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THE PROBLEM OF INDONESIAN CONTRACT BRIDES IN CHINA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGE

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ABSTRACT
The rise of Indonesian contract brides in China has become a major focus that requires urgent action to protect their rights and well-being. The initiative aims to prevent exploitation in the context of cross-border marriages and ensure that such marriages are conducted fairly and legally. This situation arises from a number of factors, including difficult economic conditions, unlicensed intermediary operations, and a strong desire to live more prosperously. It also deals with issues of commercial marriage, human trafficking, and marital fraud, which require a careful and coordinated approach. Therefore, China should take steps to renew the international marriage law, enhance cooperation with Indonesia, and effectively address these issues to promote the healthy and stable development of cross-border marriage.

KEYWORDS: Marriage Fraud; Human Trafficking; cross-country marriages; Marriage Act;

INTRODUCTION
As economic globalization increases, population mobility across countries becomes an important part of the globalization process. This mobility encompasses both voluntary and involuntary situations, with problems of human trafficking, organized crime, and a growing wave of refugees. The Rohingya issue in Myanmar has gained international and academic attention. In this context, studies on cross-country population mobility in Southeast Asia are increasing. In addition to the issue of refugees, the issue of "contract brides" coming to China has also attracted the attention of relevant countries, especially the government and people of the bride's home country. During this time, "contract brides" in China have mostly come from Vietnam, Myanmar, and Laos. With the development of this industry, the bride's home countries also expanded to other Southeast Asian and South Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Cambodia, and Pakistan. On July 30, 2019, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to discuss how the two countries can jointly resolve the issue of contract brides in China. Indonesia asked China to look at this problem from the perspective of human trafficking (Public Relations, 2019). This is the first time that the
issue of Indonesian brides in China has been on the agenda of the two countries' ministerial meetings. Under the leadership of Joko Widodo who pays great attention to the protection of the rights of citizens abroad, the severity of this problem has reached an urgent level to be resolved.

The incident drew widespread attention from the Indonesian government and society, with mainstream media such as Forum Indonesia and Kompas establishing dedicated "contract brides" columns and tracking the issue, while social media showed a trend of discussion on "Chinese topics". However, the attention of the Chinese government and society to Indonesian brides in China is relatively lacking. In June 2019, China's Ministry of Public Security worked with the police of Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand to combat human trafficking, protecting the legal rights of women and children (Rani, A. P., Windiani, R. D., Fatharini, A. T, 2022). This action does not include Indonesia. Later, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI) in West Kalimantan revealed the trafficking of Indonesian women to China under the guise of cross-border marriage, with at least dozens of people being victims of illegal marriage brokers, which immediately sparked heated discussions in Indonesian society. The Chinese Embassy in Indonesia then reminded Chinese citizens in Indonesia or going to Indonesia to raise awareness and stay away from intermediaries of illegal foreign marriages to avoid harm to their legal rights. In early January 2020, Indonesian media reported that the government had "rescued" 40 Indonesian brides from China ((Rani, A. P., Windiani, R. D., Fatharini, A. T, 2022)). However, the Chinese media's attention to this issue is much lower than that of "Vietnamese brides" and "Myanmar brides", even lower than the issue of "Pakistani brides" that has only emerged in the past year.

The existing literature on "foreign brides" in China, especially from demography, geography, sociology, and psychology, examines the causes, directions, impacts of marriage migration, and migrant groups of foreign female marriages, much from experience, particularly Vietnamese and Myanmar brides in China (especially in Guangxi, Yunnan, and other southwestern border regions). However, for Indonesian brides, research is mainly on Indonesian brides in Taiwan China, ethnically, especially research on Taiwanese Hakka men and Indonesian Hakka brides from West Kalimantan, this is a cross-country marriage but not cross-ethnic (Wang, D.K, 2011). In terms of research content, most of them are from marriage commercialization, social exclusion, cultural adaptation, cultural pluralism, and ethnic local landscapes. Most research is from a "Taiwanese" perspective and does not place Indonesian brides in their original sociocultural context for analysis, which does improve public and academic understanding in various fields about Indonesian marriage migration and its home country, Indonesia.

