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## **Working bodies, performed bodies: marriage migrant women's bodily works**

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**Chun-Yu Lin**

Phd candidate in Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, UK  
[ee852325@gmail.com](mailto:ee852325@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** *Over the last twenty years and with the age of globalization, migration flows of populations have been increasing throughout the world. Migrants who enter into Taiwan for the purpose of international marriage currently stands at more than 450,000. The highest percentages of them are women, and most come from Mainland China (M.C.) and Southeast Asian countries (S.E.A.), such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand. Many international marriage immigrant wives meet their Taiwanese husbands using commercial matchmaker agencies. In this paper, I will focus on the marketization of international marriage business's involving Taiwanese men and immigrant women from S.E.A. and M.C.. I will discuss the mechanisms and the processes by which commercial matchmaker agencies operate in order to bring both Taiwanese men and the immigrant women together. From some immigrant women's accounts, the commercial matchmaker agencies arranged immigrant women to stay in a 'brides-to-be' camp - where women take training courses to learn how to be Taiwanese wives- until women are chosen by Taiwanese men. I will use literature around body work to frame this paper and discuss how immigrant women may be trained to prepare themselves for marriage.*

**Keywords:** *International marriage business, marriage migration, body work*

### **1. Introduction**

In the past decade, the international marriage business is not only increasing rapidly, but has also provided full services to supply significant international marriage couples in Taiwan (Weng, 2007: 5; Chang, 2001: 2). The globalized international marriage matchmaking industry through migrant women and Taiwanese men represents the commodification of intimacy and the commercialization of immigrant women's bodies and which characterizes my analytical framework. This phenomenon also reflects the law

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of supply and demand in the market economy (Simons, 2001: 91; Luehrmann, 2004: 872; Wang and Chang, 2002: 93). Both Taiwanese men and immigrant women join the arranged matching activities which are usually held by profit-oriented matchmaker organizations in numerous countries in Asia (Wang and Chang, 2002: 102). Women from Southeast Asian countries and China are part of the demand in that they are willing to marry foreign men, as are Taiwanese men who desire immigrant wives.

The profit-oriented international marriage business follows a capitalist logic to operate and grow markets (Wu, et al., 2008: 136). The services that are provided by the international matchmaker companies usually claim to shrink the cost and time of finding a spouse, and to achieve the goal of finding a marital partner in a speedy and effective way (ibid). It is common to see cases that women and men got to know each other through the marital mate selective service and then become husbands and wives within a few days. As the medium to bring two customers together, the matchmaker agency benefits greatly from the process. The international marriage matchmaker agency does not only introduce Taiwanese men and immigrant women to each other, but also promises, and offers a guarantee to both clients that they can find their marital partner in a short period of time. In most cases, Taiwanese single men pay a certain price to utilize the commercial matchmaking services, and are usually engaged to immigrant women on their inbound trip to Taiwan. The guarantee of finding a wife for male client is included in the matchmaker business deal. Immigrant women have been commodified during the matchmaking process, and some are treated as products. In this sense, the international marriage matchmaker agency views both the marriage and the brides as products which can bring considerable benefits (Hsia, 2000: 48; Wu, 2008: 12).

There has been relatively little research conducted on the international introduction services (Zavyelina, 2009: 88). However, with the characteristic of being the third party to provide fast, available mate-seeking service to bachelors and the single immigrant women, the matchmaker agencies - which have branches in Taiwan and overseas - are similar to

mail order bride (MOB) services (Hsia, 2002: 4).

Studies on MOB are usually focused on their emergence in relation to wider structural factors, for example, the unequal relationships between different economically development countries under global capitalism (Belleau, 2003: 603; Zabyelina, 2009: 90), or the international matchmaking market, and they usually argued that the commercialization of MOB is related to mechanisms of capitalist economies (Simons, 2001: 78). Other factors, such as men and women's changing expectations of marriage, delayed marriage, and the advancement of information technology has also been the focus of studies into MOB (Ahuvia & Adelman, 1992: 453; Luehrmann, 2004: 858; Zabyelina, 2009: 88; Sinke, 1999: 19). For the purpose of commercial benefit, the MOB industry markets 'women from the third world countries to men in the industrialized countries' as part of a nexus of development (Langevin & Belleau, 2003: 80; Zabyelina, 2009: 90). This link between the sending and receiving countries is based on an unequal relationship, and can thus makes women involved in the process subordinate to their husbands (Belleau, 2003: 603; Zabyelina, 2009: 99; Kung, 2011: 86). The unbalanced structural connection between countries deepens the asymmetric interpersonal relationship between husbands and wives, and sometimes puts immigrant women into vulnerable positions (Zheng, 2000: 15).

Current studies of international marriage in Taiwan have examined the blossoming phenomenon of international matchmaker business as a result of the unbalanced development of global capitalism, and it's commodification of interpersonal relationships (Hsia, 2002: 3; 61; Wu, et. al., 2008: 202; Chang, 2001: 20). However, some scholars in Taiwan have argued that the institutionalization of international marriage cannot be completely explained by the development of capitalism. It has been suggested that the commercialized matching process and the social relationship between Taiwanese men, immigrant women, and matchmaker agencies, are made by all the people involved in the process, and are thus not only decided by the structure of capitalism (Wang & Chang, 2002: 94-95). The social relationships and all the people who are involved during the

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matchmaking process perhaps include individual matchmakers from interpersonal relationship, for example, friends, family, relatives, and paid commercial matchmaker companies. We will get a clearer sense of how matchmaker companies operate to bring Taiwanese men and immigrant women together in a later section.

