

International Marriages in Sweden: A Case Study of Asian Women and Western Men

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Abstract

This thesis is a case study of international marriages in Sweden. It concentrates on Asian women and Western men. The purpose of the research was not to generalize but to present individual cases and to detect what ideas, life experiences and circumstances influence the choices of life partners in international marriages. It also examines gender relations, influence of stereotypes, attitude of the society, choices of residence, marital disagreements, present, past and future of the couples and other issues. It includes 24 interviewees. The main theories of the work are social collective memory and social exchange. Based on findings, it was concluded that choice to marry internationally is influenced by numerous factors, for instance by interest in other culture, local marriage market disadvantage, look for certain values and features that are frequent among foreigners, as well as important role play globalization, technical development and countries liberalization. This research refuted a range of stereotypes connected to international marriages, showed that wider societies in Asia and Sweden negatively perceive and stigmatize them, that a majority of couples are quite gender equal and that the increase of international marriages are tightly connected to concepts of globalization and migration.

Key words: International marriage, Asian women, Western men, choice, globalization, stereotype, gender, case study.

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Foreword

First of all, I would like to thank sincerely to professor and my supervisor Dr Ann Kull that did not only guide me in my thesis writing, but also strongly supported, helped and showed her high professional skills and patience during the whole process. Moreover, I am thankful to all my respondents that agreed to participate in my study and enabled me to write about international marriages and own experiences. I think, meeting with them made me a better person, opened my eyes and gave me huge material for thoughts.

1. Introduction

As an international student and migrant in Sweden, I attended a national language course for immigrants SFI (Swedish for Immigrants). In the language school I met many Asian women that are married/engaged with Swedish men. However I noticed that sometimes there is a negative image of such relations in Sweden and I decided to see what is behind this general image. Therefore I became interested in studying these women and their partners as individuals and wanted to hear their personal stories.

1.1 Research Problem

The percentage of cross-border relations and international marriages are constantly rising in the world. For example, according to *The Economist*, international marriages in Japan accounted less than 1% in 1980, In South Korea – 3,5% in 2000, in Spain and Italy - 5% in 1995, while in 2009 they comprehended 5% in Japan, 10% in Korea, 14% in Italy and 22% in Spain (2011). Moreover should be outlined that countries accept and tolerate more international relations, though fear, implicit objections, racism, stereotypes and prejudices toward multinational marriages do not only exist but flourish in societies (Tse and Guce, 2004). Many international couples face problems with adaptation, acceptance, acculturation, public attitudes, internal and external constrains, negative stereotypes and disdain all over the world (Jones, 2012). Sweden is not an exception from global trends and it is interesting to see why these marriages increase in the country. In this study I concentrate on 12 Asian women and their western partners.

1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

The main question in this research is: What ideas, life experiences and circumstances influence the choices of life partners in international marriages in Sweden? While the sub-questions are – What is the past, present and expected future life of these international couples? What gender relations are within these international couples? How do stereotypes influence international marriages? In addition, choices of places for permanent residence, marital disagreements and the surrounding society's attitudes to international marriages are examined in the work.

1.3 Theoretical Framework and Concepts

The theory of social collective memory influences all our choices in life. According to Halbwachs, they are dependent on and mediated from the society and our collective memory of its existence and history. Thus family, social group, religious and others memories guide us in our life and influence choices. But also he emphasizes that even our dreams and fantasies are

tightly connected to our social collective memory, because consciously or not we compose them by fragments of collective remembrance (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 41).

The second theory used here is the social exchange theory that concentrates on “giving” and “taking” processes in a relationship. People in all relations tend to maximize their rewards such as love, status, attractive partner, while minimizing costs - insecurity, poverty, exploration and others (Reis and Sprecher, 2009, p. 360). According to Minervini and McAndrew people from different cultures more and more seek same features in partners at local and international levels, for example Russian, Filipino and Columbian females usually look for fidelity, ambitions and commitment in eventual life partners (2006). Thus processes of value maximizing and cost minimizing are universal in this sense.

International Marriage

The definition of international marriage is complicated, firstly because there are several definitions of it and secondly there is a confusion and misunderstanding among people in distinguishing international, interethnic, interracial and intercultural marriages (Mok, 1999). But in many internationally legislated acts we can read that international marriage is a marital relationship between two parties of different nationalities. Nationality is being a part of a group of people united by common traditions, culture, history and language, while citizenship is a status connected to rights, privileges and duties towards and within a specific country (Azkin, 1966).

According to Tse and Guse (2004) interracial relationship is between people of different racial categories, for example between White Americans and Black Americans, whilst interethnic relations are relations between representatives of the same racial category, but different ethnicities, for instance marriage between Miao and Han in China or between Koreans and Japanese. Marriages between Chinese and Japanese people will be seen as international, because these nations do not belong to the same ethnical group. Finally, intercultural marriage is between individuals that come from different cultural backgrounds (Gaines, 1995). Thus international marriages can comprise different races and cultures but it is not necessary. Generally countries see international marriages as cross border marriages, but as explained above nation and citizenship are not the same categories. In addition, cross border marriages are seen by Chia-wen Lu (2008) as not only national borders crossing, but also gender, racial, class and many other borders between individuals.

Globalization

The concept of globalization has a lot of meanings and definitions, but Brix's definition fits this research and it says that globalization is a state of close relationship and interdependence of economical, political, social, cultural, ecological and many other connections of places in the world. While the deepening process of globalization leads not only to consolidation of countries and their politics or economics, but also to integrations among people all over the world (2009). Williams (2011, p. 13) accounts globalization as the process resulting in "people from everywhere are falling in love with someone from everywhere else". But Williams also says that international marriages and globalization are not something new, even though in the previous century and currently these processes are intensified and flourishing comparing to previous times.

In addition, globalization reshapes geographic opportunities for people and promotes traveling, studying and working abroad, which increases people's opportunities to meet life partners abroad. The process of globalization has coincided with technological development, politics of liberalization and modernization in the world, which means that it is not only likely that people can travel or meet someone from other countries easily, but also that people have more and more positive attitudes to engage themselves into international relations (Hendricks, 1994; Uunk, 1996).

Migration

Migration is a movement from one area to another and accompanies mankind in every stage of history. First it was mainly connected with forcement and colonization, and then it was propelled by industrialization and urbanization. Now it is also globalization that encourages migration due to global forces of demand and supply, needs and gratifications as well as increasing facilitation of possibilities of movements and communication (Palriwala and Uberoi, 2008, p. 7). Nowadays main migration types are work, family or marriage and refugee migration.

Concepts of international marriages and migration are tightly connected to each other, because generally such marital relation implies resettlement of one of the partners. Historically and currently it is mainly women that migrate to their spouses' homelands due to presumptions that women must follow their husbands, because supposedly they are not major decision-maker or breadwinners and that man's occupation is more important (Phizaklea, 1983; Fan and Li, 2002). Also we should not forget about current huge migration of women as domestic workers and caregivers especially in Asia that also increases international marriages' amount in the world.

According to Zlotnik (2003), there is feminization of migration in both categories, in employment and marriage.

Finally, international marriages are sometimes means for migration, as well as vice versa, migration could be an instrument for the purpose to marry internationally. The first case is mainly associated with the Mail-Order Brides (MOB) and in opinion of Chia-wen Lu, it is a “system of introduction for the prime purpose of marriage with a foreign national” (2008, p. 142-3). MOB is characterized by profit-making, institutionalized matchmaking operations, cross-border situation and commercial sale of women as commodities through fees and catalogue systems. According to Del Rosario this system is mainly used in poor or less developed countries and it enables people through international marriages to migrate to more developed states (1994).

Another case relates to situations when the goal, especially of the temporal migration is not only for instance work or education but finding a partner. This phenomenon is named by Palriwala and Uberoi (2008) as volunteer mobility or migration that sees marriage with a foreigner as prestige, achievement and upward social mobility that gives the feeling of success and desire fulfillment.

1.4 Method, Selection and Material Outline

A multiple case study was used for this research. According to Yin (2002, p 1-2.), it “contributes to our knowledge of individuals, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena”, as well as fulfills our desire to understand their complexity. Moreover, as Bryman (2006, p. 52) mentions, it “enables the detailed and intensive analysis” of the cases, which is crucial in this research. In order to discover what influences the choices of life partners in multinational marriages detailed information about respondents’ lifespan should be gathered and studied.

According to Philliber, Schwab and Samsloss (1980) case study research design has four main parts – brooding over and asking questions, thinking of which data is relevant, obtaining data and finding methods for data analysis. The most important data for this study was the 24 respondents’ biography, social background, way of life, religion and (gender) relations. Qualitative interviews were used for obtaining data and as Bryman (2006) says this research strategy concentrates on the meaning rather than on quantifying and it tries to understand an issue deeper than just to collect data. Moreover, according to Holloway (1997, p. 2) it “focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live”, which responds to the research purpose well.

In addition the five step model of Taylor-Powell and Renner was used: to get to know and understand data (read or listen to it several times), to focus on the most important information that will help to answer research questions, to categorize data in order to identify the overall ideas and patterns, to see the connections between categories, finally to interpretate data and findings for conclusion making (2003).

Whereas semi-structural interviews were chosen because they are flexible and premeditated at the same time (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). Both spouses were interviewed, but separately, not only for the answers security and reliability, but also because they were asked (some) different questions, due to the different cultural, religious and spatial backgrounds. Moreover, attention was paid not only to the answers of the respondents, but also to their behavior and mood during interviews (Kvale, 1996).

In interviews, elements of the oral history methodology were used for gathering historical information about particular events in the life of respondents (Perks and Thomson, 1998) that has influenced their choices of life partners. In opinion of Grele, it is important to be a good listener and to show interest during in-depth witness interviews that provide an opportunity for people to speak about their life, experiences and feelings (1991).

18 couples were asked for interviews but only 12 participated in this study. Two couples refused to take part (women agreed but men didn't) because of an unwillingness to share private information. Two couples didn't give any answer at all and finally during the fieldwork two couples had to cancel interviews due to unexpected life circumstances. The 24 participants were interviewed separately due to the ethical considerations and in order to escape possible external influence on answers. The language of the interviews was English, for one pair Swedish. All couples are representatives of international relations such as marriage or engagement (see Table 1). As it is a small case study results cannot be generalized, thus couples were studied as individual examples in order to detect both particularities and generalities of multinational and one nation couples, and most research findings are presented and analyzed.

The age of male participants ranged from 23 to 65, while for women - from 22 to 51. Within couples the minimum age difference was 1 year and the biggest 25 years (two cases). Almost in all couples men are older than their partners, except one pair where a woman was 4 years older than a man (see Table 2 and Figure 2 "Age of Participants", Table 3 and Figure 3 "Age Difference within the Couples").

