

International Marriage: Life Must Go On!

Sekson Yongvanit

Faulty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University
sekyon@kku.ac.th

Abstract: International marriage is marriage between people from two different nations and it is a common phenomenon that occurs daily in today's small-world society. Due to the changes in this modern world, it is now very easy to be interactive, travel, and exchange information. People from many countries have the opportunity to communicate through media such as web pages, email, Face book, or Line. It is also much easier for people to meet 'face to face' due to the lower cost of airfares. Sometimes, when there are problems with language, it is possible to hire someone to help by translating or writing letters to help people connect with each other from another country. It is also possible to use a broker company who, for a fee, will contract and coordinate everything right up until the couple gets married. Thailand is one of the countries where local people enter into marriage with foreigners. Especially, Thai women prefer to marry Westerners, while women from Vietnam or China often choose husbands from Japan, Korea, or Taiwan. Studies indicate that there are large variances in the age, education, religion, language, culture, life style, and family relationships of the people involved in these marriages. The parents of Thai women, who marry a foreigner, although they may not understand their son in law's language, will accept him and be very happy to have him as a son in law. If they move abroad with their husband, the Thai women will visit Thailand every year and many send money back to Thailand regularly. They also plan to return to live in the Thailand when there is an opportunity or when their husband retires.

Keywords: International Marriage, Germany, Thailand, Way of life

1. INTRODUCTION

International marriage is very widespread in Europe and has happened from the Middle Ages until World War I. The monarchs in the past often tried to expand their dynasty, both inside and outside the country, by relationships through marriage. It is a factor that both stimulates and inhibits conflict and invasion between states and also promotes interstate peace. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_int_ermarriage)

Today, international marriage is a common occurrence in European and other Western countries. International

marriage occurs when people from two nations come to live together as man and wife. This movement of people, who create a mixture of different races, cultures, and ways of life in international marriage has increased due to the globalization effect. In France, International marriages increased from 10% in 1996 to 16% in 2009 and in Germany, international marriage was up 13.7% in 2010; in Switzerland, international marriage accounts for one-third of all married couples. (<http://www.economist.com/node/21538103>)

The relationship between two people can occur due to travel, using the Internet, or as a way to find a better life,

overseas. People are searching for ways to have more new friends in the world by having a global link. This is an important factor behind the increasing number of international marriages taking place in the world of globalization. International marriage is now associated with the ability to communicate quickly and well. It also affects upon immigrant society due to policies on citizenship, naturalization and the mix of new cultures provided by these immigrants. Important factors that encourage international marriage are as follows: 1. The desire to attempt to marry outside their home country. 2. The increase in the movement of people around the world provides more opportunities to meet and learn from, and about, each another. 3. Globalization has had an effect on many people who want to marry people from other societies (Niedomysl Thomas, et al. 2010).

In Sweden, Thomas (2010) found a marriage between a Swedish old man and a young foreign girl. There is a serious question about gender equality because during the past fifteen years, there has been an increase of 44% in young women migrating from poor countries to marry with Swedish men, with most of these women originating from Asian countries, Russia, or South America. It was also found that Swedish women may find their male friends in other countries in Europe, North Africa or in the United States.

In general, people will choose mates from their own society and of similar status. These spouses usually are around the same age, have similar education levels, share social groups, religions and social status as with other married men and women from Europe, the United States or Australia. However, Swedish men married to women from Asia or Eastern Europe are often more than ten years older than their spouse. It is

difficult for men to marry younger people in Swedish society and there are also negative indictments of international marriage. Men who marry people from other cultures are accused of having 'ordered' their wives from distant lands. They are told "It's like buying a used machine"; "This guy is a person who could not afford to have a wife from his own society". In fact, marriage is connected to sharing the satisfaction of need, whether or not it involves a variety of issues such as age, physical attractiveness, or economic stability. There are attractive people who persuade friends from abroad to marry because they look for traits they cannot find locally (Niedomysl Thomas, et al. 2010).

David Glowsky (2007) found that since 1970, international marriages in Western Europe have become even more international. Especially, marriage between Westerners and women from distant countries, who moved to live in Germany. Due to improved, low cost communications, internet, and cheap plane tickets, marriages between people from developed countries and people from countries with weak economies have increased dramatically. These women are mostly from Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, or South America. Men from wealthy countries will marry women from poorer countries because they have been unsuccessful in marriages with people from their own nation.

