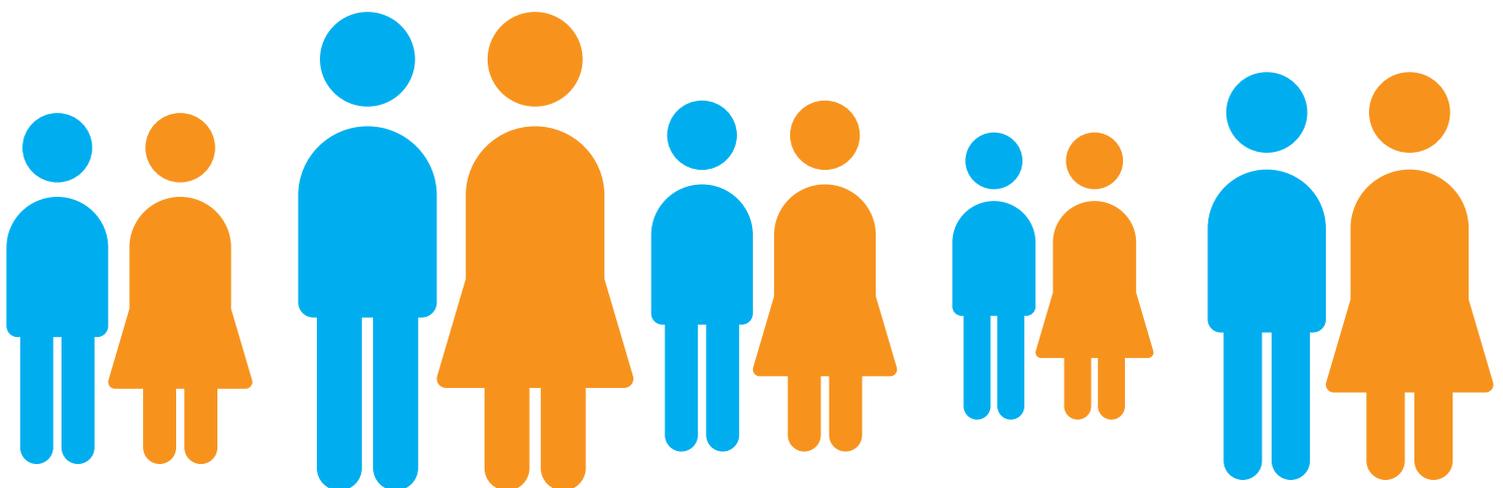




Sino-Vietnamese Cross-Border Marriage in the Context of Sex Imbalance: View from China



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I. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Status of sex ratio at birth in China

The sex ratio at birth (SRB) in China soared from 107.2 boys born per 100 girls in 1982 to 115 in 1994, and peaked at 121.2 in 2004, with certain provinces maintaining a level of 130 male births to 100 female births. The SRB was higher in rural areas than in urban areas, and increased with the birth order. The inflection point of China's SRB was reached in 2009 and then declined for seven consecutive years, reaching 113.51 male births per 100 female births in 2015.¹ During the past three decades, the skewed SRB has led to a severe imbalance in the sex ratio among people under 35 years old in China. Out of China's population of 1.4 billion, there are nearly 34 million more males than females. More specifically, in 2015, there were 704.14 million males and 670.48 million females in Mainland China, with males outnumbering females by 33.66 million.² The absolute number of men of marriageable age is excessive. The national average for youth aged 15-19 is an SRB of 116.1, with 108.5 for those aged 20-24. In rural areas, the sex ratio of the age group 15-24 is much higher than the national average, and that of the age group 20-24 is as high as 111.31. The long-term cumulative consequences of an imbalanced SRB have begun to take shape.

Rural areas are showing signs of change. Given the shortage of women of marriageable

age and the fact that women are more likely to move to developed areas through marriage, Chinese women are moving out of rural areas. A related factor for rural men is the high cost of marriage in recent years, resulting in more and more single men in rural areas suffering from the "marriage squeeze" or imbalance between the number of men and women available to marry. When some men experience difficulties in finding a local wife, they shift their eyes towards foreign brides from underdeveloped or remote areas. In response to the sex ratio imbalance, Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages and the "married-in Vietnamese women" joining husbands in China both at the border and in inland areas have emerged as special phenomena.

1.1.2 History of Sino-Vietnamese marriages

Historically, cross-border marriages in the border areas of China and Viet Nam have been taking place for a long time based on geographic, kinship and ethnic relations and ties. Zhou Jianxin (2002) defined cross-border marriage as a kind of transnational marriage that is rooted in ethnic identity in spite of a variety of challenges, such as illegality.³ After the founding of New China in 1949, China and Viet Nam successively established their own border management regimes. Cross-border marriages between people from the same ethnic group continued to take place,

1. Data from 1% national population sample survey in 2015.

2. National Bureau of Statistics of China: 2015 data on national economic performance.

3. Zhou, Jianxin (2002). Study on Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-Laos Transnational Ethnic Groups and Their Relations. Beijing: The Ethnic Publishing House. [In Chinese].

and were only suspended for a few years from the late 1970s to early 1980s when war erupted between the two countries (Long & Li, 2007).⁴ In the late 1980s, with the initial success of China's reform and opening-up and the warming of bilateral relations, particularly the establishment of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area in the late 1990s, the number of cross-border marriages between China and Viet Nam gradually increased. There is a trend towards single-sex and unidirectional marriage-based migration (Yang & Shi, 2015), which means that in most cases, Vietnamese women are married into China.⁵

In recent years, along with China's rapid economic and social development and the increasing opening-up of border areas, Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages are showing some new features that call for attention: the overall number of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages has been increasing; the geographical range where such marriages take place has been expanding from border towns to the inland areas; and the forms of marriages and channels for getting married are becoming more and more diversified and complicated, affected by many factors such as economy, ethnicity and culture. Some of these marriages are consent-based, but cases of forced marriages and trafficking of women have been documented and reported. The current state of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages and the situation of Vietnamese brides and their family life has become an area of academic inquiry. The present report responds to the pressing need for a better understanding of

the situation, and aims to offer insight that can further inform policy making.

1.2 Research objectives

In 2017, UNFPA initiated a research project titled "Study on Sino-Vietnamese Cross-border Marriage in the Context of Sex Imbalance", supporting research teams in China and Viet Nam, with the following objectives:

- To understand the status quo regarding the lives and development of individuals and families involved in Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriage and to identify their interests, needs and risks through in-depth interviews with persons engaged in transnational marriage;
- To understand the background and service management of current Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages through interviews with government cadres at county, township and village levels as well as persons in charge of relevant departments;
- To explore the connections between high sex ratio at birth and cross-border marriages, and to propose some policy guidance on improving the management of these marriages and the China-Viet Nam cooperation mechanism for international governance.

4. Long, Yao & Li, Juan (2007). National Identity of Children from Transnational Marriages in the Border Areas of Southwest China – The Case of Aijiang Village in Daxin County, Guangxi. *Ethno-National Studies*, 6: 50-59. [In Chinese].

5. Yang, Guocai & Shi, Yuqiao (2015). Research and Outlook on Transnational Marriages in Border Areas. *Journal of The Beifang University Of Nationalities*, 3:118-125.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research team in China selected a county on the border and a rural area within an inland county to conduct fieldwork. Both sites were likely to have high sex ratios at birth, along with a substantial number of married-in Vietnamese women. Eventually, two places were identified: County A of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and County B of Hebei Province.⁶

2.1 Definitions of key concepts

Cross-border marriage used in this report refers to the form of marriage not only existing between the inhabitants of the two countries in the border areas, but also between two individuals of different nationalities, such as cross-border marriages in the interior of China. This research focuses on issues of cross-border marriage within Chinese territory, thus the key term is confined only to those Vietnamese women who married a Chinese man or men living in mainland China. A Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriage could occur or exist in the following ways:

- Marriage could be voluntary or involuntary marriage (which may include forced marriage, marital fraud and trafficking for marriage);
- Marriage could result from legal or illegal migration to mainland China for any other purpose except marriage, but that ended up in marriage to a Chinese man, either voluntary or involuntary;
- Marriage could be officially registered or unregistered.

Consensual marriage is based on equality of men and women, inter alia, the same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent.⁷

Agency-arranged marriage is any marriage in which two people are introduced by an intermediary person. This person acts as the go-between, either free of charge or with a charge, which is how some intermediary persons make a living.

Forced marriage is any marriage that occurs without the full and free consent of one or both of the parties and/or where one or both of the parties is/are unable to end or leave the marriage, including as a result of duress or intense social or family pressure.⁸

Trafficking⁹ is defined by the Protocol approved by United Nations General Assembly resolution 55/25 of November 2000, which focuses on women and children:

6. The two selected sites are anonymous and referred as County A and County B.

7. The definition of consent is referred to in Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly.

8. UN Human Rights Council (2014). Preventing and eliminating child, early and forced marriage: Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2 April 2014, A/HRC/26/22, available at: www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session26/Documents/A-HRC-26-22_en.doc

9. UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2000). Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000. Available at: www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolTraffickingInPersons.aspx.

(a) "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

(b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;

(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;

(d) "Child" shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

Marital fraud is a kind of marriage fraudulently inducing another person to marry. It is complicated and involves many stakeholders; that is to say, both men and women may become victims.

Marriage immigrant refers to any Vietnamese woman who comes into China to marry a local Chinese citizen. She may enter into China with a valid Chinese visa and acquire a valid

identity as a permanent resident; or, she may enter into China with a valid Chinese visa but stay in China for the long-term without valid visa or permanent resident status; or, she may enter into China without a valid visa.

There is some overlap between arranged marriage and trafficking in the sense that a commercial transaction is taking place where a woman is being paid for (sold). The critical issue here is consent. If the woman herself chooses this, then even if money changes hands, she is exercising agency. If not, it is forced marriage or trafficking. At the same time, a market for marriage that involves money changing hands inevitably creates incentives for trafficking as well as for marital fraud.

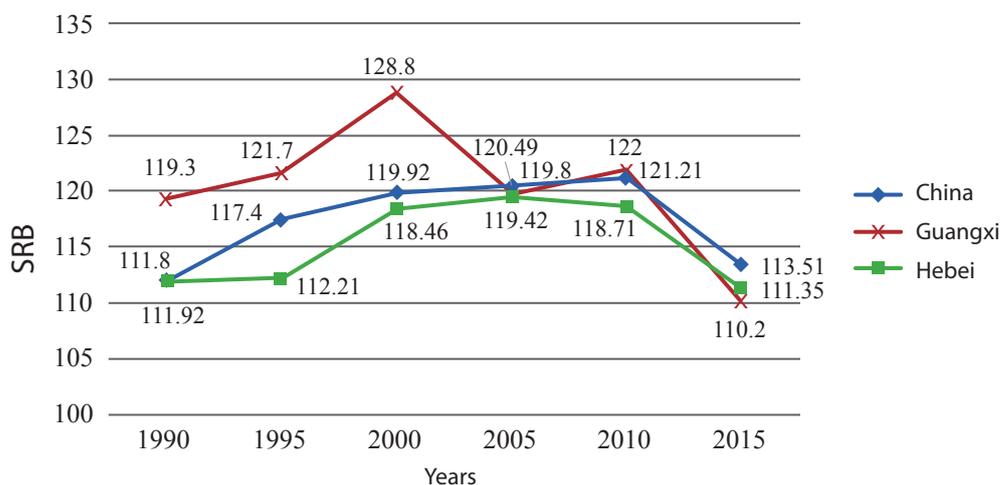
2.2 Overview of the field sites

2.2.1 Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Hebei Province

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is located in the southwestern part of China, and is adjacent to Viet Nam. It is one of five ethnic minority autonomous regions in China. The ethnic minority population accounted for 38.08 per cent¹⁰ of the region's gross population of 48.38 million in 2015. Guangxi implements a relatively relaxed fertility policy. Since the Third National Population Census conducted in 1982, the sex ratio at birth in Guangxi has remained high for more than 30 years, well above the national average. The situation has been characterized by imbalances between urban and rural, imbalances aggravated by the differences of birth order, and imbalances among different ethnic groups. In 2015, the SRB in Guangxi was 110.2 male births to 100 female births. People living on both sides the

10. 2015 Statistical Yearbook of Guangxi Province.

