

Racialization of Foreign Women in the Transnational Marriage Market of Taiwan

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Introduction

Taiwan's close economic ties with mainland China and Vietnam in the 1990s gave rise to the trend of transnational marriages. The trend extended from specific groups of people, such as veterans and businessmen, to ordinary people in the late 1990s and grew rapidly in the early 2000s. According to one survey, the rate of transnational marriages peaked at 31.86 percent in 2003.¹ To restrain the trend, the government adopted a stricter visa interview policy from 2005 and banned profit-oriented brokerage in 2008, which, along with the economy turning sluggish, led to the decline of transnational brokered marriage in Taiwan.

Why did Taiwanese men begin to marry foreign women in such large numbers? The imbalance between the sexes of the marriageable population, the discordance between the raising of women's feminist consciousness and the expected gender relations in mainstream society, as well as industrialization and urbanization that damaged the economies of rural areas and traditional industries are commonly recognized factors that triggered large numbers of men of rural origin and lower social status to look for foreign brides from developing countries (Hsia 2002; Tian and Wang 2006; Tsay 2004). At the peak of the economic boom in the early 2000s, several brokering companies started businesses introducing Ukrainian women to Taiwanese men as an alternative to brides from China and Vietnam. These new businesses challenged the assumption that only marginalized, lower-class men looked for foreign brides since marrying a Ukrainian woman was not affordable for ordinary white-collar workers, let alone the blue-collar working class.²

It would seem that the abovementioned macro factors cannot account for the trend alone. If we calculate the costs of marrying foreign brides from different regions, we find large discrepancies. I argue that it is the cultural logic of race hierarchies behind matchmaking pricing; that is, white women are considered more valuable than Asian women. It is important to look at the political economy of the imaginary of racial hierarchies in Taiwan to see how they are embodied

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in the individual's decision making and further legitimated by the market mechanism.

Although the market for Ukrainian brides in Taiwan soon declined, the phenomenon allows us to look into the cultural and political economic factors that heavily influenced the dramatic changes in the market. In the past decade there have been many studies on transnational marriage in Asia (Constable 2003, 2005; M. Lu 2008; Thai 2005; Wang and Chang 2002), yet very few deal with gender politics through the workings of market mechanisms and brokerage. Looking at the operation of the brokerage business gives us insight into how the influx of marriage migrants was facilitated by the perceived cultural and political economic affiliations between Taiwan and the bride-sending countries. It also helps us create a clear picture of how the practices of gender inequality and sexualization of foreign women conform to the existing imaginary of racial order in the global hierarchy.

In this chapter, I pay particular attention to how marriage brokering companies, based on their perception of the public imaginary of what desirable wives ought to be, constructed images of foreign women differently according to their countries of origin, especially during times of intense market competition. I examine the racialization and stratification of foreign women in the matchmaking process and argue that this social imaginary of the racial order has to be understood through both a political economic and a historical lens.

Matchmaking Trips: Vietnam and Ukraine

Having waited for a long time, I finally gained agreement from both the marriage broker, Huigo,³ and his two clients, Guoching and Yanpo, to join their matchmaking trip (*xiangqintuan*) from Taiwan to a remote village in Quảng Ninh province in northeast Vietnam⁴ in 2005. Guoching was thirty-eight years old and worked as an administrator of the warehouse of a publishing house. Yanpo was twenty-nine years old. He had graduated from a national university and was an engineer working for a computer company.

We arrived at the village around ten in the morning the next day. As our car slowly approached the destination, numerous villagers were standing by the sides of the muddy and bumpy road watching us. Children were running around the car and caused obstruction from time to time. It seemed that the entire village was rather busy and excited on that day due to our visit. When we got to the house where the matchmaking meeting was going to be held, there were more than fifty young women waiting outside. The oldest were twenty-three years old.

We sat in the living room of the small house. Dung, a local matchmaker who served as Huigo's business partner, Guoching, and Yanpo sat together on one side

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of the table, and left the other side for “interviewees.” Two women were arranged to come in at a time. Dung served as an interpreter and also raised questions for both sides. Questions revolved mainly around three points: personal information, family background, and housework capability. The male clients asked questions throughout the meeting, although the women could raise questions as well. The meeting ended after three hours, and both Guoching and Yanpo got their brides. After having lunch, Dung drove us to visit the brides’ parents to ask for agreement to their daughters’ marriage. After meeting all of the family members, simple engagement ceremonies were held on the spot. Then the couple went out of the house to meet people, take pictures, and receive congratulations.

