

ADAPTING TO A FOREIGNER IN THE  
FAMILY: TAIWANESE MOTHERS IN LAW  
AND TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGE

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## ABSTRACT

During the past two decades, a body of literature has emerged on marriage between Taiwanese men and South-East Asian women. Almost all the studies that explore aspects of the lived experience of female marriage migrants have mentioned the role of mothers-in-law, but these older women were rarely the central focus. This thesis examines the experiences of Taiwanese mothers-in-law in families with cross-border marriages, based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 20 women with South-East Asian daughters-in-law; it raises questions about how these women position themselves, both during and after their sons' marriages and how they manage their lives with someone who comes from a different cultural background. The study shows women who are actively engaged in varied strategies across different family life stages in order to meet their expectations of seeing their sons married and having a docile daughter-in-law. In their attempts to accomplish their sons' marriage, they not only become involved in the marriage decision but also provide all sorts of assistance to ensure that their sons will marry a traditional spouse. After marriage, the agency they develop to negotiate their relationship with these foreign women is influenced both by their previous experience as daughters-in-law and by gossip in the women's communities. However, these women do not necessarily hold absolute power in this family setting, despite the constraints placed on their foreign daughters-in-law and their disadvantaged position as immigrants. They still encounter difficulties in adapting to the dissimilar cultural values, behaviour and practices that are brought by their foreign daughters-in-law. Through studying these women's stories, I have expanded knowledge about families with foreign daughters-in-law and therefore added a new dimension to the study of cross-national marriage relationships.

Keywords: cross-border marriage; Taiwanese mothers-in-law; foreign spouses; women's community; active agency

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

This thesis is based on original research and I am the sole author. Some parts in Chapter 5, 6, and 7 have been reorganised as working papers which I have presented at different conferences.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

We all tell stories about our lives, both to ourselves and to others; and it is through such stories that we make sense of our selves, of the world, and of our relationship to others. Stories, or narratives, are a means by which people make sense of, understand, and live their lives (Lawler 2000: 12).

In 1994, ‘the life stories of one hundred *A-Ma*<sup>1</sup>’ essay competition was held by the Taipei Association for the Promotion of Women’s Rights (TAPWR). It collected stories among women from different ethnic groups who had been through the Japanese colonial period and KMT’s authoritarian period in Taiwan. These narratives were edited by Chiang Wen-Yu (1995) and published it under the title of ‘the stories of *A-Ma*’. Its purpose is not only to reveal the multiple forms of oppression experienced by women during the colonial period but also to present the image of toughness in women. A few years later, ‘the stories of *A-Bú*<sup>2</sup>’ was published in the same way. The protagonists of the stories in this book are women who became mothers between 1900 and 1970, who were once child brides, or woman who shared a husband with other women, or who worked in the factory or was a soldier<sup>3</sup>. Although it shows some of the major changes in patterns of gender inequality and how women began to bargain and become aware of their difficulties in everyday lived experience, the inequalities and oppression remain. From these women’s life experiences, this book has provided readers with an opportunity to understand how marriage, patrilineal structures, the kinship system, religion, and social and cultural practice have constructed the subordination of women and to question how these experiences enable women to make changes in their lives in contemporary society.

What did I see in these stories that connected them to my position as a woman who lives in contemporary Taiwan, experiencing a better economic environment and more autonomy to control my life than did my mother’s generation

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<sup>1</sup> *A-Ma* is a Taiwanese term which refers to grandmothers (see Glossary).

<sup>2</sup> The term *A-Bú* means mother in Taiwanese. ‘The stories of *A-Bú*’ was edited by Chiang Wen-Yu in 2004

<sup>3</sup> According to the editor, Chiang Wen-Yu, the stories were collected from three different types of writing, which are autobiography, biography and oral history.

in the 1950s? How did I know about women's subordination in the patrilocal family as a daughter-in-law myself? Linking my personal experiences to my concern about these queries, brought me to question how much I am influenced by traditional gendered ideology. How did I learn from my mother's experience as a daughter-in-law? Does it have any effect on my relationship with my parents-in-law?

I was born into a three-generation household and lived with my paternal grandparents as well as my parents. My parents' marriage was arranged by my grandparents. According to my mother, my paternal grandparents appreciated her work performance in my uncle's garment factory and thought that their youngest son marrying her would bring them a good and diligent daughter-in-law. My maternal grandparents on the other hand persuaded my mother to ignore my father's disability and think that his professional skill and wealthy family would bring her a secure future. But my mother and her parents did not realise that the differences in their economic status and social background would lead to her marital life becoming surrounded by suspicion and conflicts. Since she had married in, my paternal grandmother was afraid that my mother would escape from my deaf father because his disability made communication between them very difficult. She was also afraid that my mother would appropriate money in order to give it to her natal family. Therefore, she took control by limiting my mother's mobility away from the household during the first few years after my parents' marriage. She asked my father's employee to do the daily grocery shopping, while my mother was in charge of all the housework in the family.

During those first few years after her arrival, my mother's daily routine involved doing all the housework and preparing separate meals for my grandparents and my father's employees as well as serving drinks and snacks for many business clients, guests and other family members who came to our home. She also cared for my father's brother's two children as well as her own children. She worshipped the ancestors and cleaned the large room that was our shrine every day. But all this labour was not the worst circumstance because my grandmother suspected that my mother was appropriating money to send to her natal family, and she involved her daughters in gossip about this. Although my mother never had financial worries, as her parents had expected, the traditional gender hierarchy and economic dependency

brought her more conflict and contradictions. My father's brother's wife, they moved away as soon as my parents married, using the excuse that they had to concentrate on my uncle's business. According to my grandmother, my aunt was a very capable woman, and she was always comparing my mother to her. Every time they came to visit, a basket of fruit and a few concerned words were valued more by my grandmother than all my mother's hard work. On the other hand, the endless housework and caring work done by my mother was seen as an obligation. Under such circumstances, my mother often ran away from home<sup>4</sup>. When I was at primary school she would go away quite often after a fight with my paternal grandmother, but she always returned home after a few days. I could not understand her feelings, but she always said: 'When I think about the four of you [her children] I tell myself that I should hang in there'.

When she could no longer cope with the pressure from my grandmother and gossiping relatives, my mother would leave home for a few days, but she always dragged her tired body back again and would pretend that nothing had happened. Then for a while my grandmother would treat her a bit better, but this did not stop the other women from gossiping and criticizing. They would caution my grandmother to keep an eye on her and at the same time they would put pressure on my mother to think about the unity of the family. They told her to pay more attention to my father because he was the breadwinner. Therefore, after a while the cycle of compliance and resistance would begin again. When I was a bit older, in junior high school, I told my mother: 'I'm grown up now. I can help you to defend yourself in this conflict'. But she always told me that children should observe the boundaries and that I should not argue with my elders, otherwise people would blame her and claim that she had not done her best to raise her children to be polite offspring. In such a constrained family life, my mother struggled to cope with my father; because of his disability he could not understand or feel the difficult situation my mother was in. He supported my mother against his mother, but the conflict went on for so long that after a while he chose to ignore it. My grandfather was more supportive and always thanked my mother for the work she did and told her, 'You are a good daughter-in-law'. But he was unable to change my grandmother's pattern of behaviour. My maternal

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<sup>4</sup> She has never told us where she went but she did not return to her natal family which can imply the loss of face.

grandparents always told my mother to tolerate the situation and obey her parents-in-law. Since then I have realized that to follow the traditional hierarchy and to observe family values and cultural norms was a very heavy burden for women.

Growing up in these family circumstances, I have witnessed how in-law conflict is embedded within the kinship structure and family systems, and how women have employed strategies to resolve the conflict and negotiate their position and status within the family. In the past, women like my grandmother, benefitting from their own economic privilege and generational hierarchy as a mother-in-law, have received a great degree of power to control the younger generation in the household. And to describe their dominant position, one sociologist, Stacey (1983: 54), depicts 'the mother-in-law was the [sic] patriarch's female deputy in the Chinese family'. A senior woman took control in the private sphere of her husband's family and supervised the labour and services of her daughter-in-law, which was the pattern observed in my family. After my grandmother had passed away, my mother finally ended her nearly 23 years' tumultuous life with her mother-in-law. Although her female in-laws were interested in continuing their gossip game, my mother was rather brave to argue with them. She often told me that if she had the chance to go back to the past, she would definitely fight back to stop the suspicions my grandmother had about her. She wanted me and my sisters to learn from her experience and know that we should not be threatened by the authority of the mother-in-law so that we would not suffer from the same oppression she had as a daughter-in-law. At the time, I was imagining that my 'modern' position as an educated and independent individual enable me to draw clear boundaries between myself and my in-laws to avoid conflicts. However, when it came to reality, things are different from what I thought initially.

My own marriage was brought forward unexpectedly when my father was given a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. I was struggling to fulfil my daughterly obligation whereby my father had expected to see my marriage. After discussions with my partner and both our parents, we had a simple civil marriage a week before my father passed away. Although I did not live with my parents-in-law after my marriage, I was already struggling to play the role of perfect daughter-in-law. I realised that having a higher education and the experience of living in a modern

society does not enable me to separate myself from patriarchal expectations. For example, my mother-in-law aggressively nourished my health. She took me to a Chinese medical practitioner and bought many health supplements in the hope that I would become pregnant before I returned to my studies. She took me to a gathering of her friends who suggested implicitly that I should learn from and listen to (obey) my mother-in-law to become a good daughter-in-law. The gathering events reminded me of a scenario described in Wolf's (1972: 42-52) anthropological research, which reveals that the young brides join the women's community in the village, where they can learn the 'intricacies of village etiquette', under the sponsorship of their mothers-in-law. Furthermore, she tried to use me as a bridge to communicate with her son, my husband, because when she tries to tell him things he ought to do he ignores her. I understand that the expectation of my mother-in-law is to mould our nascent family into a form that she can manage and control. I used many excuses about having to arrange my return to England to passively escape from her interference but I know that I will still have to deal with my emotion and a feeling of privacy in this familial setting when I finish my studies in England and return to Taiwan<sup>5</sup>.

I present my mother's experiences and my own as daughters-in-law in different generations not to suggest that women always encounter oppressive behaviour from other women in the household but to point out the importance of understanding the differences and inequalities that exist between women, and how women identify their own value and fulfil their role within the patriarchal system in changing family forms and relationships. While they seek to establish an ideal trajectory under their own social and family status, what are the internal and external factors that influence their attitudes and behaviour towards family relationships? How do their experiences differ from one another? In fact, a number of anthropologists and sociologists have closely examined the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in Taiwan from different periods and have provided important insights into women's power struggles and potential conflicts as well as how women survived and bargained within patriarchal society. These include

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<sup>5</sup> When I read Sandel's (2004) article about how Taiwanese mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law justify their conflicts in the household. I found this kind of passive reaction I had is quite a common strategy that develop among daughters-in-law. In his study, some daughters-in-law chose to express their displeasure toward their mothers-in-law in an indirect way, like refusing to address their in-laws with the proper kinship terms or refusing co-residence with their mothers-in-law.

Wolf (1972), who studied rural women in Taipei County during the 1960s, and used the idea of the ‘uterine family’ to explain how women increased their status within their husband’s family by bearing sons and later controlling their daughters-in-law after the sons’ marriage. Gallin (1984; 1994) describes the typical image of daughters-in-law in Chinese rural families as compliant and subordinate. Although these young women were situated in the lower status positions of generational and gender hierarchies, according to Lin Chin-Ju (2005: 206), ‘they were subject to different degrees of domination according to the life cycle of patriarchal families, the private funds they had access to, and their own life cycle’. Sandel (2004) analyses the narrative accounts of both Taiwanese mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in childrearing matters. He notes that the hierarchical and elder-oriented functioning of the system still remains in present-day society but that the agency of daughters-in-law in challenging the discipline of mothers-in-law and their ability to negotiate conflict situations between them has also operated. These studies point out a complex and often uncomfortable relationship between generations of women in the Chinese family.

However, when I studied the literature in this area about mothers-in-law in the cross border marriage<sup>6</sup>, I found that mothers-in-law were not the main focus in this family form, rather they often appeared to be, in some studies in the form of dissertations, the strict and aggressive, interfering mothers-in-law who made the lives of foreign daughters-in-law miserable. For example, Cheng Ya-Wen (2000) and Siao Jhao-Juan (2000) note that foreign daughters-in-law felt hurt by the gossip their mothers-in-law contributed to the community in the village, accusing them of laziness in domestic work and profligacy in their spending. Shen Hsing-Ju (2003) finds that Vietnamese daughters-in-law try to resist the control of their husbands’ families, in particular their mothers-in-law, by manipulating intimate relationships, resorting to participating in literacy classes or going back to Vietnam. There is also a study investigating the interactions between Vietnamese daughters-in-law and

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<sup>6</sup> The cross-border marriage is understood to be a marriage arrangement between Taiwan and South-East Asia in this study, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. However, much research in this subject area used ‘cross-national’ and ‘transnational marriage’ to define this marriage form (Wang Yi-Han 2008). In this thesis, I used ‘cross-border marriage’ the most, however, the terms ‘cross-national marriage’ and ‘transnational marriage’ were used as interchangeable. In addition, I would like to point out that this term has also been applied by scholars to describe a rising phenomenon in Hong Kong and refers to marriages between persons in Hong Kong and the Mainland (see for example Ma Zhongdong, Lin Ge and Zhang Frank (2010)).

Taiwanese mothers-in-law, in which Wang Pei-Jin (2007) claims that the in-law relationship tended towards harmonization, although conflict situations arise because of the language barrier, different lifestyles and so on. Apparently, since such a marriage form has been recognised as ‘commodified transnational marriage’<sup>7</sup>, it is not difficult to see how scholars considered mothers-in-law in the host country, who have relatively more economic advantages and power than their foreign daughters-in-law, as dominant exploiters. These studies either analyse the factors of marriage migrants’ difficult settlement in Taiwan and how they become actively involved in changing their inferior position in both social and familial circumstances or they use narrative accounts from both mothers-in-law and foreign daughters-in-law, in the hope of explaining the conflict situation between them more fully. Both perspectives fail to see that mothers-in-law are embedded in a complex historical context, but are also active agents with their own investment in perpetuating patriarchal culture.

This thesis focuses more specifically on the experiences and everyday practices of mothers-in-law in the context of cross-border marriage. Drawing on interviews with 20 Taiwanese mothers-in-law who have foreign daughters-in-law from Vietnam, Indonesia, and Cambodia, I investigate the ways in which these women make sense of their lives in relation to their past experience as a daughter-in-law and to their sons’ marriages. I also consider what sort of expectations they have for their foreign daughters-in-law and how these influence the ways in which these older women interact with their foreign daughters-in-law. I argue that simply viewing the cultural and linguistic differences in cross-border marriages as the main obstacle that jeopardizes the harmony and peaceful relationship between mothers-in-law, son/husband and daughters-in-law is indeed to ignore the complex impact of wider social processes. I also question the idea that patriarchal culture has strengthened and perpetuated the power of mothers-in-law and how it is lived through the experience of these older women. Moreover, I examine the underlying mechanisms that might have contributed to either the success or failure of mothers-in-law’s patriarchal practices in the patriarchal family.

Some studies on women’s in-law relationships have categorised their

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<sup>7</sup> This term was coined by Hsia Hsiao-Chuan (2000: 48).

participants into certain forms like those who are in control, who are submissive and who are caught in the middle. But to insist on only these formulations is to flatten women's experience and to overlook the many other social circumstances that formed them. Women's roles and identities are shaped in an ongoing way through different stages of the life course and their interactions with other people in various social environments. By bringing out the mothers-in-law's own voices, I expect to provide alternative ways of seeing and knowing their everyday life practices and experiences. I organize my analytical chapters into parts accordingly. Chapter 2 provides the background for my analysis of Taiwanese mothers-in-law in the context of cross-border marriage. I sketch the historical background of women in both social and familial setting in Taiwan and further reveal the impact of industrialization on women's role and status. I am linking these discussions to address the mother-in-law and their experience in their sons' cross-border marriage. In Chapter 3 I present the methodological approach and the research process, and how I analysis my data.