In general, there has been little academic attention to Indonesian brides in mainland China, and most about Indonesian brides in mainland China appears in news reports, with a tendency toward reality that "drives" academic research. Research on this group from a "gender" perspective is extremely rare. Incorporating the concept of gender into Indonesian bride research in China is not only to examine Indonesian brides as "women", but also to view "gender" as a comprehensive social structure for analysis, combining it with patriarchy, market economy, and globalization processes. Thus, this article will be mainly based on Indonesian literature and field research results, explain the basic situation of Indonesian brides in China, discuss the causes of its formation and the problems arising from it, and from a Chinese perspective, offer suggestions for resolving the problem of illegal cross-border marriage between China and Indonesia.
METHOD

To analyze issues related to cross-border marriage between China and Indonesia, this study will use a mixed methodological approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding as well as empirical data that supports the analysis.

In qualitative data collection, this research will involve in-depth interviews with various related parties, including cross-border couples, international marriage lawyers, government officials, and socio-cultural experts to gain insight into the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by individuals in cross-border marriages. In addition, analysis of specific case studies involving cross-country marriages, both successful cases and problems arising, will be conducted to understand the dynamics and consequences of such marriages. The research will also review government policies, laws, and documents, as well as academic literature related to cross-border marriage, human trafficking, and cultural integration.

For quantitative data collection, the study will conduct surveys to collect data from a wider population, covering questions about perceptions, experiences, and issues encountered in cross-country marriages. Statistical analysis will be used to assess trends, patterns, and correlations between various factors affecting cross-country marriages.

The data collected will be analyzed thematically to identify key themes and patterns emerging from interviews and case studies. In addition, descriptive and inferential statistical analysis will be used to evaluate significant distributions, relationships, and trends in quantitative data.

This methodology will be complemented by data triangulation, combining results from qualitative and quantitative data to gain a more comprehensive understanding and higher validity. The process of data verification and peer review from experts in related fields will be used to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. This approach will enable research to capture the complexities of cross-border marriage issues from multiple perspectives and provide evidence-based recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

DISCUSSION

Situation and Motivations of Commercial Marriage Between China and Indonesia

Since the 1980s, the phenomenon of Indonesian brides to Taiwan has emerged. Although not as numerous as the Philippines and Vietnam, the number is steadily increasing. Indonesian brides originally came from West Kalimantan, mostly ethnic Hakka (Jiang, W., & Lan, C. X. 2019). However, with the development of cross-border marriage, many non-Hakka Indonesian brides, including Muslims, took part.

In the past 10 years, the gender imbalance and "marriage pressure" in China have increased, so foreign brides, especially from Vietnam and Myanmar, have become the choice for Chinese men with low economic conditions. Problems related to foreign brides, such as bride escape or marriage fraud, are often reported. In Taiwan, intermediaries promote Indonesian brides as more obedient and able to speak Mandarin, attracting more business.

Intermediaries promise Indonesian brides that their Chinese husbands are rich, offer them a worry-free life, and even help their families in Indonesia. As a result, the number of Indonesian brides in China increased, surpassing intermediaries in Taiwan. Most Indonesian brides are from West Kalimantan, while destination provinces in China include Fujian, Guangxi, Guangdong, and are slowly expanding northward. Chinese grooms are usually mature, poorly educated, in ordinary economic conditions, and some with disabilities or a history of mental illness (Afiyah, P.A. 2022). They choose Indonesian brides aged 16 to 28, preferably unmarried and childless. The total cost of this
Cross-country marriage is about 150,000 yuan (about 335,827,500 rupiah). If the relationship goes well for a year, the contract expires. However, if the Indonesian bride "runs away", the intermediary promises free replacement, excluding dowry and gifts. This kind of marriage, although it has a traditional ceremony, is actually a "commercial marriage" or "buying and selling marriage", in which all activities are regulated according to market principles for maximum economic benefit. This explains why relationships between couples are often weak, with insufficient communication, and why Indonesian brides often leave home, disappear, or end in divorce.