Figure 1: SRB in China, Guangxi and Hebei (1990–2015)



Source: Data from fourth, fifth and sixth census (Long Form) in 1990, 2000 and 2010; data from 1% national population sample surveys in 1995, 2005 and 2015.

long borderline between Guangxi and Viet Nam share the same language and similar folk customs, making cross-border marriages relatively common. After the normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations in the 1990s, and with continuous improvements in the living conditions and educational level of Chinese border inhabitants, the number of married-in Vietnamese women who have moved to China has increased dramatically in the border areas.

Hebei Province is located in North China, with a population of 74.7 million in 2016. The SRB in Hebei Province has long remained high above the normal level, with significant differences between urban and rural, and differences in birth order. The SRB has been declining since 2010 and dropped to 109.82 in 2016, achieving a continuous decline over six consecutive years. In recent years, Hebei has received an increasing number of married-in Vietnamese women.

2.2.2 County A of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

Bordering three Vietnamese counties on the south and governing 19 townships, County A has one national Class-I port, one national Class-II port, four border-inhabitant trade markets and 36 entry-exit points. It is rich in mineral, tourist, climate and ethnic resources. In 2016, its GDP reached RMB 15.8 billion (approximately \$2.38 billion¹¹). The total population of County A is 660,000, with the ethnic Zhuang population accounting for 99.4 per cent. The population of the six border townships account for 18.08 per cent of the total population of County A. People on both sides of the border share the same major language.

Since the 1990s, the number of births in County A has remained steady at 6,000 to 7,000 births per year. The SRB has been slightly higher than the normal since 1991 with fluctuations as high as 113.69 in 2017.

11. Amounts are approximate and based on the 2016 exchange rate of 1 US dollar (\$) = 6.6423 RMB (Renminbi, or the Chinese yuan).

There are a relatively large number of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border families in the border areas of County A, and the public security, civil affairs, and health and family planning authorities have carried out door-to-door surveys and established documentation files. The statistics not only include legitimate Sino-Vietnamese marriages, but also those couples without marriage registration and legal identity. Therefore, it can be said that the collected statistics are relatively complete.

2.2.3 County B of Hebei Province

County B is the hinterland of the Beijing (Jing) – Tianjin (Jin) – Shijiazhuang (Shi) triangle. County B has a total population of 540,000, with Han as the predominant ethnicity. As an ancient site of commerce, County B has strengthened the development of wool spinning, tanning and the fur and leather industry ever since the reform and opening-

up; at its peak in 2009, its fur and leather industry accounted for 30 per cent of the domestic market and 12 per cent of the international market. In 2016, with county GDP reaching RMB 9.6 billion (\$1.45 billion), County B boasted total fiscal revenue of RMB 610 million (\$91.84 million).

According to statistical data on cross-border marriages provided by the Department of Civil Affairs of Hebei Province, as of October 2017, among the top three counties/districts with the highest number of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages, County B showed the highest SRB, which stood at 114.61 male births per 100 female births. Fur merchants often travel extensively to do business, so the geographical range where their marriages take place is expanded. County B has a long tradition of marrying "non-local brides". In the 1950s and 1960s, a large number of women from Sichuan Province married into County B.

Figure 2: Field sites in China: County A and County B



2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted in the two field sites (Table 1) with a combined total of 47 individuals, including persons directly engaged in 14 Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages and stakeholders. Those interviewed include core family members (Vietnamese brides, Chinese husbands and children), extended family members (Chinese parents and siblings), stakeholders (neighbours and old bachelors), and relevant insiders (village head).

Interviews followed the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent and privacy protection. Almost all interviews were conducted in private places such as the interviewee's home. Before the interview, the research team members clarified what they had come for, and only started the interview after obtaining consent. The conversation was recorded with consent of the interviewees. Most interviews were conducted in a private room in order to minimize external disturbances, though interviews with village cadres or insiders were carried out in the village committee office or a public place. Upon completion of the interviews, the recordings were transcribed and analyzed.

Table 1: Basic information about interviewees (47 individuals from 14 families)

Interviewee	Number	Interviewee	Number
Vietnamese bride	14	Husband's uncle	1
Husband	14	Village head or neighbour	6
Mother-in-law	4	Old bachelor	2
Father-in-law	2	Son	1
Husband's brother	3		
Total		47	

2.3.2 Focus groups

Focus group discussions helped obtain information about the attitudes of the local government regarding Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages and the situations of service management. Focus groups were organized in the two field sites, and participants included representatives from the Department of Public Security (responsible for public security and migration management), Department of Civil Affairs (responsible for marriage registration and social relief) and Department

of Health and Family Planning (responsible for population, health and family planning services). The aim of the focus groups was to understand the trends and causes of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages, the attitudes of the government and responses of different authorities, and the relevant policies and services.

2.3.3 Secondary data

The secondary data used in this study was collected from a variety of sources:

- 52 papers were obtained by performing an advanced search in the CNKI database, searching by keywords "Sino-Vietnamese (transnational/cross-border) marriage" and "married-in Vietnamese women" with the type of journal confined to "core journal" and "CSSCI", then manually screening out papers irrelevant to the study or having similar or duplicate content;
- 11 papers in English were obtained by searching the Baidu Scholar research platform with keywords such as "Vietnamese brides" and "cross-border marriage between China and Viet Nam";
- 60 news reports were found using the Baidu Search Engine with such keywords as "married-in Vietnamese women" and "Sino-Vietnamese (transnational/cross-border) marriages", then selecting those published by reliable sources and excluding duplicate reports and reprints, as shown in Table 2.

2.4 Limitations of the study

The study is constrained by certain limitations.

Firstly, the samples analyzed have certain regional limitations. This study is based on surveys carried out in the border area of Guangxi and the non-border province of Hebei, both places where the SRB is high; however, Sino-Vietnamese cross-border families currently exist in almost every province in China. Conducting individual interviews with families involved in cross-border marriage in only two places means that this study is not sufficiently comprehensive.

Secondly, individual interviews could only reach Vietnamese women who married Chinese men and then settled in China. It did not include Vietnamese women who were trafficked to China and later managed to return home, or Vietnamese women who escaped from marriage and their husband's family. Therefore, this study lacks understanding of the motives behind

Table 2: Sources and quantities of secondary data

Source	Period	Screening criteria or keyword	Quantity
News report	2010–2018	Married-in Vietnamese women	54
	2010–2018	Sino-Vietnamese (transnational/cross-border) marriage	6
CNKI	2011–2017	Married-in Vietnamese women	12
	2010–2017	Sino-Vietnamese (transnational/cross-border) marriage	9
Baidu Scholar	2010–2018	Vietnamese brides	11
Total			92

these two types of phenomena and the consequences they have for individuals, families and communities.

Thirdly, the power dynamic may limit accounts given by the interviewed Vietnamese women. There is a possibility that the interviewed Vietnamese women do not feel secure or comfortable enough to disclose stories that involve negative sides to their marriages, especially if their identity or marriage is without legal status. To overcome this limitation, the researchers are highly aware of the importance of protecting the interviewees' privacy and ensuring the confidentiality of the data, and have communicated this information to the interviewees.

Fourth, no court reports on marital fraud could be obtained, though they might offer a more complete picture of incidents widely reported in media. In this research, news reports supplied the data for analysis, including those covering stories of "marital fraud" in which the Vietnamese women and the agencies are reported to conspire and the Chinese men and families are victimized. As these news reports often lack the voice of Vietnamese women, there are limitations in the readers' ability to know whether these women were acting completely of their own free will, or whether they were also trafficked or coerced in the first place. Nevertheless, high-profile media reports suggest that this phenomena is worth being brought into the picture.

Lastly, analyzing the connection between skewed SRB and cross-border marriage requires the support of macro quantitative data. This study mainly focuses on qualitative research and bases its conclusions on the perceptual knowledge and subjective judgment of the authors on this issue. Therefore, the conclusions reached are only limited to the people and places covered in the survey.

III. STATUS OF SINO-VIETNAMESE CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGES

3.1 Cross-border marriage is inevitable given globalization

With the advent of globalization, transnational population movement has become increasingly common, and migration based on cross-border marriages has also increased rapidly. The institution of patrilocality, in which a married couple resides with or near the husband's parents, has resulted in a higher proportion of women's migration to other countries through marriage.

The "mail-order bride"¹² business of introducing Asian women to Western men has been booming since 1975. With the rise of the original Four Asian Tigers and their fast-growing economies, several Asian countries have successively become destinations of foreign brides, notably Japan, Korea and Taiwan. As well, the proportion of cross-border marriages has been on the rise in Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. According to research conducted by Kim Doo-sup (2013), the proportion of foreign brides in wedding ceremonies was as high as 39 per cent in Singapore in 2008, and 32 per cent in Taiwan in 2010. In South Korea, this proportion also rose from 3.5 per cent in 2000 to 10.5 per cent in 2010.¹³ These brides mainly come from underdeveloped countries in Southeast Asia, such as Viet Nam, the Philippines and

Indonesia. Some studies have also pointed out that matchmaking agencies are the main channel through which marriages in this form are arranged. Most husbands in marriages to foreign brides are from middle and lower class backgrounds, and they tend to have low socioeconomic status and live in economically underdeveloped rural areas.¹⁴

The gap in living conditions as caused by the gap in economic development is the main reason for the increase in cross-border marriages in the relatively more developed regions of East Asia. The local imbalance in sex ratio has exacerbated the disadvantaged position of some men in the local marriage market. They have to find their wives in economically underdeveloped countries through "economic leverage". The increase in international contacts and the rise of matchmaking agencies have made this form of marriage possible. The development of cross-border marriages in South Korea and Taiwan suggests that cross-border marriage is a natural phenomenon and an inevitable trend in the process of globalization. Its emergence and development are closely bound up with economic development, population and the immigration chain in a specific country or region. As an advocate for human development, articulated by the Chinese President as building a "community

12. The term "mail-order bride" refers to the practices of transnational marriage matchmaking agencies that use paper catalogues, the Internet or other forms of advertising to introduce a large number of women from relatively less developed countries in Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe to bachelors from well-off countries such as Canada, Japan, the United States and countries of Western Europe. The term today has racial and social implications, i.e. that women are from developing countries and men are from more developed countries.

