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Managing risk, making a match: brokers and the management of mobility in international marriage

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, while scholarly work on international marriages within East and Southeast Asia has increased, the role and significance of marriage brokers in facilitating this form of transnational mobility has been given little attention. This is a particularly obvious gap in knowledge in the Asian context, as migration is largely mediated by brokers who play a strategic role in navigating the complex systems of regulation involved in the increasingly formalised regime of transnational migration. Situating our focus on marriage brokers provides a critical vantage point for unpacking the 'black box' of migration research whereby scrutiny is placed on the broader infrastructure that makes mobility possible, whilst illuminating the micro-geographies of emotion and power involved in the interactions between marriage brokers and their clients. Drawing on qualitative interviews with commercial matchmaking agencies and their Vietnamese female clients and Singaporean male clients, this paper analyses how marriage brokers manage risk in mediating the 'gamble' of international marriages, through techniques and practices of screening and selection, affective strategies of negotiation and persuasion, as well as by appropriating cultural conceptualisations of 'fate' as a way of managing clients' expectations.

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1. International marriage brokers

Despite the growing significance of international marriages in East and Southeast Asia over the past two decades, little is known about the mediating role of marriage brokers in facilitating this form of transnational mobility. Whilst earlier work has examined the largely commercial underpinnings of the international matchmaking industry (Lu 2008; Wang and Chang 2002), particularly nascent in the literature are ethnographic approaches that offer insight into the micro-politics of everyday encounters between marriage brokers and their male and female clients (in comparison with the burgeoning literature on 'encounters' between marriage migrants and state actors, see Friedman and Mahdavi [2015]). Recent scholarship on the migration industry in Asia has highlighted how the strategic positionality of brokers is embedded within complex and often multi-layered social relationships where 'profit, trust and empathy run hand-in-hand' (Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh 2012, 9). Notwithstanding their critical function in mediating multi-scalar flows of capital, information, and migrants themselves amidst increasingly sophisticated state bureaucratic mechanisms, it is precisely this fluid but ambiguous role underpinned by market-driven forces that contains the workings of the brokerage industry – an integral part of migration infrastructure comprising 'institutions, networks, and people that move migrants from one place

to another' – within a 'black box' of invisibility (Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh 2012, 9; Xiang and Lindquist 2014). In this context, we situate the marriage broker as a site of analysis to unpack this 'black box' in the international matchmaking industry. A focus on brokerage practices informs mobilities research by training the analytical lens on the infrastructural underpinnings that are 'responsible for structuring, mobilising and giving meaning to movement through their particular arrangements' (Lin et al. 2017, this issue) As a particular form of transnational mobility, international marriage well illustrates Adey's (2006, 83) more general observation that geographies of 'mobility and immobility are profoundly relational and experiential'. In this light, we focus on the intermediary function of brokers in managing the 'relational and experiential' through the analytical lens of risk management in order to cast light on how transnational matchmaking practices are performed and organised.

Key to the mobilities across international borders of an increasingly broad spectrum of people within Asia is the migration industry, comprising a range of intermediaries from licensed recruitment agencies to informal recruiters, who move, match and place would-be workers/candidates with prospective employers/clients. These intermediaries are particularly crucial under conditions of highly asymmetrical power relations, where they play a role in managing and filtering differential standards and divergent expectations in order to engineer a match. In doing so, they lend their expertise in navigating labyrinthine migration regulations, by constantly fashioning legal, governable and suitable subjects for transnational border-crossing. Whilst scholarship on migration brokers remains limited, the bulk of the research so far has tended to focus on issues of labour recruitment and mobility in the context of intensively mediated low-skilled labour migration regimes in Asia (Goss and Lindquist 2000; Lindquist 2010; Martin 2005; Molland 2012; Xiang 2012; Xiang and Lindquist 2014) with the exception of some recent work on marriage and student migration (Chee, Yeoh, and Vu 2012; Collins 2012; Lu 2008). Underlying much of the work, whether empirical or historical, is a general recognition that brokers remain critical players in contemporary migration regimes despite their frequent demonisation in abolitionist rhetoric, and increasing attempts by state actors to regulate their activities (Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh 2012; McKeown 2012). Specifically, scholars have argued that it is 'precisely because migration management is becoming increasingly sophisticated [in the context of intensifying state control, that] the demand for brokers is omnipresent at all levels' (Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh 2012, 12). Insofar as migration offers a spatial strategy for socioeconomic mobility amongst individual migrants and sending communities, circuits of capital and information that link remote areas to more industrialised regions are largely organised and administered by complex networks of informal and formal migration brokers, ranging from village-level recruiters to multinational agencies located in major destination areas. In these interactions, bureaucratic know-how and the ability to establish trust amongst prospective clients were identified as important brokering traits, since migrants are often required to make significant initial financial investments and/or entrust valuable personal documents for processing and handling (Lindquist 2012; Marius-Gnanou 2008).

In the international matchmaking industry, brokering transactions frequently involve complex negotiations of emotion and power that extend beyond their ostensibly commercial nature (Chee, Yeoh, and Vu 2012; Lu 2008) since, as Constable (2005, 7) notes, 'such migrations are shaped not only or simply by economic geographies but also by "cartographies of desire"'. This remains a particular lacuna in the literature on marriage migration as the bulk of research remains straddled between two ends: studies that emphasise the profit-driven underpinnings of international matchmaking practices as a 'commodification process' through advertising strategies that market the 'virtuous sexuality' of women (Wang 2010; Wang and Chang 2002); and studies that focus largely on issues of individual agency, highlighting female marriage migrants as active agents in decision-making processes and identity construction (Constable 2003). It is our aim in this paper to bridge this empirical divide by offering insight into the practical inner workings of the international matchmaking industry which forms a vital part of the infrastructural platform facilitating marriage migration. Specifically, we focus on how brokers work to manage the spatiotemporal risks associated with marriage migration as they aim to persuade clients to tie the knot across international borders. In so doing, we examine how brokers facilitate and imbue meanings into mobility by mediating the 'gamble' of international marriages between male and

female clients through techniques and practices of screening and selection, discursive strategies of negotiation and persuasion, as well as appropriations of cultural conceptualisations of 'fate' as a way of managing expectations.

