

When Mulan meets Romeo: Cultural impact upon the dating scripts, perceptions and behaviors of college students from the United States and Taiwan in their cross-cultural romantic relationships

Chin-Chung (Joy) Chao¹, Dexin Tian², Louisa Ha³

(1. School of Communication, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha NE 68182, USA;

2. Louisiana State University at Alexandria, Alexandria LA 71302, USA;

3. Department of Telecommunications, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green OH 43403, USA)

Abstract: This study examines the cultural impact upon the dating scripts, perceptions, and behaviors of college students from the United States and Taiwan in their cross-cultural romantic relationships. Ten same-culture and ten cross-culture couples participated in the retrospective account interviews. Reconfirming the prevalent quantitative research findings that the American participants tend to begin dating at a younger age and change dating partners more frequently, this qualitative study finds that most of the American and Taiwanese participants perceived their dating and cross-cultural romantic relationships seriously by demonstrating a strong sense of responsibility and consistent support in the face of language difficulties, cultural confusions, and social obstacles.

Key words: cultural impact; dating scripts; perceptions; behaviors; cross-cultural romantic relationships

1. Introduction

The old dictum “birds of a feather flock together” reflects the traditional belief held by many people in both the East and West that happy, rewarding relationships are most attainable among people of similar character and from the same family or even cultural backgrounds. In general, intimate relationships are formed with others from similar economic stratum, ethnic backgrounds, and equivalent worldviews (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004; Byrne, 1969; Kerckhofs, 1974; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001; Regan & Joshi, 2003). Such a “birds-of-a-feather” behavior pattern or homophily between relationship partners is pervasive in the literature describing romantic relationship formation.

However, social and cultural circumstances change, and the truth in the old saying might not hold true for long. Industrialization, large scale global immigration, and urbanization have brought people of different racial and cultural backgrounds together in countries such as the United States in an unprecedented manner. One specific result has been the proliferation of cross-cultural romantic relationships and marriages. Thanks to the Loving v. Virginia ruling, the Supreme Court of the United States declared interracial marriages legal all over the States in

Chin-Chung (Joy) Chao, Ph.D., assistant professor, School of Communication, University of Nebraska at Omaha; research fields: organizational communication, leadership, interpersonal communication, intercultural communication.

Dexin Tian, Ph.D., Louisiana State University at Alexandria; research fields: intercultural communication and intellectual property rights from the cultural perspective.

Louisa Ha, Ph.D., professor, Department of Telecommunications, Bowling Green State University; research fields: media convergence and media management, media business models, new media technologies, webcasting, media diversity, international advertising, internet marketing, audience research.

1967 (Encyclopedia, 1992). According to the 2005 U.S. Census Bureau report, the number of interracial married couples in the United States has soared more than 667% since 1970 (Solis, 2007, p. 1). By factoring in all racial combinations, Stanford University sociologist, Michael Rosenfeld, also calculated that more than 7% of America's 59 million married couples in 2005 were interracial, compared to less than two percent in 1970 (Russel, 2007, p. 1). In other words, it is becoming increasingly more common now for birds of different feathers to flock together.

This increase of interracial and cross-cultural relationships has captured much scholarly attention. Some scholars (Benokraitis, 1999; Buss, et al., 1989; Murstein, Merighi & Malloy, 1989; Sterling, 1992; TANG & ZUO, 2000) were eager to unearth the dynamics behind such relationship formation. For example, by applying the exchange theory, Murstein, Merighi & Malloy (1989) identified physical attractiveness as one of the crucial factors for the growth of interracial relationships. Sterling (1992) found that cross-cultural dating was used as a way to gain enjoyment, socialization, and social status. Other researchers (Brown, McNatt & Cooper, 2003; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Sprecher & Felmlee, 2000; Sprecher & Regan, 2002) studied the romantic relationships and dating patterns across various ethnic groups. Focusing on interracial and cross-cultural romantic or marital relationships, most of these studies have revealed a tendency to trace the social ramifications of such bonding for members of both the majority and minority ethnic groups in American society from the social psychological perspective of interpersonal attraction and interethnic relations. Still others (Remennick, 2005; Roche & Rambsey, 1993; TANG & ZUO, 2000; Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003; Weiss, 1970) studied the romantic relationships by comparing the cross-cultural dating attitudes and behaviors. For example, TANG and ZUO (2000) did a survey study comparing the dating attitudes and behaviors of American and Chinese college students. They found that the former generally entertain a liberal attitude towards dating, tend to date at a younger age and more frequently, and are more likely to develop sexual relationship. The latter, however, were more passive towards dating, tend to start dating at a later age, and are less likely to have sex with their dates.

As a follow-up study by using the qualitative research methods of retrospective account interview and theme analysis, the present project is to look into the cultural impact upon the dating scripts, perceptions, and behaviors in the cross-cultural romantic relationship building between college students from the United States and Taiwan. In this study, culture means "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 1984, p. 260). Dating scripts refer to a set of sequential step-by-step instructions used to predict actions of others and serves as behavior models that raise certain expectations in a relational context. Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting people, objects, events, situations, and activities so as to produce a meaningful experience of the world. Romantic relationship can be defined as the close heterosexual companionship between couples from dating to marriage, and cross-cultural romantic relationships. In this study it refers to the intimate relationships between dating or married American and Taiwanese couples whose value systems are permeated with different sets of cultural norms and presumptions.

2. Significance of the study

The significance of the present study lies in two major aspects. On the one hand, as the United States and Taiwan differ in normative cultural values and formative historical events, it was expected that significant cross-cultural differences in romantic behaviors may be found between the young generations of the two places. By highlighting the cultural disparities between the Chinese and American college students' perceptions of dating

and subsequent expectations of specific, appropriate dating behaviors, this study attempts to locate where cross-cultural dating can possibly go wrong, thus offering help to those who are frustrated in maintaining cross-cultural romantic relationships by better understanding the impact of cultural differences on the development of their romantic relationships.

