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**Hyunok Lee**  
**PhD Candidate**  
**Development Sociology**  
**Cornell University**

**Emergence of Regional Marriage Market: the case of Korea and Vietnam**

**Abstract**

This paper provides an overview of trends of cross border marriages within Asia and introduces the case of Korea and Vietnam. In the first section, it briefly explores the emergence of new destinations of brides in Asia including Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea, which happened to share arguably similar economic development path. It raises a question whether a certain mode of economic development is related to the rise of mass cross-border marriages which are characterized as follows: first, it is associated with the crisis of social reproduction, in particular, of certain segments of population. Second, it grew with the commercial match making industry, assisted by technological innovation in communication and transportation. In the second section, this paper explores the case of Korea and Vietnam more specifically and provides an explanation on how the trends of cross-border marriage changed and marriage market between two countries was formed.

Key words: Inter-Asian Marriage, Cross Border Marriage

## **Emergence of Regional Marriage Market: the case of Korea and Vietnam**

Cross border marriage in Asia is not a new phenomenon. The trends and patterns of cross border marriages have changed over time and the formation of cross border marriage market reflects certain changes in historical, political economic conditions. For example, the cross border marriages between Japanese and Korean, French and Vietnamese (Vu, 2006), Pakistani and Pakistani British (Charsley, 2008) are related to the colonial and post-colonial relations and the cross border marriage between Korean and Korean American, Vietnamese and Vietnamese American (Thai, 2001; Goodkind, 1997) are related to the political economic turmoil such as a war or other political economic relations, which created diasporas. These patterns of cross border marriage among the same ethnic group still exist and indeed occupy a great deal. One of the recent changes in cross border marriages is an emergence of new destinations such as Taiwan and Korea. This recent trend seems distinctive in terms that it is mass cross border marriages, predominantly arranged by commercial match making agencies and the relations between the origin and the destination are arbitrary, rather the commonality among destinations such as similar level of economic development seems more obvious. How do we explain this emergence of new destinations of marriage migration? If cross border marriage is a historically specific phenomenon, what kind of historical specificity bears in this current trend of cross border marriage? These are important questions which haven't explored much in the studies of cross border marriages and I attempt to explore this question in this paper with the case of Korea and Vietnam. In the first section, it briefly explores the emergence of new destinations of marriage migration in Asia including Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and Korea, which happened to share arguably similar economic development path<sup>1</sup> (Wade, 1990; Jones and Findlay, 1998). It raises a question of the relations between the common economic development experiences and the rise of mass cross border marriages. I suspect that the current mass cross border marriage represents a certain mode of social reproduction, which corresponded to the structural changes led by the compressed economic development path of these destinations and it was expedited due to the formation of commercial match making industry with the technological development. In the second section, it explores the case of Korea and Vietnam more specifically and provides an explanation on how the trends of cross border marriage changed and marriage market between two countries were formed.

### **1. A Question of Emergence of New Destinations of Marriage Migration and Economic Development in Asia**

#### **1.1 Current Trends of Cross Border Marriage and Studies**

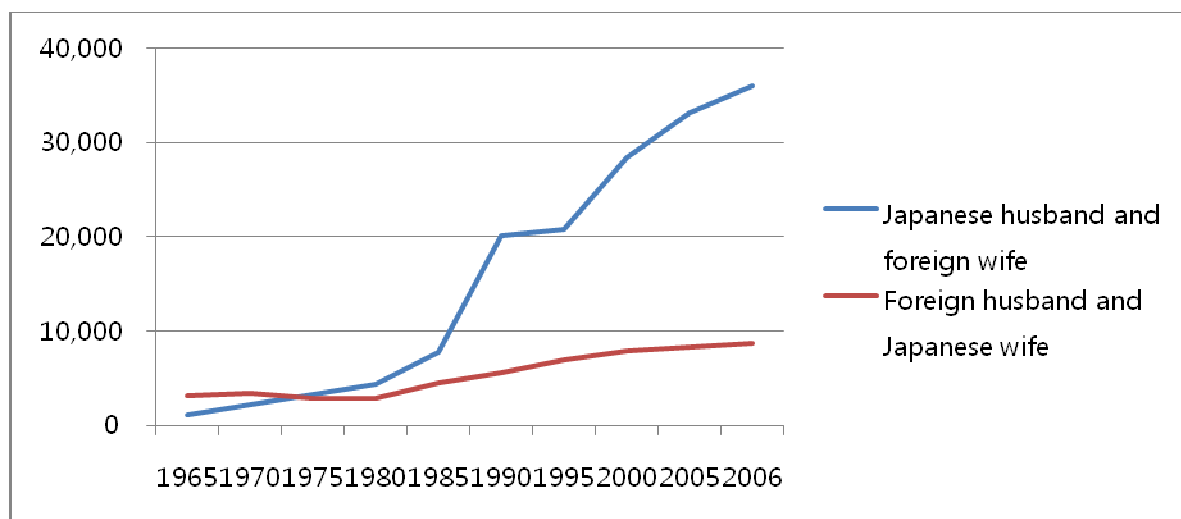
The marriage migration to Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea from other parts of Asia has been a tangible phenomenon last two decades<sup>2</sup>. In 2003, the number of cross border marriages and the percentage of cross border marriage of total marriage was 36,260 (4.9%) in

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<sup>1</sup> Wade (1990) noted that the economic transformation from the predominantly agricultural base to the manufacturing exporter in Japan during the 1950s and 1960s are similar to that in Taiwan and Korea in the 1960s and 1970s (p.47-48).

<sup>2</sup> This is an assessment based on the data of the destinations. There are other trends such as cross border marriage in the border share areas, cross border marriage between Southeast Asian women and men in the global North. However, it is less accessible to the complete data from the origins. The only destination which provides complete data may be the Philippines. And yet Jones and Shen (2008) noted that it is the most important in terms of sheer numbers. See Jones and Shen (2008) for more complete mapping of the trends of cross border marriage in East and Southeast Asia.

Japan, 54,634 (32.1%) in Taiwan, 8,862 (26.5%) in Singapore and 25,658 (8.4%) in South Korea and it continued to increase except Taiwan<sup>3</sup>. In this union, foreign spouses are predominantly women, 77.5% in Japan, 75.8 % in Singapore and 74.8% in Korea<sup>4</sup>. It is hard to estimate the total number of cross border marriages due to the availability of data. Based on the available data, the number of cross border marriage from 1998 to 2006 is 210,140 and among them 148,352 are marriages between Korean men and foreign women (National Statistical Office). The number of cross border marriages in Taiwan from 1998 to 2003 is 250,429. These women are mostly from other parts of Asia but the origins of brides vary depending on the destination. For example, three biggest origins for marriage migration in 2003 are China, the Philippines and Korea for Japan, China, Vietnam and Indonesia for Taiwan, China (Korean Chinese and Han Chinese), Vietnam and the Philippines for Korea, and Malaysia, Indonesia, India and China for Singapore. The marriage with the people of same ethnicity is still observed in Taiwan and Korea (Jones and Shen, 2008). For example, 64.7% of marriage migrants in Taiwan is ethnic Chinese in 2003 and 33.8% of marriage migrants in Korea is ethnic Korean in 2007 (Jones and Shen, 2008; Ministry of Administration and Security, 2007).



