

women and globalization

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7. Internationalization of Capital and the Trade in Asian Women

The Case of "Foreign Brides" in Taiwan

Hsiao-Chuan Hsia

The contemporary mail-order bride industry is generally known to involve men in the industrialized North seeking brides from poor nations in the South, a practice that stems from and mirrors international power relations. In this empirical study, Hsia draws attention to the marriage trade within the South itself. She locates its emergence in the particular ways that capitalism has developed that have installed Taiwan as the economic superior of neighboring Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand.

Using a variety of sources and methodologies—official and media reports, participant observation, and in-depth interviews—Hsia's readings of the more intimate personal data surrounding "commodified transnational marriages" remains linked throughout to a macroanalysis of capitalism and the theory of uneven development. Thus her view of "foreign brides" in Taiwan, while defined as an aspect of immigration, goes beyond the traditional "push-pull" framework of mainstream social science.

This article, then, devotes considerable space to the expansion of capital in Taiwan and the foregoing relations of dependency with its neighbors, whose economic devel-

opment was forced into either stagnation or collapse. The author states that it was precisely when Taiwan's outward-bound investment speeded up after 1987 that the phenomenon of Taiwanese men marrying Southeast Asian women began to take form and thrive. Thrown against this backdrop, it becomes clear how "marriage immigration" cannot but acquire its peculiar feature of gender inequality while simultaneously functioning to bolster the systemic inequalities that were its source.

In her interviews, Hsia gives her subjects the opportunities to talk about their marriages. We learn that Taiwanese men seeking foreign brides are agricultural and industrial workers whose low social status and limited time for socialization make them unattractive grooms for Taiwanese women. Foreign brides, on the other hand, explain their presence in Taiwan as a result of unstable economic and political conditions at home. Because these marriages are contracted as coping strategies for both parties, notions of a resulting "global village" are immediately eliminated. Instead, prevailing negative stereotypes in Taiwan about foreign brides are extended to their countries of origin and used as explanations for their failure to develop.

THE PHENOMENON

In recent years, paralleled with the impending threat of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the World Trade Organization to the agricultural economy and the exodus of labor-intensive industry, thousands of Taiwanese peasants and working-class men have been leaving the countryside in search of brides. Led by marriage brokers, they are transported to modern international airports, where their humble glances are immediately seized by an alien

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combination of luxurious lounges, complex and wordy immigration forms, and expressionless customs bureaucrats. Experiences like this are rare in their lives. Meanwhile, across the South Pacific, marriage brokers and matchmakers weave in and out of communities on the margins of cities and rural areas in Indonesia, Vietnam, and other Southeast Asian countries, encouraging young women to meet the men they hope to introduce. During the meetings, the men cast their anxious, searching glances, while the women act shyly and the matchmakers confidently try to sew the two together into a couple. Days later, the engagement ceremony is held. The men return to Taiwan to wait several months up to a year for their "foreign brides" to arrive.¹ Transnational marriages of this type require a long time and a large sum of money, many times half of the savings of a family from rural Taiwan. If a man successfully marries a woman, he must pay the broker a sum between US\$10,000 and \$15,000, only 10 percent of which goes to the bride's family as a dowry. Still, a dowry of this size is a considerable sum to families in Southeast Asian nations where wages are low.

This is not a new phenomenon. In the early eighties, men from rural areas in Taiwan began marrying brides from Thailand and the Philippines. By the end of the decade, the Taiwanese government stopped issuing visas to single women from Southeast Asia, since several women were caught engaging in prostitution after coming to Taiwan on tourist visas. Since then, Taiwanese men who want to marry foreign brides have to go to Southeast Asia. Since the early nineties, Indonesia has become the primary source of foreign brides in Taiwan. In each of the past few years, more than two thousand women from Indonesia have left their homes, heading to their imagined "prosperous paradise"—Taiwan. In order to reduce the number of Indonesian brides, the Taipei Economic and Trade Office in Indonesia slowed processing of visas for these women, making them even more anxious for their required interview for a visa to Taiwan. Many Indonesian brokers have therefore become impatient with the Taiwan government's slow pace and have increasingly

matched Indonesian women with Hong Kong men instead; meanwhile, Taiwanese brokers have begun to turn their attention toward women in Vietnam, Cambodia, and other countries.

THE PROBLEMATIQUE

In Taiwan, “foreign brides” refer to Southeast Asian women married to Taiwanese men. In the media, such women are often portrayed as uneducated and from poor families, while their husbands are viewed as socially undesirable and thus incapable of finding Taiwanese brides. Their marriages are usually regarded simply as “trade marriages” by the media and are viewed as a source of social problems (Hsia 1997).

The idea that their marriages are a function of “trade” contributes to nothing but strengthening the stereotypes of “foreign brides” in Taiwan. Transnational marriages between the Taiwanese and Southeast Asians must be understood in the context of a larger process, not as an isolated phenomenon. In the United States, pictures of mail-order brides from Asia, Eastern Europe, and Russia are printed up in catalogs (Lai 1992; Glodava and Onizuka 1994), and the importation of women from the Philippines to Japan, Australia, and the former West Germany for marriage has become an issue of debate (Aguilar 1987; Cooke 1986; del Rosario 1994; Sato 1989). In patriarchal marriages, women have been regarded primarily as tools for reproduction for centuries. Situations of women from the peripheral countries in the world system are even more devastating—some being sold as sex commodities, others having to rely on transnational marriages as a way out of poverty. The foreign bride phenomenon in Taiwan also needs to be examined in this global context.

These types of transnational marriages are very different from those resulting from immigration, study abroad, and work. They involve not only women and men of different nationalities and cultures, but also marriage brokers and trade relations between the

countries involved. In order to distinguish from other forms of transnational marriages, I use "commodified transnational marriages" to refer to the "foreign bride" and "mail-order bride" phenomena.²

Commodified transnational marriages have existed for several decades. At the end of World War II, U.S. and European soldiers brought home many women from Third World countries. Still, there has been little systematic research into this widespread phenomenon. Little research on transnational marriages discusses the differences between commodified and noncommodified marriages, either completely ignoring the issue of the trade in brides (e.g., Brewer 1982; Rhee 1988; Rho 1989; Rousselle 1993), or confusing them with other types of transnational marriages (Donato 1988).

The phenomenon of foreign brides in Taiwan is most similar to that of mail-order brides in other countries. Most research into mail-order brides assumes it is a social problem and adopts a sympathetic attitude toward the women, describing in detail their unfortunate fate. However, this research often falls into the trap of constructing the women as "exotic others." For instance, in *Mail-Order Brides: Women for Sale*, Glodava and Onizuka strongly criticize common Western stereotypes of Asian women as "subservient, exotic man-pleasing creatures" (1994, p. 38), while at the same time unconsciously adopting other Western stereotypes. When analyzing the violence these women face in the process of being "selected" as a mail-order bride, the authors posit that the women are "traditional" and therefore unwilling to forsake marriage or question whether their husbands deserve their respect and love. Being therapists themselves, Glodava and Onizuka are especially concerned that mail-order brides are not willing to seek help and professional therapy, because Asian values dictate them to be deferent to authority and have harmony within relationships (ibid., p. 109). This discourse implies that Asian women are the victims of Asian culture, and in order to become liberated, they must forsake their traditional culture and accept Western individualism. Their table titled "Asian Cross-Cultural Values and Assumptions Regarding Philosophy of Life and Implications for

Therapy" (ibid., p. 111) best depicts their position on cultural differences. This table dichotomizes values into "Asian/Pacific" versus "Western." In the Asian/Pacific column, characteristic values include suppression of individuality, fatalism, rigidity of role and status, and deference to authority, whereas in the Western column, the characteristics are independence, mastery of one's own fate, flexibility of role and status, and challenger of authority. By contrasting the "Asian" and the "Western" values and focusing on the "problems" Asian women have suffered, their cultural beliefs are established as the cause of their suffering; Asian cultures are thus depicted as inferior "others" that need the salvation of "Western" individualism.

Gender is the main axis of most studies, but the authors often establish those participating in these transnational marriages as distinguished from the rest of the population—they are the products of the "premodern" or "traditional" sexist values that have been left behind in the process of "modernization" (Sato 1989; Glodava and Onizuka 1994). Men who marry mail-order brides are constructed as "evil-doers" (e.g., del Rosario 1994). Sexism is definitely an important issue of commodified transnational marriages. However, scholars often only view the men as patriarchal actors, while dismissing their marginalized status in society, thus unwittingly perpetuating an existing classist image: only less-educated peasants and blue-collar men are so sexist (e.g., Cooke 1986) that they do not understand the true meaning of "modern" marriage.

Studies that view commodified transnational marriages as a social problem, or even an individual problem, lack a macroanalytical framework. Other studies, on the other hand, focus on structural trends and stress the unequal relationship between developed and underdeveloped countries as the root cause. One such study is "Women in the Political Economy of the Philippines" (Aguilar 1987) in which the author describes the parallel between prostitutes and mail-order brides, both of which are the results of U.S. colonialism. On the one hand, the Philippines' economic dependence on the United States leads to unemployment, inflation, and widespread

hunger, forcing many Filipino women to become prostitutes or mail-order brides out of financial needs. On the other hand, U.S. cultural colonialism has created romantic fantasies of betrothal to tall, light-skinned American men. Aguilar takes on the historical viewpoint of U.S. colonialism and concretely examines how colonialism distorts and remakes gender relations, reminding us of the pitfalls of an essentialist feminist theory of gender.