There are various reasons that draw both men and women into the international marriage market (Mckay, 2005; Kung, 2005: 3). However, most literatures portrays a negative image of the immigrant women involved, for example, immigrant women are described as 'gold diggers', seeking foreign men's economic support (Kim, 2010: 721; 726). For men, marital motivations are usually deemed as seeking the 'perfect wife' from foreign women who have certain characteristics, such as being 'feminine' and 'submissive', or 'women who are not feminists' (Simons, 2001: 94; Luehrmann, 2004: 862; Haddad, 2003: 3), as well as wifely roles to take on domestic services. These feminine characteristics of immigrant women and the image of an ideal wife are used by the commercial matchmaker agencies to advertise and attract male customers. By meeting Taiwanese men's ideal marital expectations, the matchmaker agency maintains a traditional gender role (Kojima, 2001: 204; Ahuvia, 1992: 456; Weng, 2007: 24; 27).

This paper investigates how Taiwanese men and immigrant women transform from being strangers to become husbands and wives. Although some couples know each other through their interpersonal networks, there are a variety of international marriage matchmaker agencies who work as the medium to bring Taiwanese men and women from both Southeast Asian countries and Mainland China together. In my fieldwork, many immigrant women meet their Taiwanese husbands through the introduction of commercial matchmaker agencies. Different commercial matchmaker agencies partake in different practices to run their business, but some general principles are similar, such as preparing women for men, rather than preparing men for women. The information in this paper is based on some of my interviewees who are originally from different countries. For example, interviewees from Cambodia, Vietnam, and China expressed their experiences of how commercial

matchmaker agencies arrange the selective matchmaker process, as well as their experiences of working with (and for) matchmaker companies. Apart from this, I also use some secondary resources from scholars, such as Kung (2005; 2011) and Chang (2001) who have completed research about particular matchmaker agencies in Vietnam. Besides, a matchmaker company's publicity document of their matchmaking business will be used in the discussion.

Those immigrant women's accounts showed that some of them take training courses which are related to their bodies, and some of them stay in a 'brides-to-be' camp<sup>1</sup> where they prepare themselves as an appropriate candidate to be a Taiwanese wife. Before immigrant women meet Taiwanese men, they are not only asked to do some works on their bodies, for example keep a slender body shape, but also use their bodies to do works. For example, the immigrant women learn how to clean households. In this paper, I will focus on the marketization of international marriage from these regions of the world, and discuss what services commercial matchmaker agencies offer, the matchmaking processes in which companies operate and how they bring Taiwanese men and the immigrant women together will be discussed. More specifically, the paper focuses on the mechanisms that matchmaker companies used to train immigrant women to meet Taiwanese men's marital expectation. How does the matchmaker agency run the international marriage business? What is the selective process?

This paper will begin with a discussion on the concept of body work (Wolkowitz, 2006; McDowell, 2009), and then look at immigrant women's daily activities when they stay in 'brides-to-be' camps. This illustrates the body work which

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'camp' refers to a place where matchmaker companies gather all immigrant women they collected from different towns, and ask women live together there. A camp usually is a building that is located in the neighbourhood of a urban city, and usually not far away from a matchmaker company. I use 'camp' here partly because Kung (2005) use the same term to describe the place they stay, partly because some interviewees' descriptions make me think about concentration camp. Tsai (2011) use 'concentration camp of brides' refers to the same thing (Tsai, 2011: 245).

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commercial matchmaker agencies ask immigrant women to do in preparation for when Taiwanese men visit. I will then turn to matchmaking processes and explicate some of the drivers which attract both Taiwanese men and immigrant women to each other.

## **2. Body work**

The term ‘body work’ is often used to refer to work which is related to people’s self-image, such as physical appearance (Wolkowitz, 2006: 1), or how people’s jobs require that they manage their own bodies to meet social expectations, for example, their employers or peers (Halford et al, 1997; Hancock et al., 2000; Kerfoot, 2000; Shilling, 1993; Williams, 1998; cited in Wolkowitz, 2002: 497). Wolkowitz (2002; 2006) expands the concept of body work to people’s paid working experience, employment relations, and the role of the human body in organizations (Wolkowitz, 2006: 1).

Wolkowitz (2006) defines body work as the ‘immediate site of labour, involving intimate, messy contact with the (frequently supine or naked) body, its orifices or products through touch or close proximity’ (Wolkowitz, 2006: 8; 147). From Wolkowitz’s wide concept, the expansive range of body work includes numerous occupations which are related to other people’s bodies. For example, care assistants, hairdressers, nurses, barbers, maids, and sex workers (Wolkowitz, 2002: 497-498). The focus here is on the physical body and work involved in the manipulation of other’s bodies. However, body work is not limited to direct touch with the human body or with human fluids and waste, other types of work related to human bodies could be accounted for in the category of body work, for example, hospital ward cleaners (ibid: 498).

Wolkowitz explores the nature of embodiment and paid employment in the labour market (Wolkowitz, 2006: 18). Like other types of service sector employment, body work encompasses a three-cornered interactive relation between the employer, the employee, and the customer or

client (Wolkowitz, 2002: 503). Body work is associated with an inter-corporeal tension: bodies-working-on-bodies (Shilling, 2011: 336). It means not only that work is done on bodies, but that human bodies are used to do work. Touching or interacting with another person's body is the main characteristic of body work. Similar to how Wolkowitz characterizes the feature of body work, other scholars like McDowell (2009) focus on workplace interaction, and term waged labour of service sector employment as interactive embodied work, which is different from the non-interactive manufacturing economy of the Fordist model used in the past (McDowell, 2009: 2). McDowell (2009) uses a broad definition of interactive embodied work in the service economy to refer to 'occupations where clients and workers are involved on a face-to-face basis, and working circumstances includes social engagements, such as identities, personal style and empathy' (McDowell, 2009: 37; 143). For example, beauty work and care work. Although McDowell uses the term differently to Wolkowitz, both authors are concerned with the relationship between body and work, and worker's agency within different types of work.