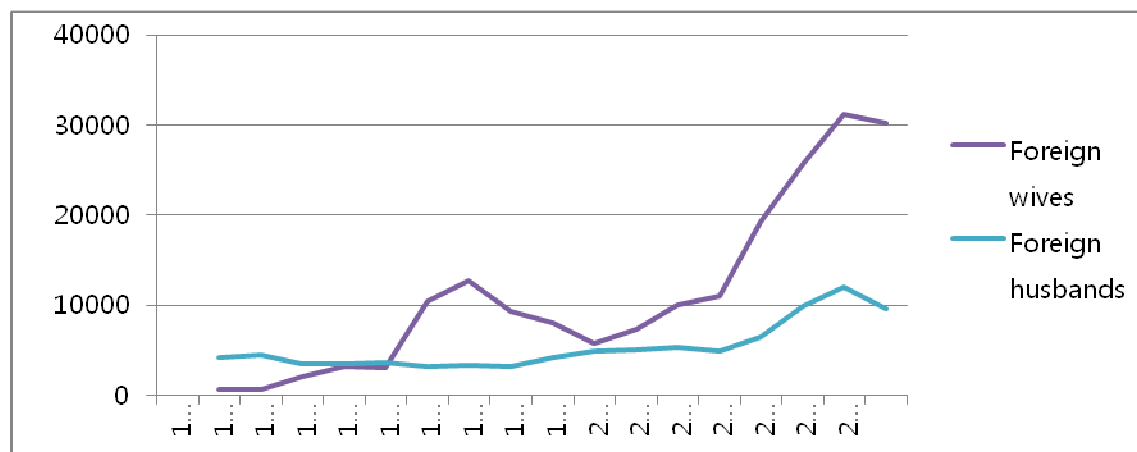
Graph 1 Marriage between Japanese and foreigners by sex 1965-2006

Source: Statistics and Information Department, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, *Vital Statistics of Japan*. The data prior to 1970 do not include Okinawa Prefecture. Figures are the tabulation of Japanese and foreign nationals who married in Japan.

<sup>3</sup> Number of cross border marriages in Taiwan decreases from 2003.

Calculated from Jones and Shen (2008) for Singapore, Statistics and Information Department, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, *Vital Statistics of Japan* and Korean National Statistical Office.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*



Graph 2 Marriage between Korean and foreigners by sex 1990-2006 (Source: National Statistical Office 국제결혼연도별통계)

The pattern of cross border marriages is described as unions between men from the wealthier countries and women from the poorer countries and this echoes the common pattern of the recent women's labor migration (Constable, 2005). More specifically, the general pattern seems to be unions between men from the wealthier countries who cannot find spouse in the domestic marriage market due to their low income, education or rural background and women from the poorer countries who search for the possibilities of economic improvement (Jones and Shen, 2008). This statement has a potential risk of stereotyping of these people who involve in this marriage, however, it is an important characteristic to be explored and contextualized. Jones and Shen (2008) pay attention to the domestic population dynamics and point out the positive correlation between education and proportion of remaining single women and the inverse correlation for single men. As women's education improved and women's labor participation increased, women tend to stay unmarried. On the other hand, less educated men with low income tend to remain unmarried as well. This can be read as marriage squeeze and the marriage squeeze happens in two ends in this case (Jones, 2004). Unlike the conventional notion of marriage squeeze<sup>5</sup>, which mainly focuses on the sex ratio

<sup>5</sup> The term "marriage squeeze" describes "the effects of an imbalance between the number of males and females in the prime marriage ages" (Schoen, 1983, p. 61). A marriage squeeze is generally measured by examining the sex ratio (the number of males per 100 females) at the prime marriage age<sup>5</sup> (Schoen, 1983, p. 62). For example, as Schoen (1983) explained, there is a hypothetical population in which men marry at 25 years of age on average and women marry at 23 years of age on average. There were 1.9 million females born between July of 1946 and June of 1947, and 1.5 million males born between July of 1944 and June of 1945. Within this population, women have to find their marriage partners in a smaller pool and are caught in a marriage squeeze because of a shortage of men, which reduces their chances of marriage (Schoen, 1983, p. 61). However, this scenario assumes that age is the only factor and most of the population follows the marriage-age norm. Given that the age-specific sex ratio and age at marriage varies, an imbalance of marriage partners always exists to a certain extent in a population (Muhsam, 1974). The importance of the marriage squeeze as a general trend has been discussed in terms of its contribution to changes in marriage rates and age at marriage (Akers, 1967; Muhsam, 1974; Schoen, 1983).

Although early discussions of marriage squeeze focused on the numerical difference between men and women at the prime marriage age, recent discussion has moved toward more qualitative explanations of the phenomenon. Fossett and Kiecolt (1991) discussed other considerable factors such as geographic accessibility, race, marital status, labor force status, and so on for their research on sex ratios and family formation. Williams *et al* (2006) discussed marriage squeeze in terms of education and occupation in both urban and rural settings. This change in approach suggests that the understanding of the term "marriage market" may have changed. In general, the marriage market loosely refers to the population pool at the prime marriage age. This term doesn't

imbalance among people in the prime marriage age, this kind of marriage squeeze is a result of rapid socio economic changes in the region. The study on marriage squeeze in Asia has been more focused on the phenomenon of unmarried women than men (Jones, 2004), however it seems that unmarried men have gained more attention with the increasing trend of cross border marriage.

One of the most widely accepted explanation of this kind of marriage squeeze seems that gendered hypergamy, which means that women tend to marry up (Constable, 2005; Jones, 2004) and it is also regarded as an important component in cross border marriage. For example, Constable (2005) identified "global hypergamy" as one of the conceptual possibility. In my opinion, gendered hypergamy may be a plausible explanatory term but it requires careful attention when it is used as a general analytical framework. The hierarchy, which gendered hypergamy presumes, tends to be reduced as economic hierarchy. This tendency appears in most of the literature on cross border marriage. Mail order bride approach emphasizes the economic disparity between rich groom's country and poor bridegroom's country and the economic structural violence against women. Mail order bride approach appears to come from the structural analysis of economic disparity of states however, it doesn't seem to go beyond the individual utility maximization approach in a sense that national identity, which is translated as individual quality in this case, is treated as a prime identity. There have been attempts to overcome the shortcomings of this approach, blanket victimization of women from the poorer countries who marry men from the richer countries and too much emphasis on the structural violence against these women. For example, a number of studies emphasized the agency of women in this process and how these women negotiate their situations by providing ethnographic account<sup>6</sup>. Although these studies certainly expand the horizon of our understanding of cross border marriages, they didn't seem to provide the any other alternatives than gendered hypergamy.

Linking marriage squeeze and cross border marriage is an important step forward, however when gendered hypergamy is used as a general framework for this link, it is rather tautological. For example, women tend to marry up so more educated women cannot find a spouse and men tend to marry down so men with less education and low income cannot find a spouse. Therefore, men tend to look for spouses outside of the domestic marriage market where their economic status can be translated as being wealthy because of the status of his national economy within the world economy. The women on the other end may look for spouses outside of the domestic marriage market or stay unmarried. Putting crudely, the hierarchy of national economies in the world economy is translated as one of the individual quality and it is assumed that this translation only happens in the population of both margins and cross border marriage will happen after exhausting the possibility in the domestic marriage market in this framework.

Moreover, gendered hypergamy doesn't necessarily explain why men's search for spouse outside of the domestic marriage market is so pronounced in particular East Asian countries at this particular point. In order to answer this question, structural conditions need to be taken into account. I think that the particular mode of economic development in these countries

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highlight the various characteristics of this population, such as level of education and income, that may stratify the market. However, recent research tends to contextualize the marriage market by taking into account other characteristics besides age. These attempts result in a more dynamic understanding of the marriage market.