Table 1 “Couples”

Couple	Gender	Country	Status	Interview Date
A	Woman A	Thailand	engaged	26.01.2012
	Man A	Sweden		
B	Woman B	The Philippines	married	27.01.2012
	Man B	Sweden		
C	Woman C	China	married	28.01.2012
	Man C	Sweden		
D	Woman D	The Philippines	married	03.02.2012
	Man D	Sweden		
E	Woman E	Singapore (mother from Singapore, father from Honduras; born and raised in Singapore)	married	04.02.2012
	Man E	Sweden		
F	Woman F	The Philippines	married	05.02.2012
	Man F	Sweden		
G	Woman G	Cambodia	engaged	9.02. 2012
	Man G	Sweden (South American roots)		
H	Woman H	China	married	10.02.2012
	Man H	Sweden		
I	Woman I	Thailand	married	20.02.2012
	Man I	Sweden		
J	Woman J	South Korea	engaged	21.02.2012
	Man J	Sweden		
K	Woman K	The Philippines	married	22.02.2012 (man)
	Man K	Sweden		24.02.2012 (woman)
L	Woman L	China	married	26.02.2012
	Man L	Great Britain (6 years living in Sweden)		

Table 2 “Age of Participants”

	AGE				
	Average age, years	Percentage			
		20-30 years	30-40 years	41-55 years	56-65 years
Man	42	16,5 %	33,5 %	33,5 %	16,5 %
Women	33	33,5 %	50%	16,5 %	0 %

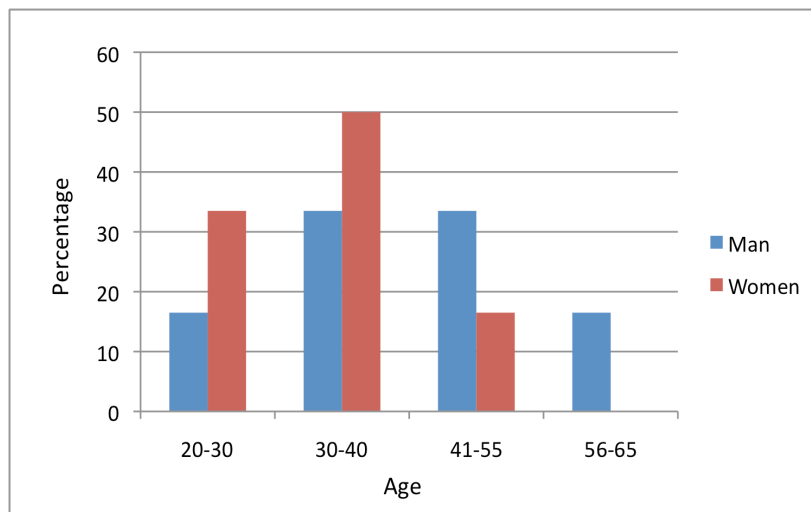


Figure 2 “Age of Participants”

Table 3 “Age Difference within Couples”

	Average difference	Percentage, %				
		1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21-25 years
Difference in Age, 90% man are older	9,5 years	41,5 %	16,5%	25%	0%	16,5%

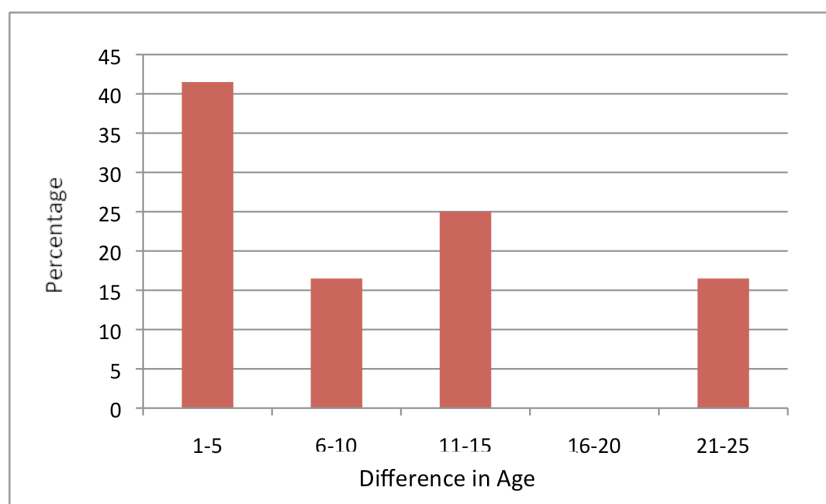


Figure 3 “Age Difference within Couples”

Interviews for women consisted of 36 questions and for men of 35. Participants were asked about lifespan, family background, confession, activities, partners meeting, residence decisions, gender relations, thoughts about stereotypes, ideal partners, marital disagreements, international marriages, choices, as well as attitudes of the society, family and friends (for complete interview questions see appendix). Interviews lasted approximately 40-50 minutes. The longest interviews were done with men that spoke for almost one and a half hour (2 representatives), and the shortest lasted only 18 minutes (2 male representatives). Many couples, 9 out of 12 continued to talk further about this topic after formal interviews sometimes even up to 1-2 hours because of their deep involvement in and strong emotions related to the subject.

Almost all women didn't want their partners to be present during the interviews, while men often emphasized that they did not mind to speak in the presence of their mates. Several women also asked me not to reveal their answers to husbands (which is in line with ethical considerations), whereas no man asked for this.

Generally all participants were open, friendly, unprejudiced and eagerly answered all questions. Sometimes it was felt a distance between interviewer and the oldest male respondents that were a little bit reserved and by their body language such as ironic smile or glance could be understood that they tell less what they really feel, especially when they were asked to share their general opinions about Swedish women. Particularly one Swedish man was nervous and somewhat suspicious about questions. The reason could be the big age difference (25 years) between him and his spouse and fear that he would be judged of an expedient marriage, but even he answered all questions.

Almost all men were surprised by the question about the look of their Asian spouses' countrymen and Swedish or western men. All of them told they do not look for other men's appearance and they were strongly outlying their heterosexuality and no interest in males. Likewise many men and some women were smiling or laughing at the question about ideal partner and were asking ironically if such person exists, but all answered that and other questions raised during interviews.

1.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation in this research was totally voluntary, confidential and anonymous. Respondents were informed about the study, their role in it, conditions of participation such as the possibility to terminate the research at any time and that the work will be published within Lund University. Likewise they were asked for the consent for the interviewing and taping. Moreover, the data

gathered from the research was solely used as material for the master thesis writing. This is all in accordance with Bryman's recommended ethical considerations (2006).

1.6 Previous Research

International marriages are not a new topic of studies. According to Barnett, the most frequent issues researched are role of religion, family, culture and economic backgrounds, racial attraction, globalization and technical development, happiness of such marriages, acceptance, gender relations, law regulations and others (1963). But it is still interesting due to new circumstances and processes in the modern world, such as internet communication, new state policies, booming of marriage agencies, new ways of spending holidays and leisure time.

Dominant number of studies concentrates on various challenges related to international marriages, for example Bischoff (2005), Gaines (1997), Goodman (1991), Martin and Bumpass (1989) studied cultural and racial challenges for international couples and how to eliminate them in order to improve the marital happiness and satisfaction. Fu, Tora and Kendall (2001) tried to check hypothesis of other authors about the lower stability of international marriages, because of the racial and cultural differences. For example, they investigated the multiethnic community in Hawaii in the same terms of cultural and racial influences on the marital happiness. Biever, Bobele and North (1998) deepened this topic by adding to it more précised matters such as sex-role expectations, attitudes to work and leisure, parenting practices and problem solving strategies within the families, or on contrary as Williams (2010) that extended studies from the international couples to the whole families of the spouses or even to the wider society.

In addition, many authors centered their studies on specific countries and issues connected with international marriages. Takeshita (2010) studied case of the Japanese – Brazilian marriages, with the specific interest in life of cross cultural kids in Japan, cultural dominations within families and choosing of surnames in international marriages. Another example is Switow's (2005) cases of marriages between Melanu and Sarawak people that belong to ethnic groups of Malaysia with foreigners, because such marriages have never occurred before the recent decade. Whereas Inman (et. al, 2011) concentrated on experience of Asian Indian – White American couples, challenges, impact and role of culture and society. He noticed that families of couples disapprove their marriages much frequently than wider society.

Large amount of international marriage studies are devoted to the sphere of national and international laws. Tan (2008) studied government policies, societal norms, regulations in patriarchal society, citizenship and statuses, and their influences on international marriages in

Singapore. While, Turner's research (2008) is about interlinks between states, multinational marriages, citizenship and human rights.

The intensification of globalization and migration processes are of increasing interest. For instance, Behtoui (2010) studied marriage patterns of immigrants in Sweden. Jones and Shen (2008) investigated them within Asian countries in relations to population mobility, tourism and business trips within the region, as well as to education and work migration, and marriage market in Asia that is looking for foreign wives within the continent. Ellegård and Vilhelmson (2004) studied (re)organization of time-space activities and relationships in the era of globalization among people. Finally, for example Burgess (2004) explored how international marriages construct and reconstruct identities of people in modern Japan.

Moreover, scholars of gender studies and generally representatives from feminist movements study international marriages. Many of them, such as Chia-Wen Lu (2010) argue and emphasize the danger of commercially arranged international marriages because they are an authentic example of women' trafficking, commodification and brokerage operations. Other scholars such as Piper (1997) that studied the case of Japan, concentrated more on gender inequalities within multinational marriages in different countries.

Tse and Guce (2004) investigated attitudes of young adults toward international marriages and international dating in the US. Liu (2008) explained the popularity of Asians and white Americans marriages in comparison to other multinational relationships in the country. Finally, it should be reminisced the famous interrogation of Jedlicka that proved that many men followed and believed in the myth of Oriental women (1988).

My study is also tightly connected to many issues mentioned above - gender relations, influence of globalization, internal problems of international marriages and others. However, in contrast to the other inquiries, it is mainly concentrated on people's choices, ideas and life circumstances that influenced their decisions to engage themselves into multinational relations. Beside this, almost all studies look at this topic usually from the perspective of the current situation and current experiencing of relations. While the main focus of this research is in the events, believes and circumstances that existed before relationships and eventually led to their emergence, though the present and planned future life of couples will be also investigated.

Thus, this study is a qualitative research that aims to scrutinize life experiences of international couples before and during conjugal cohabitation, it is inspired by oral history methodology and

not concentrated on quantitative methods, which are often used among scientists (Jones, 2012) that study global or national trends in international marriages.

1.7 Disposition

Chapter one includes research description, methodology, theoretical framework and previous research. Chapter two presents background information about international marriages, issues connected to them and current situation in the world and in Sweden. The third and fourth chapters are devoted to the material presentation and analysis of the influence of the life experiences, ideas and circumstances on marriage choices among women and men in this case study. Chapter five contains a concluding discussion.

2. Reflections on International Marriages

2.1 Global Trends

Every year the amount of international marriages is rising. According to IUSSP Scientific Panel on the Process and Dynamics of Cross-Border Marriages (2011), in every five marriages in European Union there is more than one multinational marriage and in many European countries international marriages may compose in the future 30% of all marriages, while in Switzerland they already make up 50%. Most marriage partners (usually women) come to Western Europe and United States from South-East Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Africa (Minervini and McAndrew, 2006).

When it comes to Asia, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea are top countries that marry the highest amount of foreigners (Jones, 2012). Countries can be divided into the categories of senders and receivers of brides. Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea are mainly receivers of foreign spouses, while China, Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand are main senders of partners not only within Asia but also in the whole world (Jones and Shen, 2008).

It is mainly women that migrate to other countries as spouses and the average difference of migrating brides to grooms in Asia is 5 to 1, while in the Philippines the numbers are even 10 to 1 (Tsay, 2004). Over the period 1980-2009, 41,6% of internationally married Filipino women went to the United States, 29% to Japan, 7,9 to Australia, 4,1 to Canada, 3,4% to Germany and about 2% to Taiwan, South Korea and United Kingdom. The statistics of other spouse-sending countries look approximately the same. The general tendency in the world is that spouses from less developed country migrate to more developed states where their partners live (Jones, 2012).

According to Tsay (2004), there is a wider gap in age between men married to foreign women compared to men married to countrywomen. For example, 55% of Chinese and 67% of all Southeast Asian brides marry foreign men that are ten years older or more. In addition Kim (2007) outlines that commonly foreign brides are more often never-married comparing to their partners that frequently are divorced. Finally, men tend to marry women with the same or lower education and international marriages are no exception from this (Niedomysl, Osth and Ham, 2010).

2.2 Situation in Sweden

International marriages are becoming more and more frequent in Sweden, which already has the largest amount of immigrants in its population in Europe (Behtoui, 2010). Moreover, Dreher (2006) outlines that Sweden is one of the most globalized countries and Swedes travel often abroad for leisure or business, the country also has very good internet connection. Swedish Statistiska Centralbyrån (2007) shows that Swedish citizens most often marry Iraqi and Thai women. But there is also rising amount of Somali, Serbian and Turkish brides, as well as Chinese, Philippines, Cambodian and even Singaporean spouses in the country. Moreover, according to Niedomysl, Osth and Ham between 1990 and 2004 40, 168 individuals migrated to Sweden on the marital bases which is a relatively huge amount in comparison to 9 million population of Sweden (2010).

Niedomysl, Osth and Ham (ibid.) also mention a balance between male and female marriage immigrants in Sweden in those years, but they concluded that such high ratio of groom immigrants could be arranged in order to get legal residence status in Sweden and European Union. In some way it can be true but it should not be forgotten that Sweden has a huge population of refugee immigrants from all over the world that have become after some time Swedish citizens and that often choose to marry people from their homelands, which is actually common with Iraqi and many other diasporas in all parts of the world (Kalpagam, 2008). Inquiring is that foreign grooms that come to Sweden are not only from Middle East or Africa but also from other western European countries, North America and Australia, whereas female marriage migrants are from less developed countries in the world (Niedomysl, Osth and Ham, 2010). Moreover, according to Behtoui migrants from different countries face different pressure and spouses from non- Western European and North American countries are more stigmatized and discriminated in the country (2010).