A significant feature of interactive work is that it mostly happens in health services, especially with women as dominant participants in low-wage, low-status, unvalued body work, and usually associated with femininity, for example, childcare (McDowell, 2009: 38-39; Wainwright, etc, 2011: 224). Body work is not only gendered, but also sexualized, and racialized, and is related to class inequalities (Wolkowitz, 2002: 499; 501-502; McDowell, 2009: 1). In recent decades, more and more migrants from different parts of the world have joined the service economy, and are constructed as others through the interactions of those factors (Wolkowitz, 2002: 499; McDowell, 2008; 494; 499; McDowell, 2009: 121). Bodies of Third World women are produced particularly as 'embodied sites of exploitation and accumulation', where structural inequalities can make migrant bodies vulnerable (Wright, 2006: 13, cited in McDowell, 2008; 494-495). To take women sex workers as an example, sex work is a kind of interactive body work, but also a result of global division of labour (McDowell, 2009: 119; 121). It is especially the case that the bodies of black

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women have been commodified, and portrayed as an object of desire for the white male gaze (McDowell, 2009:116;117;119). Bodies of labour are not borderless, worker's positions in a society usually associated with a difference that relates to their embodied characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, and skin colour (McDowell, 2009:116).

The labour processes of body work are usually related to how employers control workers' feelings, and train workers to use not only their own bodies, but also emotions to perform certain states to interact with other people (McDowell, 2009: 37; 184; Wolkowitz, 2002: 479, 504; Wolkowitz, 2006: 76-77, 146, 148; Wainwright, etc, 2011: 223). Hochschild (1983) found that many occupations in the growing service sectors are involved in asking workers, and women workers in particular, to be 'nastier than natural' or 'nicer than natural' in the labour market (Hochschild,1983, cited in Steinberg & Figart, 1999: 9: 24). For example, in the relationship between workers and clients, employers require workers to self-manage their own feelings to make clients sense that the service which the worker offered is of good quality.

Working bodies are not only shaped by the employer, but also constituted by workers themselves in terms of how workers play their roles and their identities in work (Wolkowitz, 2006: 56; 60). Employers fit human labour into an effective production process in order to produce ultimate profit, and exploit workers' bodies during the process. By applying Foucault's (1991) theory of discipline, Wolkowitz (2006) analyses how employers use several surveillance mechanisms to oversee workers' bodies in factories, and examines how workers' bodies are controlled in labour processes to construct working bodies as submissive, docile bodies (Wolkowitz, 2006: 57-58).

The concept of body work is useful for understanding how immigrant women are expected to align their bodies to the promotions of the marriage market industry. For example the industry advertises them as slim women and they must conform to these expectations in order to be successful. This is marriage migrant women's body work. Following this

framework, in the rest of paper, I will discuss what immigrant women do while they stay in the 'brides-to-be' camp, and the practices, including the instructions of commercial matchmaker agencies, in which they prepare themselves.

### **3. Work on immigrant women's bodies: the 'brides-to-be' camp**

Similar to a newspaper report about the phenomenon of the 'brides-to-be' camp in Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam (China Times Weekly, 1999: 50-52), Xiang, a Cambodian women said that a commercial matchmaker agency arranged for her to live with many Cambodian women in a 'brides-to-be' camp to meet foreign men, when she was 19 years old. Although the brides to be camps are not legal in Vietnam, many commercial matchmaker companies collect hundreds of Vietnamese women in a building, and hire a warden to be responsible for the brides' daily lives (Chang, 2001: 102). The main requirement for brides to stay in that camp is that they meet different foreign men who have joined the wife hunting tour/package tours<sup>2</sup> arranged by commercial matchmaker agencies (Kung , 2005: 10). The busyness of the brides to be depends on how many groups of Taiwanese men come to visit them. Except from meeting with foreign men, <sup>3</sup> Xiang said that most of time, she and other future brides stayed in that camp 24 hours a day, eating three meals and shared housework until someone decides to marry them. Xiang said that there are hundreds of women in that camp. As far as Xiang knows, the Cambodian women she met in the camp were from different towns, so it was convenient for them to choose to stay in that camp, and thus allowed groups to

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<sup>2</sup> This term and the term 'package tour' are commonly used when describing the services which are provided by commercial matchmaker companies.

<sup>3</sup> Matchmaker agencies sometimes take immigrant women to meet Taiwanese men by m o t o r c y c l e , i f any women are chosen, they will go on the next step of matchmaking process, such as one to one dating (I will discuss it in later section). Women who are not chosen will be carried back to the brides to be camps, and wait for the next meeting opportunity. See Kung 's (2005: 12) discussion.

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attend matchmaking opportunities with large numbers of women.

Xiang compared the 'brides-to-be' camp to 'many students live in a crowded accommodation'.<sup>4</sup> Xiang said that brides to be pay the commercial matchmaker agency money for their accommodations and meals while living in that camp. Like Xiang, another Vietnamese woman, Ding, also paid a significant amount of money to a commercial matchmaker agency to stay in the 'brides-to-be' camp, with her hope to become a Taiwanese wife. Ding said that 'my mother put our only house in pledge for a loan with a bank in Vietnam, in order to pay the commercial matchmaker agency 2000 US dollars in advance, before I meet my Taiwanese husband'.