Guoching and Yanpo returned for the visa interview in Hanoi a couple of weeks later. Their interviews were coincidentally arranged on the same day that I was allowed to observing the process. Owing to Yanpo’s educational background, the consular officer ceaselessly asked him with misgiving why he wanted to marry a foreign wife. “You should be able to find a wife of good quality in Taiwan with your good conditions!” he said. After Yanpo and his wife left, the official expressed to me his deep concern about the increasing rate of transnational marriages in Taiwan:

“Why are there so many Taiwanese men coming to Vietnam to look for wives? We have so many good women in Taiwan. Do Taiwanese people not understand the meaning of the old Chinese saying, *feishui buluo wairientian* (one should prevent nourishing water in his farmland from flowing into others)? You know, I’m surprised by the increasing number of cases in which the Taiwanese husband has a good educational background and good job, like the guy you just saw, in recent years!”

Indeed, during my fieldwork from 2005 to 2007, I encountered quite a few other men like Yanpo, university graduates with a good salary, also interested in having a foreign wife. These cases seem to suggest that, despite the fact that lower-class men constitute the majority of consumers in the commodified transnational marriage market, the numbers of men with more economic and social capital participating in the market have increased.

A Flash in the Pan: The Emergence of Ukrainian Brides

When the market was most active in the early 2000s, some marriage brokering companies began introducing women from Eastern Europe, mainly Ukraine, to Taiwanese men. This was seen as a golden business opportunity as the brokers

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believed white women would be targeted by middle- to upper-class men who had no time for courtship, such as engineers working in industrial parks. After the news of the brokering business in Eastern European brides hit the mass media, it attracted tremendous attention from the public.

The phenomenon challenged the stereotypical images of transnational brokered marriages in three ways. First of all, these white women, unlike brides from China or Southeast Asia, were never depicted as poor opportunists who use marriage as a strategy for a better life. Instead, they were often promoted for their sexy appearance, high educational level, and language skills, characteristics thought to be helpful in improving the quality of the next generation. Secondly, they were intended for upper-middle-class men and therefore had a much higher market price than brides from other Asian countries. The cost of marrying a Ukrainian woman was about three to four times the cost of marrying a Vietnamese or Chinese woman. Besides, it was widely believed that married life with a Ukrainian would involve far greater expenses. In other words, men without considerable economic means or inheritable property would not be regarded as eligible candidates for marrying Eastern European women. Lastly, these white women were not expected to play the traditional role of housewife as most Asian wives are when marketed to Western men. This discrepancy implies that men's expectation of women's role in the household and gender relations in the marriage varies with race and/or nationality.

In contrast to the way in which matchmaking is practiced in Vietnam, the procedure of introducing a Ukrainian woman to a Taiwanese man is much more complex and costly. To get a sense of how the business operated, I went on a matchmaking trip organized by a brokering company to Kiev, Ukraine, in 2005. The group I joined consisted of only three members: the broker, the client, and me. The client, Yangze, was a son of a landowner family. He was forty-two and worked as a foreman at a construction company. He had been impressed by a TV interview featuring the broker, Mr. Chu. After registering with Mr. Chu, he had been put in touch with several women, and had finally decided to meet Natasha after corresponding with her for several months. Yangze was told that if he was not satisfied with Natasha after meeting her in person, he could meet other potential brides. Contrary to my expectation, Yangze refused Natasha after they had spent a night together. Yangze gave me a simple reason that shocked me a lot. He said that Natasha did not meet his expectations of *jinsimao* (blonde hair cats),⁵ as she was neither blond nor as sexy as her picture in the catalog. As a result, he asked Mr. Chu to arrange other women for him to meet after Natasha left the next day.