2.3 Choices and Meeting a Life Partner

In accordance with social exchange theory, people in all relations tend to maximize rewards such as love and stability, and minimize costs such as poverty and loneliness (Reis and Sprecher, 2009). Moreover, according to Knox our choice of partner are much influenced by global, structural, cultural and background factors of our country, but also if marriages will be long-lasting and happy (2011).

In international marriages choice explanations are the same. Although, upward mobility, dowry, convenience, better life and variety play a slightly larger role. Palriwala and Uberoi (2008) outline that international marriage is an accessible and relatively easy way of upward mobility and change of the status of the family in economic and prestigious ways. While, according to Chia-wen Lu, an overall betterment of life “combined with the cultural belief that economic support from a husband are the ultimate blessing for women” drive people into an uncertain and risky word of commercial brokerage system of international marriages (2008, p. 129-130). Moreover Chia-wen Lu mentions that many multinational couples decide to engage themselves into relations because of the convenience, not for money but rather for finding a loyal partner with whom it will be easier to live, who has certain qualities of character and values which sometimes are rare among local population (2008). Or as mentioned by Jones (2012) if there are other disadvantages in local marriage markets, like impossibility to find a partner because of age, appearance or other things, in the era of globalization people do not hesitate to look for luck and appropriate spouses abroad.

Places where people meet their life partners can be defined as marriage fields. Traditionally these fields were small and local, but globalization, traveling and internet have broadened them to global parameters (Kalmijn, 1998; Niedomysl, Osth and Ham 2010). Moreover traveling and advanced technology do not only make it possible for people from different countries to meet, but also to maintain relationship at a distance through chatting and calling. Except this, Piper (2003) emphasizes that people are not only mobile in the global scale but also they are more eager to engage themselves into international relations. Statistics prove that many singles all over the world register themselves on international dating websites and are open to meet and have relations with individuals from culturally and geographically remote areas.

However, Chia-wen Lu (2008) and Barry (1995) argue that globalization has also caused negative effects, such as development of international commercial marriage institutions and agencies, increase of women-, sex-trafficking and sex-tourism. This has led to women’ commodification, social stratification inciting, gender inequality locally and globally, widened

gaps between developed and developing countries and has put women into a vulnerable and exploitive situation.

2.4 Gender Relations

Many western countries are characterized as most advanced gender equal societies due to women's inclusion to the labor market and political arena almost at the same level as men, while a range of Asian countries are regarded as much less gender equal (UN, 2003). Of course there are exceptions and imperfections in both cases, but this general tendency was proved by many scholars, for example by Takahashi (2003) that studied and compared gender relations in Swedish and Japanese families. According to her findings Japan still has a strong male breadwinner ideology, while Sweden has equal gender orientations, which are reflected within family relations. But even if couples share housework more equal in Sweden than in Japan, Swedish families have more conflicts connected with responsibilities about the house. Moreover, Swedish partners are not afraid to risk their relations in general, while Japanese people, especially women tend to avoid conflicts (Takahashi, 2003).

Interesting is the issue of ideology orientation within international couples due to the belonging to different social systems. According to Simons, Jhonson and Kelsky many Western men that engaged themselves into international marriages felt themselves disempowered and unconfident with strong native women and looked for more harmonious relations with foreign partners that came from less feminist societies and that have more family orientated values, while (some) foreign women are interested in marriage with western men, because they want an equal relationship and are powerless in own countries due to the patriarchal social system (2001; 2007, 2001). Moreover, some international families produced a symbiosis of social systems that both partners can gain comfort, namely women get more independence, whereas men receive (supposedly) more loyalty and self-satisfaction. Thus relations within the family is much influenced by the country of spouses' residence, society and partners background, though it is not only important where couples live but also who is migrating bride or groom, because as Yeh (2010) argues, in any case migrating women feel more pressure to adjust to local norms than migrating men.

2.5 Stereotypes and Prejudices

Stereotype is a conscious or unconscious held rigid belief or expectation about a group of people that does not easily permit exceptions and usually helps a group that produces stereotypes to feel better about itself (Leong, 2008). There are positive and negative stereotypes. The most common myth or stereotype of women, especially from Asia that engage themselves into international

marriages is that they are exotic, submissive goddess, geishas, sexually available, more sacrificing, domestic, small, petite, faithful, attractive, home-loving, sweet, mail order brides, inferior others, oriental doll, sexual slaves and appliances doing everything to please a partner (Nagel, 2003; Root, 2001; Jedelicka, 2000; Chia-wen Lu and Yang, 2010; Glodava, 1994). Constable (2003, p. 13) also adds that except describing them as “lotus blossom” that is delicate and very feminine, there is a new stereotype of Asian women among western females that portray them as “dragon lady”, meaning that some of them are prostitutes, devious aggressors in initiating relationships with western men, hyperagent and shrews that are looking for innocent foreigners for green cards, better life and financial support for families in homelands.

In opinion of Halualani (1995), the former stereotype of “lotus blossom” or “oriental butterfly” was mainly produced by commercial marriage agencies in order to present brides in appealing and attractive way. Moreover Tolentino adds that the trick of popularity of mail order bride agencies is that women are presented in catalogues in accordance with colonial, militarist and capitalist histories, desires and fantasies (1996). While the later stereotype is connected to a marriage market insecurity and some Western women that want to refute stereotypes about themselves that say that they are dominant, too feministic and truculent (Constable, 2003).

In addition, media can create or conduce stereotypes. For example, according to Jones and Huang media in Japan and Singapore show Filipino brides as entertainers with rural background and low education that do not know how to raise children properly, that are transmitters of diseases and frequent victims of domestic violence (2012; 2006). However, media spreads stereotypes and uses this hot topic for commercial amenity not only in destination countries but also in migrants’ motherlands. Palriwala and Uberoi mention that media in poor countries in order to reduce migration, victimize women and spread stereotypes that they marry internationally to immigrate to better situated states, where they are harassed, bitten, defrauded and used as sex workers (2008).

There are much less stereotypes about men than about women (Jones, 2012). While some stereotypes as mentioned above, present them as naive and allured by deceitful foreign females, other depict Western men as “possessors of superior socioeconomic capital” (Nemoto, 2006, p.36) and representatives of the world’s hegemonic masculinity. On the contrary it is said that they are unsuccessful males that are not able to find women within homeland and have no choice but to look for a partner abroad (Simon, 2001). Asian men are stereotypically contrasted and presented as an opposite of the white hegemonic masculinity - weak, asexual, not courteous,

unreliable, irrational, instable, tending to domination and oppression (Boscagli, 1996; Nagel, 2003).

Because of these stereotypes (some) people in many countries of the world perceive international marriages as something negative, untrue and commercial. There are also more and more positive responses to it, but still it is undeniable that these stereotypes do not only exist but also flourish in societies (Jones, 2012). According to Jedlicka and Simons, this causes great problems for internationally married couples that are often stigmatized. Such opinions complicate not only their private life and marital happiness, but also their career and social life. In fact, mail order brides and commercial arranged marriages are infrequent and constitute only 10% of all multinational marriages (2000; 2001).

3. Women's Case Study

3.1 Life in Asia

Asia is a diverse continent with different culture, religions, historical legacies and nations. Thus, following the theories presented above, people's background is a highly important factor that influences all choices in life.

All participants finished schools in homelands, but only seven women (C, D, E, H, J, K, L) out of 12 have university degrees. Reasons mentioned why they did not continue education were lack of money (A, B, F), early marriage (F), help in a family business (I), work for own and family support (G). E, J, L were studying at university and part-time working (as preschool and English teachers, workers at restaurants and construction companies) at the same time. Those who had completed only compulsory education started to work after it, but F was all her life a housewife and during the interview she said: "since the beginning until now I did not have a work. I am always depending on others. Now I am depending on my man, before I was depending on my sisters" (05.02.2012).

Women's occupations were: a cloth shop owner (A), saleswoman at jewelry shop (B), worker of electronic company (D), masseuse (G), company department director (H), worker at family restaurant (I) and teacher at elementary school (K). Often respondents' life in homeland and abroad was difficult. B mentioned that she "was working 10 hours per day, but a salary was really low" (27.01.2012). G started to work from 14 years and told: "I worked in many places and I fight very much in my life, for example as I have to work overtime and I have to live alone, I have to cook for myself and do everything, in Thailand I have very low salary, but I have to

take care of myself and sometimes I have to take care of my family in Cambodia too” (09.02.2012). I said: “before I came to Sweden I worked every day from Monday till Sunday, we closed at 23-24. We closed restaurant at 18 and then we sold drinks, my father didn’t want to close it until the last client” (20.02.2012). H mentioned that she “worked almost every day and every night” (10.02.2012), but it was not only because of need or social pressure in China, but also because of the career and that she liked to work.

Only A, H were divorced and F was a widow before current marriages. A, F have children from their first relations. A explained that she divorced because her first husband (Thai) didn’t treat her well. H said: “I divorced because I think we didn’t know how to respect each other, we were focused on ourselves, I think the work was first important for me, nothing else... Then we didn’t have children, still children are not value for me in comparison to my job, I didn’t want to have children, because I knew children would take much time from me, I didn’t like it, I felt very strong that I need to learn more from work, language knowledge and social competence” (10.02.2012).

For the other representatives it is their first marriage and they do not have children from other partners. All women (except F) were working or studying before coming to Sweden. A, H even had to leave their business and dynamic career in homelands because of marriage. While E was already married and lived with her foreign husband in the motherland before moving to Sweden. F was desperate after her husband’s death, didn’t continue his business (shop with home articles) because she was helpless, so her sisters had to support her.

In conclusion, the life experiences of the respondents is very different, but there could be seen three main categories of life activities in their homeland: studying (C, D, J) studying and working (A, B, E, L) and solely working (G, H, I, K). Moreover, for nine women the current marriage is their first and ten of them have no children or have them only from the current relationship.

3.2 Family in Asia

According to social collective memory theory, family is the group within which we pass the major part of our life, which have an influence on our behavior and choices in life (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 61). The research showed that most women have big families in homelands, with parents and several siblings, except C, E that are single children, but respondent’s E mother came from a very big family, while C was born after the One Child Policy in China. In addition fathers of C, F, J passed away, whereas parents of female E are divorced and she does not keep a

contact with her father. B, D, G, K come from farmer families, while parents of A, C, F, H, L are pensioners and have government pension. I's parents are also in the retirement age but they continue their business and have a small shop with drinks. Mother of female E is physically unfit to work since last ten years due to a work trauma, but she receives financial support from government and rent out a room in her house for income. Finally, J's mother works as a baby sitter.

A majority of the participants' siblings work and have own families, only G, K have siblings that still study in school or college. Their brothers and sisters have different occupations from hotel workers to police officers, but not all of them live and work in Asia, for instance D's three sisters are abroad, in Honk Kong, Dubai and Sweden. Her sister came to Sweden many years ago to work as a care worker, get married and stayed there. F's and H's siblings are also abroad. F has two sisters in the United States and one in Sweden that actually helped her to immigrate there. H came to Sweden first and looked in internet and among her husband's friends for Swedish men for her sisters and they are also living there now. She explained that it was important for her to have family close, because it is a big value in China, moreover she does not have own children. A final reflection here is that family members can actually influence our choice of life partners.

Almost all women told that they often communicate with their families in Asia, but all of them have different imagination what often is, for some it is every few days, for others 2-3 times per months. H mentioned that when she calls home "there are normally discussions if parents are healthy how they are living, if there is no problem we are happy, if not we are guilty" (10.02.2012).

Many women help their parents in financial terms. A sends money to her parents every month because they have a low pension and they take care of her children from the first marriage. She supports her family in Asia almost solely from own sources – work in Sweden. D, F also send money regularly to homelands, whereas G, K do this only in the emergency cases. For instance, G sent money on heart operation for her mother, which she borrowed from her fiancée's parents to whom she returns debt every month from her salary.

Other participants told that they do not support their parents financially, C, H, L mentioned that their parents have sufficient pension and do not need financial support, but H also said that before coming to Sweden she and her sisters gathered extra sum of money for parents to support them in any case. In addition, E said that now her mother has money from the room renting, but maybe in the future, she will have to support her. While B, I and J expressed their strong will to

support their families in Asia, but since they do not work, they cannot send money home. All women said that they support them mentally and by advice.