Margarita Khartanovich (2017) found that Finnish women like to marry people from Turkey, the United States, Russia, England, and Sweden because Finnish men like to live quietly, they are not social people. This is why Finnish women turn to men from other countries, but Finnish men like to marry women from Thailand, Russia, Estonia, China, and the Philippines. This is because

these foreign women are not strong feminists, they like to stay home and focus on their family, which is acceptable to their husbands. However, international marriage is often difficult to maintain as the relationship of the two people who stay together means that one of them is far away from home, they may miss their culture, their traditions and have to deal with a different language and culture. There are also other issues, such as in the case of the Finnish economy, with low wages or more unemployment. To live in a new environment with language barriers, people from distant lands may find it difficult to live and depend on only their Finnish spouse. If the spouses are able to overcome these problems, and still love each other, then they will have a balanced relationship, respect each other, and it could be true love. International marriage is not a comfortable marriage, because there are many inconveniences associated with it.

Asian countries also have the phenomenon of international marriage. This is usually a marriage between the so-called rich countries, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan and the poorer countries such as China, Thailand, and Vietnam. International marriage is a reflection of globalization because of the fact that people travel to, or study abroad in, other countries or use social media to connect with other people. A girl who traveled from a poor area of China or Vietnam would be looking for economic opportunity by entering in to a marriage with a man from a richer country. They would see such a marriage as a way to help their family at home.

In the case of Japan, the number of international marriages rose sharply between 1980 and 2006 with 40,000 international marriages in that year. However, the number has dropped continuously to an average of 20,000 per

year. Japanese women prefer to marry men from the United States or England, but Japanese men like to marry with Asian women from Korea, Thailand, China, and the Philippines (<https://www.nippom.com/en/features/h00096>). Most of these are people from rural areas. Traditionally, rural wives may have to take care of their husband's parents, be responsible for parenting (raising the children), and help with farming. For all this help, Japanese men will be looking for women from abroad as partners. Some local governments provide support and counseling services to assist men to contact a foreigner. The whole process to marry may lead to spending up to \$30,000 US. Some men pay money to the bride's family and this can improve the quality of life and conditions of her family. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan_foreign_marriage).

Regarding international marriages in South Korea, it was found that up to 2005, there were more than 250,000 such marriages in the country. In 2013, 40,000 people from Vietnam, China, Japan, the Philippines and Cambodia, married in Korea.

Since 2007, South Korea's Multicultural Families Support Act has opened a center for overseas brides to learn about the Korean way of life, lifestyle, culture, traditions, and language. This supports women, who come from Southeast Asia to marry with Korean men, to adapt themselves to Korean society because almost all of the women do not know the man who she married. All these learning programs will help these women to have a better life because they both can get to know each other through intermediaries. If she does not know the language, she cannot understand the culture. This will put them at a disadvantage and they will face inequality (Philip Iglauer, 2015).

Under Globalization, Taiwan has also received brides who have migrated from poorer countries for a better economic status. Since 1986, there have been more and more international marriages between Taiwanese and Chinese. Five years on, there were brides from Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Later still, brides from Vietnam and Cambodia were on the increase as these countries opened up. In recent years, Vietnamese brides have become the most sought after because a brokerage firm has made a significant contribution to the number of these brides.

Most Taiwanese men who married foreign brides have a background in agriculture, industry or live in the metropolitan areas. They are from an economically inferior group when compared to other people in Taiwanese society. Some of the Taiwanese marriages were intended to provide descendants and cheap labor for their families. Many foreign brides travel long distances from their home country to marry a Taiwanese. These girls will be limited, when living in Taiwan, by issues such as language. She must take care of her husband's whole family, care for her own children, her husband's parents and adapt to the environment, weather, customs, religion, language, diet, lifestyle, and her new family's way of living. The potential for conflict in an international family is obvious when they do not understand each other's culture (Betty Y. Weng, 2007).

