

## **IMPORTING BRIDES IN EAST ASIA: A new threat from China to its less-developed neighbours**

China's increasing wealth and the numerical imbalance between men and women in its population may pose a major socio-economic risk to its less-developed neighbouring countries if they start losing their women to China. That is the central conclusion of a study by **Daiji Kawaguchi** and **Soohyung Lee**, to be presented at the NORFACE Migration conference at University College London this week.

The rapid improvement in women's economic status coupled with the persistence of traditional household arrangements has resulted in an increase in 'bride importation' in East Asia as well as an increase in the prevalence of singlehood since the early 1990s.

Kawaguchi and Lee's study analyses the main factors that account for the large-scale bride importation along with the increasing prevalence of singlehood, especially among educated women in developed East Asian countries, including Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan.

Their research shows that women in developed East Asian countries take on most of the burden of household chores, even if they have better job opportunities than their husbands. Such a household arrangement persists even among young couples and the highly educated.

The researchers argue that such gender-biased household arrangements make marriage unattractive to educated women unless they can marry a high-income earner. Therefore, less-educated men in developed East Asian countries have difficulty finding a bride at home and turn to less-developed neighbouring countries to find a spouse, resulting in bride importation.

Professor Lee says:

'Importing brides from less-developed countries when a large number of native women remain single can be costly to a developed East Asian country as a whole, considering the socio-economic costs related to immigration and assimilation and the costs of devising public support for elderly singles who have no family to turn to for help.

'Furthermore, a country that exports brides also may face challenges such as gender imbalances in its marriage market and humanitarian concerns that parents may force their daughters marry a foreigner for the economic benefit. Therefore, it may be important to contemplate how to ease marriage market imbalances in developed Asian countries.

'This study suggests that making household arrangements more flexible and gender-neutral may be one way to address the concern. Of course, it is difficult for a government to change household arrangements, but a nationwide campaign advocating gender equality not only in the workplace but also in the home is worth trying.

'This research suggests that China's increasing wealth and sex-ratio imbalance may pose a major socio-economic risk to its less-developed neighbouring countries if they start losing their women to China.'

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