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Marketing images of marriage rituals: A cross-cultural analysis of wedding magazine advertising

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Introduction

In the age of globalization, the growing interconnections between local cultures are shaping new patterns in those cultures. This global interconnectedness has reached an unprecedented level as a result of the forces of modernity (Giddens, 1990), and advances in technology (Craig & Douglas, 2005). The complex, plural and uneven nature of cultural globalization has attracted scholarly attention from a wide range of disciplines.

The main debate surrounding this subject is the argument between homogenization and heterogenization (Featherstone & Lash, 1995; Pieterse, 1995). The former camp believes that the infiltration of other cultures into local cultures leads to standardization across countries, with deleterious effects on local cultures. (Athanasopoulos, 2004). However, critics argue that globalization is a reciprocal relationship between global and local elements (Appadurai, 1990). It produces cultural heterogeneity (Thompson & Arsel, 2004). For instance, McDonald’s food is not the same everywhere. The pork burger in Norway is different from a teriyaki burger in Japan (Larsson, 2001). Globalization enables new cultural products, although cultural imperialism is a real concern (Volkman, 2006). It is also noted that global-local interaction is also mediated by regional factors (Wilken & Sinclar, 2011). Globalization allows new opportunities for the spread of other cultures. Indian films and Latin TV shows are challenging the leadership of Hollywood in the global entertainment market. China now also takes a crucial role in the world economy (Moisés, 2009).

Marriage is a rite of passage and signifies a transition from childhood to adulthood (Bell, 1997). Most previous wedding studies examine how these ritual events contribute to the construction of marriage, family and gender relations (e.g. Edwards, 1989; Moore, 1988), but they do not examine the wedding as a cultural event (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2001). When couples declare their new personal identities to their families and friends publicly in a wedding that follows a prescribed procedure, such ritual elements are culturally and historically conditioned (Nelson, M., & Deshpande, S., 2003). So what is happening to these events in the age of globalization? How do magazines market ritual values and localize particular products for local markets?

Although there is a growing number of studies examining wedding rituals in terms of consumer behavior (e.g. Kates, 1998; Otnes, 1998), previous studies have mainly focused on the commercialization of wedding rituals in particular countries, such as the U.S. (Howard, 2006) and Taiwan (Adrian, 2003). The cultural dynamics of the process by which Western and local styles of wedding interact has rarely been explored (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2001). Unlike previous studies, this study examines and compares bridal magazines in Hong Kong, China and the U.S. This study serves three purposes: 1) to identify the similarities and differences between local and Western styles of weddings portrayed in bridal magazines; 2) to understand how the globalized practices of weddings are being repackaged and sold to local consumers in different societies; and 3) to examine the power dynamics in the consideration of Westernization, hybridization, commercialization and regionalization.

Literature Review

The westernization of wedding traditions

Wedding is an unchanging ritual where individuals believe they have to transmit and respond to local traditions in the past (Bell, 1997). However, commercialization and globalization have given rise to questions about this view (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). Howard (2006) suggests that the wedding industry yields
immense power over the American wedding tradition in the postwar era. Many customs, such as giving or exchanging rings, were “re-invented” as part of the wedding tradition, although their true origins are somewhat obscure. Consumers began to embrace the ideal of a “white” wedding, which was largely invented in the nineteenth century. Nelson and Deshpande (2003) mention that the white wedding, including an appropriate bride’s dress and shoes, became a popular tradition after the much publicized cross-cultural wedding of England’s Queen Victoria to her German cousin Albert. Together with the cake-cutting tradition1, cards2, the tossing of the bride’s bouquet, honeymoons,3 engagements, etc., the Western “white” wedding evolved as a unique style and is today heralded by newspapers, magazines, films, and websites in every part of the globe as the proper way to marry (Pleck, 2000; Nelson & Deshpande, 2003).

China and Hong Kong share similar wedding traditions, yet with different lifestyles, values and social practices. They were both greatly influenced by globalization. Although Hong Kong’s population was largely made up of migrants from the Pearl River Delta area in the early 1950s, individualism, upward social mobility and foreign culture played a remarkable role in shaping their consumption patterns (Cheung, 2006). China’s traditional rituals have also experienced a dramatic change since China’s growing wedding industry first advocated for the adoption of the Euro-American bride. More middle-class mainlanders began to want “modern” weddings. The traditional betrothal gifts and dowry exchanges lost popularity in the post-socialist era, while the contemporary wedding became dominant in the form of a globalized package service, including everything from the bride’s makeup and dress to arranging the bouquet to catering (Constable, 2006).

It is therefore predicted that wedding magazines in both Mainland China and Hong Kong promote more Western wedding products and white gowns than Chinese traditional wedding products and red wedding dresses. The hypotheses as follow:

H1: Western wedding products or services are promoted more often in Hong Kong and Mainland China wedding magazines than products or services reflecting other ethnic influences or hybridized styles.

H2: White gowns are more popular than gowns of other colors in Hong Kong and Mainland China wedding magazines.