To conclude, family members of several respondents are also married internationally and live abroad. While not all women help financially their families in homeland, due to families' self-reliance or having no work in Sweden, which refutes a stereotype in this case study that all people use international marriages as sort of financial help to their families in poorer countries. The fact that five women help relatives does not mean that their marriages were calculated. Moreover, some of them send money mainly from own revenues.

3.3 Religion

Religion is not only influencing eating habits, fasts, behavior and values but also the choices of life partners. All Filipino women declared that they are Roman Catholics and Chinese women C, H told that they are atheists, while A, G, I, J are Buddhists. E is a Muslim and L mentioned that she believes in God but she does not have faith in any specific religion.

A majority of women stated that there are no problems to marry someone with other religious beliefs, except E, B, K, L. In the cases of K and L it was connected with personal convictions. K told that she would not like to marry someone who is not Christian as she does not want to convert to other religion. L told that she would never marry someone who is truculent in his religious views and wants to erase other religions. B herself did not have any problems to marry someone from other religion as long as that person believes in God, but her parents are very conservative Christians and they wanted for her only a Christian and church-goer partner. J mentioned that since she is not practicing Buddhism much it is not a problem for her to marry a Christian, but she knows many cases from her motherland South Korea that strict Christian and Buddhist believers would not engage themselves in mixed relations. E's situation is different because it was not just a personal decision to marry dissenter or not, but her religion Islam forbids marring someone from other religions, so her husband had to convert to Islam in order to marry her. To sum up, religion has an influence on choices of life partners. It could be a personal constraint if a person is a strong religious believer or belong to such family, or clearly regulated by religious rules.

3.4 Global Activities

Globalization and processes connected to it bring closer people around the world and result in an international marriages' increase. Among respondents seven women have never been abroad before meeting/marrying their partners and moving to Sweden. Almost all of them told that they

could not afford to travel abroad, only H mentioned that it was not a financial matter but a matter of career and family. C and L were studying and could not travel abroad, while A was responsible for her family in homeland. In addition, K said that she planned to go to Singapore to work as a domestic helper but she succeeded to obtain a job in her home country, the Philippines.

The rest of women traveled abroad for different purposes. E, G, I were working abroad before meeting their husbands, E worked as an au-pair in Germany, G from 15 years worked in Thailand, whereas I came to Sweden and worked in her aunt's shop as a shop-assistant but before it she also visited Laos as a tourist. J combined work and university studies in Japan, traveled as a translator in China and Honk Kong, studied English in the Philippines and traveled to Germany and Great Britain for pleasure. Also E in addition to her work in Europe, studied in the United States on university exchange program and was on holidays in France, Spain, Great Britain, Sweden and Denmark. Finally, C came to Sweden for studies and stayed there.

To conclude, many female respondents were not so active abroad, but even staying at home people encounter processes of globalization, because there are many other traveling people to others' homelands and there is internet and other technological devices.

3.5 Meeting a Partner

This section is devoted to the study of marriage fields (Niedomysl, Osth, Ham, 2010) in international marriages and aims to investigate where and how multinational couples met and what first impression they had.

Half of the participants have met their partners online. A got her future husband's e-mail address from her friend that lives in Sweden and initiated a contact with him. After some time she came to Sweden to visit her friend and also met her future partner in person. She liked him immediately because he was kind and they became a couple. H also received the e-mail of her future partner from her friend. After her divorce she was single for many years because she was looking for a suitable partner. She had many female friends that were in the same situation and they exchanged information about their male friends and tried to introduce or recommend a suitable man to each other. H wrote to her future partner who at that time was planning a trip to Shanghai and they met in China during his visit. She felt very good with him, because he was frank, honest and loyal, which according to her are rare features among Chinese men. B, F met their partners through online dating websites. In the case of F it was her sister that lives in Sweden that recommended her to register there, while in case of B it were her friends. In both cases, according to women, the first contact was initiated by males. Couple F did not only meet

on-line but also decided to marry in the process of chatting, without seeing each other personally. F came to Sweden and they got married. She said that she liked man F, because he was older (12 years) and mature, so she felt that he can take care of her and her daughter.

The story of B is slightly different, she was looking for online acquaintances not only because her friends suggested her but also because her parents and family were strict and didn't allow her to have any real dates or boyfriends. After acquaintance in internet, her future partner came to Philippines to meet her, but she didn't regard him seriously, because she waited for another man from the U S that promised to marry her but disappeared. B invited man B to live and spend time with her and her family in their house and after sometime her parents began to like him and convinced their daughter that man B would be a better husband for her. B accepted court and marriage proposal from man B and they married after some time. She mentioned that she was even praying for him to come back to marry her (he had to go to Sweden after their first meeting) and told herself if he would do this, he is her fortune.

C wrote to her future partner by coincidence. She enrolled to a university in Sweden and looked for an accommodation, in ICQ (chat program) she wrote to Swedish people and asked for page or enterprises recommendations that could help her, among them were her future partner. C found accommodation for herself but something went wrong in the last minute and man C invited her to live in his flat for the beginning, before she would find something else. They became very good friends and gradually fell in love. D acquainted with her future husband on Skype (call program). Her sister lives in Sweden and her brother-in-law introduced her to his friend and hoped that they would like each other. They started to chat and became pen-pals. Then she came to Sweden to visit her relatives and their romantic relation began to develop and resulted in marriage.

Internet is not the sole place where people from different countries can meet. Half of women met partners in homelands, while two met in a third country and one met in Sweden. For instance E, K met their husbands on parties, G, I at their work places, L on her lecture in university, whereas J lived in the same student corridor as her future husband. I came to Sweden to help her mother's younger sister in her Thai food shop. She worked as a shop assistant and she met her future husband there, but she didn't like him at first because she couldn't speak Swedish well and felt uncomfortable.

G worked in a massage salon in a resort area and her future partner came with his parents for a massage. It was her turn to massage a client, so she massaged him during which they began to

talk. He invited her to go to disco, at first she refused, but then her friends convinced her to accept invitation. She agreed because he was very sad of her refuse. She began to like him on the disco, because he was polite, friendly to her and her friends, did not harass her or touch if she didn't want, so she trusted him. They spent time together in Thailand and after his return home he did everything to be with her and she moved to Sweden.

E met her partner in Singapore. He came there as an exchange student and she was a student at that time too. They met on a party in a student bar and had mutual friends that introduced them to each other. She liked him immediately because he was handsome and tall, though she thought before, she would never like someone with so light carnation. They began to spend time together within mutual friends' group and after sometime fell in love.

K met her future partner on the birthday party of her cousin's husband. In the beginning K did not consider him as a possible partner, because she had a boyfriend. However, she got to know that her boyfriend betrayed her with another woman that was pregnant with his child. Her attention moved to man K that courted her and who was grown up, kind and a good person comparing to the ex-boyfriend.

J came to Japan for her higher education. She received accommodation in a guest house, where man J lived in the same corridor. For her it was love from the first sight and they were together a year. Then man J went back to Sweden, they separated almost for three years, but now they are together again. Finally, L acquainted with her future husband during a university lecture. Man L was a teacher and sometimes visited lectures in English of other professors as a guest. L says that she did not pay much attention to him at their first meeting because she had a boyfriend and in the class were many people. After a year she broke up with her boyfriend and their friendship gradually grow into love.

To conclude, fields of international marriages are diverse and even though many couples met in internet we can see that within this field are a variety of possibilities. Moreover, the cases presented above prove that circumstances and unexpected life events can result in international marriages similar to one-nation marriages. This refutes stereotypes reported by Jedlicka that almost all multinational marriages are calculated business contracts (2000).

3.6 Where to Live

There are many issues connected with international marriages such as the choice of culture and religion for bringing up children, which holidays to celebrate and where to live for a permanent

basis (Williams, 2011). Stereotypically it is thought that in international marriages couples always prefer to live in the more developed country between two homelands (Palriwala and Uberoi, 2008). This is frequently true, but there are many other reasons that lay behind it. A, D, F, H, K and their partners decided to stay in Sweden, because it is more difficult for foreigners to migrate to their homelands in Asia. For example, it takes long time, is very expensive and it is harder to live and adopt to the culture as well as to learn language and to find a job there. Unemployment is also a problem for locals. D said “in Philippines it is very hard to find a job for all people, that is why many people and especially women immigrate” (24.02.2012).

Moreover A, B, F, J, K had temporary or not very good jobs in motherlands, while their partners had safe careers in Sweden or studies that they had to finish (D, G), so it was easier for them to migrate from their countries. C, D, F, G, H, J emphasized that life in Sweden is better and easier compared to their homelands. According to C, it is calm and not stressful in Sweden, while for G, H, L there are better conditions for education and child raising, as well as people can always count on government support. Finally J pointed out that salaries and welfare is higher in Sweden, even compared to developed Asian countries such as South Korea.

Another reason is the belief that women must follow husbands in life, which was mentioned among respondents B, E, I, J. Especially E emphasized that “in Islam a woman should follow her husband; before she is married all responsibilities of her maintenance lay on her parents, but after – on her husband” (04.02.2012). Moreover she referred to unsuitability of working cultures in Asia for western foreigners, because of overworking, coming home late, sacrifice of private life and hobbies which her husband disliked.

Weather as a migrating factor was mentioned by participants E, K. Their husbands couldn't live permanently in Asia because of too hot climate there, but except climate adaptation there is also attribute of easier adjustment to foreign country and culture, mentioned by woman H as her case. Finally, the situation of couple L was slightly different from others, because their choice to move to Europe and particularly to Sweden was an experiment to see if woman L could manage to live abroad.

Besides this, all couples were asked about their future plans and if they consider coming back to Asia for a permanent residence someday in the future. A, D, F, K plan moving back, with their partners when they will be pensioners, because there is better weather and lower life expenses. E, G also plan to do this but in the nearer future. E explained that Singapore is her home and they came to Sweden because her husband got a good job there and they decided that with a longer

working experience he would find a better position in Singapore in the future. Moreover they want to come back to Singapore before their child would be in a school age so he wouldn't have to study first in Sweden and then start his studies again in Singapore. While G stated that after studies of her partner they want to move back to Cambodia because his specialization, city planning, is highly needed in developing Cambodia. If it would not work they will wait until they will gather enough money to live there without working in the beginning.

B, H, L told that they do not know yet if they will come back to their homelands for permanent residence but actually they would like to, because of the weather (I) and less expensive to live there (B) or simply because it is their motherland (L). The problem is that they are afraid that it would be too difficult for their husbands and they would miss very much Sweden and family there (I) or because their husbands do not want to live in Asia (L) as for language and job difficulties, likewise Sweden would be better place for their children in terms of safety, calmness, education and environment (L). Whereas, H said that it depends on the possibility of making good money.

Finally, C, J would not like to come back to their homelands for the rest of their life. C expounded that she likes very much her safe and calm life in Sweden compared to China, while J said that "Korea is not a good country to have a baby, it is expensive, here it is easier with the baby care, I think Sweden is best country to have a baby in the world" (21.02.2012). However, she and her partner plan to go to Korea for some years and enjoy exciting nightlife before having children.

To conclude, the example of these participants refutes the stereotype that all women from less developed countries marry foreigners to migrate to the better economically situated and protected countries (Palriwala and Uberoi, 2008). Actually, the reasons of choosing a country for residence is influenced by many factors such as culture, climate, adjustment, family, job possibilities and studies.

3.7 Life in Sweden

As my research interests lies in the past, present and future of couples, this part discusses their present life in Sweden. A majority of women (8 out 12) study Swedish at a language school, but among them A (season worker on corn plantation) and G (worker at hotdog restaurant) study and work at the same time. J worked before in McDonalds and tattoo saloon. C, E and L are on maternal leave, but they (C, L) worked before. K has recently finished her university studies and works as a preschool teacher. After school or work most women come back home and do house

chores. Only female D said that after school during the week, she meets with her friends and sisters.

During weekends most women do shopping, visit friends/relatives, cook or just spend time at home watching TV and relaxing with their partners. Only B usually spends time alone, because her partner works almost every day on the farm. J, K, L stated that they also party or try to be outdoors as much as possible (K, L), whereas H works and sometimes helps her partner in his business during weekends. Finally, A mentioned that now she prepares everything for her children to come to live in Sweden.

A, C, E, H expressed that they are totally satisfied with their life and future perspectives in Sweden. E emphasized that she likes Sweden because it is an equal country and H told that there she feels happier and easier because there is no pressure and complaints from surrounding people as it was in China. Other participants outlined that they like Sweden but they face huge problems with finding a job (B, F, I, J) and they are homesick (B, D, G). In addition, J, L think that Sweden is a bit boring, too small, has too long winter and darkness, there are not many people outside, and that generally people are sad, closed and confined to themselves. K also expressed similar ideas and told that life in Sweden is more stressful for her because here she does not know neighbors and does not have many friends. In conclusion, the women's experiences are diverse and often related to individual circumstances.

