

“We no longer fear brides from afar”: Marriage markets and gendered mobilities in rural Vietnam

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Abstract

Since the late 1990s, Vietnamese women’s participation in international marriage migration has garnered academic and media attention. In contrast, internal marriage migration, a key driver of overall internal migration flows, has received scant consideration. In this paper, we examine marriage and migration dynamics in four rural communes that have “lost” significant numbers of their single women to international marriage and gained brides through internal migration. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2012 and 2013 in four villages and analysis of local marriage registration data and census data, this article examines internal and international marriage migration. We probed marriage migration vis-a-vis marriage markets, internal labor migration and gendered mobility patterns. The increased diversification of marriage with respect to spousal places of origin indicates a reconfiguration of marital norms and practices and changing social constructions of a desirable wife and daughter-in-law. Results underscore the role of labor migration and interprovincial networks in expanding mate-seeking circles among rural youth and in altering marital norms. Female international marriage migration is one piece of a larger puzzle whereby various forms of mobility are intertwined with changes in the realms of gender, family and marriage.

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Keywords

marriage, family strategies, marriage market, marriage migration, Vietnam, Asia

Introduction

Marriage migration – the international emigration of women who marry a foreign man and subsequently settle abroad – has generated a significant amount of research in recent years, particularly in the Asian context (Bélanger et al., 2011; Bélanger and Flynn, 2018; Chung et al., 2016; Davin, 2007; Douglass, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2014; Fresnoza-Flot and Ricordeau, 2017; Grillot, 2010; Lee and Klein, 2017; Piper and Lee, 2016). The literature has analyzed dynamics of individual women entering this process, showing both their agency and vulnerabilities, conjugal and family relations of international couples, the role of intermediaries and marital agencies in matching couples and commodifying marriages and the impact on women's communities of origin. The backdrop of this research includes regional socioeconomic inequalities, transnational business networks and global patriarchy.

Because this body of research situates analyses within the scholarship on international migration, studies tend to single out cross-border marriage migration as an independent phenomenon from other forms of migration, including internal migration (Piper and Lee, 2016). The isolation of international marriage migration from other related social processes has its corollary in media coverage and political concerns. In Vietnam, marriage migration sparked a new anxiety around the future of single men in Vietnam, particularly in communities of origin where many women have elected to marry a foreign man. How will single men find wives? Who will take care of single men in their old age and who will continue their family line? Will unmarried men become a threat to the nation's stability and peace? These questions, which echo the ones about the female deficit in China and India, isolate the phenomenon of international migration and ignore other local dynamics, including internal marriage migration and changes in marriage and gender relations.

This article analyzes migration and marriage dynamics in four villages that have "lost" significant numbers of young women who married foreign men and then emigrated abroad as immigrant spouses. Using a combination of micro-level census data and village marriage registration data, we show how the emigration of young women is accompanied by a decline in village endogamy and a diversification of marital strategies, including the immigration of brides from other provinces. Complementary qualitative evidence provides insight into the expansion of interprovincial networks developed through internal migration. Moreover, interview data reveal changes with respect to marital norms and local perceptions of potential

brides. In sum, this article argues that a simplistic demographic logic – the shortage of single women – fails to account for the transformation of marital and gender systems underway. It also calls for a better integration of marriage and labor migration, on the one hand, and internal and international migration, on the other, as related and intertwined phenomena.

Marriage, internal migration and international migration

This analysis first draws on conceptual reflections of the need to jointly analyze internal and international migration. As many scholars have pointed out, the study of migration continues to be characterized by a dichotomous view of migration categories, including regular vs irregular, forced vs voluntary, temporary vs permanent and labor vs marriage (King, 2012; Wimmer and Schiller, 2003). Among them, the division between internal and international migration is particularly structuring (King and Skeldon, 2010), as it prevents theory development and a full understanding of the role migration plays in population change (Salt and Kitching, 1992), as well as related social, political and economic changes (Castles, 2010). Research calls for the need to address various types of migration simultaneously and more comprehensively in order to highlight their relationships and go beyond current analytical categories that circumscribe our gaze and vision (Smith and King, 2012). Various studies that undertake the task of jointly analyzing internal and international movements show that international migration may be an extension of internal migration. Economic analyses indicate that these population movements derive from the same causes, including uneven development, unequal job opportunities and differentials in income and living standards between regions and countries (Adepoju, 1998; Hardy, 2005; King and Skeldon, 2010). This critical literature, however, largely focuses on economic migration and fails to include other motives for migration, including marriage and other family-related forms of mobilities.

This analysis is also informed by studies of marriage, gender and migration. Piper and Roces (2003) argued that women's cross-border migration in Asia was too narrowly defined as being either for labor or marriage and that both needed to be considered in conjunction. Particularly relevant are works on internal migration and marriage in China. Fan and Li (2002) adopt a spatial approach and highlight the interplay between micro-level strategies and the macro-structural context of transitional China. They emphasize trade-off negotiations in spousal attributes when single men consider brides from less desirable geographic origins. Meng (2012) analyzes the relationship between internal labor migration and marriage in China and shows that the declining marriage rates in rural China are attributable to young single women's mobility creating a "bride drain." The practice of hypergamy (socio-economic and residential location), patrilocal residence and young women's increased

mobility together create a tight local marriage market for men. Davin's (2007) analysis puts the high sex ratio and its consequences on the marriage market center stage while also taking into account trade-off negotiations in attributes and location.