On the other hand, college students are “more diverse than in the past, and are more like the general population than a group of social elites” (Dating: Competitiveness, sexuality, delights and discontents, 2008, p. 1). Relevant studies can be found in the research by quite a number of scholars (Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Knobloch & Solomon, 2002; Laner & Ventrone, 1998; LaPlante, McCormic & Brannigan, 1980; Mongeau & Carey, 1996; Rose & Frieze, 1989). Each year, tens upon thousands of foreign students come to the USA for further study. For instance, American universities enrolled 582,984 international students in the 2006-2007 academic year, according to the *Open Doors* report published annually by the Institute of International Education (2007, p. 1). These overseas students have an increased chance of becoming involved in cross-cultural romantic relationships. The present study has chosen the United States and Taiwan to respectively represent the West and the East partially for convenience sampling and partially for presenting an “insider’s” experience and interpretation. Through this study, we intend to push the existent study in this regard a step further with different or new findings.

3. Literature review

Two approaches are commonly used to study romantic relationships. One is the cognitive construct approach and the other is constitutive role that culture plays in romantic relationship formation. In addition, motivations are also a significant factor for engaging in cross-cultural romantic relationships. Thus, the following literature review will cover these three aspects.

3.1 Script theory as the cognitive construct approach

Cognitive constructs serve to regulate and aid individuals’ behaviors in initiating a romantic relationship. Dating scripts are a common cognitive construct that are used in the study of romantic relationships. Honeycutt and Catrill (2000, p. 18) explained that “a script comprises a set of sequential step-by-step instructions for accomplishing a specific task,” which refers to “the sequencing and categorization of behaviors across time to accomplish a goal”. Metaphorically speaking, a script acts as a type of “automatic pilot” and provides guidelines for how to act when one encounters new situations. Not only does a script inform an individual what appropriate actions are expected in specific contexts, but it also determines one’s expectations of that particular situation. In interpersonal relationship formation research, “dating scripts” or “sexual scripts” have been used to refer to a set of behavioral rules and orders that individuals follow when they are involved in dating situations. There are two advantages of adopting scripts in a dating situation. First, it allows individuals to navigate through unfamiliar situations with relative ease. Second, it increases people’s sense of security in unfamiliar social situations, such as a first date, by providing appropriate initial patterned behaviors available for recall.

Indeed, dating scripts provide an entry point from which the study can dissect the complex and highly ambiguous process of romantic relationship initiation. A relational script is part of what Duck, West, and Acitelli (1997) called a memory component. According to Duck, et al., relationships should be regarded as changing mental and behavioral expectations that one learns through memorizing what everybody else does in that context. An individual retrieves information stored in his or her memory when he or she is placed in that context. The memory is processed later and categorized into different cognitive schemes that also create expectations for one’s

relationship and provide scripts, so an individual knows how to react in a particular context.

As a cognitive construct, dating scripts, like other types of interaction scripts, are acquired through one's social experience and interaction. An individual constructs his or her scripts either from previous personal experience or by observing others' behaviors in similar situations. Hence, it is quite natural to state that scripts "occur in context and reflect the customs and values of both society and subculture in which they occur" (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2000, p. 24). This study presupposes that people's dating scripts are influenced by their cultures or subcultures because the high consistency among scripts, local culture, and society has been observed by previous research on dating behaviors. The initiative of men in the data process is shown in various script studies. In their study of typical scripts for a first date, Pryor and Merluzzi (1985) identified the following sequences of dating behaviors: The man goes to the woman's residence, the woman greets him, the man meets her family or roommates, and they engage in small talk and decide where to go. If they decide to go to a movie, the typical script includes waiting in line, buying refreshments, and getting something to eat or drink after the movie. Then the man takes the woman home and after the exchange of their pleasant feelings about the date, they kiss good night, thank each other, and then the man leaves for his place.

Another important component of dating scripts is the sexual expectation held by both parties in the dating relationships. Again, gender stereotypes are represented differently in male and female versions of sexual scripts. A sexual script refers to the cultural norms for sexual relations (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). It may include stereotypes such as men as initiators of sexual relations and women as sexual gatekeepers (Morr & Mongeau, 2004). In the American context, sexual scripts on a first date may range from verbal flirting, light kissing, and hugging to sexual intercourse depending on the levels of intimacy achieved. In a hypothetical dating scenario, men tend to demonstrate higher expectations of sexual intimacy than their female partners (Mongeau & Carey, 1996).

3.2 The constitutive role of culture in romantic relationship formation

In terms of forming dating scripts, culture can influence individuals' intimate relationships in a number of ways. Buss (1989) found that when choosing mates, men and women in China and other eastern Asian countries place higher values on chastity than do men and women in some European countries. Ting-Toomy (1994) suggested that culture influences conceptions of romantic love and one's ideal mate. She argued that in collectivist cultures such as China and Japan, less emphasis is placed on passionate and romantic love than in individualistic cultures such as that of the United States. Other scholars (Buss, et al., 1990; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1996) also noted that culture influences the characteristics, which make up our representation of an ideal romantic partner and determines our expectations and criteria for choosing romantic partners.

In their study, Goodwin and TANG (1991) noticed that British respondents stressed sensitivity and humor in romantic or platonic partners, whereas Chinese respondents were more money-minded and valued creativity more. In another study investigating Taiwanese courtship style, Cho and Cross (1995) demonstrated a strong correlation between Chinese values and beliefs and individuals' courtship styles. They observed that the friendship-based love style is most common among Taiwanese dating couples, and marriage is considered the ultimate goal of dating while romantic love is not meant to be a source of excitement or entertainment. Thus, they concluded by saying that Chinese cultural conventions favor pragmatic over neurotic love styles. Moore and Leung (2001) proposed the same thesis in a study comparing romantic beliefs, styles, and relationships among young people from Chinese, Southern European, and Anglo-Australian backgrounds.

The cultural impact on shaping and maintaining patterned date behaviors is also reflected in the

culturally-sanctioned gender norms and role distributions that are embedded in those dating scripts. Rose and Frieze (1993) discovered that in dating situations, women appear to see their first dates as highly dependent on their male partners. Actions such as initiating a date, paying, and making sexual moves are customarily considered a man's job. In addition, women show strong tendencies to follow scripts that assign them passive or reactive roles, such as waiting to be taken out. Generally speaking, men usually follow a proactive dating script while women a reactive one. Such gender differences give men more power in the initial stage of a dating relationship.

