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Adaptation of International Marriages in Mining Areas

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ABSTRACT

Mining companies play a vital role in driving economic growth, reducing unemployment, and creating business opportunities. Additionally, mines facilitate social and cultural interactions between local residents and foreign workers, with many of the latter eventually marrying locals in the vicinity. This study focuses on understanding the factors that influence the adaptation process of foreign workers with local residents in the Morosi District, Konawe Regency. It employs qualitative methods such as ethnographic research, involving direct observation and in-depth interviews. Data analysis is conducted using John W. Benet's adaptation process theory. The research reveals that the adaptation of marriages between foreign workers and local residents is influenced by marriage agreements, which impact the support from partners and the acceptance of the relationship by families for the long term. If their work contracts in Morosi have ended, the couples agree to settle in Cina.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's wealth of natural resources has positioned it as a prime destination for investors. Its diverse geography lends unique characteristics to various regions, such as Southeast Sulawesi Province, renowned as one of the country's leading nickel producers. The abundant nickel reservoirs have enticed foreign investment, notably from China, into Southeast Sulawesi. Since 2016, a surge of foreign labor has entered the mining sector, particularly at PT. Virtue Dragon Nickel Industry (PT. VDNI) and PT. Obsidian Stainless Steel (PT. OSS) in the Morosi District of Konawe Regency. This influx has accelerated a socioeconomic shift in the local community, with erstwhile farmers transitioning into roles as laborers and service providers. Such transformations are commonplace in mining regions (Kotsadam & Tolonen, 2016; Nurlaela, et al., 2020).

The presence of foreign workers has led to social and cultural interactions with local residents. Many foreign workers have even married local residents around the mining sites. International marriages occur when individuals from two different countries live together as spouses. These

marriages create a blend of different races, cultures, and lifestyles. In France, international marriages increased from 10% in 1996 to 16% in 2009; in Germany, international marriages rose by 13.7% in 2010; in Switzerland, international marriages accounted for one-third of all married couples (Yongvanit, 2018). International marriages in Asia typically occur between developed countries and less developed ones (Chu et al, 2017; Lee & Klein, 2017). In Japan, the number of international marriages sharply increased between 1980 and 2006 but then declined to an average of 20,000 per year. In 2005, in South Korea, there were over 250,000 marriages. In 2013, 40,000 people from Vietnam, China, Japan, the Philippines, and Cambodia married in Korea (Yongvanit, 2018). In 2012, 10,155 Indonesian citizens were recorded to have married Taiwanese citizens (Yunus. U et al., 2016).

International marriages can broaden perspectives and foster a deeper understanding of the world. Proficiency in foreign languages can expand social circles and networks. Living in a different country enhances adaptability skills. At certain moments, family members can celebrate unique cultures and traditions. These conditions can

increase appreciation for differences and individual uniqueness, thus nurturing emotional bonds between partners. The ability of partners to adapt to their new environment can reduce divorce rates and become a determinant of the longevity of the relationship (Lee et al, 2006; Hamano, 2019).

Although international marriages offer several advantages, they also bring about some challenges (Douglass, 2006; Kim et al, 2017). Couples from different countries have different cultures, traditions, and values (Shi et al., 2018). These differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts (Chu et al., 2017). Language differences and communication styles can cause stress and frustration in marital life (Jun et al, 2014; Ahn et al, 2018). Open communication between both partners is crucial for maintaining a healthy relationship (Kartikasari, 2017; Tili & Barker, 2015). Meeting the expectations of family and society can put pressure on the couple (Yeoh et al., 2014). Marriages of different religions or beliefs pose challenges in terms of legal issues and traditions (Zahedi, 2010). International marriages are sometimes confronted with long-distance relationships, especially in the early stages. Maintaining a long-distance relationship can be an emotional challenge and requires extra effort to keep the bond strong. Moving to live in the partner's country is also an option in maintaining a marital relationship. A new place and culture can lead to feelings of isolation and difficulty in integrating into the local community (Son, 2019). Being far from family and friends can reduce the available support network during difficult times (Zahedi, 2010). Mental health issues can arise in couples due to economic pressure (Montazer et al., 2016). Yunus et al., (2021) indicated that open communication, mutual understanding of cultures, and willingness to learn and adapt to each other's culture, greatly assist in building a successful marriage.

