

Out-of-Town Brides: International Marriage and Wife Abuse among Chinese Immigrants

KO-LIN CHIN**

During the mid-nineteenth century, tens of thousands of Chinese males came to the United States to work in the gold mines and on railroads (Barth, 1964). Since family members were not allowed to accompany them, there were very few Chinese women in the U.S. (McLeod, 1948). As a result, most of the sojourners relied on the booming vice industry that emerged in the "Chinese Quarter" as their only sexual outlet (Wilson, 1974; Martin, 1977; U.S. Senate, 1978). Only a few Chinese businessmen could bring their wives to the U.S. (Lee, 1960). Chinese communities in America came to be known as "Bachelor Societies" (Nee and Nee, 1986). In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted and most Chinese people were banned from entering the U.S. (Miller, 1960; Saxton, 1971).

The repeal of the exclusion acts in 1943 and the passage of the War Brides Act in 1946 allowed Chinese males who served in the U.S. armed forces during World War II to apply for immigration visas for family members in China (Sung, 1979) or Chinese bachelors to travel to Hong Kong and Taiwan to find a bride (Sung, 1967). These two measures, along with the liberalization of immigration laws in the mid-1960s, which authorized many women from Hong Kong and Taiwan to immigrate here, caused the Chinese sex ratio in the U.S. to become more balanced (Tsai, 1986). Between 1950 and 1978, citizens from the People's Republic of China were not allowed to immigrate to America because the U.S. had no diplomatic ties with communist China.

In 1978, the U.S. established a diplomatic relationship with China. Since then, people from China resumed their immigration to America (Zhou, 1992). Many of these newcomers were working-class bachelors. After three or four years of hard work in restaurants and garment factories, many saved enough money to return to China to find an "out-of-town bride" (a bride arriving in the U.S. from a foreign country through international marriage). Although there was a substantial increase in the total number of inter-racial marriages between Chinese and other ethnic groups in the 1970s and 1980s (Sung, 1990), many new and old Chinese immigrants still returned to China to marry. As a result, it is reported that the number of "out-of-town brides" in the U.S. increased considerably (*China Times*, November 9, 1990). According to official statistics, about 5,000 women from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan arrived in the U.S. annually as brides in 1988 and 1989 (Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1988; 1989).

* The author wishes to thank Jeffrey Fagan, Tamryn Eiten, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful critiques of earlier versions of this manuscript.

** Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, University Heights, Hill Hall, Newark, New Jersey 07102 U.S.A.

As the number of trans-Pacific marriages among the Chinese people increased, the media reported a surge in domestic violence and other family-related problems among Chinese immigrants (*Mei Tung News*, September 16, 1990; *Sing Tao Jih Pao*, September 27, 1990). Social service providers who work with Chinese families also indicated that many Chinese women, especially those from China, were abused by their spouses (*Sing Tao Jih Pao*, December 4, 1990). For instance, in 1990, the New York Asian Women's Center received more than 2,000 calls from battered Asian women (Howe, 1991). The Chinese Immigrant Association in Queens received more than 500 reports of spouse abuse in 1989 (*Sing Tao Jih Pao*, December 4, 1990). Social workers from the above two agencies found that many Chinese battered women were "out-of-town brides" from China (*Herald Monthly*, 1990). Also, according to the director of Project HELP, a program that deals with Asian victims of domestic violence in the New York Metropolitan area, during the fourth quarter of 1989, none of the program's new cases were related to immigration marriage. However, for the same quarter of 1990, all 13 new clients of the project were "out-of-town brides" from China.

Despite the apparent increase in the number of Chinese female spouses seeking help, Chinese couples are rarely mentioned in the family relations or spouse assault literature. There may be several reasons for this. First, Chinese people are generally reluctant to reveal their problems, especially family-related ones, to outsiders. Some people who are desperately in need of help may contact their family, district associations, or approach community social service agencies, but very few take their problems to non-community agencies, especially if they are official institutions. Most Chinese people are reluctant to approach government agencies because they may have language and cultural barriers, distrust the officials, fear deportation (if they do not have legal status), or fear that applications for immigration visas for relatives may be affected (New York Asian Women's Center, 1990). Others may simply have no idea where to go for help (*Centre Daily News*, March 31, 1986) or may not be eligible for help (*Centre Daily News*, March 21, 1986).¹ As a result, official data on the Chinese family in general, and problems such as domestic violence in particular, are almost non-existent. Second, not only are government agencies unable to solicit reliable data from the Chinese community, researchers are rarely able to collect it themselves. Such data collection efforts are often stymied by cultural misunderstandings and the researchers' inability to speak the many Chinese dialects in the Chinese community (Kinkead, 1992).

This paper attempts to provide a cross-cultural theoretical framework for the understanding of wife abuse among Chinese immigrants in the U.S. It proposes that a distinct explanation of spouse assault for Chinese families may be appropriate because of unique cultural circumstances of Chinese families in the U.S., and the prevalence of "out-of-town brides" who are abused. It examines the legal and social aspects of international marriages, gender inequality and exploitation of women in the male-dominated Chinese society, and legal, social-psychological, and cultural factors that appear to be associated with wife abuse in the American Chinese community. The paper includes information and data collected from newspapers and magazines, interviews with several of "out-of-town brides," examination

¹ For example, new immigrants can not apply for foodstamps or welfare assistance within 3 years of their arrival. If they did, the person who sponsored them for their immigration visas may be investigated by government agencies.

of case files maintained by a social service agency, and personal working experiences with spouses of Chinese male alcoholics, some of whom are "out-of-town brides" being abused by their spouses.