In their comparison of Western and Chinese romantic styles and relationships, Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) argued that the Western concept of "romantic love" suggests an emotional intensity. In contrast, according to the Chinese perspective, unplanned physical demonstrations of love are inappropriate. Earlier support of this view came from studies in the 1930s. For instance, Dion and Dion (1993) demonstrated that Asian students in America endorsed companionate/friendship and altruistic views of love more than their Caucasian counterparts. Such emphasis on companionship, warmth commitment, security, and future planning is consistent with the Chinese collectivist culture (Moore & Leung, 2001).

In a comprehensive anthropological study of sex, death, and hierarchy in a Chinese city, Janowiak (1993) distinguished two types of Chinese dating styles that involve two different conventions. The first, the formal dating style, "emphasizes normative rules, social judgment, and conventional standards for articulating romantic involvement" (p. 197). It is always organized into a "semi-ritualistic incremental increase on the public expression of commitment" (p. 196) that culminates in marriage. The informal dating style is characterized more by the reserved public expression of affection and intimacy because the relationship is somewhat restricted by prior obligations. Interestingly, both dating styles stress companionship.

Furthermore, GAO and Gudykunst (1995) stressed the significant role that Chinese culture plays on Chinese romantic relationship development. Family members' opinions were found crucial for individuals in romantic relationships because the Chinese are more collectivist-oriented and pay great attention to the opinions of others, especially those of their clan members. In contrast, American individuals may pay less attention to the opinions of their family members when choosing romantic partners because in such an individualist culture, person or self is defined as an independent entity. Thus, it can be seen that cultural norms and values shape the different perceptions of dating and marriage between the Chinese and the Americans.

In this regard, quite a number of scholars (Dion & Dion, 1993; Hofstede, 1984; Phinney, Ong & Madden, 2000; Triandis, Bontempo & Villareal, 1988) discussed the two fundamental values of individualism and collectivism that differentiate between western and eastern cultures. The American culture tends to emphasize individual freedom and rights, and adolescent dating usually receives fewer controls and supervision from parents and schools. However, the Chinese culture has been highly suppressive of individual freedom and rights, and adolescents' interest in the opposite sex has been traditionally perceived as "premature love," which is often controlled until the young people reached the socially appropriate age of courtship.

As for the perceptions of marriage, Americans see marriage as the union of two individuals as a result of a couple's strong feelings and romantic love. In contract, the Chinese conventionally perceive marriage as the alliance between two families. It is necessary to point out here that Hofstede's cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism has been challenged, and some study results show that young people from Hong Kong and Japan actually appeared more individualistic than their counterparts in the United States. However, the above cultural dimension still fits the reality of the United States and Taiwan in general. In addition, this study will adopt the individualistic-collectivistic cultural dimension as a continuum rather than clear-cut dualism.

3.3 Motivations for engaging in cross-cultural romantic relationships

As for the motivations or purposes of engaging in cross-cultural dating, previous studies (Erikson, 1968; Kelsky, 2001; McDaniel, 1969; Skipper & Nass, 1966; Sprecher & Regan, 2002) revealed the following categories. First, some participants regarded the experience as an opportunity to have fun or to have a good time with a partner of the opposite sex. Second, some thought of it as a means of status upgrading from, for example, an international student status to a spouse of a native with a green card. Third, still some used it as way of socialization which might lead to personal and social growth because the dating partner is a native and has more access to socialization. Fourth, others treated it as a chance to enjoy the attractiveness of the “other” or companionship with members of a different cultural background. Fifth, still others considered it an alternative means of mate sorting and selection beyond their own social circles. Finally, quite a few also perceive it as intellectual challenging and using it to signify their acculturation to the mainstream.

In summary, a script is an important schema used to organize individual experiences, and it is usually composed of a set of stereotypical actions. It allows people to predict actions of others and serve as behavior models that raise certain expectations in a relational context. As a byproduct of socialization and acculturation processes, scripts can be different for members of different cultures. Dating scripts are particular cultural performances that serve to “illustrate what terms legitimate and illegitimate sexual initiatives” (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2000, p. 29). Moreover, cultural norms and values are subject to social changes, and the impact of such changes is likely to be more evident among those who have been exposed to the cultures of the “other” for a certain period of time.

From the above literature review, we find that, besides some quantitative studies, there has been little qualitative research on the cross-cultural romantic relationships though the number of cross-cultural dating partners is growing on the campuses of American universities and colleges. The present study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the cultural impact on the dating scripts, perceptions, and behaviors of college students from the United States and Taiwan in their cross-cultural romantic relationships. To this end, the present study seeks answers to the general research question as follows:

RQ: How do cultural influences play into the cross-cultural romantic relationships between the American and Taiwanese college students?

This general research question needs to be understood from the following aspects of:

(1) How do the college students in Taiwan and the United States perceive the cross-cultural romantic relationship?

(2) How do the college students from the two cultures talk about sex on their first dates?

(3) What are the similarities and differences between Chinese and American dating scripts?

In addition to the above comparative cultural analysis, this study will specifically examine the cross-cultural relationship with a focus on strategies in overcoming the language, cultural barriers and social pressure with the following two research aspects:

(4) How do the American and Taiwanese cross-cultural couples deal with the problems as a result of the language and cultural differences?

(5) What types of public opinions do the cross-cultural couples receive and how do they face them?

4. Methods

4.1 Participants

As mentioned earlier, most of the previous researches (Buss, et al., 1990; Remennick, 2005; TANG & ZUO, 2000; Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003; Weiss, 1970) were quantitative in methodology, which recruited both same-culture couples from the two countries under study and cross-cultural couples usually from the United States. Being a follow-up study by taking the qualitative research methods, the present study consists of two parts in its research design. In the first part, the main researcher recruited 10 pairs of Chinese romantic partners from a Chinese college (Code names of C1, C2 to C10 are used to refer to the 10 Chinese participants.) and 10 pairs of American romantic partners from an American university (Code names of A1, A2 to A10 are used to refer to the American participants). The age of both groups of participants ranges from 18 to 30. The main researcher conducted a 25 to 30-minute interview with each pair of a total number of 20 couples, who recalled their dating experiences as spontaneously as possible. As dating experiences were the focus of the first part of the research, both the male and the female in each couple were interviewed together so as to provide them with opportunities to help each other reflecting and presenting a fuller picture of their past romantic experiences.