H3: Western-style wedding gowns are used more often in Hong Kong and Mainland China wedding magazines than gowns of other ethnic or hybridized styles.

Comparing Hong Kong to Mainland China, which is more receptive to Western ideas concerning wedding rituals and products? No past studies have done such a comparison. As a highly consumerist and modern cosmopolitan city once under British colonial rule (from 1841 to 1997), Hong Kong is receptive to Western ideas in dealing with cultural exchanges (Ma, 2000, 2006). However, some scholars suggest that Hong Kong is better than Mainland China in preserving traditional culture. Mainland China has advocated abandoning traditional culture in various critical historical moments, including the Westernization movement and the new culture movement, while Hong Kong is a remote fishing village which is far less

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1 The wedding cake is largely regarded as an English development. It is a product of the nineteenth-century baking and confectionary industry. After the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660, the wedding cake was developed by French chefs (Jeaffreson, 1872)
2 The purpose of the wedding card has changed over time, beginning as an invitation to a banquet. As a fashionable English custom in the nineteenth century, the bride would distribute wedding cards to her friends and acquaintances, which announced details such as when the bride would be at home to receive visitors. (Jeaffreson, 1872)
3 The custom of taking a honeymoon began near the end of the eighteenth century and was associated with weddings only among the very wealthy in the early part of George III’s reign in Britain (1760–1820) (George, 2004).
influenced by these social movements and central government policy (Yu, 1994; Gan, 2014).

During the Maoist period, no space was left over for consumer options and Chinese wedding traditions (Davis, 2000; Constable, 2006). China adopted an open door policy since the late 1970s. Since then, the situation changed dramatically. Western wedding gowns are now treated as modern symbols, and Chinese wedding dresses along with Western fashion have become popular symbols for nostalgia of tradition (Constable, 2006). Western wedding products serve as powerful cultural imaginations to allow new couples to break away from traditional rituals and construct a sense of superiority over peers (Ma, 2006). The Chinese wedding industry models themselves after Western trends. Local wedding services join hands with those in Europe and the US. The ideals of western rituals and romance are promoted in the context of Chinese rituals in Mainland China magazines (Luo, 2012).

On the other hand, the colonial government did not have any policy to assimilate the Hong Kong people into Western culture or tradition. The colonial government adopted the doctrines of social non-interventionism, and respected the culture of society (Liu and Kuan, 1988). Hong Kong people were also found to be identified with traditional Chinese culture (Ma, 1999). It is now common for Hong Kong people to practice traditional Chinese wedding rituals, including the picking up ritual, tea ceremony and evening banquet. They wear a Chinese costume on the wedding day, although the wedding rituals in Hong Kong are reconstructed in light of foreign influences and social values (Cheung, 2006). Luk-Fong (2011) claimed that Hong Kong is a good case to illustrate the hybridization of cultures, as a result of interactions between Western ideas and Chinese culture.

It is therefore expected that the Chinese style and hybridized styles of wedding products would be promoted in both Hong Kong and China wedding magazines. However, it is difficult to predict whether Hong Kong magazines reflect a more Westernized set of products, as well as a lower prevalence of traditional Chinese gowns than China magazines, even though Hong Kong has long been under British colonialism. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated.

Q1: Do Hong Kong magazines promote more Westernized wedding products or services, as well as less traditional wedding products or services than China magazines?
Q2: Do Hong Kong magazines promote more white gowns, as well as less red gowns\(^4\) than China magazines?
Q3: Do Hong Kong magazines more often make use Western-style wedding gowns, and less often make use of gowns of Chinese styles than China magazines?

The previous study of advertisements indicates that Caucasians are models found in both Hong Kong and China magazines. More than half of female models are Caucasian in magazines in China (Hung, Li & Belk, 2007), while one third of magazine advertisements used Caucasian models in Hong Kong (Chan & Cheng, 2012). Caucasian models are associated with the imagination of cosmopolitan in Asian countries. The status in China is defined by the degree of consumption of “global”, or, more precisely, Western things (Zhou & Belk, 2013). Hong Kong people also associate Caucasian models with global fashion (Chan & Cheng, 2012), and believe that whiteness is a symbol of beauty (Fung, 2006). But Jankowiak, Gray, and Hattman (2008) argue that an increase in interaction with foreigners and exposure of foreign media may make Caucasian models more tangible as well as less mysterious and attractive to audiences. Hong Kong people, who have more interactions with Westerners in their

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\(^4\) Traditional Chinese wedding gowns are red in color (Nelson & Otnes, 2005) while red color symbolizes happiness in Asian countries (Zoi & Maria, 2014).
daily lives, may find Caucasian models less attractive than Chinese models. As such, it is expected that both Caucasian models are used frequently in China and Hong Kong magazines, but used more often in China magazines than Hong Kong magazines.

H4a: Caucasian models are frequently used in Hong Kong and China wedding magazines.

H4b: Caucasian models are used more often in China magazines than in Hong Kong wedding magazines.