However, we also need to realize that commodified transnational marriages do not only occur between the Philippines and the United States. The push (e.g., unemployment) and pull (e.g., job opportunities) of countries that export brides (such as the Philippines) and countries that import them (such as the United States) is insufficient to explain the global phenomenon of commodified transnational marriages. We need a broader theoretical overview to understand them. Furthermore, a structural discourse provides us with a broader view of the issues but often overlooks the voices of the men and women involved. The issues of how the structural forces are processed by the agents and thus localized in their everyday lives have not been thoroughly examined.

This article will construct an analytical framework of commodified transnational marriages that is understood within a larger, international politico-economic structure and will at the same time discuss how actors within the structure search for solutions and react and interpret their surroundings. I will also show how actor's choices in turn reinforce the international politico-economic structure. To prevent taking on too theoretical a tone, I will limit the scope of research to foreign brides in Taiwan, which in the future may serve as a foundation for further theoretical developments.

RESEARCH METHODS

The foreign bride phenomenon involves various complicated issues. However, not much research has been done regarding this

important phenomenon. I have therefore explored many methods, including document and media analyses, participant observation in Taiwan and Southeast Asia, life-story-telling, and most importantly, participatory research based on a literacy program for foreign brides.

This is a long-term study that began in May 1994 and continues to the present time. In 1994 and 1995, my fieldwork focused on transnational marriages between Taiwanese men and Indonesian women; since 1995, I have included marriages involving women from Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

In the course of spending time with foreign brides, it came to my attention that the inability to write Chinese or speak Mandarin is a primary barrier these women encounter in their everyday lives; thus I offered free classes in Chinese for the few Indonesian brides to whom I was closest. Later I expanded this program to the whole community and then to other areas. On July 30, 1995, the opening class of the literacy program for foreign brides was held. This literacy program was the first in Taiwan designed exclusively for this demographic.

Written Documents

Two types of documents are analyzed in this study: official reports and media reports. The official reports include Taiwan's governmental plans to develop trade relationships with Southeast Asian countries and various related statistics, the rules of regulating the immigration of foreign brides, the evaluation of foreign bride phenomena, and related statistics. Media reports related to foreign bride issues from newspapers, television news, and magazines in the period from 1988 to 1996 are analyzed.

Participant Observation

The participant observation took place in several locations—Taiwan, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines—and in different

settings—visa interviews, matchmaking meetings, and social gatherings of Taiwanese men and Southeast Asian women.

The Taipei Economic and Trade Office (hereafter referred to as TETO) requires that a Taiwanese man and his foreign bride be interviewed at the TETO office before the bride's visa to Taiwan can be granted. I observed interactions in the TETO lobby while Taiwanese men and Southeast Asian women were waiting to be called upon, as well as interactions during the interview process.

In Indonesia and Vietnam, I observed interactions among matchmakers, parents, Taiwanese men, and Southeast Asian women, both in the matchmaking meetings themselves, and before as well as after the meetings. In addition, while visiting the hometowns of the foreign brides, I observed how local people perceive the phenomenon of women of their ethnicity marrying Taiwanese men.

Taiwanese men and their families gathered at the matchmaker's home while waiting for the brides to come to Taiwan; some of them continued to do so even after their brides arrived. They would attend each other's wedding or other parties, such as the celebration of the birth of a baby. I have participated in many of these gatherings and have written detailed notes after the participant observation.

In-Depth Interviews

Marriage is a collective activity, rather than being restricted to the two partners, in the context of Chinese and many other Asian cultures. To avoid the pitfall of methodological individualism, in-depth interviews were not restricted to the marital partners; rather, they included the marital partners, their families, matchmakers, marriage brokers, and involved governmental agents.

I also conducted semistructured interviews with Taiwanese government officials regarding their perceptions of transnational marriages. They were very comfortable with tape recorders and would ask me to stop recording if the issue was sensitive, reminding me to record again at "appropriate" times. The foreign brides, on the other

hand, felt uncomfortable with formal interviews, so I only conducted informal interviews with them at the earlier stage of this research. Since the literacy program served to foster mutual trust and rapport, they gradually felt more comfortable with formal interviews.

Participatory Research

Participatory research related to this phenomenon is a part of the community movement I have been involved in.³ The applied methods are therefore geared to empower the researched subjects, who have been marginalized in the mainstream society. The goal of the literacy program for foreign brides is to enhance interaction and dialogue and to enable them to organize themselves. Many candid opinions of the foreign brides were revealed in the literacy program.

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF CAPITAL AND "MARRIAGE IMMIGRATION"

Commodified transnational marriages such as mail-order brides and foreign brides in fact compose one particular form of female immigration (del Rosario 1994). In order to understand this global phenomenon, one needs an analytical framework that provides more than "push-pull forces." Cheng and Bonacich (1984) critiqued earlier migration theory for only examining the "push" of exporting countries and "pull" of importing countries without supplying an overarching theoretical framework. They established a chart of the relationship between immigration and capitalist development, positing that labor immigration is a product of capitalist development. This article draws on that of Cheng and Bonacich and posits commodified transnational marriages found in mail-order brides and foreign brides as a type of "marriage immigration," analyzing the situations of the relationship between marriage immigration and capitalist development since the eighties (see fig. 7.1). This analytic

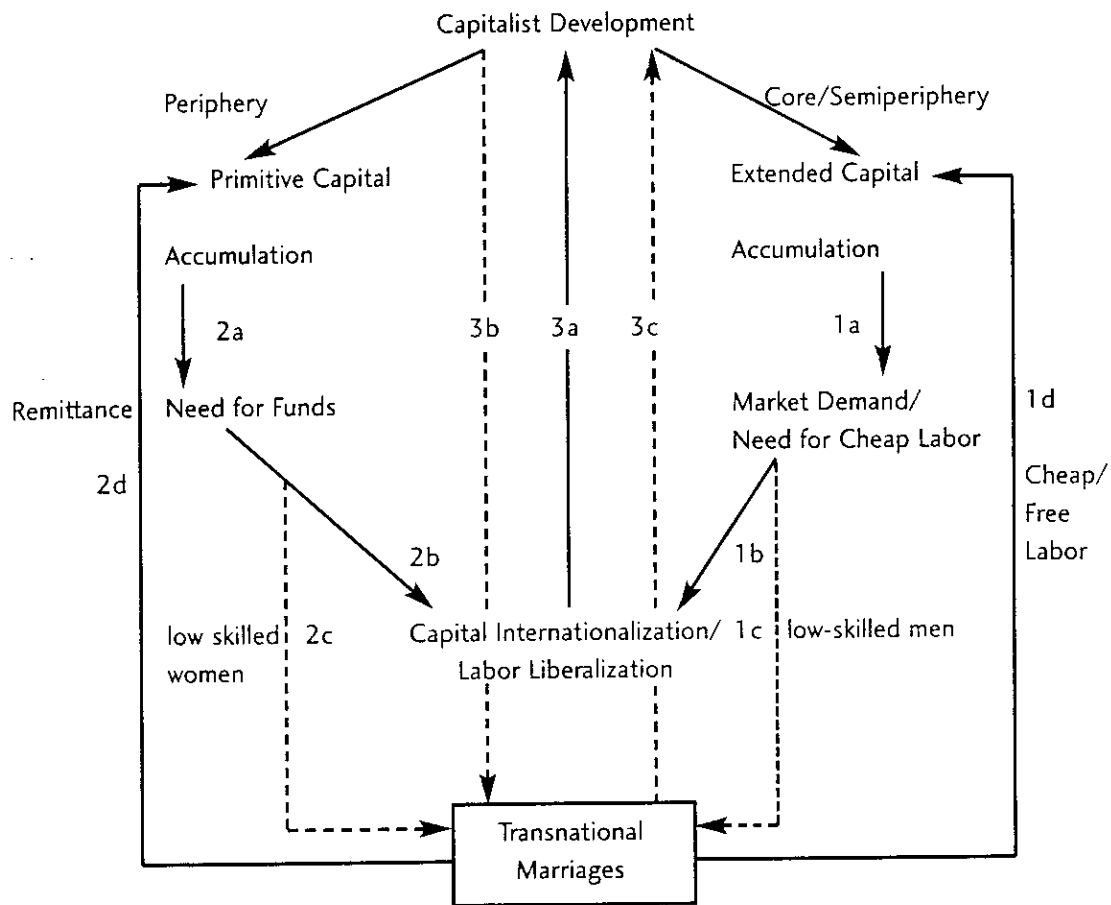


Figure 7.1. Commodified transnational marriages and capitalist development since the eighties. Note that there are numerous factors involved in capital accumulation, but this chart only shows those factors related to the international division of labor: markets and cheap labor in the core and semiperiphery, as well as funds in the periphery.

framework is a result of empirical research rather than theoretical assumption. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly explain the framework, illustrating it further later on with empirical data.

Capitalist development has resulted in unequal development and led to a division of labor among core, semiperipheral, and peripheral states. Capital from core states such as the United States, Japan, and the European Union began to invest in Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia in the eighties in search of new markets and investment outlets, greatly expanding production in those regions. Taiwan, South Korea, and other “newly industrialized economies”

began extending their economies into Southeast Asia, becoming semiperipheral states by exploiting peripheral states.