13. Kim, Doo-sup (2013). Recent Trend in Cross-National Marriage in South Korea: A Focus on Spousal Dissimilarity, Marital Stability and Fertility. *Journal of Guizhou University (Social Sciences)*, 31(5): 1-8. [In Chinese].

14. Chen, Wen (2010). An Analysis of Southeast Asian Brides in Taiwan. *Taiwan Research Journal*, 2: 72-86. [In Chinese].

of shared future for mankind”¹⁵, China must face up to and actively respond to the social, economic, gender and human rights challenges underlying skewed sex ratio at birth and cross-border marriage.

3.2 Overview and characteristics of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages

3.2.1 Constant increase in the total number

China is now transforming from a country exporting brides to a country both importing and exporting brides. In recent years, with the country’s rapid economic and social development and the increasing opening-up of border areas, Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages have increased rapidly and their forms have become more diversified.

Due to difficulties in data collection, there are currently no accurate statistics on cross-border marriages. Some scholars have attempted to obtain the total number of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages, and have estimated that the number of married-in women in the border areas of Yunnan stands at 35,000 to 45,000 (Bao, 2013)¹⁶, and that in Guangxi the number reaches at least 40,000 (Liu, 2011)¹⁷. According to incomplete statistics, there

are at least 112,000 married-in Vietnamese women¹⁸ in border areas of Yunnan, Guangxi, Heilongjiang and so on; in coastal provinces such as Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang; and in inland areas such as Henan, Hunan and Jiangxi – and this number is on the rise. A considerable number of these women are “undocumented persons” who do not have the necessary papers. The actual number of Vietnamese women marrying into China is far beyond the number known by the grass-roots authorities (Zhou, 2008).¹⁹

3.2.2 A trend expanding from the border to the inland

The intermarriage circle has expanded with the advancement of communication and transportation. The origin of married-in Vietnamese women has expanded from the border to the inland of Viet Nam, with women leaving from deeper within the country. Likewise, the residence of Chinese husbands has extended from the border to the rural areas of the inland provinces.

Based on an analysis of news reports featuring Vietnamese brides, the top three provinces with the largest numbers of Vietnamese brides were Fujian, Jiangxi and Zhejiang provinces. This indicates that a large number of Vietnamese women have married along

15. “A community of shared future for mankind” is a concept advocated by Chinese President Xi Jinping. It refers to a strategic governance plan to deal with global economic consequences and risks that cannot be resolved by any single country. The principle of this plan is cooperation and win-win among different countries and the basic two aspects are: (1) the construction of a global development community; (2) the construction of an enduring and stable international order. The contents of this plan are politics, security, economy, culture and ecology. The corresponding objectives are enduring peace, general security, shared prosperity and an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world.

16. Bao, Yueping (2013). Subjective Characteristics and Institutional Dilemma of Cross-Border Marriages: A Case Study of Border Areas in Yunnan. *South China Population*, 4: 17-25. [In Chinese]

17. Liu, Jifeng (2011). A Review of Studies on Sino-Vietnamese Transnational Marriages. *Northwest Population Journal*, 6: 64-68. [In Chinese].

18. The study conducted by Luo Wenqing and Li Juan argues that there are at least 112,000 people, including about 47,000 documented married-in Vietnamese women and at least 65,000 undocumented married-in Vietnamese women.

19. Zhou, Jianxin (2008). Identity Predicament of Vietnamese Women and Their Children in Sino-Vietnamese Transnational Marriages: A Case Study of Zhuang Village in Daxin County, Guangxi. *The Ideological Front*, 4: 1-8. [In Chinese].

the southeastern coast of China. County A as a border area had the most cross-border marriages in 1990-2000 and the number has been going down since then (Figure 3). As informed by the fieldwork, after 2000 the number of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages decreased at the border of Guangxi while the number increased in Hebei, an inland province. Among inland areas, the Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages have emerged increasingly since 2010, and in County B, Hebei, such marriages sprang up particularly in 2013 and 2014. In recent years, in addition to Vietnamese brides, there are also some brides from Laos and Cambodia.

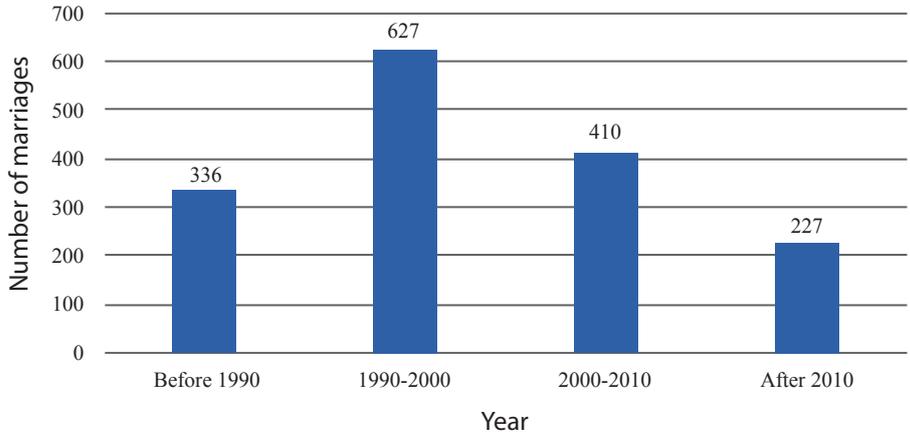
Within County A, the geographical distribution of cross-border marriages has expanded from the border villages and towns to all villages and towns across the county. The dwellings of Sino-Vietnamese couples used to be mainly located in six townships about 0-3 kilometres from the border; in recent years, however, the geographic range has gradually expanded to 19 townships across the county. Currently, the Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriage families in the six townships still account for more than 70 per cent of such families in

County A, yet the expanding trend continues (see Figure 4, where the bar with stripes refers to the six border townships).

Regarding scale, Sino-Vietnamese couples are mainly located in the border areas and dispersed in the inland areas, and thus the two situations are not comparable. There are currently 1,648 Sino-Vietnamese couples in County A and only 74 couples in County B. Although the latter only includes the number of legally registered marriages, the total number in the two situations still differs significantly.

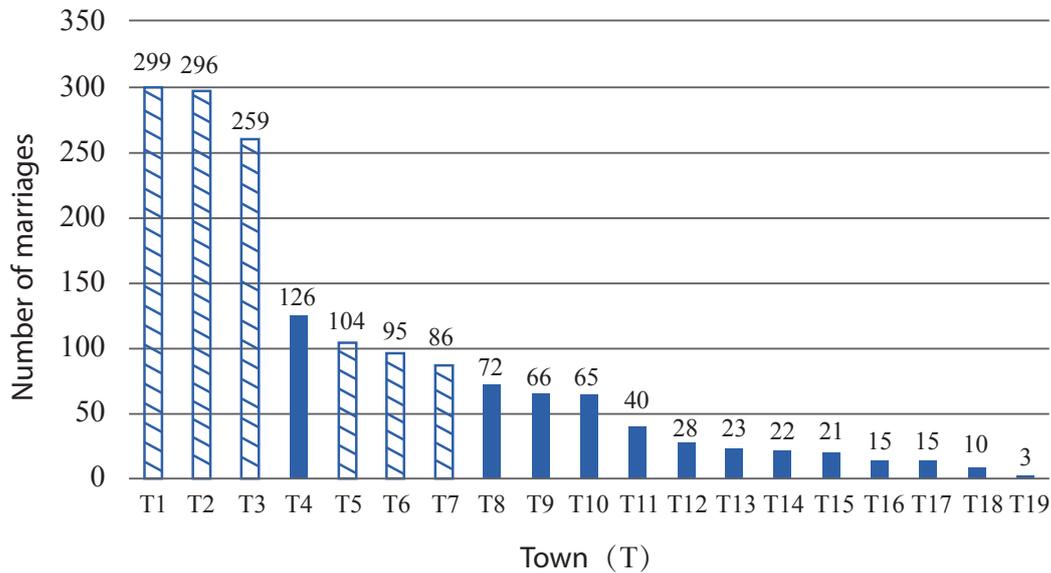
With regard to the origin of the Vietnamese women, the way of entering the marriage plays a role. The Vietnamese brides in County A are mainly from rural areas in Viet Nam at the national border, and the distance between the two families ranges from a 30-minute walk to 10 kilometres. The Vietnamese brides in County B of Hebei Province mainly come from places adjacent to Hanoi City and Ho Chi Minh City, both of which are relatively developed cities in Viet Nam, and in this case the geographical distance of the two families is up to thousands of kilometres.

Figure 3: Number of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages in County A



Source: Reports of Health and Family Planning Office of each town, County A.

Figure 4: Number of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages in each town of County A



Source: Reports of Health and Family Planning Office of each town, County A.

3.2.3 Both of lower education with varying age difference

The Sino-Vietnamese cross-border families share some basic characteristics. Most Chinese men marrying Vietnamese women come from rural areas, are often over 30 years old, married for the first time, with an educational level ranging from elementary school to secondary school. The Vietnamese women are generally younger, aged 20 to 29, never married, and have received little education. In recent years, the number of Vietnamese women above 30 years old who had been married or had given birth has increased gradually.

According to literature, the way of entering a marriage is closely linked to the age difference and the difference in family economic background of the couples. The agency-arranged marriages tend to produce more cross-border families with the basic characteristics "older grooms marrying younger brides" and "double-disadvantaged

coupling". As shown by the fieldwork, however, the men from County B are not all disabled or impoverished and the Vietnamese women marrying into County B also show higher education and better family conditions.

On the whole, the Vietnamese brides who marry into border areas have received less education than those who marry into inland areas. The Vietnamese women marrying into County A come from the rural areas of Viet Nam, with only elementary education or below. The Vietnamese women marrying into County B of Hebei have a higher level of education (some even with college or university education), are generally younger and come from better family economic conditions. The age difference of the couples in the two field sites ranges from two to five years, and does not represent what is described as "older grooms marrying younger brides" in the literature.

3.2.4 Diversified ways of entering a marriage

Consensual love-based marriage

Development of border trade and economic exchanges as well as means of communication and transportation are factors that contribute to consensual-love-based marriage. There are mainly consensual-love-based marriages in border areas. By virtue of geographical advantages, it is easier for men at the border to make the acquaintance of Vietnamese women through kinship, border trade activities and cross-border employment, which is further facilitated by the shared languages and customs across the border. Likewise, Vietnamese women working in the more developed areas in China also have greater opportunities to get to know Chinese men.

A Vietnamese woman married into County A in the 1990s told us that they knew each other when her husband visited Viet Nam. The two families are less than 5 kilometres away. The older family members believed the man was hard-working and agreed to this marriage. A young Vietnamese woman in County A reflected on her marriage saying, *"I don't know why. I just like him. It may be the so-called love."* Before she got married, her mother gave her a necklace and some money for her to buy a scooter.

Vietnamese women migrant workers to more developed regions in China have higher chances of getting to know Chinese men. A Vietnamese woman in her twenties in County A said, *"I got to know my husband when I worked in Guangzhou. After half a year in a*

relationship, we decided to get married. Before that he visited Viet Nam with me to see my parents. My parents were satisfied with him. This was how the marriage was agreed."

Kinship-and-network-based marriage

Matchmaking by friends and relatives is the main path for cross-border marriage in the border areas and even some inland areas. Vietnamese brides already settled in China often introduce their relatives and friends to Chinese men who are ready to marry. Out of the eight couples interviewed in County A, four were matches made by Vietnamese relatives who had previously married into China.

