



Caroline Grillot, *Volées, envolées, convolées... Vendues, en fuite, ou re-socialisées: les “fiancées” vietnamiennes en Chine* (Abducted, Flown, Married... Sold, escaped or rehabilitated: Vietnamese fiancés in China), Bangkok/Paris, IRASEC/Connaissances & Savoirs, 2010, 407 pp.

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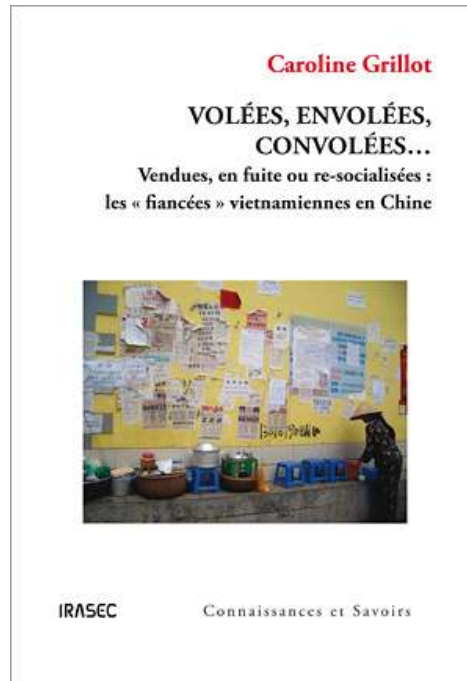
Caroline Grillot, *Volées, envolées, convolées... Vendues, en fuite, ou re-socialisées: les “fiancées” vietnamiennes en Chine* (Abducted, Flown, Married... Sold, escaped or rehabilitated: Vietnamese fiancés in China),

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1 Traditions of exogamy and patrilocality of marriage in Asia have long led women to leave their villages, regions, or even countries in search of a husband. Distances have tended to grow, at first within frontiers and then beyond. Inside China, many works have shown a correspondence between migrations for marriage and spatial hierarchy linked to development: using mobility through marriage, women have sought to move to more affluent coastal regions.¹ Chinese women's migration for marriage has crossed borders since the late 1980s: "overseas marriages" *shewai jiehun* 涉外结婚. Migrating for marriage implies that matrimonial union involves obtaining a visa and crossing national borders. Through marriages arranged or otherwise, large numbers of mainland Chinese brides have gone to Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea alongside women from Vietnam and the Philippines. While from China's viewpoint, these outflows remain relatively low (under 0.5%), immigration for marriage has become a major social phenomenon in most host countries.



2 One of the strengths of Caroline Grillot's book is that it shows China as more than a source country in the migratory system nurtured by brides' mobility across East Asian borders. It has also become a destination for foreign brides, and the totality of these flows, internal and international, must be analysed in their continuity.

3 The phenomenon of cross-border marriages [in China] has to be viewed as a continuum, a form of expansion of those consecrated inside China for about two decades, the fates of the women concerned being more similar than different: the second type often making up for the defection of the first in search of the same dreams elsewhere. (p. 129)

4 In China as a whole, cross-border mobility for marriage remains marginal. However, the phenomenon is highly visible in some localities, which have emerged as zones of departure and arrival. This localisation underlines the importance of migration chains and networks, leading to the following observation: "Why are there so few migrants from so many places and so many from only a few places?"² It also reflects social and demographic upheavals in rural zones. Depopulation, rising numbers of singletons, and measures that favour preservation of family enterprises have affected South Korean, Taiwanese, and Japanese rural zones for decades, and immigration for marriage is one of the solutions sought by localities or individuals. More recently, China has been facing the same problems but in a more accelerated manner. Studies highlight the rapid process of rural exodus and the already evident influence of the skewed male-female ratio on single men, especially in rural areas.³

5 Grillot's study of marriages between Vietnamese women and Chinese men is in the framework of highly local transformations underway in China's peripheral zones and of

Asia's transnational matrimonial market. Her original approach lies in regarding China as an immigration area and is part of studies on novel forms of cross-border exchanges between China and Southeast Asia, with borders having long been shut and mobility restricted. The entire introductory chapter describes this border region, its history and the choice to focus on two Sino-Vietnamese "twin cities" that thrive on cross-border trade: Dongxing and Mong-Cai in Guangxi Province, and Hekou and Lao-Cai in Yunnan. These cities have historically been major transit routes; the Hanoi-Kunming railway built by the French in 1910 passes through Hekou. They have again come into their own as the Dongxing-Mong-Cai Free Trade Zone and Hekou-Lao-Cai Economic Cooperation District. The author spent many months in the area, a crossroads between China and Vietnam, in order to gain intimate knowledge of marginalised women.