One of the key characteristics of capitalist development in core and semiperipheral states is the expansion of capital accumulation. Methods of expanded capital accumulation include finding new markets and lowering labor costs (1a). In order to secure the sources of cheap labor, developed capitalist states have two approaches: importing cheaper labor from the periphery and exporting productive capital to the source of cheaper labor in the periphery. To open up markets and investment opportunities in the periphery, the core uses international trade and financial organizations to force the periphery to accept investment and engage in trade (1b). Being at the initial stages of capitalist development, peripheral countries are often faced with the collective pressure of core countries and their agents (the IMF, World Bank, etc.) and are forced to further distort the domestic distribution of resources in order to come up with funds for capital accumulation in a bid to develop a capitalist economy (2a). This distorted development takes two forms: the periphery opens up its borders to dominant states, accepting foreign investment and working to create a better foreign-investment climate, or it exports laborers pushed out of a bankrupt agricultural sector, which serves to reduce unemployment pressures and earns much-needed foreign currency, thereby contributing to capital accumulation (2b). These pressures have contributed to capital internationalization as well as labor liberalization and have led to further capitalist development (3a).

Capital internationalization and labor liberalization in the semiperiphery have led to large-scale plant closures and unemployment. At the same time, the core and semiperiphery have imported a great number of migrant workers to replace more expensive local low-skilled and unskilled workers. This has put further pressure on local agricultural and industrial workers, who find it even more difficult to survive in the domestic labor market. Because of a patriarchal marriage structure, in which men are expected to be of a higher

social status than their wives, male agricultural workers and blue-collar workers find it hard to compete in the domestic marriage market (1c). A similar trend is found in the periphery, where the original agricultural economy is bankrupt and where foreign capital prevents the development of domestic industry, further driving down the conditions of local workers. As a result, many laborers are forced to find work in the labor markets of more developed countries. This also has an effect on the interaction of men and women in marriage markets: the deteriorating economic condition of men in the periphery forces women to search for husbands in the core and semiperiphery (2c). The development of global capital and liberal labor markets has led to the formation of marriage brokers, who operate between the core/semiperiphery and the periphery, spurring on the creation of marriage immigration.

The process of marriage immigration involves a number of exchanges and affects the core, semiperiphery, and periphery in several ways. For the core and semiperiphery, foreign brides provide unpaid household labor, childbearing, and child-rearing, thereby stabilizing the reproduction of a pool of cheap labor. Foreign brides also serve directly as a new source of cheaper laborers in these countries (1d). For peripheral countries, document and travel fees as well as remittances collected from women from peripheral countries benefit primitive accumulation (2d).

In sum, the phenomenon of foreign brides brings together men and women who have been marginalized in core, semiperipheral, and peripheral societies by capitalist development in order to survive. This integration of people from different societies is not a voluntary alliance, however, and should not be romanticized into the realization of a "global village." The phenomenon of marriage immigration is not only the product of capitalist development but also concretely manifests the abstract structure of international political economy in interpersonal relationships (3b). Unequal relationships between societies are thus realized in everyday life, and the minute details and conflicts that arise in marriages are often inter-

puted by members of core and semiperipheral societies as problems endemic to people from peripheral societies, which are then used to explain the underdevelopment of those countries. In other words, the historical and dynamic dimensions of capitalist development are sedimented to become an irreversible process, thereby strengthening the very process of capitalist development (3c).

The dynamic process of capitalist development mentioned above has occurred at varying historical stages and has appeared in different forms. The foreign bride phenomenon in Taiwan serves as a concrete example of the relationship between the development of the international division of labor and commodified transnational marriages.

FORMATION OF DEPENDENT RELATIONS BETWEEN TAIWAN AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

An official at the Taipei Economic and Trade Office (TETO) in Indonesia commented, "Long before the government announced its 'March South' policy, Taiwanese businessmen had been investing in Southeast Asia; so did the Taiwanese men who came here for wives." Businessmen from Taiwan had been investing in "less developed" countries near Taiwan many years before former president Lee Teng-Hui announced his "March South" policy in 1994, encouraging capitalists from Taiwan to invest in Southeast Asia. In fact, Taiwan is currently shifting from a low-wage, labor intensive phase characteristic of "underdeveloped" nations to a high-wage, capital-intensive phase often seen in "developed" countries.

Taiwanese capital began seeking outlets in 1984, but outward-bound capital investment began to grow rapidly after 1987, when the government in Taiwan relaxed restrictions on outward-bound investment (Sung 1993). In 1990, Taiwan's investment in Southeast Asia (36.6 percent out of the total investment to other countries) was greater than that in the United States (27.6 percent), and South-

east Asia became the region receiving the most investment from Taiwan. In 1992, mainland China became the favored location of investment by Taiwanese capitalists, and in 1993 investment in China overtook investment in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia has remained, however, an important investment destination for local capitalists (see Table 7.1).

In terms of value of foreign trade, bilateral trade between Taiwan and ASEAN member countries reached US\$12.51 billion in 1991. In 1995, one year after the "Outlines of Strengthening Trade and Investment with Southeast Asia," serving as the guide for the March South policy, was released, bilateral trade between Taiwan and ASEAN reached US\$25.34 billion, at a 26.3 percent growth rate from the previous year. Trade continued to grow between 1991 and 1997, rising at an annual average of 15.8 percent (see Table 7.2) during those years. Statistics from the Ministry of Finance show that Southeast Asia is now Taiwan's fourth-largest export market, behind the United States, Hong Kong, and the European

Table 7.1. Taiwanese investments in the United States, Southeast Asia, and mainland China

Year	Investment (%)		
	United States	Southeast Asia	Mainland China
1952-1986	60.0	26.3	—
1990	27.6	36.6	—
1991	16.3	39.3	9.5
1992	17.0	27.3	21.8
1993	10.9	8.9	65.6
1994	5.6	15.4	37.3
1995	10.1	13.3	44.6
1996	7.8	17.3	36.3
1997	12.1	14.2	35.8

Source: Investment Commission, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taiwan.

Note: Southeast Asia includes Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

Table 7.2. Taiwanese investment in Southeast Asia in the nineties
(in US\$100 millions)

Type	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Trade volume	125.1	146.1	163.0	200.6	253.4	264.5	294.3
Yearly growth rate	—	16.8	11.6	23.1	26.3	4.4	11.3
Singapore	38.5	42.0	47.5	57.7	73.6	73.6	80.5
Vietnam	2.3	4.0	6.5	9.6	12.8	14.9	16.9
Thailand	20.3	26.3	29.9	35.5	45.3	44.6	44.9
Malaysia	28.7	34.3	36.1	45.5	58.5	65.2	72.7
Indonesia	24.3	26.2	29.1	35.4	40.2	38.4	43.2
Philippines	10.8	13.2	13.9	16.8	22.8	27.7	36.2

Source: Statistics Department, Ministry of Finance, Taiwan.

Note: Southeast Asia includes Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

Union, as well as Taiwan's fourth-largest source of imports, behind the United States, Japan, and the European Union.

Taiwan's economy has gradually entered what Immanuel Wallerstein has termed the "world system," following the increased global character of capitalism in Taiwan. Taiwan is no longer merely a major importer and exporter of goods but now also an exporter of capital (Sung 1993; Peng 1990). By the mid-eighties, Taiwan had begun investing in Southeast Asia, following investments by the United States, Japan, and Europe, to use its cheaper labor and raw materials for expanded production. An international hierarchy of labor developed between Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries (excluding Singapore), and Taiwan began to attain semiperipheral status. Relative to Taiwan, Southeast Asian countries (excluding Singapore) were thereby placed in a peripheral status (Sung 1993).

With wages rising, and pressure from environmental concerns increasing, labor-intensive and highly polluting industries began to leave Taiwan for destinations in Southeast Asia with greater reserves of labor and lower environmental standards (Sung 1993; interview with TETO officials in Indonesia 1994). Taiwan gradually became

Southeast Asia's primary source of foreign capital, surpassing Japan to become the greatest capital investor in the Philippines (in 1987), Thailand (1988), Malaysia (1989), and Indonesia (1990) (Sung 1993). In Indonesia, Taiwanese accumulated investments ranked second by 1994, only behind Japan (TETO in Jakarta 1994a). Vietnam began to allow foreign investment in 1988, and Taiwan held the number one foreign-investor rank there for several years before giving it up to Singapore in 1994 (CETRA in Ho Chi Minh City 1999).

Southeast Asian countries have at the same time released many special incentives to attract foreign investment. For instance, to finish its sixth economic plan (REPLEITA VI), the Indonesian government passed new regulations widening the scope of foreign investment. In 1994, Government Regulation 20 lifted the restrictions on minimum investment, loosened the regulations on foreign holding and time limits on transference of stock rights, and expanded areas for foreign investment. In addition, the Indonesian government announced changes in 1994 regarding industrial, agricultural, and commercial regulations, lowering tariff rates on 739 classes of goods (TETO in Jakarta 1994a).

As mentioned above, even the socialist republic Vietnam was forced to open up its market in 1988 due to the expansion and penetration of global capitalism. In 1987, the Vietnamese government issued its first Foreign Investment Law, serving as the guideline for foreign investment. This law encouraged export-oriented foreign investment over that targeted at the domestic market; tax reductions and grace periods were the main types of incentive. For instance, foreign-investment projects that export 100 percent of the products and that are established in export-processing zones could enjoy up to four years of tax-free status and a 50 percent tax reduction for another four years. High-tech industries were also eligible for up to eight years of tax-free status (CETRA in Ho Chi Minh City 1999).