Although brides to be pay the commercial matchmaker agency living fees, they do not feel that they get equal material treatments within the camp. Xiang then complained to me that 'they (the commercial matchmaker agency) do not give us enough food, so we always felt hungry'. I asked her 'why?', and she continued to explain 'because there are many women that live together over there, it is very crowded, everyone can only have limited space, it is even difficult for women to walk or do some easy exercises, so the matchmaker agency are afraid of we will become fat if we eat<sup>5</sup> too much'.

Many women nowadays experience the 'tyranny of slenderness' (Chernin, 1994; cited in Kwan, 2010: 144), and have oppressions to remind themselves of body management. Bordo (2003) notes that female subjectivity is trained and subordinated through many forms of mass media in everyday lives, and requirements of having a slender body show the rules of making a female body admirable (Bordo, 2003 : 19; 26; 169-170). The way in which commercial matchmaker agencies ask brides to be to keeps a

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<sup>4</sup> Kung's (2011) observation from two camps in Vietnam found ten to twenty plus Vietnamese girls lives in a two-storey small house (about 16.55m<sup>2</sup>) of (Kung, 2011: 104).

<sup>5</sup> Brides to be are just like goods which wait to be sold, and the camps collects women together and limits women's diets, as if reminiscent of a slave auction.

nice body sculpture reflects a prevalent stereotype that thin beauty is what men desired. Commercial matchmaker agencies believe that a thin immigrant woman's body has the potential to attract Taiwanese male clients.

The work that immigrant women partake in while staying at the brides to be camps is predominately showing off their bodies to Taiwanese men. Immigrant women use their bodies to provide a service to be seen by male clients. What brides to be do is similar to fashion models as they put their bodies on display, for the male gaze. Like Wolkowitz (2006) described the feature of labour of body work, jobs involved in touch or that manipulate other people's bodies are classified in this range (Wolkowitz, 2006: 147; England., etc, 2011: 206- 207; Cohen, 2011: 191). Women in the camp are forced to 'manage' their bodies, from what Xiang says, they are not fed enough-she would love to eaten more. Brides-to-be camp is not only a place that matchmaker companies preparing women, but also a site of women labour. Brides to be display their physical bodies in matchmaking processes, meet many Taiwanese men, and show their slender bodies to attract men to marry them, what they do are bodily related works.

Although immigrant women that stay in the brides to be camps show themselves to Taiwanese men, and wait until they are picked as their jobs, they do not get a salary from commercial matchmaker agencies. Instead, immigrant women pay for staying in the camp. This differs from how Wolkowitz (2006) and McDowell (2009) discuss waged body worker in the service sector. In the brides to be camps, immigrant women do not get real cash. However, many women told me that a positive imagination for a good future of living in the foreign country, and a hope of marrying foreign men makes many women in the camp follow matchmaker companies' instruction, do exactly what companies ask them to do for preparing themselves to meet men.

Besides the strict limitation for brides to be to maintain a slim body shape, Xiang told me that they were taught to make an effort to attract the attention of men as much and as soon as they possibly can, when there are matchmaking opportunities. The commercial matchmaker agency keeps reminding and encouraging women to ensure that Taiwanese

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men have a good impression of them. When men came to visit, Xiang explained that 'I made an effort to give every man a big smile' a strategy she used to draw the attention of Taiwanese men. Consequently, keeping their bodies slim and making them look charming are the most important skills that immigrant women are taught in the camp.

Influenced by Hochschild's (1983) research on emotional labour of airline cabin crew, and Leidner's (1993) concept on interactive service work, Lan's (1998) paper discusses cosmetics saleswomen's bodily work in department stores in Taiwan. She argued that bodily labour includes both outside bodies, such as face, figure, and exercise - and inside bodies, such as feelings, emotions, and interactions (Lan, 1998: 50). Lan's findings have similarities with Wolkowitz's definition of emotional labour which refers to how employees are required to use their own feelings at work (Wolkowitz, 2006: 76-78). Immigrant women do much more in the brides to be camps than display their own bodies. Besides keeping a slender body, matchmaker agencies also ask immigrant women to smile to make Taiwanese men feel that they are friendly. To meet the expectations of matchmaker agencies and clients, brides to be are asked to manage their own emotions to create a comfortable matchmaking environment for Taiwanese men.

Tyler (2001) extended Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour, and put more weight on gendering emotional labour (Tyler & Hancock, 2001, cited in Wolkowitz, 2006: 82). Tyler found that women workers' bodies are appropriated by employers, and they are required as part of their work obligations to maintain their emotions to a proper state (ibid). For example, female flight attendants are asked to 'walk softly through the cabin', 'make eye contact with passengers', and 'always smile at them' -gendered performance to make customers enjoy their services (ibid). These requirements of 'body techniques' (Tyler, 2001) of women workers are usually associated with a stereotype of femininity (Steinberg & Figart, 1999: 10). In Wolkowitz's (2006) study on customer service work, she found that a feature of reproducing standards of aesthetic quality in this type of work, for example, dressing stylishly, and appealing to customers by using a sweet voice, to make themselves

'sound right', is a way in which workers do aesthetic labour (Wolkowitz, 2006: 85). Facial motion is a part of body work, and it shows the emotion of the subject. Xiang's performance of smiling to Taiwanese men exhibits her interaction with clients in a desired way, this performance makes men link Xiang to an acceptable, subservient wife image. Immigrant women are not only a good example of gendered emotional labour, but also aesthetic labour. Xiang used a big smile to make herself 'look good' (Wolkowitz, 2006: 86), but also created a friendly, enjoyable atmosphere, and thus contributed to the service that male clients received during the matchmaking process.