Chapter 4 describes the women's biographical background and offers a brief introduction to the reasons why their sons engaged in cross-border marriage. This background knowledge helps to define their status in the family and the diversity of women's experience when they became involved in their sons' marriages. In Chapter 5, I look specifically at the cultural and social factors that contribute the mothers' motivation for involvement in their sons' marriage decisions and marriage process. This chapter examines the responsibility mothers felt to find 'a good wife' for their sons and to guarantee that the marriage is completed successfully. I show how mothers developed various strategies in order to fulfill their responsibility, by persuading their sons to get married, matchmaking, helping their sons to select a wife and finally providing the cost of the marriage.

Chapter 6 focuses on the establishment of family relationships and the family life of the women after their sons married foreign wives. I begin by showing the importance of naming practices in which women choose the term by which to address and to refer to their foreign daughters-in-law. I also provide information concerning these women's own experiences as daughters-in-law in the traditional family so that I can examine how traditional values and expectations govern their attitude towards the performance of their foreign daughters-in-law and limit the ways

in which they view their daughters-in-law. The influence of gossip in women's neighborhood groups is also taken up in this chapter. I further explore how women sustain their ideal patriarchal function by employing various strategies at different stages of their daughters-in-law's marital life.

Chapter 7 continues with a discussion of women's everyday life practice, in which the experiences can be used to understand in more depth why they engage various strategies to handle the relationships with their sons and foreign daughters-in-law. Attention is given to women's agency and their negotiation and bargaining in the household. The concluding chapter (Chapter 8) draws together the main themes of women's experience within the families of cross-border marriage. I discussed how the parental control still take place in children's marriage practice and mothers-in-law's agency to negotiate their position and expectation of family practices with their foreign daughters-in-law.

## CHAPTER 2

### EXPLORING THE LINKS: FAMILY, MOTHERS-IN-LAW AND CROSS-NATIONAL MARRIAGE

In order to understand the contemporary mothers-in-law of foreign wives in Taiwan, it is necessary to look at their experience within their families and its history in relation to the phenomenon of cross-border marriage. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is first to explore how women in the past century are portrayed in a large part of the anthropological literature and what is currently known about their lives in a changing society. I believe that it is essential to appreciate the importance of changing family structures, practices, and kinship relations in order to understand how women adapt to this transformation and negotiate their roles and responsibilities within the patrilineal family. I then move on to introduce the phenomenon of cross-border marriage, and to consider the ways in which this marriage form has become intertwined with complex socio-economic, political and cultural patterns that influence women in the patriarchal family, and how these issues can be understood as a factor in shaping their transition into their role as mothers-in-law of foreign daughters-in-law.

I will provide an overview of the research findings in this subject area; although most studies were mainly investigating the position of marriage migrants, I draw much useful evidence from the narrations of foreign daughters-in-law that have been collected by other scholars in order to understand the expectations of, and requirements imposed upon, the daughters-in-law by mothers-in-law.

#### **Social change and women's position in Taiwan**

The economic structure of Taiwan was mainly agricultural when the Kuomintang (KMT) retreated to the island and established the ruling party in 1949<sup>8</sup>. However, since the 1960s, a large-scale social and economic transformation has occurred in various processes such as industrialisation, urbanisation and educational expansion

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<sup>8</sup> In 1949, the KMT lost the civil war in Mainland China and retreated to Taiwan. The KMT then completely dominated the legal and social systems in Taiwan. It was not until the mid-1980s, when the opposition parties began to challenge and intervene in the establishment of the political and social systems, that the KMT lost its absolute political power. Since then the political environment has undergone a transition to a more democratic political regime (see also Chen Fen-Ling 2000).

(Chen Yu-Hun and Yi Chin-Chun 2005). The latter policies in particular have made changes to Taiwan's economic structure, with prosperity in agriculture providing a base for industrialisation. The economy in Taiwan therefore developed rapidly during this period; for example, the per capita gross national product of Taiwan (GNP) rose from US \$162 in 1961 to US \$2,715 in 1981 and to US \$8,339 in 1990 (National Statistics 2008).

This phenomenon of economic growth has also helped to reinforce the educational system. The government increased the budget to promote education in 1968, providing nine years of compulsory education. This offered equal educational opportunities to both genders. However, before the expansion of the educational system, it seems that a higher educational background was not considered to be a necessary factor in gaining a job. For example, during the period 1961-1973, the development of the textile and clothing industries became the most important business contributing to economic growth in Taiwan (Hermalin et al. 1994). Vast numbers of labouring opportunities opened up to the working population. Since women met the requirement of low-cost employees and enabled high profits to be made during the labour-intensive period of industrial development, most employers tended to hire women rather than men (Kung 1983)<sup>9</sup>. According to statistical data, the percentage of total participation by women in the labour market rose from 36% of total labour market participation to 42% between 1961 and 1973 (Hermalin et al. 1994). Comparing 1956 and 2000 data, an overall trend towards a shift in job opportunities from the agricultural sector to industry and the service industry for women can also be observed (Chien Wen-Yin 2004)<sup>10</sup>. However, since the 1980s, with increasing requirements for educational and professional specialisation in the workforce, women with college degrees increased significantly, from 3.04% in 1980 to 19.94% in 2009 (DGBAS 2010).

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<sup>9</sup> The reasons why girls decide to join such a low-wage labour force are various according to Kung (1983: 51). First, for some families, the tuition fee of primary school is too high to afford; secondly, some families consider it useless to educate daughters rather than sons. Third, parents tend to make decisions for their daughters as they think girls at the teenage stage cannot make intelligent decisions. Fourth, the economic needs of the family may make it necessary for daughters to work and the last point is that sibling order may determine whether a daughter goes to work or remains in school.

<sup>10</sup> While the rate of participation in agriculture was decreasing from 56% in 1956 to 19.4% in 1990, that of industry and the service industry was increasing to 36.9% and 43.8% respectively in 1990 (Chien Wen-Yin 2004).

Although the pattern of women's employment has changed over the decades, many scholars point out that family and childcare responsibilities are the major obstacles to their participation in the labour market (Chien Wen-Yin 2004; Li Ta-Cheng and Yang Ching-Li 2004). For example, in 2003, the percentage of married women participating in the labour market was 54.72. They left their jobs due to various reasons, such as marriage (35.6% of total leave) and maternity leave (24%). And the data suggests that 48% of married women return to employment within an average period of six years and three months (DGBAS 2003), although there has been an increase in the number of married women re-entering the labour force after childbirth, having spent a shorter time at home than in the past (Chien Wen-Yin 2004). This is partly due to the increase in women's human capital, which enables highly educated women to work and consider it as a natural move. Other reasons for this trend are economic burdens and weakened social norms (Chien Wen-Yin 2004). However, other scholars have also observed that the tendency for women to stay at home and become housewives, namely the phenomenon of housewifisation, is becoming an overarching concern in contemporary Asian societies (Ochiai 2008; Ochiai et al. 2008).

Ochiai (2008) argues that women's decision to become housewives is not simply the influence of traditional gender ideology but that the insufficiency of public childcare services is also a major cause. In Taiwan, various childcare facilities and individual agents like relatives, grandparents, private nannies and foreign migrant workers were used to support working mothers with childcare, for which there is evidence in official statistical data from 2006. This shows that 65.79% of married women were taking care of their own children, especially when the children were young, between the ages of 0-3. However, 24.99% of working mothers would prefer their parents to look after their children, while 7.48% employ nannies<sup>11</sup> (DGBAS 2003; 2006). The familial and social structures involved in childcare arrangements are very important to these married women, because it offers them the opportunity to participate in the labour market and to support the family financially.

Since these women have more chance to participate in the job market and

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<sup>11</sup> This is often class-specific, as Lan Pei-Chia (2006) points out in her study, which found that wealthier women tended to employ foreign domestic workers to look after their children.

experience greater individual autonomy and economic independence, does this mean that they stand a better chance of escaping their familial responsibilities, the constraints of patriarchy and the control of mothers-in-law, as discussed by many scholars (Kung Hsiang-Ming 2001; Gallin 1994)? This needs a more complete discussion on the historical and cultural background of women in Taiwanese families, in order to explore the effects of the various social and cultural dynamics: family structure, kinship, ritual performance, gender ideology and the women's position in the family. I am also particularly interested in finding out what the role of a mother-in-law is in this shifting society and what other structural factors, which are different from previous generations, have influenced their role and family relationships. How do mothers-in-law perceive these changes and what further actions do they undertake to make sense of their lives in this contemporary society?

### **Women and the changing family**

Historically, in Chinese societies, age and gender ideology legitimated patriarchy and the traditional hierarchy (Lang 1968; Stacey 1983). Women, in particular, experienced oppression in various configurations and degrees throughout their lives. For example, women as daughters were generally viewed by their parents as inferior to sons, as they would eventually belong to other families when married (Wolf 1972). They were trained to be obedient and compliant from an early age and to first contribute their labour to both agricultural and domestic chores (while their brothers experienced much greater freedom) before later preparing for their move to another family upon marriage (Gallin 1984). And it is also well documented that girls from poor families were given out as child brides (*sim-pua*)<sup>12</sup> at an early age without having the right to refuse their parents' decision (Chiang Wen-Yu 1995; Wolf 1972). When they married, their status changed from daughters to daughters-in-law, who were under the supervision of their mothers-in-law. Much research has addressed the conflict situations and tense relationships among women of different generations. For instance, the daughter-in-law has often been portrayed as a stranger who entered her husband's household and was considered as a competitor by her mother-in-law to

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<sup>12</sup> There are basically various forms of the child-bridal system but, in the common situation, the child bride is handed over to the husband's family and she is regarded as a daughter until they put her into the marriage (usually marrying her to her non-blood brother in the adopted family) However, my grandmother was once a child bride but she did not marry her non-blood brother, instead her marriage was the result of her adopted parents' matchmaking.

deprive her of her son's loyalty and support (Gallin 1992). Therefore, the older woman exerted a certain pressure on her son to ensure her daughter-in-law's submission, including the use of actual physical force (Gallin 1992). Since divorce was discouraged and considered dishonourable in traditional society, Wolf (1975) found that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rate of suicide was high among young and newly married women.

However, these women's experiences of subordination cannot be generalised into a prototypical model which assumes that every woman has a similar way of living, even though they might, to a great extent, suffer from the same constraining patriarchal system. They were not always helpless and timid. For example, in terms of family form, Chuang Ying-Chang (1986) shows that how much influence women have depends on the structure of the family. That is, when women are situated in a nuclear or meal-rotation family<sup>13</sup>, they have more power to participate in decision-making processes and this is not necessarily related to their educational attainment or participation in the labour market. And apart from the family form, Wolf (1972) describes how women influence their husbands at large through the women's community.

When a man behaves in a way that they consider wrong, they talk about him not only among themselves, but to their sons and husbands. No one 'tells him how to mind his own business,' but it becomes abundantly clear that he is losing face and by continuing in this manner may bring shame to the family of his ancestors and descendants (Wolf 1972: 40).

In their attempts to understand the lives of women in the previous generation, sociologists and anthropologists faced challenges that were brought about by the transformation of Taiwanese society. The issues surrounding women and family became rather more complex due to the enhancement of women's status and the

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<sup>13</sup> The form of the meal-rotation family is that children, in particular married sons, share the responsibilities; the parents are taken to the home of one married son for a week or a month before they move to another son's household. They take turns in supporting and serving their elderly parents. According to Jun Jing (2004), the preconditions of this family form are, first, that the parents should have at least two married sons, second, that they both live nearby, and third that this happens when a family is divided.

varied forms of family life that developed in the changing society<sup>14</sup>. Numerous studies have argued that industrialisation does not entirely thwart and weaken kinship ties and parental authority but that married daughters have a tendency to provide financial support and have more contact with matrilineal kin than previously (Lee et al. 1994; Tsay Tsae-Show 1992; Tsui Elaine Yi-Lan 1987). Others examine the influence of women's labour force participation on their power in familial decision-making processes and the division of domestic work, and these studies show that the traditional gender ideology still has a strong effect on women (Lu Yu-Hsia 1983; Gallin 1984). However, the allocation of domestic work between genders and women's attitudes towards traditional values have both changed significantly during the 1990s (Lu Yu-Hsia and Yi Chin-Chun 2005).

These discussions indicate that women's position has gradually improved in contemporary society, but this does not necessarily apply to older women. As Hu Yow-Hwey (1995) emphasises, a high elderly suicide rate is found, in particular among women. This phenomenon is partly reflected in their vulnerable position and their dependence on their children – their sons and daughters-in-law. How do older women perceive this loss of status? Especially, how is their understanding of themselves as mothers-in-law affected by this shifting position? And in what ways do they negotiate their status in the family where they may have a non-traditional daughter-in-law who no longer accepts her subordination? Certainly, there is no question that the role of mother-in-law has always been portrayed as authoritarian and dominant. Even now, many soap operas in East Asia still depict a strict, interfering and aggressive type of mother-in-law, who is spiteful and ill-treats her daughters-in-law (Lin Shih-Yi 2006). However, this representation does not necessarily reflect the actuality. As many scholars point out, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is influenced by varied factors; the distribution of family resources, family structure, role identity, knowledge about domestic or ritual practice, domestic labour arrangements or childcare activities, different life courses and the level of intimacy with husband/son (Hu Yow-Hwey and Chou Ya-Jung 1996a; Kung Hsiang-Ming 1999a, 2001; Li Tsui-Shan 2002; Lin Chin-Ju 2005; Sandel

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<sup>14</sup> There is a book collection about this transformation. Thornton and Lin (1994) provide a comprehensive view of changing family relations in term of Taiwanese society; they explore the patterns and causes of change, examine education, work, marriage, living arrangements, filial piety and interactions among extended kin.

2004).

For example, in terms of the division of domestic labour, traditional Chinese mothers-in-law not only supervised the work and taught their daughters-in-law to be familiar with family rules and routines, but also acted as caregivers for children when their daughters-in-law spent most of their time working in the labour market (Chen 2004; Gallin 1986, 1994). Moreover, mothers-in-law also needed to undertake work during their daughters-in-law's postpartum rest period. This was called 'doing the month'. Most mothers-in-law behaved appropriately by washing clothes and preparing meals in order to help their daughters-in-law to have more rest and recover quickly after childbirth<sup>15</sup> (Heh Shu-Shya 2004; Sandel 2004).

Nowadays, this intergenerational division of domestic labour between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law has shifted into a rather different arrangement. For instance, Lin Chin-Ju (2005) compares the actual practice and identity among middle-class working women of different generations on the issue of the division of domestic labour and points out that women's resistance to patrilineal kinship norms in the post-industrial period is silent but effective. They choose not to stay in the paternal household but to establish their own home; they seek emotional and substantial support from their natal homes (including childcare and domestic labour) rather than being caught in the trap of patrilineal practice, where women undertook most of the responsibility for domestic labour and its arrangements. By contrast, women who are financially dependent on their children are in a precarious position unless they can exchange their labour for old age security by looking after their grandchildren (Lin Chin-Ju 2005).

However, this situation may be exacerbated when their daughters-in-law choose to hire a foreign domestic worker instead of using the grandmother. And when these elder women become frail and need care, their sons and daughters-in-law may use foreign domestic workers to undertake their filial duties. As Lan Pei-Chia (2006) points out, the idea of a 'transfer chain of filial care' consists of two

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<sup>15</sup> However, the practice of 'doing the month' in Taiwan has gradually been affected by various medical institutions in which professional nutritionists, doctors and nurses provide a package of postpartum services for mothers, such as postpartum care, confinement meals, practical short lessons on newborn care and so on.

components: ‘first, gender transfer of the filial duty from the son to the daughter-in-law, and second, market transfer of elder care from the daughter-in-law to nonfamily care workers (mostly women)’ (2006: 104). However, this makes mothers-in-law apprehensive about the future and they feel abandoned by their children when ‘they have been denied the link they would have enjoyed with their sons’ families’ (2006: 105). Nevertheless, the constraints that daughters-in-law feel, stemming from the deeply rooted ideology of familial responsibility, were a major motive for them to seek migrant domestic workers to perform the filial duty for them. Other scholars also point out the same ambivalence among modern Taiwanese daughters-in-law. For example, in both Kung Hsiang-Ming’s (1999a; 2001) and Chang Szu-Chia’s (2001) research, women struggled to find a balance between their roles as daughters-in-law, who should follow and obey their elders and earn a good reputation from other kin and community, and their desire for individual autonomy.