Gender Roles & Commercialization

Past studies indicate that brides have greater participation in wedding planning than grooms. Wedding-related artifacts are regarded as “sacred” items by brides, but not by grooms. It may because individuals are socialized to believe that the wedding day is “the bride day” (Lowrey & Ottes, 1994). Traditionally, marriage is more important for women than men, because it is the only choice enabling women to move into the upper class (Greenblat & Cottle, 1980).

In the contemporary world, late marriage and the development of the culture of dating has resulted in many premarital sexual intimacy, and the importance of weddings as a rite of passage has shifted to that of a rite of distinction (Argyrou, 1996). As such, weddings are no longer perceived as a significant change in one’s life stage, and a consuming one-upmanship has filled the vacuum of meaning left by this shift. This is especially true for the bride, who is usually the center of attention at the wedding ceremony. The bride becomes a “visual production of celebrity” (Freeman, 2002, p. 31). She feels satisfied when she earns the appreciation of others after achieving the “correct” appearance of a bride (Berger, 1998). Bridal magazines devote plenty of content to promoting bridal products (Engstrom, 2011). This perfection only concerns the theme of a bride’s feminine appearance and nothing to do with her more personal traits. The bride becomes an actress who plays a starring role in the creation of her “fairy-tale” wedding. Her success depends on her ability to discipline her body and physical appearance (Boden, 2001) and to make the correct decisions concerning the presentation of the ceremony.

The ideal of the “superbride” has spread throughout the world in the sweeping tide of globalization and is now prevalent in Hong Kong society. According to ESDlife Wedding Survey (2012), the total wedding consumption among couples hit a record high of HK$16.5 billion (US$2.1 billion) last year, and couples spent HK$282,317 (US$ 36,194) each on average. Their main expenditures were wedding banquets, rings and jewelry, wedding gowns and makeup. Today, a couple in China spends on average about CNY$100,000 (US $16,000) on a wedding, a great deal of which goes to creating the appearance of a contemporary bride and the wedding ceremony (Zhang, 2013). In the past, Chinese women were marginalized under the patriarchal system, and their marriages were arranged by their parents. The bride was a pawn rather than an active player in the arrangements, and was perceived as property transferred between families in the feudal wedding ceremony (Zhang, 1991). But the romanticized images of the Western bride, along with imported Western wedding accouterments, have now altered this tradition. China’s wedding industry now also sells the idea that products can be used to create the “perfect bride” (Luo, 2012) while it marginalizes the man and frames the wedding as a female-centered endeavor (Engstrom, 2011).

The rise of consumer capitalism has also led to the perception of a wedding as a public declaration of a couple’s romantic relationship. The jewelry industry in the U.S. introduced diamond engagement rings as ritual goods, actively associating them with

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5 The median monthly household income in Hong Kong for 2013 is HK$ 22,400 (US$ 2,872) (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2013)

6 The median monthly household disposable income in China for 2013 is CNY$ 2,325 (US$ 377). (China Household Financial Survey, 2013)
romantic love and the idea of tradition (Howard, 2006) Lavish bridal photography satisfied couples as a “commodification of romance” (Lewis, 1998, p. 304). Similarly, Otnes and Pleck (2003) and Boden (2001) suggests that the mass media frames lavish weddings as the consumption of romance in the U.S. This has also becomes a phenomenon in Asian countries. For example, Adrian (2003) documented that Taiwanese wedding portraits usually portray the marrying couple as emotionally and physically intimate. It is thus predicted that these magazines sell the superbride look and romance in many countries, and thus the following hypotheses were formulated:

H5: The bride appears more frequently than the grooms in all examined wedding magazine advertising.

H6: The theme of romance and the superbride are promoted than other themes in all examined wedding magazines.

Globalization and Regionalization

Although Western rituals have greatly influenced local customs, scholars have argued that homogenization is not a sufficient describer of globalization because it ignores the multiple ways in which a culture can be indigenized. Both homogenization and heterogenization occur in the process of globalization (Hopper, 2007).

Wedding rituals involve the mix of local and Western styles that characterize the modern pattern of globalization (Befu, 1984). Constable (2006) claims that wedding photographs from mainland China were Western-style images that portrayed traditional Chinese standards of feminine beauty. Goldstein-Gidoni (2001) suggests that the contemporary wedding ceremony in Japan involves a combination of both Japanese and Western ritual elements, while the beauty types used in Taiwan women’s magazines are influenced by Japanese culture (Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005), and the weddings in Pakistan follow trends of both Western and Bollywood ideal fashion (Siddiqui, 2012).

As a leader of popular culture and fashion in Asian countries, Japan has influenced Hong Kong’s and China’s cultures (Fung, 2006; Chan, 2009). However, it is expected that Hong Kong is more ready to receive Japanese culture than Chinese culture due to the historical hostility between China and Japan and the restriction of import of Japanese TV programs (Chan, 2009).