Commercial Marriage and Human Trafficking

In late June 2019, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union in West Kalimantan reported to the media that dozens of Indonesian women were victims of illegal marriage intermediaries (Tuasikal, 2019). Some parents reported their daughters being kidnapped to China and missing. The incident received widespread attention in Indonesia after media coverage. According to the Indonesian Embassy in Beijing, 18 victims were tempted to promise a better life by marrying a Chinese man. However, after arriving in China, they were forced to work without pay, even subjected to sexual violence and domestic violence, including a 14-year-old girl. Indonesia managed to send home two victims who shared their tragic experiences on Facebook, triggering sympathy and anger from Indonesian netizens towards China (AP News., 2019).

In the era of economic and cultural globalization, cross-border marriage is accepted in Indonesian society. However, behind the burgeoning cross-border marriage market hides cruel "buying and selling marriages", called "global female body trafficking" and even covert "human trafficking". Chinese law and relevant judicial explanations have distinguished between trafficking in women and cross-border marriage. Trafficking in women is against the law against women's will. China's Supreme People's Court clarified that using marriage to sell women by withholding identity documents or restricting personal freedoms is unlawful.

The situation of Indonesian brides in China can be divided into two cases. First, intermediaries expose the excessive economic conditions of Chinese men, creating a beautiful picture of life for Indonesian brides. However, after marrying and arriving in China, they were surprised to find the actual conditions very different, life was more difficult than in Indonesia, even facing domestic violence and restrictions on freedom. In the second case, middlemen deceived Indonesian brides with promises of "contract marriages", taking them to remote areas, working hard, and even being used as sex slaves.

This Indonesian bridal trafficking group is well organized, involving fraud, recruitment, and sales. Indonesian female intermediaries who are fluent in Indonesian persuade the victim's parents, while men take care of documents, including passports and visas (Liu, Z. Y, 2013). The cost of creating a passport can be expensive and time-consuming, often requiring bribes. Indonesia's bridal intermediary market is rife with negative reports and illegal activities, including human trafficking and forced prostitution.

Cross-border Marriage as Legal Fraud

In Indonesian media, contract marriages involved in human trafficking often portray Indonesian brides as "victims," middlemen as "abusers," and Chinese grooms as "conspirators." However, this gives rise to the stereotype that Indonesian brides are always deceived into China and marking Chinese grooms as "conspirators" is stigmatizing. In Chinese-Indonesian commercial marriages, there is a phenomenon of "legal marriage fraud" where intermediaries collude with the bride to deceive the Chinese
groom. In reality, it is the Chinese groom who is often the real victim, losing money and confidence in the process. They are often caught up in scenarios where Indonesian brides use various excuses to return to their home country after a scam.

Second, after Indonesian brides "run away", Chinese grooms have to bear the stigma of being "traffickers", "perpetrators of domestic violence", and "perpetrators of sexual violence". To prevent escape, usually Chinese men will confiscate the bride's Indonesian passport and identity upon arrival at the airport. However, after "escaping", without a passport, the bride can only ask for help from the police and embassies, often by claiming to be a victim of domestic violence or human trafficking to return to her country immediately (Tribun News, 2019). This leaves Chinese grooms stigmatized as "traffickers" or abusers.

Third, Chinese grooms who "lost money and people" received no help. While Indonesian brides can seek help from police and embassies, deceived Chinese grooms often have nowhere to turn for help. They face difficulties in reporting to the police or taking legal action, often ending in despair and confusion.

Fourth, Indonesian brides often "run away" without performing divorce procedures, making it difficult for the man to register the marriage again. When the man's side can finally get out of the shadow of this marriage scam and want to rebuild his family, but because he and the Indonesian bride have been registered with the civil office, and the bride "ran away" without taking care of the divorce procedures, legally he is still considered a married person, and must divorce first if he wants to form a new family.