Bossen (2007) underscores the relationship between labor and marriage migration in the widening marriage market. Her original contribution further suggests taking into account distance in the understanding of the impact of marriage migration for women and gender equality. By incorporating distance in her analysis, she rejects the dichotomous categories of "insiders" and "outsiders" and rather attempts to approach degrees of "outsideness" and "foreignness" to a given village. She develops a typology of three categories of marriage: (1) village endogamy, (2) "close" village exogamy and (3) marriage migration or "distant" exogamy (over 20 km is considered distant). She also underscores the potential of cellphones (for maintaining ties with natal families) and the value of previous labor and migration experience in increasing young women's potential to exercise their agency and rights as marriage migrants (Bossen, 2007: 115). In sum, literature on China proved particularly relevant for understanding the case of Vietnam, although the Chinese literature does not discuss how patterns of international migration may, at the local level, interact with internal migration patterns and marriage choices. Moreover, the literature on China emphasizes high sex ratios at birth as one factor for the territorial expansion of marriage markets; in the case of Vietnam, as we will see below, community-level high sex ratios among young adults result from cross-border marriages of local women.

Gendered mobilities in Vietnam

Prior to the late 1980s, urbanization and rural to urban migration were controlled through a strict household registration system (Desbarats, 1987), but some peasants circumvented and negotiated state policies (Hardy, 2005). The transition to a market economy, initiated with the Doi Moi policy in 1986, contributed to a very significant increase in spontaneous internal migration flows. While neither facilitated nor recognized officially, internal migration became a key driver of economic growth in order to respond to a very high demand for labor in some regions (Dang et al., 1997; Le et al., 2012; Phan and Coxhead, 2010). Between the 1989 and 2009 censuses, the number of internal migrants increased from 2.4 million to 6.7 million; these figures represented 4.5 percent and 6.5 percent of the total population, respectively. More migrants migrated long distances in 2009 than 10 and 20 years earlier, a trend revealed by the growth of the subcategory "interprovincial migrants." In 2009, the majority of migrants (59.2 percent) were concentrated in urban areas, and the largest proportion (41.3 percent) of them was found in the

southeast region. Migrants, in general, are younger than those who did not migrate (Coxhead et al., 2015; Dang et al., 2003; General Statistical Office (GSO), 2015; Nguyen et al., 2008).

As of 2018, Vietnam's registration system continues to exist and access to social rights depends on one's place of official residence. Unregistered migrants cannot access subsidized housing, health care services or education for their children. Research shows how this situation creates precarity for internal migrants who are at risk of being "undocumented" in their own country. Nationally representative statistical sources on migration in Vietnam only account for registered migrants (Pincus and Sender, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2015) and, thus, fail to include the most vulnerable ones, including short-term, circular or seasonal migrants and those without any registration (Dang et al., 2003; Nguyen et al., 2015). In the mid-2000s, according to some observers, estimates for unaccounted migrants range from 12 to 16 million (Marx and Fleischer, 2010), potentially tripling the official count of internal migrants.

An additional feature of Vietnam's internal migration over the past decades is its gradual feminization. Between 1989 and 2009, census data show an increase in women migrants relative to men. In 1989, men dominated internal migration; the gap narrowed in 1999, but men still accounted for the majority of migrants. Since 2009, women have represented more than half of the internal migrants (Le et al., 2012). In terms of direction (rural to rural, urban to rural and rural to urban), women represented nearly two-thirds of all migrants who moved from rural to rural areas (Le et al., 2012) and more than half of rural to urban flows. Data from the 2014 Viet Nam Intercensal Population and Housing Survey show the same trend: of the 5.7 million internal migrants estimated by this survey in 2014, 59 percent of them were women (GSO, 2015). Part of this feminization trend can be explained by the high demand for young female workers in the rapidly developing industrial zones (Marx and Fleischer, 2010) and the informal sector (Resurreccion and Ha, 2007). In this context of employment and mobility opportunities for women, Guilмото and De Loenzien (2014) show that migration can be a source of empowerment but that it may also increase women's vulnerability.

Research on internal migration in Vietnam focuses on economic and labor migration, and marriage-related migration is rarely discussed. Moreover, the lack of analysis of marriage as a component of internal migration dynamics ignores the fact that marriage migration may simultaneously involve family formation and economic motives (Lavelly, 1991; Bossen, 2007). Women who move for marriage are rarely considered emigrants or immigrants in their own right, but rather wives, mothers or daughters-in-law, limiting the analysis to the confines of kinship, gender and parental relations (Bélangier and Tran, 2011; Bossen, 2007). In addition to women forming the majority of internal migrants, the international migration of women has also increased since the

early 1990s with new opportunities for labor abroad and marriage to foreigners. Marriage with Vietnamese ethnic men from the diaspora (Thai, 2008) or men from East Asia (Bélanger et al., 2011; Bélanger and Tran, 2011) or China (Grillot, 2010) increased as a result of expanding networks and the growing marriage industry, both domestic and transnational (Bélanger, 2016a). Among labor migrants, women accounted for about 40 percent of all migrants enrolled in export labor migration programs as of 2012 (MOLISA, unpublished data provided to authors).

In sum, literature and analyses of secondary data on recent migration has focused on international migration related to labor or marriage or on internal labor migration. Internal marriage migration has been ignored to date, despite its significance both for internal mobility patterns and for gender and family issues. Moreover, research examines internal and international migration separately, yet fails to examine the dynamics between the two phenomena. In this context, this paper aims to fill the gap by examining links between internal and international migration at the local village level, with a focus on how changes in the realm of marriage and gender are both sources and consequences of these intertwined trends.

Factors of internal migration

While most research to date has focused on internal labor migration, the Vietnam Household Living Standard Surveys (VHLSS) of 2012 and 2014 both indicate that the main cause of internal migration is family-related (Table 1). In 2012 and 2014, the proportion of individuals who migrated to get married or to form a new household is greater than that of individuals who say that work is the first reason for migration.

As indicated by Table 2, the data of the 2012 VHLSS migration special module also indicate that marriage migration entails high employment rates among migrants who move primarily for family reasons. Among marriage migrants, the proportions of “employed” and “unemployed/not working” remain relatively stable when we consider the six months before departure, six months after departure and the last six months before the survey, that is between 85.0 and 87.4 percent.