It is clear to see how women of different generations are struggling with changing expectations of the roles of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. However, there is another line of study which has emphasised the importance of the attitude of a son and a husband in facing the uneasy relationship between mother and wife. This research suggests that the son/husband could smooth over the relationship between the mother and daughter-in-law and mediate between them<sup>16</sup> (Kung Hsiang-Ming 1999). To understand this triangular relationship – mother, daughter-in-law and son/husband – it is necessary to discuss the context of filial piety in Taiwan and also the mediating position of the son/husband in order to grasp the dynamics of this most complex of household interactions.

### ***Mother-son bond/relations***

The strong connection between mothers and sons in the Chinese context is associated with the concept of filial piety and the responsibility that rests on the mother to cultivate her son in order for him to be able to take up his filial role and national responsibility. For instance, Stafford (1992) emphasises how the mother not only struggles to inculcate social norms into her son to prepare him for national obligations, but after her sons are released to serve the nation (usually they have to

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<sup>16</sup> This has been well examined by Apter (2009) in the Western context.

perform ‘military service’), she keeps on praying and pacifying the god of her ancestors for continuing protection over her male offspring until they come back to take up their position in the home. The mother is seen in this context as an essential figure who functions to sustain cultural norms and to pass them on to her offspring. Indeed, tracking this cultural package back to various periods in history, the conventional privilege and authority of elders is attributed to the filial obligation system and the function of kinship, which were both brought to Taiwan by the early Han Chinese immigrants from mainland China in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Fricke, Chang, and Yang 1994). This implicit moral contract gave legal power to parents in Taiwan, where they were accorded great respect and exercised extensive authority over the younger generations (Yi Chin-Chun and Chen Yu-Hun 1998). However, since the 1960s, the development of Taiwan has shifted, not only in terms of the economic environment, but also with regard to patterns among family members. For example, an increase in job opportunities, which made the younger generation economically independent of their parents, and a shrinking in the size and complexity of the household due to rural-urban migration, saw changes that weakened parental control and intergenerational support (see also Thornton et al. 1994; Marsh 1996).

Despite arguments that the filial bond in Taiwan cannot resist the onslaught of the forces of modernisation and Westernisation that might weaken it, there appears to be evidence that parental support by adult children is still considered as a normative obligation (Yi Chin-Chun and Chen Yu-Hun 1998). Some scholars find that the practice of filial piety has shifted into a more flexible form. Lan Pei-Chia (2001), for example, points out how the younger generations balance the social norm of filial piety with a desire for autonomy and privacy through alternative co-residence arrangements, which include living with their parents in different flats within the same building, living apart yet having meals together<sup>17</sup> or making frequent visits, and hiring non-family care workers to look after aged parents. This means that the transformation of Taiwanese society may change the power and privilege of parents, but it does not necessarily overthrow the strong patrilineal traditions, which impose obligations on the younger generation to respect and provide care for parents and elders. And this phenomenon also applies to other East Asian countries like

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<sup>17</sup> See footnote 13

Korea and Singapore (Sung Kyu-taik 1998, 2001; Verbrugge and Chen 2008).

Another influence on the patterns of parental care in Taiwan is the decreasing fertility rate, which also has significant consequences. In the past, parents had more than one son to take up the filial obligation and may have lived alternately between their married sons and received daily assistance. Since the total fertility rate of women aged between 15 to 49 decreased to 1.03 in 2009 from 7.04 in 1951 (DHRA 2009), it is clear that in the near future the responsibility of parental care and support may be the burden of only one child, in the same way as it is happening in China under the one child family policy (Zhan and Montgomery 2003)<sup>18</sup>.

However, this reciprocal system is normally promoted by parents who are widowed, have poor health or are economically dependent (Lee, Parish and Willis 1994). Younger and healthier mothers may not yet be the recipients of dutiful behaviour from their sons, but instead exchange their labour in unpaid or underpaid childcare and domestic work. This happens most often in the case of dual-earner young couples where the mother provides substantial support to her son in order to stay co-resident with him and to secure personal bonds to his family (Hu Yuw-Hwey 1996; Verbrugge and Chen 2008). This assistance in the conjugal family from mothers/mothers-in-law in the current generation is similar to the traditional function of rural mothers-in-law, who cared for their grandchildren while sons and daughters-in-law did farm work outside the household. The difference is that the intergenerational power has been reversed from the earlier period, when older women still enjoyed the power to distribute patrilineal properties and disperse traditional familial authority. Nowadays, elder women, as I mentioned in the last section, have to show that they are available and contribute resources in order to overcome their worries about living in a dependent family role (Hu Yow-Hwey and Chou Ya-Jung 1996).

Although none of these studies specifically discuss the living conditions of elder fathers/fathers-in-law and whether they contribute to their future security in the same way as their female counterparts, mothers (elder women) tend to be more

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<sup>18</sup> See also Tu, Freedman and Wolf (1993)

involved in the chain of reciprocity in Chinese society in general than the men. This may be in part due to the fact that women have a higher chance of being widowed<sup>19</sup>, and becoming dependent on an adult child's financial support. In addition, since women are tied to fulfilling patriarchal expectations, they tend to be the ones implementing these ideological rules as they grow older and expect the younger generation to adhere to them. Sung Kyu-taik (2001) has written an overview of filial piety from different literature and has categorised the form of elder respect into fourteen different practices:

1. Care respect: Providing care and services for elders.
2. Victual respect: Serving foods and drinks of elders' choice.
3. Gift respect: Bestowing gifts on elders.
4. Linguistic respect: Using respectful language in speaking to and addressing elders.
5. Presentational respect: Holding courteous appearances.
6. Spatial respect: Furnishing elders with honourable seats or places.
7. Celebrative respect: Celebrating birthdays in honour of elders.
8. Public respect: Respecting all elders of society.
9. Acquiescent respect: Being obedient to elders.
10. Consultative respect: Consulting elders on personal and family matters, customs, and rituals.
11. Salutatory respect: Greeting elders.
12. Precedential respect: Giving precedential treatment to elders.
13. Funeral respect: Holding funeral rites for deceased parents.
14. Ancestor respect: Worshipping ancestors.(Sung Kyu-taik 2001: 17, 20-21)

Sung Kyu-taik goes on to emphasise that the younger generation's willingness to uphold these traditional values of elder respect and filial obligation will depend on the present adult generation's efforts to educate and transmit such cultural values. Other related research has examined intergenerational support among Taiwanese families by focusing on gender differences (Lee, Parish, and Willis 1994; Lin et al.

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<sup>19</sup> According to Taiwanese statistical data, the average age at death was 68.09 years for males and 72.94 years for females in 2009. And since 1998, when this data became available, there has always been a gap of 4 to 5 years between males and females in respect of average age of death (DOS 2010a).

2003). The results show that sons rather than daughters are more likely to assume major care responsibilities for elderly parents, but daughters, especially married daughters, may be considered in a substitute role, where in other circumstances a brother was unable to take the responsibility. This research has also pointed out that daughters can end up with two sets of responsibility; one is to their own parents and the other to their in-laws.

In sum, both quantitative data and qualitative analysis offer similar results about how the patrilineal family maintains intergenerational ties and how the parents benefit from sons fulfilling their filial duties. However, as argued by many scholars, this mundane obligation of sons is often carried out by their wives (Hsiung Ping-Chen 2004; Lan Pei-Chia 2006). That is, the act of care-giving is strongly tied to the ideal of womanhood, so the wives who are daughters-in-law have inevitably assumed that it is their responsibility to take on this caring work in the household. Therefore, it is also understandable why relationships between women across generations have long been contentious. I have wondered how the mother-in-law would process the internal patriarchy to maximise and strengthen her influence in the conjugal family. How would she secure her well-being in old age by utilising the advantage of her son's duty? Does the son's compliance with the mother's authority help to uphold this triangular relationship in the house?

### ***Women's support networks***

The women's community group, in terms of place, is an abstract concept, because it does not exist in spatial form. But in terms of its functionality, as observed by Wolf (1972) in her earlier work on women in rural Taiwan, it revealed different levels of women's relationships in the village. In Wolf's setting, this women's community was operating when the women met while performing various daily activities – doing things together in the house of their close relatives or neighbours (e.g. making pickles, sewing), gathering around a shared work-place, washing at the riverside, shopping at the grocery store – they would usually talk about issues of common concern and gossip around the village. It was from these perspectives that they developed networks providing support for one another and meeting at different locations. Women were then able to take advantage of this kind of feminine power to enhance their status in their households. This female solidarity demonstrated in

women's informal community has also been documented in numerous studies (Croll 1978; Kibria 1990)<sup>20</sup>.

There is a cultural perception within the Taiwanese community that it is appropriate to keep domestic issues private<sup>21</sup>, so as to 'save face' from exposure and criticism and also to avoid becoming a target for gossip. However, with the network as discussed above, where women consult each other for advice, such cultural expectations are not always achievable. This is because the women need to expose their own stories in order to advise others. By so doing they inevitably open up their private issues and these get spread around. Meanwhile, there are also some women as mothers-in-law who welcome the evaluation of the observant community on their treatment of their daughters-in-law, with the purpose of gaining a good reputation in the community (Sandel 2004). I am interested in finding out how the mother-in-law is situated and functions within this cultural contradiction, especially with the emergence of the foreign bride phenomenon. This trend has become so popular in Taiwanese society that people discuss evolving issues with this marriage form in public; some men, in rural areas in particular, and under the influence of their mothers, seek advice from friends and acquaintances on how to enter into such marriages. This is the first level of a breakdown of the boundary that conceals the private domain, where issues are kept discreet. The second breakdown of this wall comes when both mothers- and daughter-in-law seek community advice whenever there is conflict between them. I am interested in finding out how these mothers-in-law experience their lives in such a contradictory setting. Would participation in women's social groups have benefitted them and contributed to their family relationship in the household?

Apart from the influence of women's community, sometimes family kin

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<sup>20</sup> For example, exploring the power and gender conflicts of Vietnamese immigrant women in the United States, Kibria (1990) emphasises that access to such networking empowers women in two ways. First, women are able to ease their difficult economic conditions via various exchange activities, such as sharing information about welfare and social services in the host country or exchanging food, material goods and services like childcare tasks among themselves. Second, it empowers the women to assert public judgement on certain individual men who subject their partners to domestic violence and to protect those women from continual abuse.

<sup>21</sup> There is a Chinese proverb that says '*jiā chǒu bù kě wài yáng*' to emphasise that private family problems should be kept at home and not become public. A similar expression in the Western context is 'Do not wash your dirty linen in public'.

would also act to either smooth or provoke conflict situations between parents-/mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. For example, Chang Szu-Chia (2001) reports that daughters-in-law may benefit from the person who plays the role of mediator to resolve dilemmas and conflicts in the family. These relatives include siblings from their husband's family (sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law), and their own parents.

In sum, the literature has indicated that women's status is changed through the modernisation process, and a general improvement was found in younger women's familial power and individual autonomy. In contrast, the older women who are mothers-in-law are aware that their authority has become limited through this transformation, due to their lack of economic contribution, the weakened mother-son bond and the daughter-in-law's increased agency. Their position has been reversed from that of their mothers-in-law's generation. Although they tend to justify their dominant behaviour as the upholding of traditional values, they still bear a great loss of authority and have pointed out their difficulties in adjusting to this current generation. However, the challenges that mothers-in-law face in this contemporary society are due not only to their ambiguous encounters but more to the burdens and conflicts that derive from their persistence in following patriarchal logic. And these happened in particular in the series of practices in cross-border marriages when women acquire a foreign daughter-in-law.

### **Making the match: The cross-border marriage phenomenon and stories about mothers-in-law**

#### ***A brief overview of cross-border marriage in Taiwan***

The phenomenon of cross-border marriage has emerged in Taiwan since the late 1970s, while this marriage form was also pervasive in Japan and South Korea in the 1980s and 1990s (Kim Doo-Sub 2006; Kojima 2001). Some scholars have situated this phenomenon within globalisation and capitalism (e.g. Hsia Hsiao-Chuan 2000), while others have looked at the socio-demographic factors and economic developments of receiving countries (e.g. Liaw, Ochiai, and Ishikawa 2010; Wang Hong-Zen 2001). In the study of marriage migration, both push and pull factors have been applied to explain the tendency of South-East Asian women to move from low income to high income and developed countries. However, as argued by many other scholars, these economic and poverty facts alone cannot explain migratory

motivations (e.g. Piper 1999; Wang Hong-Zen 2001); social mobility should also be taken into account (Lu M. Chia-Wen 2008; Tosakul 2010). This is so, for instance, in the case of Tosakul's (2010) study discussing Thai women marrying Western husbands. The solution for poor village women to escape from social and economic disadvantage in Thailand is to have a cross-border marriage. Most of them confirmed that their Western husbands provided them with financial security, which enabled them to fulfil their roles as dutiful daughters and with this they are empowered to seek gender equality and better social status and it also empowers them to advance towards autonomy.

While the consequences of globalisation and social demographic factors have helped create the phenomenon of cross-border marriage, the burgeoning of commercial and mediating marriage agents has also contributed to the prevalence of this marriage form. Through the lenses of research done by a number of scholars, marriage agents in Taiwan involved in cross-border marriage can be categorised into three different types: (1) Organised marriage companies and agencies; in this form, cooperation between agents in sending and receiving countries is necessary for operating such a marriage business. (2) Individual entrepreneur agents and matchmakers; encompassing agents who use their social network to arrange the marriage. These are Taiwanese men who have contacts in South-East Asia through their previous business connections or are involved in direct contact with marriage agents in the countries of the women's origin to recruit women and introduce them to Taiwanese men. Alternatively, these individual entrepreneur agents may have their own experience in cross-border marriages, and when they also know all the diverse processes of this marriage institution, they are able to arrange the marriage either by using their own or their wives' social network to make a profit from it. (3) Bride matchmakers; South-East Asian women married to Taiwanese men, who introduce their relatives and acquaintances from their home countries to Taiwanese men (see Chang Shu-Ming 2002; Lu M. Chia-Wen 2008; Wang Yi-Han 2008).

The easy access and wide choice of marriage agents is another development, apart from economic and social transformation, which helps to boost the form of cross-border marriage. The percentage marriages of this form in Taiwan grew from 7.16 percent in 1998 to 15.47 percent in 2004 (see Table 1).

*Table 1: Statistics on marriage registrations*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Marriage registrations (Couples)</b>	<b>Foreign spouses (Couples)</b>	<b>% of marriage registrations involving cross-border marriage</b>
1998	145,976	10,454	7.16%
1999	173,209	14,674	8.47%
2000	181,642	21,338	11.75%
2001	170,515	19,405	11.38%
2002	172,655	20,107	11.65%
2003	171,483	19,643	11.45%
2004	131,453	20,338	15.47%
2005	141,140	13,808	9.78%
2006	142,669	9,524	6.68%
2007	135,041	9,554	7.07%
2008	154,866	8,957	5.78%
2009	117,099	8,620	7.36%
2010 (Jan-Sep)	99,213	5,814	5.86%

Source: Data derived from DHRA (2010a)

However, the percentage of cross-border marriages has decreased from 15.47 percent to 7.36 percent in 2009. This decrease is mainly a result of amendments in government policy. First, the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), the department in charge of all issues regarding foreign spouses in Taiwan, attributed the decrease in the cross-border marriage rate to a tighter immigration interview system (DOS 2010b). For example, since 2005, all South-East Asian spouses are interviewed both in their countries of origin and at the point of entry into Taiwan. Second, the law on profit-making marriage agencies has changed. Initially, a regulation was instituted in 2003, which required all profit-oriented cross-border marriage brokering businesses to come under legal supervision. Though the government regulated the activities of these agencies, it permitted them to register their businesses and continue to operate for profit. However, scholars and women's advocates as well as NGOs protested against the government's move to allow the marriage brokering agencies to continue to operate, arguing that such brokers' initiative violates human rights and also reinforces the commodification of marriage migrants. Finally, in 2007, the MOI outlawed profit-making agencies and only allowed them to function as non-profit

organisations. The MOI also banned all advertisements that promote foreign brides and cross-border marriage in Taiwan. Although the 2009 level is relatively lower than the previous years, it cannot be denied that the foreign wife phenomenon has become an indispensable marriage form in Taiwan. The total number of South-East Asian wives in Taiwan appearing in the September 2010 census is 129,588, of which Vietnamese wives made up nearly 65% (83,716), and constitute the biggest proportion of all South-East Asian female marriage migrants, followed by Indonesian wives (20.6%; 26,815), Thai spouses (6%; 7,937) and Filipino wives (5%; 6,799) (DHRA 2010b).