Women workers are expected to manage themselves to look desirable or heterosexually available. In this sense, emotional labour sometimes can also be sexual labour (Tyler & Hancock, 2001; Adkins, 2002; cited in Wolkowitz, 2006: 81-82). McDowell (2009) uses the concept of emotional labour to analyze sex work (McDowell, 2009:108). The labour processes of sex workers refer to how workers manipulate and keep an emotional distance with their clients (ibid). There are two meanings of emotional labour here. On the one hand, sex workers show their 'authentic' experience in their embodied works, such as perform 'faking enjoyment' to satisfy their clients' demands (Chen, 2006: 27-28; ibid). On the other hand, sex workers avoid physical contact or find ways to avoid full sexual encounters with clients to protect themselves (Wolkowitz, 2002: 504). The way sex workers do their jobs is similar to how immigrant women in the brides to be camps display their bodies. Meeting Taiwanese men in matchmaking processes is similar to how sex workers work in their workplace. No matter how many smiles immigrant women have performed, and how many men and future brides have met, immigrant women prepare themselves and let Taiwanese men who come to visit them feel welcomed. The difference being that sex work is usually illegal, and keeps hidden, the way commercial matchmaker agencies collect immigrant women in a camp through public<sup>6</sup> routes

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<sup>6</sup> The Vietnamese government expressed their determination to ban commercial matchmaker agencies in 2005, and only gave a few companies get legal permission to operate matchmaker businesses to help Vietnamese women to look for foreign men, but many matchmaker companies still go underground to continue their business in Vietnam (Kung, 2005: 7; 2011: 116).

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to pair up international marriage couples and exploit women's bodies to benefit themselves is legal. In addition, men pay money to meet women, but the meeting does not lead to a fleeting and commercial sexual encounter.

Xiang said that Cambodian brides to be have to afford their own living expenses during their stay in the camp. Hence, not every woman in that camp can meet a man and then get married during their stay. Xiang said that 'several girls I met in the camp gave up in the end and went home, because they had been waiting for a long time, and that it cost them a lot of money'. All brides to be get time pressure while staying at camps (Chang, Ya-Ting, 2004: 86). However, slightly different from Xiang and Ding's descriptions about the brides to be is that they have to be able to afford their own living expenses during their stay in the camp. In Kung's (2005) research about how commercial matchmaker agencies collect immigrant women in a camp of brides to be in Vietnam, Kung found that many Vietnamese women mortgaged themselves to the commercial matchmaker agency (Kung, 2005: 5). When brides to be decided to stay in the camp, they have to hand in their identification card as well as their birth certification to the commercial matchmaker agency (Chang, Ya-Ting, 2004: 85; Kung, 2005: 11). Brides to be in the camp consequently cannot go out without the commercial matchmaker agencies' permission (Chang, 2001: 103; Kung, 2005: 11).

There are two reasons for matchmaker companies to keep immigrant women's documents: one is for checking the date of birth, single status certification and finger print that immigrant women filled are same as the information in their identification card (Kung, 2011: 104; 107). The other reason is matchmaker companies keep women's document as a hostage to ask them for free household labour for companies, set restrictions for their movements, or pay their debts (for example, some women cannot pay all the fees for staying in the camp in the beginning of their stay) (ibid). Kung's (2011) research reported that if immigrant women who are not chosen by any men, the commercial matchmaker company would send them to night clubs, massage shops, or reduce them to prostitution (ibid: 113). Kung's (2011) research is about a matchmaker company in

Vietnam, and it seems that immigrant women do not have a choice to leave once they get into the camp. Xiang's experience is at a commercial matchmaker company in Cambodia, and from Xiang's memory, it is possible for women to go home if women change their minds or they found that they cannot afford the fees for stay in the camp.

There is an unequal power relationship between the brides to be and the commercial matchmaker agencies. Immigrant women are overlooked, scrutinized, and tamed. Like Foucault's (1997) 'panopticon', commercial matchmaker companies get hundreds of immigrant women together, and put them into an enclosed space, and in some cases, commercial matchmaker companies set up CCTV cameras around the camps which are used to oversee the movements of brides to be (Kung, 2005:15). Similar to the panopticon, the matchmaker agencies help Taiwanese men recruit, train, and supervise immigrant women to become Taiwanese wives.

Controlling brides to be's movement at camps is not only for immigrant women's safety or security, but also to make women whiten their skin colour (Chang, Ya-Ting, 2004:84-89). If those future brides stay indoors at camps, they could have yellowish-white skin color, rather than the tendency to be brown or slightly dark (ibid). Kwan (2010) examined a narrow concept of beauty and 'normal' bodies, particular for the physical features of women's body, such as whiteness of skin color, height, hair colour, size (Kwan, 2010: 145; 147; 161). Kwan found that people who have 'normal' bodies can avoid different kinds of oppression, and get unearned assets in the daily lives, it is called 'body privilege' (ibid, 2010: 144; 146; 161). The different patterns of body privilege depend on gender and race (ibid: 145). I think the preference of lighter skin for the immigrant wives could link to reasons that Taiwanese men prefer to marry to Vietnamese women, rather than women from other Southeast Asian countries. In a similar way that immigrant women are asked to keep a slender body in the camp, and smile at Taiwanese men, a lighter skin colour is another body work which matchmaker companies think could improve immigrant women's image and thus increase their exchange value.

#### **4. Immigrant women's bodies at work: training courses**

It is not enough for commercial matchmaker agencies to have plenty of slender, charming women, some agencies provide education and training courses to teach future brides to become Taiwanese wives. Many commercial matchmaker agencies not only offer translation services, but also have language courses to teach future brides to speak simple Mandarin, teach immigrant women how to cook Chinese cuisine, clean households, and use modern electronic equipment (Wu, 2008: 38; Wu, et al., 2008: 147; Chang, Ya-Ting, 2004: 93).