Among marriage migrants only, Table 3 indicates that the majority of both men and women who migrated internally primarily for marriage were employed before and after migration. This suggests that the great majority of female marriage migrants find themselves in employment as non-local brides who married internally to move to the locality of their husband’s residence. Moreover, the overall proportion of women in employment also follows an upward trend.

Table 1. First reason for departure from the household, by year of departure: Vietnam, 2012, 2014.

Reason for departure from household	2012 (<i>n</i> = 1,188) (%)	2014 (<i>n</i> = 1,323) (%)
For work	21.9	22.7
To get married	22.2	24.2
To form a new household	35.3	34.3
To study	2.9	2.9
To go with family	14.1	12.0
Other	3.5	4.0

Sources: VHLSS datasets 2012 and 2014; Authors’ calculations, weighted data.

Table 2. Employment and marriage rate among migrants, by type of migration: Vietnam, 2012.

Migrant’s employment situation	Work (<i>n</i> = 1,717) (%)		Marriage (<i>n</i> = 2,496) (%)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Working in the last 6 months before leaving the household	59.6	17.9	85.0	11.0
Taking up work in the new location within the first 6 months after arrival	94.4	3.2	86.1	11.8
Working during the 6 months preceding the survey	94.3	4.2	87.4	11.9

Note: Category “still studying” was not presented.

Source: VHLSS dataset 2012; Authors’ calculations, weighted data.

Fieldwork and data

This analysis is part of a larger research project conducted in the villages of origin of international marriage migrants. It aimed to study the various impacts of this marriage migration flow at the local level, with special attention to local marriage markets, by capturing determinants, experiences and representations. These different approaches together shed light on social change by providing a nuanced analysis of the relationships between various

Table 3. Employment rate and migrant employment situation among married migrants, by sex: Vietnam, 2012.

Migrant's employment situation	Men (<i>n</i> = 532) (%)		Women (<i>n</i> = 1,964) (%)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Working in the last 6 months before leaving the household	94.2	4.3	82.5	12.8
Taking up work in the new location within the first 6 months after arrival	96.0	2.9	83.3	14.2
Working during the 6 months preceding the survey	94.8	4.8	85.3	13.9

Note: Category "still studying" was not presented.

Source: VHLSS dataset 2012; Authors' calculations, weighted data.

factors and their associated local social constructions. We conducted ethnographic fieldwork in four villages located in two districts (two villages per district) of the provinces of Hai Phong (120 km north of Hanoi) and Can Tho (185 km south of Saigon) between March and December of 2012. These villages, known for having "lost" large numbers of young women to international marriage, were selected by district-level authorities who provided field access. We maintained contact with key village informants and followed up on some cases by phone in 2013 and 2014. In the southern communities, international marriage migration was particularly prevalent in the 1990s, while it rose sharply in the northern communities in the 2000s. The localities studied are in provinces considered "focal economic engines" of their respective region; for this reason, they attract internal migrants more than adjacent provinces in the same region. In fact, both provinces had a positive net migration rate between 2004 and 2009, although they are located in larger administrative regions with negative net migration rates. They are, thus, poles of attraction for young workers from neighboring provinces and even regions. The southern villages are in a district categorized as urban, so the subdivisions are referred to as wards, while the northern villages are located in a district categorized as rural, so the subdivisions are called communes. A ward and a commune include several villages; our unit of analysis is thus the village.

The analysis relies on various sources that provide triangulation on the dynamics studied. First, to analyze local sex ratios and the presence of immigrants from other provinces in the studied localities, we analyzed micro-level census data from 2009 for the two districts where the villages studied

Table 4. Interviewee’s relationship to family head and type of families: Provinces of Hai Phong and Can Tho, 2012.

Relationship to family head	Types of families						Total
	Son married to wife from another province	Son married to village wife	Family with son(s) too old to marry	Family with unmarried daughter(s)	Uxorilocal families	Divorced men, ex-wife married abroad	
Parent	9	5	16	3		1	34
Son	9	3	17			2	31
Daughter	1	0		3	1		5
Daughter-in-law	9	4					13
Son-in-law					3		3
Total	28	12	33	6	4	3	86

Source: Authors’ fieldwork data.

are located.^{1,2} Second, we analyze local marriage registration data provided by the People’s Committee of the four localities studied for the 2005–2012 period. These data are of excellent quality and offer information for a total of 2,634 marriages for the northern locations and 8,297 for the southern ones. A typology of marriages by type inspired by Bossen’s (2007) categories was created to examine various combinations of marriage according to spouses’ place of origin (local, other province, other country). Third, we analyze the relationship between international and internal migration and its impact on marriage based on our ethnographic data and 86 in-depth interviews that were recorded and transcribed in the Vietnamese language. The 86 interviewees were purposely sampled to offer a variety of situations and adaptations (Table 4) that emerged as relevant during the fieldwork. We started the fieldwork by interviewing families with sons considered too old to marry; during this process, we discovered that some of these families had resorted to bringing in a wife from remote provinces and thus we actively recruited them. As the fieldwork evolved, the following categories were also included: families with a son married to a village wife (endogamous marriage), families with unmarried daughters, families with a son-in-law from another province (uxorilocal) and cases of divorced men whose ex-wife remarried

¹For census purposes, in Vietnam, individuals are categorized as migrants in relation to their place of residence five years earlier. Depending on migration distance and according to the administrative divisions of the country, individuals may be categorized as 1) intra-district (change of commune), 2) inter-district, 3) interprovincial or 4) international migrants.

²These data are unpublished and were prepared for the authors upon request to the General Statistical Office (GSO) of Vietnam.

a foreign man. With these six subsamples, the interviews provided a diversity of experiences and viewpoints.

For the present analysis, we mostly draw on interviews from families with a single son considered difficult to marry and families with a bride from another province. Since the qualitative analysis complements the quantitative analysis, we focus on general patterns.