Agency marriage and broker marriage

In inland areas in Viet Nam, due to language barriers and limited knowledge about local geography, Chinese men contact and marry Vietnamese women mainly through "marriage agencies" and "brokers", and they are required to pay for this service.

In this way, in marrying a Vietnamese bride, the marriage agency plays a vital role: first, acting as a go-between and, second, dealing with complicated marriage-related legal procedures. According to fieldwork conducted in County B, money is collected to cover travel expenses to Viet Nam for the marriage interview, living costs, expenses related to the interview and engagement as well as a service fee. In total, the charge is only about half of the cost of marrying a Chinese bride.²⁰

A father escorting his son to Viet Nam for matchmaking said that they visited a marriage agency in Guangdong Province to which they

20. Compared with the heavy burden of betrothal gifts for marrying a local woman, the service fee is within the range of affordability for unmarried men over marriageable age and their families.

were introduced by a friend from Heilongjiang Province. In the end, they stayed in Viet Nam for four months, spent a total of RMB 150,000 (\$22,579) and found the right daughter-in-law. *"The agency is very important. In Viet Nam we could not get to know the Vietnamese girls due to language difficulties but have to rely on the agency. In addition, there are a lot of complex procedures. Without the help of the agency, it would have wasted a lot of time and effort,"* the father explained.

In the agency marriage, the will of the woman and her family also make a great difference. In interviews, Vietnamese women marrying into China said that "parents' will and matchmakers' words" count a lot.

A Vietnamese woman said her mother encouraged her to try a matchmaking agency: *"Before coming to China, I had been working in a clothing factory in Ho Chi Minh City. Afterward, mom said she was not well and worried about my marriage since I was so old (22 years old). She asked me to come back for matchmaking and that's how I got to know my husband. After several months, we got married,"* she said.

Another Vietnamese woman said her mother influenced her choice: *"I married into China primarily because mum believed my now-husband was good. At that time I was studying in the university and my husband was introduced to my family through a matchmaking service. Both my mum and I like him quite much. So I dropped out of the college after two years' of studies and got married,"* she said.

One possible explanation is that since traditionally Viet Nam belongs to the Confucian cultural circle and shares customs and rites with China, Vietnamese parents are more likely to accept a Chinese son-in-law.

Marital fraud

News reports describe "marital fraud". On the one hand, it is reported that Vietnamese brides collude with the marriage agency, engaging in marital fraud in the name of real marriage. Many news stories report that Vietnamese brides have disappeared collectively from rural areas in Hebei, Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangxi and Shandong and have caused extensive damage to the livelihood and development of the men's families. On the other hand, there are some cases in the news contending that Vietnamese brides have left the Chinese families after they get married because they feel they have been tricked by the scam and are unsatisfied with family conditions. Such news reports generally lack in-depth accounts of who the women are, where they come from, how they entered into these marriages, and what their motivations are for leaving. Without more information, it is difficult to draw conclusions about whether the Vietnamese women reported in these cases are indeed engaged in fraudulent marriages of their own free will, or if some of them might be escaping from trafficking. The widespread existence of such reports suggests further study need to be conducted in future, in order to gain more first-hand data including the narratives of both Vietnamese women and Chinese men involved.

Trafficking-involved marriage

There are also reports of trafficking-involved marriages, which are criminal acts on which the police intend to crack down. For instance, on 16 May 2016, the Ministry of Public Security organized and directed the public security authorities in seven provinces and cities of Yunnan, Henan, Shandong and Jiangxi to "close the net" on an anti-trafficking operation for the "2015.09.02 Vietnamese

Women Trafficking Case". The action destroyed a large cross-border and cross-region gang that had trafficked Vietnamese women from the Yunnan border to the inland, in the name of tourism and employment. It is widely understood that in this kind of marriage, matchmaking agencies often play a key role and usually these marriages are the result of collusion by the agencies on the two sides of the Sino-Vietnamese border.

3.2.5 Diversified outcomes of the cross-border marriage

The outcomes and duration of cross-border marriages are strongly correlated with the way the couple entered the marriage, and the expectations and conditions of both sides. Both sides are faced with risks introduced by transnational spouse selection, according to news reports. The woman may find the living conditions of the man's family do not meet her expectations, and it may be challenging for her to adapt to the new country as well as the new family. The man may be faced with the loss of the bride as well as the money paid, ending up with no wife and new financial burdens. Some marriages last only for a short time.

According to the fieldwork, the married-in Vietnamese women tend to settle for long periods in the rural areas of China and seldom move across the country. Stability in residence is the major characteristic of these families. These women reproduce in accordance with the local family planning policies of China, take care of children and assist their husband, living a traditional rural family life. In County A, there are 1,602 couples that have had children, of which 390 couples gave birth to one child and 1,212 couples gave birth to two or more children; in addition, 46 couples never gave birth.

3.3 Survival, development and challenges of cross-border marriage

3.3.1 Living conditions have improved

Family relations

As revealed in interviews, "breadwinning men and homemaking women" is the pattern of labour division in these families. The respondents keep their home very clean and the married-in Vietnamese women and their children are dressed smartly. The Vietnamese women have harmonious relationships with their husbands and undertake most housework including care, they explained in interviews. In many cases, they report that they also get on well with the wives of brothers-in-law and maintain a good relationship with their mother-in-law. Several husbands expressed that ending bachelordom makes them cherish and try to maintain their marriages. Many mothers-in-law mentioned that their Vietnamese daughter-in-law is diligent and family-oriented, and *"even better than those Chinese daughters-in-law"*.

An elderly woman explained that the Vietnamese wife of her brother's son is now in charge of the family finances. *"The Vietnamese wife takes good care of her husband. Local Chinese daughters-in-law may not be able to do the job as well she does,"* she said.

Her words suggest that the gender expectations for Vietnamese wives are similar to the expectations for Chinese wives, and Vietnamese wives may be preferred because they meet the traditional gender expectation for wives, e.g. women should be responsible for the children and should do more housework than men. Such gender norms are reinforced through everyday interactions between husband and wife, and mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

Based on responses by the families interviewed, the families are stable and appear to enjoy a harmonious family relationship. Although patrilocal residence is common, there are also cases of couples residing with or near the wife's parents (uxorilocal residence). A couple who had lived in China for some time then moved the whole family into Viet Nam. This represents diversification among cross-border marriages and shows equality in family relationships.

Family livelihood and development

Family livelihood refers to the earning capacity, assets and external resources obtained by individuals and families that can be used to improve long-term productivity and living conditions, with sustainable development as the ultimate goal. Research shows that family livelihood has a strong correlation with the capacity building of family development; that is, families with stronger development capability usually possess more livelihood capital.

In general, cross-border marriages have improved family livelihood, as well as the well-being of both the family and individuals. The couples in some families support each other and make their fortune through hard work. Births also add happiness to the family. The children have legal status and enjoy free compulsory education, further contributing to family stability. In the research, many husbands expressed satisfaction with their present family life. For example, one husband said that after getting married he could focus on work and leave the family affairs to his wife, and this improved the family's financial situation.

"An important reason why I am happy to live here is that my husband is nice and reliable. In Viet Nam some men like drinking and beat their wives. After coming to China, I feel Chinese

women have higher status," a Vietnamese woman said.

The married-in Vietnamese women in County B of Hebei often take up part-time jobs and establish connections with the people around them, in addition to doing housework and looking after children. They explain that *"staying at home is too dull and boring", "going out to do something is better"* and *"connecting with people can help with language learning"*. By holding a part-time job, these women not only contribute to family livelihood but also to some extent integrate themselves into society.

3.3.2 Social integration of the Vietnamese women marrying into China improved

Community integration in this study mainly includes two dimensions: first, the degree of adaptation by Vietnamese women who have married into China; second, the degree of acceptance by the local Chinese people of these women.

In County A of Guangxi, given the long-existing history of cross-border marriage between China and Viet Nam, people show an attitude "neither for nor against" towards this matchmaking pattern and marriage. Especially for unmarried men over marriageable age, in comparison to the awkward situation of not being able to marry, they prefer to accept a wife from Viet Nam. For many men, to get married is the most urgent task. In an interview, an unmarried man above the normal age for marriage said *he was willing to marry into and live with his wife's family, or marry a divorced woman or a woman with a child or children from a previous marriage or a disable woman; further, he said his family would not point a finger. He would like to marry a Vietnamese woman, but heard that it was hard to find one.*

For married-in Vietnamese women in border areas, thanks to the similar culture, customs and languages, to marry into China may mean to live in a place of better economic conditions only a few kilometres away from home. Barrier-free communication in terms of language provides a foundation for such marriages, as this helps newcomers to quickly adapt to local life. A Vietnamese woman who married into the border area of China said that she *"adapted to the life here very well" and has not felt mistreated*, and *"there is no 'special term' for the Vietnamese in the village. I feel just a member of County A. My children also identify themselves as Chinese."*

Language can be a barrier in County B in Hebei Province. For married-in Vietnamese women moving to a foreign land, speaking the language is an important precondition to start a new life. In interviews, women explained that they could communicate at an elementary level in Chinese, though experienced difficulties in understanding complex sentences. A married-in Vietnamese woman told us, *"I learn Chinese by myself. I like watching TV and from the television I also learn many words. Now I could understand the TV programmes. There's a small market in the village and people often go shopping there. Sometimes I stroll over there and talk with people I know. Taught by my husband and my sister-in-law, I can also shop on Tmall.com and jd.com and I can hail a taxi."* By and large, there are two ways of learning language: one is learning from husbands, relatives and the others around, to improve the speaking; the other is learning through the mass media such as TV and Internet.

It was apparent from the interview process that married-in Vietnamese women identify strongly with their local community and can actively adapt themselves to local life. One

married-in Vietnamese woman interviewed said that the weather did not agree with her when she first arrived in Hebei, but she became accustomed over time. Most women interviewed said they could adapt to local food practices. The husband of a married-in Vietnamese woman said, *"She did not eat dumplings when she first got here. Better now, she can accept steamed buns and dumplings at least."* A mother-in-law said, *"My daughter-in-law now can make local meals, except tasting a little bit sweeter than normative local food."* A married-in Vietnamese woman said, *"I can do some simple Chinese cooking. When my husband is at home, I cook Chinese dishes; if not, I may eat some Vietnamese food with my children."* Although positive words were given by some interviewees, many of them also face various challenges and problems in their everyday life and social integration within their community and the larger society, which will be further discussed in subsequent sections.

3.3.3 Increasing number of registered cross-border marriages

As the number of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages increases, so too does the number of those that are officially registered. The Chinese embassy in Viet Nam said that it authenticated 18,000 no-spouse certificates for Vietnamese women in 2013, a step in registering a marriage that confirms neither party has a spouse.²¹ In the daily work of the government at the grass-roots level, there is active exploration regarding the governance of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages. Lichuan County of Jiangxi, for example, established the Oversea Personnel Administration Services Centre. When Vietnamese brides first marry into the administrative area, the local police station is requested to immediately report to the exit-

entry administration of the county public security bureau; for Chinese citizens who have already travelled or are about to go to Viet Nam for matchmaking, the local police station should inquire about the related details, explain the policies and establish a system of "one person one record" for the Vietnamese brides. In addition, governance entities at the grass-roots level should publicize the relevant laws and policies regularly, and prevent the occurrence of illegal cases including illegal residence and illegal employment.