I was very surprised by the way Mr. Chu positioned his client in relation to the Ukrainian bride candidates in the matchmaking process. The expected gen-

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der relation was the complete opposite of that between Taiwanese clients and Asian bride candidates. For example, all of Yangze's meetings were dinners at luxurious restaurants with only one candidate at a time. We were given instructions regarding how to behave in a proper manner at the dining table, how to eat and drink, what to say and not to say, and other Western etiquette that Mr. Chu thought we should follow. We were both asked to behave and speak with caution so as not to lose face in front of the candidates, whom Mr. Chu thought to be "Western" and more "civilized" than Taiwanese.

As noted above, the Eastern European bride fever did not last long, and successful cases were very few.⁶ Despite its transience, however, it did cause a sensation. For instance, to attract the public's attention, one proprietor held a public dating event close to an industrial park for interested men to meet several Ukrainian women who had been invited to Taiwan. These women were arranged to stand on stage and play interactive games with a crowd of men standing in front of the stage. One newspaper used half a page to report this event and the new foreign bride trend with the compelling title "Wukelan jiaren, Taiwanlang xiang qianshou! (Taiwanese Men Want to Hold the Hands of Ukrainian Beauties!)" (Pan 2003). This scenario is reminiscent of another piece of sensational news about Vietnamese women being displayed in front of a Mazu temple as being "for sale" by a marriage broker in 2004. The marriage broker arranged for several Vietnamese women who were interested in marrying Taiwanese men to come to Taiwan. In contrast to the treatment the other broker offered to his Ukrainian women, unfortunately, these Vietnamese women ended up being peddled in the streets and displayed in public with a price of NT\$320,000 (about \$10,000) for on-site transactions. According to a news report, interested men could just pay and take a woman away with them (Apple Daily 2004). This incident resulted in the opposition of women's rights advocates deploring the overt practice of "selling women."

The differences in the ways marriage brokers operated according to the origin of their brides encouraged me to explore further the racial hierarchy among these foreign women: Why were Eastern European women represented as "modern" subjects in relation to Asian women as "backward" ones? How does racial ideology interact with class distinctions to differentiate the value of foreign brides in the marriage market?

Racialized Bodies: How Are Foreign Women Advertised?

A piece of doggerel that has circulated widely on the Internet since 2004 jokes about the reason why many Taiwanese men turn their back on local women and

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seek foreign women, especially from China and Southeast Asia. It crudely differentiates Taiwanese brides from foreign brides by delineating the former as arrogant and avaricious, in opposition to the latter who are docile and easily satisfied, with little consumption desire. Here are some excerpts:

When looking for foreign brides: Women line up for men to choose!
When looking for Taiwanese brides: Men have no choice but to be chosen!
Foreign brides: Honey, please take me to supermarkets and night markets!
Taiwanese brides: Honey, please take me to Japan and USA!
Foreign brides: Honey, I want a cake on my birthday!
Taiwanese brides: Honey, I want a diamond on my birthday!
Foreign brides: Cleaning the house whenever they have time.
Taiwanese brides: Doing nothing! (“Why are there so many Taiwanese men looking for foreign brides?”)⁷

By using contrasts such as wanting to go to supermarkets/night markets vs. Japan and the USA, and diligence vs. laziness in doing housework to represent the different perceptions of foreign and local brides, this text has provoked much discussion on blogs and brokers’ websites. Many men expressed their approval of the content by sharing the same feeling of being tramped (*cai*) by Taiwanese women. For many of them, it is their sense of male dignity and masculinity that primarily triggers them to consider marrying foreign women from developing countries (Tian and Wang 2006). Portrayed as men’s essential characteristic, this sense of male dignity is manipulated by brokers. Many men looking for Vietnamese brides shared similar concerns for their marriage. Despite being economically powerful they were often culturally weak due to a lack of socially recognized masculinity. Besides masculinity, the need for free labor is also an important factor triggering men to look for foreign brides, a demand that crosses class distinctions. For example, for men who own a small factory or farm, money is not an issue when getting married. What is important, rather, especially for those who have parents or children to be cared for at home, is finding a wife who is willing to support them by contributing both free productive labor and reproductive labor at work and home.