2. Conceptualising migration, intermediaries and risk

Migration is often seen as a risky undertaking, even as it represents a coping strategy of dealing with risk and uncertainty for individuals, households, and communities (Charsley 2007; Lees 2006; Rosenzweig and Stark 1989). As Williams and Baláz (2012, 167) have pointed out, migration can be thought of as 'informed by, generating, and ameliorating risks' on a variety of scales. Embedded within different notions of risk is the underlying issue of uncertainty, whether real or perceived, calculable or incalculable, stemming from varying conditions of imperfect knowledge, ambiguity, and unpredictability (Lupton 1999; Williams and Baláz 2012). As such, the role of social networks and access to information about places, opportunities, and societal conditions in both source and destination areas form significant influencing factors that shape and inform individual and household decision-making practices concerning migration (Charsley 2007; Lees 2006; Lindquist 2010). Fox and Tversky (1995) have described this tendency as an outcome of 'source preference', which refers to the extent to which trust in specific sources of knowledge works to mediate one's perception and response to risk. At the same time, societal fears about migration posing as a threat and risk to national identities and mainstream social order are often informed by privileging (and over-emphasising) certain discourses and stereotypes about particular migrant groups.

Whilst economic theories generally consider risk as a phenomenon that is rational, objective, and quantifiable on the basis of individual decision-making, sociological approaches have highlighted how discourses of risk are social constructions that are constantly negotiated and interpreted within particular social contexts and cultural histories (Douglas 1992; Lupton 1999). More specifically, normative assumptions about gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and so on are often embedded within notions of risk as they are 'discursively constructed in everyday life with reference to the mass media, individual experience and biography, local memory, moral convictions, and personal judgments' (Zinn and Taylor-Gooby 2006, 54; quoted in Williams and Baláz 2012, 172). Rather than understand the calculus of risk in quantifiable terms, sociologists, anthropologists and geographers observe that risk is often calibrated on the basis of socially constructed, imperfect, and even inaccurate information (on the financial costs and benefits of migration, regulatory framework for migration, work conditions, etc.), as well as rendered acceptable or otherwise depending on the characteristics of the population concerned including gender, class, educational status, social networks and so forth. As Lupton (1999, 13) has argued, 'To call something a "risk" is to recognise its importance to our subjectivity and well-being' as individuals, communities, and society as a whole. Risk is thus 'associated with notions of choice, responsibility and blame' insofar as it is seen as 'something that can be managed through human intervention' (Lupton 1999, 25). In short, risk does not always connote exposure to hazard but can be a productive force (Zaloom 2004). In the migration literature, scholars have examined these ideas of risk (often implicitly) through the lens of individual agency, household decision-making, and state immigration control (Anderson 2013; Bossen 2007; Charsley 2007; Fan and Huang 1998; Friedman 2012; Lees 2006), though much less has been studied on the mediating role of brokers in the management and reduction of risk between these multi-scalar interfaces.

In the context of international marriages, such migrations are often seen as a 'gamble' in the eyes of those embarking on this path (Suzuki 2002). As the term suggests, these decisions do not preclude elements of agency, but reflect real tensions between migration aspirations and outcomes that involve a complex interplay of 'economic factors, familial obligations, cultural fantasies and imaginings, and personal motives' (Constable 2005, 3) negotiated against a backdrop of risk and uncertainty. For marriage migrants, the unique spatiotemporal risks that undergird this form of border crossing are evident in the ways that these relationships are embedded within a moral economy of trust and intimacy. As marriage migrants undertake the decision to tie the knot across physical and cultural borders – where

mobility may be simultaneously associated with 'new forms of empowerment and also disempowerment' (Constable 2005, 3) – potential risks include mismatched expectations, hidden spousal flaws, the inability to secure a long-term visa, as well as familial clashes with in-law relations that might pose as contributing factors to failed migration and the dangers of marital dissolution. For spouses at the receiving end, a common fear expressed was the risk of 'bogus' marriages, or 'marriages of convenience', whereby marriage is exploited by one's partner as a primary way of gaining permanent residency or citizenship in a particular country.

In the face of unfamiliarity and uncertainty, varying logics of trust and intuition are typically evoked and utilised as a basis for risk management and decision-making. In Charsley's (2006, 2007) work on transnational marriages between British Pakistani women and male Pakistani nationals, she highlights how families utilised kin relations and cultural proximity as a coping strategy against the risky process of arranged international marriages. As she points out, 'risk is managed through trust based on the bonds of kinship' since 'marrying within the family provides trusted referees in mutual kin to advise on the character [and compatibility] of the proposed spouse' (Charsley 2007, 1120). In the case of commercially arranged marriages across international borders, the marriage broker steps in to fulfil a similar role. Without the benefit of the implicit trust and social capital vested in kinship ties that operate to counter perceptions of risk, commercial marriage brokers not only have to work towards presenting themselves as middle-men and -women who understand the way things work (for example, with regard to having a good handle on changing government regulations, navigating bureaucratic practices and channels, developing networks and contacts with 'the other side', etc.), but have to take pains to build trust and manage clients' risk perceptions, particularly given the spectre of commercial gain and profit-making that hovers over the 'foreign bride industry'. In this vein, the work of matchmaking agencies that broker international marriages is an act of transformation, not just translation (Latour 2005): not only do they transmit and exchange information between clients, they work to interpret and deconstruct the calculus of risk and to reduce the perception of riskiness for their clients through various techniques and practices of selecting, packaging, representing and contextualising knowledge in order to 'set the process of [marriage] migration itself in motion' (Lindquist 2012, 88).

In the next two parts of the paper, we explain our field methods and provide a brief history of the evolution of commercial matchmaking agencies in Singapore. Following these sections, we turn attention in the latter half of the paper to one of the key questions Williams and Baláz (2012, 177) raise in developing a research agenda on migration and risk: 'how do intermediaries [commercial matchmaking agencies in this case] reduce (which types of) risks associated with [international marriage] migration?'

3. Field methods

We draw primarily on qualitative interviews with 15 commercial matchmaking agencies specialising in international marriages between Singaporean men and Vietnamese women part of a project entitled 'State Boundaries, Cultural Politics and Gender Negotiation in Commercially Arranged International Marriages in Singapore and Malaysia'. Commercial matchmaking agencies were identified through commercial listings,¹ as well as the online business information services provided by the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority. The keywords 'matchmaker' and 'marriage' were used to search the online databases. An Internet search was then conducted to identify agency websites, from which we culled as much information as we could. We then visited each of the agencies to conduct field observation and to obtain interviews.