Looking at the characteristics of foreign wives and their bridegrooms, a survey of both foreign and Mainland Chinese spouses (the majority of spouses are female, 96.5%), conducted by the National Immigration Agency in 2008, found that most female spouses were aged 25-34, while their Taiwanese counterparts were aged 35-44 (NIA 2008)<sup>22</sup>. With respect to educational status, generally, the educational level of foreign wives is low. Many of them (65.1%) had a secondary school education or lower, while the Taiwanese grooms' education is somewhat similar. Due to their low educational attainment, the women had to do unskilled jobs and earned low salaries in Taiwan. The data regarding the occupations of these marriage migrants reported in 2008 (NIA 2008), found that the majority of them did jobs such as manual workers in the manufacturing industry or service workers in the catering or sales industry and earned less than NT\$20,000 (£400)<sup>23</sup> per month. In the same report, regarding the occupational distribution of Taiwanese husbands, most of them were employed in the manufacturing industry, construction, wholesale business and other service industry<sup>24</sup>. Under these conditions, the gross monthly income in most cross-border marriage families ranged from NT\$20,000 (£400) to NT\$40,000 (£800). For the majority of female spouses (66.4%), the main source of daily expenditure was money provided by their husbands, while 27.4 % of them were dependent on their own income from outside paid work.

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<sup>22</sup> This result is similar to a previous finding (Wang Hon-Zen 2001), that Taiwanese men who married Vietnamese women were about 12 years older than their wives.

<sup>23</sup> The currency exchange rate is one British Pound (GBP) to 50.22 Taiwanese Dollars (NTD). Accessed from Bank of Taiwan <https://ebank.bot.com.tw/NNBank/Default.asp?Mode=RateInq> (10th February 2010).

<sup>24</sup> The information on job type reveals that Taiwanese husbands were most likely to work as manual workers, cab drivers, and farmers as well as in self-employment (e.g. Pan Shu-Man 2004; Shen Hsing-Ju 2003; Wang Hon-Zen and Chang Shu-Ming 2002).

With respect to the life adjustments of marriage migrants, it is a rather optimistic result which shows that nearly 90% of brides claimed that they did not have any difficulty when they interacted with their Taiwanese families, while only 5.7% of them had trouble with their parents-in-law or with their husbands (NIA 2008). Conflict situations occurred because of the differences in beliefs and values towards things but, on top of that, the language barrier is one of the causes reported by most brides. The work of Nguyen Xoan and Tran Xuyen (2010)<sup>25</sup>, provides more detailed information to illustrate how foreign wives perceived their family lives in Taiwan. Although a similar proportion, nearly 80%, of marriage migrants claimed that they were satisfied with their lives in Taiwan, having the right to earn their own income or having husbands who provide money for their parents in Vietnam is a prerequisite for their happiness (50%), followed by women who are happy and consider that their lives in Taiwan are better than other women's in Vietnam (around 30%). The remainder are unhappy because of their difficult experiences with their in-laws, who have made them feel offended and disrespected.

Although the characteristics of bridegrooms and marriage migrants that are discussed in this section are the characteristics used to explain their living conditions in Taiwan, looking at micro-familial interactions and relationships can help to further uncover their actual lived experience in Taiwan.

### ***Mapping out the images of Taiwanese mothers-in-law in cross-border marriage***

The issues related to marriage migration have been debated time and again in Taiwan and other East Asian countries. Almost all the literature that studies aspects of adaptation and the lived experience of female marriage migrants in Taiwan has mentioned the role of the mother-in-law. In this literature, mothers-in-law have been portrayed as the root cause of the oppression of foreign daughters-in-law in the family. For example, much research has reported that, since this marriage form has always been associated with commodification and racial hierarchy, foreign wives were easily discriminated against by their in-laws, in particular by their mothers-in-

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<sup>25</sup> By using the data derived from a large-scale survey, which applied both quantitative and qualitative methods, conducted by both a governmental committee (The Vietnam Commission for Population, Family and Children, VCPFC) and an academic unit in Vietnam in 2004, they analyse both structural (demographic, economic and cultural) factors and micro-personal motivations (brides and their parents) for cross-border marriage in Vietnam.

law (Shen Hsing-Ju 2003; Shieh Who-Long et al. 2003). For instance, in Wang Yi-Han's (2008) work, a Vietnamese wife expressed her feeling in this way:

Hearing me call them, my Gonggong [father-in-law] nodded and smiled to me. But my Popo [mother-in-law] looked unhappy. She glanced at me and then returned to her room. I was fearful. The next day, she woke me up at 4:00 in the early morning. She asked me to begin to clean the house and prepare for breakfast. Gradually, I realised she disliked me because she thought her son spent lots of money marrying me. (Wang Yi-Han 2008: 195)

Others argue that cultural mechanisms have an influence on every stage of marriage migrants' family lives (Shen Hsing-Ju 2003; Tien Ching-Ying and Wang Hong-Zen 2006). This cultural factor provides a further means of analysis that acknowledges the relevance of the gender ideology of the actors (both foreign brides and their in-law group) associated with women's particular experience in understanding how they manage their lives in Taiwan and how this cultural system is operated by their Taiwanese in-laws. I review this literature by highlighting how the image of the mother-in-law became a signifier of oppression. I intend to develop an analytical framework that depicts the experiences of Taiwanese mothers-in-law in the context of cross-border marriage.

Within this premise, I first give an overview of work revealing the family lives of South-East Asian wives. When marriage migrants arrive in Taiwan, they are immediately situated within an unfamiliar socio-economic, political and geographical domain. They have limited knowledge to allow them access to resources such as employment or social welfare and a limited capacity for using language in Taiwan. These conditions reinforce their dependence on their husbands and in-laws. Moreover, most of them live in a joint family (NIA 2008). This then brings various concerns to the interaction between foreign daughters-in-law and their in-laws in the household. I draw on three main themes from existing research that refers in particular to the involvement of mothers-in-law in this marriage form. These themes are: fertility control, domestication and mobility control.

First, some research indicates that mothers-in-law often become involved in

the pregnancy decisions of foreign daughters-in-law and this adds pressure to these young women to take on motherhood while they are still adapting to their lives in their new surroundings (e.g. Siao Jhao-Juan 2000). Domestication in this context refers to the various activities in the house, which include domestic work, childcare issues, dietary requirements and, following Taiwanese custom, religious practices such as ancestor worship. Within this domestic domain, the foreign daughter-in-law is in a position where she must behave in an appropriate manner that is fitting to her role. But, as a result of cultural differences, language barriers and dissimilar attitudes towards housework, conflict begins to erupt due to a lack of understanding of each other's world view. For example, Shen Hsing-Ju (2003) points out how some foreign daughters-in-law complain about the heavy domestic workload, and are annoyed at being treated as hired migrant employees<sup>26</sup>. Other examples, provided in Cheng Ya-Wen's (2000) study, describe how foreign daughters-in-law have arguments with their Taiwanese mothers-in-law due to their distinct preferences for tastes and flavours or different ways of preparing a meal. Similar conflicts that occur in the household can also be found in the work of Su Fang-Yi (2007) and Wang Pei-Jin (2007), although these studies did not demonstrate that there are different stages that mothers- and daughters-in-law go through in this marital arena. I can make the assumption that the conflicts go through different stages, whereby at the very beginning the daughter-in-law accepts whatever the in-law tells her, but later developing to a stage where she resists this domineering attitude and this causes tempers to flare up in the house. It is too simplistic to assume that these women are caught up in a web of conflict and confrontation because of the language barrier and cultural differences; in fact, the situation seems more complex than first meets the eye. The different dynamics that unfold in this domestic domain are what cause these women to engage in this cold war. However, the mother-in-law in particular engages in different negotiating practices that help both of them to adapt to the situation, thereby creating harmony. In some cases, the mother-in-law continues to position herself as an authoritative figure in the house (Kung Hsiang-Ming 2001; Li Tsui-Shan 2002).

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<sup>26</sup> In 1992, the Taiwanese government officially opened the floodgates to allow migrant domestic workers into the country. This was in order to solve the growing demands for paid care work among the expanding number of nuclear households and an aging population (see Lan Pei-Chia 2006).

The attempts of mothers-in-law to control the mobility of their foreign daughters-in-law have been emphasised in many studies. This often includes actions such as prohibiting daughters-in-law from going out to work, meeting friends and attending literacy classes<sup>27</sup> or travelling back to their home countries. For example, in Siao Jhao-Juan's (2000) study, one Indonesian wife described how she felt discriminated against when her mother-in-law behaved in a certain way to control her mobility.

Indonesian mothers-in-law will not interfere the lives of their daughters-in-law, but Taiwanese mothers-in-law do, and their sons support them. My mother-in-law likes to control everything, including money, and she treats her Taiwanese daughters-in-law better, as if they are human beings and we are not. Is that because I did not bring any dowry and I cannot rely on my natal family, so she treats me like an underdog. Before, I needed to do almost everything when I lived with my mother-in-law. I cannot even have a nap otherwise she will say I am lazy. She doesn't allow me to meet my friends. She scolds me if I call my family in Indonesia...she treats me like a child, but she would not do that to my sisters-in-law. (Siao Jhao-Juan 2000: 64)

Other studies have also revealed similar incidents where mothers-in-law exert control over their foreign daughters-in-law in order to limit their mobility (e.g. Shen Hsing-Ju 2003; Lin Ko-Ju 2007). According to this research, mothers-in-law's actions and dominant attitudes towards their foreign daughters-in-law are the result of media representations and the social discourse of what these daughters-in-law might become, such as escaping wives or gold-diggers, if certain strategies are not applied to monitor them (Lin Ko-Ju 2007; Su Fang-Yi 2007). Even though the mothers are so much involved in their sons' marital life, research into the way they initiate the cross-border marriage and influence their sons' participation in this marriage is limited. For instance, Chung Tsung-Fa (2004) and Cheng Ya-Wen (2000)

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<sup>27</sup> The idea of running an educational course was first introduced by the 'Meinung People's Association' in July 1995. In co-operation with a primary school, which provided classrooms, they attempted to help South-East Asian wives to learn the language they needed for everyday life. This included speaking with members of their husbands' families, shopping or going to the post office etc. Over the last decade the literacy programme was gradually expanded in Taiwan and became more systematic. Moreover, the government also provided funding to assist with the operation of the courses in 1999 (Hsia Hsiao-Chuan ed. 2005: 12-23).

both mentioned mothers' involvement in pushing their sons to find a wife from South-East Asian countries and pointed out that the motivation of the mother to partake in her son's marriage decision is that she has a need to fulfill her responsibilities in the patriarchal family, namely to continue her husband's family line. But their works did not examine the actual practices these mothers engaged in within their sons' marriages or what influence their involvement had on their sons' marital life and their own position at home.

From the above discussion, it becomes easy to map out the characterisation of mothers-in-law in this marital arena. However, looking at the different dynamic situations that happen in this marriage form, it can be argued that both agencies interact in their diverse roles to define what goes on in the relationship. It is easy for the majority of scholarly work to legitimise their claim that the foreign wives are subordinated and victimised by their in-laws by virtue of the commodified marriage form which has already manoeuvred the daughters-in-law into a vulnerable status. Nevertheless, some other scholars also point out that the activities of these marriage migrants situate them as active agents in charge of creating a world of meaning for themselves in this foreign land (see Constable 2003; Shen Hsing-Ju 2003; Wang Yi-Han 2008).

The claim that mothers-in-law are the domineering 'other' could be contested. This is because research on the narration of their position in relation to their sons' marriage is limited. In the first instance, the daughter-in-law already perceives herself as a commodified object due to the peculiar nature of this marriage contract, which situates the foreign wives in a lower class and economic status. Therefore, her mother-in-law's actions towards her are by no means perceived as an oppressive experience. There is no doubt that scholars' discussions about the conflict situation between foreign daughters-in-law and their mothers-in-law, positioned within a patriarchal Chinese cultural context, portrays the character of the mother-in-law as holding power because of her age and also as having economic dependency. Such qualities could reinforce the assumption that the mothers-in-law are using their position to victimise their foreign in-laws. Obviously, such claims are not based on research and they cannot be justified. In this research, I intend to investigate the previous experiences of the mothers-in-law as daughters-in-law and what their

expectations were when they became mothers-in-law themselves. This will help me to identify how much previous experience they brought to bear upon their role as mother-in-law and the degree to which patriarchal cultural influences impact on their way of dealing with their daughters-in-law in this cross-border marriage. There is a need to contextualise any perception about the role of mothers-in-law within a proper research framework in order to understand how these women interpret their own experiences, and also to uncover the motivations that precipitate them into becoming involved in their sons' marriages in their role as mothers-in-law.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**STUDYING ‘TRIVIAL WOMEN’S MATTERS’: MOTHERS-IN-LAW IN  
THEIR SONS’ CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGES**

*Why do you need to interview my wife? Who on earth is interested in our family business? What contribution are you expecting to dig out merely from women’s trivial matters? I suggest you should just ask your father and mother and reproduce it as everyone’s story, they are all the same. (Sioù-Lan’s husband; aged 66)*

When Sioù-Lan’s husband interrupted in the middle of our interview, and made this statement to comment on my research, I felt angry but still tried to keep my temper and explain to him that everyone’s stories, especially every woman’s, are unique and not interchangeable. This remark indirectly represented many concerns in feminist research: how can feminist research practice make women’s voices and their ‘trivial matters’ visible in both social and political concerns; how does the social positioning and biographical background of the researcher affect their understanding of their research subjects; what is the relationship between researcher and research subjects, especially the power dynamic? (Kelly et al. 1994; Maynard 1994)

This research explores the life experiences of Taiwanese mothers-in-law in families with cross-border marriages. I adopted feminist principles in conducting a qualitative study and used in-depth interviews as my major approach in order to collect participants’ life experiences, supplemented by focus groups as an additional resource in generating ideas from the interviews. Much research on the relationship between mothers- and daughters-in-law conducted by scholars in Taiwan has only demonstrated how the transformation of family and social structures have had an influence on the status of women of different generations, or it has discussed how the mothers- and daughters-in-law’s relationship has an impact on their lives or how the husband/son takes on his role and maintains the balance in his mother’s and wife’s relationship. I am interested in seeing how women develop their own agency in order to negotiate their position in the family domain and how they interpret their experience through different life stages: first as a daughter-in-law and then as a mother-in-law.

I begin this exploration by detailing the geographical character and the distribution of foreign spouses from South-East Asia in the area where my research was conducted. This is followed by the section 'Sampling process', in which I focus on how I contacted my participants and how I negotiated the interviewee recruiting process. In 'Interview process' I discuss the pre-identified themes, how I collected my data in both individual interviews and focus group, and reflect on issues of the power relationship between researcher and participants. Finally, in 'Analysing the data and writing up' I explain how I analysed the data and examined my own position in constructing what the participants said.

### **Fieldwork setting**

The fieldwork took place in Yunlin County, located in the central-southern region along the western coast of Taiwan, with a registered population of 717,915 in one city and 19 townships in 2010. This county is mainly reliant on agriculture. Typical products from this area are: rice, garlic, star fruit, tomatoes, and so on. According to official statistics, Yunlin County was one of the areas in Taiwan with a higher than average proportion of South-East Asian spouses, along with other counties like Hsinchu County, Miaoli County, Chiayi County and Penghu County where agriculture and fishing are major sources of employment (Table 2). Since I have close relatives and friends residing in a few of the townships in Yunlin County, I decided to approach interviewees through a snowballing method, for example, through their personal networks and the networks of participants. Another reason for me to choose a rural area as my field site was to explore the role that women's communities have played in their surroundings. That is, compared to the neighbourhood housing arrangements in urban areas, people find it easier to access and build up their personal network in rural areas. This kind of community interpersonal interaction is less likely to exist in the city.