Before profit-oriented matchmaking was completely banned in 2008, it was easy to find advertisements online or to see them in the streets. Many brokering companies knew well how to manipulate the cultural logic of love in packaging their bride candidates. They assumed and homogenized all foreign women from developing countries as docile and domestic so as to make them ideal wives in the traditional sense. One brokering company promoted their bride candidates

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by calculating for men the benefit of getting married to a woman from China or Vietnam:

First, she can work and earn NT\$20,000 [about \$625] a month. The total income of the household increases NT\$240,000 [about \$7,500] per year. Second, she will sleep with you. You do not need to find women outside. It saves you NT\$80,000 [about \$2,500] per year. Third, she can do housework, cooking and doing laundry for free. It saves you NT\$10,000 per month and NT\$120,000 [about US\$3,750] per year. Fourth, she can give birth to a child. Producing a male heir to continue the family line is invaluable. In total, you can get a benefit of NT\$300,000–400,000 [about \$9,375–\$12,500] per year. Why don't you get married?

Although using this kind of degrading language to promote foreign brides gave drew reproach in society, it did reflect the ideal marriage that many Taiwanese men dream of; that is, “buy one (wife) get one free (labor).” More interestingly, these two groups of women could further be differentiated from each other according to their “racial traits.” For example, Huigo maintained that Chinese brides are cleverer than Vietnamese brides, while Vietnamese brides are more obedient and trustful. Mr. Lin, a manager of a brokering company that also did business in both Chinese and Vietnamese brides, expressed the same opinion:

“If the client is more introverted and his personality is less masculine, we will probably suggest him considering Vietnamese rather than Chinese brides. Here is our reason. For example, Chinese brides more likely request more than Vietnamese brides do. It is because their economic condition is better than Vietnamese on the average. Plus, they speak Chinese so they can argue with you. You will find sharing the same language would be good for some people yet bad for others.”

Indeed, in my observations of matchmaking meetings, in Vietnam most bride candidates agreed to do housework and domestic tasks without negotiation and considered them the wife's obligation; whereas in China, more women reached agreement through negotiation. While it is true that sharing the same language makes it easier for Chinese women to bargain with Taiwanese men, the impact of a nation's economic capability also influences women's accumulation of social capital. After China's economy became prosperous and attractive to foreign capital, Chinese women started to enjoy better living conditions than before. A flood of Taiwanese enterprises entering China gave these women more opportunities to meet and compare Taiwanese men of different backgrounds. Therefore, Chinese

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bride candidates hold relatively more bargaining power and are more “difficult” than their counterparts from Southeast Asia in the eyes of the brokers.

The Power of Image

Yet these kinds of culturally twisted narratives for emphasizing foreign brides’ domestic capability were never utilized by advertisements for Eastern European brides. Comparing webpages from two brokering companies’ websites reveals how the reproductive labor of women from different regions is considered.

In the catalogs, Vietnamese women are presented through snapshots taken on the spot one after another. They have no makeup and their hair is not styled. They wear plain dresses and shy smiles and there is no attempt to make them look sex-