In the case of Thailand, as reported from the seminar topic: Is being married to foreigners really a good thing? It is considered that 300,000 Thai women are married to foreigners and live abroad. They are located all around the world for example; Germany has the largest population of Thai married women with 50,000 brides. France and the United

States each have around 30,000 Thai brides. A foreign language, the gap between ages, and expectations of a comfortable life in a foreign country are the problems that Thai women face when they marry and live in Germany. However, there are many families who have successful marriages and are happy; this is usually because the spouses can communicate with each other. These couples experience few or no language problems, learn from each other before marriage, and know how to make a living, they do not wait for the husband to pay for everything. Success is found by attempting to study and adapt to each other's culture. It is important to keep talking to each other when problems arise. (<https://pantip.com/topic/30980927>)

2. Research Method

This research is divided into 3 parts. The first part is a study of the lifestyle of Thai women who marry with a German and live in Germany. The researcher provided questionnaires to 241 Thai women who live in Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, and Nuremberg, Germany. The second part concerns a questionnaire provided to 173 parents in Northeastern Thailand, of women who married a foreigner. The objective of the study being to learn their perspective on their son in law. The third part is also based in Northeastern Thailand and relates to a questionnaire provided to 193 people, who are in ongoing contact with foreigners, so as to learn why they have contact with foreigners.

3. Result of Research study

a. Research in Germany

The results of the study indicate that Thais who are married and live in Germany are aged from 22 to 66

years old and have an average age of 40 years. The German husbands are aged between 25-73 years old with the average age being 50 years. The age variation between couples is around 10 years. For the Thais, 88%

are female and they are 100% Buddhist. For the husbands, 50% are Christian and 18% are Buddhist. The Thais are mostly educated to secondary school level, but 88% of the Germans have higher education.

Religion	Thai (%)	Partner (%)
Christian	0	50
Buddhist	100	18
Muslim	0	0
Other	0	13
No religion	0	11
No data	0	8

Education	Thai (%)	Partner (%)
Primary School	46	2
Secondary School	22	16
College	23	28
University	4	12
higher	1	17
other	4	25

How many years – marry with present partner ?	Number (%)
1-5	26
6-10	28
11-15	16
16-20	21
21-25	8
26-30	0
31-35	1

Thais (46%) and Germans (48%) had been married and divorced before. Spouses (54%) lived together in Germany for more than 10 years. Most Thai people return to Thailand every year. And will stay in Thailand for 4 weeks.

Married before	Thai (%)	Partner (%)
Yes	46	48
No	54	47
No data	0	5

Which country is more difficult to live?

Germany	21 %
Thailand	41 %
No difference	28 %
I do not know	1 %
No data	9 %

Sixty percent of the Thais report that they live in Germany without problems. However, the most common problem was being unemployed, and consequently having no money. German language is very hard to learn and the cost of living there is high. Some Thais reported a feeling of being 'second class citizens'. Regarding the difference in culture, most Thais (84%) said they were satisfied with their life in Germany and 41% of Thais said it was more

difficult to live in Thailand than in Germany.

Do the Thais intend to return to Thailand in the future? The answer was Yes, with 62 % wanting to return to live in Thailand because they want to stay with a relative, Thailand is their homeland, parents want their children to return and stay in Thailand. Some do not like the German way of life and consider the weather to be too cold in Germany. Some are happy to stay in Germany because they feel very happy there. They have no

relatives in Thailand and in Germany they have a better social security than in Thailand which has no social insurance.

The main reason stated for the Thais to go abroad was due to economic problems and they want to go to 'try their luck!' Some had

left after being disappointed with their partner in Thailand. Sixty five percent reported sending money back to their family in Thailand, an average of 6,267 Euros per person, per year.

Reasons international marriage migration	%
had economic problems in Thailand	33 %
just wanted to go abroad	31 %
wanted to try my luck	22 %
disappointed by the partner in Thailand	20 %
recommended or informed by friends or relatives successful in abroad	16 %
did not like the work in Thailand	11 %

Send money to your family	%
Send money regularly	65
Send money, but not regularly	16
Do not send money	19

evaluate your stay in Germany	%
satisfied	86
not satisfied	7
Do not know	7

b. Research in Northeastern Thailand

The second study was undertaken in a sub-district in Northeastern Thailand by providing a questionnaire to 173 parents of Thai Women who had married a foreigner. It was found that the foreigners were from 23 countries

with most from England and Germany. The age of the Thai women was 21-57 with an average of 33 years. The foreigners were aged between 27-72 years old, with an average of 44 years. The age difference between spouses was around 10 years.