In County B of Hebei, the Vietnamese brides interviewed had all handled the marriage registration and entry formalities with the help of an agency. They all hold a Vietnamese passport and possess the status of "foreigner in China" or "foreign spouse of Chinese citizen", which places them in a somewhat better-off position than their counterparts in County A. In accordance with China's entry-exit administrative provisions, Vietnamese women marrying into China must go through passport extension procedures with the Baoding City Administrative Service Centre regularly, first once every half year, then once a year, and once every two years after two years. If they need accommodation outside their home or want to visit Viet Nam, they must report to their local police station in advance. As foreigners, they are not entitled to employment, social insurance, most basic social welfare or social security. In County B, they married into China through legal ways with some formal legality and procedural legality. Most married-in Vietnamese women and their families are concerned about when they can obtain their permanent residence permit.

In contrast, in County A as a border area, the vast majority of married-in Vietnamese women are illegal immigrants residing in China and getting married illegally. China and Viet Nam have different laws, policies and regulations regarding inhabitants at the border, nationality and cross-border marriage. Complicating matters, most couples have received little education and have limited understanding about relevant policies. The vast majority of Vietnamese brides in County A are not able to obtain the relevant supporting documents required, or obtain a passport and visa, and they do not enter the country through the legal channels. Therefore, the couples cannot go through legal marriage registration procedures in China. Moreover, Chinese marriages with foreigners can only be registered at the Bureau of Civil Affairs located in the prefectural-level city, which is often a remote distance; since most of the families involved in cross-border marriages cannot afford the registration fees and transportation expenses, this is another contributing factor to the very low registration rate of cross-border marriages. In the whole of County A, only 25 couples have officially settled their marriage certificate.

Vietnamese brides who lack legal standing face many challenges. Since the marriage is invalid and is not recognized and protected by law, these Vietnamese brides not only fail to acquire Chinese nationality after marriage but may also lose their nationality and become stateless persons. Although their children can successfully become registered and acquire Chinese nationality, these Vietnamese women have encountered tremendous difficulties in traveling and daily life and most of them

21. Sina.com (2013). "Vietnamese Bride": risks and thresholds in the marriage market. Released on December 26, 2013. Retrieved via: <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2013-12-26/000229081951.shtml>. [Accessed on May 26, 2018]. [In Chinese].

endure restricted movement and can only stay in the townships or the county.

3.3.4 Strong kinship networks between Chinese and Vietnamese families of origin

In this study, review of the social network mainly includes two dimensions: first, maintenance of the original social network (in Viet Nam) after the Vietnamese women marry into China; second, construction of a new local social network in China.

According to the fieldwork conducted in County A, Vietnamese women tend to more or less maintain their original Vietnamese social network after they marry into China, e.g. returning to their parents' home in Viet Nam, communicating with their Vietnamese family members over telephone or Internet at regular intervals, and inviting Vietnamese relatives to visit them in China. In one interview, a Vietnamese woman marrying into China said that she has brothers and sisters in Viet Nam and *"I return to Viet Nam through a 'side street' at least twice every year (at Spring Festival and Ghost Festival)"* after marrying into China. With no barrier in communication, these married-in Vietnamese women are able to make new friends in the local community and rebuild their social network. In County B, due to the distance from home, married-in Vietnamese women said they travelled to Viet Nam once every one or two years and connected less with the neighbours and co-workers in China, ending up with a limited interpersonal circle.

The establishment and maintenance of a new social network are achievements closely related to personal character and resource endowment; that is, not every Vietnamese woman marrying into China can construct a new social network successfully. Those failing

to construct the new social network tend to have less contact with others, a trend more evident in the inland counties than at the border. Overall, many married-in Vietnamese women have not established strong local social networks, though some in the study had not been in China for long and might expand their networks over time.

In the era of mobile technology, mobile phones and the Internet offer convenient means for the married-in Vietnamese women to communicate with their families in Viet Nam. Young married-in Vietnamese women contact their families and friends in Viet Nam as well as the compatriots in China through social media applications such as WeChat. The married-in Vietnamese women in County B of Hebei have formed a support network of Vietnamese women in China through WeChat. *"I have few friends in China and not even on WeChat,"* a respondent said. *"I have two or three Vietnamese friends, all known in China through a chat group on ZALO (Vietnamese equivalent of WeChat). I have met two of them. They are living well in China and their children have grown up."* Connections with the other married-in Vietnamese women could mitigate the loneliness to some extent and these small groups often have gatherings, but they have not yet formed an organization and could not provide essential help to each other.

3.3.5 Risks to economic and social development in cross-border marriage

Differences between Sino-Vietnamese cross-border families and other local families can cause some difficulties and problems in life and development. These challenges are mainly reflected in villagers' status and welfare, mobility (out for work), national subsidies granted for policy considerations, and children's health and growth.

Economic development risks faced by cross-border families

From the perspective of family economy, cross-border families are not better off than other local families; rather, they tend to be more economically disadvantaged. First, the family of the husband is often not rich and, due to the wedding expenses, there is not much savings left. The couples have to rely on their own income. Second, with regard to personal endowment and social resources, the channels to increase household income for the couples are also relatively limited. Generally speaking, both parties in the marriage have received little education. It takes a long time for the married-in Vietnamese women to learn the Chinese language and adapt to the environment. If she has no legal status, the married-in Vietnamese women cannot go out for work. In comparison, in non-transnational families both husband and wife can seek employment. Even when married-in Vietnamese women with no legal status manage to secure employment of some kind, they can only engage in low-income jobs due to their lack of legal status and lack of language skills.

Thirdly, these families are usually at a disadvantaged position in receiving subsidies and productive resources. Even the Vietnamese women marrying into China legally, due to their status as a foreigner, cannot receive any subsidies eligible to holders of registered permanent residence and ID card, e.g. the minimum subsistence allowance and 0-3km border subsidy. The subsidies are calculated and distributed as per the registered population, with the married-in Vietnamese women excluded. These women are also often excluded in the scope of distribution in the land contract and collective economy distribution in rural areas.

Not included in the scope of social security, these women cannot obtain the economic support in health care, medical service and endowment insurance that is available to others, increasing the financial vulnerability of their families.

Challenges faced by children of cross-border marriages

The children of cross-border marriages are confronted with greater social pressure and intercultural challenges than their peers. The children of both legal and illegal marriages can obtain Chinese nationality and gain access to relevant social welfare and social security. However, within the family, there may be certain intercultural challenges due to the different cultural backgrounds of the parents. Since their mother is a “foreigner”, the children could experience discrimination. If the mother has no legal status, the children may be discriminated against in education, employment and political activities, which may have a negative impact on their personality development and life experience. For instance, in the fieldwork, a young man raised in such a family said that he was most afraid of filling in various forms regarding family background and had used his aunt's information to fill in the column asking about his mother. Ever since he was a young child, he had been the target of other students' conversations, he recalled. In short, children from cross-border families may face greater challenges during their growth.

3.3.6 Criminal acts in cross-border marriages

In addition to fieldwork, this study also collected and sorted the secondary data of online news reports and academic literature. It also summarized the legal practices in Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriage as well

as illegal activities, and the actions taken by the Chinese and Vietnamese governments in response to these problems. This secondary data supplemented the fieldwork. As noted above, using the Baidu and Google search engines, the research team searched news reports published since 2010 with the keywords of "married-in Vietnamese women" and "Sino-Vietnamese (transnational/cross-border) marriages". The content of these news reports often pointed to marital fraud by Vietnamese women and trafficking of Vietnamese women (Table 3). Given the very different nature of marital fraud and human trafficking, those two acts are separately discussed here.

Marital fraud reported in the mass media

In cases of "marital fraud" where Vietnamese women are blamed, news reports often portray a scenario in which a group of women run away collectively after forming "planned and organized" lightening marriages with Chinese men, sometimes "events in serial". The men who are victims of "mercenary marriage", most over marriageable age in rural areas of China, lose both the bride and the money, and often end up in poverty as a result of their "marriage pursuit". Such planned criminal cases involve many parties who speak different languages and often use pseudonyms or aliases. Authorities find it hard

Table 3: Illegal activities in Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages.

Type	Time	Place	Number of Vietnamese brides involved	
Marital fraud	2012	Jiangxi	8	
	30 April 2014	Xingzi County, Jiangxi	7	
	November 2014	Countryside in Handan, Hebei	Hundreds	
	17 April 2015	Liaocheng, Shandong	4	
	13 July 2015	Guanxian County, Shandong	18	
	16 February 2016	Nan'an County, Fujian	17	
Type	Time	Place	Criminal suspect	Vietnamese brides rescued
Trafficking	July-August 2012	Border areas (Sino-Vietnamese, Sino-Burmese and Sino-Laos joint anti-trafficking)	781	1,244
	End of 2013	Fujian	62	28
	30 June 2015	Kunming, Yunnan	18	12
	16 May 2016	7 provinces of Yunnan, Henan, Shandong, Jiangxi, etc.	Unknown	32
	25 Sept 2016 to July 2017	Xinhua County, Hunan	28	24
	January 2018	Kunming, Yunnan	78	33

Note: Only the cases with greater social influence are listed and some cases of trafficking and marital fraud scattered in news are not counted here.

to investigate these cases because of factors including the complexity of the criminal's social networks, the alternating commission of criminal acts by one person and then another within a larger scheme, and the vast spatial and temporal span of the crimes.

However, as stated previously, women engaged in such cases may be acting of their own free will or they may be coerced or forced, and the news reports do not clearly make this distinction. If the Vietnamese women involved act of their own free will, they face legal sanctions from China. However, it is important to be aware that some Vietnamese women may be victims themselves, if they were coerced or forced into the situation in the first place.

Trafficking of Vietnamese women

The review of legal cases that involve trafficking of Vietnamese women revealed that most cases were carried out by cross-border collusion. These victimized women were scammed in Viet Nam and then shipped to China, trafficked through middlemen in different regions with a clear division of work among multiple parties, characterized by cross-border, cross-region and hierarchy. Once such cases were verified, the persons involved would be punished severely. The Vietnamese women involved who were below 18 years old were usually repatriated; those adults who voluntarily stayed in China had to apply for a residence permit. In cases of trafficking, the rights of the Vietnamese women are not protected. If she does not want to marry the Chinese man introduced by the criminal group, her passport can be taken away from her as a threat to force her into agreement.

The impacts and problems brought about by illegal activities in the Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages are two-way and multi-level,

i.e. influencing both the man and the woman, influencing the development and livelihood of individuals and families, and affecting the governance implemented by the community and the local government. The criminal acts in cross-border marriages also present challenges to the exit-entry administration, public health, policy implementation and national security.

3.4 Cross-border marriages and skewed SRB

3.4.1 China's sex ratio imbalance and economic development is the background

China's skewed SRB and marriage squeeze generate the demand for cross-border marriages.

The skewed sex ratio at birth has lasted for almost 30 years in China, with the geographical range expanded from a few areas to most areas and from rural to urban. The skewed SRB has resulted in more men than women aged 25 or younger in China's rural areas, exacerbating a shortage of women in the marriage market. The SRB is estimated to remain high for a long time, and the sex ratio imbalance in the marriage market will continue to be a salient problem.²² In addition to this, migration of the rural population, the traditional "marry-up" culture and the growing cost in the domestic marriage market leave Chinese men in rural areas under the heavy pressure of a marriage squeeze.