<sup>6</sup> See Constable (2005), Palriwala and Uberoi (2008) and Faier (2009)

generated conditions that made certain group of men less marriageable. In other words, marriage squeeze in both ends indicates that men and women may experience the structural changes over the industrialization period differently. Economic development path in East Asia was based on the export oriented industrialization depending on the cheap labor for manufacturing sector and the industrialization process was compressed in a short period of time. The socio economic and demographic changes such as GDP growth, industrial structural changes, rural to urban migration, urbanization, fertility decline, the improvement of women's education and women's labor market participation were astonishing. Hence, marriage squeeze is not just a matter of their individual qualifications but also a structural issue of where these individuals belong to within the social strata. For instance, being a farmer or a factory worker didn't necessarily make Korean men unmarriageable in the 1970s. It is rather an indication of intensified stratification and the impasse of the ways in which social reproduction, in particular, of particular segments of population is governed.

### 1.2 Some commonalities of new destination of marriage migration in Asia

In this section, I am going to present some of the common characteristics of new destinations of marriage migration in Asia and explain why the marriage migration between Korea and Vietnam is chosen as a case. There is a bulk of literature on economic development in East Asia. The most commonly described characteristics of economic development strategies in East Asia is an export oriented industrialization based on the labor intensive manufacturing for global market in the process of "new international division of labor"<sup>7</sup> in the 1960s (Wade, 1990; Jones and Findlay, 1998; Mason, 2001). This led to a rapid structural transformation from the agricultural to industrial and serviced based economy (Mason, 2001, p.7). As the Table 1 shows, the percentage of labor force in agriculture dropped from 33.1 in 1960 to 7.3 in 1990 in Japan, 61.3 to 18.1 in Korea, 56.1 to 12.6 in Taiwan, 7.4 to 0.4 in Singapore. Also the value added in agriculture dropped from 13.1 in 1960 to 2.5 in 1990 in Japan, 35.8 to 8.7 in Korea, 28.9 to 4.1 in Taiwan and 3.8 to 0.3 in Singapore. Japan's industrialization started earlier than other countries in the region so the proportion of agriculture, both in terms of labor force and GDP contribution is relatively lower than Korea and Taiwan. Rural to urban migration and the urbanization was phenomenal. Urban population increased from 43.1% of total population in 1960 to 63.1% in 1990 in Japan, 27.7% to 73.8% in Korea, 25.9% to 50.2% in 1985 in Taiwan (World Development Indicators; Speare, 1988). Singapore is an exception for this agricultural to industrial transformation in terms that the dependency on agriculture was low because it is city state. In other words, these data indicate that the labor transfer from the agricultural sector played an important role in the early phase of industrialization in Japan, Taiwan and Korea (Jones and Findlay, 1998)

Table 1 Summary of Agricultural Statistics: Four East Asian Countries, 1960-1990

Statistic and Period	Japan	South Korea	Taiwan	Singapore
Percentage of total labor force in agriculture				
1960	33.1	61.3	56.1	7.4
1990	7.3	18.1	12.6	0.4
Value added in agriculture (percentage of total GDP)				

<sup>7</sup> This resulted in changes in production patterns "from specialized manufacturing concentrations in the older industrial countries to globally integrated production system whose labor intensive production sites have increasingly been located in the so-called newly industrializing countries" (Jones and Findlay, 1998, p.93)

	1960	13.1	35.8	28.9	3.8
	1990	2.5	8.7	4.1	0.3
Annual labor force growth, 1960-1990 (%)					
Combined		1.2	2.9	3.1	3.5
Agriculture		-3.9	-1.2	-1.9	-6.5
Nonagriculture		2.3	5.4	5.4	3.7

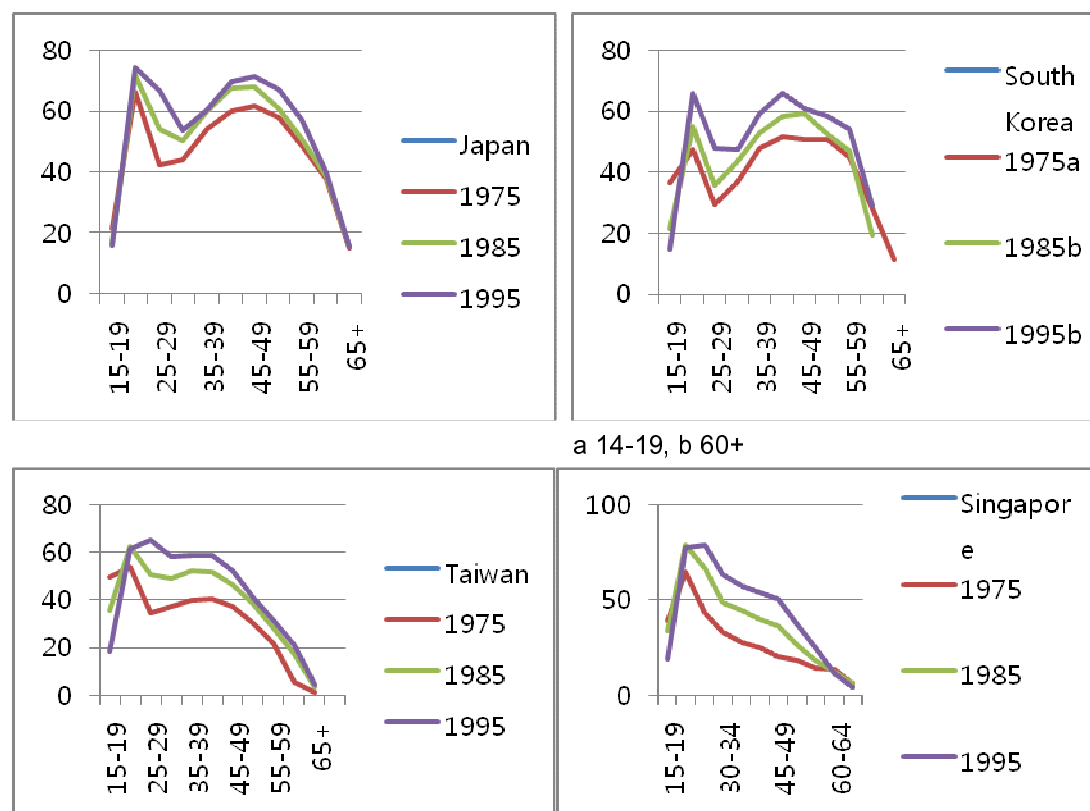
(modified from Mason, 2001, p.10)

In the 1980s, "labor shortage, higher labor cost, capital accumulation, and considerable investment in education and other forms of human resource development" shifted these economies into "higher value-added manufacturing and service activities and growing investment in 'offshore production'" (Jones and Findlay, 1998, p.89). In response to labor shortage, various policies to utilize women's labor force, in particular married women, were implemented and migrant workers appeared despite of relatively strict regulation. While Japan and Korea attempted to solve the problem within the domestic labor market, Singapore and to certain extent Taiwan sorted out the issue by "importing" domestic workers from other countries (Bartram 2000, Brinton *et al* 1995, Jones and Findlay, 1998). For example, Singapore and Hong Kong started to accept domestic workers and Taiwan later implemented this policy in the 1992 (Seol and Im, 2000). It is not clear to what extent these policies influenced the women's labor participation but the overall women's labor participation increased. The women's labor participation increased from 45.7 in 1975 to 50.0 in 1995, 39.6 to 48.3 in Korea, 38.1 to 45.3 in Taiwan, 29.6 to 50.1 in Singapore (Okunishi, 2001). The trend of women's labor participation by age is the M shape in 1975 in Japan, Korea, which shows the highest labor participation between the age of 20 to 24 and the lowest between the age of 25 to 29 and recovers slowly over the age between 30-49 and drops again from the age of 50. In 1995, the lowest point of labor participation moved from the age between 25 and 29 to the age between 30 and 34, and the degree of decrease became moderate in those three countries. Again, Singapore shows different trend; once it researches the highest point, it decreases constantly. The trend in Taiwan is between Japan and Korea, and Singapore. Once the participation rate drops, it stays until age of 45 and drops. Women's labor participation drops most at the reproductive age and it indicates that child care depends on family, especially women.