I got a Vietnamese bride introduction service document from a matchmaker company called MW. MW's publicity document illustrates how MW has a system to control the quality of brides to be. 'Our company will observe the learning ability and the personality of brides to be, tell you the truth, offer you to choose another bride instead, and we will not charge you the re-choose fee. We understand that it will bring confusion and regret, if we let a poor quality bride enter your family'. MW's advertising shows some of the strategies that commercial matchmaker companies use to attract potential male clients. Bride training courses are established to ensure that Taiwanese men have the right to choose, and are satisfied with the bride they receive (Chang, Yu-Ping, 2004: 68). Moreover, like brides to be camps, training courses are another mechanism used by commercial matchmaker agencies to help Taiwanese discipline immigrant women to become Taiwanese wives.

The training courses for brides to be is a part of necessary process which commercial matchmaker companies use for the examination of product control (Chang, 2001: 102). It is common to see a variety of selection criteria at different stages of the matchmaking process. This highlights the amount of brides to be that commercial matchmaker companies own, but also emphasizes what they have done to check the quality of immigrant women (Chang, Ya-Ting, 2004: 84). Both the brides to be camps and the training

courses are investments for commercial matchmaker companies (Chang, 2001: 102). After collecting plenty of unmarried immigrant women and placing them within brides to be camps, commercial matchmaker companies give women lessons to train them to become Taiwanese wives. The two instruments that commercial matchmaker agencies use the camp and training courses are similar to how businessmen 'manufacture' and 'transform' new materials into the furnished, polished products.

Commercial matchmaker agencies discipline and transform immigrant women to be 'marriable' Taiwanese wives through a series of modification lessons and training courses. The agencies try to package immigrant women to meet how Taiwanese men characterize wives such as being 'beautiful, virtuous, lighter skin colour, agreeable, and good at housekeeping' (Han, 2003: 166-167; Wang, et al., 2008: 133-134). The requirement of maintaining body sculpture, smile performance in the brides to be camps, and training lessons are strategies which the enterprise-based professional matchmaker companies set up for 'manufacturing' (Kung, 2005: 14) Taiwanese wives for Taiwanese men.

Foucault (1977) explored the training process of producing docile bodies, and explained that human bodies are 'manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces' (Foucault, 1977: 136). Take soldiers for example, Foucault described how their 'posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times...' (ibid: 135). Human bodies are corrected and improved to be well prepared and acceptable for workplaces. Wainwright, et. al., (2011) investigated a learning course for body work among mothers. Wainwright, et. al., (2011) found that mothers learn feminized roles, gendered perceptions of skills, and that mothers are expected to care for others, no matter whether they are at home or in the world of employment (Wainwright, et al., 2011: 221-224, 228-229). Similar to Foucault and Wainwright's findings, the training courses for brides to be correct immigrant women's bodies, and transform them into

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to be more 'Taiwanese-like' by enforcing characteristics that commercial matchmaker agencies think Taiwanese men prefer. Matchmaker agencies reproduce a traditional gendered stereotype to immigrant women throughout the learning process. During this socializing process, immigrant women gain knowledge about Taiwan and skills of cleaning households which shows femininity as they learn how to play the role of being a Taiwanese wife. Just like asking immigrant women to greet men with smile in a friendly and polite manner, commercial matchmaker agencies prepare immigrant women to have docile, but 'right' bodies.

By the time that immigrant women take regulatory training courses, commercial matchmaker agencies exploit immigrant women's bodies to work for companies. The training courses are an example of how commercial matchmaker agencies regulate immigrant women's bodies, it also shows that companies take advantage of immigrant women's working bodies at the same time. An ideal feminine performance and gendered body is constructed through the gendered regulatory process of the training courses where brides to be's gendered, docile bodies are used by companies. Similar to Kung's (2011) study in Vietnam, future brides not only share housework but also do housekeeping for the matchmaker company, while they stay in the brides to be camps (Kung, 2011: 104). Xiang also mentioned that while her stay in the camp, Cambodian women have to wash their own clothes, and after their cooking lessons, women have to take in turn to prepare Taiwanese style cuisine and then invite staffs in the company have meals together, and help company to maintain the environment while they stayed in the camp, for example, clean women's accommodations. From Xiang's statement, future Cambodian brides actually cook for matchmaker agency while future brides were in the camp. Likewise, future brides clean the office to maintain a tidy environment for the company. After immigrant women are transformed from learners to practitioners, they put what they learn from the training courses into practice. Commercial matchmaker agencies get maids for free. When company took women's documents, women were actually

labouring there as domestic workers. In this sense, matchmaker agencies are not only train immigrant women's bodies, but also make immigrant women use their physical bodies to work for companies. A relationship of 'bodies-working-on-bodies' (Shilling, 2011: 336) are shown in this context. On the one hand, matchmaker companies for the purpose of women's preparation of bodies, they ask immigrant women do work on their own bodies, and women's bodies are on display during the matchmaking process. On the other hand, women's bodies are trained to do work not only related to becoming a good wife candidate for example, cook Taiwanese cuisine for future husbands, or housekeeping in the training courses, but also used as free labour for the company itself.