The problem of spouse abuse in Chinese communities poses difficult methodological challenges because there has been no scientific research on spouse assaults in Chinese immigrant families. Accordingly, this paper relies extensively on media accounts. Unfortunately, these inquiries examine in detail marital dynamics that paint a gloomy picture of conditions that seem to inevitably lead to spouse assaults. This is a liability of sampling on the dependent variable, especially when prevalence estimates are unknown. Although some number of Chinese brides entering the country are subjected to their spouses' abuse and violence, there are undoubtedly many brides who are not the victims of conjugal violence and enjoy peaceful and happy lives after coming to the U.S. This paper focuses only on those who are abused by their spouses after they arrived. In order to underscore the nature of wife abuse among Chinese immigrant families in America, abusive treatments of Chinese women in general are also discussed in the paper.

LEGAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF INTERNATIONAL MARRIAGE

Before 1986, persons from other countries who married a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident could apply for an immigration visa to enter the U.S. Upon arrival, the bride or groom was granted a permanent resident status and could become a U.S. citizen within three or five years, depending on the immigration status of the petitioning spouse. If the petitioner was a citizen, the alien spouse had to wait three years; if not, the wait was five years.

As the number of transpacific marriages involving U.S. citizens increased in the late 1970s and early 1980s, investigations by Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) determined that as many as one-third of these marriages were frauds (*Sing Tao Jih Pao*, October 1, 1986). In many instances, marriage was simply a way for the alien spouse to obtain an immigration visa to enter the U.S. Once the immigrants arrived and became permanent residents, the couples filed for divorce. INS reports suggested that some Korean prostitutes and bar girls paid up to \$10,000 to U.S. soldiers stationed in South Korea for their marriages, and once here, promptly divorced their husbands (Houston Police Department, n.d.; Cohen, 1986).

In order to curb marriage frauds, the "Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendments" were enacted in 1986. Under the new laws, an alien who was married to a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident would be offered Conditional Permanent Resident status instead of the Permanent Resident status. This conditional status expired in two years during which time the original petitioner had to file for regular Permanent Status for the alien spouse (U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News, P.L. 99-639). If the couple divorced during this period, the alien spouse could lose his or her status and be deported.

After the enactment of the "Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendments," INS officials realized the amendments had been exploited by American citizens or permanent residents

to control or abuse their spouses. To protect alien spouses from being "prisoners" of their U.S. citizen partners, a 1988 amendment (Immigration Technical Corrections Act) was passed allowing an alien spouse to file a petition to change immigration status from Conditional Permanent Status to regular Permanent Status without the petitioning spouse's signature if the petitioner could prove that: (1) the marriage was real, or (2) the petitioner was physically abused by his or her spouse (U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News, P.L. 100-525). But the high standard of proof required by the amendment to demonstrate family violence may have deterred many female victims of spouse abuse to seek help (Lin, 1991).

These legal complications in immigration marriages were accompanied by economic, psychological, and social problems for spouses entering the U.S. Many brides were disappointed by the marginality of their spouses' occupations and the insurmountable economic hardships. Sung's observations of the disillusionment felt by Chinese brides upon arrival, made more than 20 years ago, may still be applicable to those arriving today:

For the wives of the mutilated families and the brides of the trans-Pacific marriages, the initial reaction upon arrival in the United States is shock. They are shocked to learn that the husband must wash other people's dirty shirts or prepare other people's meals to earn a living. They are shocked at the heavy load of work both husband and wife must do. Separated suddenly from their family and friends and catapulted by jet from an Oriental environment to an Occidental one, they are confronted with the compound problems of accommodation and adjustment to their husbands and to their new life. The rainbow they had conjured up in their minds based on popular misconception of the United States vanishes, and their disillusionment is great (1967: 158).

Upon arrival, immigrant brides often immediately seek employment to supplement their husbands' limited income. Due to their lack of language and professional skills, most must find jobs in restaurants and garment factories in the Chinese community. If they live with their in-laws, they may have to care for the elderly whose norms, values, and lifestyles often differ widely from theirs. To communicate with the larger society, many brides enroll in evening classes to learn English (*Center Daily News*, March 21, 1986). If their husbands are substantially older than they are, they may experience pressure to have children quickly. They may also feel obligated to send money home to their families in China (Martin, 1988; Miscevic and Kwong, 1989).

Beyond these responsibilities, brides may also feel the pressure to please their spouses who see themselves as the brides' "saviors" (*World Journal*, March 13, 1990). Yet, the brides also face contradictions in playing the role of a "good" wife: they should be "competent" but not too "independent," "adjust" to a new environment but not become "Americanized," and be "real nice" to their husbands but not "pretentious."

These brides may also face hostility from people in the Chinese community. Some well-to-do Chinese immigrants tend to attach certain "auxiliary traits" to the "master status" of "out-of-town brides." Some auxiliary traits include being "materialistic," "selfish," "ignorant," "incompetent," "unkempt," and "passionless." A Chinese newspaper claimed

that those women who seek help from domestic violence programs are in fact "victimizers" rather than "victims" because they are simply exploiting the programs to help them to file for divorce and apply for permanent resident status (*Mei Tung News*, September 16, 1990).