Out of an initial list of 30 agencies identified, seven had residential addresses, and the remainders were retail outlets. Later, we obtained a few more leads with only telephone numbers, but none of these including agents that had residential addresses were interviewed (they either did not consent to talk to us, or did not answer our phone calls). We also discovered later that there were informal matchmakers who operate without registering as business, most of whom were Vietnamese wives and their Singaporean spouses who were matchmaking among their friends and relatives. Our interviews did not include this cohort of matchmaking agents. We completed interviews with 15 agency owners

that operated from retail outlets. The majority of the agencies were specialising in arranging marriages between Singaporean men and Vietnamese women, but there were three agencies that focussed on marriages between Singaporean men and Chinese women. We tried to obtain consent for recording the interviews, but there were five who did not want to be recorded, for whom we relied on note taking. As much as possible, the interviews were conducted by two researchers, one of whom led in the interviewing, and the other focused on observation and taking notes. Most of the interviews took place between October 2008 and July 2009, with one carried out in March 2010.

Review of the English language media in Singapore was carried out using online databases Factiva and Lexis Nexis Academic which covered the titles *The Straits Times*, *Business Times Singapore*, *Channel News Asia*, *MyPaper*, *The New Paper*, and *TODAY*. The first review in August 2008 used a list of 33 search terms that included international marriage, marriage migration, intermarriage, foreign bride/wife/spouse, Chinese/Vietnamese bride, and their variations, and yielded articles beginning from 1995. This was updated till August 2011. Similarly, review of the Chinese language media was carried out using online databases and search engines with a list of 35 specified keywords, including: Chinese wives (*zhongguo taitai/xinniangu/pei'ou*), Vietnamese wives (*yuenan taitai/xinniangu/pei'ou*), foreign spouse (*waiji xinniangu/pei'ou*), international marriage (*guoji hunyin*), cross-border marriage (*kuaguo hunyin*), marriage migration (*hunyin yimin*), matchmaking (*hunyin jieshao*), matchmaking agency (*hunyin zhongjie*), commercial marriage (*shangyehua hunyin*), and other keywords concerning the immigration and residential status of migrant wives. Close to 1000 news articles and reports from 2002 to 2011 were collected from *Lianhe Zaobao*, *Lianhe Wanbao*, *Shin Min Daily*, *Sin Chew Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *Sing Tao Daily*, *Nanyang Shangbao* (*Nanyang Business Daily*), and *Xinhua News Agency*.

4. The modus operandi of commercial matchmaking agencies

As is the case of many industrialised societies in Asia such as Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, the historical evolution of the international matchmaking industry in Singapore may be traced in tandem with shifting marriage trends since the 1990s that were generally characterised by an increasing 'marriage squeeze' (Jones 2004) amongst older working-class men at lower rungs of the socioeconomic scale. In the context of rapidly rising educational levels amongst young women, 'cultural and social impediments to women's "marrying down", and men's "marrying up" (in terms of education, occupation, and income)' (Yeoh, Chee, and Vu 2014, 286) had resulted in increasing rates of singlehood and significant marital delays, particularly amongst Chinese-speaking working-class men who were increasingly turning to the regional marriage market to enlarge their pool of prospective partners. The common perception was that all the 'good girls in Singapore [had] been snapped up', whilst the rest were too 'career-minded and materialistic' (*The Straits Times*, June 8, 1996). The latter were deemed as unsuitable for these men who expressed a desire for 'somebody simple' who was 'willing to stay at home and care for the family'.

In the early 1990s, commercial matchmaking agencies began importing foreign brides from Mainland China to meet the growing demand for foreign brides. China brides were marketed as the top choice as these women could communicate easily with their prospective husbands and were seen as 'less demanding' than their Singaporean counterparts (*The Straits Times*, March 2, 1998). Moreover, they did not mind men who were much older as they were generally perceived to have greater income stability than younger men. As noted by an agent, 'they just want someone with a stable financial background who is compatible and isn't fussy about age' (*The Straits Times*, March 2, 1998). In contrast to the tightly squeezed marriage market in Singapore, there was a ready supply of brides from China as an increasing number of women began to express interest in marrying foreigners. Agencies capitalised on this business niche by marketing Singapore as an attractive option, whilst operating as a service point to facilitate their migration. At the same time, it became increasingly popular for Chinese nationals to migrate to Singapore for work, and these businesses grew as the demand for marriage to a foreign husband increased. This spike in demand is evident in the rising numbers of Chinese nationals marrying Singaporean men, which increased by nine times from 127 in 1991 to 1000 in 1996 (*The Straits Times*, August 13, 2000).

The dominant mode of operation through which matchmaking agencies worked to facilitate these transnational unions was through liaising closely with agencies in different parts of China that provided a ready supply of prospective brides, and offering matchmaking tours to China for male clients to meet their choice brides and tie the knot. It was not uncommon for agencies to supply portfolios with photographs of about 200–300 prospective brides, detailing a range of personal biographical data such as age, occupation and interests, from which male clients in Singapore could then screen through to select two or three women that they were interested to meet (*The Straits Times*, March 2, 1998). At the same time, the personal profile of the prospective client would be faxed over to these chosen women for consideration. Upon confirmation of mutual agreement between both parties, the client may then opt to meet these women either individually or through a group tour. The cost of these tours was typically around SGD 2000 for a trip spanning between 4 and 5 days, which often included visits to different tourist attractions to allow the couple to interact and get to know each other better.

By the late-1990s, there was a gradual decline in demand for China brides owing to bad press and 'too many horror stories' that portrayed these women as 'gold-diggers or schemers who use marriage as a stepping stone to obtain permanent residence or citizenship' (*The Straits Times*, August 13, 2000). A watershed incident in the media involved a lengthy three-year legal tussle between a Chinese bride from Beijing and her Singaporean husband who was the son of a shipping tycoon concerning maintenance declarations in their divorce affidavits after a brief marriage of only a year and a half. Another notable example involved the 1996 case of a Chinese lady who tried, but failed, to annul her marriage with her Singaporean husband who worked as a technician on the grounds of non-consummation after obtaining Singapore citizenship (*The Straits Times*, August 13, 2000). The effect of these media portrayals was a general sense of wariness towards these women, which caused the demand for China brides from matchmaking agencies to dip considerably by the early 2000s. This general decline was attributed to two reasons: in part due to the growing perception that these women were solely interested in obtaining personal residency, not marriage; and also because Chinese women were able to enter Singapore on a work visa without needing an agency. According to an agency owner, 'The young, pretty ones are perfectly capable of coming themselves [whilst] the agency will get mostly older, divorced women like study mamas' (*The Straits Times*, February 19, 2006).