On a national scale, the marriage squeeze will last a long time for the men in rural areas. As shown in Figure 4, the sex ratio of the unmarried population in the rural areas of Hebei Province is relatively lower than the national level, while in the rural areas of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region it is significantly higher.

- In Hebei, the sex ratio of the unmarried population aged 20–24 is 147.6 males per 100 females, and rises with the increase of age, reaching 248.16 in the 30–34 age group.
- In Guangxi, the sex ratio of the unmarried population aged 20–24 is 158.73 males per 100 females, and rises dramatically to 414.15 in the 30–34 age group.

Both areas were selected by the research team for the present study because they are likely to have high sex ratios at birth, along with a substantial number of married-in Vietnamese women. However, the areas are quite different. Guangxi is located in the relatively remote mountainous district in the southwestern border of China, which is relatively less economically developed compared with Hebei Province, an inland area. Guangxi is a typically vulnerable area regarding the issue of the marriage squeeze.

Migration is another factor, in addition to China's current population sex structure. The migration of the rural population contributes to the problems faced by men at marriageable ages in rural areas in the marriage market. According to the 2016 Migrants Population Dynamic Monitoring Survey Data, among the rural migration population, Hebei flowed out (including trans-provincial outflow and outflow of the province) 3.91 million people of which 31.67 per cent are women; meanwhile, Guangxi flowed out 3.73 million people of which 46.1 per cent are women. The same year, Hebei flowed out 200,000 unmarried women aged 18–19 and Guangxi 490,000.²³ In

the outflow population of Guangxi, there are a significantly larger proportion of women, and relatively more women at marriage age and childbearing age.

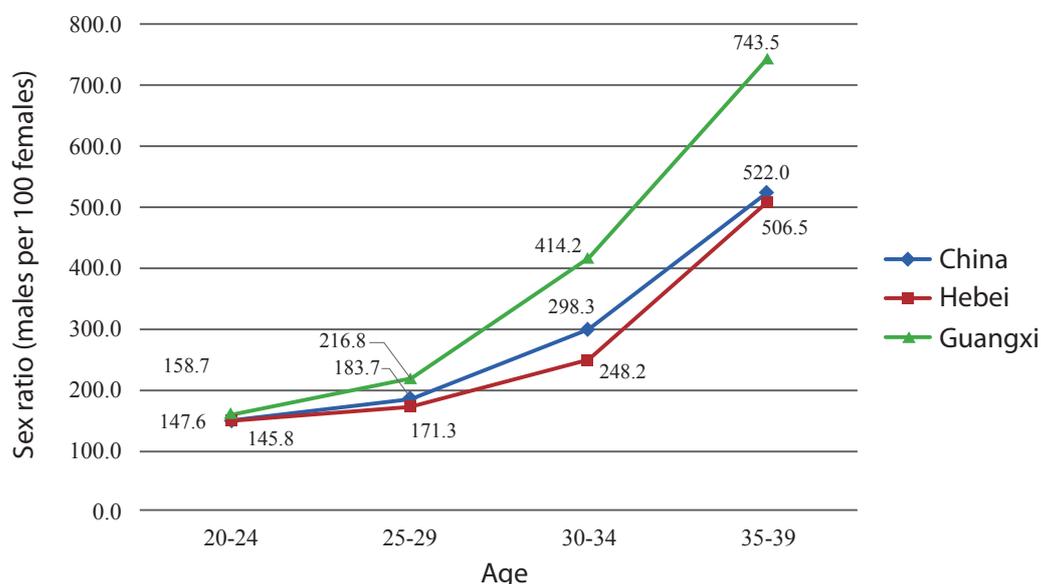
Women have long been the major group engaged in marriage migration. Influenced by the culture of patrilocal residence and expectations that they should “marry up”, young women from rural areas, while working or studying away from home, are more likely to get married outside of their hometown and marry a man with better conditions. The traditional gender division of labour requires the man to undertake more responsibility for carrying on the family line and providing for the elderly. Men from rural areas tend to stick to their homeland, and working-out in another place is considered a temporary arrangement, especially for men of average abilities. Therefore, men are more likely to remain in rural areas, while their female counterparts are more likely to migrate to urban areas. In this way, the number of women in the rural marriage market decreases, which further limits the marriage prospects of men in rural areas.

A less visible factor in the marriage squeeze is cost. In the background of the shortage of women in the rural marriage market, the cost of marriage has risen considerably in rural areas. In the countryside of China, this cost is mainly borne by the man's family. As a result of economic development, currency inflation and the shortage of women in the rural marriage market, the marriage cost in rural China has risen rapidly since the 1990s. In County A, before 2000 to marry a local woman

22. Guilmo, C. Z. (2012). Skewed Sex Ratios at Birth and Future Marriage Squeeze in China and India, 2005–2100. *Demography*, 49(1): 77-100.

23. Department of Migrant Population, National Health Commission (2017). *Frequently-used Statistics Handbook for China's Migrant Population 2016*. Beijing: China Population Publishing House. [In Chinese].

Figure 5: National sex ratio of unmarried population aged 20–39 in rural areas compared with Guangxi and Hebei (Male = 100)



Source: Data from 1% national population sample survey in 2015; data from 1% Hebei provincial population sample survey in 2015 and data from 1% Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region population sample survey in 2015.

usually cost less than RMB 10,000 (\$1,208) and since then has increased tenfold to RMB 100,000 (\$12,078). In County B, the man should have this amount to cover betrothal gifts and the wedding ceremony, plus a house and a car valued at nearly RMB 400,000 (\$48,320²⁴). In any year, the Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriage cost is lower than that of marrying a Chinese bride. In County A, it was a few thousand Yuan in the 1990s and has risen to between RMB 20,000 to RMB 30,000 (\$3,011 to \$4,516). In County B, the cost of marrying a Vietnamese woman is between RMB 100,000 to RMB 150,000 (\$15,053 to \$22,579²⁵).

Ultimately, a certain percentage the of Chinese male population will inevitably be forced to be single, due to the combined

effects of age, regional and urban-rural disparities, economic level, education, and population dynamics including migration and the skewed sex ratio at birth. The marriage squeeze has a lag-behind effect. As time goes by, the population of different birth cohorts enters the marriageable age, and being forced to be single may become a serious social problem.

Past experience shows that the imbalance in the sex ratio in the marriage market in some regions (e.g. due to outflow of women) can often be compensated by women's inflow from less developed regions (e.g. the western women go into the more developed eastern regions)²⁶. However, with China as a whole, the current imbalance in the sex ratio across the country is too severe to cope with through

24. Based on the exchange rate of 2000, 1 US\$ = 8.2797 RMB.

25. Based on the exchange rate of 2016, 1 US\$ = 6.6423 RMB.

the internal population flow alone. Moreover, this will inevitably cause rural men in remote and impoverished areas to be caught deeply in the marriage squeeze.

From the family perspective, the marriage squeeze will result in impaired family welfare. When men have no access to the relative security of marriage, the family welfare and pension of their parents and siblings are also affected. In addition, the marriages of middle and lower class men will become less stable. Against the background of imbalance in the sex ratio, the family division of labour and family roles will face potential challenges and the distribution of family resources will experience profound changes, which will have an adverse effect on the survival and development of women family members and support for the single elderly man. From the perspective of regional development, the marriage squeeze will aggravate imbalances in regional development and regional poverty, which may further lead to severe social economic problems.

In this context, unmarried men in rural China have all lowered their requirements for their marriage partner and increased their tolerance towards marriage. They are even willing to accept non-traditional forms of marriage such as uxorial marriage, marriage with a divorced woman with children from a former husband and cross-border marriage. In China's rural areas, the increasing number of married-in foreign women have made a positive contribution to reducing people's prejudice about cross-border marriages. Just as the respondents interviewed in Lixian County of Hebei said, marrying a Vietnamese bride is not different from marrying a Sichuan or Guizhou

woman.

The skewed SRB first showed up in border areas, due to their relatively underdeveloped economy. These areas have always been the hardest hit by the marriage squeeze and have a "geographical advantage" in cross-border marriages. However, as the skewed SRB expands to inland areas, some inland provinces, even the counties with better economic conditions such as County B, are experiencing an increasingly severe marriage squeeze. It is precisely because the marriage squeeze is becoming a common phenomenon in rural areas that the demand for cross-border marriages has gradually emerged in various parts of China. Expansion from the border to the whole country is the trend in Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages.

China's economy attracts foreign women through marriage migration

China has become an important part of the global economic system and is showing leadership in the economic development of the Asia-Pacific region. Economic factors are an important driving force of women's marriage in the marriage market of all countries in the world.²⁷ Marriage is an important way for women to improve their living conditions and to achieve social mobility. Therefore, along with the rise of China's economy, not only the Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages, but also more and more Sino-Myanmar marriages, Sino-Laotian marriages and marriages with women from other countries of Asia and the Pacific as well as other regions will become an important feature of the marriage market in the near future.

26. Jiang, Quanbao, Li, Xiaomin, Li, Shuzhuo, & Feldman, Marcus (2016). China's Marriage Squeeze: A Decomposition into Age and Sex Structure. *Social Indicators Research*, 127(2), 793-807.

China's inland economy has been growing and the Vietnamese women marrying into inland areas of China believe the Chinese families are in general economically better off, according to research for this study. In the process of matchmaking, the family property, savings and financial earnings of the male are important criteria considered repeatedly by Vietnamese women and their families. Their marriage choice appears to be rational and pragmatic. Similar to what is happening in South Korea and Taiwan, Chinese men have become sought-after by Vietnamese women for cross-border marriage due to their relatively better economic situation.

3.4.2 Cross-border marriages influence sex ratio imbalance in both countries

Imbalance in the sex ratio exists in both China and Viet Nam. The consequences of this imbalance have already emerged in China, where the marriage market has been out of balance. Viet Nam is on its way to developing a skewed SRB trend, and the imbalance in the marriage market is not obvious yet. This situation highlights the impacts of Vietnamese women in the Chinese marriage market. To some extent, the arrival of Vietnamese women might ease the marriage squeeze faced by the unmarried men over marriageable age in China. The large-scale presence of Vietnamese brides in some areas is actually a sign of China easing the risk of sex ratio imbalance through cross-border marriages. However, if a large number of Vietnamese brides flow into China, it will form a marriage squeeze for Vietnamese men in the Vietnamese marriage market in

the future, which means this strategy may not be sustainable. Therefore, the Vietnamese women's cross-border marriage behaviour may aggravate the consequences of sex ratio imbalance in Viet Nam and have an impact on that country's regional stability and long-term development.

27. Kashyap, R., Esteve, A., & García-Román, J. (2015). Potential (Mis)match? Marriage Markets Amidst Sociodemographic Change in India, 2005–2050. *Demography*, 52(1), 183-208.