The second part of the research was conducted in the United States, with a focus on the exploration of the cultural impact on the romantic relationships of the cross-cultural couples. Through snowball convenience sampling, the main researcher enlisted 10 pairs of Chinese and American dating or married couples from a Midwestern US state university. The age of the participants also ranged from 18 to 30. Among the 10 cross-cultural couples, all the males turned out to be from the United States, and all the females from Taiwan. The interviews of the 10 couples were conducted with the female (Code names of CF1, CF2 to CF10 will be used to refer to the Chinese female participants.) and male participant separately (Code names of AM1, AM2 to AM10 will be used to refer to the American male participants.) so as to have all the voices of the ten cross-cultural couples heard and recorded to the full. The most obvious discrepancies confirmed by these interviews were analyzed to detect the cultural implications and to explore answers to the research question of this study.

According to Sprecher and McKinney (1993), various methods had been adopted to investigate dating processes and cross-cultural romantic relationships. They provided an extensive review of those methods, including experiment, mate selection questionnaires, and retrospective interview. Among them, retrospective interview is one of the most commonly-used methods. Researchers frequently use a retrospective account method in their studies, in which participants recall every detail of what happened during their dating stages. From the descriptions provided by their subjects, researchers are able to synthesize a fairly representative common dating script (Rose & Frieze, 1989). As this study primarily aims to obtain the participants' recall of their dating experiences and insights rather than a generalization of the overall population, a retrospective account interview method is deemed the most appropriate approach to collecting the expected data. To ensure accuracy, all the interviews were audio-taped to record the details and exact quotations with the permission of the participants. The researchers verbatim transcribed and separately coded the interviews for analysis.

4.2 Analysis

To begin with, the researchers conducted the coding process by paying special attention to three types of operations: (1) focusing on relevant phenomena, (2) collecting examples of those phenomena, and (3) analyzing those phenomena to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures. These operations have also been understood as a way of identifying and reordering the data, allowing the data to be thought about in new and different ways (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). To this end, theme analysis was used in this study. In a theme analysis, the researchers repeatedly read the accumulated information from the interview transcripts and determine the

patterns or themes as research findings and answers to the research questions. The presented themes are constantly compared with the document to derive the conclusion of this research. For the purpose of this study, a “theme” is defined as a relevant issue, concept, opinion, understanding, knowledge, experience, or question. To become a theme in this research, three criteria are required: The first criterion is occurrence, which means that at least two parts of a report have the same thread of meaning even though the meaning may be indicated by different wording. The second criterion is the repetition of key words, phrases, or sentences, which is an extension of the first criterion in that it is an explicitly repeated use of the same wording. The third criterion is forcefulness, which refers to the underlining of words or phrases in a written report or vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses in a recording (Owen, 1984).

5. Results and discussion

As stated earlier, respondents for the research design were drawn from a college in Taiwan and a university in the United States. The average age of the Chinese respondents was 22.82 years old ranging from 18 to 30 and the average length of their relationship was 1.9 years. The average age of the American respondents was 21.34, ranging from 18 to 30 and the average length of their relationship was 1.8 years. Almost all of the American respondents reported an average of two or more previous dating relationships (83%), while only 40% of the Chinese respondents had been involved in an average of one previous romantic relationship. In addition, among the respondents from both settings, 31% of the American dyads and 5% of the Chinese dyads reported that they were living together.

When responses were grouped according to commonly discussed themes, the following topics emerged: (1) perceptions of dating and marriage; (2) ideas about sex on the first date; (3) similarities and differences between Chinese and American dating scripts; (4) ways to deal with the language and cultural problems; and (5) courage to face different types of public opinions. In the following sections, the researchers will answer the research question by elaborating on the themes with illustrations from the interview transcripts.

5.1 Perceptions of dating and marriage

As mentioned earlier, unlike the Americans, the Chinese traditionally disfavor adolescents’ dating and usually restrain romantic relationships before marriage. However, in this study, both Americans and Chinese young people supported practical and altruistic romantic relationships and felt that dating is a pre-stage of marriage that provides a way for one person to get to know the other person better. The following are some examples of what some of them said about dating and marriage:

Example 1:

Dating serves two purposes: It can be a trial to see if this person is a strong marriage candidate, or it can merely be a means of having a companion around to share activities with. It all depends on the long term goals of the parties involved. (AM2)

Example 2:

Dating is comparatively free and flexible while marriage is for life. Also, dating lets people see if they are compatible before marriage. So, to make sure that you can have a stable and happy marriage, you need to either date a girl for a longer period of time or keeping changing your girlfriends till you find the right one. (A4)

Example 3:

To me, so long you don’t have sex, marriage doesn’t have to be a corollary of dating. Dating provides me

with exciting opportunities to socialize with the natives and get to know the mainstream culture better. However, once in a marriage, people need some sort of commitment. Both husbands and wives need to take their commitment seriously. (CF1)

Example 4:

Nowadays, young people in Taiwan enjoy romantic relationships at a considerably early age. Boys and girls begin to have a taste of dating or even romantic love since middle school. However, most of our generation had to begin our romantic relationships after the age of 18 when we were at high school or college because of the rules of the school and the pressure from parents. Although young people today openly pursue romantic relationships, these relationships are usually based on the goal of marriage. Therefore, family background and social status are still important factors to determine whether a couple is fit or not. (C7)

From the above examples, we can see that both the American and Chinese participants pursue the excitement and joy of dating and romantic relationships. Besides, all the four American and Chinese young people treat marriage as a serious matter. While the two American boys are dating for “stable and happy marriage” partners, the Chinese base their dating on the goal of a marriage with “commitment.” Nevertheless, the differences in their perceptions of dating and marriage lie in the fact that the American participants intend to date flexibly and change partners freely. Marriage is their individual pursuit of happiness, so they are ready to go through trial and error in order to find the “right one.” To the Chinese participants, there is responsibility since the beginning of dating, and sex should be reserved until marriage. More importantly, suitable marriages are usually based on “family background and social status.”