The selection of specific villages for their relevance to the research project entails limitations because it introduces a certain heterogeneity. The two villages in the northern province of Hai Phong, however, offered similar contexts in terms of socio-economic profiles despite being of different sizes with respect to their total population (see Table 5). The two villages of the southern provinces of Can Tho differed geographically since one (village 1) was located on an island linked to the mainland by a ferry. This feature could explain why, among the four localities, this village has the lowest proportion of international marriages (see Table 5). Nevertheless, an active network of actors of the international marriage migration industry existed in this locality, as in the others (Bélanger, 2016a), and the emigration of young women who married abroad altered the local marriage market. This study's main limitation is thus that it focuses on localities that have experienced high rates of female out-migration due to international marriages, so the results cannot be extrapolated to Vietnam in general. Despite this limitation, these communities provide insightful results about processes that may spread or occur at a slower

Table 5. Demographic characteristics of four villages in the provinces of Hai Phong and Can Tho, 2009 census.

Provinces	Can Tho (south)		Hai Phong (north)	
Localities	Village 1	Village 2	Village 3	Village 4
Total population (2009 census)	18,201	29,617	6,842	11,274
Sex ratios (M/F) all marital statuses				
20–24	95	111	146	150
25–29	111	118	130	115
30–34	104	114	109	104
Sex ratio (M/F) among single men and women (district)*				
20–24	171		213	
25–29	184		334	
30–34	169		247	

Note: *Data from the 2009 census by marital status are not available at the commune level. We present the district-level data where the villages studied are located.

Source: 2009 Census Data; data prepared for authors by General Statistical Office.

pace in the rest of the country. Given the domino effect of migration and marriage markets, as shown in this paper, these communities have a strong effect on others because they draw in brides from other localities.

Taken together, these various sources of data explore the relationships between migration and marriage from different angles: the analysis explores the patterns and determinants of changes in marital patterns as they relate to migration and other social changes, while it also unpacks local representations of and experiences with these changes.

Results

Sex ratios for men and women (for all marital status and single status) were calculated from the micro-level village/ward data of the 2009 National Vietnam Census.³ Results reveal a surplus of men to women for specific age groups 20–34 (Table 5). Sex ratios by age groups are particularly high in village 3 with ratios above 130 (130 men for 100 women) for age groups 20–24 and 25–29. The age group 20–24 is the most likely to show a high ratio in both villages of the north (146 for village 3 and 150 for village 4). In the south, village 2 indicates higher sex ratios than village 1. Overall, the south has a smaller surplus of men relative to women in these age groups. If we only examine the ratios among singles, we must rely on district-level data. We note among single men and women very high surpluses of men in the north. Overall, these data suggest that endogamy or close village exogamy would be difficult considering the much higher number of single men relative to single women in the districts studied. Among singles only (district-level), the ratio was 157 single men for 100 single women in the northern district and 138 for the southern one (data not shown). For specific five-year age groups, the ratios were the highest among individuals aged 25–29 with 334 single men for 100 single women in the northern locations and 184 single men for 100 single women in the southern ones.

Internal migrants that have come from other localities contribute to the age and sex distribution of these district-level populations.⁴ Census data indicate a significant proportion of internal migrants among women in young age groups (results not shown). Results indicate (1) higher proportions of women internal migrants (relative to non-migrants) than men by age group in both districts and (2) higher proportions of women migrants in the north than in the south by age groups with about a quarter of women migrants among all women aged 20–29. Among all categories of female internal migrants (intradistrict, interdistrict, interprovincial), women from other provinces accounted for the largest group (results not shown). These local level data support the larger picture of higher female internal mobility.

³We use district-level data as proxies for the population characteristics of villages/wards. For the variables we used, it was the smallest geographic level available.

⁴Marital status was available at the district level only.

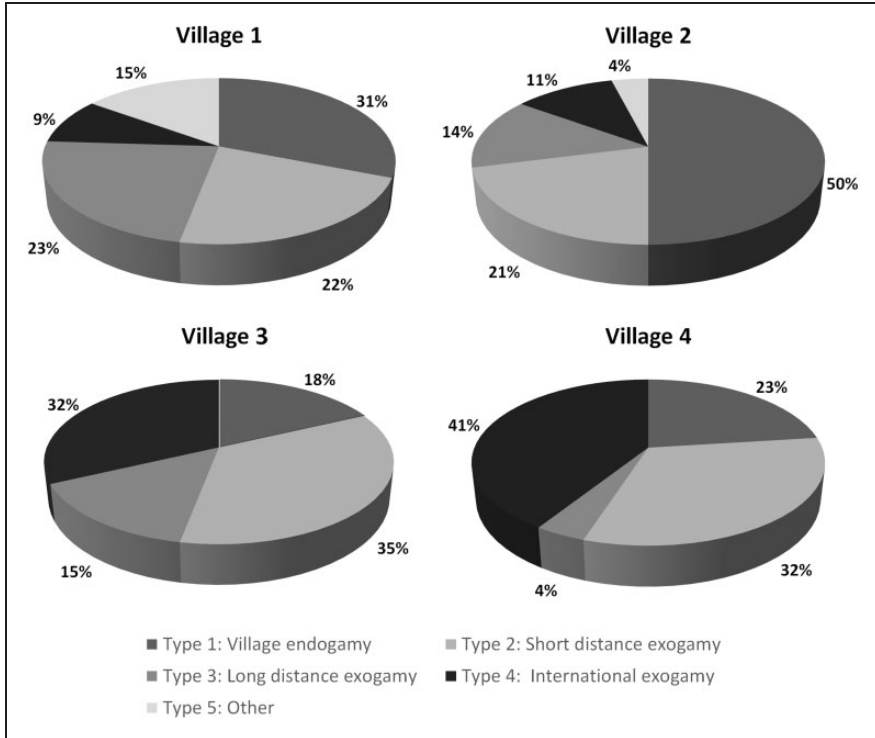


Figure 1. Marriage type by village in the provinces of Hai Phong (north) and Can Tho (south), 2005–2012.