Following the gradual wane in the Chinese bride market in the early 2000s, matchmaking agencies began to advertise Vietnamese women as 'young, submissive and virgin brides', mostly from rural southern Vietnam, who embodied the traditional image of Asian women and an ideal wife as caring and industrious homemakers with a strong sense of filial piety (*The Straits Times*, August 5, 2012). In contrast to their Chinese counterparts who carried a 'reputation for being calculating' whilst always putting pressure on their husbands for 'more money [and] more everything', Vietnamese women were seen as 'beautiful, innocent, and well-mannered', exemplifying desirable traits as loving and caring wives (*The Straits Times*, May 21, 2000). The modus operandi of the Vietnamese bride industry during the early 2000s was generally similar to that of sourcing for China brides. Agencies in Singapore would approach their counterparts in Vietnam who typically had a close working relationship with several village-based recruiters, known as *yangmas* (foster mothers), who served as the first point of contact in the villages. Should a Vietnamese girl express interest in marrying a foreigner, the *yangma* would bring her to see the 'team leader' (having several *yangmas* under their charge), who would in turn connect her with the key coordinator in the city who worked directly with matchmaking agencies in Singapore.

A matchmaking tour in Vietnam typically spanned four to five days, consisting of a heavily packed travel schedule that was designed to ensure that male clients would return with having secured a bride. On the first day, the client would be presented with a group of prospective brides, from which a few ladies would be shortlisted for dating and personal interviews. It is encouraged that the male client makes his decision by the end of the day whilst securing the mutual consent of his bride-to-be. The chosen bride would then undergo a mandatory health check-up and virginity test on the second day to ensure a clean bill of health, after which the couple would pick out wedding clothes and jewellery in preparation of an engagement dinner at the end of the day. On the following day, the marriage ceremony would take place in the presence of the bride's parents to whom the dowry would be

presented. A celebratory lunch would then be hosted, after which the newly-weds would be left alone to consummate their marriage. On the fourth day, the male client would return to Singapore whilst his bride awaits the necessary paperwork procedures (approximately 10 to 60 days) before she is able to join her husband. Once she arrives in Singapore, the marriage would then be formally solemnised.

The industry dealing in 'Vietnamese brides' peaked in the mid-2000s, a period which saw at least 10 new agencies setting up shop. During the boom, some agencies claimed that they could match at least two to seven couples a month (*The Straits Times*, August 5, 2012). Within a few years, however, match-making operations began to change. Vietnam legislated a law that prohibits foreigners from going to Vietnam to acquire Vietnamese brides (AS002, 26). This also made it harder for matchmakers to conduct tours to Vietnam. While agencies still conducted matchmaking tours, these had to be arranged in a more low-key manner than before. Except for Myanmar, all member states of ASEAN are not required to obtain a visa to enter Singapore for a short-term visit of up to 30 days. As such, it was easier to get groups of prospective Vietnamese brides into Singapore, as opposed to bringing Singaporean men overseas to choose a wife. Vietnamese women were also beginning to seek out matchmaking agencies, unlike in the 1990s, when agencies had to approach women from the Vietnamese countryside (*The Straits Times*, August 5, 2012). In recent years, while some matchmakers still take men to Vietnam, this is much less common. A 6-day matchmaking tour to Ho Chi Minh City costs about \$10,000. The process is kept low-key and the brides come in twos and threes, rather than in 100s in the peak of the trade. However, agencies now mostly do not organise trips but rather bring the brides to Singapore. The 'walk-in brides' mode costs about \$8000 and is favoured as it is cheaper. These women come into Singapore on a tourist visa that last for 2 weeks, after which they have to leave the country if they are not able to find a match. The women usually stay in the matchmaker's homes while in Singapore.

From the second half of 2000s, matchmaking agencies brokering international marriages began to decline due to a few reasons. In a climate of fierce price wars, the number of matchmaking agencies that offer Vietnamese brides were reduced to less than 10 (as compared to 20 agencies during the peak in the early/mid 2000s) (*The Straits Times*, August 5, 2012). The Vietnamese authorities have increasingly moved to clamp down on the 'bride trade'. In 2010, they government addressed the issue of the bride trade and required Vietnam's government departments to improve efforts to protect these prospective brides (*ibid.*). In Singapore, the Vietnamese embassy spokesperson said that it is illegal to broker marriages between Vietnamese women and foreign men and that there is a fine and jail term for brokers. Some prospective clients by-pass Singapore agencies and go directly to the agents in Vietnam, or they go through relatives in Vietnam (AS002, 46). Moreover, some Vietnamese wives have become matchmakers themselves, drawing on their Vietnamese contacts and their husbands' social circle (cf. Chee, Yeoh, and Vu 2012). A handful of them charge a fee of about \$3000, substantially less than commercial matchmaking agencies. As such, with the burgeoning of an informal matchmaking industry and cheaper alternatives, there is less demand for formal matchmaking agencies. In sum, the shifts in the international marriage industry – from mainland Chinese sources for brides to newer Southeast Asian markets, as well as from organised matchmaking tours to 'walk-in' brides and semi-informal matchmaking – illustrate not just how infrastructural assemblages morph in response to business logics, but also how they steer mobilities into different channels and fashion variable mobile subjects.

5. Reducing risk: technologies of screening and selection

Inasmuch as marriage in the modern context is often perceived as an individualised affair, the sustainability (and credibility) of the commercial matchmaking business remains predicated on their ability to deliver sound 'products' based on socially accepted baseline standards to ensure client satisfaction. That is to say, the matchmaking business is informed by a certain homogenising process (often interpreted as 'quality control') as matches are made based on the construction of appeal and affinity through classificatory strategies – frequently informed by highly gendered, racialised, and class-based assumptions of particular nationals (Wang 2010) – that (re)create specific traits of an ideal male/female spouse as basic 'selling points'. Through practices of screening and selection carried out at both sending/receiving

ends, these qualities are then packaged by agencies as standard, start-up ingredients that would lay the foundations for a successful marriage. Often, by virtue of the disproportionate supply/demand curve of prospective brides and husbands, initial screening measures for the former has tended to operate on the basis of elimination with a range of exclusion criteria that typically include bodily traits, such as height, weight, age, and skin colour, as well as factors of socioeconomic capital, such as educational level, place of origin, and family background. As elaborated by agent FLMP,