I set out two pre-conditions for recruiting my participants; first, I sought to recruit mothers whose sons had married South-East Asian women. Second, in order to understand the lived experiences of mothers-in-law and their stories about their family roles and responsibilities, I preferred women who lived with their foreign daughters-in-law, while not excluding women who did not and were willing to participate. Ultimately, I conducted my fieldwork in two phases; the first was from

the end of November 2006 to January 2007, and consisted of one focus group and 13 in-depth interviews. In the second phase I undertook interviews with 7 more mothers-in-law during January 2008 to February 2008. During this period, I also visited the previous interviewees with the intention of making follow-up observations on their living conditions.

*Table 2 Distribution of foreign wives in Taiwan*

Area	Number of South-East Asian wives	Total population	Population density of South-East Asian wives
Taipei City	6,571	2,608,923	0.25%
Taipei County	2,0319	3,892,603	0.52%
Yilan County	2,647	460,679	0.57%
Taoyuan County	15,422	2,002,318	0.77%
Hsinchu County	4,853	512,097	0.94%
Hsinchu City	2,062	414,323	0.49%
Keelung City	2,054	384,954	0.53%
Miaoli County	4,666	560,557	0.83%
Taichung County	9,243	1,564,577	0.59%
Taichung City	3,384	1,080,617	0.31%
Changhua County	8,670	1,307,843	0.66%
Nanton County	4,181	527,299	0.79%
Yunlin County	6,098	718,054	0.84%
Chiayi County	4,908	543,853	0.90%
Tainan County	6,040	1,101,866	0.54%
Tainan City	2,602	771,888	0.33%
Kaohsiung County	7,390	1,243,332	0.59%
Kaohsiung City	6,151	1,529,445	0.40%
Pingtung County	7,080	875,379	0.80%
Taitung County	1,293	230,941	0.55%
Hualien County	1,653	339,295	0.48%
Penghu County	877	96,488	0.90%
Kinmen County	273	96,091	0.28%
Matsu County	28	9,957	0.28%
<b>Total</b>	128,465	22,873,379	

Source: Data derived from DHRA (2010b, 2010c)

## Sampling process

### *Finding interviewees*<sup>28</sup>

Due to the controversial nature of the ‘foreign bride’ phenomenon in Taiwan, I located participants using a variety of methods. In the first phase (between November 2006 and January 2007), I relied on the good connections of my grandparents, who live in Township 3 (Figure 1), to recruit mothers-in-law who have South-East Asian daughters-in-law. Initially, my grandparents told me that there were many potential participants in Township 3 where they lived, thus I thought there should be no problems in beginning my fieldwork. Nevertheless, when I returned to Taiwan, I discovered that my grandparents had only acquired permission from four women who agreed to be interviewed (Jih, Píng, Shuěi, and Táo<sup>29</sup>); two of these are distant relatives of my grandfather (Jih and Táo). The main difficulty in finding enough participants, according to my grandparents, was that most women claimed that they did not want to gossip about their family matters and were questioning what made their lives special and worthy of an interview. Although this hesitation and worry about the influence of gossip had an effect on the success of the recruitment process, the more participants I got in touch with and interviewed, the more I found that women in general in my grandparents’ township were indeed already sharing family matters and information with their neighbours and these get spread around.

I also accessed nine interviewees<sup>30</sup> through the introduction of my then boyfriend’s (now my husband) Aunt Kao<sup>31</sup> and my great-aunt, and those women who agreed to be interviewed also helped to find other potential participants. However, I still encountered unexpected situations. For example, due to the prevalence of scams in Taiwan, many victims had been trapped through telephone conversations and lost personal property and money. I never thought that I would be suspected of being a criminal. At the beginning when I tried to contact potential participants by phone to schedule an interview, the line was disconnected before I had the chance to explain my status. Later I discovered that these women or family members hung up the

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix A for a list of how all the participants were recruited.

<sup>29</sup> I gave each interviewee a pseudonym.

<sup>30</sup> These 9 participants are Dai, Fen, Jiao, Liań, Mǐn, Mèng, Shù, Tang, and Ying.

<sup>31</sup> Aunt Kao opened a *bǔ xī bān* in Township 3. She helped me contact three mothers-in-law whose grandchildren go to her *bǔ xī bān*. (*bǔ xī bān* is a company that offers intensive tuition in Chinese composition, English, mathematics etc., as well as homework supervision during evenings and vacations).

phone whenever they heard an unfamiliar voice on the other end. Hence, in the case of contacting my participants, I had to adopt a different strategy of visiting them in person or with the help of an intermediary who could accompany me to the house of my participants and set up an appropriate time for the interview.

However, there was another dilemma if I went to participants' houses by myself because initially I did not know the daily schedule of these women and thus I often missed the chance to meet them during my personal visits. Most women go out to work in the fields at 5 am and return home around 11 am for lunch, or may not return home at all if they take along lunchboxes. An interesting incident occurred while approaching them. They often went to work without locking the door and that misled me into believing that they were at home. When I tried to open the door and call their names, my voice was answered by the barking of their dogs. I often wondered how they could be so cautious when answering phone calls but without any fear of robbery due to the unlocked doors. After a few unsuccessful visits, I had to ride my scooter to find them in the rice paddy with the help of their foreign daughters-in-law or neighbours and had to repeatedly but courteously confirm the interview time with them. During the two months of country life, I moved from getting lost in the remote alleys to becoming acquainted with all the households of my interviewees. Those interviewees who did not know me at the beginning would stop me on the street when seeing me riding the scooter and would ask me how I was doing and how my interviews were going, and some of them later became my intermediaries.

In the second phase of fieldwork (from January 2008 to February 2008), I recruited seven more participants in order to increase the diversity of the sample. I first returned to Township 3, where my grandparents are based, and sought more participants through this personal link, while revisiting those mothers-in-law I met in Township 3 during the previous phase of fieldwork. At the same time, I contacted a friend and one of my uncles who live in Townships 1 and 2 in Yunlin County to introduce me to some potential participants. At this stage, the recruitment process went quite smoothly in both Township 2 and Township 3 where my uncle, Aunt Kao and one of my previous participants, Jihh, resided and they located four more mothers-in-law who were willing to be interviewed.

In Township 1, I had the opportunity to visit four participants with the help of my friend's mother, but I only completed three formal interviews. I sensed how local and human connections worked as the main key to conducting fieldwork and gaining trust, but the attitude of the intermediary and the way he/she introduces the researcher can also lead to tension in the relationship between interviewer and interviewees. When I met my friend's mother, she asked me about my family background and my studies in England, while my friend, who also got his doctoral degree in England, was sitting beside me. I thought that it was just a normal conversation between us and was not aware that this chat would become the main obstacle when I interviewed the first mother-in-law in Township 1. My male friend's mother asked my friend to accompany us to visit one of her neighbours, who was the potential participant. When we got there, she immediately told her neighbour: 'Do you know my son (pointing to my friend), he got his PhD in England. And this is his friend, she is currently doing her PhD in England, she wants to know about your experiences as the mother-in-law of a foreign daughter-in-law'. After this introduction, I could feel her neighbour hesitate for a few seconds with a blank expression on her face and then she said: 'Well, we are all fine, I always let her do what she wants'. As Lan Pei-Chia (2006) found during her research amongst foreign migrant workers in Taiwan, the differences between herself and her Indonesian participants in age, educational background and her position as a university professor all created a social distance between them. Similarly, in this case, my status as a student who is 'doing her PhD in England' is considered to indicate economic privilege in the eyes of rural residents. It created a certain distance between me and that mother-in-law. After my friend's mother left, she talked to me with less interest and her husband and father-in-law were also at home. I tried to make another appointment with her but she said she did not have more time to talk.

Later, when I returned to my friend's house, I politely asked my friend and his mother to share a phone number or home address of someone whom they thought would agree to share their experiences, to avoid the same situation again. Although, without a direct introduction by an intermediary, I had to explain and answer all sorts of questions, like 'Are you a civil servant who is coming to check our life?', and 'Why did you want to study this topic?', when I visited these potential participants, it led to a smoother interview process compared to the first one. Finally, I travelled to

Township 1 twice to complete three interviews.

In the end, I managed to interview 20 mothers-in-law; their network of relationships is demonstrated in Figure 1. I also talked to four other women, which cannot be counted as proper interviews due to the circumstances of family members becoming involved in the interview or because they only participated in a focus group. There were also four male interviewees whom I met due to the kind of unexpected situation that happens in fieldwork<sup>32</sup>.

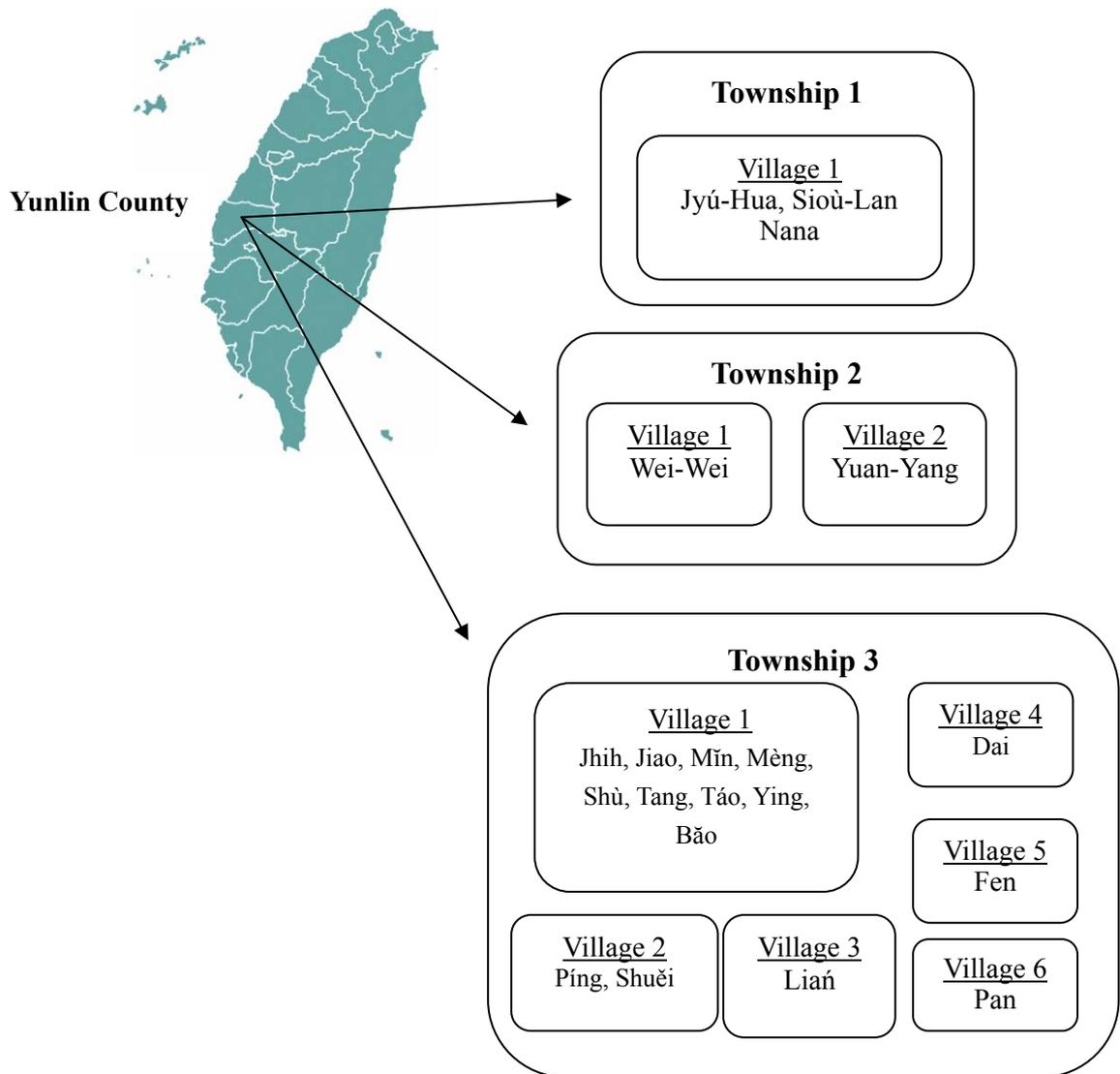
Although it was rather easy to locate potential participants through the snowballing method, this sometimes created problems in attempting to meet the criteria of the original sample design. As Mason (2002) indicates, a researcher should consider how adequate a sample has been provided and selected by the intermediary in the initial contacts. However, the best-laid plans are sometimes unsuccessful. For example, there was one occasion when my great-aunt came to visit my grandparents and knew that I still needed a few interviewees. She went on her scooter intending to look for potential participants in her village. Within ten minutes, she contacted me to get ready and volunteered to take me on her scooter for interviews.

In the first household we visited, the son had just sent his wife back to Vietnam. This participant did not match what I required in the research but my great-aunt said it was all right to visit this mother-in-law due to her past experience with a foreign daughter-in-law. Before I had the chance to explain my requirements again, we had already arrived at Ruèi's house. Thus, I persuaded myself that it was impolite to reject the kindness of my great-aunt and Ruèi, who had agreed to be interviewed under such conditions. However, when my great-aunt knocked at Ruèi's door, I soon realised that she had not contacted her at all but had taken me directly to the interviewee's house. Ruèi kept the door half closed and said she had nothing to be interviewed about and her daughter-in-law had returned to Vietnam. She did not want to be bothered. I soon apologised for my unceremonious visit and was about to leave, but my great-aunt kept persuading Ruèi until she finally opened the door and let us in but she was still very protective of information.

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<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 4 for their personal backgrounds and details.

Figure 1: The network among participants



Note: These three townships are distributed through Yunlin County. Each township is divided administratively into numerous villages. For example, Township 1 contains 12 villages, Township 2 has 24 villages and there are 14 villages in Township 3. The approximate number of households within each village, which I derived from each township's household registration office's online source, was between 319 and a maximum of 2133 in December 2009 (HRSYC 2009).

Although I was aware of the ethical issues and my position in relation to the researched (see Mason 2002; Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002) and its implications for the validity of data, the sampling practice is sometimes inevitably constrained by

the actions of the intermediary. I tried to create a better harmony between me and Ruèi but after five minutes I discovered that her son was at home. He was extremely protective and looked at me with anger. He asked me if I was the government officer who had come to investigate his marriage. He said that he had tried so hard to finally send his wife back to Vietnam and he did not want to complicate the divorce process. I kept explaining my student status, and considering the tense situation I told him that I just wanted to know about his mother's past experience as a daughter-in-law. At the same time, my great-aunt was echoing my explanation, thus Ruèi's son (Mr. Huang) finally calmed down. But, unexpectedly, he started to talk about his marriage and described how his wife had misbehaved, how she was suspected of having an affair with another foreign worker she met at the night market. And during the whole period, Ruèi even fell asleep and snored. Although this kind of interview was unexpected and I considered it to be an informal interview, I appreciated the data from the different perspective of a Taiwanese groom and the effects on a mother-in-law of her son's divorce<sup>33</sup>.

Soon after this interview, my great-aunt took me to the house of the next interviewee, Ying, a mother-in-law I had had very few contacts with prior to the interview<sup>34</sup>. She agreed to be interviewed almost immediately when I asked her for permission. Therefore, the second interview went much more smoothly. But I did not expect that Ying would set up the next interview for me right after our interview. It was her friend who agreed to be interviewed when Ying contacted her via telephone. But the husband turned up at Ying's house and said his wife still had some work to be finished and thus he would like to represent his wife and talk about their experiences with their Vietnamese daughter-in-law. In spite of my numerous explanations that I needed to interview his wife, the father-in-law, Mr. Wang, simply said that his wife would not have anything to say since she is a woman. Meanwhile, Ying and her husband helped explain that it would be the same thing to interview Mr. Wang because he knew everything about his wife. Hence, I was put in the position of interviewing him instead of his wife with the focus on his experiences and his observations of how his Vietnamese daughter-in-law interacted with them. My great-

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<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 4 for Ruèi and Mr. Huang's personal backgrounds and details.