### **5. Taiwanese men ('s family) select immigrant women as if a king chooses his concubines**

Although Chang's (2001) research found that there is a tendency for young Taiwanese men to marry immigrant women in recent years (Chang, 2001: 43), there is often a significant age gap between Taiwanese men and their immigrant wives. In terms of the officers in Taipei Economic & Cultural office in Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam, the average age that Taiwanese men marry is 36 years old, and for Vietnamese women is 23 years old (ibid: 45). The average age gap between Taiwanese men and their Vietnamese wives is about 10 to 13 years old (ibid). Some husbands are twenty years older than their wives. Furthermore, internet access is not popular in Vietnam and most of the Taiwanese men who have immigrant wives are middle aged, from forty to sixty, some of which are not interested in watching photos or have difficulties using computer technology (Wang, et al., 2008: 151). The digital gap creates difficulties for matchmaker companies as – unlike MOB – they cannot develop and promote their business using the internet (Wang, et al., 2008: 151). Some Taiwanese men decide to marry immigrant women because of pressure from their parents to continue the family name, while not every parent of Taiwanese men can access computer technology (Hsia, 2002: 190). Therefore, some Taiwanese men joined the package tour with their parents or elder family relatives or their parents

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persuade them to find an immigrant wife, rather than spend time watching photos of immigrant women on websites. In some cases, Taiwanese men's parents are not only persuade them to join the package tour, but also join them on the tour. For example, Xiang's Taiwanese husband adopted a suggestion from his aunt to join the marriage matchmaker's service, and then his aunt joined the tour with him in Cambodia. Similarly, some matchmaker agencies of MOB offer the 'romantic tour package' for their male clients to go to Russia to see and meet potential wives (Luehrmann, 2004: 860). Because the distance between Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries or China is short, and the airfare is not so expensive, in comparison to some American men who want to meet their MOB in Russia, most Taiwanese men join the package tour to travel to Southeast Asian countries or China, to see and pick out a woman they want, and then get married. Besides the reason of speed and cheap airfare, the cultural proximity and the lower ranking of Southeast Asian in the region's hierarchy are also reinforce many Taiwanese men's marital motivations to go to these areas.

Some Taiwanese men joined the wife hunting tour because they are deemed undesirable by women or do not have a way to meet possible partners. It is not easy for them to find a Taiwanese woman to marry. Thus, some Taiwanese men look abroad, thinking that it could be easier to 'buy' an immigrant woman. The speedy service that commercial matchmaker agencies offer could solve Taiwanese men's problems. Advertisements from commercial matchmaker agencies that offer introduction services to Vietnamese brides, Indonesian brides and Chinese brides can be seen on billboards on the street, and in recent years, in the advertisement section of newspapers. The advertisements of professional matchmaker agencies usually mention how:

Our companies provide speedy matching services for a reasonable price which includes a return ticket between Taiwan and Vietnam for Taiwanese men. Our services not only includes a matching tour, but also prepares a wedding banquet, helps new couples pass the marital interview, and the procedure for applying the official

certification of marriage. (A8, 4th April, 2009, The Journalist).

Commercial matchmaker companies' guarantees a 'convenient' and 'speedy' service which is very attractive for Taiwanese men as it makes sure that Taiwanese men can definitely get a wife home (Wu, et al., 2008: 144; Chang, 2004: 59). The guarantee is attractive for two main reasons. Firstly, getting married to an immigrant wife in an effectively way can make Taiwanese men's family stop worrying that they are single, and removes the pressure about family continuity. Second, the 'all inclusive' matchmaking services saves Taiwanese men time and money, they do not need to worry if they can pass the marital interview, and thus easily become a real married couple.

Some commercial matchmaker companies promote that they can guarantee immigrant women's virgin bodies, and a domesticated image. The company promote how they can introduce girls from rural areas to male clients, and tell them the advantages of having a countryside girl as a wife (Chang, 2001: 121; Chang, 2004: 61) or a traditional wife (Wu, et al., 2008: 162). In the front cover of the paper file, there is a picture of both Taiwanese and Vietnamese national flags, and use a big Chinese character 'double happiness' as the background. The symbol represents good luck, and is commonly used to congratulate people who have got married. There are three Vietnamese girls who wear Vietnamese national clothing and hold bamboo hats in their hands, acting like they are dancing. The advertising message on the front cover portrays the advantages of marrying a Vietnamese woman, it writes that 'Vietnamese are traditional women who put their husband as the top priority in their own life, they are good at helping family businesses', and tells male clients that 'you can choose any one you want from hundreds of Vietnamese women in our company'. Service items promote the benefit of immigrant women are included in the matchmaker business deals, and the matchmaker agency try to make the male client feel the added value that the company provides.

The way that commercial matchmaker agencies make Taiwanese men feel that they have priority and advantages

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over immigrant women, are constructed not only by promotions and advertisements, but also in the later stages of matchmaking process. Mei Yum, a 40 years old woman who is originally from Guilin, China and left there ten years ago. Mei Yum told me that she feels that the matchmaking process is comparable to how 'a king chooses his concubines'. Similar to Mei Yum's description, Xiang and Ding told me Taiwanese men can see and select a woman from hundreds of brides to be. When commercial matchmaker agencies offer hundreds immigrant women to Taiwanese men, they tell Taiwanese men that they can take their time when they go to see immigrant women. 'Don't be shy, you can select some women that you feel are good first, and have dates with them, and then choose one from them, otherwise, you perhaps cannot find anyone at the end of the matchmaking process'(Chang, Yu-Ping, 2004: 66; Kung , 2005: 13). In Kung 's (2005) research, a Taiwanese man finally decides which women he wants to marry after he has seen three hundreds Vietnamese women (Kung , 2005: 13). Mei Yum said 'my husband told me that I was the 60th Chinese women he saw on that day'. Maximizing Taiwanese men's choice make them have an illusion that they are big men, and an oversupply of women reflects this effect is needed. An unequal power relationship between men and women is created by the way commercial matchmaker agencies arrange the matchmaking process. In comparison with looking for immigrant women' femininity, Taiwanese men's masculinity are constituted and aggrandised by the matchmaking process.