3.8 Gender Relations

Gender relations within international couples can be complicated, because respondents come from different social systems – patriarchal and equal orientated. Five women (A, C, D, E, G, K) declared that they share more or less equally responsibilities about the household. G emphasized that they also share bills within their couple, while E, K told that they do a little bit more household work because of maternal leave (E) or due to idea that domestic chore is done better by women than by men (K).

B, F, H, I stated that sometimes they share domestic chores with their partners, because their husbands (B, F, H) work every day, even during weekends. Moreover, H told that housework is easy and it is her job because she does not work anywhere else. While I does not want her spouse to help her about the house because “it is woman's job. He does not clean well, it is better for me to do this” (20.02.2012).

The cases of J, L are more different. J's partner does not help her at all in domestic chores, but he works and earns money for their living, while L notified that almost everything is done by her husband and she does only cooking and laundry, because women are physically weaker and should be looked after. All women (except F) declared that within their couples they make important decisions by negotiation and mutual agreement. According to C, decision making must be always respectful and responsible in order to choose the best way for both partners, but sometimes people need to sacrifice something for a partner's well-being, which in her case was moving to Switzerland for several years because of her husband's career. G says that the secret of agreement between two different mentalities is listening and understanding of causes why partners aspire to different things. Within couple E both spouses try to see pros and cons of every decision or solution and after that they decide. While H mentioned that if they cannot agree they both give up, but also she emphasized that there is no problem for her to recede if something "is not so important for me, it does not matter. I do not want to make so much trouble to him, I think happiness is very important in the family" (10.02.2012). Finally, F confessed that daily and small decisions are done mutually in her family, but when it comes to important decisions sometimes man F makes them alone, which makes her sad but she accepts it.

To conclude, almost half of respondents equally share responsibilities about the house, while reasons of not sharing are connected to everyday work of husbands or women's opinion that housework is women's job and they do it better. The case of women J, L are more specific and prove that responsibilities can be almost unshared (J) or contrary can be done more by the man than by the woman (L). In decision making almost all women declared their equal status, which refutes a stereotype that Asian women are submissive, passive and always agree with their partners (Constable, 2003) as well as indicates the significant influence of society and residence country on gender behavior within international marriages (Takeshita, 2010).

3.9 Responses to Stereotypes

Female participants were asked about opinions about Western/Swedish and Asian/compatriot men and women. All respondents answered that everyone is individual and they will not generalize, but some of them mentioned features that they think are frequent among these categories.

Western/Swedish men were described as handsome, polite, frank, understanding, kind, independent, determined, straightforward, good husbands, good-mannered, honest, shy, family-orientated, generous, respecting and gender equal. Western/Swedish women were characterized

as pretty, open, liberal, independent, good wives, powerful, equal with men, courageous, career-orientated, kind, respectful, family ruling, casual, easily divorce, less caring of men and look.

Asian/compatriot women were described as pretty, social, moody, conservative, good wives, family-orientated, shy, modest, traditional, obedient to husbands, parents and in law, involved in sex industry, less powerful and looking younger. However, E, H, L also emphasized that their countrywomen from Singapore and China are becoming independent, gender equal, educated and ruling. While J explained that both Asian and western women are good wives but in different way, Asian do house chores, follow husbands and sacrifice more for family, while Western women are wise and know how to balance family and work. Asian/compatriot men were portrayed as conservative, family responsible, religious, good-looking, career-orientated, want to rule and have power, gender unequal, thrifty, self-enjoining, unfaithful and less mature. Though L emphasized that young Chinese men think more about gender equity but still are under a pressure of being successful and are afraid of powerful women.

Half of respondents changed their mind about these categories after living in Sweden. C, J noticed that their countrymen from China and Japan adopt western values being abroad, L understood that Chinese men are constantly under pressure and discovered new type of Chinese women that want to stay in Sweden for any price. H realized that Chinese men are also suitable for her as partners, while F began to think that not all western men are kind and handsome. Finally, E found that Swedish women are very active in life. To conclude, all respondent were open-minded and stereotypical thinking was not detected among them. Even though they named characteristics for those categories all of them emphasized that every person is individual and we should not generalize.

3.10 Ideal Partner

Respondents were asked to describe ideal man, husband and father. Many described attractive man as tall (A, B, E, J, K) or medium tall (D, G, H, L), with big blue (A, B, E, I, K) or bright eyes (J) and good body proportion (G, H, J, K). Other mentioned features are white (B) or tanned skin (F, G), oval face (K), European nose (F), brown hair (G, K), young (C), strong (H), brown (F, G) or kind eyes (L). B, D, H, I described their husbands as attractive, though H mentioned that appearance is not important for her and in men she looks for good health and intelligence. While for C every person without physical and psychological defects is attractive. Finally E likes mulattos and G – natural men (not dying hair).

Ideal husband was characterized as caring (F, G, K, L), kind (B, C, D, F, I, K), respecting wife (C, F, H), understanding (D, I, J), loving (D, H, K), romantic (F, G), responsible (C, E), considerate (C, G), gender equal (A, G), patient (I) and polite (D). Moreover for H ideal husband is family-orientated, hardworking, healthy, active, knows how to solve problems and make money. Finally B mentioned that wife must be on the first place for him.

Good father was portrayed as caring (all), responsible (G, H), well situated financially (A, H, K), patient (E, L), hardworking (D, H), helping (I), understanding (I), loving (F), respecting (H) and disciplining children (F). Moreover, G mentioned that he should be educated and know how to take care of infants and wife. Lastly, A, B, C, J stated that father should spend time with his children, especially J emphasized that “in Korea men work too much” (21.02.2012) so she wanted to marry a foreigner.

Generally, all participants described ideal men, husband and father as such that have European features or mutual features of Asians and Europeans. Important are also character traits that sometimes are more frequent among foreigners than among countrymen, such as gender equity and consideration, as well as overseas culture and values – possibility to spend time with children, which also influence people to look for a partner abroad.

3.11 Marital Disagreements

According to Fu, Tora, Kendall (2001) and Biever (et al. 1998) international marriages face internal constrains connected to different culture, religion, sex-role expectations, parenting practices, attitudes towards work and leisure. Investigation showed that three couples disagree about political issues such as Tibet status (C), abort permission (D) and others (L). Couples E, L have different opinions about raising children. J, K think that their husbands play computer games (J) and spend time with friends (K) too much. I discards her husband help about the house despite his insisting, because he is slow and slapdash. F dislikes that her husband is not a strong believer and that he reads books about evolution. E’s husband did not only convert to Islam but also became a strict follower, while woman E is more liberal. B cannot get along with her mother in law that lives with them and tries to control everything, including husband. Whereas couple H disagrees about money spending and children position. Woman H says that money should be invested in property not in leisure and parents instead of children must be honored in the family. Finally A, G emphasized that they do not have marital problems, since they tolerate each other (G) and think similarly (A). To conclude, it seems that because of the globalization there are less problems connected to religion and culture, since only couples D, E, H, L face such problems,

while the rest disagree about usual things such as politics, family, friends or have no problems at all.

3.12 Attitude of Society, Family and Friends

Jones (2012), Inman (et. al, 2011) and others argue that in many countries people have a negative attitude toward international marriages. Research showed that family and friends of half of the women are positive about their marriage because husbands respect wives' culture (A, D), are good persons that take care of wives (B, C), converted and follow wives' religion (E) and see that they are happy (F). Parents and friends of G, H, K, L were negative and disturbed about it, due to rumors that western men harass foreign wives (K), are unfaithful and have many partners (L), question their daughter capability to live abroad with a foreigner (K), that people with such different culture and background divorce quickly (H) and uncertainty if men are trustworthy (G). H, I, J emphasized that their parents accepted their decision because they are adults, but J's friends envy her because life in Sweden is freer and better.

When it comes to women's parents in law and partners' friends, eight women are not sure but they think they are positive about their marriage, since spouses do everything together and do not fight (A), have similar views and are kind to each other (C), men have finally married (B), liked daughter-in-law personality (E) and communication with her (I), met in person and helped to immigrate (G), heard no negative comments from them (F, D). J outlined that her parents-in-law are happy that they are together, since their son found a right woman for himself. While H mentioned that for her husband's family and children it took time to accept her, likewise L told that she is not first choice of her parents-in-law because they wanted their son to marry English woman, because China is a third world country and Asian women are gold-diggers. K stated that spouse's parents and friends thought that their marriage is mercenary because she is younger (11 years) and Asian, so they would divorce soon. Finally, I have met negative attitude of some Swedish people that look down on her and think that every Thai woman is a prostitute.

Only four women answered that international marriages are seen good in their homelands, because countrymen drink and fight with women (A), like people with white skin (C), it means luck (F), upward mobility and better life (D). B, G said that it depends, if couple is faithful and young, whereas K mentioned that people are more open-minded now but still many believe in negative media image that foreigners betray and maltreat wives. Some also emphasized that country people see multinational marriages as marriages for money (I, E, J, L), but at the same time they are envious because of better and easier life possibility (L). Moreover, H mentioned that many Chinese men are angry and argued with her when saw her with her husband.

All respondents have friends that are married internationally and some of them are happy, others are not, due to meeting unkind and drinking men, financial problems, disagreements with parents-in-law and becoming couples without knowing each other well.

To conclude, these international couples feel pressure both abroad and in homelands. This disproves the stereotype that in less developed countries marriage with a foreigner is always seen positively (Palriwala and Uberoi, 2008). It also shows that such couples face more marital challenges due to social pressure, lack of family support and understanding (Gaines 1997).

3.13 Reflections on International Marriages and Personal Choices

Respondents were asked about international marriages phenomenon and its increased frequency. According to C, E, H, J, L the growth is connected to globalization, while D, F, I, K think it is because of possibility to have a better life abroad. A, B argue that women marry foreigners because countrymen are not faithful and family-orientated, likewise Asian women are attracted to white men because of their skin and exotic appearance (B, E). Further reasons are interest in other cultures (E), beautiful children procreation, love (G), willingness to try new things (H) and belief in success of such marriages (L).

Personally women engaged into international relations because of love (D, E, G, I, J), men' personality (A, F, K, L), encouragement of internationally married family members (D), example of happily married friends (H) and family (L, D), desire to immigrate from homeland (J), beautiful children (B), better life abroad (D), western men' physical attraction (E), conversion to women' religion (E), studies (C) and work (I) in Sweden.

Analysis of all interviews showed that partners' personality, romantic feelings, personal acquaintance and absence of religious constrains (except E, L) because of the same religion or positive attitude to others were characteristic for all respondents and influenced their partner choice. Whereas internet was important in cases of couples that met online (A, B, C, D, F, H), as well as courage to initiate first contact with a foreigner (A, B, H). Moreover, participants had unsuccessful experience of first marriages (A, H) and relations (C, K, L) with countrymen, likewise were disadvantaged by local marriage market because of own age (F), men' alcoholism (A, D), infidelity (A, B, D, H), career-orientation, gender pressure (H), fear of strong and successful women (L).

C, F, H, J, K assumed that their life would be better and easier abroad, especially B mentioned that she and her family (farmers) "were treated as a low standard" (27.01.2012), so these women

were more open to idea to leave homelands. Except this, family and friends played a significant role in partner choice as an example of successful international marriage (D, F, I, K), being abroad (A) and encouragers of acquaintance (D, H), registration on international dating websites (F, B) and relationship (B, D, G). In the case of B, parents forbade her to have relations with men, so she decided to date foreigners virtually, whereas A, E had mutual friends with their partners so there were less awe to try it.

Such ideas that some western men are good husbands, faithful, equal, serious, stable, family-orientated, understanding, helping, child-caring, honest, frank, direct, easygoing were also of importance (except I, K, L), likewise general physical attraction to western type of look (except C, G, H, L). Moreover, B, G think that children from international marriages are more beautiful. B came to such conclusion when she migrated to city and saw such children, while G likewise C, I, J emphasized that generally they engaged into international relations due to their global activities – work (G, I) and studies abroad (C, J).