Source: Authors’ fieldwork data.

Figure 1 presents pie charts for each village/ward for all marriages registered in the village/ward for the 2005–2012 period. We use a typology adapted from Bossen (2007, discussed above):

1. Village endogamy (wife and husband from the village/ward)
2. Short distance exogamy (village/ward man and woman from another village/ward/district in same province)⁵
3. Long-distance exogamy (village/ward man and woman from another province)⁶

⁵This category corresponds to the ‘intradistrict migration’ category of the national census.

⁶In the case of migration between adjacent provinces, the distance might not be particularly ‘long.’ The sense of belonging to a province, however, is very high in Vietnam and being from a different province, even if close geographically, may increase the ‘social’ distance between a daughter-in-law and her husband’s family. This category corresponds to the ‘interprovincial migration’ category of the national census.

Table 6. Percentage distribution of type of marriages in four villages in the provinces of Hai Phong and Can Tho, 2005–2012.

Type of marriages	Can Tho (south) (%)		Hai Phong (north) (%)	
	Village 1	Village 2	Village 3	Village 4
Husband from the same village/ ward (endogamy)	31.0	49.7	18.4	22.5
Village husband, woman from another village in the same province (intraprovincial migration)	22.2	21.4	34.7	32.4
Village husband, woman from another province (interprovincial migration)	22.6	13.9	14.9	4.1
Village woman, foreign husband (female emigration)	9.3	11.0	32.0	41.1
Other	15.0	4.1	0.0	0.0
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>n</i>	2,859	5,438	946	1,688

Source: Marriage registers of the villages studied (unpublished data analyzed by authors).

- 4. International exogamy (village/ward woman with foreign man)
- 5. Other (mostly uxori-local, local woman with man from another village/ward).

Local marriage data provide striking results with respect to the interplay between migration and marriage and the diversification of marriages with respect to the origin of spouses. In the northern villages, endogamous marriages only account for a small proportion with 18.4 percent and 22.5 percent, respectively, and most marriages involve the migration of one of the spouses (out- or in-migration) (Table 6). Marriages between foreign men and local women account for 32.0 percent to 41.1 percent, while marriages with a female spouse from elsewhere (close exogamy or long-distance exogamy) represented 49.6 percent and 36.5 percent, respectively. In the south, we note the highest share of endogamous marriages in village 2. This ward being an island (the entire island is occupied by this ward), could explain this result. Finally, in village 1 of the southern province, we note more marriage migrants, fewer marriages with foreign men and more uxori-local marriages than in the other locations.

To sum up, these data are remarkable in three ways: (1) Endogamy is not the dominant type of marriage in three of the four localities. (2) Between

a third and a half of the marriages registered are exogamous (close or distant). With respect to the differences between the northern and the southern locations, for the years 2005–2012, endogamy was more prevalent in the south than in the north and international female exogamy was more frequent in the north than in the south. (3) In both the north and south, migration was a central feature of marital patterns. We should note that individuals who registered their marriages in the village may not live there anymore; this is the case for women who married foreign men. For men married to non-local women, it is reasonable to hypothesize that most of them live in the village and, if not, keep their registration there to maintain their entitlement to land and housing.

We end this section with maps showing marriage-related female mobility, including marriage emigrants (going abroad) and marriage immigrants (from Vietnam). Out-marriage might be underestimated, since we do not have data on local women married in Vietnam to men living in other provinces. Figures 2 and 3 combine results from both villages/wards for each province on the destination of international migrants and the origins of internal migrants (interprovincial only or long-distance exogamy). On the right-hand side, we note that most women from these localities marry internationally within the Asian region (arrows from provinces to countries of destination). Marriages with men from other countries are mostly with Vietnamese ethnic men from the diaspora (insight gained during fieldwork). On the left-hand side, we see all the provinces of origins of the women married to local men. Women come from many provinces, both nearby and distant. Davin comments that a “nation-wide marriage market” is emerging in China; this seems to be underway in Vietnam as well (Davin, 2007: 87). We turn now to our qualitative evidence to document the factors associated with these trends.

The end of endogamy

The qualitative evidence complements the quantitative analysis by providing information on local processes underlying the changes documented above as well as insight into representations that accompany the observed diversification of marital and migration patterns. The interviews collected indicate two main processes: 1) the expansion of networks in the context of internal labor migration, the development of interprovincial matchmaking services and the impact of the proliferation of cellphones, and (2) a segmentation of the marriage market emerging from socio-economic inequalities, in part, created by remittances received by some families from international marriage migration spouses. Furthermore, interviews reveal shifting gendered representations of young women among the elderly and men. The weaving of these processes points to the multiple connections between various types of migration and family change.