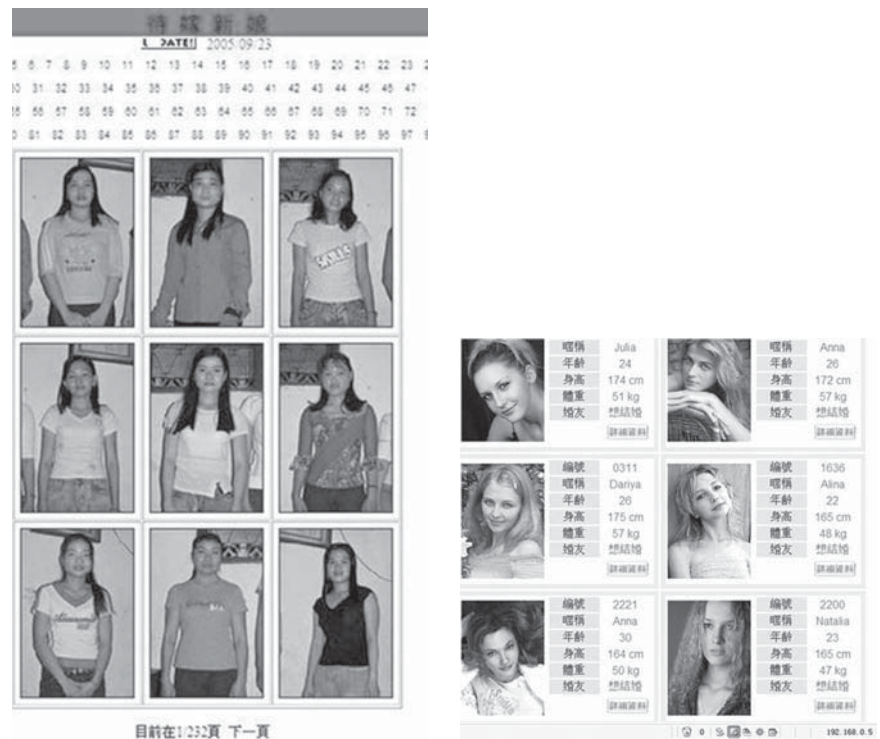


Figure 12.1 A screenshot of a Taiwanese marriage brokerage website (www.vnn.com.tw) showing Asian bride candidates taken June 15, 2006.

Figure 12.2 A screenshot of a Taiwanese marriage brokerage website (www.crosinternational.com.tw) showing Ukrainian bride candidates taken June 15, 2006.

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ually attractive. By stark contrast, Ukrainian women are presented in glamour shots with full makeup, styled hair, and fine clothes. Enchanting poses and facial expressions make them look more like celebrities than housekeepers. Romantic attraction thus appears as a reference to distinguish Eastern European brides from Vietnamese brides, and a cue for male clients to consider what type of wife they want and what they can afford.

Interestingly, photographic portraits of bride candidates in the catalog mean different things to consumers/suitors according to the cultural framework in which the portraits are positioned and through which the consumers view them. In the “mail-order bride” market of the United States, glamour shots of Russian brides never threaten American men’s confidence in Russian women’s traditional values but enhance their belief that Russian women possess the virtues of domesticity, passivity, and patience while still being sexy and hyperfeminine (Patico 2010). In the context of Chinese society, women gesturing in an alluring way or showing certain body parts in a photograph would seldom be associated with the image of an ideal wife but more with that of licentious woman. The Ukrainian women gazing at the lens/men with sexy and confident poses therefore means they are far from being the model of “traditional” and “passive” women in the Chinese context. By contrast, Vietnamese women’s plain dress, stiff, standing posture, and shy smile makes them desirable as traditional housewives who lack modern subjectivity and consumer desire and whose self can only be realized through helping her husband and teaching her children (*xiangfujiaozi*). This lack is constructed, discursively and visually, as if it can only be fulfilled through a love connection with a man who can rescue her from the catalog world and bring her into the real world.

Many studies have mentioned how nostalgia for “tradition” is at work in creating men’s desire for foreign brides (Halualani 1995; Robinson 1996; Simons 2001; Tolentino 1999; Wilson 1988), and how brokering companies manipulate nostalgic discourses and fit foreign women’s bodies into the discursive framework (Patico 2010; Tolentino 1999). As Rolando Tolentino (1999, 59) observes, to maintain the U.S. nuclear family fantasy, “the functional third-world woman’s body is made symptomatic of the ideal first-world male nuclear family narrative.” In the same vein, Jennifer Patico (2010, 33) criticizes brokering companies for their reductive and objectifying rhetoric that homogenously positions all American male clients as consumers of Asian or East European “tradition,” docility, or desperation and that ignores other dimensions of the gender crisis that also account for men’s desire of foreign brides, such as excessive individualism and materialism, and the American culture of divorce. Similarly, most Asian bride brokering companies I encountered knew well how to manipulate men’s nostalgia for the traditional

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gender relations in preindustrial Taiwan, and link the realization of “brining nostalgia back to reality” to men’s vision of romantic love.

The strategies that appeal to men’s masculinity through the idea of “rescuing/ conquering” women and nostalgia, however, were never seen in Ukrainian bride advertising. As mentioned above, Ukrainian brides are promoted in Taiwan not in terms of tradition but, on the contrary, in terms of modernity and cosmopolitanism, which is embodied in their higher educational background and their stereotypical appearance: blonde and tall. The contradictory perceptions of Eastern European women in the United States and Taiwan shows us how the cultural logic of value and desire varies from one society to another and how this has led to different sentiments toward foreign women as ideal wives in different social contexts.