Age	Foreign	Thai
20-24	0	15
25-29	8	40
30-34	23	51
35-39	25	39
40-44	25	18
45-49	33	6
50-54	26	1
55-59	9	1
60-64	13	0
65-69	8	0
70-74	4	0
Do not know	2	2
Average	44	33

Nationality of foreign partner

England	34	Austria	9
Germany	29	Netherland	7
USA	19	Japan	7
Norway	13	Denmark	6
Sweden	10	Switzerland	6
France	9	New Zealand	3
Other; Taiwan, Finland, Argentina, Oman, Malaysia, Mexico,			21

Of the foreign husbands, 66% had married before, as had 38% of the Thai women. They had children within their first marriage, some having 3 children! So the question is – “Why did she divorce?” The

answers included, the first husband did not show responsibility to the family, they did not understand each other, and the husband had a second wife, he drank too much alcohol or he had passed away.

Number of children	Foreign	Thai
No Children	105	24
1	16	61
2	30	24
3	5	4
4	1	0
5	1	0

Reasons for divorce	
Passed away	9
Has other wife	11
Did not has responsibility, do not work	39
Drink to much alcohol	9
Do not understand each other	39
Do not know	11

Their daughter would return to Thailand every year and they could talk with each other, by phone, at least once per week. Around 91% sent money to their parents, and the parents said the money was enough for them to support themselves and

other relatives. The parents used the money mainly for building or repairing their home, to buy new agricultural land, invest in a business, pay off debt, and for general expenses.

How often – come to Thailand / Year

Once a year	95
Once in 2 years	33
2 time a year	17
seldom	13
Never return	15

How often –do they contract on telephone

Everyday	26
Every week	104
Every month	37
Once – 3-4 Months	6

For the parents, 86% said that it was good that their daughter had married a foreigner, but 13% were also worried or sad because their daughter was far away from home. They said they loved their son in law, even though they may not be able to communicate with each other. It was reported that 68% thought that their daughter, by marrying a foreigner, had a better life than in Thailand as they were very disappointed with the Thai husband and it will be good for their grand children... However, 19 % of parents indicated they were disappointed with their son in law.

Of the Parents, 91% indicated they wanted their relative to marry a foreigner, only 16 % said... “No way”. This was because they would be so far away from home and could not understand each other.

The parents wished that their daughter would return to live in Thailand (76%) and 78% of parents did not want to go to live with them, abroad, Finally, 84% of parents said their life today is better and they were satisfied with their current living status.

The third part of the study was conducted in Northeastern Thailand and consisted of a questionnaire to 193 Thai women in ongoing contact with a foreigner. The foreigners are from 24 countries, of which Germany, United States, and England are in the topic. Regarding the Asian countries, they are Japan, Pakistan, Singapore, and Malaysia, with a total of only 9 people. There is an age difference of 12 years and the Thai women’s ages are not more than 50 years, with most 26-30 years old. The foreigners are mostly in the

31-50 years age group, while some are much older, from 50 to 70 years old.

Regarding education, most of the Thai women and foreigners are graduates and their religion is Buddhist for the Thai women and

Christian for the foreigners. The foreigner's occupations are as self-employed or in the public and private sector. The Thai women are workers and employees in the private sector.

Country of partner

Germany	41
America	36
England	30
Sweden	13
Norway	10
Australia	9
Switzerland	5
Japan	5
Canada	4
New Zealand	4
Other; Israel, Malaysia, Finland, ...	35

AGE	Foreign	Thai
17 – 20	1	3
21-25	1	19
26-30	6	70
31-35	26	42
36-40	35	30
41-45	30	24
46-50	27	5
51-55	23	0
56-60	21	0
61-65	18	0
66-70	5	0

EDUCATION	Foreign	Thai
Primary	0	25
Secondary	5	63
College	13	29
University	175	75

RELIGION	Foreign	Thai
Buddhist	6	181
Christian	169	6
Muslim	4	0
Other	13	0

All parties had been married before and have children. The Thai women made contact with the foreigners because they learned from their friends or relatives who had married a foreigner and had a successful life after having economic problems or being disappointed with Thais. Some just wanted to go abroad, some wanted

to try their luck... Why had they chosen a particular person? Because they understand each other well, he had a good income, he had a good job, he was good natured and kind. "I love him" was the fifth choice. The final question was; when do you plan to marry? It seems that they are not in a hurry to marry.