Table 2 Women's labor participation rate, all adult 15+ (Okunishi 2001)

	1975	1985	1995
Japan	45.7	48.7	50
South Korea	39.6a	41.9	48.3
Taiwan	38.1	43.5	45.3
Singapore	29.6b	44.9	50.1

a 14+, b 10+

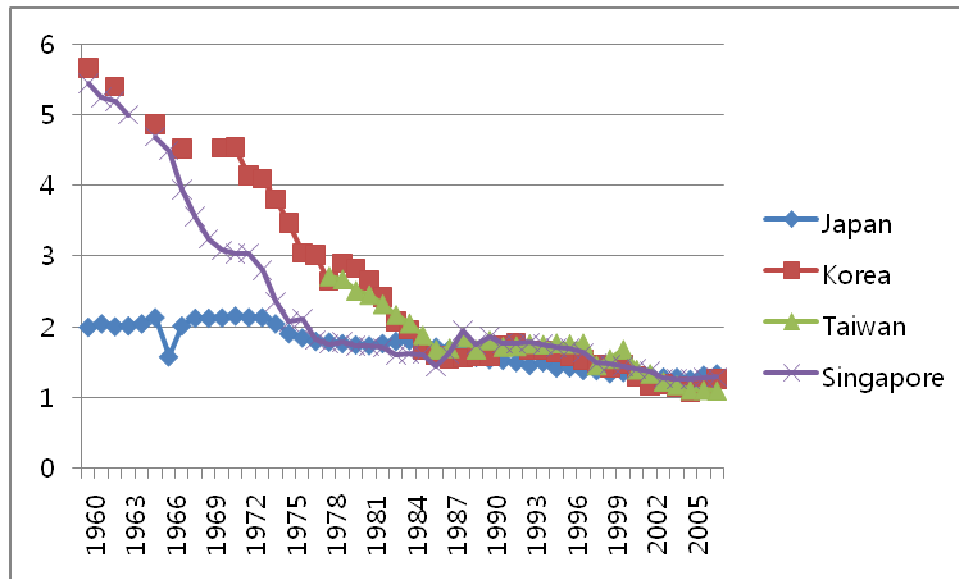


Graph 5 Women's labor participation by age

The trend of labor migration to Japan, Taiwan and Korea became visible in the 1980s despite of the strict regulations. While Singapore relaxed the labor migration as early as 1968, others were rather slow in institutionalizing labor migration (Martin, 2001; Jones and Findlay, 1998). Taiwan officially accepted foreign workers in construction in 1989, in manufacturing in 1991 and domestic helpers and care givers in 1992 (Seol and Im, 2000). Japan and Korea didn't accept unskilled migrant labor but "tacitly permit foreign students, industrial trainees and illegal entrants to take unskilled employment" (Jones and Findlay, 1998, p.94). Work permit system was implemented in Korea only in 2004 (Segyeilbo 2009-09-07).

Finally, fertility decline and the changes in family size is a distinctive characteristic. This was the consequence of the economic development but also of the strong family planning policy as a part of economic development in Taiwan, Singapore and Korea. It may have not influenced the labor market much in the 1980s but it may have bigger impact at the moment. In Japan, total fertility rate was 2.0 in 1960, 1.54 in 1990 and 1.26 in 2005 (World Development Indicator). In Korea, total fertility rate decreased from 5.66 in 1960, to 1.59 in 1990 to 1.08 in 2005 (World Development Indicator). In Singapore, total fertility rate decreased from 5.4 to 1.8 (World Development Indicator). In Taiwan, total fertility rate was 2.71 in 1978, 1.81 in 1990, 1.11 in 2005 (Population and Housing Data, National Statistics in Taiwan).





Graph 6 Total Fertility Rate in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore

Source: World Development Indicator, Population and Housing Data from national statistics in Taiwan

These data show a great deal of similarity, despite of its differences, and raises a question of structural changes such as economic development of individual countries and the regional economic integration and their relation to cross border marriage. Situating cross border marriage in the regional context and analyzing similar but different pieces of structural changes of these individual countries in East Asian region will be an ultimate research goal in the future. However, I limit the research to the case of Korea and Vietnam in this project in order to provide in-depth political economic context of the increase in cross border marriage. I choose Korea among other destinations because Singapore is a bit exceptional among others in terms of population composition and size, industrial structure and its immigration policy and Japan's economic development happened a bit earlier to other countries and its political economic status in Asia is different from others e.g. it colonized other parts of Asia. Taiwan and Korea share most similarities in terms of population dynamics, economic development path and the trend of cross border marriage. I looked for the non-traditional cross border marriage which is not based on same ethnicity. The cross border marriage in Taiwan tends to be more same ethnic marriages. For example, 64.7% of foreign women who married Taiwanese men in 2003 were Chinese (calculated from Tsay, 2004). Also, Vietnam, the second biggest origin, has Chinese diaspora and it may play a role. In the case of Korea, Korean Chinese are the biggest group among other foreign brides but the percentage is relatively low. In 2007, 33.8% of marriage migrants are ethnic Korean Chinese, 20.9% are Chinese and 19.4% are Vietnamese (Ministry of Administration and Security, 2007). I chose the case of Korea and Vietnam because it represents the new trend of cross border marriage, non-ethnic based, predominantly commercially arranged, increased in a short period of time.

## 2. The Scale of the International Marriage Market between Vietnam and Korea

The cross-border marriage between Korean men and foreign women started in the late 1980s and dramatically increased during the 1990s. In 2007, 126,955 marriage migrants<sup>8</sup> live in

<sup>8</sup> According to Immigration Office, the definition of "marriage migrants" is foreigner who has Korean spouse. It doesn't differentiate whether foreigners came to Korea with spouse visa or with other visa and married later in Korea. This number includes marriage migrants who attained Korean citizenship (38,991).