Accordingly, many Chinese brides are often socially and economically isolated. They are unfamiliar with American society and are generally ill-treated by the Chinese community. Consequently, when they have problems, they have few channels and personal resources to help them cope with these problems (New York Asian Women's Center, 1990). Some of them may resort to extreme measures, such as committing suicide, when overwhelmed by personal and family problems. For example, an "out-of-town bride" who lived in New York City's Chinatown with her husband and two children committed suicide because she was assaulted by her husband whenever she complained of how little money he gave her for food (*Centre Daily News*, March 31, 1986).

According to social service providers quoted in news reports, women who live in Chinatown have a high rate of depression (*Centre Daily News*, July 9, 1988). Many Chinese immigrant women have to work long hours and are overwhelmed by the burdens of traditional responsibilities such as taking care of the husband's parents, the husband, and the children. They may also be overwhelmed by debilitating living conditions, economic hardship, and longing for absent natal family members. Instead of seeking help from outsiders, some Chinese women who are treated poorly by alcoholic husbands adopt self-defeating measures such as taking a second job or working overtime to compensate for their husband's lost income (Chin et al., 1991).

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHINESE WOMEN: PAST AND PRESENT

Chinese women have been treated unfairly by both the legal system and society at large throughout Chinese history (Chao, 1973). Chinese norms and values put considerable pressure on women by the cultural expectation that a daughter must obey her father, a wife must obey her husband, and a widow must obey her eldest son (Hsu, 1967). The word "husband" in Chinese literally means "supporter," and "wife," "subordinate." "Marriage" means "going home" — a woman, as an "outsider," goes to a man's home and molds herself to serve the man's family (Chen, 1971).

Under many rigid gender norms and values, exploitation of women has been a serious problem in China for many centuries (Bloodworth, 1967; Chao, 1973; Wolf, 1985; Honig and Hershatter, 1988; Gilmartin, 1990). Traditionally, husbands were considered as "heaven" and wives "earth." As a result, it was taken for granted that "if the husband is abusive, the wife was not supposed to leave the husband, because the earth could never discard the heaven" (Chao, 1973: 61-2). An examination of the Chinese legal code regulating divorce clearly shows that women have always been treated more harshly than men (Chao, 1973).

Even in modern China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, women face many forms of victimization: infanticide, slavery, child prostitution, forced marriage, rape, and wife abuse

(Wang, 1974; Watson and Ebrey, 1991; *Sing Tao Jih Pao*, June 1, 1991). Traditionally, boys have always been considered more precious than girls among the Chinese people for both economic and cultural reasons (Bloodworth, 1967). Compounded with the one-child policy in contemporary China to control population growth, this has resulted in the pervasive practice of Chinese couples abandoning newborn girls in hopes of having a son (WuDunn, 1991a). If the baby girls are not discarded, they may be sold as slaves or child prostitutes when they grow older. In Taiwan, the media reported that many teenage girls from rural areas have been sold by their poor parents to work as prostitutes in licensed brothels of Taipei (*Centre Daily News*, October 29, 1986).

Women may also be sold into marriage with peasant men who cannot afford a marriage under normal circumstances. Reportedly, a traditional wedding may cost more than 10,000 Chinese dollars (about 1,800 US dollars), but peasants may pay only 2,000 - 3,000 Chinese dollars for an "illegal" wife (*Sing Tao Jih Pao*, December 17, 1990). Many girls, especially those who arrive in cities from rural areas seeking jobs, are kidnapped and sold to peasants as wives (Ping, 1991). After being sold, their victimization continues by being closely watched and controlled by their "husbands" and coerced to perform back-breaking farm work (WuDunn, 1991b).

Even when women marry through formal, traditional channels, physical and psychological abuse of brides by grooms' families is reported to be common (*Sing Tao Jih Pao*, June 1, 1991). In addition, these wives may also be economically and emotionally exploited by their mothers-in-law (Wolf and Witke, 1975).

Spouse abuse in the American Chinese community may involve verbal, psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. According to social workers who provide help to Chinese women, the first two types of abuse are most common. "Out-of-town brides" may often be ridiculed by their spouses or the spouses' natal family members (New York Asian Women's Center, 1990). Social workers in Chinatown indicated that many abuse victims find it especially difficult to cope with the foul language their spouses use against them in public or in front of other family members.

Psychological abuse is probably the most prevalent form of mistreatment encountered by the brides. Chinese males who are wary of their spouses' infidelity may not allow their wives to work, learn English, talk to strangers, call or write home, or go out alone. These husbands may watch and control their spouses closely, retain their spouses' travel documents, and be reluctant to share a bank account. If their marriage partners show some resistance to their tight control, they may threaten their spouses with divorce or refusal to petition for change of immigration status in the future (*Herald Monthly*, 1990).

Physical assaults by male spouses against "out-of-town brides" or their lovers are not uncommon. For example, an "out-of-town bride" in Philadelphia who was often hit and kicked by her 55 year-old husband travelled more than 100 miles to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), an umbrella organization in New York City's Chinatown, for help (*Centre Daily News*, July 17, 1986). In a few extreme cases, the victims are killed by their spouses (New York Asian Women's Center, 1990). In one case, a lover of a bride was shot dead by a professional killer hired by her husband (*Sing Tao Jih Pao*, November 6, 1990).

Some brides reported that they were sexually assaulted by their spouses. For example, a 37 year-old woman who had been in New York City only 45 days after immigration from China, sought help from a social service agency because her 65 year-old husband demanded to have sex every night. She was so frightened by the ordeal that she left her husband to join a relative on the West Coast. Another victim indicated she was traumatized by her husband's unusual sexual practices.