This is often a tool of blackmail by Indonesian brides not to return the delivery money, saying, "I can work with you to divorce, but I will not return any delivery money. After all, I am single in Indonesia and can still get married, so for me, taking care of this divorce certificate has no effect." (Sohu Web, 2018) An Indonesian bride who "fled" to the Indonesian Consulate General in Guangzhou to "ask for help" said so to the Chinese groom Zhang Mao (pseudonym) who came to "arrest" her. With the help of the consulate, most Indonesian brides can be "rescued and returned to their country", while deceived Chinese grooms are already a reality. In order to be able to remarry in the future, most Chinese grooms have to "swallow the loss secretly", even if the loss reaches hundreds of thousands of yuan, they must complete the divorce procedures and translate it into Indonesian(Sohu Web, 2018).

Solution to the Problem

To solve the problem of cross-border marriage between China and Indonesia, the following steps can be taken:

1. Improve international marriage laws to protect the rights of both parties: Laws must be updated to adapt to new situations, especially issues that often arise in cross-border marriages. Ensure that the marriage registration process is voluntary, strengthen the investigative work of the international marriage registration department to ensure the voluntariness and real will of both parties. Add registration requirements related to differences in language, culture, and age, and clearly regulate the invalidity of marriages that occur due to coercion or fraud, using the law to protect the freedom of marriage and divorce of both parties.

2. Crack down on illegal international marriage organizations: Increase supervision and enforcement, crack down on illegal marriage agencies. Police, foreign affairs, and civil departments should work together, coordinating with Indonesian police to crack down on illegal international marriage activities. The commerce department should regulate marriage agents more strictly,
periodically inspect, investigate related work, and immediately report agents involved in crimes to the police department.

3. Work with Indonesia to crack down on trafficking and rescue victims in time: Strengthen border controls and checks on trafficking routes. Eliminate transnational trafficking crime networks, establish law enforcement coordination offices for communication and effective handling of victim remittance issues. Judicial institutions should provide legal aid services, improve work efficiency, and reduce defense costs for victims.

4. Raising public awareness and education: Through the media and education system raising public awareness of the laws, cultural differences, and risks in cross-country marriage. Strengthen cross-cultural exchange and understanding to reduce misunderstandings and problems resulting from information imbalances.

5. Strengthening international cooperation and exchanges: Cooperate with the Indonesian government and relevant international organizations, establish more effective communication and cooperation mechanisms. Sharing data and information, developing joint guidelines and practices for cross-country marriage issues.

6. Provide support and services: Provide necessary legal, cultural, and language support for both parties in a cross-country marriage. Establish dedicated consultation and assistance centers to help people understand the legal and cultural background of cross-border marriage, reducing conflicts caused by incomprehension.

Through these comprehensive measures, the problems in cross-border marriage between China and Indonesia can be effectively resolved, promoting the development of healthy and harmonious cross-cultural marriage relations between the two countries.

CONCLUSION

Based on the description above, although the issue of Indonesian brides in China is a "new" issue, it has attracted the attention of the governments and societies of both countries, and involves illegal acts such as human trafficking and legal marriage fraud, which are non-traditional security focus areas. In order to avoid affecting bilateral relations between China and Indonesia and the progress of the "One Belt One Road" initiative and avoid the occurrence of more serious diplomatic incidents, the two countries should strengthen cooperation, establish a cooperation mechanism, immediately establish a bilateral marriage information mechanism and consultation system, jointly expand the field of free marriage, and promote the stability and harmony of cross-border marriage.

At the same time, from the perspective of market demand, it must be recognized that the phenomenon of "difficulty finding a wife (can only buy)", the more shocking cross-country marriage scams are, the more it shows that the crisis of singles of marginalized groups has reached a point that requires immediate resolution. Behind these problems are also the problems of imbalance in population development, population aging, and difficulty caring for parents under the two-child policy. It should strengthen legal education and counseling, while increasing assistance to relevant groups, so that they actually have the opportunity and capital to choose a partner in the marriage market. In addition, the issue of Indonesian brides in China also reflects inequalities between countries, regions, urban-rural, and between classes, very worthy of reflection.
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