5.2 Ideas about sex on the first date

Due to cultural influences, Western philosophy emphasizes the importance of the individual, notions of romantic love, and preference for love matches rather than arranged marriages, which “has gradually developed to the current state of sexual permissiveness and gender equality” (Higgins, ZHENG, LIU & SUN, 2002, p. 76). However, traditional Eastern philosophy preached the suppression of passionate love. Even today, many people in Taiwan and other Asian countries still hold a critical attitude towards the Western-style sexual freedom. Then, how do the college students from both Taiwan and the United States perceive sex, especially at the very beginning of their date. Below are some examples:

Example 5:

Unwise, very unwise! It’s a very bizarre and uncomfortable thought for me to have sex on the first date. If he had proposed that, I would have thought that he had become interested in me only sexually. If we had done it on the first day, there would have been no genuine respect and promising future in this relationship. (CF 10)

Example 6

I was and I am still strongly against sex on the first date because it would ruin everything. I had really good feelings towards her, and I wanted to have a serious romantic relationship with her. Some guys around me, who are called noodle hunters because they are only sexually interested in Asian girls, might just think of doing this. So the difference is whether you are dating your girl partner for real or just for fun. (AM4)

Example 7:

I do not think it is appropriate to have sex on the first date. Although Westernization plus today’s globalization launched waves of “sexual revolution” in Taiwan and other parts of Asia, this kind of Western influence began just since the beginning of the last century. However, the Confucian ideas of underplaying all matters of the heart and restricting all types of desires have been existent for more than two thousand years in the

Asian cultures. Besides, according to the Yin-Yang doctrine, the universe is seen as a balance of conflicting forces including male and female. While male is Yang, strong, and active; female is Yin, yielding, and passive. Sexual intercourse was thought to strengthen the male in that he benefits from absorbing some of the women's Yin essence. No matter how powerful the Western influence is, the above traditional ideas have been deeply rooted in the Chinese blood. Therefore, not only I but many other Chinese would think it is inappropriate to have sex on the first date. (C7-Male)

Example 8:

Hollywood movies and American TV shows leave foreign audiences the impression that most Americans, young and old, are very loose with their sexual desires. It is true that most American adolescents begin dating at the age of 13 or 15 when they are in middle school, they get parental and social approval, and they have easy access to cars and bedrooms of their own. However, many Americans are still reluctant to have sex on their first dates. As for cross-cultural dating, I feel it a taboo to do so on the first date. It is too soon and serious couples should wait till the right time. (A10-Female)

From the above examples, it is clear that neither the Chinese nor the American participants approve sex on the first date in their cross-cultural romantic relationships. In Example 5, the Chinese participant thought it unwise and unsafe to have sex on the first date for their future relationship development. In Example 6, although some of his peers hunted for Asian girls just for fun and would like to try to have sex on their first dates, AM4 was strongly against it because he took his dating with the Taiwanese girl seriously and he did not want that to ruin his relationship. The Taiwanese participant in Example 7 majors in Chinese language and culture, and he gave a very thorough analysis of the Western influence of sexual freedom in Taiwan and other Asian cultures. To him, to have sex on the first date was against his traditional ideas, which "have been deeply rooted" in his blood. Finally, the American participant tried to readjust the foreign impressions on the American perception of sex due to the misguiding of American movies and TV programs. She analyzed the favorable environment for the American adolescents to go dating, but she cautioned the readers that many Americans did not have sex on their first dates as depicted in the media.

5.3 Similarities and differences between the Chinese and American dating scripts

Like other eastern cultures, people in Taiwan are living in a collectivistic culture while people in the United States have an individualistic culture. As a result, young people from Taiwan often initiate their dates with more caution than their American counterparts. The former seldom initiate dating invitations unless they have consulted with their in-group members or they feel confident about the result of the relationship. Thus, the dating scripts for the young people from the eastern cultures are comparatively complicated and changeable due to a series of family, social, and cultural factors. On the contrary, American young people initiate their dates based on their own will without the necessity to consult their family or friends all the time. Their dating scripts are more simple and clear-cut as suggested by Roche and Rambsey (1993).

On the other hand, for thousands of years, the Chinese have been influenced by the Confucian ideas of the "Five Cardinal Relations" between the sovereign and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and friend and friend, which designated the former in each pair as the superior and the latter as the subordinate. Even today, a lot of Chinese including young people still feel the impact of such hierarchical social relations, so the Chinese or Taiwanese dating partners tend to be more dependent, passive, and indecisive than the American counterparts. Unsurprisingly, more than 70% of Taiwanese female participants said that they were dependent on their American male partners to initiate dates, start sexual inquiries, and pay for the dating

expenses. In contrast, most American young people felt that it was normal to “go Dutch” for everything. Following are some examples:

Example 9:

In retrospect, I was pretty surprised when he asked me out for the first time, but the shock didn't last long and I was not intimidated during the first date. We ate lunch together, went for some outdoor activities, and then had a short get-together with his sister's family. The cost, of course, he paid. Most of the time, he was doing the talking and decision-making. I just listened to him and answered questions his sister's family members asked. To me, I had a good time for the first date with an American boy. (CF7)

Example 10:

My dating with my Taiwanese partner was both easy and exciting. It was easy because we did not have to fight over where to go and what to do. All the time, she was so sweet and so submissive. Certainly, sometimes, she was very shy and determined when I was too aggressive. It seemed that she listened to the words of her friends and obeyed the rules or orders from her far-away family members or even relatives too much. I had to be very, very patient and wait for her to be ready before I could move to the next stage of our relationship. Anyway, her sweetness, submissiveness, and mystery make our dating experiences very exciting and, occasionally, adventurous. (A4-Male)

Thus, we see that both the Chinese girl and the American boy found each other attractive and their cross-cultural dating experience exciting. However, differences in their cultural backgrounds provide them with different dating scripts. Throughout the dating process, the Chinese participant took a reactive role by being submissive to her dating partner and obedient to her family, relatives, and friends. In contrast, the American participant played a proactive part by being protective to the dating partner and decisive or even aggressive in following the clear-cut Western dating script.

5.4 Dealing with the language and cultural barriers

As a result of the differences in the Chinese and American cultures and, consequently, their dating scripts, there arise a series of difficulties in the dating relationships between the Taiwanese and American participants. Facing the difficulties, those couples who took their cross-cultural romantic relationships seriously worked together and thought of ways to deal with the problems while some who just sought fun and excitement gave up and finally broke up.