Stratification of Foreign Brides: Quality?

In contrast to the guaranteed happy ending when Taiwanese men travel to select a Vietnamese bride, not every man interested in marrying an Eastern European woman realized his dream. According to Mr. Chu, men who wanted to become his clients had to go through the following process: online registration, a telephone interview, and then a face-to-face interview. They had to be single with a stable job and high income, and own real estate. The client was granted access to the entire online bride catalog only when he passed the examination and paid the membership fee.

However, this kind of filtering mechanism was never adopted by Asian bride brokering companies. Asian bride brokers usually recruited as many clients as possible without stipulating any requirements for their backgrounds. Unlike choosing a Ukrainian bride, which required correspondence between both sides for a period of time before meeting in person, choosing a Vietnamese or Chinese bride was far more straightforward. The client did not even need to know who he was going to meet prior to his departure on the matchmaking trip. In most cases, the bride catalog existed only for the client’s reference and as proof that the broker had the “ability” to provide that number of bride candidates.

For Mr. Chu, Asian brides, especially those from Southeast Asia, were not comparable with Eastern European brides due to their huge difference in “quality.” How Ukrainian brides were promoted is illustrated by a newspaper interview he gave (Hsiu 2003). In that interview, Mr. Chu claims that all of the women listed in the catalog held at least college degrees.⁸ By comparison, the educational background of Asian brides is never recognized as important human capital, even though some do receive higher education, especially Filipina brides.

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Eastern European brides' language ability was also highlighted as a selling point. In the same interview, Mr. Chu stated that "marrying Eastern European women allows our next generation to grow up in a bilingual environment, which is important for Taiwan's internationalization." He misled readers here by implying English and Chinese bilingualism rather than Ukrainian (or Russian) and Chinese bilingualism. Mr. Chu claimed most Ukrainian women could speak English well, but Filipina brides generally speak English more fluently—a skill that is never promoted by brokers in relation to their advantages. The differing treatment of foreign brides reflects male clients' different expectations of the role of their future mates and conforms to the social imagination of racial/ethnic division of labor in Taiwan. For example, Filipina women are associated with domestic workers while Ukrainian women are associated with models. The gendered racialization and stratification of others has been observed both in the labor market (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983; Lan 2006; Palmer 1989; Parreñas 2001) and in the marriage market (M. Lu 2008, 99–100). The racialized representation of foreign Asian brides as less cultivated and romantic than white Eastern European brides conforms to the Western-centric logic of a global racial hierarchy in Asian people's minds.

The incompatibility between Taiwan native-born brides and those from Vietnam and China is very often ascribed to the latter's low quality of cultural cultivation, in spite of the common belief that they share a lot of cultural similarities with Taiwanese. To improve their quality, Asian brides are asked to learn and internalize the host culture and lifestyle. Contrary to this "cultural racism" (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991), Ukrainian brides are treated as coming to "rescue" Taiwan with their sought-after genes.

If cultural similarity and the political economic relationships between Taiwan and the bride-sending countries in Asia were the background for the booming transnational marriage brokerage, what could be the background for the transient yet sensational Ukrainian bride craze, considering that neither cultural affiliation nor close political economic cooperation exists between the two countries? What so intrigued Taiwanese men about the possibility of having a Ukrainian bride? What kind of desire was it?

The Myth of Whiteness: A Historical Lens

"Wow, it is too romantic to be true!" When I chatted with young men about Ukrainian bride brokerage, I often saw a strange smile appear on their faces. Because there was no guarantee of marriage, clients had to pay for one trip after another until they find a suitable bride. Plus, during the period of correspondence, they

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also needed to spend money on gifts and flowers and translation if both sides could not use English. So it was not affordable for ordinary white-collar men. Yangze, in order to make the trip to Kiev, had spent almost NT\$1,000,000 (about \$31,000) on relevant expenses before I met him.