Korea and 111,834 are women (Ministry of Administration and Security<sup>9</sup>, 2007). The origins of marriage migrants include China, Vietnam, Japan, the Philippines, Cambodia, Uzbekistan and so on as the Table 3 shows. As the Graph 7 shows, the marriage between Korean men and Chinese women, predominantly ethnic Korean Chinese, was dominant in the 1990s and the marriage with Vietnamese women dramatically increased in the 2000s and soon Vietnamese became a second biggest marriage migrant group. Overall decrease in cross border marriage in the late 1990s can be explained as follows. First, the economic uncertainty after the economic crisis in 1997 may have influenced on the decrease of cross border marriage. Second, there were growing concerns on marriage fraud with Chinese women from the mid 1990s<sup>10</sup> and a couple of legislative changes were followed. As the marriage fraud became an issue, Korean government and Chinese government signed the memorandum of an agreement on cross border marriage procedure in 1996. According to this memorandum, each party has to notarize the marital status of prospective husband and wife, the marriage needs to be registered and notarized by each government. Only after this notarization process, a Chinese bride can apply for Korean Visa. This memorandum had abolished in 2003 and the couple only has to report the marriage to each government without notarization and apply for Visa (Shindonga Magazine 2006, vol.557, p.140-145). Also Korean government amended the Nationality law in 1997 and implemented in 1998 (Lee, 2005, p.82). Foreign women used to attain Korean citizenship as soon as they married Korean men but they should stay in Korea for 2 years before applying for citizenship according to the amended Nationality law (Nationality law 6.1). However, the number of cross border marriage increased again since 1999 as the text on the regulation on the match making industry was deleted from the legislation<sup>11</sup>. The number of cross border marriage increased even more from 2003. The trends after 2003 are different depending on nationality of brides. In the case of China, the abolishment of the memorandum between Korea and China in 2003, which mentioned above, contributed to the increase of cross border marriage after 2003 but it decreases significantly in 2006. National Statistical Office analyzes it because of the announcement of implementing the visiting work permit for Korean diaspora in China and former Soviet Union in 2007 (Result of Marriage Statistics in 2006, NSO). According to NSO, the foreseen opportunity for labor migration decreased the marriage migration. In the case of Vietnam, there are many contributing factors but following two points are widely speculated but not yet proven. The application process for Taiwanese visa through marriage became more difficult in 2005. The interview changed from the group interview to individual interview and the rejection rate was

<sup>9</sup> Basic Research for Foreign Residents( 07 거주외국인기초태조사). Source of data is vital statistics.

<sup>10</sup> From November in 1993, marriage fraud was extensively covered by newspaper (Seoulsinmun 1993-11-09, Segyeilbo 1993-11-09, Seoulsinmun 1993-11-10, Dongailbo 1993-11-10, Seoulsinmun 1993-11-11, Kyoungghayngsinmun 1993-12-01, Kukminilbo 1993-12-01, Kyoungghayngsinmun 1993-12-02, Kyoungghayngsinmun 1994-1-04, Kyoungghayngsinmun 1994-6-10, Segyeilbo 1995-05-25, Seoulsinmun 1996-01-31). Immigration office decided to investigate the marriage fraud and deport in case they found the case (Kyoungghayngsinmun, Hangyere, Hankukilbo, Seoulsinmun, Dongailbo 1993-11-30, Segyeilbo 1993-12-15). In 1994, fraud of marriage broker became a hot issue in the newspaper (Kyoungghayngsinmun 1994-3-15, Hangyere 1994-06-07, Seoulsinmun 1994-08-03, Hangyere 1994-08-03, Hankukilbo 1996-02-02, Hankukilbo 1996-12-05, Segyeilbo 1994-12-10). In 1994, the court gave a decree of nullity on the case of Chinese woman who married Korean man and left home after 5 months (Kukminilbo 1994-10-04, Segyeilbo, Seoulsinmun, Dongailbo 1994-10-05).

<sup>11</sup> Until 1999, match making business was regulated under the family affair law (가정의례에 관한 법률) Family Affair Law 5.1. noted that Anyone who engages in match making business should report to the government authorities.

"제 5 조 (의례식장등의 영업) ①가정의례를 행하는 식장(이하 "의례식장"이라 한다) 을 제공하거나 결혼상담 또는 중매행위를 하는 것을 업으로 하고자 하는 자는 시장(구가 설치되지 아니한 시의 시장을 말한다. 이하 같다)·군수·구청장에게 신고하여야 한다. 신고사항을 변경하고자 할 때에도 또한 같다."

about 30% (Chen, year not listed). Korean-Vietnamese marriages were at its peak in 2005. Also, the implementation of work permit system<sup>12</sup> in 2003 may have contributed to certain extent. Work permit system reduced the opportunity of female labor migration because employers apply for recruiting foreign workers and they tend to prefer male workers.

Table 3 Marriage between Koran and foreigners by sex 1990-2006

Year	Total Marriage	Marriage between Korean nationals and foreigners	Foreign wives	Foreign husbands
1990	399,312	4,710	619	4,091
1991	416,872	5,012	663	4,349
1992	419,774	5,534	2,057	3,477
1993	402,593	6,545	3,109	3,436
1994	393,121	6,616	3,072	3,544
1995	398,484	13,494	10,365	3,129
1996	434,911	15,946	12,647	3,299
1997	388,591	12,448	9,266	3,182
1998	375,616	12,188	8,054	4,134
1999	362,673	10,570	5,775	4,795
2000	334,030	12,319	7,304	5,015
2001	320,063	15,234	10,006	5,228
2002	306,573	15,913	11,017	4,896
2003	304,932	25,658	19,214	6,444
2004	310,944	35,447	25,594	9,853
2005	316,375	43,121	31,180	11,941
2006	332,752	39,690	30,208	9,482

(Source: National Statistical Office, International Marriage by Year 국제결혼연도별통계)

Table 4 Border Marriages between Korean men and Foreign women by Nationality and by Year

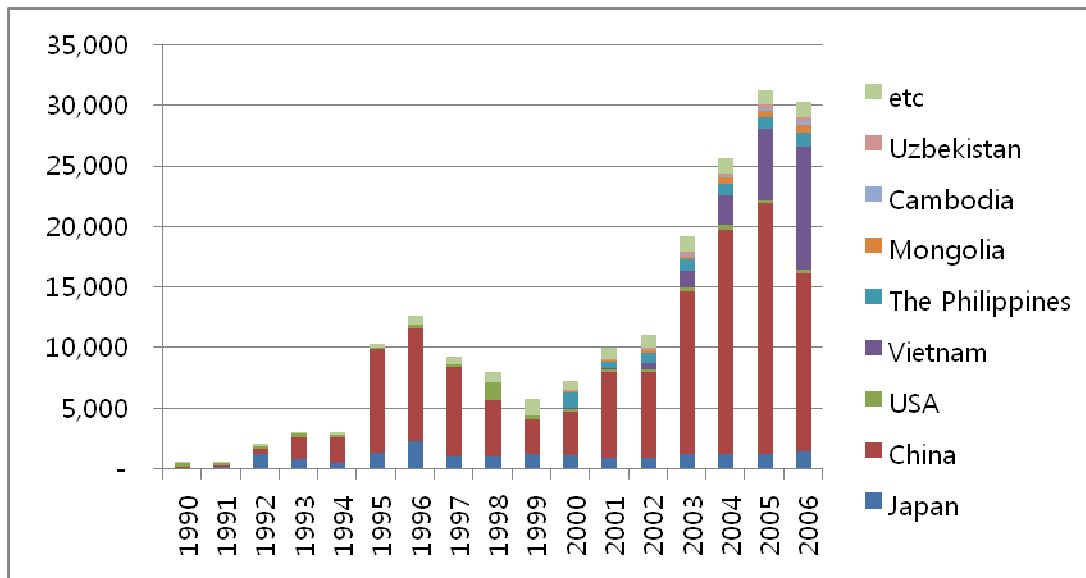
Year	Korean men and Foreign women								
	Japan	China	US	Vietnam	The Philippines	Mongolia	Cambodia	Uzbekistan	Etc
1990	175	88	268	*	*	*	*	*	88
1991	224	106	232	*	*	*	*	*	101
1992	1,223	429	249	*	*	*	*	*	156
1993	826	1,851	230	*	*	*	*	*	202
1994	561	2,043	227	*	*	*	*	*	241
1995	1,412	8,450	188	*	*	*	*	*	315
1996	2,370	9,271	228	*	*	*	*	*	778
1997	1,075	7,362	213	*	*	*	*	*	616
1998	1,004	4,688	1,514	*	*	*	*	*	848
1999	1,248	2,883	280	*	*	*	*	*	1,364
2000	1,131	3,586	235	95	1,358	77	*	43	779
2001	976	7,001	265	134	510	118	*	66	936