<sup>34</sup> Ying was scheduled to join the tentative focus group scheduled on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006. Therefore I had a chance to talk to her for about half an hour.

aunt showed up with her grandson (my cousin) in the middle of my interview with Mr. Wang and wanted to take me to the next interview. I declined the offer due to the on-going interview and also because I was tired after three consecutive interviews. But later, when I had finished my interview with Mr. Wang and returned to my grandfather's house, my great-aunt phoned and asked me to go to Táo's house straight away. It was seven o'clock in the evening. Disregarding my fatigue and hunger, I rushed to the designated location on my scooter to conduct the interview in the courtyard of a traditional quadrangle house.

The reason I visited all the participants my intermediaries offered me was not to pursue a good size of sample or to violate the participant characteristics I had originally intended, but because I was aware of the unpredictable schedules of my respondents and the common constraints that added to the difficulty of conducting the interview, like family members being around to interrupt the interview or the husbands (fathers-in-law) intending to help, to 'give voice' to their wives as in Mr. Wang and Mr. Lin's cases<sup>35</sup>. Not every single visit can lead to a successful interview. Thus, I seized every opportunity in order to collect enough data to explore my research focus and address the research questions.

## **Interview process**

### ***Themes***

I had pre-identified certain themes and prepared questions about them for the interviews. Even though I did not stick to a fixed sequence of themes, I raised questions about topics they had not covered after they had finished speaking (see Appendix B). The interviews covered four themes according to the different experiences and reflections of the mothers in relation to their sons' cross-border marriages. The themes and sub-topics which informed my interviews are shown as follows (Table 3).

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<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 4 for detailed information about Mr. Lin.

*Table 3 The themes and sub-topics guiding the interviews*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-topics</b>
Involvement of the mother-in-law in the cross-border marriage	Comment on son's cross-border marriage; ways of helping son's marriage (such as financial support, emotional support, direct involvement in the selection process); reasons for their involvement; influences of others' marriages in the village (cross-border marriage)
The practice and experience of being a mother-in-law	Memories of their own experience of being a daughter-in-law; changes in family and social status; women's perceptions and experiences of being a mother-in-law (impact of their experience in a traditional society and family upon their present character as a mother-in-law; the obligations and responsibilities of the mother-in-law; experience and practice of being a mother-in-law in this marriage context); interactions with daughter-in-law in general; differences between Taiwanese daughters-in-law and foreign daughters-in-law
Towards grandparenthood	The role of grandmother; responsibilities of being a grandmother in the context of cross-border marriage; motherhood of foreign daughter-in-law (grandchildren's academic achievement, adequate care of child?)
The interactions within the family	Intergenerational division of domestic work (diverse possibilities from one to another: if foreign daughter-in-law needs to help with family business or work, how the work is divided in the family); discipline and supervision of their daughter-in-law in following familial practices (e.g. ancestral worship); impact of potential patterns upon their relationship with foreign daughter-in-law (mother-son bond, language, different life experiences and cultural background, in-law relations); foreign daughter-in-law's reactions; the strategies for dealing with the differences between women and their foreign daughters-in-law

### ***Individual interviews***

In the first phase of fieldwork, my initial research plan was to conduct focus groups prior to personal interviews in order to identify any important themes I might have missed. However, things did not happen according to the plan. I had intended to conduct the first focus group on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006. Yet, after waiting for half an hour, there was only one interviewee present at Mèng's house. They had a casual conversation with each other while waiting for the others to turn up and talked about the behaviour of their Vietnamese daughters-in-law but later indicated that they

would return to the farm if no other people showed up. Hence I had to cancel and reschedule the meeting.

Actually, it was quite difficult to arrange a time to meet with these interviewees. Therefore, I decided to reverse my research sequence and conduct personal interviews before putting the women all together in a group. At the beginning of each interview (in both phases of my fieldwork), I usually explained the purpose of my research and assured participants that any data and personal information collected during the interview would be kept confidential. I would choose pseudonyms to replace their own names in order to protect them. However, as I presented the interviewees with the consent form in the first few cases and asked them to read and sign it, I soon discovered that many of them were illiterate and also that this requirement made them fear for their safety. Under these conditions, I decided not to use the consent form in the remaining interviews but changed to verbally informing them of their rights. As Murphy and Dingwall (2001: 342) argue: ‘The rights of research subjects... will not be respected simply because consent forms have been signed... The answers depend more on the moral sense of the researcher and their ability to make reasoned decisions in the field than upon regulative codes of practice or review procedures.’

All of the interviews were taped. Although a few of the participants felt uncomfortable at the beginning about being recorded and often said they did not want to be recorded, I tried to persuade them that my memory would not retain all the accounts they gave and my handwriting was not fast enough to jot down everything. It would be such a pity not to record their personal experiences. Finally, they allowed me to make a digital recording. The other participants, who were introduced by mothers-in-law I had already interviewed, all agreed to be recorded. Almost all the interviews were conducted at the interviewees’ houses. Two participants, Jiao and Mǐn, preferred to be interviewed at Jih’s barn since they had considered the inconvenience of other family members being present during the interview. Not every interview could continue without interruption, especially for five women who still needed to look after their grandchildren as the interview went along. Even though the quality of recording was somewhat affected by the noise of their grandchildren, I did not have to keep regaining their attention during the

interview process since the interviewees paid a lot of attention to our talk. Only if the grandchildren threw the toys or pulled their clothes, would the women spare some time to scold or respond to the children. However, I was amazed that these women were so supportive and prepared to commit themselves to research. I also took notes during the interviews and wrote a field diary after each interview, recording details that occurred during the process and my observations of the interviewee's reactions and body language.

The interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 2 hours and 10 minutes in length and covered a number of topics that derived from the questions relating to the pre-identified themes. Although I used the same questions for all of the interviews, the interviews were set in a loosely structured format. I changed the sequence of my questions based on various incidents. For example, some participants started by talking about their interaction with their foreign daughters-in-law before I had a chance to ask my first question: 'Why did your son want to find a foreign wife?' I paid close attention not to interrupt their talk and listened attentively. After they stopped talking, I would quickly pick up the relevant themes and ask a consistent question. In other situations – such as when I asked participants: 'how did you feel about your son marrying a foreign wife?', and they would simply say that they had no opinion about their sons' marriage and they did not know what to say<sup>36</sup> – I would change the subject and move the interview onto a new topic, such as asking about their previous experiences of being a daughter-in-law and later return to this other issue when the timing was right. As Mason (2002: 67) suggests: 'A qualitative interviewer has to be ready to make on-the-spot decisions about the content and sequence of the interview as it progresses, and to keep everything running smoothly.'

This also happened when I asked participants about their personal information<sup>37</sup>. Initially, I left this series of questions to the end of my interview in an attempt to avoid participants becoming worried about being over-exposed to a stranger at the beginning. However, when it comes to a real interaction, it does not

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<sup>36</sup> It often happened, when the participants were introduced by my respondents that they introduced me as 'This lady is coming to listen to us and to know if your daughter-in-law treats you well and if you treat her well.' This kind of introduction may lead to a rather protective reaction by the participants.

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix B

work out in the planned way. Although rapport and a comfortable atmosphere could be sensed during the interview, when I attempted to ask interviewees questions like their marital status, economic resources, how many children they had and so on, they would appear uneasy and worried. After having a similar experience during the first two interviews, I began to raise these questions during the relevant topic instead of leaving these individual background questions to the end of the interview. And it worked out fine in subsequent interviews. Nevertheless, to create a smooth interaction between researcher and researched is advantageous in gaining access to participants. As Liu Jieyu (2005) pointed out with regard to a particular cultural practice in her research on women in China, showing respect for elder participants and acting humble as a junior learner has helped her to develop a better relationship with her interviewees. Similarly, in interviews with my participants who are mothers-in-law, I was always polite and would express my gratitude to them for sharing their experiences with me. I sometimes briefly shared my mother's experience as a daughter-in-law (see Chapter 1) when they asked me if I understood how difficult it was being a daughter-in-law in the past generation.

After each interview was finished, I gave my participants a small gift to express my appreciation. It seemed a very small issue before I conducted my fieldwork; I was planning to buy each present in the value range NT\$200 to 300 (£4-6). But my grandparents said that it was not recommended to give country folk 'expensive presents', otherwise they would be afraid about my intentions. Hence, giving them bars of soap, a box of six bars of soap only costs NT\$50 (£1), or a wooden backscratcher (NT\$10 (£0.20)), would be the most appropriate gift. And the timing for giving the gift was also a key point. My grandmother wanted me to give out gifts at the beginning of the meeting so the interviewees would be more willing to share their stories. However, Aunt Kao said it was more appropriate to present my participants with gifts at the end of my interview. I followed the suggestion from Aunt Kao but I had no chance to prove if her suggestion was right because most of the interviewees appreciated the chance of having me listen to their stories and refused to accept my gifts.

### ***Focus groups***

Wilkinson (1998) points out that the use of focus groups can also play an essential

role in feminist research. This method yields abundant information and raises only moderate ethical concerns about the power of the researcher in data collection<sup>38</sup>. In this type of group discussion, participants have more opportunities to take control of the topic than in individual interviews where the researcher controls the proceedings. Inviting participants with similar experiences or views to talk about their lives can help to stimulate them to contribute their points of view or to remind them of their own experiences that they might not otherwise have remembered. Similarly, as I proceeded, I found that all the mothers-in-law were eager to share their thoughts about their role as a mother-in-law and their interactions with their foreign daughters-in-law. Moreover, they helped each other to recall issues or see patterns in their experience because they knew each other in the community. The interaction between them was very dynamic and lively. Even though the atmosphere was rather comfortable during the whole period of the focus group, I faced some practical problems at the beginning.

To find an opportunity to invite farming mothers-in-law to a group discussion was not an easy task. It was only because the continuing bad weather stopped them from working in the fields that I was able to gather these participants together with the help of mother-in-law Jhih and my great-aunt. The initial time was scheduled as 13:30, but the women had not turned up in Jhih's barn where I ran my first focus group after ten minutes. Only one mother-in-law, Zhen, showed up and she started to talk to Jhih. I was worried that this focus group would be unsuccessful like the previous time when most participants did not turn up. My great-aunt came with her scooter at 13:45 in front of Jhih's barn and told me that she was going to invite the other interviewees to join the meeting and at the same time, Jhih contacted her neighbour via telephone. Luckily, ten minutes later, three women showed up one by one.

After getting the interviewees together, the situation was initially chaotic. There were three mothers-in-law with their grandchildren, and I had no other assistants to look after these children. Hence, during the interview process and in the recording, there was noise from the kids. Since Jhih and Zhen had already started a

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<sup>38</sup> However, Wilkinson (1998) also explains the power that the researcher retains in the data analysis and writing-up process.

conversation about their foreign daughters-in-law, I let them develop the themes which were most important to them. Those topics included how they maintained family harmony, such as the relationship between their son and foreign daughter-in-law; how to prevent daughters-in-law from sending too much money to their natal families; how they taught them to worship the ancestors; how they asked them to buy things economically; and how they helped their daughters-in-law to adapt to the lifestyle of Taiwan; as well as their grandchildren's education and daily care. I intervened in the discussion only when the interviewees were silent to propose the pre-identified questions which they had not discussed. In two hours of discussion, each woman had an equal amount of time to express her views. According to my observations, they take the floor to express their ideas when someone stops talking. Although the pace of the focus group was very fast, I still kept notes on the group process.

After the first focus group, I run a second focus group in another village in January, 2007. However, the second focus groups failed because the husband of one of my participant for some reason appeared on the scene, and insisted wanting to participate. However, I perceived that his present would intimidate my female participants and would prevent them from saying anything. Moreover, my focus was not to include men in the interview. As a result I wanted him to go and come back later, but he would not. As I anticipated he dominated most of the discussions while the other three women, including his wife tended to remain silent during the whole process. Therefore, I did not use any information from this focus group, especially because this man repeated almost the same stories he shared with me when I went to invite his wife in their house.

*Figure 2: Photos of focus group*



[Original in colour]

### *Power dynamics and emotional work in the field*

The power relationship between interviewer and interviewees has been underlined in feminist scholarly discussions (Maynard and Purvis 1994; Wolf 1996). While earlier work suggests a non-hierarchical research relationship (Oakley 1981), others argue that the power dynamics in the interview are fluid and complex (Cotterill 1992; Hall 2004; Letherby 2003; Tang 2002). In my research, the age difference and my unmarried status in particular, presented many problems during the interview process. And the power is not only shifting between researcher and respondents during the research but also with the intermediary. For example, at the stage of recruitment, I had to rely on my intermediaries, who were older and stood in a higher position than me. I had to address them in the same way as I would address my grandmother and aunt: ‘*A-Má*’ (grandmother) or ‘*A-tí*’ (aunt) according to Chinese customs and naming practices. I had explained my research subject and the sampling criteria to the intermediaries before they suggested the potential participants but I still felt vulnerable that I was unable to refuse their enthusiasm in introducing participants who did not match the conditions (in the case of my great-aunt and my respondent Ying). In other cases, I could not modify or correct their statements when they introduced me as someone who wanted to know ‘if your daughter-in-law treats you well and if you treat her well’ or referred to my ‘superior PhD status’<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, I had to follow what they suggested when I approached my participants: when to present my gift and the dress code for the interviews.

At the interviewing stage, I was often asked by my participants if I, a junior, could understand what they were saying and picture their lives in the past. As a woman who was raised in the city, and having no experience of being a daughter-in-law, I was disempowered at that moment by those concerns. However, the age difference between me and my respondents was just one of the many factors that had an effect on the power relationship between us. My education and then-unmarried status were other issues that could be used to explain the dilemmas in the interviews. And, surprisingly, all of the mothers-in-law gave rather nice compliments to me

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<sup>39</sup> In order to deal with these uncontrollable circumstances, I applied some strategies to reduce suspicion about my research intentions and to lessen our social distance. For the former situation, I changed the sequence of my interview questions by asking about their previous experiences as daughters-in-law and for the latter I shared my own experience that I was taking a part-time job as a cleaner while doing my PhD in England. These methods brought positive results in the interviews.

about my intention to achieve a higher degree, in contrast to the fathers-in-law. There was one occasion when I was interviewing a mother-in-law (Sioù-Lan) and her husband returned home from work for lunch. He kept disrupting the interview in deliberate ways by asking my participant to prepare another two dishes for him when my participant had told him that everything was ready in the kitchen and she was in the middle of an interview. Even so, my participant went to the kitchen and asked me to wait for a while. During this period, her husband wanted to know if I was sent by the government to investigate their lives, and when I explained my status as a student he then asked me: ‘are you married or not?’ I replied politely: ‘Not yet!’ He was then being sarcastic by implying that I was wrong in trying to attain high status with education: ‘NO? [loud voice] Are you going to put yourself up as being more valuable? It is worthless! [...] I think you have eyes on the top of your head<sup>40</sup>.’ I found that listening to this very patriarchal kind of account from my respondent’s husband was very distressing, and this was compounded by the fact that he was intending to degrade women like me who give greater weight to education than marriage. I tried to control my anger and not to challenge his opinion at that moment in order to continue my interview with his wife. As Letherby (2003: 112) notes, when she encountered various emotive issues in the interviews, ‘I “managed” my emotions’.

Nevertheless, this tense experience made me aware that, although my participants felt comfortable when the interview took place in their familiar territory, like home and workplace, and it is also easier to establish the relationship between researcher and research subjects, this does not necessarily mean that the researcher will not encounter any difficulties in the interview. Cotterill’s (1994) experience is relevant here. She notes how, when doing research with mothers- and daughters-in-law in their own home, her respondents’ husbands interrupted the interviews in deliberate or less obvious ways, which often led to the failure of the interview. She points out how men felt threatened by the researcher who had entered their domain as an outsider to conduct a conversation from which they were excluded and over which they had no control. In my research, I also encountered this problem when my participants’ sons or husbands disrupted interviews or insisted on engaging in

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<sup>40</sup> The Chinese phrase ‘eyes on the top of your head’ refers to someone behaving in an arrogant manner.

conversation with me and their mothers/wives for the whole period<sup>41</sup>.