Among the cross-cultural couples in this study, all of them communicated in English. However, some of the Taiwanese partners oftentimes found their English insufficient for smooth communication, and most of the American partners could not speak Chinese. Moreover, differences in the two cultures caused countless confusion, misunderstanding, and even fight between the couples in terms of gender roles, degrees of self disclosure, choices of clothes, food, lodging, and cars, as well as tastes of music and art. Below are illustrations of their difficulties in language and culture and some of ways the participants used to cope with them:

Example 11:

The biggest concern for our relationship was my oral English skill. In the first couple of dates with him, I almost wanted to back up due to the deficiency of my oral English ability. When I was trying to explain something, and he did not understand me or misunderstood me, I was really frustrated. The most embarrassing thing was that I did not understand most of his jokes and could not laugh out loud as he expected. Now we have gradually solved the language problem because we have kept learning and improving in the mother tongues of each other. Certainly, cultural differences sometimes still cause difficulties in our communication and problems in our relationship, but

time plus our concerted efforts will get all these issues solved. (CF3)

Example 12:

At first, when she got mad at something and kept quiet, I didn't know what happened and how to comfort her. But I would think that all of her old friends were in Taiwan, so maybe she had more burden than I do. Although I was interested in this Taiwanese girl, I could not speak any Chinese. At most of the parties held by her Chinese friends, I had to remain silent, which was not cool for me at all. I almost broke up with her as some of my buddies did with their foreign girlfriends. Then I tried to learn the Chinese language as well as the Chinese culture. I feel the more I have learned her language and culture, the more we know about each other better. (AM5)

In Example 11, the Taiwanese participant told us about her frustrating feelings with the English language at the beginning stage of her dating experience. She felt that it was the most embarrassing thing when she could not respond to her partner's jokes. Likewise, the American participant in Example 12 had to keep silent at her partner's parties and was at a loss when his dating partner was mad. The frustrating difficulties had something to do with both the language deficiency and the lack of cultural background knowledge. Fortunately, both couples were confident that they could solve the problems by getting more and more familiar with each other's language and culture.

5.5 Courage to face different types of public opinions

As in the past, people in Taiwan and the United States talk about cross-cultural romantic relationships both positively and negatively. Positively, they accept and verbally support the young people's choice; Negatively, some expressed their suspicions and made opinionated decisions to prevent such relationships in their families or community. Following are some examples:

Example 13:

Since we come from two cultures and two different countries, this gives us a special position. For me, I like to be unique, so it doesn't bother me. When I took my Taiwanese girlfriend, who is now my wife, to my home, my family members found her fresh and nice, and they were all amiable to her. When I went to Taipei in Taiwan, I felt especially accepted and appreciated by her family and other Taiwanese relatives and friends. To me, people in both cultures welcome us with open arms because we two really love each other. For instance, before we went back to our hometowns in the two different countries, we had exchanged countless phone calls and e-mail messages with our own folks about their new family member! (AM4)

Example 14:

For the first several months, I was so mad at others' staring and cold attitudes towards us. It seemed that we were a bit weird because I was an Asian girl and he was a white American boy. But I thought if we were feeling great with each other and having a wonderful time together, that was good enough, right? Later, we found out that some Americans doubted about my feelings toward Steve. They thought that I was dating him simply to stay in the States. Ironically, some other people in Taiwan felt that it was a shameful loss for the Chinese to lose a girl to a foreigner. No matter what, we two love each other, support each other, and always stay close to each other. (CF4)

Example 15:

At first, my parents and some of my relatives and friends were all against our dating relationship. They said that I ought to stay close to my parents since I am their only child. Certainly, they had many other worries. For instance, they told me that the American boy was just intending to play with me for a while and might leave me any time he wanted. However, they gradually changed their opinions when they understood him better. For me, I must be good and respect my parents' opinions about the development of our relationship. Without the approval of

my parents and the support of my relatives and friends, I don't think we can further our relationship and finally get married. (CF7)

As can be seen from the above two examples, people in Taiwan and the United States look at cross-cultural romantic relationships both approvingly and disapprovingly. The couple in Example 13 seems to be very lucky because they were welcomed "with open arms" in both Taiwan and the United States. However, they won others' approval with sincere love between themselves and spent great efforts to pave the way for the expected result. On the contrary, the couple in Example 14 was not that lucky. They met cold faces, and they encountered obstacles from others in the course of the romantic relationship. Nevertheless, they are still together because they "love each other," and "support each other." In Example 15, the Chinese participant described some typical Chinese responses and reactions regarding cross-cultural romantic relationships. On the one hand, the parents, relatives, and friends had too many worries to agree with the participant's choice of an American boyfriend though the boy finally proved himself qualified and acceptable. On the other hand, the participant herself wanted to be "good" and decided to listen to the words of her big family in the development of her romantic relationship.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the cultural impact upon the dating scripts, perceptions, and behaviors in cross-cultural romantic relationship building between college students from the United States and Taiwan. Through the theoretical lens of script theory and via the retrospective account interview method for data collection and the theme analysis approach for data analysis, this study has found five emerging themes.

The first theme is about perceptions of dating and marriage. This study found that dating and romantic relationships appealed to both the American and Chinese participants today. Both were treating their dating seriously so as to have a responsible and happy marriage. However, the American participants were ready to go through trial and error in order to find the "right one" while the Chinese participants began shouldering commitment since the beginning of dating. Second, with regard to the ideas about sex on the first date, neither the Chinese nor the American participants approved sex on the first date in their cross-cultural romantic relationships. Although some American college students hunted for Asian girls for mere sexual excitement, all participants in this study equally voiced that serious dating did not include sex on the first date.

The third theme talks about the differences between Chinese and American dating scripts. In this study, both the Chinese the American participants found their dating experiences and cross-cultural romantic relationships challenging and exciting. However, throughout the development process of their relationships, the Chinese participants were reactive, dependent, and obedient while the American participants were proactive, protective, and aggressive. The next theme concerns the ways to deal with the language and cultural problems. Language inefficiency blocks smooth communication and meaningful exchange of ideas, and lack of cultural background knowledge causes countless confusion, misunderstanding, and even fight between the couples in almost every aspect of their life. Luckily, most of the cross-cultural couples faced the problems with sufficient patience, sustaining encouragement, and pains-taking efforts to get familiar with each other's language and culture.