C, G, J, believe that a coincidence/fortune such as living in the same corridor (J) or asking for accommodation tips unknown person (C) could bring them together. Though J mentioned that she always wanted to have a foreign husband because she does not like Korean traditions of taking care of parents-in-law and working culture that make people to work too much and men to attend bars and prostitutes after work. While H stated that she wanted to try something new and is flexible to live in any country. Moreover, J, K plunged into such relations because it is becoming common and people are more open-minded about this.

To conclude, analysis proved that theory of social collective memory explains indeed our choices because the choice of partner of our respondents were influenced by internationally married relatives and friends, opinion and historical traditions of society. The same is with social exchange theory because our respondents tried to maximize rewards – better husbands, life, beautiful children and minimize costs – marital infidelity, less time for children, gender inequality. Except this, such circumstance as local marriage market disadvantage, unemployment, social pressure and life events (divorce, betrayal, religion conversion) also play important role in choices of partner. Finally, globalization has significant influence on the rise of international marriages, especially internet and possibility to study, travel and work abroad, (Palriwala and Uberoi, 2008), as well as many other more personal reasons, which is (all) in line with studied cases.

4. Men's Case Study

4.1 Life in Sweden

All respondents (except L) were born in Sweden. Among them only eight received higher education, others (A, B, F, I) finished their studies at Swedish gymnasium level, after which they started to work. D, G, K also worked some time after gymnasium and only then began their university studies. Half of men have technical occupation, A, D, E, L are engineers (D works and studies at the same time), J is IT consultant and K is a programmer. While B is a farmer, C financial project manager, F seaman, G student, H traffic school owner and I is a pensioner but before worked as a construction worker.

For nine respondents it is the first marriage or engagement and they do not have children except from those with the current partner. F, G, I were divorced before and have children only from their first marriages. The reasons of divorce were different, F's first wife cheated him, I and his first partner did not feel good together, while H's wife left him (all ex-wives are Swedish).

Everyday life of respondents consists mainly of work or studies after which those who have children spend time with them, watch TV, movies, read books, listen to music, some also play computer games (J, K), renovate houses (K, L) or look after home pets (C). During weekends many are relaxing, shopping, watching movies, visiting friends and parents, walking, spending more time with kids, doing domestic chores and traveling. J declared that he and his fiancée are partying a lot during weekends, L spends time with his wife that decides their activities during weekends, while couple K has sometimes separate nights out with own friends to socialize and relax. B, F, H admitted that they are usually working during weekends, but if they are not, they spend time at home, have guests, go downtown or have or enjoy scuba diving and motorcycling (H).

G and L have slightly different life events. G was born in Sweden and has Swedish citizenship but his parents are refugees from Southern America. When he was three years old they came back to South America and lived there four years, but the respondent's father got cancer and they migrated back to Sweden. Finally L was born, studied and worked in Great Britain. Later he decided to change his life and went to China to work as a teacher, where he met his spouse and they migrated together to Sweden, where they have been living for more than 6 years. Thus in the case of couple L both partners were migrants, which is different comparing to other pairs. In conclusion, men in half of the cases have higher degrees than their spouses, but several couples

(C, E, F, H, I) have the same scientific achievements and one woman (L) has higher academic achievements than her husband.

4.2 Family in Sweden

Respondents B, I, L, K have only one parent alive and F, H have both parents dead. The parents have various professions: both parents of C are nurses, A's mother works in employment service (father - pensioner), D's mother works in the care service (father is pensioner, but was a seaman), E's parents are doctor and economist, G's are Spanish and kindergarten teachers and J's parents are IT supervisor and engineer.

Almost all families are nuclear families, but parents of C, E, G divorced. Whereas C, H, L are single children and G has a half-sister from his father's second marriage. Most siblings of our respondents are adults, have work and own life. Moreover they and parents live separately and often reside in other towns than the participants, except B that lives together with his mother.

F, H, I have children from their first marriage and most are adults now, and live separately. However two children (out 3) of H that are still pupils, but they live with their mother. One child of F (out 6), is a carpenter and lives with his father, father's second wife and her daughter in the same house.

To conclude, male comparing to the female participants are from more mixed family backgrounds. Parents and family of majority of respondents live separately which refutes stereotype that western men marry women from less developed countries to provide care for old and ill family members. While in cases of B, F, relatives that live with them are self-reliant and healthy.

4.3 Religion

Almost half of the male participants are Christians. H, J, L are atheists and two agnostics (C, D). G believes in God but he is not sure about the truthfulness of religions' proclamations. Finally, E is a converted Muslim that before was an atheist. Nine men declared that there were no problems to marry someone with another faith. Only K, L stated that it would be a problem for them if their partner would be a religious fanatic, especially K emphasized that for him other religions and values except Christianity would be an obstacle in relationship. Though, only for E having a specific religion was a precondition to marry his wife that is Muslim. During the interview he mentioned that he was quite developed atheist and he did not want to become a Muslim but his wife explained to him that if he wants to marry her there is no choice, so he agreed. He attended

religious classes with imam before the conversion and discovered that Islam is different than it is presented in mass media and that not all Muslims are terrorists, aggressors and oddities that hide their women and do not let their daughters to attend school and those who are such just misinterpret the religion.

In conclusion, believes and religious convictions did not play an important role in the men's choices compared to the female respondents. But man D said that for successful marriage and generally for harmonious life people need to learn how to respect other confessions. It seems that Christianity is (slightly) more favorable for mixed marriages, which in some way explain why international marriages are frequent in Western World, including Sweden, likewise as western countries are very secular, so the influence of religion on people' life is softened.

4.4 Global Activities and Interests in Asia

Nine participants had visited Asia before they met their partners, but C, D, H also traveled there after acquaintances and before their marriages. For example C planed a trip to Chine several months before he met his spouse but the date of trip occurred when they were already together. The similar story happened with H that after divorce decided to go for holidays to China and accidently get acquainted with his future wife (from China) through internet at the time of journey planning. D also met his partner on-line and after her visit in Sweden, resolved to go to Philippines. Before they did not travel to Asia because it was too expensive, they concentrated on work and studies in Sweden.

Other men voyaged to Asia many times and mainly for tourism. I visited many times Thailand, A went to Thailand, Singapore and Honk Kong, B traveled to India, Thailand, Cambodia and Nepal, K, G went to Thailand, but also have visited Philippines (K) and Cambodia (G – to meet parents of his mate). E made a trip with his brother through Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, Fiji, Japan, Taiwan and China than after several years came to surf in Indonesia and later participated in university exchange program in Singapore, where he met his partner, get married, worked several years and then with his family came back to Sweden.

J studied in Tokyo Japanese language and then traveled for holidays to China and South Korea. L worked as English teacher in China and for pleasure visited Honk Kong. Finally F declared that as a seaman he voyaged all over the world.

Except Asia, all respondents traveled to Europe for rest or business. But many of them mentioned that they like to travel to Asia because it has cheap, good resorts and good weather.

Moreover all were interested in culture and traditions of that continent. For example, E described Singapore: “very interesting, there are like three main cultures and ethnicities, so it is like a melting pot; it is a place, where different people are living together, with different religions and in harmony” (04.02.2012).

Thus the stories of participants confirm that Swedes are indeed frequent international travelers abroad for leisure, business or studies and these global activities as well as a good internet connection within the country has positive effect on the emergence of international relations in Sweden.

4.5 Meeting a Partner

The stories of meeting were presented in the section 3.6, but in order to see the whole picture, stories of male participants are also included.

Participants A, B, C, F, H met their partners in internet. B received a letter from female B on the dating website. According to him her letter was personal, true and from heart, he answered on it and they began to communicate. After a month of the communication he came to the Philippines to meet her and propose. He lived as a groom with woman B and her family there. At his second trip to the Philippines he married woman B.

A also acquainted with his future wife in internet. Female A took his e-mail address from her friend that lives in Sweden and wrote a letter to him. Then woman A came to Sweden to visit her friend and she met there man A. He liked female A and they became a couple. Whereas man H was planning a trip to China for holidays and his ex-colleague gave his e-mail to female H to help him to find accommodation in China. Female H wrote to him and they began to chat. According to him he began to like woman H quickly because she was honest, intelligent, little stubborn and when he came to China they decided to marry.

In the case of couple C, woman C wrote to the man randomly a letter in MSN (chat program) in which she explained that she is a student and looks for accommodation in Sweden. He recommended several websites and continued writing to her in order to know if she was successful in findings. When it was time to come to Sweden something went wrong and her contract was cancelled, so he offered her to stay in his place initially until she could find something else. He mentioned that he started to like her from the chatting. It was like an emotional relationship. They became friends, but he understood that it is something more, so their feelings began to grow into love after the personal meeting. Finally, couple F also met in

internet and their story is identical. As well as woman F, he liked her immediately, so proposed her to become his wife even without seeing her in person.

In couple D, the first contact was initiated through ordinary letters. Man D started to write to female D because his Swedish friend was married to her sister and constantly encouraged him to do this, but after sometime he did not want to continue the correspondence because he felt that it was not right and he didn't know her. Two years later they began to communicate again, when female D had an access to internet. He said, they were just friends that were chatting and calling through Skype occasionally, but it changed when she came to Sweden to visit her sister. He began to like her, interested in her personality, because she was always smiling and happy. So he visited Philippines several times and married her.

Love from the first sight happened with man G that met his fiancée in Thailand, where he went for holidays with his family. One evening after dinner they were coming back to hotel, when his step-father suggested him to try a Thai massage which he has never tried before. He agreed and they randomly chose a massage salon where woman G worked. It was not the closest salon to them and due to him it was destiny that they went in that particular place. So woman G chose him to massage (according to her it was just her turn). He said that he got attracted to her right away and during the massage he told her straightly that he loves her. He explained that he is not such person that can easily say about feelings and he did not come to Thailand to find a girl, but he felt if he would not do something he would regret it whole life. He also invited her to disco. She refused first but then changed her mind, after it they became a couple, spent holiday together and decided to keep in touch and now they are together and live in Sweden.

K's story is also connected with holidays, he went to Philippines with his friends for pleasure and one his friend had a birthday, so he and his Pilipino wife organized a party, on which woman K was a guest from family side of friend's wife. K became interested immediately in female K because she was nice, funny, and showed him local games after the party. After some weeks (when woman's K boyfriend betrayed her) romantic relation began to develop between them. I also liked his future wife immediately. He met her at a small supermarket of Thai food during shopping. Female I worked there as a saleswoman, so he began to go there frequently for a contact, even though she could speak Swedish very little.

In couple's E case, the place of meeting was a student bar in Singapore. Man likewise woman E went there for a party and their common friends introduced them to each other. For the first

meeting they spoke just several minutes but when their companies began to spend more time together (in future), they fell in love.

J came to Japan as a student and as other international students he got accommodation in a big student house in Tokyo. There lived woman J that was a student from South Korea. After several months of living in the same place they became friends, even though he liked her from the first sight (she was beautiful, very social and popular). Finally, L met his wife in China, while he was working as a teacher at university. During a lecture he met woman L that he noticed quite immediately, but she was completely aloof towards him. After some time they became friends and after considerably long period of friendship they became a couple.

To conclude, the stories of the same event can differ between the participants, which was detected in stories of couples A, B, D, H. Namely, woman A presented her story as more coincidental and began it from her friend's place, without mentioning their foreword chatting, initiated by her. In the case of couple B, the man assured me that female B wrote to him as first to initiate a contact but in her story it was inversely. In story of woman D there is no mention of ordinary post communication and that they knew each other long before Skype communication, whereas in couple H, participants named different persons that gave their e-mails to each other. According to woman H it was her friend that chatted with man H in internet, whereas man H said that it was his colleague from previous work. Of course to know the truth is important, but even more important is that the same events are presented differently by its participants.

4.6 Where to Live

Ten male respondents have chosen to stay in Sweden because of secure life, work, career, unstrained behavior of people, higher wages, government protection and education. In addition, C, D said that their wives wanted to stay for a permanent residence in Europe and D, J emphasized that spouses did not have any real life commitment in homelands, so they moved to Sweden.

Man E expressed his unwillingness to have children in Singapore due to a work culture there that demands for employees to work overtime which means that there would be no time for a child and s/he would be brought up by relatives. Moreover, child and healthcare are cheaper and safer in Sweden, so he "lobbied" his decision of moving there. While H wanted to move to Asia for a permanent residence but he could not, because he was taking care of children from his first marriage, moreover he was working and studying at that time.