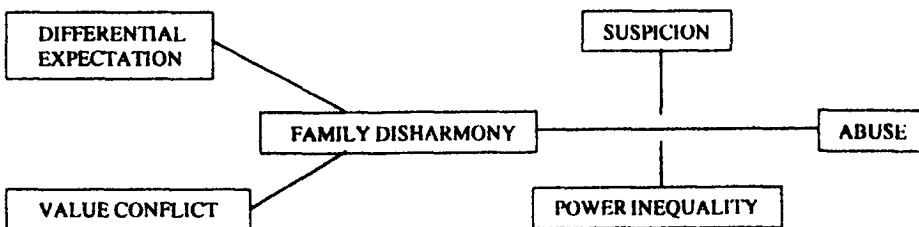
The gender inequalities and exploitation of women built into Chinese culture have translated into socio-psychological and cultural factors in working-class Chinese immigrant behavior. These factors are salient influences in spouse assault by males involved in international marriages with women from China. These factors can be integrated into a theoretical framework to explain spouse abuse in the American Chinese community.

EXPECTATION, VALUE, SUSPICION, AND POWER: AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF SPOUSE ABUSE

Since the revelations of the "battered child syndrome" (Kempe et al., 1962), contemporary explanations of violence toward family members have included resource theory (Goode, 1971), general system theory (Straus, 1973), ecological models (Garbarino, 1977), exchange models (Gelles, 1983), patriarchal explanations (Dobash and Dobash, 1979), sociobiological perspectives (Burgess and Draper, 1989), economic models (Gelles, 1974), and sociocultural explanations (Straus et al., 1980). Some researchers conducted cross-cultural studies to shed light on the commonality and variation of marital violence across cultures (Gelles and Cornell, 1983; Levinson, 1989). However, due to the lack of reliable data on family violence in Chinese societies, researchers have had to rely on anecdotal reports in the media, personal experiences, and court cases to glimpse at this extremely political and emotional issue within the patriarchal Chinese society (Parish and Whyte, 1978; Honig and Hershatter, 1988; Gilmartin, 1990).

Few theories on family violence have addressed dominance and aggression within Chinese immigrant families. This paper suggests that theories of marital violence among Chinese couples should integrate aspects of Chinese culture with constructs that have been validated in research on Western families. The integrated theoretical framework set forth below (Figure 1) includes independent and intervening variables assumed to contribute to (or restrain) conjugal violence among Chinese immigrants. The independent variables are "differential expectation" and "value conflict." Intervening variables include "family disharmony," the husband's "suspicion" of the wife's social and sexual infidelity, and the "unequal distribution of power" in a marriage.

Figure 1 : An Integrated Model of Marital Violence among Chinese Immigrant Families



“Differential expectation” refers to the degree of differences in the couple’s expectation of each other and of married life. Among Chinese immigrant families, the husband and wife may have different expectations about married life (*World Journal*, September, 27, 1990; *Sing Tao Jih Pao*, January 11, 1992). Chinese males, who often endure adversity to enter the U.S., obtain a permanent resident status, gain citizenship, or save money to get married, may view marriage as the most important investment they have ever made. Saving for marriage may exhaust the financial resources they accumulated painstakingly over many years. Some may even mortgage their future income with their employers for the occasion and consequently, face heavy financial pressures after the marriage. From their perspective, bringing spouses to America signifies they have somehow “saved” their spouses from the poor living conditions of China and its oppressive government. As a result, they strongly feel that their spouses should be grateful and appreciative of their efforts and reward them through any means.

However, in comparison with grooms, brides may have completely different expectations of married life. For many brides, coming to the U.S. symbolizes the beginning of a new, much more luxurious lifestyle. After all, they are coming to the “Mountain of Gold” (Sung, 1967). They may expect to live in a spacious house with a yard, own a car, travel around the country freely, make a lot of money to send home to relatives, and eventually sponsor family members for immigration visas. But, they may view marriage as somewhat of a sacrifice because, in exchange for these things, they may be marrying someone for whom they may have little affection, and who may be much older and less attractive physically. Along with the normal process of living with someone new, these expectations and realities may have a dramatic effect on marriages. In sum, both the bride and the groom may view themselves as paying a huge price for marriage and expect to be materially or emotionally rewarded by the other party after marriage.

Some grooms, realizing that people in China have no means to verify their occupational and economic success in the U.S., tend to magnify their occupations or exaggerate their wealth to impress potential brides. As a result, some brides mistakenly believe that their husbands are rich and successful. When they arrive in the U.S., they discover, to their dismay, that their husbands’ success had been fabricated. This may create animosity for brides and they may complain constantly after marriage. One battered wife, for instance, indicated that her husband misled her into believing she could expect a much better life in the U.S. and was shocked to find out later that the couple’s apartment was very small and poorly furnished:

“Initially, I wasn’t looking for a ‘Mountain of Gold’ guy. All I wanted was to come to the U.S. However, when he was courting me, he said he was a restaurant owner, and he owned a house and a car. That made me all the more excited about the marriage. I am not afraid of living a poor life, that’s the story of my life in China anyhow. But I am very afraid of people who are deceitful, especially one who you have to share your life with. That’s why whenever I am angry now, I always ridicule him for his dishonesty before the marriage. When I mention these things, he punch me in the face (Quoted and translated, *Herald Monthly*, 1990).”