In spite of this great expense, Yangze still wanted to give it a try. He told me that he was originally going to find a Vietnamese wife to take care of his old mother, but after watching Mr. Chu's interview on TV, he changed his mind. "How come you changed your mind so dramatically? How about your mother? Do you expect your Ukrainian wife to take care of your mom?" I asked, and his answer surprised me: "But I think it is also good to have someone practice English with me and lead me to the Western world. . . . In the past I could only imagine white women's bodies through reading novels, watching TV and movies, but now I can touch them physically. Even if I cannot find one eventually, it will still be an unforgettable memory in my life. It is thus worthy."

It is clear how the differentiation of body values between Eastern European brides and Asian brides is made along the class and race/ethnicity lines. The huge difference in their market prices cannot be accounted for only by the visible costs such as paperwork, travel expenses, and service quality; there is also, I argue, the exchange value of women's bodies created by "white fetishism" that frequently lurks in Taiwanese men's thoughts. Generally speaking, one of the major reasons for Taiwanese men to find a foreign wife from developing Asian countries through brokers is to maintain the mechanism of labor reproduction in the family, while the selling point of a Ukrainian bride is their sexiness and cultural capital, the value of "modernity." This disparity suggests that Taiwanese men who dream of marrying Eastern European women are not concerned about their future wife's domestic capability but their sexuality and whiteness, the homogeneously imagined high cultural taste that can bring glory to the match.

During the short-lived craze, Eastern European women became more and more visible to the public thanks to the mass media, and their sexy appearance drew the public's attention. In the past decade, increasing numbers of women from Ukraine and Russia have found work as dancers and models in the Taiwan entertainment industry. A few have even become well-known TV stars. Some are involved in the sex industry, which has been reported by the mass media. These attractive women help the stereotypical construction of *jinsimao*, the exotic women who only used to only appear in movies and novels but are now available in the real world.⁹

For Yangze, marrying an Eastern European woman signified appropriating her whiteness, the magic power that can boost men's cultural capital and symbolic power. The psychosexual dynamics in transnational gender politics may be

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understood in the light of Fanon's famous analysis of black men's white complex in the postcolonial context:

I wish to be acknowledged not as Black but as white . . . who but a white woman could do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her noble love takes me onto the road of self realization—I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands grasp those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine. (Fanon 1967 [1952], 63)

Yet how could Fanon's analysis of this inferiority complex make sense in our case when there was no such historical contact between Taiwan and Eastern European countries? Where do the desire and complex come from and what does whiteness mean to Taiwanese? I suggest that the desire for Eastern European women should be analyzed in the context of the formation of American and Eurocentric discourses in the contemporary history of Taiwan, the history of how white culture—mainly American culture—was introduced to Taiwan and became a symbol of modernity for people to pursue. I argue that the desire is created based on the chain of misrecognition, a simplified logic of the myth that all Ukrainians are blonde/white; all whites are from the United States; the United States is a perfect example of modernity; modernity is desirable; and therefore Ukrainian women are desirable.¹⁰

As Chen Kuan-Hsing (2001) has shown, in Taiwan and East Asia in general modernization is very often interpreted as “Westernization” and has been used interchangeably with “Americanization” ever since the United States gained its power and influence on the region in the postwar era. The long-term relationship based on America's military and economic assistance to Taiwan after World War II paved the way for the latter to follow the steps of the former toward modernization. Taiwanese imaginings of American society and American lifestyle thereby triggered many people's “American dream,” a dream that does not fade away even though Taiwan has successfully developed into one of the newly industrialized countries in Asia. The collective imagination of modernization appearing in daily life becomes the individual's desire to be Westernized and participate in global capitalist consumption through consuming goods from the West, such as European luxury brands and American pop culture, the practice of “imagined cosmopolitanism” (Schein 1994, 149).¹¹ In this formula, English proficiency was perceived as an index of an individual's degree of modernization and internationalization. One can say that the Taiwanese imaginary of the West is by and

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large formed through knowledge of the United States. People imagine Westerners through the stereotype of Americans—Caucasian Americans—obtained from the mass media and then extend the stereotype to all others who look “American.” The conflation of Eastern European women and Caucasian American women into the same category of “white” women is actually the practice of Occidentalism, the cultural practice through which the West is homogeneously and exotically represented with the same logic of what Edward Said (1978) criticizes as Orientalism.

