

Why Are Some of the Cross-Border Marriages in Taiwan Doing Better than Others? – Identifying the Factors that Made a Successful Trans-Cultural Marriage.

Michael S. Chen & Doris Y. Lin

Background:

Twelve percent of the marriages in Taiwan that consummated in the year of 2002 were cross-national, and a majority of the couples were those of lower classes on both parties. In the same year, one of eight newborns was by the “foreign brides”. A tide of new mode of marriages never seen throughout the history of Taiwan has swept the island that will give a new face to what we know now as Taiwanese.

This tide of commodification of cross-national and cross-cultural marriages has entailed a myriad of problems for the Taiwanese society as a whole and for those families with such marriages. Many brides from foreign countries quickly found their “Taiwan dream” shattered; those of worse luck found themselves under constant domestic violence of some sort; children from the cross-national marriages have been found intellectually retarded, especially lacking appropriate linguistic skills of their peers.... It was estimated that about 25% of the school children from cross-national marriages had a problem of maladjustment in this way or the other.

A wealth of literature, mostly of qualitative nature, has documented the misery of and occasionally the defiant struggle by the foreign brides that often lead to tragedies. The literature, however, might have overlooked that some of the cross-border marriages were more blessed than others. It's of academic interest as well as policy importance to identify why some of the international couples were on the lesser wedlock while the others were successful.

Method:

Couples of seemingly successful marriages were identified and interviewed; the qualitative data were then analyzed with an “interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)” to draw the elements that had contributed to the success of those marriages.

Result:

We analyzed the data along four lines:

1. Reason for an international marriage: The Taiwanese man who entered an international marriage is often in the occupation of less appreciated, such as

labor-intensive agriculture. Some of them are less sociable. These men are often disadvantaged in the domestic marriage market, and would have difficulties getting a domestic bride.

2. Process of getting into such a marriage: The cross-border marriages were mostly initiated by the parents of the Taiwanese men, and both parties were fixed up in groups by commercial agents. To minimize the costs, the decisions were made often in a matter of days, or even shorter.
3. Life After Marriage: Willing to share financial resources; having an opportunity to establish their own small business; Willing to share the chores; Respecting the culture of the bride, such as wouldn't pose a hostile attitude if the mother teaches the children her mother tongue; willing to compromise the differences...
4. Way of Coping Prejudice: Many of the cross-border marriages found hard to cope with the prejudice. Those on a successful marriage tend to be more optimistic and take the adverse comments lightly.

Discussion:

As to the reason and the process, we found that were the general patterns shared by most of the international marriages. The difference, therefore was in the way they managed the life after the marriage, including the way they faced the prejudice. The long-term effects in terms of, e.g. intellectual development or other possible genetic consequences on the children were largely left out in our analysis for the lack of information.