The second independent variable in the theoretical model for understanding spouse abuse in the Chinese community is "value conflict." It denotes the clash between traditional patriarchal values of the groom and modern gender-equality values of the bride. Due to the social and cultural isolation of the Chinese community from the larger American society and the strong influence of traditional norms and values in the overseas Chinese community, some Chinese immigrants, especially men, closely adhere to Chinese traditions (Lee, 1960). In fact, they adhere to these traditions more than people in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, who are influenced by Western cultures and have become familiar with the ideas of gender-equality, feminism, and changing conceptions of the nuclear family (Kyi, 1988). As a result, some couples who came to know each other through immigration marriage can be shocked to find out that their spouse's values differ greatly from their own. Many Chinese males consciously choose to marry women from their homeland because they want wives who are family-oriented, self-sacrificing, and subordinate. When these men find that their wives are not what they expected, they are disappointed (Sung, 1967). On the other hand, brides may not expect their spouses, who have been in the U.S. for so many years, to adhere so closely to Chinese traditional values and norms that place women at an economic and social disadvantage. Coupled with the differential expectations between the bride and groom, this may create disharmony in the family, the third variable in this model.

Within a disharmonious family, the relationship between the couple may become strained, or according to a Chinese saying, the couple may "share the same bed, but have different dreams." The couple may keep their feelings and disappointments to themselves or share them with only their natal family members. For brides, the need to find a job, to locate adequate housing, to furnish the house, to adjust to a new environment, to learn English, and to make new friends, may become more pressing than the need to figure out what is wrong with the marriage. Because of their long and different working hours, the couple may see each other only briefly in the evenings when they have dinner. Although they may argue often, the disputes may not escalate to abusive confrontations. When the couple has children, attention may quickly shift to the nurturing of the next generation, thereby undermining the significance of the problems between the adults.

Disharmony between the couple, whether a result of differential expectations or value conflicts, may not necessarily result in abuse and violence. Among Chinese immigrant families, the husband's suspicion of the wife's disloyalty, the fourth variable in the model, may be a critical intervening factor. As mentioned earlier, a marriage is often a major financial investment for a husband. Since many females in China and other Asian countries are willing to marry almost anyone from America, males often can choose from among the prettiest and youngest brides. Not only may grooms be disadvantaged in terms of age and appearance, they also may be less educated than the brides. For example, a waiter who married a college-educated woman expressed his concerns for his wife's loyalty even before his spouse arrived in the U.S.

"I feel like I am dreaming. Here I am, a guy who did not even complete primary school, and nothing but a waiter. Yet, I married to a girl who is a college student. Don't you think I'm superb. Besides, she is very beautiful. However, I am in a double bind because although I want her to join me as soon as possible, I am also afraid of her arrival. With her, I do not have a sense of security. I am worried

that once she adjust to this country she may leave me because her qualifications are much better than me. I don't know whether she really likes me or not because she agreed to marry me when I met her for the second time. I am sure if I am not a U.S. citizen, she would not have married me (Quoted and translated, *Herald Monthly*, 1990)."

Under these circumstances, husbands often become concerned about their wives' loyalty and try to restrict their wives' freedom as a result. If the wives resist these restraints, the husbands may take more extreme measures to control their wives' daily lives. Violence as a coercive tactic may result from this conflict. A woman who sought help from a community service agency told a social worker how her husband could be easily provoked:

"My husband never believed that I was going to be loyal to him. For example, he refuses to open a joint account with me, he keeps all my travel documents, and he watches me closely. Once I had to work late and I asked a male colleague in the garment factory to drive me home. My husband saw that and he rushed out to the street and start yelling and cursing at me and my colleague. It was really embarrassing (Quoted and translated from a case file maintained by a domestic violence program in Chinatown)"

Besides the mismatch between the couple in terms of age and attractiveness, suspicion of infidelity may also be the result of the groom's low socio-economic status, financial pressure, unemployment and underemployment — which are markers of ecological instability and heightened risk for marital violence (Straus et al., 1980). A substantial number of Chinese immigrants, especially those who were professionals in their country of origin, have experienced "downward mobility" after their arrival here because they could not continue their professional careers due to language problems or legal restrictions. According to a survey by a Chinatown newspaper, about 67 percent of the Chinese professional immigrants were forced to work in bluecollar jobs in America (*Sing Tao Jih Pao*, August 18, 1990). Chin et al. (1991) found that among Chinese alcoholics who were restaurant workers, none worked in restaurants in their country of origin. They often had more prestigious occupations then.

Besides underemployment, Chinese male immigrants are also affected by job insecurity. Mobility among workers in the food or garment industries is usually high, either because of burn-out or the lack of promotion and benefits that cause people to leave. Under these circumstances, it is common for many Chinese restaurant workers to be out of work for a few months each year, which adds strain to an already fragile family financial situation.

"Inequality in marital power," the fifth variable, is another intervening variable that may interact with these factors. According to Gelles and Straus (1988), husbands beat their wives because they can — there are few societal restraints and numerous symbols and signals that such behavior is tolerated, if not expected. Power inequalities between Chinese couples include legal, financial, and social inequalities. Legally, "out-of-town brides" depend on their spouses for their stay in the U.S. If the marriage is dissolved, brides may lose their legal status. The brides also need their spouses' sponsorship when they petition for a change from temporary to permanent resident status. Husbands may use this legal

leverage to coerce their spouses into submission and subjugation. For example, an "out-of-town bride" who married a heavy gambler said the following about her husband's tactic of intimidation:

"The first few months after my arrival here, we had a good time together and he brought money home on time. Last year we had a baby boy and all of a sudden he started to change. He started to come home late, and beat the baby whenever the baby cried. When I tried to stop it; he attacked me instead. Later, I found out he was going to Atlantic City to gamble almost every evening. Whenever he lost, he came home and blamed me and my son for his lack of luck at the table. Very often, he bragged that he may not help me to change my immigration status, so that me and the baby, two 'unlucky people,' according to him, would be deported (Quoted and translated, *Herald Monthly*, 1990)."

