

**Female Marriage Migration to Japan from Countries
in Economic Transition in Asia:
Cases of the Family of a Chinese Student and the Family of a Vietnamese Refugee**

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Summary

This study attempts to analyze agency of marriage migrant women, who come to Japan. In order to analyze marriage migrants' agency, this study takes case studies from China as well as Vietnam, where gender equality is considered as one of the fundamentals of the communist regime. Agency is defined by the World Bank, as "individual's ability to make effective choices and to transform those choices into desired outcomes." This study basically takes this definition as an analytical concept, but this study also puts highlight on the individual's awareness towards structural constrains.

Chinese cases illustrate highly educated women's efforts to tackle with their difficulties which are caused by their downward mobility in Japan. They tried to pursue their career by accompanying their husbands' study in Japan, as they are from the society where gender equality and women's labor participation are considered as social norm. However, due to the limited needs for non-Japanese experts as well as gender inequality in the Japanese labor market, they normally had to give up their pursuing career. In addition, many of them experienced their husbands' authoritarian attitude due to the changes in power balance in the household.

Faced with the sense of loss as a consequence of downward mobility, they tried to make their situation desirable by utilizing various social resources. Although they all knew their surrounding social structure was immutable, still they made choices and decisions to bring them favorable outcomes with such resources. Such acts they made can be seen as their exercising agency.

From Vietnamese cases, this study found that the sense of gender inequality can be a driving force for young women to be a marriage migrant. The status of the young unmarried women in their household in rural Vietnam is still low, and they have a limited chance of being employed. There are only two ways to change their status in the household. One is to find jobs in the factories in Free Trade Zone in order to remit. The other is to find foreign husbands to live abroad and to remit. Thus, they choose with

their own will to get married with Korean or Taiwanese men, in order to improve their status in their household. Their remittance to their natal family makes their bargaining power strong. In some cases, especially in the villages where quite a few daughters decide to marry men in other countries, girl's social value improves and son preference in such villages has become less important.

This study confirms that Vietnamese marriage migrants in Japan also have made decision making with their own will. As they often get a job, and make their own living, this brings them large bargaining power in the household. Their husbands are normally the men with Vietnamese traditional gender idea. With their economic autonomy, however, they are negotiating well with their husband to manage their household, and make their life more secure and desirable.

In general, marriage migrants are still considered as the women without their own decision. Especially, in the case of marriage migrants with commercial match makers, the tragic outcomes or more trafficking like dimensions are often focused. In one side all these are true. The decisions they made to be a marriage migrant are obviously influenced by various structural factors, including the traditional gender relations in rural area or their sending countries, globalization, and social norms.

However, the cases from China and Vietnam clearly show that marriage migrants are not necessarily the victims of social structure but the actors who are making effective decision in everyday life with understanding their social constrain, in order to transform those choices into desired outcomes. Moreover, accumulation of such daily practice has even potential to change social structure gradually.