From 1986 to 1991, Taiwanese investment in Southeast Asia was concentrated in Thailand and Malaysia, where the infrastructures were more advanced. The Philippines also attracted a signifi-

cant amount of Taiwan's investment, and Taiwan became the Philippines' largest foreign investor in 1989. In 1991, however, the unstable political and social situation in the Philippines drove away investment from Taiwan. Taiwan's investment in Indonesia began in 1988, and an Investment Guarantee Agreement was signed between the Taiwanese and Indonesian governments in December 1991, spurring further investment, with a rise from US\$158 million to US\$618 million in 1990 and a jump to US\$1.057 billion in 1991 (Sung 1993). After Vietnam opened its doors to foreign investment in 1988, Taiwan's China External Trade Development Council (CETRA) sent a delegation to Vietnam and established an office in 1990. Many Taiwanese investors applied for investment permits to Vietnam between 1992 and 1993 (interview with CETRA officer in Ho Chi Minh City 1999). Taiwan and Vietnam signed an Investment Guarantee Agreement in 1994 and a reciprocal agreement to lower tariffs in 1998. The two governments also concluded agricultural and labor export agreements in May 1999. All of these agreements have further encouraged Taiwanese firms to invest in Vietnam (CETRA in Ho Chi Minh City 1999). According to the Ministry of Planning and Investment in Vietnam, Taiwan now ranks first in total investment. Taiwan's accumulated investment in Vietnam is US\$5.96 billion as of 2003.

DISTORTED DEVELOPMENT AND THE FORMATION OF "MARRIAGE IMMIGRATION"

A clear international division of labor has developed between Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Taiwan gradually began to take on the characteristics of a semiperipheral state after it became increasingly incorporated in the world capitalist system in the eighties, when Taiwan began to exploit Southeast Asia and other peripheral countries. At the same time, globalization began to push liberalization, privatization,

and deregulation, resulting in distorted development in Southeast Asian countries and a great number of agricultural and industrial laborers in distress. The poverty created by globalization was not as serious in Taiwan, but agriculture in Taiwan was clearly hollowed out by the twin forces of continued urbanization and industrialization, as well as the recent international pressure on agriculture. Low-skilled workers have also been affected by the increasing threats of liberalization. These agricultural and industrial laborers found survival increasingly difficult and fell into an extremely disadvantaged position in Taiwan's domestic marriage market.

Meanwhile, capitalist globalization has resulted in large-scale rural bankruptcy and unemployment in Southeast Asia, forcing many workers to travel to developed countries for survival. With the encouragement of matchmakers familiar with both Taiwan and Southeast Asia, "marriage immigration" has emerged.

Taiwanese investment in Southeast Asia and the trend of Taiwanese men marrying Southeast Asian women grew in tandem.⁴ As previously mentioned, Taiwanese investment in Southeast Asia began to grow between 1986 and 1991, mainly concentrated in Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines. According to matchmakers and media reports, foreign brides from Thailand and the Philippines began coming to Taiwan in the mid-eighties. There were few brides from Malaysia, most likely because of that country's relative wealth. An Indonesian matchmaker commented, "Next to Singapore, Malaysia is probably the most well-off Southeast Asian country. There are many women from Indonesia who marry men in Malaysia." According to the statistics from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taiwanese investment in Indonesia did not really begin until 1991, which was also the year the number of Indonesian brides dramatically increased. According to an official at TETO in Indonesia, the number of women marrying Taiwanese men began to significantly grow in 1991.

As Vietnam and Cambodia have relaxed restrictions on foreign investment, Taiwanese men have begun to travel to those nations to find brides. According to marriage brokers, since 1993, Indonesian

women have had to wait for months to even a year to get their visa granted; thus more and more Taiwanese men turn to Vietnam instead. That was also the same year that Taiwanese investment in Vietnam significantly increased (statistics from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taiwan). Unfortunately, the Taiwanese government kept no figures of the total number of foreign brides until 1994. The limited statistics can still show the high correlation between Taiwanese investment in Southeast Asia and the influx of "foreign brides" from those countries. Table 7.3 shows that after Taiwanese investment in Vietnam grew significantly following the signing of an investment agreement in 1994, the number of brides from Vietnam grew rapidly in 1995, to 2.7 times the number of the previous year.

The relations of dependency between Taiwan and Southeast Asia have become the context of commodified transnational marriages between the countries. However, not all Taiwanese men need to go to Southeast Asia to find brides. And not all Southeast Asian women wish to marry men in Taiwan or other countries. The following sections will analyze the unequal domestic development in Taiwan and Southeast Asia and the relationship between this unequal development and the phenomenon of marriage immigration.

Table 7.3. Approved marriages between Taiwanese (ROC) nationals and citizens from Southeast Asia

Year	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Thailand	Vietnam	Total
1994	2,247	55	1,183	870	530	4,899
1995	2,409	86	1,757	1,301	1,969	7,574
1996	2,950	73	2,085	1,973	4,113	11,212
1997	2,464	96	2,128	2,211	9,060	16,009
1998	2,331	102	544	1,173	4,644	8,879
1999 (through July)	1,787	58	321	693	3,362	6,267
Total	14,188	470	8,018	8,221	23,678	54,850

Source: Spouse visa applications approved by the Bureau of Consular Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan.

Taiwan

Taiwan's economic development policies after the successful land reform of the fifties have been characterized as sacrificing agriculture for industry. The end of the sixties was the "spring" for industry in Taiwan, but the "autumn" for agriculture. The most important and characteristic strategies are "import substitution industrialization" and "export-oriented industrialization." The role of agriculture under this plan was to provide a surplus for extraction in industry, cheap labor, and a market for locally produced industrial goods. In other words, the ultimate goal of the government's agricultural development policy was to squeeze the fruits of agricultural labor in the interests of industrialization and overall economic growth. The function of agriculture is always to develop industry, whereas industry never plays a role in developing agriculture.

Two aspects of the agricultural sector felt the squeeze: (1) agricultural products and labor forces and (2) agricultural capital. The first was to lower agricultural prices in order to lower production costs in industry, thereby lowering labor reproduction costs. It also forced agricultural workers to urban areas in search of work. The second type, mediated through agricultural capital, occurred when the government raised taxes on industrial inputs needed for agriculture, including fertilizer, farm tools, etc., which drew out excess capital from agriculture and transferred it to the industrial sector (Hsiao 1981). Moreover, since the mid-eighties, the government in Taiwan has gradually liberalized the import of foreign agricultural products in exchange for entry into GATT and later the WTO. This has further depressed agriculture in Taiwan. The wide gap between industrial and agricultural workers in Taiwan has formed what Michael Lipton described as an "urban-industrial bias" (1976). Simply put, Taiwan's farmers have been victims of Taiwan's "economic miracle" since its inception.

Taiwan's developmental-policy bias toward industry and urban areas meant that farmers have become more and more dependent

on income from nonfarming sources. Official statistics show that the ratio of per capita income in farming to nonfarming in 1986 was 0.72. The hard life of rural living coupled with the high wages and modern lifestyle in the cities drew many agriculture workers, particularly young people, to urban areas. The results of a survey reported by Chu show the sense of victimhood of Taiwan's agricultural workers: approximately 50 percent of farmers feel that the income gap in Taiwan is very large (1990).

The long-standing government policy of supporting industry by sacrificing agriculture had led most rural youth to the cities. Even if young people prefer to stay in the farm, their parents would do everything necessary just to push them away, because they foresee no prospects. The story of A-Ching illustrates the difficult situation of a young man returning to his hometown: "After I got out of the army, I worked in a nursery in Kaohsiung. The job was my dream, since my parents raised flowers for a living. I wanted to make a living out of my strength and the land. You know, life in the cities is hard for someone from the countryside like myself. But my parents said that I shouldn't do anything that involves dirt. They called me several times a day to tell me to change jobs, and I was going crazy under their pressure. But I could handle it. I took their advice, quit my job in the nursery, and got a job in the florist as a delivery boy. I was still working with flowers! Ha!"⁵ A-Ching's parents' reactions vividly reflect farmers' hopelessness in farming. A-Ching fully understands his parents' feelings: "Don't think that farmers are below other people; they're very proud people. They don't want others to look down on them, and they are afraid that other people will say that their children are deadbeats and can't make a living in the cities. I know that in their hearts they want me to go back, since they're getting old and they need help around the house as well as companionship."

Capital flight from Taiwan began after the mid-eighties, resulting in the closure of many factories and widespread unemployment in Taiwan. The government also began importing migrant workers, further exacerbating unemployment among domestic workers.

Many urban workers who had moved from rural areas could no longer stay in the cities and returned to the countryside to find work in the informal sector.

After working for the florist for a while, A-Ching's parents told him he should find a "real job." So A-Ching finally severed all his ties with the earth and went to work in a car parts factory. Unfortunately, after working there for less than a year, the plant was shut down and moved to Southeast Asia like many other factories in the mid-eighties. A-Ching, unemployed, had to go home. His parents had to accept the fact that A-Ching was going to help them on the family's plot of land.

Youth like A-Ching, who were forced back to rural areas after the mideighties, appeared to be failures. Suffering from the agriculture decline in the process of industrialization, urbanization, and internationalization, those men staying on the farm or forced back to the countryside because of urban unemployment are disadvantaged not only economically but also symbolically. They are viewed as "men without future," as most people in the countryside believe that they only return home if they are unable to "make it" in the cities. Even women staying in rural areas are not willing to "marry down" to men living in the same locales, for fear of the hardship of agricultural work.

Unlike the stereotypical man who is unable to find a wife, A-Ching looks very strong and handsome. He made the following comments about his decision to marry a wife from Indonesia: "I had had girlfriends when I was living in the city. But I was young then and never really thought about marriage. When I got back to the countryside, it was nearly impossible to find a girlfriend. Who would be willing to give up their comfortable city life and spend their days in hardship with me?"

A-Ching was not alone in his woes. His neighbor A-Chie was in a similar situation. A-Chie worked in the city and had gone out with several women, but all left him after he brought them home to see his parents in the countryside. They didn't want to be with

someone who came from a farming family. A-Chie's parents very much wanted grandchildren, so they contacted a matchmaker and eventually convinced A-Chie to marry an Indonesian woman. His parents felt remorse for the difficulty their son had finding a bride: "What's wrong with people from the countryside? The boys from the sticks are the best. Why do women treat them so badly? We're strong, and we don't care about what other people think. If [A-Chie] can't find a bride, then we'll go to Indonesia!"