The examples given above illustrate how the power shifts between researcher and respondents in various interview settings. Although I was vulnerable in my position as a junior and an unmarried woman in mother-in-law's groups, I was aware of my influence on the path of the interview through my responses and my decisions in selecting the questions, and I also have the power over how their stories are presented.

### **Analysing the data and writing up**

My interviews were transcribed and analysed according to theoretical themes, in particular on how the women negotiated with patriarchy to secure their position within the family. I do admit that during the primary stages of my research, when I was not married, I analysed the mothers-in-law's narration with more sympathy. However, after my marriage the situation was different, especially my perception of the mothers-in-law. As a result of this transition, my research analysis can be patterned into two different stages: Before and after my marriage. Before marriage my knowledge about, and experience of, these mothers-in-law was directly influenced by what I read in the academic literature and my own observations of my grandmother's attitude towards my mother, which the data has referred to as the domineering nature of mothers-in-law. Such symbolic imagery affected the way I approached these women. I entered into the field with a somewhat unsympathetic attitude from a position where my mind was clouded by what my experience with mothers-in-law was at that stage. However, when they started narrating their own stories, a privilege that had never been offered to them to voice their own experiences, I became more understanding towards these women because I noticed that they also had their own very oppressive and traumatic stories. The women expressed emotional disappointment in the way they were not appreciated by their daughters-in-law<sup>42</sup>. Their narrations contradicted my original views and began to defuse some of my original thinking.

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<sup>41</sup> See the section *Finding interviewees*

<sup>42</sup> In my earlier paper, presented in the IIAS newsletter in 2007, I was focusing upon the reversed position of the mothers-in-law who cannot expect to share the same authority as their mothers-in-law's generation (Chi Hsing-Miao 2007).

My observations after my marriage give me a broader context to reflect on the varied interactional web of interplay between these mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in their domestic domain. This offered me a more balanced understanding of the women's experiences and also, knowing the story behind the scene, enabled me to be more objective in my analysis. In my own marriage, I sometimes applied the same strategy as my respondents' foreign daughters-in-law by asking my husband to act as a mediator to avoid confrontational situations with my mother-in-law and indirectly refuse her interference in my marriage, which, in the eyes of my participants, was wrong and manipulative. Facing these two different transitions in the process of data analysis, I became aware of the power I own as a researcher to control the material and interpret my respondents' accounts. As Stacey (1991: 114) puts it:

With very rare exceptions it is the researcher who narrates, who 'authors' the ethnography. In the last instance, an ethnography is a written document structured primarily by a researcher's purposes, offering a researcher's interpretations, registered in a researcher's voice.

And this ultimate privilege in managing the presentation of the data has also given much responsibility to the researcher (Cotterill 1992) because the analysis is not simply an opportunity for a researcher to interpret respondents' accounts but also to look at the ways in which their stories are connected with social reality and how a researcher's personal history has influenced the way she analyses the research materials.

Similarly, my intention in this research is not to provide a privileged account of what mothers-in-law are really like in the context of cross-border marriage families, rather I am concerned with how women 'talk' about their stories and how these narratives explain their understanding of their lives. As Anderson and Jack (1991: 19) note, 'looking closely at the language and the particular meanings of important words women use to describe their experience allows us to understand how women are adapting to the culture within which they live', and Jackson (1998: 49) notes that narratives are not constructed in the form of 'raw experience' but are communicated in the form of 'representation, interpretation and reconstruction'. For

instance, in my study, I heard things like: ‘I am flexible; I let her [daughter-in-law] do whatever she wants,’ and ‘there is no other mother-in-law who would be like me, I treat her as my own daughter’. However, these narratives were often accompanied by the fact that mothers-in-law complained of feeling unappreciated by their foreign/Taiwanese daughters-in-law. The contradictions within the ‘logic of the narrative’ (Anderson and Jack 1991: 22) show how my respondents have endeavoured to act as good mothers-in-law but have still expected to receive levels of respectful treatment from their daughters-in-law. They expressed resentment about the attitudes of their daughters-in-law rather than recognising how their experiences were constrained by wider social and cultural forces. Therefore, making an ‘interpretive reading’ (Mason 2002: 149) of the transcripts in the analysis process is essential for a researcher to discover the ‘implicit norms or rules with which the interviewee is operating, or discourses by which they are influenced’ (ibid: 149).

Although all the interviews were conducted in Taiwanese, the recorded data, including formal and informal interviews and the focus group, were transcribed in Chinese<sup>43</sup>. During the transcribing process, I also incorporated the field notes, which recorded what was happening at the time in the field setting, my own observations about the interviews and the respondents’ body language. In addition, the pre-identified themes (Table 3) were used at this stage for working on the preliminary generalisation, thus various specific remarks or statements that were relevant to each theme were selected and added to the notes. In the analysis process, I went through all the transcripts and focus group material as well as re-read the notes from the preliminary overview, and generated themes that emerged from these data. I agree with Mason (2002) that reading transcripts from qualitative interviewing requires operating at three levels: literally, interpretively and reflexively. Therefore, I first focused on what participants said by reading the data literally, and then examined the implicit meaning of the remarks that participants made as well as noting my own role and perspective in the process of constructing the interview data. These types of reading brought out correlative sub-themes. I then selected quotes from individual

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<sup>43</sup> The reason I transcribed the quotes in Chinese rather than Taiwanese is because written Chinese is capable of representing all the Chinese stylistic fonts. The use of alphabetic writing and colloquial Taiwanese characters is still rare, despite the fact that, starting in 2001, local dialects or colloquial languages like Taiwanese, Hakka or an aboriginal language, have been incorporated into official language courses in junior high (optional courses) and elementary schools (compulsory courses) in Taiwan.

interviews or focus group material and put them in the relevant context. In processing these quotes, I translated only selected quotations into English due to time constraints; this practice has also been applied by many researchers (Liu Jieyu 2005; Wang Yi-Han 2008), who collected data in one language and presented the findings in another. When translating the quotes into a different language, I ‘try to convey meaning using words other than literally translated equivalents’ (Temple 1997: 610). I was aware that my knowledge of the culture and traditions of my participants and my personal background might have an influence on my decisions in translating the data but I tried my best to link the cultural context of some expressions as explicitly as possible. For example, when there were specific Taiwanese or Chinese descriptions and metaphors that represent a very culturally specific significance which cannot be simply translated into alternative English terms or phrases, I wrote them in the phonetic alphabet and explained the meaning in footnotes. I sought advice from native English speakers regarding the work of finding equivalent phrases when translating the quotes.

The relationship between theory and data is reflected by drawing extensively on interview material throughout the thesis. In this study of women’s experiences of their sons’ cross-border marriages, the logical ordering of events begins with the period prior to marriage, concerning how these mothers become involved in their sons’ marriage, and therefore this appears in the second analysis chapter. The first analysis chapter focuses on the autobiographies and personal backgrounds of these women and their sons. The discussion about life after their sons’ marriages and the women’s negotiations and the challenges they face in everyday practice appears in successive order. This is to illustrate the chronological connections between the family and marriage life-course and developments in mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships and to integrate theoretical concerns.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

This chapter I present the biographical background of the mothers-in-law and provide a snapshot of how their sons come to have wives from South-East Asia, how these women generally described their experience with foreign daughters-in-law in order to capture some of the features of their life stories and to serve as background information to which the rest of the chapters can be read. I begin by providing demographic details of interviewees and introduce their sons and foreign daughter-in-law in five tables. A brief snapshot of each woman and her family will follow.

*Table 4: Characteristics of interviewees*

<b>Participants in November 2006-January 2007</b>							
Name	Age	Marital Status	Number of Children		Number of Daughters-in-law		
			Sons	Daughters	Taiwanese	Foreign	China
Dai	68	Married	1	4	0	1	0
Fen	57	Married	3	1	0	3	0
Jhih	64	Married	2	3	1	1	0
Jiao	65	Widowed	1	2	0	1	0
Liañ	75	Widowed	4	0	3	1	0
Mĩn	70	Widowed	2	0	1	1	0
Mèng	57	Married	4	0	1	2	1
Píng	86	Widowed	2	4	1	1	0
Shù	70	Married	2	1	1	1	0
Shuěi	65	Married	3	0	2	1	0
Tang	73	Widowed	2	1	0	1	0
Táo	60	Married	3	0	2	1	0
Yíng	68	Married	2	2	1	1	0
<b>Participants in January 2008-February 2008</b>							
Bǎo	63	Widowed	2	1	1	1	0
Jyú-Hua	55	Married	3	1	0	1	0
Nana	65	Married	2-one deceased	3	0	1	0
Pan	72	Widowed	1	1	0	1	0
Sioù-Lan	64	Married	3	0	2	1	0
Wei-Wei	78	Widowed	2	1	1	1	0
Yuan- Yang	63	Married	2	2	1	1	0

A summary of twenty women's ages, marital status, and number of children and daughters-in-law are shown in Table 4. The participants ranged in age from 55 to 86. Eight of them were widows. All of the women had at least two children and the majority of them had both sons and daughters. However, there were also seven of the interviewees who had no daughter. The women with more than one son had a greater possibility of having both Taiwanese and foreign daughters-in-law, with the exception of three participants, two of them managed to let all of their sons marry foreign wives.

More of the women's personal information, their marital and work status and income are provided in Table 5. Not every widowed woman relied on her children's financial support, they either engaged in farm work or sought out money-making opportunities in the area where they lived. Only three women described themselves as housewives, with one also working part-time with her farmer husband. Those who are not employed and do not define themselves as housewife were neither engaging in housework nor a paid job, but depended on their husband's income or personal savings and the support of their children. Although each elderly person is eligible to receive a quasi-pension of NT\$ 3000 (£57) per month when they are over 65, and some of them who have joined the farmers' health insurance programme can receive a monthly allowance of NT\$ 6000 (£115), only two participants relied mainly on this. These two women were widowed and still took occasional part-time farm work as an additional disposable income along with their old-age allowance. For example, Pan grew some vegetables in her back yard for another farmer, she got paid NT\$ 500 a day (£10) with no specific working schedule. However, this source of income would discontinue after the harvest unless she received another request. In another case, Shuěi was paid in cash of NT\$ 900 (£17) right after 10 hours work, but again the work opportunity only appears occasionally. It is not difficult to see why women considered the old-age pension to be their main source of income rather than the earnings from unstable part-time work.

Table 5: Marital and Work Status of Interviewees

<b>Participants in November 2006-January 2007</b>				
Name	Age	Marital Status	Work Status	Main source of income
Dai	68	Married	Not employed	husband's income
Fen	57	Married	Farmer	casual paid farm work plus husband's income
Jhih	64	Married	Farmer	husband's income
Jiao	65	Widowed	Seasonal farm worker	paid farm work
Liañ	75	Widowed	Not employed	children's support
Mĩn	70	Widowed	Seasonal farm worker	paid farm work
Mèng	57	Married	Farmer	self-employment
Píng	86	Widowed	Housewife	children's support
Shù	70	Married	Housewife/ part-time farmer	husband's income
Shuěi	65	Married	Part-time farm worker	husband's income and paid farm work
Tang	73	Widowed	Part-time farmer	Old-Age pension
Táo	60	Married	Farmer	husband's income
Ying	68	Married	Farmer	husband's income
<b>Participants in January 2008-February 2008</b>				
Bǎo	63	Widowed	Farmer	self-employment
Jyú-Hua	55	Married	Self-employed	husband's income
Nana	65	Married	Greengrocer	self-employment
Pan	72	Widowed	Part-time farmer	Old-Age pension
Sioù-Lan	64	Married	Housewife	husband's income
Wei-Wei	78	Widowed	Not employed	income from personal savings
Yuan-Yang	63	Married	Not employed	husband's income

The next table is demonstrates the residence status of my participants and the related members who staying with them in the households (see Table 6). Bringing out their residence form will provide greater insight into women's life in their private sphere. The kind of household setting influences the ways in which domestic chores are arranged and affected the family interaction. Madigan and Munro (1999) point to

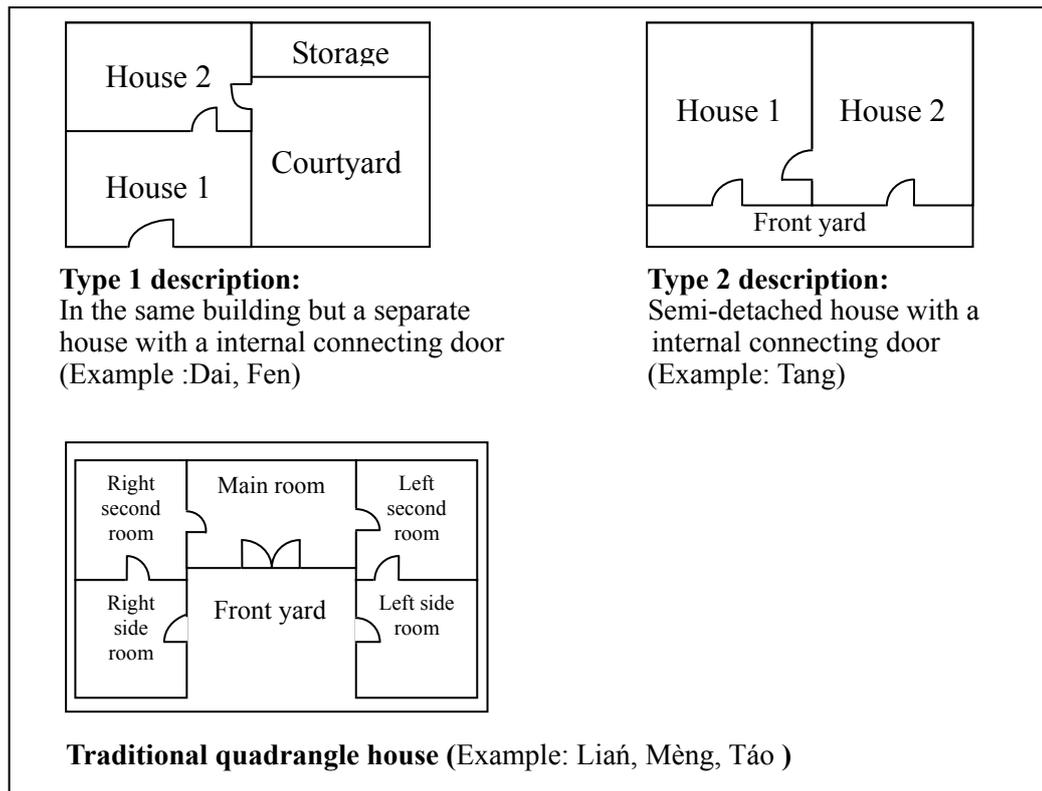
the significance of home and space in understanding the workings of family relationships. My participants' accounts reveal a similar connection. For example, when Ying and her husband lived with both of her Taiwanese and Vietnamese daughters-in-law in a terraced house, they shared spaces like the kitchen and living room with each other. Ying thought since her daughters-in-law lived with them, they undoubtedly should contribute their labour, take turns preparing meals and cleaning communal space. However, this arrangement did not work but instead created many conflicts due to the unbalanced workloads between them. I begin now to introduce my interviewees' residence status: only three of them did not live with their foreign daughters-in-law, with one residing in another village with her son and Taiwanese daughter-in-law while another participant's foreign daughter-in-law has run away from the family and was not intending to return, and one lived with only her husband. There were three of my interviewees who lived with both Taiwanese and foreign daughters-in-law, while fourteen of them had only foreign daughters-in-law in the house. When those who did not live with their Taiwanese daughters-in-law had their grandchildren in the house this was because the parents could not look after them due to the occupational responsibility. However, not every one of my participants' residence status remained the same after one year when I interviewed them the second time, the changes shown on the number of daughter-in-law and grandchildren's column (particularly in Jhieh, Mèng and Jiao's case).