Were you married before	Foreign	Thai
Yes	123	115
No	70	78

How many children did you have	Foreign	Thai
No Children	93	87
1	35	65
2	38	30
3	17	8
4	4	0
5	2	0

Why do you contract with him ?

Do not like the work	27
Has economic problems	97
Disappointed with Thai-friend	79
Just wanted to go abroad	52
Wanted to try my luck	42
Friends or relatives successful in abroad	122
Other	38

Why - this person as present partner ?

Understand each other well	132
Good income	124
Good job	116
Good-natured and kind	116
I love him	83
Good-looking	57
Not drinking, smoking, and stay home	50
Nationality	31
Other	18

When do you plan to marry ? / Year

1 Year	24
2 Year	37
3 Year	34
4 Year	17
5 Year	10
More than 6 Year	6
never plan	19
Do not know	16

4. CONCLUSION

From the literature review it was found that there are many negative reports regarding international marriage, or marriage between the rich and poor. The rich are those who could not find women in their homeland because they are not attractive and in a lower social status. Therefore, they find women from a poor country to fulfill their needs, and globalization has only increased the opportunities to contact with a partner.

This study found that the spouses' age, education, and religion are different and Thai women mostly prefer to contact Western people, rather than Asian. Around 50% have married previously, and some have children. They have not had success in family life and they want to start afresh. For the Thai women, it is more of an economic motive that drives them to find a better life. Parents are satisfied with their daughter when she achieves a better life and they accepted their son in law, although they may not be able to communicate with each other.

The ongoing contact is with foreigners who have a higher education level and is almost always with western people. They have married before and have children. The woman wants to get away from her environment, to go abroad, to try her luck, but she is in no hurry to marry her boy friend.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

- Glowsky David. (2007): Why Do German Men Marry Women from Less Developed Countries? An Analysis of Transnational Partner Search Based on the German Socio-Economic Panel. In: Zeitschrift für Soziologie 36 (2007): 282-301.
- Iglauer Philip. (2015): South Korea's Foreign Bride Problem. The Diplomat.
<https://thediplomat.com/2015/01/south-koreas-foreign-bride-problem>
- Khartanovich Margarita. (2017): Multicultural Marriages in Finland: Love Knows No Stereotypes, No Borders.
<http://www.oulunylioppilaslehti.fi/multicultural-marriages-in-finland>
- Nakagawa Satoshi, Sekson Yongvanit. (2007): International marriage migration from rural Thailand to Germany. The 4th International Conference on Population Geographies, 12 July 2007, Hong Kong.
- Thomas Niedomysl , Östh John and van Ham Maarten. (2010): The Globalization of

Marriage Fields: The Swedish Case',
Journal of Ethnic and Migration
Studies, 36: 7, 1119 — 1138

Tomoko Nakamatsu (2002): Marriage,
migration and the international
marriage business in

Japan. PhD thesis, Murdoch University.

Weng Betty Y. (2007): International
Marriages-Impact on Children and
families in Taiwan.

The Fourth Annual East Asian Social
Policy Research network (EASP)
International Conference, 20-21
October 2007, Tokyo, Japan

Yongvanit Sekson, Satoshi
NAKAGAWA (2012): Deutsch –
Thailändische Ehen – Eine

Socialanalyse Forschung zu Thailand:
Symposium 2012 anlässlich des

Doppeljubiläums 150 Jahre
deutsch-thailändische Beziehungen
und 50 Jahre Deutsch-
thailändische Gesellschaft, Berlin.

<http://www.economist.com/node/21538103>. International marriage: Herr
and Madame,

Señor and Mrs, Nov 12th 2011

<https://www.nippon.com/en/features/h00096/>. A Look at International
Marriage in Japan

2015.02.19

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_international_marriage

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan_foreign_marriage