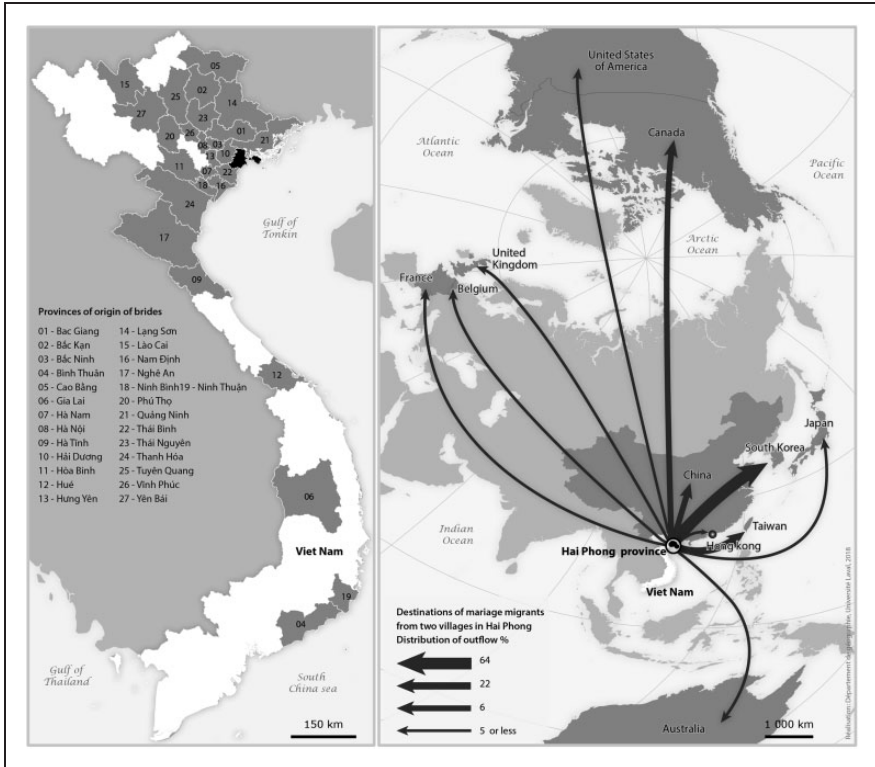


Figure 2. Places of origin and destination of marriage migration from and to the two villages in Hai Phong Province, 2005–2012. Source: Bélangier and Nguyen (2016); Authors’ fieldwork data.

Expansion of networks. As argued by Fan and Li (2002), in the case of China, internal labor migration creates “enlarged social spaces” to meet a potential spouse in Vietnam. The two districts studied draw young internal migrants from other provinces who come to work in nearby factories, a situation that provides local young people and internal migrants with opportunities to socialize together on assembly lines, during breaks and after work. For local single men, working in a nearby factory may even be an overt strategy to meet women and look for a potential spouse. Similarly, young women who migrate for work may consider marriage to men near their workplace, even if their initial plan was to return home to find a local husband after a period of factory work as a single woman.

Trinh, for instance migrated from the city of Hue, located in the central region of Vietnam. She came to the south to follow her aunt who works

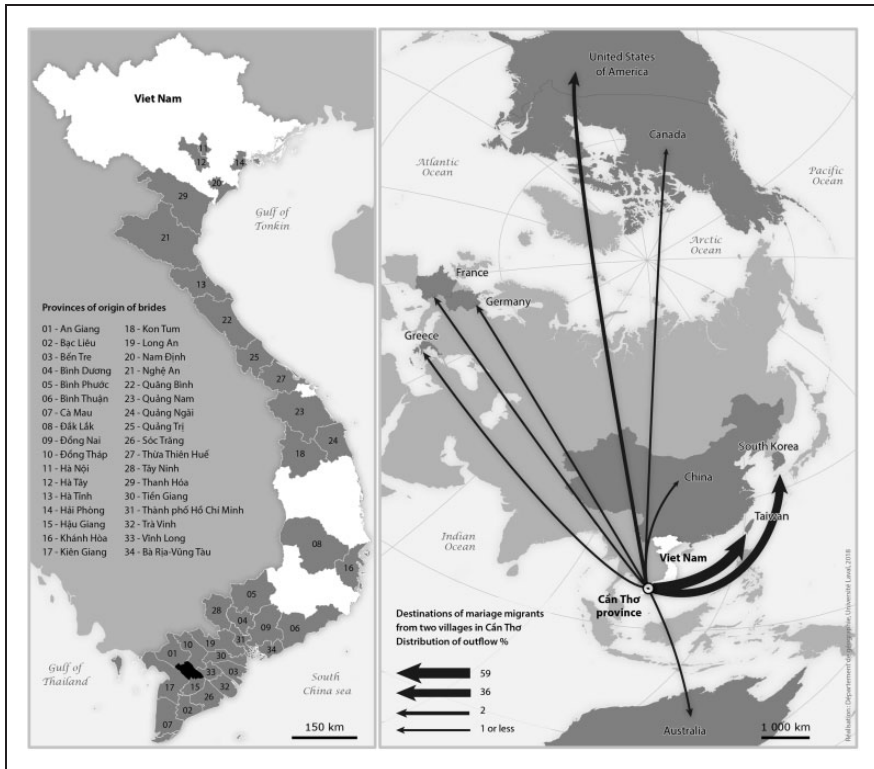


Figure 3. Places of origin and destination of marriage migration from and to the two villages in Can Tho Province, 2005–2012.
 Source: Bélanger and Nguyen (2016); Authors' fieldwork data.

in a factory there. She met Vu, a local man, at her workplace. Trinh said:

Men who do not work cannot find a bride not only because they do not have money, but also because they do not meet anyone from outside. I go to work, I meet people, we drink coffee together (Trinh, thirty-year-old single female).

Vietnam's manufacturing sector targets young childless single migrant men and women and extracts as much labor as possible from them. Despite harsh working conditions and long hours, the opportunities for young rural adults to make connections outside their home village are significantly enhanced through internal labor migration. Factory encounters lead to marriages, which, in turn, create new family interprovincial interconnections.

These new networks generate visits and the marriage migration of more women into the village:

I have an older sister who married a man from here. Before I married, I was working in Saigon and then I went to Da Lat to work with my father who was a security guard for a company there. Then I came to visit my sister for a month and I met my husband. When I met him, I thought we were compatible and I decided to marry quickly. When I came, I never thought I would marry a man from here, but my uncle said: "Meet with him and you will see, if you do not like him no problem, if you do, then good." At that time my plan was to work, but I listened to my uncle and met with my husband. I thought he was good enough, he was gentle and did not drink, so I accepted and married him (Thin, twenty-four-year-old non-local bride).