I go to Vietnam a few times a year. When I go, I pick out 50 girls there. These 50 girls result from my eliminating others, i.e. those who have dark skin, are too fat, too short, have lower educational qualifications, or [are] of poorer quality. [...] You have to find those of good quality [... such as] those with a good family background. If her father drinks, or he owes money to others, and you find such girls to come to Singapore, wouldn't it be a headache? This means that they have a lousy family background. So it's not easy for us to find girls. It has to go through our elimination. The intermediary [in Vietnam] also has to visit each family and household to find out if there are any problems. (AS001Y, 10–11)

As part of standard screening procedures, the women also undergo health check-ups – that is, checking for chronic, infectious, and sexually transmitted diseases, and testing for virginity – in Vietnam and Singapore to ensure a clean bill of health. As agent VBIM points out plainly, 'If you are ill, there is no point in coming over. You waste the air ticket and money' (AS002Y, 21). Although the initial procedures (i.e. checking for diseases) are largely informed by state immigration regulations, the virginity test is a stipulated requirement by agents, who either make it mandatory as a safeguard measure (and 'selling point'), or upon a male client's request. According to agent VPM,

'Virginity is not important to my customer [though not always the case], [but] it is important to me as an agent' (AS009Y, 19), stating the potential risk of a woman's previous husband looking to have her back when she has already tied the knot with his Singaporean customer: 'Then they will come looking for me, [saying] this one, she has a husband already. Why did you still recommend her to me? How? What do you want me to do? That time, I will die. I can't even run fast enough'. (AS009Y, 19)

Whilst the health check-up in Vietnam serves primarily as a 'first line of defence [for agents] to be more assured' (AS003Y, 12), the procedure is repeated in Singapore as a verification measure to abate client anxieties concerning the veracity of these results, since, 'in the eyes of Singaporeans, only Singapore [tests] are reliable'.

Apart from quality control measures, the elimination process often includes establishing a pre-emptive baseline of expectation as a way of reducing the risk of mismatched expectations and spousal rejection. The political economic underpinnings that undergird this process are valuable to note as these assembled 'expectations' of male clients tend to conform explicitly with specific demographic and socioeconomic traits – namely, age and income levels (often conflated with one's educational standing) – of those 'squeezed' out of Singapore's marriage market. In the words of agent FLMP,

I will tell them in advance that if you all want to marry a husband in Singapore ... you don't expect to marry a husband who is 25 years old or 30 years old. There is no such thing. My customers are between the ages of 38 and 58 years. If you agree, then come. If not, then don't come. (AS001Y, 10)

Having clarified and benchmarked the age factor, the agent then moves on to ascertain the range of opinions about the amount of monthly household expenses these women expected to receive from their Singaporean husbands:

Firstly, [I will say:] you all want to marry a Singaporean, and you want to start a family, [so] you have to start afresh a new chapter in your life. And later when you come, your husband will not allow you to work, and the government will not give you permission to work when you all first arrive.² However, Singaporean men all have jobs. How much then do you expect your husband to give you for family expenses? [...] I ask those who want SGD 300 to 500 to raise their hands, [and] eliminate them. All those that are left expect that their husbands given the between SGD 100 and 200 monthly. This is equivalent to their monthly salary. Sometimes, they only 'earn' SGD 70 to 80. So I eliminate those with high expectations. (AS001Y, 10)

In the above quote, the broker's deliberate emphasis on 'family expenses' (instead of actual salary figures that husbands should receive) may be attributed to two overlapping factors: (i) to create a 'selling point' for male clients to negotiate the amount of money they wished to provide their spouses; and (ii) to acquaint the women with local immigration restrictions that disallow them from working in Singapore

unless they have secured permanent residency (PR) or citizenship status (often only after several years with no explicit guarantee).

In addition, the mention about 'start[ing] a family' and 'start[ing] afresh a new chapter' in life serves to outline specific preconditions of the migration journey that these women should anticipate: namely, that of family formation through reproduction; and having to adapt to new living conditions in terms of culture, household arrangements, community (often the lack of), and so on. As a way of tackling and reducing the risk of homesickness, the broker also spells out clear boundaries to establish who has the upper hand in marital decision-making:

I will tell the woman that all Singaporean men have jobs, so you cannot say that you request to go back home three months after your marriage. Our conditions are that since you have married, your husband will bring you home when he has obtained leave. This can be six months or one year from now. [...] This right lies with the man only [...] and the woman has no right to ask of that. The man has to agree to a condition: no matter how you get married, you must go back once to visit her parents. (AS001Y, 10)

In this regard, the productive power of brokering practices is evident in how these processes are as much about particular acts of *transformation* as they are of translation (Latour 2005). A key task of the broker is to identify potential areas of mismatch and take pre-emptive action. In this sense, fashioning the migrant subject into the mould of a fittingly compliant wife with 'reasonable' expectations is a critical part of controlling risk in the production of mobilities. Having prepared the prospective brides at source, the broker then turns to the male client to present the summation of his efforts:

[I tell them] that I have already eliminated all these things [including 'those who have dark skin, are too fat, too short, have lower educational qualifications, or are of poorer quality'] so when you bring your wife back, you don't have to worry that you have to give her a lot of money. If you like them, and it's economically convenient, you can give her about SGD 200 per month. If it's not economically convenient, you can give her SGD 100. So, it is like there is a framework and channel that has helped both parties to communicate. They won't encounter friction in the future over finances. (AS001Y, 10)

In the above instance, the broker strategically lowers the average bar of financial expectations to allow the male client to tailor his personal preferences and needs. By smoothening mutual spousal expectations, particularly concerning the often-sensitive nature of finances, potential friction is avoided through the establishment of specific baseline requirements from which marital responsibilities and obligations could be discussed and negotiated. Notwithstanding the highly uneven plane of negotiation between prospective brides and husbands, male clients are not exempt from standard screening procedures set out by the agent:

Normally [it's] like this: He must have three conditions. Firstly, he must not be currently married. Secondly, he must have a stable income. If he can't even feed himself, how can he have a wife? Thirdly, he must be a normal man—[that is,] he should not be saying things like he likes to sleep with men or cannot have sexual intercourse, etc. Perverts are also not allowed. [...] I have seen people without money [and] I say [to them] you better not have a wife. (AS002Y, 12–13)