In addition to the rural men, blue-collar workers also have similar difficulty in finding women to marry. The three-shift work schedules greatly limit their social lives. They do not necessarily have low income, but their social status is relatively marginalized under the prevailing urban middle-class values.

Fu-Hsin has been working in a chemical factory ever since he finished his service in the army. He was in his late thirties and had a stable income but never a girlfriend, when he finally decided to go to Indonesia for a bride under his father's pressure. When asked why he had never had a girlfriend, he responded with a humble smile: "We have three shifts and the schedule is rotated. It's basically like you don't have time to be social with friends. After work, all you want to do is go home and sleep. You know, it takes time to have a girlfriend—you need to be social. I don't even have enough time to sleep. After all, when I have a day off, everyone else is at work; when they have a day off on weekends, I am at work. How could I have a date?" I asked Fu-Hsin why he didn't work less overtime, so he could have more time for a social life. He said, "Before, I just wanted to make more money. Later, business was bad and it was very hard to find a stable job. You don't know when the factory is going to be shut down. Whenever your boss gives you overtime, you just have to take it. Otherwise, you might get fired."

Statistics show that most men who marry foreign brides come from the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder in Taiwan, mostly from agricultural counties or counties outlying major metropolitan regions. Statistics from the Bureau of Police Administra-

tion, Ministry of Interior Affairs, show that the majority of foreign brides holding Alien Residency Certificates are located in Taipei County (13.7 percent), followed by Taoyuan County (12.8 percent), Pingtung County (11.1 percent), Changhua County (7.0 percent), Kaohsiung County (6.7 percent), Yunlin County (6.2 percent), Taichung County (5.9 percent), and Kaohsiung City (5.8 percent). Of the counties listed above, Pingtung, Changhua, and Yunlin are agricultural counties, while Taoyuan, Kaohsiung, and Taichung are mixed industrial-agricultural counties. Within Taipei County, most foreign brides are located in Panchiao, Hsintien, Hsinchuang, Sanchung, Tucheng, Shulin, and Chungho, where most residents are involved in the industrial sector. In Kaohsiung County, the most concentrated regions include Chienchen and Hsiaokang, which are predominantly industrial, and Sanmin, whose residents are mostly immigrants from the agricultural regions.

Breaking down the statistics by occupation again shows that the majority of men who marry Southeast Asian brides are either industrial or agricultural workers. In a sample of two hundred applications for foreign brides obtained from the TETO in Indonesia, 17.2 percent of applicants were farmers, 16.5 percent farmed but also did other work on a casual basis (including cement, carpentry), 54.3 percent worked in low-skill industrial jobs (lathe operators, electronics industry, moving business, etc.), and only 12 percent were in business for themselves (own a small stall selling goods or food). Most of the full-time farmers planted high-value cash crops including fruit and tea, which are highly affected by the imports since liberalization, while part-time farmers had to take on other work during the slack time in their farming work in order to make ends meet.

Furthermore, most men who marry foreign brides are between thirty and forty years old. Based on data collected from TETO in Indonesia, of Taiwanese men marrying Indonesian women in 1993, 27.7 percent were between the age of 20 and 30, 55.5 percent were between 31 and 40, and 16.8 percent were 41 and over. Statistics from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Vietnam show that

of the 2,972 men marrying Vietnamese women from January to June in 1999, 18.1 percent were between the age of 20 and 30, 60.3 percent were between 31 and 40, and 21.5 percent were 41 and over. For this age group of rural men (born right before or in the early sixties, when Taiwan's economy began to take off, and reaching marriage age when Taiwanese capital began leaving the island), Taiwan's economic development not only led to their economic marginalization but also marginalization in the domestic marriage market.

Southeast Asia

Colonialism and Underdevelopment

Southeast Asia's development must be understood alongside the development of imperialism. There are different opinions about the origins of imperialism, which are beyond the scope of this paper. Most authors agree, however, that its origins are related to crises in the development of capitalism. That is, imperialism is one way that capitalism temporarily solves its internal contradictions. There is another set of theories about capitalist crises, but most agree that the fall in the profit rate drives capitalists to lower their investment. This further leads to unemployment and a drop in consumption, which are in turn harmful to further capitalist development (Cheng and Bonacich 1984). Therefore, capitalism is constantly in search of cheaper labor and natural resources, as well as markets for goods produced in capitalist countries.

Southeast Asia was confronted by imperialism at an early date. After World War II, anticolonial movements sprang up in many Southeast Asian countries, demanding political independence. Despite later independence, the development of Southeast Asia was still highly influenced by the region's colonial history and Western imperialism. Many scholars also believe that the World Bank, IMF, and other Bretton Woods organizations have in fact extended imperialist development in Southeast Asia and contributed to continued capitalist accumulation in the region.

Western imperialism has long sought after the rich natural resources in Southeast Asia. Indonesia's large land area, for instance, including more than seventeen hundred islands, holds rich oil, tin, gold, and other mineral deposits. Its rich soil produces rubber, pepper, gambier, palms, cocoa, coffee, rice, sugar, and other agricultural products. The Dutch colonized Indonesia for 340 years, and Japan briefly occupied the country during World War II. Indonesia declared independence at the end of the war, but the Dutch government did not recognize the declaration until 1949.

Under colonialism, however, Indonesia's rich natural resources led to underdevelopment. The country was turned into a natural resource provider for the colonizers, preventing the development of a local industrial sector, and failing to contribute to the wealth of the Indonesian people (Aas 1980; Knight 1982). After independence, Indonesia remained caught in the colonial development model, continuing to rely on exporting raw materials for foreign currency. Indonesia's high dependency on international markets meant that large fluctuations in the prices of raw materials seriously affected Indonesia's chances of earning foreign currency and even threatened to derail the country's economic development.

For instance, oil became Indonesia's prime foreign currency earner after 1969, accounting for 82 percent of Indonesia's foreign earnings in the early eighties. The price of oil plummeted between 1982 and 1985, seriously crippling Indonesia's economy. The government was forced to borrow to meet its payments, and foreign debt skyrocketed. The average economic growth was below 4 percent during these years (TETO in Jakarta 1995).

Oil markets remained depressed after 1985, and the Indonesian government began to promote export-oriented light industry. The government canceled taxes on the import of raw materials for export industries, lowered import tariffs, liberalized import restrictions, widened the scope of industries that allowed foreign investment, and simplified import customs procedures. To lower the country's dependency on petroleum and natural gas, the government encour-

aged nonpetroleum manufacturing industries, especially the textile, shoe, and wood products industries (TETO in Jakarta 1995).

The Indonesian government shifted between market and planned economic policies in the seventies and eighties. By the mid-eighties, the government owned over two hundred enterprises, including tea plantations and steel furnaces. Once Indonesia was no longer able to depend on petroleum sales for foreign currency, the government clearly shifted toward a market-oriented economic policy, stopped subsidizing local industry, and began deregulating its economy in 1986 when the price of oil dropped sharply (Robertson-Snape 1999).

The government's market-oriented economic policies did not lead to a burst of economic development, however. Indonesia undertook its first five-year plan in 1969 and experienced an average yearly growth of 7.3 percent until 1974. Economic growth hit a yearly average of 7.5 percent during the second five-year plan from 1974 to 1979. During the third five-year plan, from 1979 to 1984, growth slowed to 6 percent. The government began to encourage foreign investment during the country's fourth five-year plan, but economic growth continued to slow to 5.1 percent. The start of the fifth five-year plan in 1990 saw a growth rate of 6.2 percent, and economic growth returned again to 6.2 percent by 1993 (TETO in Jakarta 1994b).

In sum, Indonesia inherited a dependent market economy from its colonial period, which forced it to adopt a different economic strategy to earn foreign currency to repay its foreign debt after it could no longer depend on petroleum and natural gas exports. Indonesia's official foreign debt reached US\$73.6 billion in 1993, but the country only had US\$12.1 billion in foreign reserves.

Chossudovsky (1997) contends that Third World countries' foreign debt consigns them to continually finding new ways of repayment. This limits the development of Third World countries and leads to economic bankruptcy, social instability, ethnic conflict, and even civil war. Since the debt crisis in the early eighties, interna-

tional monopoly capital has pursued a strategy of liberalization to increase its profits, break down barriers throughout the world, and allow multinational corporations to grow. The Bretton Woods organizations have played a crucial role in this reorganization of the global economy.

*Internationalization of Capital
and the Woes of the Working Masses*

“Globalization” should not be romanticized into the realization of an ideal “global village.” Globalization in fact entails privatization, deregulation, and liberalization, which means unemployment, hunger, disease, and a threat to survival for the vast majority of laborers. The “bitter medicine” of the Bretton Woods institutions—structural adjustment programs (SAPs)—appears to help economic development in developing countries in Southeast Asia. The financial crisis that started in Thailand in 1997 exploded the myth of the sixties that Southeast Asian countries could sustain economic growth. Waves of criticism of the neoliberal development models have arisen (e.g., Dixon 1999).

Harsh criticism points out that the World Bank and IMF have driven hundreds of millions of people into poverty in the guise of offering loans to developing countries and promising a boost in development by carrying out SAPs (Chossudovsky 1997). Structural Adjustment Programs include reductions in medical, education, and social welfare spending; privatization of state-owned enterprises; and tax hikes. Deregulation, liberalization, and privatization are also the policy goals pursued by APEC, the WTO, and other international organizations. These policies have led to outbreaks of diseases in many developing countries. The World Bank’s goal included eradicating poverty and protecting the environment, but ironically it still funds massive construction projects such as large dams, which speed up environmental destruction and displace millions of people.