Interesting is the case of man L who is English and that decided with his spouse to migrate to Sweden and not to Great Britain. According to him, there were many factors influencing their choice to come to Sweden, first of all because he liked Sweden, he easily found job of his specialization there, many Swedish people know English and studies cost nothing in Sweden, while they are expensive in Britain.

Half of the men declared their willingness to move to Asia after retirement because of nice weather, low life costs and closeness of spouses to their families. Still they are not fully sure that it will happen because of probable bad economic and political situation there (I), health problems in the older age and need of professional health care (K). While E, G will move to Asia in next several years. For E it is a matter of responsibility of his wife that is a single child and according to culture and tradition in Singapore she must take care of her parents. Even if he wouldn't like to move back to Singapore, he acknowledged that he must respect it and will follow his wife. Whereas for G it is more personal desire to move, even if he was born in Sweden, he feels himself as a foreigner there because often people are closed and cold. So after studies he would like to move to developing Cambodia and work there as a city planner.

Others admitted that they could move to Asia for a while but not for ever, again because of social insecurity in Asia and better life conditions in Europe. C told that it would be good for his child to learn mother's language and traditions, while J admitted that it is his dream to live in Asia for some time because of a new experience. Moreover he wants to learn the mother tongue of his wife and they both think that night life is more exciting in South Korea. B said that moving to Asia is impossible because he is responsible for his farm and he cannot leave it. Finally, L mentioned that he would not like to move to Asia, because of the good environment, salary, pension, career and lack of strong competition in Europe.

Thus, to deduce the choice of place of permanent living is connected not only to personal opinions of men or women but also to the existing pros and cons of living there for whole family. In addition, E's case proves that it is not only women that must follow their husbands in life, but also men should respect traditions and culture of their foreign spouses.

4.7 Gender Relations

According to Gender equality policy objectives in Sweden, "women and men should take the same responsibilities for the home and have the opportunity to give and receive care on the same terms" (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2006). Eight men stated that they share almost equally house responsibilities with their partners, but A, E, F said since their wives do not work, they make

more domestic chores, while K mentioned that in his family they have specific responsibilities each, like he renovates house and does the dishes, she cleans and cooks because according to her she does it better. H, I, J declared that they help their spouses occasionally because they work (H, J), are lazy (J) or wives do not want them to help (I). Only B said that he does not do domestic chores at all because he works on his farm every day.

All men pointed out that within their families they make decisions by consensus. However C told that he decides often alone about financial matters, due to his financial studies background. H mentioned that they negotiate but he has a feeling that his wife makes final decision and J outlined that his word is the most important in the process. Finally, E told that first of all his family is guided by Islam in decision making, but if it tells nothing about some issues they see pros and cons of solutions and negotiate.

Males A, B, C, D, E, I, K stated that for women it is important to work because of economical issues (A, K), social life (C, D, I, K, E), sense of independence (B), intellectual growth and happy family life (E). In addition E, K said that being all the time at home is depressive for everybody and it makes family members to split and develop on different levels. While C, G, L outlined that women should decide by themselves to work or not and according to H this issue is not gender but financially related. Finally, F answered if men have sufficient funds, it is not important for women to work.

Nine respondents mentioned that they would like their partners to work. L emphasized that work will give his wife independence and self-sufficiency which is important for her. According to F it will help his wife to cover her demands and meet new people. Only G, H, I think that work decision belongs solely to their wives. Women A, G, K work already and their partners are satisfied with it because of extra money to the family budget (A, G) and good career (K). G emphasized that as he studies now it is necessary for his fiancée to work, but later on she should develop intellectually by making university studies.

In conclusion, B, F, J, L gave different answers than their spouses on questions. It seems that J, F presented themselves in a more favorable light, in the case of B it could be his wife that did this, while L on the contrary diminished his role. Finally, according to E not only partners are important in decision making but also religion.

4.8 Relations with Spouse's Family

Something that is frequently left out by researches of international marriages is the relation between spouses and their parents-in-law. This research has shown that eight men very rarely communicate with their parents-in-law, mainly because of the language barrier. B mentioned that some of his wife's relatives are too shy to speak with him even though they speak English. D, I, J, K stated that they communicate with their parents-in-law every time when their wives call them, despite not speaking the same language they try to tell them few words anyway.

Only A, D, F help their parents-in-law financially on a regular basis. A mentioned that he sends only very a small amount of money to his wives' relatives, whereas his wife mainly supports them from own revenues. B, G, I, J, K sometimes help their parents-in-law because of emergency and medical expenses or when they visit them. K also helps his wife's further relatives to pay university tuition fee. C, E, H, L do not support their parents-in-law, because there is no need for it, but E, L feel that in the future maybe they will have to do this in case of health problems. L mentioned that when his parents-in-law came to Sweden, he and his wife paid for everything due to the Chinese culture, where children do everything for their parents. But no man mentioned other sorts of help, like for instance mental support or support by advice, but it seems that this is mainly connected to the language problems in communication.

In conclusion, one third of respondents do not help their parents-in-law at all because they are already financially secured. Five respondents help their wives' families only in cases of emergency, which is of course normal within families in general. The fact that three people support their parents-in-law regularly does not necessary mean that their marriages are mercenary.

4.9 Responses to Stereotypes

All respondents refused to generalize about people and told that every person is different, but in further discussion some features were mentioned by them. Western/Swedish men were described as good-looking, gender equal, impatient, career-orientated, open to many relations, good husbands, unfettered, stable, reserved, faithful, easily divorcing, nationalistic, less family-orientated and less religious. Man B added that western men have comfortable life, travel a lot and work less, while B, C, D, E outlined that Swedish men are even more democratic, good-looking (C) and gender equal than other westerners. According to E they like to date girls internationally, but usually marry native women and are American-focused.

Western/Swedish women were characterized as pretty, good wives, self-determined, independent, wanting to rule and to have everything the best, unfettered, liberal, reserved, often change partners, strong, self-sufficient, career-orientated, equal, easily divorcing, less family-orientated and less religious. Though J thinks that too independent women usually do not need partners in their lives likewise dependent women are passive and man-reliant which is also bad for relations.

Asian/wives' fellow countrywomen were portrayed as pretty, slim, good wives, kind, polite, traditional, religious, family-orientated, loyal, not so liberated as western women, shy, easy-going, unwilling to divorce, sincere, talkative and open. However, B pointed out that some are dishonest, mercenary and covert (J). C, L emphasized that Chinese women are family ruling and quickly liberalizing. According to E there is no difference between Singaporean and western women.

Finally Asian/wives' fellow countrymen are good-looking, less gender equal and career-orientated (except Chinese men), traditional, good husbands, conservative, family-focused, healthy, generous in courting, open, polite, relaxed, religious, economical, modest and unfaithful. In addition, according to H, Chinese men are educated, while D said that Pilipino men like to spend leisure time separately from wives and there is more hierarchies and submission in Asia.

After visiting Asia, C, D discovered that there is more gender equity and women respect than they thought, that Asian men are not brutal in their manners (G), as well as they value family, are religious and happy (K). Moreover J understood that people are very diverse and modern, likewise he was surprised that many young Korean women do not want to have career despite higher education.

To conclude, all respondents were open-minded and did not follow stereotypes about nations. Even though some features were used as people characteristics, but it was constantly emphasized that everything is individual and cannot be generalized to all people.

4.10 Ideal Partner

According to respondents an attractive woman should be medium tall (B, D, G), curvy (E, G, K), young (B, D), healthy (C, L), feminine (K), fit (L), slim (H), with nice smile (H), pretty face (A, J), long legs (G), good proportion eyes to face (J) and lead a healthy life (C). Though I, F told that appearance is not important for them but F finds his wife attractive, while I look for kindness and cooking skills in women. In addition, A, B emphasized that there are no specific

features that they like, whereas C, E like exotic beauty and C, J, L, H prefer more Asian appearance than European. Finally, according to K, womanish way of dressing is attractive, but it is not popular in Sweden.

All men described a good mother as caring, educated and educating (C, E, L), developing good features (C), patient (H), healthy (K), understanding (G, H), loving (E), disciplining (E, J), responsible (D), warm (J), cooking (F), doing all the best for children' future (E) and health (L). Moreover, according to B, she should be sacrificing and put children' need on the first place, while for G she should help children to chose a right way in life.

Lastly, ideal wife was portrayed as caring (C, E, G, J), compromising (B, K), patient (E, H), consistent (I, H) willing to solve problems (B, D), healthy (K), cooking (F), loving (E, K), warm (J), open-minded (E, L), tolerant (C), guiding (G), attractive (K), flexible (H), looking after (F) and disciplining children (J),), with good sense of humor (E), taking care of house and man (A). L added that a wife should be equal that they will share and do everything together, likewise C said that she should “not be too dependent on the husband” (28.02.2012).

In conclusion, C, J, E, H, L find Asian appearance more attractive, while the rest look for features that can belong to any nation. Interesting is also that F, H, J, K named same features for good mother and ideal wife, which was not the case among women. Finally C, L refer to significance of women equality and independence which shows that these values are sought after not only by women but also by men and can be found among Asian women in contrast to stereotype that they are submissive and like to do everything to please a husband.

4.11 Marital disagreements

Couples C, H, J disagree about politics of wives' motherlands and statuses of Taiwan and Tibet. B, H sometimes dislike behavior of spouses such as acting without thinking (B) and taking the leftover food from a restaurant (H). Couple K argues about what to watch on TV and what amount of time to spend with friends, because man K wants to meet friends more often, while female K wants to spend time at home. J said that his fiancée thinks that he acts dismissively towards parents and wants children now, but he disagrees with it. A, G emphasized that sometimes they think differently (about culture or existence of karma) but they do not disagree. Whereas D has different opinion about the world's origin and L – about duration of stay his parents in law in Sweden. Moreover, they think that in the future they may have misunderstandings about raising children, because in their wives cultures children do everything

for parents and wives may press children to be successful in everything (L). E, F, I stated lack of problems at all because they understand each other well (F, I) or both follow religion (E).

In conclusion, many men (except A, C, G) answered differently about marital problems than their wives which can be matter of other perspective or denial of problems. Only four couples (D, H, J, L) faced problems connected to culture, religion and way of bringing up children that disapproves stereotype that all multinational pairs have strains and marital dissatisfaction (Inman, et. al, 2011).

4.12 Attitude of Society, Family, Friends

According to Jones (2012) international couples are challenged by adaptation, acculturation, public attitudes and stereotyped in negative ways. Majority of participants met with an opinion that international marriages is about buying women for care (A), mail-order-bride (C, H), women' import (D), misuse of women from poor countries (H) mercenary (G) and fictive marriages (J). While Asian women are often portrayed in the society as poor ex-sex-industry-workers that are exploited by western men (G, H, J). Moreover, B, E, C emphasized that some people think that Swedish men should marry only fellow women because Sweden is the best. Especially E said that some people are suspicious about his marriage and cannot understand his partner choice and distinct culture fascination, because there is nothing to learn about and only hideous men marry foreigners since local women refuse them, which is not his case. L has also noticed that in Great Britain people are more open-minded, whereas H emphasized that the problem is that people and especially media see other people as groups and not as individuals and focus mostly on negative parts of international relations.

11 males expressed opinion that their parents and friends accepted their marriage well, because there were no negative comments (A, C, B, D, G, H, I), of brides' personality (E, J), long-awaited marriage of man (K) and happiness of men (F). Though in the beginning the parents of D, G thought that distance relations are wired, while E's parents are worried that he changed religion and can become a terrorist. Finally L's family wanted him to marry only an English woman but now they respect his choice.

Parents-in-law and spouses' friends of ten males were positive about marriage because white men are interesting (C, H), Sweden is better country for life (D), support of parents-in-law (F) and getting to know seriousness of men (G, E). A, B, I, H told that they feel that their marriage is well-received, while family of women E, J were worried about their relationship since they were unmarried, likewise females' K, L parents were skeptic about dating, seriousness of men, taking

away their daughter and had local candidates for them. Except this, C, H faced society disapproval of their marriage in China.

Eight men know other international couples and they seem to be satisfied, while B, F, D know some unhappy pairs as well, sometimes because spouses began to behave as Swedish women (F). E does not know anybody that is interested in international marriages and other cultures.

Investigations showed that 10 respondents faced problems with negative attitude of the society, while I and F said that most people say nothing about their marriages but they are not sure what they think. Moreover, on the contrary to Inman's (et. al, 2011) study this research has revealed that in most cases, respondents' parents and friends are positive about their marriages. Whereas the surrounding society undermines and stereotypes international marriages the most.