As for the final theme of courage to face different types of public opinions, people in Taiwan and the United States responded to the cross-cultural romantic relationships both approvingly and disapprovingly. Facing cold faces of some individuals, hostile suspicions in the community, and stubborn disapproval of family members, most of the participants in this study demonstrated their courage by showing their genuine love to each other,

staying together to physically and spiritually support each other at the time of difficulty, and making great efforts to prove that they were the best matches. In a word, ever-lasting courage is needed to maintain the cross-cultural romantic relationship as revealed in this study.

Compared with the previous researches, the present study has reconfirmed quite a few quantitative research findings and revealed, at the same time, some fundamental differences. Similar to the earlier research findings, this study has also found that the American participants are comparatively more liberal with regard to dating in that they are more likely to begin dating at a younger age and to change dating partners more frequently. Nevertheless, most of the American and Taiwanese participants perceived their dating and cross-cultural romantic relationships seriously. Instead of seeking some practical goals such as satisfying physical pleasure and changing personal status, the majority of the participants from both cultures demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility and consistent encouragement and support in the face of language difficulties, cultural confusions, and social obstacles.

This study has several limitations that readers should be cautioned in interpreting the research findings. We were not able to get equivalent samples in both the United States and Taiwan. The interviews of the 10 cross-cultural couples were conducted only in the United States. The research results would have been enriched if equivalent cross-cultural couples residing in Taiwan had been included. The US respondents who have cross-cultural relationships were used to represent US culture may not be a good choice as they may be quite different from mainstream US college students. In addition, since family members play a significant role in the Chinese culture, they should have been interviewed with their opinions included in the data analysis. Future research on dating and relationship development especially in collectivist culture should include family members in the analysis. Finally, the design of this study did not take into consideration the attitudes, beliefs and value changes of the Taiwanese participants who have already been staying in the United States for some years. It is very likely that the cultural values of some of them might be "Americanized." Therefore, their dating scripts may be more isomorphic with those of their American partners rather than reflecting a specifically Chinese flavor. Future studies of intercultural relationships should take this acculturation factor into consideration.

References:

- Baxter, L. A. & Bullis, C.. (1986). Turning points in developing romantic relationships. *Human Communication Research*, 12, 469-494.
- Benokraitis, N. V.. (1999). *Marriage and families: Changes, choices, and constraints*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Blackwell, D. L. & Lichter, D. T.. (2004). Homogamy among dating, cohabitating, and married couples. *Sociological Quarterly*, 45, 719-737.
- Brown, L. M., McNatt, P. S. & Cooper, G. D.. (2003). Ingroup romantic preferences among Jewish and non-Jewish white undergraduates. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 27, 335-354.
- Buss, D. M.. (1989). Sex differences in human mate preferences: Evolutionary hypothesis testing in 37 cultures. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 12, 1-49.
- Buss, D. M., Abbott, M., Angleitner, A., Asherian, A., Biaggio, A., Blanco-Villasenor, A., et al.. (1990). International preferences in selecting mates: A study of 37 cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 21, 5-47.
- Byrne, D.. (1969). Attitudes and attraction. In: L. Berkowitz. (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*. New York: Academic Press, 35-89.
- Cho, W. & Cross, S. E.. (1995). Taiwanese love style and their association with self-esteem and relationship quality. *Genetic, Social & General Psychology Monographs*, 121, 283-310.
- Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P.. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dating: Competitiveness, sexuality, delights and discontents. (2008). Retrieved July 26, 2008, from <http://family.jrank.org/pages/345/Dating.html>.
- Demographics. (1992, July 27). *U.S. News & World Reports*. 12.
- Dion, K. & Dion, K.. (1993). Individualistic and collectivist perspectives on gender and the cultural context of love and intimacy. *Journal of Social Issues*, 49, 53-69.

When Mulan meets Romeo: Cultural impact upon the dating scripts, perceptions and behaviors of college students from the United States and Taiwan in their cross-cultural romantic relationships