It is the conscious plan of the IMF and World Bank to keep the

economies of Southeast Asian countries both export-oriented and import-dependent, as well as to integrate light industry in those countries into the global production system of multinational corporations. This has subjected these countries to the volatility of international markets and also increased international competition among developing countries, forcing them to raise their concessions to foreign capital and lower labor costs.

In the agricultural sector, liberalization policy has destroyed the self-sufficient system and led to the bankruptcy of farming areas. To take the Philippines as an example, the neoliberal policies adopted included crop conversion and land conversion. Around 3.1 million of 5 million hectares of corn and rice fields were converted to the production of cash crops, or used to raise animals for export. By 1996, 300,000 hectares of prime agricultural land were rezoned as high-class residential areas, golf courses, recreation centers, and industrial land, in conjunction with the government's policy weighted toward foreign investment and industrial parks. According to estimates produced by Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP, a national alliance of farmers in the Philippines), the nation's neoliberal policies have led to widespread rural bankruptcy, forcing the Philippines to import many agricultural products, even rice, the nation's staple grain. It is estimated that by 2005, the Philippines will have to import 239,000 metric tons of rice each year, even though the nation was previously self-sufficient in producing this staple (Center for Women's Resources 1998).

The large-scale transfer of land away from agricultural and rural bankruptcy has driven millions of rural residents into urban areas. Many unable to find employment end up in urban ghettos. A large portion finds work in the low-wage, labor-intensive informal sector, forcing them to put up with poor labor conditions. The Philippine government has adopted a "no union, no strike" policy to attract foreign investment, allowing employers to worsen labor conditions and lower environmental standards with impunity. The utter lack of public facilities in urban ghettos prevents the flood of

people from rural areas from finding a respite from rural bankruptcy and unemployment (Largoza-Maza 1996).

Now let us turn to Vietnam. Eighty percent of Vietnam's population is classified as farmers (CETRA in Ho Chi Minh City 1999). The World Bank and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization helped Vietnam draft a series of agricultural reforms beginning in 1986, leading Vietnam to abandon its policy of grain self-sufficiency, encouraging farmers to "specialize" in "high-value" crops tailored for their regions and destined for export. Even areas suited for growing rice such as the Mekong delta have been advised to switch to cash crops. This has led to the overcropping of coffee, cassava, cotton, cashew nuts, and other crops, further depressing rural areas already hard hit by the plummeting of world commodity prices and high costs for imported farm inputs. The state policy of regional specialization has led to a ridiculous situation: although grain exports at costs below international prices, there are still grain shortages in areas that had switched to cash crops, while rice over-supplies obtain in the Mekong delta (Chossudovsky 1997).

The complete deregulation of grain markets and dismantling of state grain companies led to regional grain shortages and drove up the price of grain. Famine affected not only food-deficit areas but also major regions, including urban areas and even the Mekong delta, that consistently ran grain surpluses. A report produced by the World Bank (1993a) stated that the daily caloric intake of 25.3 percent of adults at the Mekong delta was below eighteen hundred calories. In urban areas, the devaluation of the Vietnamese currency and cancellation of subsidies and price controls sent the price of staple grains skyrocketing. Coupled with unemployment, malnutrition spread quickly.

Land conversion in Vietnam also led to rural bankruptcy. Many farmers in the Red River and the Mekong delta areas were driven off the land. Under the guidance of the World Bank, Vietnam passed the Land Law in 1993, allowing farmers to freely "transfer" land, or put it up as collateral. Many farmers lost their land after they were unable to pay their debts, leading to the concentration of

land into a few hands, particularly in the south following the reemergence of usury and land tenancy. Many state farms were converted into joint-venture plantations that hired permanent and seasonal workers. The number of farmers who had lost their land continued to grow. Some found work as seasonal workers, and others were forced into urban areas for work.

Those who are pushed out of rural areas can hardly find work in urban areas or in factories, because the industrial sector is also in deep trouble. The policy to attract foreign investment in the end crowded out many local firms, forcing them to cut their workforce and close plants down. Combined with a labor "flexibilization" policy, many workers were forced into the informal sector, earning a living at a piece or part-time rate that was much lower than in the formal sector. Official statistics from the Philippine government state that the unemployment rate is 10.23 percent for women and 8.16 percent for men, but the statistics count each person working more than an hour a day as employed. The actual number of unemployed should therefore be much higher.

The serious unemployment in the Philippines and the government's labor export policy drove tens of thousands of Filipinos to work abroad each year. The government established the "Philippine Overseas Employment Administration" to search out areas where Filipino workers are needed. Statistics show that 654,022 workers from the Philippines left in search of work in 1995 alone. Remittance from migrant workers is the largest source of foreign currency for the Philippines, and there are an estimated 7.2 million Filipinos now working abroad. Official government statistics indicate that migrant workers remitted US\$1.67 billion in foreign currency in the first quarter of 1996 alone (Largoza-Maza 1996).

To take Vietnam as a further example, what on the surface appeared to be "free" market mechanisms and "economic reforms" have seriously damaged Vietnam's productive capacity. By the end of 1994, 5,000 out of 12,300 state enterprises had been shut down. Regulations passed regarding the state enterprises in 1990 further

eroded Vietnam's industrial base. Between 1991 and 1992, four thousand state enterprises closed their doors (Chossudovsky 1997).

A reorganization of Vietnam's state banking and financial institutions allowed the government to close down local cooperatives and freeze medium-term loans to domestic producers, sending the interest rate on short-term loans up to 35 percent in 1994. The IMF banned the government from providing the state or an incipient private sector with budget support, yet at the same time requested the government to give tax holidays and exemptions to foreign investors while continuing to impose taxes on state-owned enterprises to 40 to 50 percent. The so-called reforms served to destabilize Vietnam's industrial base, and heavy industries including petroleum, mining, cement, and steel came increasingly under the control of foreign companies. The lowering of Vietnam's tariffs further allowed imported goods to replace domestically produced products, squeezing domestic industry (Chossudovsky 1997).

Under conditions set down by the IMF, SAPs require the cut-down of public investment and restricts the investment to limited areas. For instance, Vietnam has not received any war reparations payments, but Hanoi has been forced to accept the foreign debt incurred by the southern Saigon regime during the Vietnam War as a precondition for the "normalization" of relations with First World countries and the lifting of the U.S. embargo. The IMF has also requested that the Vietnam government repay more than US\$140 million in debt borrowed by the Saigon regime as a condition for further loans from the IMF. The SAP that Vietnam undertook later in the eighties had devastating consequences: many clinics closed down, and the country experienced regional famines affecting a quarter of the population. After four years of "reforms," the malaria death rate increased threefold (Chossudovsky 1997).

Public investment sharply dropped after the government started to introduce reforms. Between 1985 and 1993 (World Bank 1993b), the ratio of government capital expenditure to overall GDP fell from 8.2 percent to 3.1 percent, a fall of 63 percent. The decline was most

marked in agriculture and forestry, falling from 1.0 percent to 0.1 percent of the GDP, a 90 percent decline. Government spending in industry and construction fell from 2.7 percent to 0.1 percent of GDP, a 96 percent decline. Under pressure from Bretton Woods institutions, Vietnam was no longer able to allocate national resources for public infrastructure projects. Creditors had become the "brokers" of public investment projects, and the World Bank's Public Investment Program put control over what public project was best suited to Vietnam and what should be funded by the "donor community."

The negative influence of Vietnam's reforms was clearly seen in the deteriorating conditions of education. From 1954 to 1972, the enrollment for primary- and middle-school children grew sevenfold in northern Vietnam. When North and South Vietnam unified in 1975, the government undertook a literacy drive in the south. Statistics from UNESCO show that the literacy rate (90 percent) and school enrollment rate in the south were among the highest in Southeast Asia. The economic reforms systematically cut the national budget for education, lowering teachers' wages and raising school fees (including occupational schools, and affecting all levels of education), eroding the educational system. Statistics from Vietnam's Ministry of Education show that after three years of economic reforms, nearly seven hundred fifty thousand school-age children were forced to leave school. Education, which had previously been guaranteed by the state, was now a commodity.

Transnational Marriage as a Way Out

Under the sway of distorted development, farmers and workers in the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, and other Southeast Asian countries were increasingly squeezed economically and were forced to find work abroad. For women in Southeast Asia, they could choose to find work outside of their native countries or escape their economic plight through transnational marriages.

A-Hsuei, from Indonesia, is a typical example. She worked

overseas before she married her Taiwanese husband. As the eldest daughter in the family, A-Hsuei had to take care of brothers and sisters ever since she was little. She worked in Singapore as a maid for two years. Compared to what she earned in Indonesia, the wage in Singapore was a fortune. One day, she got a letter from her mother in Kalimantan, asking her to come home. It turned out that her mother wanted her to get married, because she was worried that A-Hsuei would spend too much time working abroad and would forget about marriage. A neighbor introduced her to a Taiwanese man, and A-Hsuei's mother took it as a great opportunity. "I thought I would never get married," said A-Hsuei. "I was thinking of working overseas for a few years and saving some more money to open a small shop at home. But my mom was really worried about my marriage. So, I thought, I would not want her to worry, and I decided to marry in Taiwan."