The increasing trend of international marriages is influenced by various factors. Niedomysl et al., (2014) and Seah (2015) suggest that the rise of international marriages is driven by the increasing mobility of people worldwide, including tourism, business travel, labor migration, or studying abroad. Piper & Roces (2003) illustrate the connection between labor migration and international marriages among women. Commercial matchmaking agencies

(Wang & Chang, 2002), ethnic or familial networks (Yu & Chen, 2018), the internet (Lihui & Hong, 2008), and human trafficking (Yakushko & Rajan, 2017; Mei., 2024) also play significant roles in international marriages. Itoh (2017) and Indriani & Raemon (2019) highlight that marriages with local residents are often motivated by the desire for citizenship recognition or permanent residency, fulfilling biological needs, and obtaining tourist visas. Palriwala & Uberoi (2008) indicate that marriages between locals and foreigners are also based on societal acceptance and improving economic status.

The Morosi District, one of the largest mining areas in Southeast Sulawesi, is inhabited by thousands of foreign nationals, primarily from China. They have interacted with the local residents due to work relationships as well as for food and housing needs. Chinese workers frequently engage with the local community through the Chinese Market located around the mining sites (Ashmarita et al., 2022). The community's perceptions of Chinese individuals vary, with some positive and some negative. Local residents consider Chinese workers unfavorably due to their perceived rude behavior, impatience, selectiveness, and arrogance. Some are even seen as behaving improperly according to local moral standards (Ashmarita et al, 2022). On the other hand, some members of the community view Chinese workers as hardworking, diligent, respectful towards elders, loyal, and generous (Hildayanti et al, 2022).

Marriages between Chinese laborers and local women in Morosi often face various challenges. Initially, they encounter administrative hurdles to ensure the marriage is legally recognized according to Indonesian laws and regulations (Sidebang, 2021). However, the biggest challenge arises after the marriage process. Differences in language, religion, and customs pose significant challenges for the couple in building a household. To ensure the longevity of their marital life, adaptation from both parties is necessary. Bennett (2017) indicated that humans strive to adapt to their environment biologically, socially, and culturally. Adaptation is essential for individuals to sustain their lives in their surroundings. Based on the above description, the research investigates the factors causing the adaptation of foreign laborer-local woman couples in the Morosi mining area, in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study utilizes a purposive sampling technique for informant selection. Interviewees include married couples, sellers around the Morosi District, village heads, and district heads of Morosi. Informants are chosen from individuals who are trustworthy and knowledgeable about the subject under investigation, enabling them to assist the researcher in obtaining accurate information relevant to this study. The data collection technique employed is field research. Once the research data, comprising observations and in-depth interviews, has been collected, the next step is data sorting. The data sorting process begins with reviewing the gathered data from various sources, including observations and in-depth interviews related to the adaptation process of Chinese individuals to the local community. After the data has been sorted and relevant information pertaining to the research problem has been identified, the data is then subjected to analysis. Data analysis involves organizing and categorizing data into patterns, categories, and a fundamental description to identify themes and formulate working hypotheses (Moleong, 2014). Spradley (1979) indicated that data analysis is conducted to determine the data, the relationships between the data, and the relationships among the data comprehensively. Data analysis is performed using the theoretical perspective of adaptation theory according to Bennett (2017) thereby leading to conclusions that fulfill the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Adaptation involves personal adjustment to the environment, which can entail modifying oneself to fit environmental conditions or adjusting the environment to align with personal preferences. Cultural, linguistic, religious, and environmental disparities necessitate mutual adaptation between international laborers and local women in marriages to sustain their households. In the Morosi District, numerous marriages occur between Chinese laborers and local residents, highlighting the need for mutual adaptation. Married couples are the focus of research, as Chinese laborers often interact with locals outside the company, albeit with restrictions on free roaming. Being a foreign laborer in Morosi doesn't guarantee seamless integration or effective communication; rather, it involves facing challenges

in adapting to the new environment, depending on the immigrant's ability to navigate unfamiliar cultures.

Husbands and wives often have diverse desires within a family, which may not necessarily align. Adaptation is a crucial factor in determining the well-being of a family. If both parties can adapt quickly, it can accelerate the development of long-term harmony and stability in the family relationship. Based on research, local women in Morosi who are marrying Chinese laborers first ensure the establishment of a long-term relationship. This will influence their responses and service to their husbands according to the agreements they have made. Below is an outline of marriage agreements, service to spouses, and acceptance within the families of marriages between Chinese laborers and local residents in Morosi.

Marriage Agreements Between Foreign Workers and Local Women

Establishing a relationship necessitates mutual agreements to uphold and achieve shared objectives, including in marriages involving Chinese individuals and local residents in Morosi. Marriage agreements encompass the understanding between couples on various marital issues, such as religious beliefs, family perspectives, finances, living arrangements, domestic roles, and more.