4.13 Reflections on International Marriages and Personal Choices

According to a majority of men international marriages are rising because of globalization and what is connected to it, broadening of marriage fields, liberalization and opening of countries. Moreover people are more adventurous, interested in other cultures (E, G, J) and want to be different (J). However, B, E, K mentioned that disadvantage on local marriage markets and possibility to find better match abroad also play a significant role.

Personally respondents engaged into international relations because of love (B, C, G, L), meeting and liking future partners and their personality (A, C, D, H, I), attraction to exotic beauty (B, C, E, J), interest in other cultures (B, C, E), local marriage market disadvantage (K, F), friends encourage (D), traveling and studying abroad (E, J). Moreover J mentioned that he was always open to such idea, whereas E has dreamed to have a foreign wife, to live abroad and investigate the world. Choices were also influenced by absence of religious restraints because of the same religious views or tolerance to diversity (except E); by attraction and romantic feelings, women's personalities; strong interest in culture and history of Asia (except F, G), especially E emphasized that "culture is like a spice to relationship, something extra interesting" (04.02.2012). Moreover C, F, G, H, J, K, L prefer women with Asian type of beauty, while E like any exotic appearance. The same is with personal meeting, it was important in every case, but especially for man D that had no feelings to woman D during their chatting, but changed his opinion after personal meeting.

In the opinion of many respondents (some) Asian women care about husbands and house (A, E, F, I, J) worry if they are good wives (E, J), are traditional and family-orientated (C, E, J, K, L),

open, easygoing (D, E), loyal (E, I, L), good wives (C, F, G, J), feminine dressed (K); less- self-determined (B, F, K, L), licentious (F) and self-contained (G, J), and eagerly divorce (E, H, L). Except this, men F, H, I looked for a foreign partner because of unsuccessful marriages or relationship (C) with fellow women and local marriage market disadvantage (B, H, I, K), due to own age (accept K) and unpopularity among Swedish women. As B explained some countrywomen change partners and do not want to marry at all, so he looked for a partner with features that he likes abroad.

Family, friends and society also played a role in partner choices. Thus mutual friends of A, D, E, H acquainted them with women, encouraged to be together (E) and gave possibility to get to know each other better. Whereas parents of C, G and friends of J, K liked and supported their choice, despite of some negative opinions of people around. All respondents knew about negative stereotypes about international marriages and even some of the participants' relatives were against their marriage but it didn't challenge their choice. Moreover, respondents C, D, E, H outlined their tolerance and open-mindedness to other nations, cultures and religion.

Males' choice was also influenced by their studies (E, J) and work (E, F, L) abroad, access to internet (A, B, C, D, F, H) and profession (F seaman) and a desire to immigrate/live some time abroad (G, E, J, L). Especially G told that he feels himself as a foreigner in Sweden and do not like weather there. E, J mentioned that they wanted to marry internationally because of distinct experience, while according to F multinational marriages are becoming more common, so he opened to the idea as well.

In conclusion, the same as in women' cases theories of social collective memory and social exchange were suitable, because we can see influence of family, friends and society on partners' choices as well as maximization of benefits – attractive partner with preferred features of character and values and minimization of costs – loneliness. Again significant was a role of globalization and internet, likewise circumstances of local marriage market disadvantage, events of divorce and ideas that for instance some Asian women are good wives and family-orientated. Moreover, the choice could be influenced by dream, cultural interests, desire to immigrate, profession and trend of rising of multinational marriages. Finally, interesting is that no one mentioned that international marriages can be popular means of upward mobility and migration to better developed country.

5. Concluding Discussion

The research has shown that choices of partner in international marriages are influenced by many different factors, ideas, events and experiences. Similar to one nation marriages feelings, personality, family and religious beliefs play important roles in multinational relations. However, the choice to marry internationally is significantly influenced by globalization, global activities, internet, opening and liberalization of countries, which broaden marriage fields. As well as the choice is tightly connected to local marriage market disadvantages, physical attraction to other nations and exotic appearance, desire to live abroad, desired values and features that are more frequent among foreigners, happily, internationally married relatives or friends, interest in other cultures, general positive ideas about foreigners, open-mindedness, unsuccessful relations with counterparts, tolerance, dream, and desire to be different. Thus all kind of choices, including choices of partner, are tightly connected to our social background and issues of maximizing rewards and minimizing costs in outcomes, which is in accordance with theories of social collective memory and social exchange.

Moreover, this inquiry of cases has refuted a range of stereotypes connected to international marriages and their participants, for instance that such marriages are calculated business contracts, sole means of migration to more developed countries and revenue of financial support for families in homelands or care suppliers for old and ill relatives of grooms. Except this, it was disproved that all brides are passive and submissive and their family is always positive about their marriage with a foreigner. However, it was confirmed that wider society, sometimes even family and friends perceive international couples stereotypically and negatively. These couples feel lack of support and understanding, as well as pressure, both at home and abroad, which challenge them and their happiness. Thus even in democratic, liberal and multinational countries these marriages are stigmatized and negatively stereotyped. Such results were also found by Inman (2011), Behtoui (2010), Jones (2012), Jedlicka (2000) and Simons (2001). Though on the contrary to Inman's research, this case study showed that international some couples face more pressure from wider society than from families.

This study points out that people who engage themselves in international relations are from different backgrounds, have various religious views, life experiences and opinions. Before marriages all respondents studied, worked or combined both. For a majority it is first marriage and many have children only from the current partners. Their everyday life do not differ much from (Swedish) one nation couples, though many foreign spouses outlined that they face problems with homesickness, finding a job and friends in Sweden. Two couples plan to migrate

to Asia in the near future, while the rest (except 2) are not sure but would like to do this as pensioners, due to weather, lower life expenses and because it is the female partners' homeland. Moreover as Simons (2001), Jhonson (2007) and Kelsky (2001) described, many respondents indeed looked for and found harmonious relations with foreigners, men – family-orientated women, women – gender equal men, which sometimes are infrequent features among local population. Except this, it was noticed in the cases of women D, F and H that having members of the close family abroad also plays an important role, those relatives often stimulate and help family members to migrate.

On the contrary to Bischoff (2005), Gaines (1997), Goodman (1991), this study found that international couples do not necessary face internal problems and marital dissatisfaction connected to different religion, customs and backgrounds. In addition, there are different reasons for choice of residence country (not solely economical), such as climate, culture, government protection and others in contrast to stereotypes. Finally, a majority of couples are gender equal and especially in decision making, but situation with sharing household responsibilities is a bit less equal due to men's work or women's unwill to accept husbands' help. Moreover, differently from Jedlicka (1988), this work did not detect that men follow myth of Oriental women in their choice of partners, on the contrary many males looked for independence, activeness and gender equality in women and found them among Asian females. Women were also not guided by stereotype of world's hegemonic masculinity described by Nemoto (2006) in their choice of partner. Likewise all respondents showed no stereotypical thinking about other nations. Whereas the case of man E proved that men also follow wives in life, as well as it is not necessary that in international couples males have higher education. It was true only for half of the cases, while in the rest, spouses have the same or (one) woman has higher degrees.

However, this work has showed that men are averagely 9,5 years older than their foreign spouses, which is in line with Tsay's study (2004). But the age difference of 40% of the respondents was only 1-5 years, whereas in one couple a woman was four years older than her fiancé, which refutes the stereotype that in international marriages men always marry much younger women. Except this, it was noticed that sometimes spouses gave different answers on the same questions, like who initiated the first contact, or how you make important decisions within the couple and share responsibilities, which is of course a matter of personal experience and belief. However, if it is consciously changed facts the reasons behind are interesting, though it is hardly possible to reveal them.

Finally, it should be emphasized the deep connection between increase of international marriages, migration and globalization, because globalization increases amount of such marriages, while both phenomena intensify migration. No research couple is a representative of Male-Order Brides marriage discussed by Chia-wen Lu (2008), as well as it was not detected that women that met their partners in Sweden wanted purposely to marry Swedes to stay in the country, an issue mentioned by Palriwala and Uberoi (2008). Though, as said above stereotypes follow international marriages and stigmatize them, but globalization makes countries and people more open and liberal towards such marriages despite of numerous challenges and constrains.

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Appendix:

Interview Questions for Women:

1. Could you please tell me your short biography with the most important events in your life? (Birth, education, work, marriage, divorce, children...)
2. What is your confession?
3. Is it a problem to marry someone with other confession than yours?
4. Were you somewhere abroad before coming to Sweden? Where? Why?
5. Could you please describe your family in Asia? (Family members, children, their activities...)
6. Do you often communicate with your family from your homeland? (Why/ why not, do you support them in any terms)?
7. How did look your ordinary day in you homeland?
8. Where and how did you meet your partner? (What did you do there)? Did you like him immediately? Why/ why not?
9. Why did you and your partner decide to come and stay in Sweden?
10. How does your ordinary day look in Sweden?
11. What do you usually do during weekend? Do you generally share the responsibilities about the house?
12. Do you like your life and perspectives in Sweden? Why/ Why not? (personal/work perspectives)
13. Would you like to come back to your country with your husband for permanent residence? Why?
14. How do you make important decisions in your marriage? If you cannot agree, what do you do?
15. What do you think about Western men generally? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
16. What do you think about Swedish men generally? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
17. What do you think about Asian men? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
18. What do you think about your countrymen? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
19. What do you think about Asian women? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
20. What do you think about your countrywomen? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
21. What do you think about Western women? (Look, behavior, as life partners).
22. What do you think about Swedish women? (Look, behavior, as life partners).
23. Did you change your opinion about western/Swedish men, after coming and living in Sweden? Why?

24. Did you change your opinion about western/Swedish women, after coming and living in Sweden? Why?
25. Did you change your opinion about Asian/countrymen, after coming and living in Sweden? Why?
26. Did you change your opinion about Asian/countrywomen, after coming and living in Sweden? Why?
27. What features should have an attractive man?
28. What features should possess an ideal husband?
29. What features should possess a good father?
30. Do you disagree in something with your partner? Why/ why not? In what?
31. What do your parents/ family, friends think about your marriage?
32. What do your husband's parents/family, friends think about your marriage?
33. How a marriage with the foreigner (Western) is seen in your country?
34. Do you have friends that are married with Western/Swedish men? What do they think about their marriage?
35. Do you think international marriages are rising? Why/ why not?
36. What has influenced your choice to engage yourself into the international marriage?

Interview Questions for Men:

1. Could you please tell me your short biography with the most important events in your life? (Birth, education, work, marriage, divorce, children...)
2. What is your confession?
3. Is it a problem to marry someone with other confession than yours?
4. Did you travel a lot to Asia before the marriage? Where? Why?
5. Could you please describe your family in Sweden? (Family members, their activities, where they live ...)
6. How does look your ordinary day?
7. What do you usually do during weekend? Do you generally share the responsibilities about the house?
8. How and where did you meet your partner? (What did you do there) Did you like her immediately? Why/ why not?
9. Why did you and your partner decide to come and stay in Sweden?
10. Do you often communicate with your wife's family?
11. Do you help your wife's family in some way? Why/ Why not?

12. How do you make important decisions in your marriage? If you cannot agree, what do you do?
13. Would you like to come back to your wife's country for the permanent residence?
14. What do you think about Western men generally? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
15. What do you think about Swedish men generally? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
16. What do you think about Asian men? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
17. What do you think about countrymen of your wife? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
18. What do you think about Asian women? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
19. What do you think about women from your wife's country? (Look, behavior, as life partners)
20. What do you think about Western women? (Look, family, behavior, as life partners).
21. What do you think about Swedish women? (Look, family, behavior, as life partners).
22. Did you change your opinion about Asian women/ women from your wife's country, for example after visiting this country? Why?
23. Did you change your opinion about Asian men/men from your wife's country, for example after visiting this country? Why?
24. What feature should have an attractive woman?
25. What features should have a good mother?
26. What features should possess an ideal wife?
27. Is it important for a woman to work?
28. Would you like your wife to work? Why/ why not? If she works now, what do you think about it?
29. Do you disagree in something with your partner? Why/ why not? In what?
30. How a marriage with the foreigner (Asian) is seen in your country?
31. What do your parents/ family, friends think about your marriage?
32. What do your wife's parents/ family, friends think about your marriage?
33. Do you have friends that are married with Asian women? What do they think about their marriages?
34. Do you think international marriages are popular? Why/ why not?
35. What has influenced your choice to engage yourself into the international marriage?