A-Fang came from a small island in Indonesia. She grew up in a family of eight in a small straw house. Her family was too poor to let her finish primary school. She left home for Jakarta at sixteen, working at a store, sending home her salary to support her younger brother's education. One day, her boss asked her to "see a man," which she later realized was a matchmaking meeting with a Taiwanese man. She went home and could not make up her mind. "Taiwan is so far away. I didn't know what it looked like. I was very afraid. I thought about it for many days and got really bad headaches." Finally, A-Fang decided in favor of marriage: "People are poor in Indonesia. I thought that if I married a Taiwanese, I could help my family build a cement house." Recalling her days in Indonesia, A-fang said, "We didn't have any lights at night, and sometimes we didn't know where the next meal was going to come from." A-fang's mother did not want to see her daughter leave, but supported her decision, saying, "It doesn't matter which country women go to, it's never their home whatever family they marry into. I just hope that my daughter can marry a good man and that their children have better lives than she did. We were too poor to

send her to school. Her life will be better if she can get married and move abroad—it doesn't matter to which country."

After A-Fang arrived in Taiwan, she hoped to help her younger sister find a husband as well, but her sister did not want to get married to someone so far away and only wanted to work in Taiwan to send money home. The family was unable to afford the broker's fee, however. Several years later, after the financial crisis of 1997 and the subsequent political unrest in Indonesia, her sister changed her mind and began to search for a husband in Taiwan.

Tsui-Hua, from Vietnam, was lucky compared to A-Fang, because she was able to finish high school. When she was little, her family was not rich, but the rice they grew could at least feed the family of seven. Schools did not cost much. Tsui-Hua's eldest sister is the primary support of the family. It is hard to believe that her slim body can endure the hardship of the rice fields. She said, "Life is different now. Everything takes money. The rice we grew can only feed us and can't make money for other needs." Tsui-Hua's sister talked about Tsui-Hua's marriage: "It is good to get married in Taiwan. She doesn't have to work so hard like us here." Her remarks seem mixed with envy and frustration. The interpreter accompanying me asked her, "Do you want to marry in Taiwan as well?" Tsui-Hua's sister looked at her mother beside her and nodded.

Almost all foreign brides I have interviewed expressed the hardship back home as the primary reason for their decision to marry in Taiwan. Even the few foreign brides with better-off family backgrounds also pointed out that under the unstable economic and political conditions in their home countries, life is unpredictable and that they therefore hoped to find a better and more stable life for their children by marrying abroad.

The Development of Marriage Brokers

The relationship between Taiwan's export of capital and the phenomenon of foreign brides can be further explored through the different

types of marriage brokers that developed. The first type is the staff of Taiwanese investors who once worked in Southeast Asia and only later became brokers. In the town of Meinung in Kaohsiung County, for example, the marriage broker Chi-Wen is the eldest son of a farming family. His younger brothers and sisters all moved to the cities, and he was the only one left home taking care of the family farm. The falling price of rice forced him to plant mushrooms as a cash crop. Later, a Taiwanese businessman who owned a mushroom canning facility in Indonesia needed someone who understood mushroom-growing techniques. He found Chi-Wen, employed him for two years, and replaced him with cheaper labor from Indonesia. Chi-Wen then returned to Meinung. A neighbor's son, in his late thirties, was still unmarried. The father was worried and talked with Chi-Wen on his return. Chi-Wen then contacted some of his Chinese friends in Indonesia and found a bride for his neighbor. The news spread in the community, others began to ask Chi-Wen to help them find brides from Indonesia, and Chi-Wen began his job as a marriage broker.

The second type of marriage broker is the transnational married couple. With their social networks built up in both Taiwan and Southeast Asia, they are perfect for the role. To take Mei-Hua as an example, after she was married for two years to a Taiwanese man, her husband's relative asked her to find a bride for his son; hence, she started life as a marriage broker. Mei-Hua's mother worked as a matchmaker in Indonesia, finding appropriate women for match-making meetings, and her sister also helped arrange accommodations, make schedules, and assist with paperwork.

The third type is the professional marriage broker company, most of which are Taiwanese businessmen who have investments in Southeast Asia. Knowing the high profits of working as marriage brokers, they often start part-time and eventually turn their brokerage into a full-time business. In Vietnam, the office of one marriage broker used to be a small factory owned by a Taiwanese businessman. The businessman used his connections through the workers he hired to begin his marriage brokering. Another broker

in Indonesia said that he runs a factory in Indonesia but the business did not turn out to make the profits he expected. To make more, he started a marriage agency, and the profits from the marriage agency had become higher than his factory. At first, the agency depended on occasional introduction of women by a Chinese-Indonesian worker in his factory; later on, as the business increased, this Chinese Indonesian worker and his family became the full-time staff of the marriage agency, responsible for introducing women, driving them around, taking care of papers, and offering their family room as the place for matchmaking meetings. The Taiwanese businessman then focused on running the office in Taiwan to attract Taiwanese men to go to Indonesia for brides.

Southeast Asian women themselves account for the fourth broker type. Many Filipino domestic and factory workers meet Taiwanese men while working in Taiwan. The law forbids migrant workers from marrying while working in Taiwan; they must first return home and then apply to come to Taiwan on a marriage visa. Jenny is a typical example. She was hired as a domestic helper in Taiwan but actually worked at the employer's family business. The employer's truck driver was forty years old and still unmarried. The employer matched Jenny with the driver. She returned to the Philippines and asked a marriage agent to process the paperwork, and she came back to Taiwan with a marriage visa. Jenny said she knew many Filipino women married Taiwanese men the same way she did. Since they learn some Chinese while working in Taiwan, many Taiwanese men prefer them to other Southeast Asian women who cannot understand Chinese.

Of the four types of marriage brokers listed above, the first three are the result of Taiwanese foreign investment, while the fourth is the result of Taiwan's labor importation policy. This further demonstrates that the "marriage immigration" phenomenon in Taiwan is closely linked to trade and investment between Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

CONTRIBUTION OF TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES TO CAPITAL INTERNATIONALIZATION

Transnational marriages strengthen the internationalization of capital (1d, 2d, and 3c in figure 7.1) by (1) stabilizing the reproduction of cheap domestic labor in core and semiperipheral states, as well as by offering a new source of cheap labor; (2) enhancing the primitive accumulation of capital in the peripheral countries; and (3) personalizing the abstract international division of labor.

Transnational marriages are one way to ensure reproduction of the agricultural and working classes in Taiwan, and also continue to provide a new source of cheap labor to Taiwan's labor market. The Japanese government has set up various channels to help rural men find foreign brides to maintain labor reproduction in rural areas (Sato 1989). The government in Taiwan has not taken an active role in this respect, but the effect on Taiwan's labor market is the same. Based on interviews I conducted with transnational married couples, 95 percent of couples had children within the first one to two years of marriage. Many men who married foreign brides also said that if they had not had the pressure to carry on their family line, they would have been unlikely to marry a foreign wife (Hsia 1997).

In addition to undertaking domestic work and raising children, foreign brides also take on productive work while in Taiwan. A survey by the Hung-Yi Travel Agency showed that 10.3 percent of brides from Vietnam worked, making an average NT\$14,810 (US\$460) a month, a salary lower than Taiwan's minimum wage. Based on extensive interviews, I found that 32 percent of foreign brides worked for wages, in electronics and textile factories as well as household put-out work. Most employment was low-skill, low-wage work. To take a small factory as an example, the owner married a Chinese Indonesian more than ten years ago, who unfortunately died in a car accident. He then married another young Chinese Indonesian. The factory hires all Indonesian women who are married

to the local men nearby, and his new Indonesian wife has become the factory manager. Foreign brides who live in rural areas mostly work on the farm, helping to reduce the problem of a lack of agricultural labor. When A-Fang was newly married, her aging parents-in-law still worked on the farm every day. A-Fang was curious about farming, on the one hand, because her own family in Indonesia was too poor to own any land. On the other hand, she felt anxious about farming, because she knew that as the wife of the eldest son, she would have to take over the hard work. In 1994, when A-Fang was still new in Meinung, she complained to me, "I go to the farm watching my parents-in-law work everyday. I feel dizzy just watching them. I had never seen it before in Indonesia. It is so hard growing tobacco. My parents-in-law are so old and they still have to work on the farm. I want to help them, but I don't know how to do it. I go to the field everyday, and the sun burns me. What will I do after they pass on the land to us?" Having now lived in Taiwan for six years, A-Fang has two children. At first, her main responsibility was to take care of the children and cook for the whole family. Two years ago, her father-in-law decided to divide the family property, and consequently A-Fang and her husband have to take care of the farm themselves. A-Fang got used to it very quickly; the neighbors jokingly call her "the youngest tobacco farmer in Meinung."⁶

Moreover, commodified transnational marriages greatly increase the foreign remittances sent to the homes of the brides. In Vietnam, according to an information sheet issued by the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Ho Chi Minh City in September 1991, it costs US\$150 and US\$15 to apply for a marriage license and passport, respectively, while the Foreign Affairs office in Ho Chi Minh City charges US\$12 per document for certificates of marriage eligibility and birth certificates. Notarization of each of these documents costs another US\$0.40, and the couple must undergo a US\$52 health checkup in the hospital. Further, the groom must pay a dowry of between US\$2,000 and \$3,000 to the bride's family, as well as around US\$500 to the matchmaker. It costs about US\$20-

25 to stay a night in a hotel in Ho Chi Minh City. If the groom stays for a week to take care of the paperwork, then, everything included, he must pay around US\$3,500 to marry his bride. As of July 1999, 23,678 women from Vietnam successfully applied for marriage licenses from Taiwan. Estimating outlays of US\$3,500 for each woman, that comes to a total of US\$82.7 million, a significant source of foreign revenue for Vietnam.