Therefore, the language used in advertising was predicted to vary according to the extent to which the advertisements were localized. The English language conveys a cosmopolitan outlook in Asian countries (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2003), and can obfuscate meaning. It is predicted that both local and foreign languages will be used in Hong Kong and China, while Hong Kong is more receptive to English than China. This is because Hong Kong was under British colonial rule for 150 years and Hong Kong ranked higher than China in terms of English language skills (Zhao, 2013). Hong Kong is also expected to be more ready to use Japanese than China. The following hypotheses were formulated:

H7a: A mixture of Chinese and English is used in China and Hong Kong magazines.

H7b: English is used more often in Hong Kong magazines than China magazines.

H7c: Japanese is used more often in Hong Kong magazines than China magazines.

In order to appeal to local customers, beauty types, products and language featured in wedding magazine advertisements would be different across different countries (Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005; Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Mueller, 1987), and the process of hybridization involves hierarchical and power relations between local, regional and global (Chan, 2009), thus the following hypotheses were formulated:

H8: The beauty types used in bridal magazines differ among the U.S., China
and Hong Kong magazines.

H9: The products or services advertised in wedding magazines differ among the U.S., China and Hong Kong magazines.

H10: The percentage of beauty types used in each country varies according to the races of models featured in advertisements.

**Method**

**Advertising and Bridal Magazines**

The media continually transmits and influences cultural meaning (McCracken, 1993). While women's magazines teach women about the popular definition of gender roles, bridal magazines also condition customers to the popular imagination of wedding rituals and shape common perceptions about consumption to match this imagination (Boden, 2001). Bridal magazines have played a key role in incorporating consumerism into the wedding tradition throughout the twentieth century. They have done more than teach couples what to consume; they have helped to create and expand the bridal market and established the image of the ideal wedding for consumers (Howard, 2006). Bridal magazine is a microcosmic yet important case for illustrating the process of globalization (Luo, 2012; Michelle R, N. & Paek, Hye-Jin., 2007) and cross-cultural interaction (Tse, Belk & Zhou, 1989).

Bridal magazines largely depend on selling advertising for revenue (Engstrom, 2011). Advertising acts as a powerful tool to create necessities and foster new consumer behaviors (Cheung & Ma, 2005). Advertising “must be viewed as an agency of socialization…it transmitted cultural values of an advertiser’s own design” (Vinikas, 1992, p. 22).

In this study, content analysis is used to examine how idealized wedding rituals are advertised across countries. Content analysis is useful in examining the difference between media contents across countries (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000; Frith, Shaw, and Cheng, 2005). Two of the most popular bridal magazines in each region were chosen for this study. To understand how different cultures influence the ads appearing in bridal magazines, only those magazines that targeted local audiences, were published more than quarterly and were written in a local language were selected.

The bridal magazines selected from China were *Modern Bride* and *Cosmopolitan Bride*. *Modern Bride* is the most popular bridal magazine in China and *Cosmopolitan Bride* is the runner up. The circulation for *Modern Bride* was 500,000, while for *Cosmopolitan Bride* it was 398,000 (Information Power in Marketing, 2012). Two of the bestselling bridal magazines in the U.S. were *The Knot* and *Brides*. Each of these two magazines had circulations of 330,000, which was the highest circulation figures per year among their competitors (Echomedia, 2013). The bridal magazines selected from Hong Kong were *Wedding Message* and *All About Weddings*. They were two of the most popular bridal magazines in Hong Kong (Marketing Hong Kong, 2012; Lam, 2012). All of the selected magazines claimed that the average age of their readers ranged from 25 to 31 years.

Issues of *Modern Bride*, *Cosmopolitan Bride*, *Wedding Message*, and *The Knot* released for three specific randomly selected months (June 2012, November 2012, and January 2013) were used. For those magazines not published once a month, the closest corresponding issues were used (*All About Weddings*—May/June 2012, November/December 2012, and January/February 2013; *Brides*—Summer 2012, Winter 2012, and Spring 2013). As a result, six issues were chosen for each region.

The unit of analysis was restricted to the advertisements occupied at least one full page. Repeated advertisements were examined, as repetition is a common practice used to strengthen audience impressions. A total of 1,443 advertisements were collected for content analyses of product traditions, language(s) used, themes of advertisements, and product categories. In advertisement where more than one products or service were promoted, the largest or most dominant products or service
were coded for the content analyses of product tradition. The coding criteria for the gender of models required that at least one model was included in the advertisements, and the advertisements without containing a model were excluded. Among 1,443 advertisements, a total of 1,098 were selected for the content analyses of the gender of models. The coding criteria for beauty types and race of women required that at least one dominant female model be shown in the advertisements. A dominant female model was considered to be shown in advertisements when a female model’s face and some part of the body were visible. In an advertisement with more than one female model, the largest and most dominant female model was coded. A total of 749 and of 336 advertisements were used for content analyses of beauty types and race of women respectively. The coding criteria for images selected for analysis of gown color and style were that at least one dominant gown in the image. A total of 310 advertisements were chosen for content analyses of gown color and style.