A range of legal preconditions concerning marriage and immigration regulations in Singapore typically underpins these criteria – namely, the prohibition of polygamy, and a husband's proof of income stability (often highly discretionary) to justify his ability to support a foreign spouse and sponsor her application for long-term stay in Singapore (marriage migration does not automatically guarantee PR or citizenship status). At times, only verbal confirmation is needed, although clients are warned that 'they can lie but they have to face the music because [they] can be jailed up to 3 years' (AS007Y, 15) under Singapore law. The women are typically brought in on social visit passes that are extendable for a maximum of six months, after which husbands would have to apply on behalf of his spouse for a Long-Term Visit Pass (LTVP), renewable every six to twelve months, to secure her ability to remain in the country. As explained by agent EBM,

Right, if you want to come here and choose brides, ok, I want to know: Do you have qualifications to help her apply for long-term pass? If I know that you do not qualify, sorry I will not accept you. [...] It is not that you have the money [that] you can do whatever you want. [...] What I want to know is whether you have a salary. Do you pay income tax? Because I am doing a legal business, I don't want to do things casually. [Also] I need to know what you have and what you are using as evidence to help your wife apply to guarantee that she gets her long-term pass in

Singapore. If you have money now but you do not have a job, and you married a wife, she stays in Singapore for 2 to 3 months, and [afterwards] let her go back to Vietnam? If anything happens in the future, you come and find me? I need to know first whether you fulfil the criteria. (AS008Y, 3)

In this regard, the broker's mediating role in the marriage/migration process lies in his ability to navigate complex systems of state control to minimise risk by virtue of their bureaucratic know-how and professional experience concerning these procedures. As agent VPM explains,

When we bring [the women] over to get married, we are actually using 'tourism' as a smokescreen for getting married in Singapore. [...] As for the men, we inform them that] you cannot say you are getting married there. [...] It is a criminal act. But we know how to cover up for the offence ... We are the agents so we know how to do it such that we don't transgress their regulations. (AS009Y, 21)

In addition to sourcing and matching prospective brides for male clients, brokers also handle a range of paperwork procedures, such as applications for travel documents and immigration passes, as well as logistical arrangements for marriage ceremonies, formal and informal, at both source and destination. In some cases, agents also opt to include the LTVP application process as part of their overall business strategy to establish trust and credibility despite the often-arbitrary outcome of these applications. As agent FLMP explains,

[Some] agencies will say that these are government regulations, and it's none of my business. You were the one who applied for the long-term social visit pass, and it's the immigration authorities that denied your application. Now that they rejected your application, it's not my fault. It's not my fault that I didn't help you settle this. I'm different. My sign outside and my advertisements all state that my package includes the handling of the long-term stay application. (AS001Y, 8)

In view of significant investments of time and effort required on the part of the broker in this complex and multi-layered process, package fees and initial deposits operate as a practical way of 'test[ing] sincerity' (AS002Y, 13) and securing commitment levels at both sending and receiving ends. As elaborated by agent VBIM, 'Because I charge SGD 8000 to 10,000, there's a certain level of barrier. If you don't have a barrier, everything will be messed up, you understand?' (AS002Y, 13).³

By well-honed techniques of screening, selection, the setting of minimum criteria (for conditions ranging from 'looks' for the women and financial standing for the men) and the establishment of entry barriers (e.g. fees and deposits), matchmaking agents strive to assure clients of the 'quality' of their business 'products' and to allay clients' fears of the unknown in commercial international marriage. By presenting evidence of careful quality control, they work towards reducing clients' perception of riskiness by convincing them that the international marriage process is not one which is entirely arbitrary but where clients – under the experienced guiding hand of the agent – can exercise a comfortable level of choice and discretion in making well-informed decisions in the arena of marriage. In this light, brokerage practices are not only generative of migrant mobilities but serve to reorder migrant subjectivities and create unequal categories of 'suitable' and 'unsuitable' subjects who can participate in transnational marriage mobilities.

6. Reconstituting risk: discursive strategies of persuasion and negotiation

As the term connotes, 'matchmaking' involves a necessary discursive and creative process, of which success is contingent upon both strengths of selection *and* negotiation. Inasmuch as pre-emptive measures of screening and selection at both source and destination have served to reduce risk by means of establishing reliable networks of 'quality' sourcing and referral, competency in tailoring one's 'product' to the individual needs of clients through discursive strategies of persuasion and negotiation forms another important marker of a successful marriage broker. In particular, service delivery marked by qualities of trust, empathy, and credibility were deemed as necessary to secure a client's confidence in one's business. Insofar as notions of risk are shaped largely by human subjectivity and normative assumptions about particular places or people (Douglas 1992; Lupton 1999), it may be argued that perceptions of risk are necessarily contested and embedded within a discursive field of knowledge and uncertainty. In this regard, the efficacy of matchmaking lies in the broker's ability to craft convincing arguments

through various discursive strategies to reconstitute perceptions of risk by managing expectations (and fears) in a way that serves to remove immediate barriers to decision-making. In other words, the work of lubricating marriage migration requires brokers to sustain what Harvey and Knox (2015, 526) calls the work of 'enchantment ... at (different) junctures of infrastructural promise'.

As a way of 'setting the stage' for client interactions, brokers often work to establish trust by presenting themselves as sincere and trustworthy professionals through parallel strategies of proximity and distancing (Goffman 1959). In some instances, the commercial underpinnings of business making are re-presented through notions of charitable 'help' and a sense of identification and empathy. As agent VPM puts it,

Nowadays, in Singapore, there are many people that are 'expired'. [...] When they are [aged] 30 plus, they don't get a wife. In their 40s, they cannot get a wife. When they are 60 plus, they are sick and cannot eat. They have to look for government welfare [or] look for an old folks' home. This person's life is gone. We want to help these people the best that we can. (AS009Y, 14)

The transactional nature of commercial matchmaking is masked by recourse to the moral discourse of marriage as an act of self-help that will at least insure against dismal conditions in later life. In other instances, the profit motive is bracketed out and redefined through the lens of responsibility and accountability, giving way instead to the achievement of domestic bliss as the primary goal of commercial matchmaking. In the case of agent CDJ,

She would first look at the client's character and background to determine how they would match him. She added that she did not accept every client [...] but] would talk to him over a period of time. [...] If she felt that the match and marriage would not be the kind that the client would want, then she would not continue. She hoped that all her clients would have a blissful marriage and not divorce after realising that their characters didn't match. (AS013X, 3)

Similarly, agent EBM argued:

I cannot casually marry the lady off just to earn money. Later if her husband in the future has anything, if the lady is unwilling, then her husband [will] come and find me [to] say, this kind of girl you also dare to recommend to me. (AS008Y, 5)

To allay potential fears of exploitation and/or deception, the broker justifies his/her business integrity by situating him/herself within an interconnected web of relationships sustained by practices of honest communication and mutual consent:

We must get her parents' approval. I discuss the conditions with the ladies, for example if the guy is 55 years old and below, do you want to marry? If she does not want to marry, I cannot force her, you understand? [...] She can say no, there is no use in forcing. If you force her to marry someone she doesn't want, the customer [will] come to find me [and demand an explanation]. (AS002Y, 25)

In another case, agent FLMP explains his business principle of ensuring that clients are given the right amount of information needed to make their own personal judgments on whether or not they wished to marry:

For instance, if the person is crippled, mute or [has] other forms of disability, we won't accept their business. However, we will tell [the lady] directly that this is a crippled person and he wants to choose you. We will also show her his legs. This cannot be covered. If she agrees, then she will marry. If not, she won't. If the man is mute, we will tell her that he is mute, because they cannot communicate. Afterwards we will ask if she agrees. If she does, we will ask her mother. Her mother will say that she will leave it up to her daughter. If her daughter objects, we won't marry her. If she agrees, we will marry her. We cannot force people to marry. This is our principle, the principle of my agency. (AS001Y, 11)

Beyond strategies that serve to build up the agent's image of empathy, accountability and transparency, the most common strategy in reconstituting risk involves representing Singaporean men and Vietnamese women as ideal marriage partners, particularly against the foil of 'career-minded' Singaporean women and 'good-for-nothing' Vietnamese men. In contrast to portrayals of Vietnamese women as 'pure and innocent' village girls who are humble, hardworking, and caring spouses, Singaporean women are typified as materialistic marriage partners who 'think very highly of themselves' and often require 'high maintenance fees'. In this regard, Vietnamese women are marketed as fitting into the traditional image of Asian women as 'gentle, hardworking, filial, and family-oriented' women who make ideal wives and

excellent homemakers. Similarly, representations of Singaporean men as model husbands who serve as 'good providers' and will 'look after their wives well' are juxtaposed against unfavourable portrayals of Vietnamese men as 'Casanovas' (stemming from French colonial influence) who 'like flirting with the ladies', 'have an easy-going attitude', and 'can be quite violent'. Through these representational strategies, risk is reconstituted through the logic of comparison, where transnational matches between Singaporean men and Vietnamese women are marketed not just as viable but attractive options.

As a parallel strategy, brokers combat negative media portrayals of Singaporean men seeking foreign brides as 'old', 'uneducated', and 'undesirable' by providing contrasting claims that they are 'busy working men' with simple needs and wants (such as that of 'com[ing] home to a clean house, a hot meal, and a happy family') that most modern career-minded Singaporean women are thought to be unwilling to fulfil. In this regard, the agent inserts him/herself as a point of intervention to pair these men with a suitable match, whilst at the same time using persuasive techniques to remind clients of the opportunity costs of not marrying. Subsequently, marriage is presented as a way of mitigating the future risk of having no support in one's old age. In the words of agent VPM, '[We help him get] married in his 40s or 50s. In his 60s, when he is sick, he still has a wife by his side: someone to pour a glass of water for him to drink, [and] someone to feed him his medicine. [...] He has a pillar of support' (AS009Y, 14).

Brokers also work to subvert risk by utilising their fluid positionality to reconstitute (and soften) the commercial face of the broker/client relationship by taking on a range of personas to meet different needs. Stemming from the multifaceted nature of the matchmaking business, brokers frequently take on roles that may range from that of marriage/courting counsellor to one of a foster parental figure (for female clients), as seen in the case of agent MSG:

I always tell my client that you are not coming here to buy a person. This is the 21st century... You cannot abuse her, you cannot rape her, [and] you cannot beat her, [because] you can go to jail. So you better choose the right girl and use the [time] before registration and how much visa they [have] left to get to know them. The best [way] is to bring back to their family [and] introduce to their family. [...] But we did warn them [that] if you abuse my girl, we would make a police report. Singapore is very small, [so it's] not good for you. [...] Also we teach the ladies that if anything goes wrong, don't panic, you know, you can call a taxi, you can shout for help, and then I will be there or you come back here by taxi. [...] There's strictly no staying overnight, [...] which] means, usually by 9:00 pm they [have] to come back here during the courting period. (AS007Y, 22)

Apart from undertaking the role of pre-marital advisor for clients, agent MSG takes pride in seeing himself as 'a foster parent to many of the girls, where they treat this place here like their home when they come back with their kids or bring red eggs' (AS007, 4) to share the blessings of their new journey as mothers. He also continues to avail himself 'as a friend' (AS007Y, 7) and contact point through which clients could approach him for various forms of assistance such as transferring money, and the booking of flight tickets. In their work of providing infrastructural support to transnational marriage, intermediaries have a better chance of shaping the contingencies of migrant mobilities to their favour if they are also able to refashion their own subjective positionings.

7. Rarefying risk: evoking cultural conceptualisations of 'fate'

Whilst brokering practices may offer strategic ways of reducing and reconstituting risk for clients to make a suitable match, most brokers admit that marriage is largely 'a gamble of luck' (AS008Y, 21) where there are no real guarantees on what happens in the future. In the words of agent EBM, when a client goes into a matchmaking agency and find himself

satisfied... [That is to say,] you are willing, I am willing, [and we decide] ok, let's get married. Who can guarantee that in the future, in 10 years, 8 years' time [that you will be together?] You can't even guarantee yourself. (AS008Y, 22)

In this regard, brokers work to manage expectations by setting out clear boundaries to communicate that these decisions will always entail an element of risk and uncertainty. In agent VPM's view, the intermediary act of matchmaking should be distinguished from marriage as a private, lifelong affair:

There is no hundred percent. Even our fingers, when we stretch them out, there are long and short ones. There will be bad people around, right? But we try our best to help them come together [and] explain things to them.