In addition to labor migration, the widespread cellphone ownership and usage has provided youth with alternative ways to meet each other besides being introduced by a third party or physically meeting each other at work or school. Most young people used their smartphone to get to know each other. Often, they were provided each other's phone numbers by friends. This phone-based meeting and dating was followed by in-person encounters and, in some cases, marriage. Communication technology allows some young people to emancipate themselves from the parental generation that traditionally holds power in the realm of introductions and approval of potential partners.

Expanded networks are also prompted by the development of an interprovincial matchmaking industry that piggybacks the very elaborate local marriage migration industry that serves international marriage migration (Bélanger, 2016a). In parallel to this vibrant local industry catering to the international marriage market, other people are beginning to specialize in domestic services for families with single sons considered "difficult to marry" due to their low economic status, physical appearance (being considered unattractive), age (being too old), housing situation (poor housing conditions) and family situation (too many family responsibilities). Matchmaking services for poor local men are much simpler and less lucrative than those for local women who marry internationally.

"Professional" matchmakers work in these villages to introduce men who lack the connections to meet non-local women. In one village, for instance, a merchant woman who visited the village regularly to sell traditional medicine and traveled between her hometown in a mountainous area and the village began to serve as matchmaker. She brought pictures of single men looking for wives to her village, and when she found an interested family, she made the

introduction. In these cases, place of origin (being from a remote province for instance) and ethnicity (belonging to an ethnic minority) did not matter for the man and his family.

Here we have people from Cao Bang, Lang Son [remote provinces] who are matchmakers for women who come here to marry our local men. Families who resort to their services spend a few hundred dollars. If the family from here agrees, they go to the woman's village to meet her and her parents, and then the two families agree. Those from Lang Son come like this (Lan, forty-nine-year-old mother of a son married to a non-local bride).

Another mother of a single son said:

My son can marry a wife from anywhere. If he has affection for a girl, I will agree immediately. I never think about whether she is from another province or not, if she is from afar or not. From anywhere is fine (Liên, fifty-seven-year-old mother of a thirty-two-year-old single son).

The negotiation process involves trade-offs between certain attributes, including location. The story of Phin and Thanh illustrates this. Phin, a twenty-nine-year-old woman, is from the remote province of Kien Giang. She married in Can Tho because her uncle had a connection there who served as intermediary. She said:

We did not know each other, this man served as intermediary and I accepted immediately. This man was from the same hamlet as my family; he had already married off his daughter to someone in our village. He was my matchmaker.

Phin's husband, Thanh, thirty-five years old, works as a daily laborer. He said:

Here too many women marry Taiwanese men. Because I am poor no one wants to marry me, so we need a matchmaker. Here it is very hard to marry a local woman because they expect that a man should have social status and a house.

Interprovincial marriages occurred before internal migration accelerated in Vietnam in the 2000s but have taken on a new scale and now go beyond adjacent provinces. Inter-ethnic marriages, which, until recently, were frowned upon by the Kinh ethnic majority, were prevalent in the villages studied, pointing to a significant change in the women considered acceptable as daughters-in-law by parents and as wives by men. In the localities studied, endogamous marriage as the ideal type of marriage is no longer the predominant type of marriage.

Segmentation of the marriage market. New economic, employment and migration opportunities have reduced poverty in Vietnam and increased overall living standards. According to our informants and other analyses (Tran, 2008), remittances sent from international marriage migrants contributed to worsening local economic inequalities between migrant and non-migrant households.

All study participants made a link between this phenomenon and the increase in the bride price they had witnessed over the past decade. According to village informants, this increase had been so rapid and significant that a whole segment of families with adult sons (one or more) was excluded from the local marriage market. It was these families that resorted to a local matchmaker to find a non-local bride. These marriages were deemed the ones that entailed the lowest cost, since the bride price was generally symbolic (low cost jewelry, for instance). Wedding costs were limited to transportation to visit the brides' parents in the other province (generally for a few hours, a day or two at most) and to the wedding banquet held at their house. An elderly woman explained:

I organized everything for my son. I brought everything there [bride's village] and we did it all in one day: the engagement, the wedding, and the "delivery" of the bride to her in-laws. My only regret is that my in-laws could not escort their daughter to my house in the village (Dung, fifty-three-year-old mother of a man who married a wife from a remote province).

Poor families who could not afford the bride price for their son attempted to marry off their daughter abroad in order to receive remittances, so they could afford the bride price. This domino effect, documented elsewhere (Bélanger, 2016b), perpetuated cycles of migration as the strategy to respond to inequalities created by migration, among other processes.

One additional segmentation created by the increased inequalities is the emergence of a class of poor single men who are likely to remain childless and therefore will not have a child to rely upon. Sons considered too old to marry form a new class of undesirable men in a society where, until recent years, nearly all men married. These local single men are rejected by women due to their poverty and perceived backwardness, compared to urban or foreign men. Their peasant rural habitus becomes a handicap in a rapidly changing social world that is increasingly connected to the outside world (for an analysis of male singlehood in rural Vietnam, see Bélanger and Nguyen, 2016).

Changing marital norms in the era of widespread mobility

Interviews also offered interesting insight into changing local social constructions. Due to space limitation, we only elaborate on one

aspect here. Interviewees primarily attributed the decline of marital village endogamy to the out-migration of village women who marry foreign men. For them, this very significant local change in marital practices explained new ways of forming a family. Local perceptions vary across gender and generations: the elderly and men tend to believe that women have changed as a result of new marital options; while young women view these opportunities as new options allowing them to help their native families.

For example, an elderly man from one village explained how women's greater mobility has affected men's ability to find a spouse over the past two to three decades:

Prior to this trend of marrying foreign men, young men and young women from the village married each other. But now when young men want to form a family, they need to seek a bride further and further. Since the early 1990s when women from here started to marry foreigners, it has become harder for young men, even the educated ones with a job, to find a spouse (Hoài, seventy-two-year-old male with a single son aged forty-one).