<sup>12</sup> Work permit system and visiting work permit for diaspora are two different systems. Work permit system introduced in 2003 and implemented in 2004. There was a consideration for Korean diaspora within the work permit system but visiting work permit for diaspora, particularly in China and countries of former Soviet Union makes the crossing border process and working easier. The employment sectors were expanded as well. (Policy Briefing, Ministry of Justice, 2007. 2)

<b>2002</b>	959	7,041	267	476	850	195	*	183	1,046
<b>2003</b>	1,242	13,373	323	1,403	944	318	19	329	1,263
<b>2004</b>	1,224	18,527	344	2,462	964	504	72	247	1,250
<b>2005</b>	1,255	20,635	285	5,822	997	561	157	333	1,135
<b>2006</b>	1,484	14,608	334	10,131	1,157	594	394	314	1,192

\*included in etc

(Source: National Statistical Office, International Marriage by Year 국제결혼연도별통계)



Graph 7 Cross Border Marriages between Korean men and Foreign women by Nationality and by Year (Source: National Statistical Office 국제결혼연도별통계)

The scale of the cross border marriage market in Vietnam is hard to estimate because of the availability of data, and the matchmaking industry is not legally recognized in Vietnam. However, if we look at the data from Taiwan and South Korea, which are the two biggest destinations of Vietnamese marriage migrants, it is possible to estimate the scale partially. Wang and Chang (2002) suggest that cross border marriage between Taiwanese men and women from other parts of Asia began around the early 1990s. A total of 86,754 Vietnamese women received residence visas for Taiwan through the marriage between 1995 and 2004 (TECO Ho Chi Minh City). The marriage between Korean men and Vietnamese women started late 1990s and 25,629 Vietnamese women received visas for Korea through marriage between 2000 and 2007 (Korean Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City). According to the estimation of International Organization for Migration in Ho Chi Minh City in 2006, Over 110,000 Vietnamese women marriage migrants in Taiwan, over 20,000 in Korea and over 5000 each in Malaysia and Singapore.

Table 5 Marriage Migration from Vietnam to Destination Countries as of 2006

Country of Destination	Estimated Numbers
Malaysia	over 5,000
Singapore	over 5,000
China	estimates vary
Korea	over 20,000 (75%+ annual increase)
Taiwan	over 110,000

Sources: *Malay Mail*, *Asia Pacific Post*, Consulate General of Korea, Ho Chi Minh City, Taiwan Economic and Cultural Office (TECO), Ho Chi Minh City in 2006

### **3. Formation of the International Marriage market between Vietnam and Korea**

There are various theories on how the migration stream initiated and continued. The most widely used framework is push-pull theory to explore the push factors in the origins and pull factors in the destination. For example, high unemployment rate in the origin can be a push factor and the labor shortage and high level of income in the destination can be a pull factor. The migration theory has been developed with the focus of labor migration. Massey *et al* (1993;1994) summarized and evaluated the current theories for labor migration including neo-classical economics, new economics of migration, dual labor market theory, world system theory, network theory, cumulative causation theory, institutional theory and migration system theory. Each theory contributes to understand migration with a different focus and at various level of analysis, and all of these theories are overlapped to certain extent. Whether marriage migration can be explained with these theories is a new question. In my opinion, the first four theories for the initiation of migration are not directly applicable to the marriage migration because these theories are mainly focused on individual or household economic decisions based on industrial structure within and among different countries. The latter four theories may be worth considering for its application to the marriage migration. The thesis of network theory is that migrant networks, "sets of interpersonal ties among migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through the ties of kinship, friendship and shared community origins" form social capital and serve to increase migration by reducing the cost and risk of migration (Massey *et al*, 1994, p.728). Cumulative causation is defined as "the tendency for international migration to perpetuate itself overtime, regardless of the conditions that originally caused it" (Massey *et al*, 1994, p.733). Institutional theory indicates that private institutions such as commercial institutions and voluntary humanitarian organizations emerge to meet the demand of mediating the process once the international migration began. Commercial institutions provide a range of services including "surreptitious smuggling across borders; clandestine transport to internal destinations; labor contracting between employers and migrants; counterfeit documents and visas; arranged marriages between migrants and legal residents or citizens of the destination country; and lodging, credit, and other assistance in counties of destination" and humanitarian organizations provide services such as "counseling, social services, shelter, legal advice" (Massey *et al*, 1993, p.450). Migration systems are characterized by "relatively intense exchanges of goods, capital and people between certain countries" and generally consist of core receiving region and a set of specific sending countries (Massey *et al*, 1993, p.454). Migration system is not a fixed structure, rather it is dependent upon the political economic changes such as "economic fluctuation, political upheaval or social change" (Massey *et al*, 1993, p.454). Network theory, cumulative causation theory and institutional theory also intersect with migration system theory but I will explore macro-economic and institutional conditions in this section based on migration system perspective.

Migration system cannot be divorced from the particular political economic exchanges among origins and destinations. In the case of Asia, the discussion on regional economic integration can be a relevant context. Scholars paid attention to the relations between regional economic integration and the labor migration. Jones and Findlay (1998) argues that the East Asian international migration system emerged with the economic integration by examining the institutional conditions and economic linkages such as foreign direct investment, trade, aid and personal visits e.g. tourist flows. Martin (2001) sees the growing investment and trade

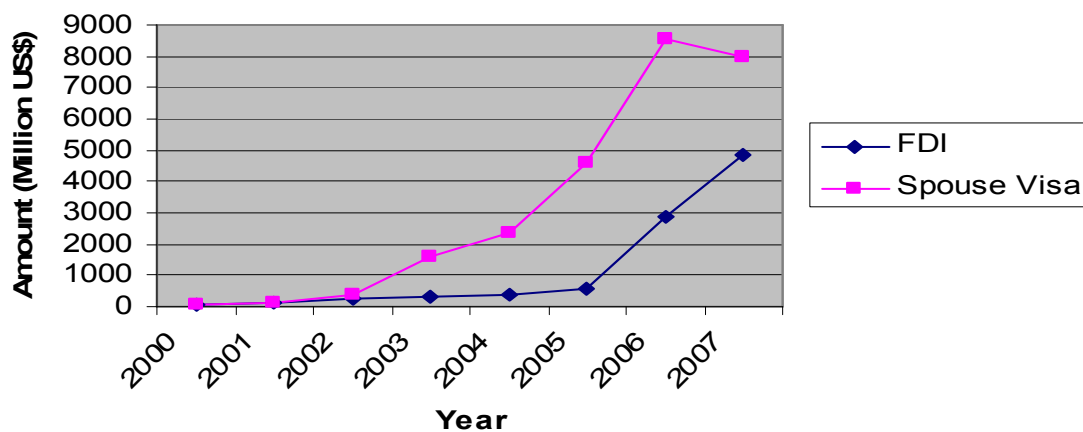
as an indication of Asian economic integration and suggests that the growing labor migration can be one of the pillars of Asian economic integration including trade and investment. Although these discussions are exclusively focused on labor migration, it is useful to understand the structural commonality of the destinations because the identified destinations and origins of labor migration and marriage migration are overlapped, and also the identified categories of linkages are useful starting point. For example, Fawcett (1989) identified four categories of linkages in the migration system: "state to state relations; mass culture connections; family and personal networks; migrant agency activities" and provided tangible examples such as trade and financial flows, bilateral economic and technical assistance; international media diffusion through print, TV and Film; remittance flows and correspondence from migrants; job recruitment and promotional materials and officially channeled remittances" respectively (p.674). In this section, I will explore the potential relation of marriage migration to the investment, labor migration and cultural influence.