Marriage agreements between Chinese workers and local women in Morosi often entail planning their future daily lives together. For instance, Aurel, a 22-year-old informant who married a Chinese national employed at PT. OSS Morosi negotiated terms before their marriage. Her prospective husband consented to converting to Islam and undergoing circumcision in accordance with Aurel's community's traditions. Being a newcomer and in love with Aurel, he complied with her wishes. Additionally, they agreed before tying the knot that if his work contract ended, they would either settle in Indonesia, and China, or go their separate ways. Aurel's husband revealed their intention to relocate to China after his work contract expired, citing the administrative hurdles they encountered in Indonesia when attempting to change their citizenship status. This decision was influenced by their experiences dealing with marriage certificates and other paperwork. Such agreements significantly shape the responses and services rendered by both spouses to each other.

Another stipulation is that Chinese laborers wishing to marry local women in Morosi must be single or widowed. According to statements from seven local female informants in Morosi, they expressed unwillingness to marry Chinese laborers who were still married to someone else. As a result, in certain cases, these couples have proven their single status or have divorced their wives in China.

These agreements significantly impact the sustainability of marriages between Chinese laborers and local women in Morosi, with the aim of fostering harmonious families. Despite common perceptions of marrying Chinese laborers solely for financial gain, interviews conducted by the author with the seven local female informants revealed that their marriages were based on love. They underwent stages of acquaintance, courtship, and family integration. The refined demeanor of the Chinese laborers, characterized by responsibility, care, attentiveness, and love for their families, led the local women to highly value their husbands, irrespective of their diverse nationalities. Consequently, these factors influence the interactions and support provided between couples in marriages between Chinese laborers and local women in Morosi.



Figure 1. Wife assisting in preparing husband's work needs (Documented by Nening, 2023)

Services to Married Partners

It is a customary practice in society for a wife to attend to her husband's daily needs and manage household chores, including cooking, laundry, ironing, sweeping indoors and outdoors, and more. As illustrated in the image below, we can see the wife catering to her husband. Figure 1 shows the wife's service to her husband in preparing his necessities for work. The photo was taken at 10:45 PM local time, a period when most people are usually resting or asleep. However, due to the night shift demands of Xin Xian Cun's work, which

typically runs from 11:00 PM to 8:00 AM, the husband promptly wakes up and prepares for work. Sulasmin, the wife, also efficiently assists her husband in preparing his meals and other necessities.

In addition to husbands being served by their wives, these Chinese workers also reciprocate the same care to their wives. They do not insist that their wives must be skilled in cooking, especially considering the differences in food preferences. It's possible that the Indonesian wives might not be fully aware of their husband's culinary tastes. However, they are open to learning and adapting to their preferences. These caring Chinese workers often take on the role of a wife, such as cooking, despite their daily work schedules. Their work hours do not diminish the service they provide to their wives, especially if they have children. The wives are allowed to take care of themselves, rest, and tend to the children. Researchers observe reciprocal actions between husbands and wives in terms of service. Service based on responsibility without neglecting affection is evident in mixed marriages, such as between Chinese workers and local women in Morosi.



Figure 2. First Meeting with wife's family (Aurel documentation, 2022)

Acceptance in the Family of the Couple

Acceptance within the family is marked by care and affection within each couple's family, allowing for participation in daily activities. Acceptance in the family can also be interpreted as the families of each couple being able to accept someone who is not of their lineage. Therefore, it is important for the families of each couple to wholeheartedly accept foreigners into their families to create a harmonious family. In line with the statement above, the following image illustrates how a Chinese worker meets the extended family of his prospective wife for the first time.

Figure 2 indicates a gathering of the family members of one of the local female informants, Aurel, where her husband is meeting her extended family for the first time to seek their blessings. Aurel's husband, Cheng Junsen, is not a local but a foreigner from China. Despite this, the harmony of the extended family is evident as they gather, even though the husband is not part of their lineage and hails from another country. However, the steadfastness and magnanimity of Aurel's extended family in accepting Cheng Junsen or Muh Yusuf as a member of their family and Aurel's husband are apparent. The explanation above illustrates the efforts of the foreign worker, who transformed from Cheng Junsen to Muh Yusuf after converting to Islam, to fight for a local woman he met in Morosi. Through his efforts, he not only gained acceptance as Aurel's life partner but also became embraced as a member of Aurel's extended family.

Based on the author's observations regarding the background of adaptation in marriages between foreign workers and local residents who have married, it is directly proportional to what they have achieved. Mutual agreements, services, and personal acceptance of the wife and the partner's family mutually benefit and ensure that no one feels disadvantaged in the long run.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that there has been an adaptation process between couples consisting of foreign workers from China and local residents. This adaptation process is intended to maintain long-term relationships within these marriages. The factors underlying this adaptation process include marriage agreements, the provision of services to partners, and acceptance by the extended family. The agreement they made is that if the work contract ends in Morosi, this mixed-marriage couple will settle in China. This agreement significantly influences the services and acceptance by the local community's families towards these Chinese workers.

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