IV. GOVERNANCE ON SEX RATIO IMBALANCE AND CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGES

4.1 Status quo of skewed SRB governance

4.1.1 History of governance

The Chinese Government has promulgated a series of relevant laws and regulations to restrict fetal sex diagnosis and sex-selective artificial termination of pregnancy since 1986. By 2000, the Chinese Government had become more aware of the complexity and multi-level nature of the sex ratio imbalance as well as the importance of governance in building a harmonious society and realizing sustainable social development, and thus it proposed the "comprehensive governance" of the sex ratio at birth and tried to fundamentally solve the problem of an imbalanced sex ratio. Since 2003, the National Population and Family Planning Commission of China has taken the lead and all relevant departments have been taking part in a nationwide "Care for Girls" campaign to comprehensively address the problem of the high SRB. After a period of hard work, China's SRB governance has achieved preliminary success, and the rising SRB has basically been contained. In 2009, China's SRB fell by 1.11 percentage points compared with the previous year. This was the first decline since the "11th Five-Year Plan" and in subsequent years the country has seen seven successive drops.

The governance of China's SRB is a complex and systematic project. The strength of a single department or measures in only one field cannot achieve the goal of containing, reducing and stabilizing the

sex ratio imbalance. Therefore, it is very important to make the working mechanisms supplementary among various fields, to establish and monitor each working mechanism, and to encourage cross-department collaboration. After years of exploration and practice, China's "Care for Girls" campaign, based on the strong support of relevant government departments, has become a strategic platform for the governance of SRB and thus the country has developed a new mode of SRB governance known as the "three-wheel drive" model.

On the strategic platform of "Care for Girls":

The strategic platform of the "Care for Girls" national action provides the space and opportunity for all departments to take part in the governance work pertaining to the high sex ratio at birth.

On the social development system: The governance of China's high SRB and the improvement of China's gender mainstreaming process and social development system are mutually influenced and promoted. China is now in an important period of social transformation. SRB governance can promote economic and social development on the basis of the comprehensive settlement of population problems, and thus promote the realization of social transformation.

In the field of public policy: China's SRB began to rise slowly from 1980. At that time, this problem did not receive sufficient attention from the government. During the period from 1990 to 1995, the government began to recognize the existence of problems

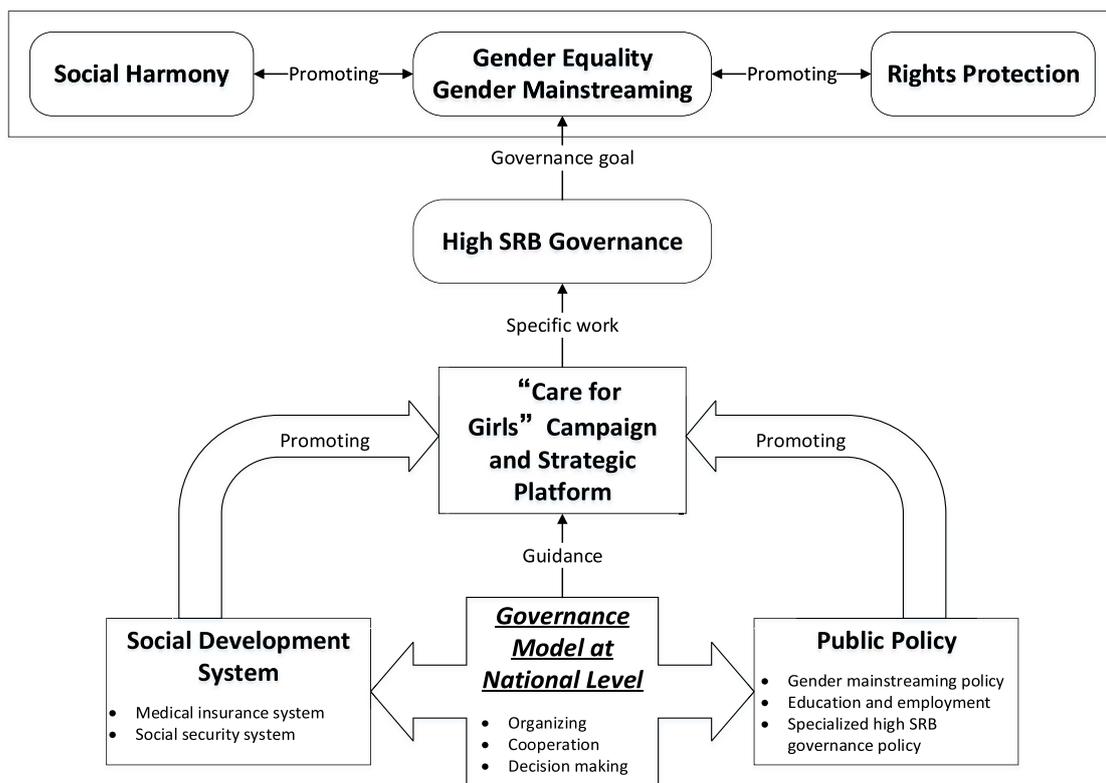
and promulgated a series of regulations and measures of governance, such as the Law of the People's Republic of China on Maternal and Infant Health Care released in 1994. Since 1996, the government, academia and civil society have been working together to improve the living environment of girls. The government has adopted a series of active policies and legal measures in response to the low fertility rate at that time.

4.1.2 Cross-border marriages are overlooked in SRB governance

Although current governance regarding the imbalance in the sex ratio has shifted attention from the causes and phenomena themselves to the consequences, governance

of the consequences still has many limitations. Regarding cross-border marriages, for example, current governance has not yet clarified the relationship between the consequences of the sex ratio imbalance and cross-border marriages, and has carried out work with the two separated. However, linking the two issues makes sense. Efforts to regulate cross-border marriage legal procedures, to ensure individual rights in cross-border marriages, to improve cross-border marriage services, and to provide multi-channel marriage opportunities for unmarried men over marriageable age can inspire new ideas for the control of the consequences of the sex ratio imbalance and offers great benefits for SRB governance at a crucial stage.

Figure 6: China's "three-wheel drive" model for curbing skewed SRB



4.2 Governance of cross-border marriages

4.2.1 Cross-border marriage registration and the residence and employment of Chinese citizen's spouse

The Nationality Law of China has no clear prescription on the specific conditions and procedures for the naturalization of foreigners or stateless persons, and many foreign women in cross-regional (transnational) marriages cannot acquire Chinese nationality, or experience huge difficulties when trying to do so. According to the *Measures for the Administration of Examination and Approval of Foreigners' Permanent Residence in China* issued by China's Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of Foreign Affairs in August 2004, as the legal spouses of Chinese citizens, foreign women are eligible to apply for permanent residence in China when the marriage has lasted for up to five years and they have been residing in China for five years, no less than nine months per year, and have stable income and accommodation in China. Therefore it can be said that there is still some threshold for married-in Vietnamese women to obtain a permanent residence permit.

China has been imposing rather heavy restrictions on the employment of foreigners. The Social Insurance Law of the People's Republic of China stipulates that foreigners who have been employed in China are eligible to access social insurance in accordance with the provisions of this law, but it is not compulsory. The married-in Vietnamese women who have not yet been naturalized are not entitled to employment or social insurance, and some of the most basic social welfare and social security supports are eligible only to the holders of permanent residence permits, which may leave these women in difficult situations in daily life.

According to Chinese law, it is explicitly forbidden to run a cross-border matchmaking agency. Chinese marriages with foreigners can only be registered with the civil affairs bureau at the prefectural-level city. In order to deal with the tide of cross-border marriages that have emerged in recent years, the marriage registration departments in some areas have decentralized the authority of cross-border marriage registration to the county/district or even the sub-district level, and have specifically created a "cross-border marriage" service window.

4.2.2 Combating the illegality involved in cross-border marriages

The mercenary marriage, marital fraud and human trafficking involved in cross-border marriages has attracted the attention of the Ministry of Public Security. In response to the increasing number of cross-border marriage-related cases in China, the Chinese public security authorities have begun to deploy and draft laws and regulations about cross-border marriages, and have also expanded their cooperation with the Government of Viet Nam in the trafficking of women.

Around 2010, the mainstream media such as Xinhuanet.com, Sina.com and Tencent reported that a large number of Vietnamese brides had fled in the eastern provinces of Guangdong, Shandong and Zhejiang. The Ministry of Public Security and local public security departments began to investigate, and ultimately sentenced and imprisoned the Chinese nationals participating in cases that involved sex trafficking; they also repatriated the involved Vietnamese nationals according to the law. Some married-in Vietnamese women in Suzhou City, Anhui Province, chose to stay in the Chinese families, and the local authorities respected their decisions and

provided assistance in the processing of immigration and marriage registration based on humanitarian considerations and the family will. Some of the criminals also swindled in the name of cross-border marriage to profit from the agency service fee. For example, the Guangdong police uncovered a case in 2017 in which the offender recruited and disguised Chinese women as Vietnamese brides to commit fraud and was finally arrested by the police.

In addition to convicting the offenders involved in human trafficking and running illegal agencies, the Chinese public security authorities have started to address the needs of cross-border marriages. For the first time, in 2017, Taizhou City of Zhejiang Province convicted Chinese male residents who paid for Vietnamese brides on charges of “buying trafficked women”. This set the legal baselines for the local cross-border marriage environment and gradually incorporates the management of transnational marriages into the bounds of the law in order to address the existent needs of such marriages. At the same time, crimes committed by the transnational families are also complex. For example, cases were reported by Sohu.com that a married-in Vietnamese woman in Guangdong murdered the Chinese family and that a married-in Vietnamese woman in Sichuan committed intentional assault. However, as no details were disclosed in the reports about the reasons why these crimes were committed, the motivations of the women remain unclear. Chinese public security authorities are currently dealing with these cases as criminal cases in China, and they have not been raised to the international level as extraditable offenses.

China and Viet Nam first attempted to jointly manage transnational marriages in border

areas like Yunnan, China. In 2016, the Ministry of Public Security set up a special investigation team to supervise important transnational cases involving trafficking of women in Yunnan Province, and the team travelled to Viet Nam to investigate and collect evidence in accordance with the foreign affairs procedure. The Ministry of Public Security also organized case coordination meetings, and the Vietnamese investigators were also engaged in the investigation and evidence collection. This was the first time that Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriage cases were handled through international government cooperation. Currently, however, cooperative governance is limited to the investigation and conviction of sex trafficking and fraud cases; the issues showcased by this emerging transactional marriage market have yet to be addressed.

4.2.3 Room for improvement in governance of cross-border marriages

China and Viet Nam have a long history of cross-border marriage in various forms. At present, there are at least three different types of marriages:

- First, there are a large number of de facto marriages in the border areas, for which the Vietnamese women without legal documents have lived in China for a long time;
- Second, there are legally registered cross-border marriages formed through agencies or other legal channels that have been increasing in the inland areas for the past few years. Most Vietnamese women comply with the Chinese laws, except when they have their own legitimate claims. This form of marriage is likely to continue growing in the future;

- Third, there are marriages in which the Vietnamese women are trafficked or traded illegally to China by outlaws.

At present, the policies and measures to promote the healthy development of cross-border marriages are not perfect, in light of the principles of tailored treatments and rights protection. The channels for legalization of a large number of illegal de facto marriages at the border are still absent.