**Content Categories**

The content analyses for traditions of product/service were classified into four types: Western, Chinese, hybridized (the components of new culture were mixed with the original culture so that it looks familiar) and cultural odorless (containing very few traces of their origins). This classification was based on works by Monger (2004), Howard (2006) and Adrian (2003). The content analyses for beauty types were based on the eight beauty types identified by Englis, Solomon, and Ashmore (1994). They presented a set of photographs of models to fashion magazines editors. The editors then categorized the photographs on the basis of similarity of looks. The results revealed eight distinct content categories as the most prevalent beauty types in United States. They are Classic, Feminine, Sensual, Exotic, Cute, Girl-Next-Door, Sex Kitten, and Trendy. Frith, Shaw, and Cheng (2005) modified these classifications and generated four types of beauty types: Classic, Sensual/Sex Kitten, Cute/Girl-Next-Door, and Trendy.

The classifications of race and of product categories were modeled after Frith, Shaw, and Cheng (2005). The racial types are Caucasian, Chinese, Malay or Indian, Pan-Asian, African-Americans, Mixed races, others. The product types includes alcoholic beverages, beauty & personal care, cleaning products, clothing, entertainment & information, food & nonalcoholic, household appliances, medicine, personal accessories, services, and miscellaneous. The classification of language was modeled after Michelle and Paek (2007). The advertising copy elements including headline, subhead, body copy and slogan were examined. The types of gown colors include white, red and others. Red is a dominant color in traditional bride’s costume (Chen, 2013), while white gown is identified as a crucial and typical element in western white wedding (Nelson and Deshpande, 2003). The styles of the gowns, themes of the advertisements, and gender of the models were also analyzed. (See Appendix A for operational definitions.)

**Coding**

Two independent Hong Kong coders, who were fluent in English and Chinese, coded a total of 1,443 advertisements. A preliminary subset of about 50 advertisements was selected for the coding training. The two coders met to compare and discuss their results until both coders were comfortable with the coding process (Holsti, 1969). About 10% of the advertisements (145 samples) were randomly selected and coded by the two coders simultaneously. Using Cohen’s (1960) kappa formula, reliabilities for the following items were determined: tradition of products ($k = .85$), gown style ($k = .98$), gown color ($k = .95$), race of female model ($k = .87$), beauty types ($k = .82$), product categories ($k = .81$), language of advertisements ($k = .85$), theme of advertisements ($k = .84$), and gender of models ($k = .10$).
As shown in Table 1, Western wedding practices were promoted most often in Hong Kong (33.2%) and China (38%) if cultural odorless products were excluded. Therefore, H1 is partially supported. To answer RQ1, Table 1 shows that China wedding publications promote more Western wedding practices and less Chinese wedding practices than Hong Kong, although the differences between them are small.

**Table 1. Tradition of Product**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tradition</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>48(38%)</td>
<td>161(33.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>13(2.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybridized</td>
<td>7(5%)</td>
<td>114(23.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odorless</td>
<td>72(56%)</td>
<td>197(40.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[X^2 = 24.5; \text{d.f.} = 3; p < .001; \Phi = .20\]

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, white gowns and western gowns were promoted frequently in advertisements in China and Hong Kong. Thus, H2 and H3 are supported. To answer RQ2 & RQ3, table 2 and 3 indicates that Hong Kong publications promote more white gowns and red gowns than China publications, although the differences between them are small. There are no significant differences between the gown styles shown in Hong Kong and China publications.

**Table 2. Gown Color**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>49(75%)</td>
<td>213(86.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>3(5%)</td>
<td>21(8.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>13(20%)</td>
<td>11(4.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[X^2 = 17.8; \text{d.f.} = 2; p < .001; \Phi = .24\]

**Table 3. Gown Style**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>61(94%)</td>
<td>222(90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12(5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybridized</td>
<td>4(6%)</td>
<td>11(5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[X^2 = 3.5; \text{d.f.} = 2; p = .17; \Phi = .11\]

As shown in Table 4, Caucasian models were used most often in China (48.9% of the time), while Chinese models were used most frequently in Hong Kong (67.9% of the time). Chinese models were used much more often in Hong Kong than in China (45.2% more often), while Caucasian models were used more often in China than Hong Kong ads. H4a and H4b are supported.

**Table 4. Race of female models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[\text{As shown in Table 4, Caucasian models were used most often in China (48.9% of the time), while Chinese models were used most frequently in Hong Kong (67.9% of the time). Chinese models were used much more often in Hong Kong than in China (45.2% more often), while Caucasian models were used more often in China than Hong Kong ads. H4a and H4b are supported.}\]
As shown in Table 5, female models appeared most frequently in bridal magazine advertisements in all three societies: in China, 76.7% of the models appearing in advertisements were female; in Hong Kong, 53.3% were female; and in the U.S., 69.4% were female. Far fewer male models appeared in these advertisements: only 1.9% of advertisements in China and in Hong Kong featured a man, and in the U.S., only 1.3% featured a man. These findings are statistically significant ($X^2 = 73.6; \text{d.f.} = 6; p < .001$). Thus, H5 is supported.

