authors classified the marriages according to whether they have legal residence and work permits, and whether these marriages were legitimized through religious institutions in Indonesia or Indonesian communities in Malaysia. Using foreign worker-Malaysian citizen marriages as a lens, the first paper traced the laborious and complicated pathways to legality and/or legitimacy, and illustrated the role of human agency in fashioning flexible arrangements that work to circumvent regulatory regimes.

The Indian Punjab study approached marriage migration from its own unique and appropriate angle. The authors discussed the perspectives, contexts and factors that are largely responsible for absence of cross-border marriage data and scholarship in Punjab. In this paper, the role of outward marriage migration was discussed as a tool for sustaining or advancing one's social class. The marriage migrant diaspora from Punjab was noted as having a facilitating or positive marketing effect on the continuance and perhaps further expansion of outward marriage migration. This effect would seem to lend some support to the argument that these marriages are avenues for social advancement. This paper also enumerated the government agencies that are involved in some aspect of marriage migration administration, and those that could take a stronger role. Despite the multitude of interested parties, it was argued that key elements of data are not available to better inform policy research, and key areas of advocacy and protection seem to remain weak.

In the next paper, authors successfully profiled marriages involving migrants in Portugal, and built useful insights from comparisons of relative levels of endogamy and exogamy in these marriages, across key factors. This paper reminds us that key insights from marriages between migrants and non-migrants also occur in situations where the migrants are already settled inhabitants, settled immigrants, who may have no need to marry to enable their migration, and who have not entered the country or into settlement through the act of marriage. In these cases, the insights gained from examining the characteristics of these marriages help illuminate the role of this kind of mixed marriage in facilitating assimilation, and in the creation of new multicultural environments. Additionally, the study also stressed the gender dimensions of the give-and-take, gain-and-loss of these marriages. The study examined whether men or women are most likely to marry outside their group of education attainment, and whether exogamy in this area is more likely when the woman is the migrant and has the higher education attainment.

Two papers were presented in session 4. It was argued in the first paper that marriage migration constitutes a significant vector of social change for both sending and receiving areas of migrants. Focusing on the unions of Vietnamese wives and Taiwanese husbands over the past decade, expected and unexpected social changes such as challenges in terms of gender norms that impact both societies were discussed. Deriving data from surveys and

interviews in the country of destination (Taiwan) and country of origin (Vietnam), the authors stressed two major forms of transnational economic and social activities. The authors introduced the concept of “transnationalism from below” to frame the social impact of marriage migration and discussed how these transnational activities contribute to social change in both societies.

The Philippines has long been a country of emigration and data on marriage migration have been collected for a long period of time. The second paper explored trends in Filipinas’ marriage migration to the United States from 1995 to 2009, and assessed the changes that occurred in many aspects of female marriage migration including personal socio-economic characteristics, changes in means of spouse selection, fertility as well as the information of feedback on difficulties in adjustment in country of destination.

At the end of session 4, a documentary video entitled *Rainbow* was presented. This video was directed and filmed by a marriage immigrant from Japan, currently living in Korea. This video includes interviews of marriage immigrants from various countries on the process of their adaptation, Koreans’ perceptions and attitudes toward them, their children’s education, various aspects of their marriage life, and the Korean government’s multicultural policies.

Sessions 5 and 6: Marital Stability, Adaptation, Fertility and Health Issues of Marriage Migration

Two papers in session 5 extend the research focus to stability of transnational marriage and their children’s school performance. The first paper explored the effects of spousal dissimilarity on marital stability among transnational couples in Korea. The prevailing hypothesis that positive assortative marriage is more stable and tends to last longer was tested. The notion of “transnational openness hypothesis” that socio-demographic thresholds tend to be more open or flexible among Korean men who are looking for foreign brides was created in this study. Results of the analysis showed greater incidences of spousal dissimilarity in age and educational attainment among transnational couples, which supports the transnational openness hypothesis. The extant hypothesis that spousal dissimilarity increases the risk of marital dissolution and shortens the duration of marriage was not found to fit transnational couples in Korea. On the contrary, marriages with high age-educational distance between spouses were found to have lower odds of getting divorced. In sum, it is important to recognize that transnational marriages are likely to form a certain pattern of systematic departure from those among native Koreans. As the divorce rate for international marriages has risen rapidly in recent years, examining which marital characteristics are associated with marital stability carries strong policy implications in contemporary Korean society.

By the year of 2010, children born of foreign-born mothers who attend primary schools have reached 150,000 in Taiwan. The second paper in session 5 revealed that mothers' ethnicity backgrounds have significant and direct effects on parental educational expectations and children's school performance. Specifically, immigrant brides from Southeast Asian countries and their Taiwanese husbands have lower parental educational expectations for their children compared to Taiwanese couples. Lower parental educational expectations influence parenting styles, parenting practices, and children's attitude toward schoolwork, which in turn contribute to the findings that children of Taiwanese mothers outperform those of Southeast Asian mothers.

Topics covered by the three papers in session 6 include mating and fertility behaviors, and health concerns of marriage migrants. The first paper examined the increasing trends in transnational marriages and their changing characteristics in terms of assortative mating, mainly using censuses and other official data. Survey data were also used to highlight the mechanisms by which mixed couples are formed, their criteria of mate selection, and their family and fertility behaviour. It was indicated that the relationships of mixed couples in Italy are less stable: they have more out of wedlock children, pre-marital conceptions, lower fertility, more previous experience of divorce and abortion, compared to all-foreign and all-Italian couples.

The second paper also explored the topic of mate selection pattern and fertility differentials among marriage migrants. With respect to the pattern of mate selection, foreign wives were found to be more heterogeneous than their Korean native counterparts. A Poisson regression model was constructed to examine the effect of spousal gaps in age and education on current fertility, planned fertility, and potential completed fertility. The most notable findings were that spousal dissimilarity in age and education tends to be negatively associated with the level of fertility, and that foreign wives tend to have relatively lower fertility compared to Korean wives at the early stage of settlement. As their duration of residence becomes longer, however, the difference in the level of fertility between foreign and Korean wives becomes very small.

The third paper investigated the health barriers for marriage migrants with qualitative methods, and proposed a human rights approach to address the health needs of marriage migrants in Korea. It was found that health environments and health behaviors of marriage immigrants are linked to their current status as a wife and daughter-in-law and background in their origin. In addition to linguistic barriers, poor economic status of their husband, powerlessness in health decision, low medical and health information, and negative experiences of medical care in their country of origin tend to bar their accessibility to health services. This paper argued that health approach for marriage immigrants should be based on comprehensive collaboration between agents from medical and non-medical sectors, and understanding marriage immigrants' diverse backgrounds.

In sum, the formation, duration, and dissolution of international marriages are context-specific. Trends that are statistically marginal may be socially prevalent depending on the interpretation of researchers and policy makers. Addressing the diverse dynamics of global marriage migration through the lens of gender, ethnicity, class and globalization will contribute to further understanding of various forms of international marriages that will create unexpected social change regionally and globally. It is also important to further investigate to what extent immigration policies and welfare systems accommodate the needs of these families and their children. In the countries of destination, careful examination is required to identify the effect of changing ethnic homogeneity through international marriage migration. Within the context of Asia, marriage migrants from less-developed countries use such migration channel as an avenue for social advancement or upward mobility; however, certain groups of population such as highly educated women are being left out in the unbalanced marriage markets in East Asia. Coupled with strict and less-advanced gender norms in East Asian countries, strategies are to be developed in order to reengage such population into marriage markets and boost fertility rates.