Xiang said that she realized the reason her Taiwanese husband and family choose Xiang as a wife, several years after Xiang got married and moved to Taiwan. Several Cambodian women were chosen by Xiang's husband and Xiang's aunt, after the matchmaking process. Xiang's husband then had dates with the chosen immigrant women. Xiang's husband and his aunt took some future brides shopping at a department store, and went to restaurants for dinner for several days. During the dates with several immigrant women, Xiang's husband's aunt observed immigrant women's behavior and movement. Xiang's husband told Xiang that when they went shopping Xiang

brought clothes which have a conservative style, rather than tighter and more revealing clothes. In addition, Xiang did not choose expensive clothes, even though she knew that the family would have paid for them. When they went to restaurants, some immigrant women only eat a little, and some of them were too shy to eat, while Xiang showed her appetite and ate as much as she desired. Even Xiang put food into other Cambodian women's bowls, and this behavior impressed Xiang's husband's aunt, and these findings from Xiang's behavior made Xiang's husband decide to choose her in the end.

Goffman argues that the management of people's bodies is a necessary and constitutive element of how social order is maintained (Crossley, 1995, cited in Wolkowitz, 2006: 20-21). Goffman (1969) found that we learn the 'feeling rules' through social interaction with contemporary social actors, and people conform to these rules through 'face work' and, by implication, 'body work' (Shilling, 1993: 84; cited in Wolkowitz, 2006: 21). Goffman noted that the appropriate surface presentation of self, is learnt and reinforced from rules that exist in bodily discourses in society, for example, through images we know what clothes, facial expressions, movements, and behavior is required (Bordo, 2003:169-170). Individuals use their bodies to interact and mediate their self and the relationship with society. Immigrant women's body work is not only limited to the brides-to-be camps, training courses, or selection and matchmaking process. Their body work extends to different scenarios, even outside the surveillance of matchmaker companies, including dates with Taiwanese men. Xiang said that she knew her every movement and behavior was under the Taiwanese men and their family's gaze. For her to ensure that she was deemed an appropriate candidate to be a Taiwanese wife, she had to perform a balance between making herself feel comfortable, and being polite.

Hochschild (1983) distinguishes 'surface acting' from 'deep acting', the former includes how workers' smile because of their jobs, and the latter is workers integrate their true feelings into the role they are playing, for example, workers internalized the principle of an organization, so

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when workers smile, they actually believe that they are happy (Hochschild, 1983, cited in Chen, 2006: 23). Xiang said that she performed better and did her best while dating, but she also chose the clothes that she used to wear, and eat food, as she was afraid that if she did not grab the chance, she may still feel hungry when she went back to the brides to be camps, or would not have new clothes to wear after the dating opportunity. Women's performances vary. It is not clear that what Xiang did is surface acting or deep acting, or both, but she's acting in one way or other. Xiang's experience suggested that she is negotiating between performing an appropriate role of a wife candidate, and making herself feel comfortable as well.

Bordo (2003) notes that a rule of femininity construction, requires women to develop an other-oriented characteristic (Bordo, 2003:169-170). Xiang's husband's aunt, and Xiang's husband were impressed that Xiang served food for other immigrant women, when they went to restaurant for a meal. For Taiwanese men and their family, Xiang's behavior is considerate of her friends, and it shows a feminine virtues. In Xiang's husband and his aunt's observation, Xiang's behaviors while dating made her more admirable. Xiang told me that she was lucky that she only stayed in the brides to be camps for eight days, and then she was chosen by her husband.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this paper, I explored how the matchmaker agencies bring Taiwanese men and immigrant women from two strangers to couples, and what do matchmaker agencies do for preparing women to be chosen. Similar to Xiang's experience, many immigrant women stayed in the brides-to-be camp, before they met her Taiwanese husband. Commercial matchmaker agencies arrange training courses on improving or correcting the immigrant women's bodies to make them look like appropriate mates during their stay in the camp. Women learned how to perform well to fit the ideal marital expectations of Taiwanese men in the matchmaking process.

From the processes of matchmaker companies preparing women, I have two important findings. First, an unequal interpersonal relationship between Taiwanese men and immigrant women is a result that not only because of unbalanced development of global capitalism, but also manipulated by matchmaker companies. The way commercial matchmaker agencies run their business maximizes Taiwanese men's choice, but neglects to give immigrant women the same opportunities. All the selective criteria are based on immigrant women, rather Taiwanese men. The way that matchmaker companies operate the matchmaking processes make immigrant women like products waiting to be sold, and make immigrant women become a certain extent 'submissive'.

Second, immigrant women are not only brides to be in the matchmaking process, but also body workers, emotional labour, and domestic workers who work for companies without getting any payment. Immigrant women are body workers in the process of preparing themselves as candidates to be proper Taiwanese wives. To preparing Taiwanese men's ideal immigrant wives, matchmaker companies treat brides to be 'like a thing' (Kung, 2005: 3) in the brides-to-be camps. Matchmaker companies do works on immigrant women's bodies, for example, ask them keep a slender bodies and smile to men. Sometimes, immigrant women have to not only negotiate between play a role of an appropriate wife candidate, but also use strategies to make themselves feel comfortable as well. In addition, matchmaker companies appropriate immigrant women's bodies to work for them. For example, they clean the office environment for companies as a practice of learning how to be a suitable Taiwanese wife. Through a series of disciplinary procedures in the brides to be camps and regulations that are taught in the training courses, matchmaker companies 'manufacture' immigrant women to meet Taiwanese men's expectations, increase immigrant women's value, and gain commercial benefit from the process.

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