Most women from China come to America not only to improve their own living conditions, but also to provide a channel for family members to immigrate to the U.S. (Zhou, 1992). These brides, therefore, are sometimes called the "engine" of their natal families, meaning that they are the ones who can pull their families out of China. If they fail to become permanent residents, and eventually citizens, they will be unable to sponsor their family members (*Herald Monthly*, 1990). This places additional pressure on brides to obey their husbands and conform to their standards, and in turn can breed guilt and shame in brides who fail to please their husbands. The "Mountain of Gold" promise to their families becomes a mountain of guilt and family burden.

A second source of inequality is financial. Most brides need financial support from their spouses. Unlike their counterparts from more affluent Hong Kong and Taiwan, women from China usually arrive here with very little money (*Centre Daily News*, March 21, 1986). Because most of them are unskilled, do not speak English, and are unfamiliar with the environment, most cannot support themselves. Some women earn meager incomes in garment factories in the Chinese community. Some men do not allow their wives to work, for fear that their spouses may become financially independent or involved in extra-marital affairs with colleagues. Without their own income, brides must seek direction and permission from their husbands on spending. Family activities and lifestyles are dictated by the groom's control of family finances.

Socially, the bride is also at a disadvantage because she rarely has members of her own family nearby for "protection." In China, although the newly-wed couple almost always lives with or near the groom's parents (patrilocality), brides are also able to maintain close relationships with their natal families due to the proximity of villages where relatives live. As a result, mistreatment of the bride can be made known to the bride's family (Parish and White, 1978). However, in the U.S., most "out-of-town brides" have no friends or relatives nearby. They are completely surrounded by family members, friends, or colleagues of the groom. In some cases, the bride not only is victimized by the groom, but also his brothers, sisters, and parents (New York Asian Women's Center, 1990).

In sum, Chinese husbands hold legal, financial, and social power over their "out-of-town brides," thus making these brides somewhat defenseless to abuse, with little access to

legal remedies or informal social controls. As one battered wife said, quoting her husband: "You have no friends or relatives here in the U.S. If I beat you up, nobody will come to help you." These predicaments of battered Asian wives are summarized by the New York Asian Women's Center:

.... battered Asian women have few options open to them. They cannot use battered women's shelters due to language and cultural barriers. They cannot leave their apartments since they have no place else to go, would be unable to find decent affordable housing, and would be completely isolated outside the community. They cannot leave their jobs since they have few employment opportunities open to them. These factors coalesce for Asian women in a particular cruel way, leaving them with limited ways of leaving the violence in their lives and condemning them to escalating violence and danger (New York Asian Women's Center, 1990: 9).

Differential expectations, value conflicts, mistrust, and power inequality all play a role in causing spouse abuse. These factors or conditions conducive to wife abuse among Chinese immigrant families are similar to those that have been discussed by researchers of marital violence in the U.S. For example, Dobash and Dobash (1979) attribute the cause of family violence to "patriarchy," which is also the underlying factor for value conflicts among American Chinese couples. Straus's concept of "ecological instability" (Straus et al., 1980) and Rodman's (1972) idea of "status inconsistency" are relevant to the explanation of Chinese grooms' suspicion of their brides' infidelity. Gelles and Straus's model (1988) discusses how factors such as community attitudes, family isolation, and power inequalities affect marital violence in American families. All these concepts can also be used to explain the Chinese community's attitudes toward conjugal violence, the isolation of Chinese families from American society, and the legal, social, and financial power inequalities for Chinese brides. Gelles's (1983) exchange theory may also help to describe the asymmetry between rewards and costs for abusive Chinese grooms.

Wife abuse in the American Chinese community may be viewed as the result of the "transplantation" of Chinese culture into the American ethnic enclaves. Cultural constructs (patriarchal values and norms) are compounded with structural constructs (immigration, social isolation) through the political economy of Chinatown, creating a family atmosphere in which Chinese brides become vulnerable to abusive tactics of their spouses. This conclusion suggests that these socio-cultural processes are not specific to Chinese culture, and can be conceptualized along a continuum of cultural factors that attribute to spouse assault. Perhaps in the Chinese community these processes are particularly salient and represent an extreme on this continuum.

CONCLUSION

Since the crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in China in June, 1989, many Chinese are struggling to find a way to leave the country (Kamen, 1991). Many people from the southern part of China, especially the Fujian Province, are illegally smuggled into the U.S. for a fee ranging from \$20,000 to \$30,000 (Chan et al., 1990). For those who have no relatives abroad, no college degree, and no savings to pay smugglers, marriage is one of the

major means of procuring an immigration visa. Given a situation where both the demand and supply are strong, it is anticipated that the practice of immigration marriage among the Chinese will continue to grow (*Sing Tao Jih Pao*, July 16, 1990; *World Journal*, January 2, 1992).