- 6 The ground covered in *Volées, envolées, convolées...* expanded and deepened, leading to a thesis that Grillot defended at Macquarie University in May 2012.⁴ The research project germinated when the author went to Phnom Penh on a mission for an NGO, AFESIP Cambodia, and its observatory on illicit traffic in Southeast Asia. Contradictions observed between "institutionalised stereotypes" of cross-border marriages between China and Vietnam and the remarks encountered on the ground spawned the idea of an ethnographic study. Starting from an analytical framework focused on forced marriages and notions of human trafficking that treated women as victims, the author gradually changed her approach, abandoning what she considered stereotypes to take into account a surprising social reality (PhD thesis, p. 5). Thus was born this book project, its publication supported by IRASEC (Institut de l'Asie du Sud-Est contemporaine or Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia at Bangkok), as well as the PhD thesis.
- 7 Apart from deconstructing the discourse on trafficking of women in Southeast Asia, fieldwork also helped the author enrich socioeconomic analyses that often remain at too macro a level to properly gauge the reality of such mixed marriages and the migration of these women. Grillot offers a look at these marriages from the inside, through women's own accounts, juxtaposing transformations underway in the Chinese and Vietnamese societies with illustrated representations of conjugality and matrimonial norms in these couples' daily and private lives. While taking note of structuralist approaches highlighting the demographic crisis and poverty in explaining such mixed marriages (Chapter 3), the author gives pride of place to the issue of marginality, especially in discussing the Chinese husbands, whose profiles are much more varied than might be suspected.
- 8 Chapter 4, devoted to encounter factors, describes these forms of marginality and diversity of profiles. Chinese husbands are childless farmers, excluded from society (the sick, differently abled, divorced, etc.), or migrants from interior areas. Vietnamese women are often victims of trickery, but are also determined to emerge from their marginality (being old, divorced, widows, single-mothers, victims of violence) or are even adventurers or romantics dreaming of a better life in China. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 describe their daily lives: first of all, the marriage, often non-regularised, a life of illegality; and relations with in-laws and the rest of society as well as between the couples themselves. Relying on extensive interviews, the author analyses the mutual representations, deceptions, and adaptations by both men and women. Finally, the last chapter describes cases of such women's return to Vietnam, often under the most difficult circumstances.

- 9 *Volées, envolées, convolées...* is an absorbing tableau of personal dealings and stories set around the Sino-Vietnamese border over more than two decades. Making for easy reading with numerous accounts of daily life, this tableau, with its nuances and critical stance, is part of numerous discussions on the social transformations in China and Vietnam, and more generally on human trafficking and on the feminisation of migration.
- 10 3. Pei Hongwei, Chang Chunping, He Wenhui, and Shen Yanjun, "Depopulation of rural areas under the backdrop of urbanization – a case study of Kangbao County, Northwest of Hebei Province," *Zhongguo shengtai nongye xuebao*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2009, pp. 169-173; Isabelle Attané, Zhang Qunlin, Li Shuzhuo, Yang Xueyan, and Christophe Guilmoto, "Bachelorhood and Sexuality in a Context of Female Shortage: Evidence from a Survey in Rural Anhui, China," *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 215, pp. 703-726; Christophe Z. Guilmoto, "Skewed Sex Ratio at Birth and Future Marriage Squeeze in China and India, 2005-2010," *Demography*, Vol. 49, pp. 77-100.

NOTES

1. Fan Cindy and Huang Youqing, "Waves of Rural Brides: Female Marriage Migration in China," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 88, No. 2, 1998, pp. 227-251. Delia Davin, "Marriage Migrations in China: The Enlargement of Marriage Markets in the Era of Market Reforms," in Rajni Palriwala, Patricia Uberoi, *Marriage, Migration and Gender*, New Delhi, Sage Publications India, 2008.
2. Thomas Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.1.
4. Caroline Grillot, "The fringes of conjugality: On fantasies, tactics and representations of Sino-Vietnamese encounters in borderlands," PhD thesis in social anthropology, Macquarie University, Sydney, cotutelle Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2012, 477 pp.

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