As shown in Table 6, the theme of the superbride was promoted more frequently across the three cultures than any other theme in wedding magazines, featuring in 65.6% of the advertisements in China, 45% in Hong Kong, and 77.5% in the U.S., while the theme of romance was in second place in China (23.4%) and in the U.S. (17.6%), and third place in Hong Kong (24.1%). Therefore H6 is partially supported.

### Table 5. Gender of Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female adult models only</td>
<td>79 (76.7%)</td>
<td>168 (53.5%)</td>
<td>538 (69.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male adult models only</td>
<td>2 (1.9%)</td>
<td>6 (1.9%)</td>
<td>9 (1.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both female adult models and male adult models</td>
<td>21 (20.4%)</td>
<td>137 (47.9%)</td>
<td>127 (18.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>7 (1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 73.6; \text{d.f.} = 6; p < .001; \Phi = .26$

A mixture of local and English is used in China (45.3%) and Hong Kong (34.6%)
magazine advertisements. H7a is supported. Interestingly, English (34.6%) and mixed languages of Japanese and English (4.1%) were used more often in Hong Kong than in China ($X^2 = 917.94; \text{d.f.} = 8; p < .001$). H7b and H7c are supported (see Table 9).

Table 7. Language of Advertisements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>China (52.3%)</th>
<th>Hong Kong (26.6%)</th>
<th>U.S (99.8%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local language</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(China &amp; HK: Chinese)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(U.S: English)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>2 (1.6%)</td>
<td>168 (34.6%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(China &amp; HK: English)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(U.S: other language)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed language</td>
<td>58 (45.3%)</td>
<td>168 (34.6%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(English &amp; Chinese)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed language</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20 (4.1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Japanese &amp; English)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed language</td>
<td>1 (0.8%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(English &amp; European language)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 917.94; \text{d.f.} = 8; p < .001; \Phi = .80$

Although the “classic beauty type” was used most frequently across the three regions, the “sensual/sex kitten beauty type”, largely associated with women’s sensuality, was used more frequently in the U.S. than in China and Hong Kong. The “cute/girl-next-door beauty type” was used more often in Hong Kong than in China or the U.S. The beauty types used across three areas differed significantly ($X^2 = 13.23; \text{d.f.} = 6; p < .05; \Phi = .13$). Therefore H8 is supported.

Table 8. Beauty Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beauty Types</th>
<th>China (75.8%)</th>
<th>Hong Kong (74.4%)</th>
<th>U.S (65.8%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classic</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensual /Sex Kitten</td>
<td>14 (15.4%)</td>
<td>26 (10.6%)</td>
<td>74 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cute/Girl Next Door</td>
<td>1 (1.1)</td>
<td>17 (6.9%)</td>
<td>23 (5.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trendy</td>
<td>7 (7.7%)</td>
<td>20 (8.1%)</td>
<td>44 (10.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 13.23; \text{d.f.} = 6; p < .05; \Phi = .13$

As shown in Table 9, the product categories used in wedding magazines differed ($X^2 = 586.84; \text{d.f.} = 14; p < .0012$) across the three cultures, with clothing featuring in the greatest percentage of advertisements in the U.S. In China, both clothing and beauty and personal care products had the largest and almost equally large percentages of advertisements, while in Hong Kong, wedding-related services were the most common focus of advertisements. H9 is thus supported.

Table 9. Product Categories
As shown in Table 10, the beauty types used for Caucasian models differed from those used for Chinese models ($X^2 = 12.63$; d.f. = 3; $p < .001$). The advertisements reflected a preference for Chinese female models in “classic beauty styles” (77.6%) to Caucasian female models in the same style (66.9%). However, the percentage of Caucasian female models who adopted a sensual appearance (17.1%) was far greater than that of Chinese models (8.1%), thus supporting H10.

Table 10. Beauty Types for Models of Different Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beauty Types</th>
<th>Chinese (N=210)</th>
<th>Caucasian (N=462)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classic</td>
<td>163 (77.6%)</td>
<td>329 (66.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensual/Sex kitten</td>
<td>17 (8.1%)</td>
<td>79 (17.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cute/Girl Next Door</td>
<td>14 (6.7%)</td>
<td>24 (5.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trendy</td>
<td>16 (7.6%)</td>
<td>50 (10.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 12.63$; d.f. = 3; $p < .001$; $\Phi = .14$

Discussion

This study illustrated that western culture exhibited a dominant cultural force in China and Hong Kong, and counter-flows were rarely seen. If we exclude the advertisements featuring cultural odorless products, Western wedding practices were promoted most frequently in both China (38%) and Hong Kong (33.2%), and the difference between these two regions are small. It is also noted that there are overrepresentation of white gowns in both cultures. The themes used in advertisements and the way they portray women indicate that certain aspects of values and beauty are promoted as universal in both Western and Eastern cultures. That is, the “classic beauty type” was used most frequently in all three societies, and weddings were no longer depicted as a strongly meaningful life event, but were promoted as a practice of one-upmanship and a public declaration of one’s romantic relationship. This fulfills women’s wedding fantasies of appearing beautiful in a romantic wedding ceremony.