The increase in the number of "out-of-town brides" in the Chinese community has resulted in the manifestation of many social and health-related problems. Among them, marital violence among Chinese immigrants has become an alarming social phenomenon. Besides, elderly Chinese are reportedly being poorly treated by their "acculturated" and "practical" offspring (*World Journal*, May 4, 1990); children are being ignored by their parents who have to work long hours (Sung, 1979); and women are being abused by their alcoholic spouses (Chin et al., 1991).

Violence against Chinese women in general, and "out-of-town brides" in particular, has never been systematically studied. As a result, many questions are unanswered. For example, how prevalent is wife abuse among Chinese immigrant families? Among Chinese immigrant women, are the "out-of-town brides" more likely to be abused by their spouses, and if so, why? What are the social processes of abuse? What are the patterns of abusive behavior? What are the individual, legal, social, cultural, and situational risk factors associated with conjugal violence in Chinese families? What has been the impact of the "Marriage Fraud Amendments" on wife abuse among Chinese immigrant families? What coping mechanisms exist among battered Chinese women? What needs to be done to help these battered wives?

Spouse abuse among Chinese working-class immigrant families is hardly unique. Not only do cultural norms and values facilitate coercive interactions between husbands and wives, but ecological instability due to immigration and adjustment also create an enormous amount of financial and emotional stress for the newly-wed couple. Lower-class immigrant families are normally ill-equipped to cope with stress because they possess few economic and social resources both at the family and community level. Moreover, not only are they separated from their extended families, but they also are isolated from mainstream society.

As a result, problems within the family have to be solved by members of the family themselves, with very little help from the extended family, community, or the society. The lack of "social buffers" or "safeguards" due to social isolation among the immigrants may deprive family members of outlets to vent their stress and frustrations. Other problems such as underemployment or unemployment, lack of job security and prestige, the need to work long hours in restaurants and factories, fear of crime, and poor living conditions may also overshadow and overwhelm immigrant families.

Nevertheless, hardship may generate courage and strength, create a sense of collectivity among family members, and energize them to strive for new goals as a unit, no matter how insignificant these achievements may appear. Many new immigrant groups in the U.S. have demonstrated this. Unfortunately, the innerstrength of the immigrant families can be easily diluted by suspicion and inequality that characterize transpacific marriages. Basic elements of marriage such as love, trust, and fidelity may be lacking in some of the international

marriages, and the task to generate these feelings after the marriage in a hostile and difficult environment may be almost impossible. Under these circumstances, abusive interactions between husband and wife may develop.

REFERENCES

- Barth, Gunther
1964 *Bitter Strength: A History of Chinese in the United States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bloodworth, Dennis
1967 *The Chinese Looking Glass*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Burgess, Robert and Patricia Draper
1989 "The Explanation of Family Violence: The Role of Biological, Behavioral, and Cultural Selection," Pp 59-116 in Lloyd Ohlin and Michael Tonry (eds.), *Family Violence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Centre Daily News* (in Chinese)
1986 "Serious Adjustment Problems Among New Immigrants." March 21: 19.
1986 "Women in Chinatown are most Vulnerable to Depression, Social Workers Revealed." March 31: 20.
1986 "A Fujianese Out-of-town Bride from Philadelphia in New York for Help" July 17: 24
1986 "Young Girls Forced to Work as Prostitutes" October 29: 8.
1988 "Many Problems for New Immigrants, Besides Survival." July 9. 24.
- Chan, Ying, J. Dao and K. McCoy
1990 "Journey of Despair: Out of China, into Desperate Debt." *New York Daily News* September 23: 4.
- Chao, Fung-cher (in Chinese)
1973 *Women and Law in Chinese Society*. Taipei: Shi Hor Publishing Co.
- Chen, Ku-yuan (in Chinese)
1971 *History of Marriage in China*. Taipei: Commercial Press.
- Chin, Ko-lin, May Lai, and Martin Rouse
1991 "Social Adjustment and Alcoholism Among Chinese in New York City" *The International Journal of the Addictions* 25 (5A & 6A): 711-732
- China Times* (in Chinese)
1990 "Out-of-town Brides Increasing Every Year." November 9: 1.
- Cohen, Sharon
1986 "Fighting a Shadowy Foreign Trade in Sex." *The Record* September 26: A1.
- Dobash, R.E. and R.P. Dobash
1979 *Violence Against Wives*. New York: Free Press.
- Garbarino, J.
1977 "The Human Ecology of Child Maltreatment." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 39 (November): 721-35.
- Gelles, Richard and Claire Cornell
1983 *International Perspectives on Family Violence*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath.
- Gelles, Richard
1983 "An Exchange/Social Control Theory," Pp. 151-165 in David Finkelhor, Richard Gelles, Gerald Hotaling, and Murray Straus (eds.), *The Dark Side of Families*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
1974 *The Violent Home: A Study of Physical Aggression between Husbands and Wives*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