- Duck, S., West, L. & Acitelli, L. K.. (1997). Sewing the field: The tapestry of relationships in life and research. In: S. Duck. (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships: Theory, research and interventions*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1-28.
- Encyclopedia of African-American Civil Rights*. (1992). New York, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Erikson, E. H.. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Gagnon, J. H. & Simon, W.. (1973). *Sexual conduct: The social origins of human sexuality*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Gao, G. & Gudykunst, W. B.. (1995). Attributional confidence, perceived similarity, and network involvement in Chinese and European American romantic relationships. *Communication Quarterly*, 43, 431-445.
- Goodwin, R. & TANG D. (1991). Preferences for friends and close relationships partners: A cross-cultural comparison. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 131, 579-581.
- Graham, M. A., Moeai, J. & Shizuru, L.. (1985). Intercultural marriages: An intrareligious perspective. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 9, 429-434.
- Harris, T. M. & Kalbfleisch, P. J.. (2000). Interracial dating: The implications of race for initiating a romantic relationship. *Howard Journal of Communication*, 11, 49-64.
- Hatfield, E. & Sprecher, S.. (1996). *Love and sex: Cross-cultural perspectives*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Hendrick, C. & Hendrick, S. S. (1986). A theory and method of love. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 392-402.
- Higgins, L. T., ZHENG, M., LIU Y. L. & SUN C. H.. (2002). Attitudes to marriage and sexual behaviors: A survey of gender and culture differences in China and United Kingdom. *Sex Roles*, 46(3/4), 75-89.
- Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Honeycutt, J. M. & Cantrill, J. G.. (2000). *Cognition, communication, and romantic relationships*. Mahwah, NY: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Institute of International Education. (2007). *Open doors 2007: International students in the United States*. Retrieved August 22, 2008, from <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=113743>.
- Jankowiak, W. R.. (1993). *Sex, death, and hierarchy in a Chinese city: An anthropological account*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kelsky, K.. (2001). Who sleeps with whom, or how (not) to want the West in Japan. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7, 418-435.
- Kerckhoff, A. C.. (1974). The social context of interpersonal attraction. In: T. L. Huston. (Ed.), *Foundations of interpersonal attraction*. New York: Academic Press, 61-78.
- Knobloch, L. K. & Solomon, D. H.. (2002). Intimacy and the magnitude and experience of episodic relational uncertainty within romantic relationships. *Personal Relations*, 9, 457-478.
- Laner, M. R. & Ventrone, N. A.. (1998). Egalitarian daters/traditionalist dates. *Journal of Family Issues*, 19, 468-477.
- LaPlante, M., McCormick, N. & Brannigan, G. G.. (1980). Living the sexual script: College students' views of influence in sexual encounters. *Journal of Sex Research*, 16, 338-355.
- McDaniel, C. O.. (1969). Dating roles and reasons for dating. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 31, 97-107.
- McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L. & Cook, J. M.. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social Networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 415-444.
- Mongeau, P. A. & Carey, C. M. (1996). Who's wooing whom? An experimental investigation of date-initiation and expectancy violation. *Western Journal of Communication*, 60, 195-204.
- Moore, S. M. & Leung, C.. (2001). Romantic beliefs, styles, and relationships among young people from Chinese, Southern European, and Anglo-Australian backgrounds. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 4, 53-68.
- Morr, M. C. & Mongeau, P. A.. (2004). First-date expectations: The impact of sex initiator, alcohol consumption, and relationship type. *Communication Research*, 31, 3-35.
- Murstein, B., Merighi, J. R. & Malloy, T. E.. (1989). Psychical attractiveness and exchange theory in interracial dating. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 129, 325-335.
- Owen, W. F. (1984). Interpretative themes in relational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, 274-287.
- Phinney, J. S., Ong, A. & Madden, T.. (2000). Cultural values and intergenerational value discrepancies in immigrant and non-immigrant families. *Child Development*, 71, 528-539.
- Pryor, J. B. & Merluzzi, T. V.. (1985). The role of expertise in processing social interaction script. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 21, 362-379.
- Rangel, D. K.. (1999). Crazy about each other: A qualitative exploration of culture in the context of interracial relationships. *Dissertation Abstracts International*. Section B: The Social Sciences and Engineering, 60(2-B): 0841.
- Regan, P. C. & Joshi, A.. (2003). Ideal partner preferences among adolescents. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 31, 13-20.
- Remennick, L.. (2005). Cross-cultural dating patterns on an Israeli campus: Why are Russian immigrant women more popular than men? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22(3), 435-454.
- Roche, J. P. & Ramsbey, T. W.. (1993). Premature sexuality: A five-year follow-up study of attitudes and behavior by dating stage. *Adolescence*, 28, 67-80.
- Rose, S. & Frieze, I. H.. (1989). Young singles' scripts for a first date. *Gender and Society*, 3, 258-268.
- Russell, L.. (2007, April 14). *Interracial marriage changing American society*. Retrieved July 28, 2008, from http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/214177/interracial_marriage_changing_american.html?cat=7.
- Skipper, J. K. & Nass, G.. (1966). Dating behavior: A framework for analysis and illustration. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 28, 412-420.
- Solis, R. V.. (2007, April 15). *After 40 years, interracial marriage flourishing*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from <http://www.msnbc.msn>.

When Mulan meets Romeo: Cultural impact upon the dating scripts, perceptions and behaviors of college students from the United States and Taiwan in their cross-cultural romantic relationships

com/id/18090277/.

- Sprecher, S. & Felmlee, D.. (2000). Romantic partners' perceptions of social network attributes with the passage of time and relationship transitions. *Personal Relationships*, 7, 325-340.
- Sprecher, S. & McKinney, K.. (1993). *Sexuality*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Sprecher, S. & Regan, P. S.. (2002). Liking some things (in some people) more than others: Partner preferences in romantic relationships and friendships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 19, 463-481.
- Sterling, A. J.. (1992). *What really works with men*. New York, NY: Warner.
- TANG S. & ZUO J. P.. (2000). Dating attitudes and behaviors of American and Chinese college students. *The Social Science Journal*, 37(1), 67-78.
- Ting-Toomey, S.. (1994). Managing conflict in intimate intercultural relationships. In: D. D. Cahn. (Ed.), *Conflict in personal relationships*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 47-77.
- Toro-Morn, M. & Sprecher, S.. (2003). A cross-cultural comparison of mate preferences among university students: The United States vs. the people's republic of China. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 1, 151-170.
- Triandis, H., Bontempo, R. & Villareal, M. J.. (1988). Individualism and collectivism: Cross-cultural perspectives on self-ingroup relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 323-338.
- Tucker, P. & Aron, A.. (1993). Passionate love and marital satisfaction at key transition points in the family life cycle. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 12, 135-147.
- Weiss, M. S.. (1970). Selective acculturation and the dating process: The patterning of Chinese-Caucasian interracial dating. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 32(2), 273-278.

(Edited by Annie and Chris)

(continued from Page 16)

These ironies come from the characteristics of Japanese agricultural political dynamics. Traditional small farming dominates Japanese agriculture, and small-size farmers are richer than their urban counterparts, because they depend on stable off-farm income. Small-size farmers retain possession and use of farmland not for the purpose of earning farm income but to obtain easy money through the political alchemy of farmland.

A small number of innovative large-size farmers have high agricultural productivity. However, policymakers try to prevent development of large-size farms in order to protect traditional small farming communities, which form powerful voting groups.

Under such political dynamics, Japan's huge domestic agricultural support did not result in an oversupply of agricultural products. This is why Japan is the only country whose food self-sufficiency rate keeps declining in spite of its heavy agricultural protection.

In consideration of this background, we are skeptical about the significance of the WTO three-box classification. At least in Japan, WTO-style domestic policy reform may not be effective for promoting sound development of international agricultural trade.

References:

- Blandford, David & Tim Josling. (2007). *Should the green box be modified?* Discussion Paper. Washington DC: International Food and Agricultural Trade Policy Council.
- Godo, Yoshihisa. (2007). *The puzzle of small farming in Japan*. Pacific Economic Papers No. 365. Canberra: Australia-Japan Research Centre, Australian National University.
- Godo, Yoshihisa & Daisuke Takahashi. (2008). *Agricultural policy reforms and WTO commitments on domestic support in Japan*. IFPRI Discussion Paper, No 0822, Washington D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).
- Hart, Chad E. & John C. Beghin. (2006). Rethinking agricultural domestic support under the World Trade Organization. In: Kym Anderson and Will Martin. (Eds.), *Agricultural trade reform and the Doha development agenda*. Washington DC and New York: The World Bank and Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. (1992). *New policy direction of food, agriculture and rural policies*. Tokyo.
- Mulgan, Aurelia George. (2000). *Japan's interventionist state*. London: Routledge.

(Edited by Annie and Chris)