While Occidentalism is common practice in Asian societies, its expressions vary from country to country as a result of different historical and geopolitical influences. In his research on Chinese identity, Sheldon Lu looks into what Fredric Jameson called the “geopolitical unconscious”; that is, the vision of the social, the public, and the national-within-the global, through the tales and images in media representations (S. Lu 2000, 29). Lu analyzed Chinese masculinity in Chinese soap operas and found Chinese men are always positioned as the owners of power and capital, and white women are the “subalterns” subject to the men’s gaze and desire (Barmé 1999; S. Lu 2000, 34). For example, Russian women who migrate to China for jobs and wealth are depicted as romantic, innocent, and fragile subjects who heavily rely on Chinese men.¹² This image is very different from its counterpart in Taiwan, which sheds light on how white women are consumed by the national imagination in different geopolitical contexts. The comparison with representational politics across the strait shows the importance of taking into account the history of imagination when exploring the embedding of imaginaries in geopolitical and economic structures. From this cross-strait example we can see how the political and cultural logic of the Cold War has shaped and dominated people’s imaginaries and sentiments differently in the postwar era, even up to today.

Conclusion

Due to the decline of Taiwan’s economy in recent years and a stricter immigration policy, the demand for foreign brides in Taiwan has cooled. The high-profile brokering companies discussed in this chapter did not exist at the time of writing. In addition to these political economic factors, other social forces have caused the demand to fall and therefore we cannot simply assume that Taiwanese men no longer desire foreign brides as ideal wives. I am not trying to say that all Taiwanese men are “foreign bride dreamers.” Yet it cannot be denied that an imaginary of a racial hierarchy among foreign women is pervasive in society, and the transnational marriage market is the venue where cultural racism can most easily be perceived.

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I have shown how a racial hierarchy is in consonance with class distinctions in the marriage market through the representation of foreign women in Taiwan. Resonating with what Tiantian Zheng has emphasized in the introduction to this book, this study also suggests that gender and sexuality in a society have to be understood within its own cultural context, which is very often influenced by its political economic relationship with others. In the same manner, I have unraveled the cultural logic of the racialization and stratification of foreign women in the transnational marriage market of Taiwan through analyzing Taiwan's direct and indirect political economic relationships and cultural contacts with the bride-sending countries. Only through revealing these dimensions, I argue, can we trace the causes of social mentalities and seek to deconstruct the gender inequality in the marriage market and in society.

Notes and References

1. Survey by the Department of Statistics, Ministry of the Interior, Taipei, Taiwan.
2. Marrying a Ukrainian woman would cost approximately \$25,000 to \$30,000 or even more, while marrying a Vietnamese woman would cost only \$7,000 to \$8,000. The cost of marrying a Ukrainian woman in Taiwan is about 1.6 times that in the United States (Peterson 2003, 109).
3. To protect the privacy of research subjects, all names in this chapter are pseudonyms.
4. Although marriage brokerage is more popular in the south, Huigo still made trips to the north and claimed that it was a "new virgin land" for bride hunting.
5. Taiwanese people liken Eastern European women to golden-haired cats, implying that they are as tempting as cats.
6. Since the brokers I contacted always refused to reveal the number of their successful cases to me, my conjecture is that the numbers were low.
7. Article from the Bunny Forum website. For the full version please see: <http://bonny.com.tw/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=12241>.
8. In fact, the education system of Ukraine is different from that of Taiwan and it is problematic to conflate the degrees of one system with those of the other.
9. For more discussion on how Western women and Asian women are represented in the East and West respectively, see Ling (2002).
10. I would like to thank my friend Tzu-I Chung for helping clarify my thinking here.
11. I do not deny Japanese colonial influence on today's Taiwan. However, when speaking of "connecting to the world" and "being cosmopolitan," American culture and English are more valued.
12. These scenarios sharply contrast to the Soviets' brutal treatment of China. Soviet demands that China pay back its debts caused widespread hardship and hunger in the late 1950s and early 1960s. China's generosity is emphasised through Chinese men's heroic behavior toward Russian women in the soaps (S. Lu 2000, 35).

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