

## **CROSS-BORDER 'MARRIAGE MARKETS' IN ASIA: Evidence on what determines men and women's relative bargaining power**

The handover of Hong Kong (HK) to Mainland China in 1997 and increases in one-way permit (OWP) quotas, which allow families to move to HK, greatly increased the number of HK men marrying Mainland women but far less the reverse match. That is one of the findings of research by **Yoram Weiss** and colleagues on 'cross-boundary marriage markets' and the relative bargaining power of men and women

Their study to be presented to the NORFACE migration conference at University College London this week shows that the increases in the OWP quotas and the handover bolstered men's relative position in the marriage market and diminished that of women. Specifically, for women, the currently married and ever-married rates decreased, whereas the divorced rates increased.

Cross-national or cross-boundary marriages are an understudied research topic. Although economists have studied the open goods market (international trade), open financial market (international finance) and open labour market (international labour migration) for hundreds of years, the open marriage market is a new research topic in economics.

But cross-boundary marriages have increasingly become an important socio-economic phenomenon. According to the International Migration Organization, in 2009, the number of international migrants under the family reunion scheme accounted for approximately 35% of the total number of international migrants around the world. In Singapore and HK in recent years, cross-boundary marriages have constituted up to 50% of the newly registered marriages.

The increase in cross-boundary marriages between residents of HK and Mainland China was triggered by the handover of HK to Mainland China in 1997 and the discrete increases in the OWP quotas. The handover greatly facilitated the interchange between the Mainland and HK residents.

Furthermore, the cross-boundary marriage behaviour is strictly governed by the OWP scheme, which requires all Mainland spouses or children of HK permanent residents to obtain an OWP document before moving to HK for family reunion.

The daily quota of OWP was 75 in 1982, which increased to 105 in 1993, and then to 150 in 1995. Prior to 1996, Mainland partners or children born in the Mainland normally had to wait eight to ten years to obtain an OWP. The waiting period was reduced from five to three years after 1995.

Cross-boundary marriages accounted for almost half of all the marriages registered in HK in 2006. These cross-boundary marriages are notable for inducing gender asymmetry: HK men marrying Mainland women outnumber the opposite match by seven times during the period 1986-2006.

These results show that the increases in the OWP quotas and the handover bolstered men's relative position in the marriage market and diminished that of women. Specifically, for women, the currently married and ever-married rates decreased, whereas the divorced rates increased.

Furthermore, wives are less likely to be household heads. The results are opposite to that of men. The results also find that emigration from HK was biased toward females since 1997.

These results contradict the alternative hypothesis that the boom of higher female education has driven the rapid increase in cross-boundary marriages. Under this hypothesis, the change in marital status concentrates on the highly educated females, and the intra-household bargaining power would tilt toward females with higher educational attainment.

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'Hypergamy, Cross-boundary Marriages, and Family Behaviour'

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