On the other hand, culture does play a role in selling ritual goods. The variations of product categories, and beauty types were statistically significant across the three societies. First, hybridized wedding practices were promoted more often in Hong Kong than in China. Hong Kong was a colony under British rule until relatively recently, and...
more receptive to hybrid culture. This may also be a reflection of the robust
development of Hong Kong’s wedding industry, as using local models and hybrid
elements were important strategies to appeal to local mindsets (Kraidy, 2002).

Second, although both Hong Kong and China are collectivistic societies, the
products of household appliances were promoted far more often in China than in
Hong Kong. This may indicate that the perception of family relations is considered a
more important element of a wedding in China than in Hong Kong. Third, Hong
Kong advertisements tended to use both male and female models more frequently
than advertisements in China and the U.S., which may be explained by the fact that
the theme of romance and the “perfect wedding” were found to be used more
frequently in Hong Kong than China and the U.S. The presence of male models
helps to realize women’s fantasy of romance and a fairy-tale wedding.

Also, the tendency to portray women as “sensual or as sex kittens” is more
prevalent in the U.S. than in Hong Kong or China, which may be a reflection of the fact
that the people of Hong Kong and China hold more conservative, Confucian cultural
values than those of the U.S. Caucasian models were portrayed more often as sensual
beauties than Chinese models in all three countries. Presenting a bride as a sexual object
in a wedding is a more common practice in Western countries than in Asian countries,
and Caucasian models are more often portrayed as sex objects. This can be traced back
to the tradition in Western art that displays the female body, while traditional Chinese
art did not (Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005).

The product categories were statistically significant among the three societies.
Clothing advertisements (mainly for wedding gowns) were much more common in the
U.S. than in China or Hong Kong. This finding is consistent with the arguments that
U.S. audiences are particularly interested in wedding products related to the body
(Wood, 1999). Wedding advertisements in China more often tend to advertise beauty
products aimed at improving the physical appearance of a bride than those in the U.S.
and Hong Kong. Beauty products are featured in advertisement in China at about the
same rate as clothing, which suggests that in China, the beauty of a bride is important
both in term of her face and her body. Services and food products including
photography and video recording services, wedding dinners, and wedding planning
are featured in a large percentage of Hong Kong advertisements. This indicates that
wedding dinners and the ceremony itself still play an important role in Hong Kong
people’s perceptions of the fairy-tale weddings. Finally, the languages used in
advertisements were significantly different across the three societies. The use of
Japanese in advertisements in Hong Kong suggests that Hong Kong is influenced by
Japan due to the close physical proximity to the region. The use of Japanese as a
promotional strategy may also serve as a symbol of modernization and class. It
demonstrates the influence of regionalization.

Conclusions and Future Research

This study indicates that particular ideas about Western weddings, coupled with
the ideals of romance and the superbride, exert great influence over contemporary
Chinese society in spite of the difference in culture from society to society. This may
lead to negative consequences. As the wedding rituals become more standardized, it
benefits a limited number of large corporations, and at the same time marginalizes
others. The existed local, autonomous, distinct and robust culture may be destroyed.
Wedding rituals, as collective treasures of a community, constitutes one’s cultural
identity and connects one with the past. When the world become more globalized,
cultural identity is being more at risk.

Studying cultural flows and globalization is a complex issue, and it should be
noted that there are several limitations in this study. First, the promotion of the
Westernized “white” wedding and the ideal of the superbride involves many different
media, such as newspapers, magazines, films, and the Internet (Pleck, 2000; Nelson &
Deshpande, 2003). The bridal industry also plays a very significant role in this process.
Studying bridal magazines only reveals how weddings are portrayed in one particular media outlet across different cultures. Future research should focus on how the bridal industry repackages the idea of the wedding through different media outlets. Second, glocalization is a complex process in which a Western, commercialized ideal is both embraced and resisted by the audience. Future research should examine more closely the public’s perceptions of and ideas about weddings, and their interpretations of media contexts. Third, this study has not discussed the influences of the development of homosexual marriage. As homosexual marriage has been legalized in 15 states in U.S and many other European countries, and same-sex magazines have already been launched in New York, it may have some impacts on the images and presentation of advertisements of the traditional wedding magazines in U.S. The influence may not be the same as Hong Kong and China where homosexual marriage is still considered as a taboo.

To conclude, this paper is the first study of globalization that makes use of cross-cultural examination of bridal magazines. It indicates that Western culture is still hegemonic force across cultures while the process of globalization involves interactions between global, local and regional cultures, and subject to the expectation of gender roles and influences of commercialization. This interaction nonetheless allows variations in products and promotion methods that is deserving of attention and future study.
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Appendix

Tradition of Products

1. Chinese wedding products/service: Chinese wedding gowns, Chinese wedding dinner\textsuperscript{7}, marry-girl cake, Chinese wines\textsuperscript{8} and Chinese wedding bracelet\textsuperscript{9}.