- Gelles, Richard and Murray Straus
1988 *Intimate Violence*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Gilmartin, Christina
1990 "Violence Against Women in Contemporary China," Pp. 203-226 in Jonathan Lipman and Stevan Harrell (eds.), *Violence in China: Essays in Culture and Counterculture*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Goode, W.
1971 "Force and Violence in the Family." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 33 (August): 445-58.
- Herald Monthly* (in Chinese)
1990 "INS enacted an Amendment to Curb Wife Abuse Under the Marriage Fraud Amendments." Vol.3, Number 3, March: 1, 11-12.
- Honig, Emily and Gail Hershatter
1988 *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980's*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press
- Houston Police Department
n.d. Korean Prostitution Ring. Internal Memorandum.
- Howe, Marvin
1991 "Battered Alien Spouses Find a Way to Escape an Immigration Trap." *New York Times* August 25: 40.
- Hsu, Francis L.K.
1967 *Under the Ancestor's Shadow: Kinship, Personality & Social Mobility in China*. Taipei: Rainbow-Bridge Book Co.
- Immigration and Naturalization Service
1988 *Statistical Yearbook*. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.
1989 *Statistical Yearbook*. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.
- Kamen, Al
1991 "A Dark Road from China to Chinatown." *Washington Post* June 17: A1.
- Kempe, C., Federic Silverman, Brandt Steele, William Droegemuller, and Henry Silver
1962 "The Battered Child Syndrome." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 181: 17-24.
- Kinhead, Gwen
1992 *Chinatown: A Portrait of a Closed Society*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Kyi, Wang-yu (ed.) (in Chinese)
1988 *Feminist Movement in Taiwan*. Taipei: Ku Fung Publication.
- Lee, Rose Hum
1960 *Chinese in the United States of America*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Levinson, David
1989 *Family Violence in Cross-cultural Perspective*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lin, Wendy
1991 "Is INS Hindering Abused Wives?" *New York Newsday* July 8: 25.
- McLeod, Alexander
1948 *Pigtails and Gold Dust: Pigtails Gold Diggers in the Sierra Nevada*. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd.
- Martin, Douglas
1988 "New York's Chinese: Living in 2 Worlds." *New York Times* February, 20: L29.

Martin, Mildred Crowl

1977 *Chinatown Angry Angel: The Story of Donaldina Cameron*. Palo Alto, CA: Pacific Books Publishers.

Mei Tung News (in Chinese)

1990 "Battered Wife Wants a Divorce." September 16, 1990: 2.

Miller, Stuart Creighton

1960 *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1881*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Miscevic, Dusanka and Peter Kwong

1989 "The New Chinese Exodus." *Village Voice* October 31, 1989: 27.

Nee, Victor G. and Brett de Bary Nee

1986 *Longtime Callifornia: A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

New York Asian Women's Center

1990 "Problems Faced by Battered Women" Testimony for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Roundtable Conference on Asian Civil Rights Issues for the 1990's.

Parish, William and Martin Whyte

1978 *Village and Family in Contemporary China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ping, yen (in Chinese)

1991 "Selling Women in China." *Wide Angle* May 26, No. 224: 88-89

Rodman, H.

1972 "Marital Power and the Theory of Resources in Cultural Context." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 3: 50-59.

Saxton, Alexander

1971 *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sing Tao Jih Pao (in Chinese)

1986 "Congress Passed a Bill to Deter Marriage Fraud." October 1: 24

1990 "Australian Government to Adopt Marriage Laws Similar to American." July 16: 22.

1990 "Almost 70 Percent Chinese Professionals Experienced Downward Mobility." August 18: 24.

1990 "Why Asian Men Batter their Spouses." September 27: 27.

1990 "A Man was Accused of Hiring a Professional Killer." November 6: 24.

1990 "Susie Wu Speaks about Violence among Chinese Families in the Queens Borough's Manager Office." December 4: 21.

1990 "Wedding Expenses in China Rise Dramatically." December 17: 52.

1991 "I am a 'Out-of-town Bride,' I was Abused." June 1: 50

1992 "Tragedy among Out-of-town Brides" January 11: 26.

Straus, Murray, Richard Gelles, and Suzanne Stemmetz

1980 *Behind Closed Doors*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Straus, Murray

1973 "A General Systems Theory Approach to a Theory of Violence between Family Members." *Social Science Information* 12 (June): 105-25.

Sung, Betty Lee

1967 *Mountain of Gold: The Story of Chinese in America*. New York: MacMillan.

1979 *Transplanted Chinese Children*. Report to Administration of Children, Youth & Family, U.S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare.

1990 *Chinese American Intermarriage*. New York: Center for Migration Studies.

Tsai, Shih-shan Henry

1986 *The Chinese Experience in America*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News

1987 99th Congress Second Session 1986, Public Law 99-639. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co.

1989 100th Congress Second Session 1988, Public Law 100-525. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co.

U.S. Senate

1978 *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1877. Reprinted by Arno Press, New York.

Wang, Su-nu (in Chinese)

1974 *Prostitution in China*. Taipei: Wang Nien Ching Bookstore.

Watson, Rubie S. and Patricia Buckley Ebrey (eds.)

1991 *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wilson, Carol Green

1974 *Chinatown Quest*. San Francisco, CA: California Historical Society

Wolf, Margery and Roxane Witke (eds.)

1975 *Women in Chinese Society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Wolf, Margery

1985 *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

World Journal (in Chinese)

1990 "Domestic Violence among Chinese Families Increasing." March 13: 24

1990 "Physical and Psychological Problems of Chinese Elderly are Discussed in a Conference." May 4: 28

1990 "Couples Who have Different Expectations are Hard Pressed to Maintain a Marriage." September 27: 34.

1992 "Women in Taiwan Flock to Beijing to Find Marriage Partners." January 2: 3

WuDunn, Sheryln

1991a "China's Cashway Babies: Cruel Practices Lives on." *New York Times* February 26: A4

1991b "Feudal China's Evil Revived: Wives for Sale." *New York Times* August 4: 12

Zhou, Ming

1992 *Chinatown: The Socioeconomic Potential of an Urban Enclave*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Copyright of Journal of Comparative Family Studies is the property of Journal of Comparative Family Studies and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.