Young women's opportunities of international migration through marriage prompted suspicion about them. Interviewees voiced a loss of trust and reliability in local women "who could decide to marry a foreign man anytime." In the eyes of single men and their family members we interviewed, local women are deemed responsible for some men's difficulty in finding a bride. They are portrayed negatively as being demanding, unpredictable and unreliable. This changing local social construction of village women as potential betrayers of local men leads some families to prefer non-local brides, now constructed as more trustworthy than the local ones who are seen as being volatile, lazy and aspiring to an easy urban life. The mother of a young man recently married with a non-local bride said:

I will tell you that my son went to the province of Thai Binh to find a wife. There, women do not think about going to Taiwan or South Korea. Women there work in agriculture and cultivate rice, they are like us (Hoa, forty-eight-year-old female with a son married to a non-local bride).

A father aspiring to find a wife for his son said:

What matters is someone you can trust; we no longer fear brides from afar (Luan, fifty-nine-year-old male with a single son).

A single man shared the same perspective:

I want to find a wife that can make a living, who has skills. This way, both wife and husband work and look after their happiness together. But if, for instance, I marry a girl from here but she does not work and only wants to have fun, I will not be able to support her. Girls from here who get married in the village leave their husband a lot [to marry a foreign husband] (Nam, twenty-five-year-old single male).

For some men, the loss of trust in local women arose during their youth: the first girlfriend they had and hoped to marry eventually left them to marry a foreign husband and went abroad. The sentiment of having been betrayed, abandoned and ill thought of created mistrust in local women in general, as explained by this single man:

I never wanted to marry a local girl absolutely. Most girls from here want to leave the village to go abroad. The worse is that they do not want to work hard, and they are not loyal to their husband, they dream [about a better life] too much (Quang, thirty-year-old single male).

Norms with respect to local women “with a past” (i.e., separated, divorced, widowed) have changed rapidly. In 2008, we undertook a study about return marriage migrants who had failed abroad and returned to their place of origin (Bélanger et al., 2009). Results indicated that these women experienced severe exclusion and the impossibility of marrying due to the shame of international marriage failure. Five years later, the same families were willing to consider various local women, including divorcees, widows, women with children and return marriage migrants from abroad, groups of women previously excluded from the marriage market or with very limited options. Rather than an impeccable past, the ability to appreciate and care for one another was the priority:

If I met a woman like that [who married a foreigner, lived abroad, and then returned to the village] and I happened to have affection for her, I would consider her for marriage. We could appreciate each other. There is no problem with this at all, it is normal, I can accept this (Phuong, thirty-two-year-old single male).

Increasing internal out- and in-migration opened up new opportunities for marriage, but also led to shifting perceptions of acceptable and desirable marriages among those who stay put. The shifts we have observed over five years provide good examples of how migration patterns and family norms interact

and may rapidly change. The gender balance sheet of these changes suggests that young women benefit from more migration opportunities than young men and, in turn, are playing a new role in families as they become remittance senders and economic providers for their parents.

Conclusion

This paper makes two contributions to the existing literature on migration and marriage in Southeast Asia. First, the article provides a comprehensive approach to the study of the impact of migration on communities of origin. It is impossible to isolate the impact of international marriage out-migration given the high mobility context of the region, particularly among women. As we have seen in our Vietnamese case studies, the predicted marriage squeeze for men assumes that marital patterns will not change and that village endogamy will remain the preferred, most sought after marriage. In fact, village data revealed that for the seven years preceding our fieldwork, marriage patterns had been very diverse and endogamy was not the dominant marriage form, especially in the northern communities known for following family "traditions," such as patrilocal marriage and village endogamy, more closely. The cases we studied might be extreme in that they are particularly affected by women's emigration for international marriage. What matters is that they are powerful demonstrations of how families adjust and exert agency in marriage matters.

Second, the analysis suggests that this more comprehensive take calls for attention on the relationship between internal migration and translocal networks and how they contribute in expanding local marriage markets. Even when the original motive of the migration is labor, it should not overshadow the fact that many women migrants marry and settle outside their communities of origin, and thus also migrate internally for family reasons. Well-researched in other countries such as China and India, the relationships between these processes remain unstudied in Vietnam.

The high mobility of women in Vietnam raises interesting questions with respect to the power of migration to alter gender inequalities. Research often underscores how women migrants are vulnerable and at risk of various forms of abuse; at the same time, however, new mobility opportunities also translate into new gender power relations. New opportunities for migration and for marriage for women transform the social constructions of men and women, sons and daughters. In the north of the country, where Confucianism is more influential than in the south, migration challenges the place of sons as the main, if not the only, contributors to parents' support. Daughters who marry abroad or are in another more affluent community within Vietnam, become remittance senders and thus contribute to the wellbeing of their parents and siblings, including providing for the costly marriages of their

brothers (Bélangier and Tran, 2011). In the south, the practice whereby the youngest child must look after one's parents may also be unsettled by young women's labor and/or marriage migration: the women may offer care in the form of remittances rather than through in-person care and support. These different effects indicate that the internal or international migration of young women — for marriage or for work — alters gender and family relations depending on the dynamics that prevailed prior to the increase in mobility. Overall, in the case of Vietnam, analysis suggests more egalitarian parental perceptions of sons and daughters as well as daughters' enhanced ability to support themselves and their parents.

In sum, women's power over their own geographic mobility provides them with a wider network from which to choose a spouse. In many cases, marrying interprovincially also provides an opportunity for upward economic mobility. For some women who experience difficulties in marrying locally, marrying in another province may provide a solution. The repercussions of women's gains beyond the studied families and communities are difficult to evaluate; nevertheless, the desirability of marriage has opened up marriage and mobility opportunities that are powerfully reconfiguring marital patterns in Vietnam.

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