### **3.1 Foreign Direct Investment and Cross Border Marriages**

What are the contributing factors of marriage migration? In order that two people marry, it requires a marriage market. By marriage market, I mean a pool of men and women who have potential to marry. How an international marriage market between particular countries was formed, is worth exploring. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is regarded as a key catalyst to new labor flow in the migration system (Jones and Findlay, 1998). Is this explanation between FDI and labor applicable to cross border marriage? Taiwanese literature highlighted foreign direct investment as a reference point from which to explore the reasons for surging marriage between Taiwanese men and Vietnamese women (Wang and Chang, 2002; Hsia 2004). Wang and Chang (2002) suggested that "the globalized capital investment indirectly catalyzed the development of the international marriage market" (Wang and Chang, 2002, p. 95). Hsia (2004) also points out economic dependence between Taiwan and Southeast Asia contributed to the increase in marriage migration by applying World System Approach to international migration. This is an important account and FDI can be an indicator of economic integration of two national economies. However, it requires more explanation to contextualize how they are potentially related. Hsia (2004) attempted to show the link between FDI and marriage migration by laying out 4 types of brokerage practices including match making through Taiwanese investors and staffs in Southeast Asia, transnational married couple, commercial match making companies, Southeast Asian women who work in Taiwan and she noted that the first three of them are relevant to the FDI. Hsia (2004)'s typology of brokers is useful and indeed all of these types exist in the case of cross border marriage in Korea. However, she didn't account how much each of them contributes to the whole cross border marriages. To be fair, it is difficult to have an accurate data of this composition. However, judging from my interview with the brokers of Korea-Vietnam marriages, it seems that the case between Korean investors and staffs and Vietnamese workers occupies relatively small portion within the whole cross border marriage. Second and third cases are more prominent practices, however, it doesn't necessarily explain the direct relations between FDI and increase in marriage migration.

I reviewed the data on Korean direct investment to Vietnam. According to the Statistical Yearbook of Vietnam 2005, Taiwan and Korea are the first and second largest investors in Vietnam in terms of numbers of investment projects (p. 96). The Graph 8 shows a correlation between the FDI and the number of cross border marriages between Vietnam and Korea. The investment began around 1992 when Korea and Vietnam established diplomatic relations. According to the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (2006), 58% of the investment

has taken place since 2002. According to the survey of [Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency](#) (KOTRA) in Ho Chi Minh City, 68.2% of Korean investors engage in manufacturing sectors and 65.5% of them invest in the Southern Vietnam. If there is a relation between Foreign Direct Investment and cross border marriages, my best speculation on how these two are related are as follows: as the exchange between Korea and Vietnam increased, networks involved in the business were established and, based on those networks, other further exchanges such as labor migration or marriage emerged.



Graph 8 Amount of Korean FDI to Vietnam and the number of Spouse Visas  
Source: KOTRA and Korean Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City

I considered the possibility that Korean investors and staffs are involved in cross border marriage as Hsia (2004) suggested as a direct relation between FDI and marriage migration. For example, early investment from Korea to Vietnam was concentrated on labor intensive light industry which attracts female labor. While Vietnamese women work in the factory, they may have married Korean workers or gotten introduced other Koreans. I asked Korean brokers who work in Vietnam and in Korea about this possibility. All of them were very skeptical about this possibility. According to one of the Korean broker in Vietnam(kbv1), there were some occasions that Korean managers marry Vietnamese women or introduce Vietnamese women to their acquaintances but this happened only recently as the marriage between Korean men and Vietnamese women became popular through match making agencies in Korea. Also none of the Vietnamese women interviewee married through this process. Indeed, most of them married through match making agencies. Only one Vietnamese parents mentioned that their daughter met her husband at the factory. If cross border marriage between Korea and Vietnam is predominantly arranged by match making agencies, the question may be the relation between Foreign Direct Investment and match making industry. Other broker (kb2) who identified himself as a frontier of international marriage market between Korea and Vietnam offered a clue of this possibility by noting that he went to industrial area where women workers reside densely in order to find a potential pool of candidates when he started cross border match making business between Korea and Vietnam. FDI may not influence cross border marriage directly but the female population density seems to play a role as a potential pool of candidates or information circulating network of cross border marriages.

### 3.2 Mass Culture Connections and Cross Border Marriages

The influence of FDI on cross border marriage is rather vague and indirect. If FDI contributed to form a certain kind of perception on Korea and Koreans, Korean expat community may have played a certain role. New satellite cities were built around Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Korean expats predominantly stay in these newly developed areas. Their wealth somewhat may have contributed that Vietnamese people associate Korea with modernity. What is more influential than Korean expat community is the media. Some of the literature mentions that Vietnamese women developed the ideal image of Korea through Korean soap opera on TV. In the 1990s, the ownership of TV increased quickly from 2.3 million in 1990 to 3.57 million in 2000 and satellite TV and internet became popular in the 2000s. In 2007, Vietnam has 17.87 million internet users<sup>13</sup> (CIA factbook in 2008). Average 20 Korean soap operas per year have purchased by Vietnamese TV stations since first purchase was made in 1997. Korean soap opera occupies 30-35% of the Vietnamese soap opera market (Yoon, 2004). Indeed, it was not difficult to watch Korean soap opera in the rural area even without satellite TV while I did field research in Vietnam.

### 3.3 Labor Migration and Cross Border Marriages

It may be worth exploring the relations among Korean investment in Vietnam, labor exchange between the two countries, and cross-border marriage. According to the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs in Vietnam, 88,756 Vietnamese migrated to other countries for the purposes of labor during the period 1992–1999, among them 12,336 females. South Korea was the biggest destination country: during the period 1991–1999, 36,107 Vietnamese migrated to Korea for work, among them 8,007 females (Dang *et al*, 2003, appendix).

Marriage migration from Vietnam to Korea started around 1999, nearly a decade after the labor migration. The fact that labor migration from Vietnam to Korea occurred a decade ahead leaves us a possibility of marriages among female Vietnamese migrant workers in Korea and Korean men. Piper (2003) showed that the distinction between marriage migration and labor migration is blurred with the case of Filipina in Japan. Indeed, one interviewee mentioned that some of the female Vietnamese industrial trainees married Korean men after the economic crisis in 1997; however, the total number of marriages between Vietnamese women and Korean men until 2000 was fairly small<sup>14</sup>. To verify the possibility of marriages between Vietnamese women workers in Korea and Korean men, I compared the number of spouse visa attainment and the number of cross border marriage reports<sup>15</sup>. As seen below, there are some differences in numbers between two data. For example, the number of cross border marriages in 2006 is 10,131 in Korean vital statistics but the number of visa attainments from the Korean embassy in Vietnam is 8,529. One speculation is that the difference in numbers may indicate the number of marriages between Vietnamese labor migrants and Koreans. In 2007, 25,659 Vietnamese workers stay in Korea and 4,317 of them are women workers. Also 13,444 Vietnamese students or Vietnamese of other category stay in Korea and 3,278 of them are women (Ministry of Administration and Security, 2007). It is not

<sup>13</sup> “This entry gives the number of users within a country that access the Internet. Statistics vary from country to country and may include users who access the Internet at least several times a week to those who access it only once within a period of several months.” CIA factbook 2008

<sup>14</sup> Vietnamese was classified as miscellaneous before 2000 in most of National Statistical Office publications.