In addition to the expenditures the groom pays abroad to marry, foreign brides also remit considerable funds back to their home countries. Reports have stated that Taiwan remits the equivalent of US\$3,200 to Indonesia each day (Napitupulu and Kaliailat 1995). Also, transnational marriages have increased the consumption of Taiwanese men in Southeast Asia. According to a survey by the Hung-Yi Travel Agency, brides from Vietnam return home on average 1.6 times a year. If every time the Vietnamese woman spends US\$500, the 23,678 Vietnamese brides have contributed more than US\$18.9 million in Vietnam in one year.

The effect of transnational marriages on consumption in Southeast Asia can also be seen from Indonesia's revisions of its anti-Chinese policy. In August 1994, the government relaxed its restriction on the display of Chinese characters in public places in order to increase the number of Chinese-speaking tourists. In recent years, many Chinese tourists from Taiwan and other locations have traveled to Indonesia, along with capital from overseas Chinese. Statistics from the Indonesian Tourist Bureau in Taipei show that three hundred thousand Taiwanese tourists traveled to Indonesia in 1993, ranking Taiwan fifth behind Japan, Germany, the United States, and Australia in the number of tourists. Indonesia's airlines were previously banned from using the Chinese language (including Chinese subtitles) or displaying Chinese magazines, and ethnic Chinese stewardesses were forced to speak in Indonesian. The increasing number of tourists from Taiwan led the government to relax the language restrictions, for the influx of funds has contributed to Indonesia's economic development. The government also allowed

Chinese tourists to fly to the airports of Surabaya and Medan (Central Daily News, International Division, August 6, 1994).

THE PERSONALIZATION AND ENGENDERING OF THE INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOR

The structural phenomena of capital internationalization and the international division of labor analyzed in political economy have the strongest impact on the working class. The working class often feels increasing difficulty in survival but rarely realizes that the reason is tied to the poverty of their nation or linked to the international division of labor. The development of transnational marriages transforms what appeared abstract into a relationship between real people.

Capital internationalization has led to distorted development, but we should not overlook the resistance of actors in this system. A-Ching, A-Fang, and many others like them are all active in finding solutions to their problems. Transnational marriages are the result of the resistance of marginalized laborers in core and peripheral countries. For men from Taiwan, transnational marriage is a way for them to solve the problem of carrying on their family line, while for the women, it is a way of escaping poverty.

This "merging" of the marginalized in two societies is not automatically an alliance, however, and should not be seen as an ideal realization of the "global village" concept. Commodified transnational marriages are a product of capitalist development and inscribe abstract international relations of political economy as unequal social relations.

Taiwan's mainstream media and official discourse assume that foreign brides use the pretext of marriage to come to Taiwan for money and in doing so create social problems (Hsia 1997). Based on interviews and observations, I have seen how the media's negative reporting has influenced the way that families and friends of foreign

brides view the women. At the earlier stages of marriage, the families and groom often worry that the bride will run away or steal money. Taiwan's immigration rules state that foreign brides must leave Taiwan after their first six months of residence there. Women often use the opportunity to return to their home countries, often becoming a crucial moment for the success or failure of the marriage. Before returning home to Indonesia, Shei-Fen's mother-in-law reminded her, "You should hurry back; otherwise people will begin to talk about you." She only went home for a week, but neighbors began to ask, "Has your daughter-in-law come back?" The mother-in-law was angry. "It was like they were watching some kind of play, just waiting to laugh at us!" The mother-in-law was also worried that the new bride would run away as many people had said, and sighed, "It's hard to have a foreign bride as a daughter-in-law. You don't know if she's sincere or not. What if she runs away?" Anytime that the foreign bride wants to leave home or remit money to her family abroad, it strengthens the stereotype of these women popularized by the media. Shu-Hsien's first husband died, and she had a child in Vietnam. After she married her Taiwanese husband, she started to send money back to Vietnam to raise the child, which began a long-standing argument with her husband. Shu-Hsien later decided to return to Vietnam and did not contact her husband in Taiwan. Her husband and his family and friends concluded this problem, "You see, it's just like what they say in the papers! She just came to Taiwan for money."

Even if the foreign brides "perform well" and act as the paragon of new brides, it is still hard to shake the preconceptions held by their husband and families. For them, "good" foreign brides are the exceptions. A happily married man said, "My wife is great, and she gets along with my family well. But other people might not have the same luck [with foreign brides]. I've heard stories about women who run away." The force of real experiences with foreign brides is not enough to overpower their image created by the media.

There is often friction in transnational marriages that leads to conflict, that in turn strengthens discrimination against Third World

countries stemming from Taiwan's economic prowess. For instance, when questioned about high fees, a matchmaker retorted by saying that, "There are a lot of procedures and you have to give 'red envelopes' to [bribe] officials if you want to hurry things up. You know how it is in underdeveloped countries. Everyone wants money. Ha!" Furthermore, because foreign brides often send money home, which can be a burden to the agricultural and working-class families of their husbands, which are not wealthy to begin with. This is often a source of conflict. I have met many husbands of foreign brides who do not view their wives' desire to send money home as a result of Third World poverty. Instead, they blame the women and interpret it as the essential characteristics of the foreign brides, saying, "You see, they just come to Taiwan for money."

I have accompanied Taiwanese men and their families numerous times to Indonesia and Vietnam to meet prospective brides or to visit the families of their wives. Often the men and families reveal their explanation of the poverty of Southeast Asian countries through casual comments. During one such trip in Jakarta, the family and I visited a park with a large lawn. The mother of the Taiwanese man cried out, "What a waste of land! If this were in Taiwan, someone would have planted crops on that land long ago." The other companions from Taiwan all agreed, and someone else added, "When I arrived at my wife's home, the living room was empty, without even a chair. If it were Taiwan, even if the family didn't have money for furniture, they would have piled some stones up to make a chair." Another added, "The people here are poor because they're lazy. The land here is so fertile; how can they not make money?" The minute differences perceived by people from core countries are interpreted as problems resulting from the essence of people from the periphery. Even things as mundane as taking a shower often become issues that lead to conflicts. Many husbands and families of foreign brides complain that the women take showers three times a day, seeing this as a wasteful practice: "They just don't know how to save money. No wonder they are so undeveloped."

This essentialism is thus used to explain the underdevelopment of the periphery, ignoring the historical and dynamic relationship between the periphery and capitalism, instead viewing it as inevitable. Guided by this framework, the unequal division of labor between core/semiperipheral and peripheral states constructs the personal and gender relations among those involved in transnational marriages, that is, the personalization and engendering of the international division of labor.

CONCLUSION

The "foreign bride" phenomenon is not restricted to Taiwan but is a global phenomenon where women from underdeveloped countries move to more developed countries. This essay has attempted to view commodified transnational marriages as a product of capitalist development. Capitalism has led to an international division of labor among core, semiperiphery and periphery, as well as distorted domestic development. Commodified transnational marriages are marriages across national boundaries between people marginalized by this distorted development. The marriages are people's solutions to problems resulting from capital internationalization and labor liberalization. This in turn feeds back into the international division of labor and contributes to further capitalist development.

Some scholars contend that the influx of a large number of foreign brides has contributed to a more pluralistic society in Taiwan, turning the island into a "global village." These transnational marriages do not, however, lead to local internationalization, as transnational marriages crystallize an unequal international division of labor into personal relationships. We can therefore boldly assert that transnational marriages are the deepest state of capital internationalization. Commodified transnational marriages link together the men and women most seriously affected by unequal development. The marriages are the flip side of capital internationalization. These

transnational marriages also add an understanding and acceptance of the international division of labor into people's stock of knowledge, as well as among interpersonal relationships. "Local internationalization" will only come about as a result of the purposeful raising of mass consciousness undertaken by a social movement. Furthermore, this social movement cannot be achieved merely by emphasizing the importance of "multiculturalism"; it needs to be enlightened by political economic analyses to pinpoint the formation process of unequal status and treatment among different cultures.

Furthermore, for feminists, commodified transnational marriages make us aware that globalization forces gender issues to be understood in the context of class and capitalist development. When men from relatively wealthy countries are threatened by a rising feminist consciousness, international capital flows allow them access to poorer regions to maintain their patriarchal relationships. It is similar to the trends where capitalists move to poorer regions when they are threatened by rising workers' demands for better conditions. This phenomenon signals us that in the context of capitalist globalization, isolated feminism shall never succeed, and international solidarity is necessary. Moreover, feminists with a global vision must openly criticize the internationalization of capital, rather than follow the flow of neoliberalism.

NOTES

1. The term "foreign bride," common parlance in Taiwan, reflects the discrimination experienced by Third World women in that country. I use the term in quotes to remind readers that it is ideologically charged.

2. I do not intend to define "commodification" or "commodified transnational marriages" in this paper, since it would involve additional complicated analyses beyond the scope of this article.

3. For more details and discussion of the literacy program and related issues of participatory research, please see Hsia and Chung 1998 as well as my dissertation (Hsia 1997).

4. In addition to Southeast Asian women, many Taiwanese men marry women from mainland China, a trend that is closely linked to Taiwan's investment in China and thus fits in the analytical framework of this paper. Since cross-strait restrictions add another dimension to this type of transnational marriage (such as yearly quotas), this paper focuses solely on foreign brides from Southeast Asia.

5. Pseudonyms are used to protect the privacy of interviewees. All quotes have been translated to English by the author.

6. Like other farming areas, Meinung has experienced serious aging problems, as most young people have left for the cities. Although the expression "the youngest tobacco farmer in Meinung" is not based on scientific fact, it fully indicates the problem of an older labor force in the rural areas.

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