Since we have brought them together, we will try our best to help. If we cannot help them, [we have] no choice [because] they are not our children or anybody close to us. We are just the middlemen. We help them get together. That is all. (AS009Y, 15)

In some instances, clients desperate for a male offspring would make specific requests for brokers to find a suitable partner that would grant them this desire. Having no means to offer any sort of guarantee, agent EBM laments:

Let nature take its course, right? Have means have. Don't have means don't have. Like some people tell me, marry a wife must guarantee [that she] can give birth. I ask him how to guarantee this? The problem might be [that] you cannot have children, or it might be the girl's problem? I don't know. How can I guarantee that she can give birth? Still must give birth to a boy. I cannot. I am not God. Even the doctor can't guarantee that. [It's] hard to say. You cannot control. Some people get married and... say they don't want to give birth. [But] even buying 4D also not so lucky – the first [time] and she is pregnant! Who dares to guarantee? (AS008Y, 46)

Whilst screening and negotiation techniques may serve to increase the likelihood of mutual compatibility between clients, the inherent unpredictability of business outcomes have led some brokers to externalise notions of risk and blame through the cultural lens of *yuan fen* or 'fate'. As agent MSG reflects, 'Of course something that you cannot describe is the *yuan fen* [between a male and female partner]. Certain people see [a] certain girl, they have a liking for that lady so there is no word to describe' (AS007Y, 22). These sentiments evoke a sense that there are larger forces at work that bind particular individuals together, which transcend the fleeting and often transactional nature of these interactions.

According to agent FLMP, it is 'quite normal' for a man to walk into an agency, set his eyes on a particular lady, take an immediate liking to her at 'first sight, and decide to get married straightaway' (AS001Y, 3). As he elaborates:

When a man seeks to be married to a woman, it is just like a man buying clothes. Do you understand? They will choose their desired clothing from this supermarket, which is to say from the agencies. This is related to fate. Let me give you an example. Let's say that his fate is located in that one girl in the opposite company. He can't find a match amongst the 20 girls here. So in order to do business, it depends on which girl the man is fated with when he enters the company. (AS001Y, 8)

Likewise, in the words of agent VPM,

If he [the male client] comes, he comes. Otherwise it is alright. If we have [an] affinity, and he can get me to help him, it is affinity. If he finds me and there is no affinity between us, he can find someone else. (AS009Y, 26)

Apart from navigating different scales that span across national borders, the economy, and individual clients, brokers also 'jump scale' to the transcendent realm of fate and destiny as a way of justifying the inherent unpredictability of business outcomes and practices in the industry. Despite the enigmatic nature of these encounters, however, business interventions are not entirely precluded as some brokers have also stepped in to assist couples with arranging for their zodiac signs to be read as a way of better assessing their mutual compatibility and destiny in this perceived gamble of luck. In the face of the inherent uncertainties of matchmaking, cultural notions of fate and providence are invoked at critical junctures to smooth over possible cracks in the 'infrastructural promise' of commercial matchmaking services.

8. Conclusion

Brokers have long played a strategic role in facilitating movement by bridging the barriers to mobility (McKeown 2012). In her conceptualisation of a 'politics of mobility and access', Doreen Massey (1993, 61) has argued that some groups of people are 'more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement; others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; [and] some are effectively imprisoned by it'. In this regard, it may be argued that mobility is inherently relational and political – that is, different groups of people experience mobility differently within an interdependent web of relationships. In this paper, we have demonstrated the productive role of marriage brokers in not only facilitating but conditioning specific flows of marriage migrants from Vietnam into Singapore in order to fulfil the 'infrastructural promise' of commercial matchmaking.

Much has already been written on the conception of 'risk' in modern societies which are more pre-occupied with living in the future than the past (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990). In the face of the uncertainties of dynamic change in future-oriented societies, constructing and managing risk takes on major significance as a means of optimising the exploitation of opportunity (Luhmann 1993). As a way of circumventing and reducing elements of risks and uncertainty associated with marriage migration, brokers have sought to utilise a strategic combination of three elements. First, through highly gendered, classificatory strategies of 'quality control' based on particular 'selling points' along the lines of gender, age, class, nationality, as well as bodily traits such as height, weight, and skin colour, prospective clients are screened and sifted as a pre-emptive measure before mobility can be facilitated. Second, brokers take on multiple roles as service provider, foster parent, and marriage counsellor to mitigate the commercial front of the matchmaking business, whilst adopting various affective strategies of persuasion and negotiation to secure a match. Lastly, cultural conceptualisations of 'fate' are often appropriated to justify the ambivalent nature of commercial matchmaking. Migration infrastructures that facilitate transborder matchmaking and marriage hence manage risk based not just on distinctions in the domain of 'rational' calculation and anticipation, but also by relying on manipulating affective sensibilities and deferring to what Luhmann (1993, 13) calls 'the constants and secrets of nature and religion'. In short, in the case of international marriage, brokerage smoothens out this form of transnational mobility by managing the risk that coheres in intimate human relations.

Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh (2012, 10) have asserted that a 'broker is not a fixed identity and must be considered in relation to location, time, and power'. By situating our analytical focus on brokering practices in the commercial matchmaking industry, it becomes evident how the fluid positionality of marriage brokers is key in shaping and reinforcing different contours of (im)mobility across national borders. In this regard, a grounded perspective on the mediating impacts of brokering practices on migrant mobility is particularly crucial in understanding the organisational and productive power of the commercial matchmaking industry in facilitating this growing form of transnational migration within the Asian region.

Notes

1. These included the Yellow Pages (08/09 and 06/07); Internet Yellow Pages (English and Chinese); Yellow Pages Listings (2006) used in initial research; Mocca OneGuide; www.thegreenbook.com; www.sgbuyers.com; www.singaporebusinessguide.com; *Shin Min Daily News* and *Lian He Wan Bao* CATS (non-random sample).
2. 'Foreign brides' first enter Singapore on a social visit pass (ranging from three to twelve months in the first instance, and renewable) which forbids gainful employment. The right to engage in paid work is only conferred upon securing permanent residency, and this process can take many years. As this agent suggests, husbands (and other family members such as mothers-in-law) may also not be supportive of, or may not allow, their wives to engage in paid work outside the home as often their primary function is expected to involve anchoring reproductive work in the household, including domestic chores, procreation, and caring for children and the elderly.
3. Similarly, marriage brokers also ask prospective Vietnamese female clients to put down a small deposit to distinguish between those who are genuinely interested to marry (as opposed to getting a free holiday), which will be returned if they get married (AS007, 19). One agency (VPM) requires female clients to pay for their own ticket to Singapore [starting from 2008], because 'if Singapore's immigration and customs don't allow her to cross and she gets repatriated, our money will be gone. So if she pays and gets sent back, we don't care' (AS009Y, 11).

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