<sup>15</sup> I used the data from the Korean embassy in Vietnam instead of Korean immigration office data because the classification of Korean immigration office data has changed over time.



clear how many of them married Korean men because immigration statistics doesn't offer the data of the number of visa changes. However, given the number of Vietnamese female labor migrants and other visa holders e.g. students in Korea<sup>16</sup>, it is not likely to make up the whole difference. The other speculation is that the difference in numbers is because of the procedure of cross border marriage. Korean men usually go to Vietnam and marry Vietnamese women in Vietnam, come back to Korea and send the necessary documents, and Vietnamese women apply for visa with those documents. According to the interviews, from the marriage to the departure to Korea takes at least two months and sometimes takes a year in Vietnam. Since one person can report marriage without spouse in Korea, a Korean man tends to report marriage in Korea to speed up the process for a Vietnamese spouse attaining a visa. Nonetheless, the number of spouse visa attainments clearly indicates that most Vietnamese female spouses come to Korea through marriage.

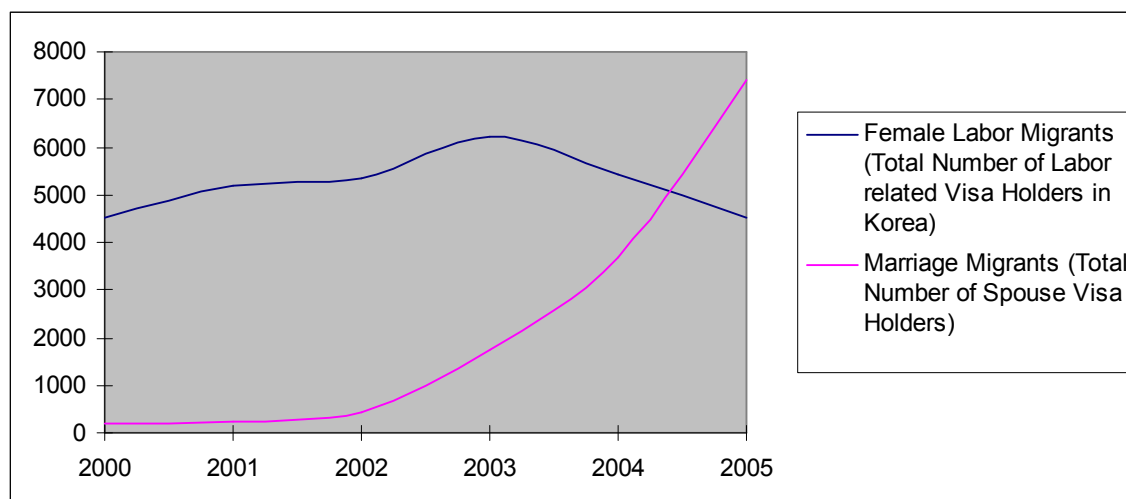
Table 6 The Number of Spouse Visa attainments at the Korean Embassy in Vietnam and Cross Border Marriage from vital statistics

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Reported Number of Marriages with Vietnamese Women	95	134	476	1,403	2,462	5,822	10,131	6,611
Spouse Visa Attainment	83	104	400	1,602	2,389	4,566	8,529	7,956

Source: Korean Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City and National Statistical Office

In addition, the comparison of trends of marriage migration and female labor migration is worth paying attention. While the volume of Vietnamese labor migration to Korea increased constantly, Vietnamese female labor migration has decreased since 2003 after Korean government introduced guest work permit system. It may be because of the nature of guest work permit system. Korean entrepreneurs file their preference of guest workers to the authority and authority mediates the transaction of labor migrants. In many cases, Korean entrepreneurs prefer male workers, the chance of female labor migration has been slimmer since 2003. Interestingly, the scale of marriage migration increased dramatically since 2003. Intuitively, we can claim that Vietnamese women chose marriage migration as the channel for labor migration decreases. However, there are many other factors in the increase of cross border marriages. It hasn't been proved whether there is any causal relation.

<sup>16</sup> Data doesn't indicate their marital status. If we think of general marriage rate in Vietnam, not all of these women are single.



Graph 9 Accumulative Number of Female Labor Migrants and Marriage Migrants  
Source: Immigration Statistics from 2000-2005

Table 7 Accumulative Number of Female Labor Migrants and Marriage Migrants

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Female Labor Migrants (Total Number of Labor related Visa Holders in Korea)	4530	5198	5344	6201	5420	4510
Marriage Migrants (Total Number of Spouse Visa Holders)	180	253	444	1744	3693	7412

Source: Immigration Statistics from 2000-2005

Table 8 Vietnam's Labor Migrants by Sex 1992-2000 (Dang *et al*, 2003)

Year	Total	Female	%Female
1992	816	101	12.4
1993	3,976	538	13.5
1994	9,234	986	10.7
1995	9,593	1,723	18.0
1996	12,661	2,065	16.3
1997	18,469	1,977	10.7
1998	12,197	1,447	11.9
1999	21,810	3,499	16.0
2000	30,000	4,500	15.0
Total	118,756	16,836	14.2

Note: The Number of Labor Migrants is cumulative Source: MOLISA (2000)

Table 9 Vietnam's Labor Migrants to Selected Countries of Destination 1991-1999 (Dang *et al*, 2003)

Destination	Total	Female	Percentage of Female
Japan	9,757	4,117	42.2
South Korea	36,107	8,007	22.2
Taiwan	6,615	3,468	52.4
Singapore	487	3	0.6
Arab	712	234	32.9
Kuwait	2,527	21	0.8

Libya	9670	0	0
Eastern Europe	4,460	1,305	29.3

Note: \*includes Former USSR, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, Poland, and Slovakia

Source: MOLISA (2000)

#### 4. Conclusion

I started this paper by showing the common trends of cross border marriages in Japan, Taiwan, Korea and Singapore and raised a question whether cross border marriage is related to the experience of economic development. I explored some of the demographic and economic indicators including changes in the contribution of agriculture to GDP, labor in agriculture, urban population, women's labor participation and fertility to show the structural similarities and differences among these countries. I also showed the map of investment, labor migration and marriage migration within East and Southeast Asia. Data suggests that there are relations among investment, labor migration and cross border marriages. As noted earlier, the purpose of this research is not exploring the causal relations among these individual factors, rather contextualizing cross border marriages in the regional context, in particular its economic development and integration. Hence, the data is presented at the descriptive level. Indeed, there has been a discussion on economic integration in Asia and the rise of migration system with the focus of labor migration and I found that the traces of my research are incredibly similar to the discussion. However, I didn't start with this theory as a given framework to avoid tailoring the research outcomes, rather I left the possibility open by raising a question.

In the second half of the paper, I provided the details of the scale of cross border marriages between Korea and Vietnam and explored possibly linkages such as FDI, mass cultural exchange and labor exchange, which were suggested by migration system theorists. This is somewhat troublesome process because it is not easy to show the tangible and direct relation between these factors and cross border marriage although the linkage is intuitively recognized. Although I acknowledged that examining each factor's to cross border marriage is not the most feasible way to describe the relations, I attempted to consider each factor individually as detailed as possible before providing a story. Lastly, I didn't consider the match making industry which is one of the major components in this paper because there is another paper is devoted to the emergence of match making industry.