The cross-border marriage market requires standardized regulations for many reasons, including the following:

- Illegal cross-border marriage agencies continue to exist.
 - Policies on the social life, employment and security of the increasing number of foreign spouses legally marrying into China have lagged behind.
 - Policies and programmes are not addressing the special needs of cross-border marriage families and the married-in women.
 - The existing governmental management system does not specifically target cross-border marriages, affected families or the married-in women.
 - No special agencies or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) serve this group, i.e. to protect the rights of this group or provide necessary support for their integration into Chinese society.
 - Current governance gives more weight to criminal law sanctions than guiding public opinion.
- Many current news stories about cross-border marriages are related to cases of sex trafficking and marital fraud, resulting in the association of cross-border marriages with crimes in public opinion and increasing the social stigmatization of cross-border marriages and the families and foreign brides.

V. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages encompass many dimensions and they involve multiple subjects, such as the men and women of the marriages as well as their families, governments of both China and Viet Nam, grass-roots organizations and civil society. It is a multi-level and complex research proposition and an area that needs overall, strategic and mutually-beneficial policy measures and suggestions at the international level.

5.1 Improve the international cooperation system in the regions of Sino-Vietnamese community

Viet Nam is a friend and a neighbouring country of China and also an important country for the "Belt and Road Initiative" development strategy, having close contacts with China in history, culture, politics and economics. The recommendation is to increase the two country's cooperation in cross-border marriage management, skewed SRB control and other population and development issues; strengthen regional harmonization and coordination; and form a system for international cooperation in the region.

Guangxi shares a border with many provinces in Viet Nam. The cross-border brides do not only carry the nature of international marriage, but more importantly, the normalization of cross-border marriages formed through kinship networks of the same ethnicity. Therefore, it is of crucial importance for China and Viet Nam to form a regular and stable international cooperation platform for

cross-border marriage governance. At the same time, Guangxi and the border provinces of Viet Nam can appropriately explore the opportunities for regional government cooperation, for instance, initiating certain breakthroughs at the township level, organizing regular consultations and township information exchanges on cross-border marriage issues, or sharing grass-roots administrative information about cross-border marriage population flows at the township level.

5.2 Implement special international cooperation programmes to combat cross-border human trafficking

A significant number of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages involve human trafficking. The cross-border trafficking has formed an illegal Vietnamese bride buyer's market in China and also an illegal Vietnamese bride seller's market in Viet Nam. Therefore, China and Viet Nam should implement special international cooperation programmes and cooperate with various sectors such as the immigration office, the public security bureau, border defense administration, grass-roots civil administration and community residents committees to jointly combat the sex trafficking chain in both the buyer's and seller's market, by regulating the legal matchmaking agencies on the one hand, and combating human trafficking in the cross-border marriage market on the other.

5.3 Policy recommendations on skewed SRB governance

5.3.1 Promote gender mainstreaming

The recommendation is to strengthen women's education on gender equality and health based on the principle of gender equality, promote changes in the traditional culture of reproduction through advocacy, increase investment in social security for groups that are disadvantaged by the imbalance in sex ratios, and provide strong financial support for the governance of girls' survival issues and the implementation of benefit-oriented social policies.

5.3.2 Protect the lawful rights and interests of the stakeholders in the cross-border marriage families

In-depth studies should be conducted with the foreign married-in women and with unmarried men over marriageable age to know their number and understand their living conditions, improve their personal development abilities and protect their basic rights. Law-related education must be strengthened for men in rural areas in China.

5.4 Design measures to protect the rights and interests of Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriage families

5.4.1 Lawmaking: seek local breakthroughs in Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriage management

It is difficult to register most Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages in a timely manner, for a number of reasons including the financial situation, long distance to the place of registration and overall lower education level. The recommendation is for the prefecture-

level administrative units in the border areas to design some local policies tailored to the local economic and social contexts, and to explore ways to establish a "long-term residence permit for marriage" system or "marriage green card" system for border residents, which can be used as a proof of identity for married-in Vietnamese women to handle social security before formal naturalization. In this way, it is possible to systematically govern the right of residence, right to work, application for household registration, healthcare services, welfare and education of married-in Vietnamese women, to ensure their rights and dignity. It will also help to better integrate these women into their local communities. As a further step, regulate the Sino-Vietnamese international marriage agency service, to reduce the exploiting acts of agents, increase transparency throughout the cross-border marriage market and facilitate the legalization of marriage immigrants.

5.4.2 System building: improve marriage migration management and services for Vietnamese women

On the whole, there is a serious shortage of social integration, social communication and social development opportunities for married-in Vietnamese women. The current system lacks awareness of basic rights. In response to the national and local protection strategies for vulnerable groups, border cities should actively set up special protection clauses and services for cross-border brides so that they could access equality-and-free-will-based services in daily life, healthcare, employment and social security, to reduce the negative effects of their foreign status, language barriers and limited social network and to integrate these women into their local communities as soon as possible.

5.4.3 Community management: improve social networking among married-in Vietnamese women

Due to the barriers in language, environment, culture and social networking, married-in Vietnamese women often form small groups. This creates challenges to their social integration and increases risks related to national information security and public security at the border. Therefore, the grass-roots community should try to establish a local social network integration mechanism for married-in Vietnamese women, such as villagers' meetings or women's meetings, and actively motivate the married-in Vietnamese women to participate in daily public affairs. The limitations of social networking have also limited employment opportunities. Such problems can be solved through local industry development, collective migration for employment and other channels.

5.4.4 Economic development: guarantee the livelihood development of cross-border families

Many of the multinational families in the border areas are poor and vulnerable. Therefore, the recommendation is to promote the livelihood development of cross-border families by dint of poverty alleviation promoted by the state. As for the means, target setting and investment, the suggestion is to set up a special poverty alleviation working mechanism for cross-border families in the border cities; alternatively, include these families in the existing poverty alleviation mechanism, thereby promoting the livelihood development of the cross-border families. First of all, improve their living conditions at the material and economic level to ensure that they can be included into the national poverty alleviation scope and quickly recover from financially difficult situations.

5.4.5 Social security: ensure the social security and welfare of cross-border families

Because they lack legal marital status, cross-border families in the border areas of Guangxi generally cannot access the existing national social security and welfare support in areas such as healthcare, employment and old-age care. The recommendation is for the grass-roots towns and villages to use the "long-term residence permit for marriage" or "marriage green card" as the proof of identity for cross-border brides and families to access local social security and public welfare. In order to be consistent with the national cross-border marriage and naturalization system, the social security application using a "long-term residence permit for marriage" or "marriage green card" can be limited to local towns and villages, so as to realize the basic social welfare of the cross-border families and meet the needs of the family members in de facto marriages in healthcare, employment and old-age care.

5.4.6 Health services: incorporate the marriage and family service of the Sino-Vietnamese cross-border families into regular work

Married-in Vietnamese women in cross-border families generally have little access to family planning and reproductive health services, and the daily work of the Health and Family Planning Committee rarely includes this group. This is due to the lack of legal marital procedures and the absence of legal status in the social security system. Therefore, the recommendation is for Guangxi local government to come up with special programmes and utilize resources in its daily work to provide family planning and reproductive health services for the women in cross-border marriages and families. At

the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the health knowledge education and family-building education for the foreign brides, so that they can quickly adapt to and be integrated into the local culture and community.

5.4.7 Inter-generational equity: guarantee equal opportunities for the children of cross-border families

Although they do not have problems with their nationality and identity, the children of cross-border families have experienced, in school and in employment, discrimination based on the "illegal status" of their mothers. Therefore, the grass-roots community, villages, schools and government functional departments such as the "Caring Office" should actively explore the situation of children in local cross-border families; implement specific help and care programmes; and publicize the culture of marriage and family harmony in schools, companies and public opinion guidance. Such efforts will weaken the "foreigner" stigma of married-in Vietnamese women in cross-border marriages and families. Also, address as soon as possible the language communication problems of married-in Vietnamese women through language training, so that they can participate in their children's learning, life and social interaction and reduce discrimination against these children.

5.5 Support the living and development of married-in Vietnamese women

5.5.1 Regulate Sino-Vietnamese matchmaking services and combat the social stigma against the female marriage immigrants from Viet Nam

It is important to regulate the agency services

for cross-border marriages. Regulation could reduce the exploiting acts of the agents; increase the transparency of the cross-border marriage market; and facilitate the legalization of marriage immigrants. It is suggested that the Chinese civil affairs department or the industrial and commercial department gradually correct the unjust profiting of the cross-border marriage agencies, allow the cross-border marriage system to return to the right track, and ensure the marriages are no longer based on the buyer and seller relationship, but based on mutual liking and personal connection. At the same time, it is suggested that the government can positively publicize the images of married-in Vietnamese women and establish some models of cross-border marriages and families, so that the numerous families with Vietnamese brides would no longer bear the stigma of mercenary marriage.

5.5.2 Provide support in establishing support groups among married-in Vietnamese women

After marrying into China, traditional networks of interpersonal relationships can suddenly shrink or even fall apart, and the collective activity of the married-in Vietnamese women will become the main platform for them to overcome homesickness and strengthen friendships. At the present stage, most groups supporting the married-in Vietnamese women in the society are spontaneously established. It is suggested that the grass-roots government at the local level actively guide these groups; attach them to the leadership of various government organizations for activities such as the Women's Federation, family planning association, Youth League committee, etc.; and enrich the social resources of married-in Vietnamese women to achieve the accumulation and development of social

capital. This could enhance social integration and improve public understanding.

5.5.3 Promote the social integration of married-in Vietnamese women and their families

After marrying into China, Vietnamese women are expected to perform their role in the family, yet they may also face the problem of social and cultural incompatibility in a new social and cultural environment. They should be encouraged to participate in life adaptation training to improve their cultural adaptability. First, provide cultural adaptation and advocacy training, primarily to address language, listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as values, ways of communication, ways of dealing with people and ethics. At the same time, ensure that training also includes the family members, especially the mother-in-law and husband, so that they learn about Vietnamese culture so as to enhance mutual understanding. Second, provide education services such as literacy classes for married-in Vietnamese women to improve their cultural adaptability through language learning.

VI. CONCLUSION

This report is the first exploratory study to address cross-border marriage between China and Viet Nam in the context of the imbalanced sex ratio. In addition, this study discusses the current issue of the “Vietnamese brides” in the perspective of public service and policy improvement to protect the well-being and human rights of Vietnamese brides and their families. There is another comparative study that addresses the same issues from the perspective of Viet Nam. The present study is the “China report” and specifically talks about the situation in border areas and the inland of China, and related policy issues.

Based on interviews and secondary data, the present study describes the situation of marriage, living, employment and family life among Vietnamese women who married Chinese husbands and moved to join them in China. The preliminary results reveal that the sex imbalance in China is connected with the increased number of cases of cross-border marriage, especially in inland areas of China, where the marriage markets experience evident consequences of the skewed sex

ratio, with more men than women. Overall, foreign brides are benefitting from significant improvements regarding their family lives and policy-oriented services; however, they are still experiencing challenges in social integration and employment. The report concludes that the policy system regulating cross-border marriage registration is in urgent need of improvement, in order to make the procedure more simple and convenient. The results from secondary data indicate that the Governments of China and Viet Nam have cooperated to reduce illegal issues, including marital fraud and human trafficking of Vietnamese women. However, more international cooperation is recommended, including support for improving legislation that strikes at criminal activity and the services that supply the market for international marriage and visas. This study also suggests policy efforts to ensure that Vietnamese brides live better, feel more comfortable in China, integrate into local communities and have their human rights protected.

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