2. Western wedding products/service: Western wedding gowns, wedding cards\textsuperscript{10}, Honeymoon\textsuperscript{11}, wedding cake\textsuperscript{12}, rings\textsuperscript{13}, western banquet\textsuperscript{14}, red wines and white wines\textsuperscript{15}, flowers\textsuperscript{16}.


4. Culturally odorless products\textsuperscript{17}: Bridal photography, photography service, video recording services\textsuperscript{18}, beauty and personal care products/service, electronic appliances, jewelry and accessories.

The Wedding Gowns’ colour

1. White
2. Red
3. Others

The Wedding Gowns’ style

1. Western
2. Chinese
3. Hybridized or unidentified

Gender of models

1. Female models only
2. Male models only
3. Both Female models and male models
4. Adults and children

The themes of advertisement

1. Romance: love and romance
2. Perfect Bride: beautiful, trendy

\textsuperscript{7} Food is generally considered a culture-specific item (Murcotte, 1986).

\textsuperscript{8} See footnote 4

\textsuperscript{9} “Marry girl cake”, Chinese wines and Chinese wedding bracelets are Chinese wedding gifts a man sends to his fiancée after the engagement (Xu, 2008).

\textsuperscript{10} See footnote 2

\textsuperscript{11} See footnote 3.

\textsuperscript{12} See footnote 1.

\textsuperscript{13} The giving and receiving of rings at the engagement or betrothal and at the wedding are an important part of Western wedding traditions. It is a tradition beginning in the Romans, and later became a well-established practice by the Middle Ages in Western countries (Monger, 2004).

\textsuperscript{14} See footnote 4.

\textsuperscript{15} See footnote 4.

\textsuperscript{16} Flowers play a big part in the decorations in Britain and in the U.S. This tradition can be traced back to ancient Rome (Monger, 2004).

\textsuperscript{17} Culturally odorless products are the products without positive association with widely circulated images of the lifestyle of cultural origin (Berry, Liscutin, Mackintosh, 2009; Moeran, 2004).

\textsuperscript{18} Photography and video recording began in the nineteenth century. It allows wedding photography, bridal photography and video recording in many countries before and during engagement celebrations and weddings (Adrian, 2003; Monger, 2004).
3. Perfect wedding: fairy wedding, unforgettable wedding.
4. Perfect Grooms
5. Warm family
6. Others

**Beauty Types for female model**
2. Sensual/Sex Kitten: Model with revealing gowns, and posed in sensual way.
4. Trendy: Model wears oversized clothes or gowns with a slight sense of chaos.

**Race of female model**
1. Caucasian
2. Chinese
3. Malay or Indian, Pan-Asian.

**Language (Headline, subhead, body copy and slogan)**
1. Local and official dialectics (China & HK: Chinese; U.S: English)
2. Foreign Language (China & HK: English; U.S: other language)
4. Mixed language (English & Japanese)
5. Mixed language (English & European Language)

**Product types**
1. Alcoholic beverages: Beer, wine, alcoholic drinks.
2. Beauty & personal care: cosmetics, hair care products, skin scream, etc.
3. Cleaning products
4. Clothing: All clothing designers, and manufacturers.
5. Entertainment & information
7. Household appliances: TVs, VCRs, stereo equipment, etc.
8. Medicine
9. Personal accessories: Watches, handbags, belts, shoes, accessories, scarves, etc.
10. Services: Insurance and other services.
11. Miscellaneous: Any other products that do not fit comfortably in the above.
Figure 1. Sample for Chinese wedding products: Chinese wedding bracelet

Figure 2. Sample for Chinese wedding products: marry-girl cake

Figure 3. Sample for Western wedding products: engagement ring

Figure 4. Sample for hybridized wedding products: hybridized wedding venue
Figure 5. Sample for odorless wedding products: personal care product

Figure 6. Sample for odorless wedding products: beauty care product

Figure 7. Sample for odorless wedding products: pre-wedding photography services
Figure 8. Sample for western style of wedding gowns

Figure 9. Sample for Chinese style of wedding gowns

Figure 10. Sample for hybridized style of wedding gowns: qipao following western fashion
Figure 11. Sample for romances as theme of advertisement

Figure 12. Sample for love as theme of advertisement

Figure 13. Sample for perfect bride as theme of advertisement
Figure 14. Sample for perfect wedding as theme of advertisement

Figure 15. Sample for perfect groom as theme of advertisement

Figure 16. Sample for warm family as theme of advertisement
Figure 17. Sample for classic look of female model

Figure 18. Sample for sensual female model

Figure 19. Sample for trendy look of female model

Figure 20. Sample for girl next door look of female model
Figure 21. Sample for Caucasian female model

Figure 22. Sample for Pan-Asian female model

Figure 23. Sample for Chinese female model