Six of my participants' family property is divided but they had lived with their sons in a three-generational household. There were also other family members like mother-in-law and unmarried daughter who stayed with my participants: two of the women had unmarried daughter residing in their houses, while three women who had aged mothers-in-law living with them. In households that contain more than a nuclear family, conflict might be caused from the use of housing space and the division of housework. I will discuss this issue in Chapter 7. Many my participants shared two- or three-storey house with their sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren, but there were other housing types as well. House type 1 and 2 allow for family occupied single spaces in the same building (as the traditional quadrangle house) (see Figure 3).

Table 6: Residence Status

<b>Participants in November 2006-January 2007</b>						
Name	Number of daughters-in-law		Grandchildren		Residence form	Additional information
	Foreign	Taiwanese	Foreign	Taiwanese		
Dai	1	0	2	0	Type 1	
Fen	3	0	5	0	Type 1	
Jhih	1	0	2	0→1	four-storey house	her mother-in-law lives with them
Jiao	1→0	0	2	0	three-storey house	
Liañ	1	1	2	0	traditional quadrangle house	house had been divided
Mĩn	0	1	0	2	three-storey house	house had been divided
Mèng	2	0	2	2→0	traditional quadrangle house	her mother-in-law lives with them
Píng	1	0	1	0	four-storey house	house had been divided
Shù	1	0	2	0	two-storey house	
Shuěi	1	0	1	1	three-storey house	
Tang	1	0	3	0	Type 2 (Figure 3)	
Táo	1	1	2	2	traditional quadrangle house	house had been divided
Ying	0	0	0	0	terraced house	
<b>Participants in January 2008-February 2008</b>						
Bǎo	1	0	1	0	three-storey house	unmarried daughter lives with them
Jyú-Hua	1	0	0	0	four-storey house	unmarried children and a foreign domestic worker live with them
Nana	1	0	4	0	three-storey house	
Pan	1	0	2	0	three-storey house	1. disabled daughter lives with them 2. house had been divided
Siòu-Lan	1	0	2	0	four-storey house	
Wei-Wei	1	0	0	0	two-storey house	house had been divided
Yuan-Yang	1	1	1	2	traditional quadrangle house	her mother-in-law lives with them

Figure 3: Share house arrangement



Let me now turn to the introduction of sons' personal background. Table 7 shows a summary of sons' ages at the time of marriage, their occupation and the reason they married foreign wives. Most of the sons were persuaded by their mothers rather than arranging the marriage process themselves. Only two of them happened to meet their wives through their occupations. The husbands' average age at the time of marriage was 32, with the youngest aged 25 and the oldest aged 46. Two of these, Dai and Wei-Wei's sons were in their second marriage. Although most of them were from agricultural families, not everyone inherited the family work. Their occupations were various; a few had specific professions like engineer, mechanic or manager in a family textile business, five of twenty-three sons were farmers and others were construction workers or self-employed. This associated information about the sons contributes to an understanding of the patterns in their cross-border marriages and their mothers' involvement both during and after the marriage.

Table 7: Characteristic of sons

<b>Participants in November 2006-January 2007</b>				
Mother's name	Age at the time of marriage	Birth order of son	Occupation	Reason for marrying a foreigner
Dai	30	youngest	Engineer	Second marriage- persuaded by Mother
Fen 1	31	second son	Construction worker	persuaded by Mother
Fen 2	28	third son	Construction worker	persuaded by Mother
Fen 3	26	youngest	Construction worker	persuaded by Mother
Jhih	30	youngest	Farmer	persuaded by Mother
Jiao	35	eldest	Worker	persuaded by Mother
Liañ	38	youngest	Family textile business	He was working abroad and his colleague introduced his daughter to him
Mĩn	35	eldest	Worker	persuaded by Mother
Mèng	26	middle	Farmer	persuaded by Mother
Mèng	25	youngest	Farmer	persuaded by Mother
Píng	46	middle	Stallman (noodle stall)	He was persuaded by a relative whose son had married a foreign wife
Shù	40	eldest	Mechanic in a car garage	He was influenced by a friend whose brother married a foreign wife
Shuěi	37	middle	Factory worker	He developed an interest through a friend who had married a foreign wife
Tang	34	eldest	Factory worker	persuaded by Mother
Táo	28	middle	Farmer	persuaded by Mother
Ying	32	youngest	Mechanic	He was working abroad and his colleague introduced him
<b>Participants in January 2008-February 2008</b>				
Bǎo	27	youngest	Employed by his brother to work in a cell phone shop	He was influenced by a salesman who married a foreign wife
Jyú-Hua	30	eldest	Construction labourer	persuaded by Mother
Nana	25	middle	Garbage man	persuaded by Mother
Pan	29	eldest	Odd job	He took the initiative in hoping to marry a foreign wife
Sioù-Lan	29	youngest	Construction worker	persuaded by Mother
Wei-Wei	42	youngest	Family business of Noodles	Second marriage- persuaded by Mother
Yuan-Yang	33	eldest	Farmer	persuaded by Mother

The foreign daughters-in-law's country of origin, the length of their married life and identified linguistic capacity, as well as their occupation are summarised in Table 8. There were twenty-three foreign daughters-in-law as two of my participants had more than one daughter-in-law, seventeen of them are Vietnamese, while five daughters-in-law are from Indonesia and one is from Cambodia. The longest length of marriage was thirteen years and the shortest two years (based on the result of the second time of the interview in 2008). The statements of language skill are based on the perception of my participants, when they described their communication experiences with their foreign daughters-in-law and because most of my participants speak Taiwanese the language skill here is mainly Taiwanese. Most of the foreign daughters-in-law had jobs outside the family, mainly as factory workers or farm workers, but five of them were housewives. According to eight of my participants, their foreign daughters-in-law worked with them in either the family farm or other farm work when they first arrived, but only two of the foreign daughters-in-law had continued to work with them, the six others all found another waged job outside the family. Mèng's first Vietnamese daughter-in-law had worked with her in the family farm, the reason she stopped working with Mèng might be the payment and heavy physical work are not in the direct ratio. I remembered Mèng told me she paid NT\$ 500 (£ 9) for her daughter-in-law to work only four hours, she considered this amount of money as fairly good and respectable payment while other farm workers can only earn NT\$ 800 to NT\$ 1000 (£ 15 to £19) for one day's work<sup>44</sup>.

In the next section I provide further information about them and offer the major experience of their living through certain periods, such as how and what resource they applied to marry their sons and what kind of relationship they had with their foreign daughter-in-law.

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<sup>44</sup> This amount of payment for a day labour can also be observed from one of my participants, Shuěi's case. When she worked as a day labourer picking coriander in the fields, she had to work from six o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the evening and she got NT\$ 900 (£ 17) paid by the employer immediately after work.

Table 8: Details of the foreign daughter-in-law

<b>Participants in November 2006-January 2007</b>				
Name of M-in-L	Country of origin of D-in-L	Duration of marriage /years	Language skill	Occupation
Dai	Indonesia	10→11	Fluent Taiwanese	Worker (clothes factory)
Fen	Vietnam	2→3	Basic conversation	Part-time worker → day labour
	Vietnam	3→4	Fluent Taiwanese	Farm worker → factory worker
	Vietnam	1→2	Basic conversation	Housewife
Jhìh	Cambodia	4→5	Fluent Taiwanese	Collecting eggs in a chicken farm → betel nut beauty
Jiao	Indonesia	7	Fluent Chinese and Taiwanese	Housewife → has run away for 8 months
Liañ	Vietnam	11	Fluent Taiwanese	Housewife
Mĩn	Vietnam	7→8	Barely understandable	Worker → Individual worker (selling cosmetics with Ying's D-in-L)
Mèng	Vietnam	8→9	Fluent Taiwanese	Part-time worker → Serves in a chophouse
	Vietnam	8→9	Fluent Taiwanese	Betel nut beauty → maybe factory worker
Píng	Indonesia	11→12	Fluent Chinese and little Taiwanese	Works with her husband on a street store
Shù	Vietnam	6→7	Fluent Chinese and little Taiwanese	Worker (packing vegetables)
Shuěi	Vietnam	2→3	Basic Taiwanese	Worker (packing vegetables) → temporary housewife (for three months)
Tang	Indonesia	12→13	Fluent Hakka and Taiwanese	Worker (clothes manufactory)
Táo	Vietnam	6→7	Fluent Chinese and Taiwanese	Farmer (works in family fields)
Ying	Vietnam	8→9	Fluent Taiwanese	Individual worker (selling cosmetics with Mĩn's D-in-L )
<b>Participants in January 2008-February 2008</b>				
Bǎo	Vietnam	6	Fluent Taiwanese	Factory worker
Jyú-Hua	Vietnam	2	Basic Taiwanese	Part-time worker and housewife
Nana	Indonesia	13	Fluent Taiwanese	Worker (packing vegetables)
Pan	Vietnam	13	Fluent Taiwanese	Worker (packing vegetables)
Sioù-Lan	Vietnam	5	Fluent Taiwanese	Day labourer
Wei-Wei	Vietnam	2	Basic Taiwanese	Housewife
Yuan-Yang	Vietnam	4	Basic Taiwanese	Part-time farmer and housewife

### **Biographical details of the women and their families**

I divided my participants into two sets based on the time when I interviewed them; November 2006 to January 2007 and January to February 2008 respectively. And I also conducted second interviews with some of the first group.

#### ***Participants from primary interviews: November 2006 to January 2007***

**Dai** was aged 68 when I interviewed her in December 2006. She was married with four daughters and one son. Her husband was working as a chicken farmer and sometimes he would butcher the poultry for his customers if they wanted; he charged on a case-by-case basis. Her daughters were all married and were living at a distance from them. At the time of the first interview, she was not employed and was living with her husband, son, their Indonesian daughter-in-law and two grandchildren in the same compound but a separate house. They shared most of the family activities, such as eating together and doing laundry collectively. Since Dai had lost her sight in one eye two years previously, her family did not want her to do any housework. They wished her to enjoy her old age. Her son and daughter-in-law took on most of the housework, such as preparing a meal for herself and her husband to be just heated at lunchtime or doing the laundry before they went out to work. However, before I started interviewing her, I noticed she was still helping them to do the laundry work. The reason that her son came to have a foreign wife was through an introduction by their neighbours. Dai was very worried about him as he had gone through a divorce at 29 years old. She asked her neighbours to introduce some good woman for him, but was unsuccessful. One of her neighbours, whose son had married an Indonesian wife, suggested to her that she approach their cross-national marriage broker. She then persuaded her son to go for this opportunity for marriage. Her husband accompanied her son to Indonesia to find a suitable candidate. After the completion of the marriage documents, Dai's husband went over to bring their daughter-in-law back because her son could not take leave from work. Her daughter-in-law was a Chinese-Indonesian of Hakka ethnicity, who could speak Hakka and a little Chinese. After ten years of living with her daughter-in-law, she was pleased that the second marriage had made her son happy.

Her life was remained much the same in 2008 when I visited her the second time, daughter-in-law was helping her brother to migrate to Taiwan to find a job and the administrative work was still in process at that time.

**Fen** was married with three sons and one daughter. At the time of first interview, she was aged 57 and was living with her husband, three sons and their Vietnamese wives and five grandchildren in the separate but at joining houses on a shared courtyard. She and her husband were working on the family farm, and sometimes Fen took paid farm work to earn extra money while her three sons were working as construction workers. The first and second daughters-in-law both had waged jobs, one was a part-time worker in a vegetable packing factory, the other was a waged agricultural worker. Only the third daughter-in-law, who had just delivered a baby boy, stayed at home as a housewife. It was Fen who persuaded all three of her sons, who otherwise had a low chance of meeting a suitable woman as they were involved in construction work, to marry a foreign wife. She thought the advantage of marrying a foreign wife was that it is fast and men have relatively much more choice than the traditional blind date where they can only meet one woman at a time. With the help of their neighbours, she approached a cross-national marriage agent to ask for their services. Afterwards her sons had married one by one in successive years. The second son was the first one to marry, when he was 28, and then the first son, who was 31, and lastly the third one when he was 26. This arrangement was made because the first son was taking a night school course and needed to complete it. Only Fen accompanied her sons to Vietnam and helped them select the candidate. She taught the first daughter-in-law how to speak Taiwanese properly and also trained her regarding the traditional way of worshipping their ancestors and deities. After the arrival of her second and third daughter-in-law, she entrusted this duty to the first one.

During my second visit, their life had not changed much. Fen was in charge of the housework related only to herself and her husband. She was still working in her husband's fields. The little assistance she provided to her daughters-in-law was related to child care and worshipping. In fact, Fen mentioned that her third daughters-in-law had asked her once if she could spend more time to help them with childcare as she too wanted to go out to work like her sisters-in-law. Fen had refused this and asked them to negotiate the work arrangements between themselves. On the whole, she was pleased with her three daughters-in-law.

**Jhjh** was aged 64 when I interviewed her in December, 2006. She was married with three daughters and two sons. At the time, she and her husband were working in the family fields and her youngest son was working with them. She was living with her

husband, her mother-in-law, her son, Cambodian daughters-in-law and two grandchildren in a four-storey house. Her youngest son was the one who married a Cambodian wife at the age of 30. His marriage was arranged by Jhih, who persuaded her son to get married. She first sought the help of the local *muê-lâng-pô* (female matchmaker) who had co-operated with a cross-national matchmaking agency, and who led Jhih to the agent. They had chosen her Cambodian daughter-in-law by only viewing the photo albums from a branch of the cross-national marriage agent. After the marriage, her daughter-in-law worked in a chicken farm where she was collecting eggs.

By the time of my second visit in January 2008, their co-residence form had changed over a period of one year. Her older son had left his baby boy with Jhih while he and his wife had to work, but they visited Jhih's family regularly. Her youngest son's marriage was in difficulties, since her foreign daughter-in-law had changed her job and was working as a betel nut beauty.<sup>45</sup> Jhih thought her daughter-in-law had become uncooperative in housework after she started the second job, which was better paid than the previous work. She also was planning to go to Cambodia to attend her younger brother's marriage the following year and was not going to return to Taiwan thereafter. I asked what Jhih thought about her daughter-in-law's intention to leave the family; she said she is fine as long as her daughter-in-law would not take away her two grandchildren.

**Jiao** was aged 65. She was a widow with two daughters and one son. Two of her daughters were married and were living some distance from them. At the time of the first interview, she not only worked as a seasonal farm worker but also grew tomatoes on their family land. She was living with her son, Indonesian daughter-in-law and two grandchildren in a three-storey house. Before her son had married a foreign wife, he was not dating other girls as he had experienced a few break ups in the past. In order to help her son, Jiao asked the opinions of some of her friends who had foreign daughters-in-law. She collected the information about which cross-national marriage agent had introduced better prospective women to other families. After she compared her neighbour's to her aunt's neighbour's daughter-in-law, she

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<sup>45</sup> The women selling betel nuts, cigarettes and beverages from a highly decorated glass enclosure alongside the main street, normally they wear revealing clothing. However, from what I observed in the village the girls would tend to be dressed in a more conservative way, for example they wore brief t-shirts and shorts rather than bikini covers with transparent top.

went for her aunt's neighbour's agent. She also had to persuade her unwilling son to go abroad for marriage. When her son, who was 35 years old, finally agreed to go, Jiao was disappointed when she received a call from the marriage broker informing her that her son had picked the first woman he met in Indonesia as his wife. According to her, 'it was his destiny'. During her son's seven years marriage, Jiao had not liked her daughter-in-law, she thought this Indonesian neither a good housewife nor an efficient worker because she was too lazy at home and work too slowly.

At the time of my second visit, her daughter-in-law, who had run away from home in the past a few times, had left home without leaving any information for eight months previously. However, it was not until her granddaughter received a call from her mother that Jiao became sure that this Indonesian had gone to Taoyuan County the north of Taiwan and working as a waitress in a restaurant. During the same period, her son had also been working away from home for a long period. She faced a lot of financial crises as she had to look after her two grandchildren on her own and was also not able to go out to work. I remember during my interview her son phoned Jiao to ask to borrow some money to meet his living costs. Jiao told me that she had no idea how to get out of that situation.

**Liañ** was 75 years old with four sons, her husband died in his forties, at that time the oldest son was seventeen years old and the youngest son was only eleven years old. Although some of the neighbours were advising her to get remarried again as soon as possible and were attempting to introduce *guā-síng-á* (mainlanders) for her, Liañ refused it. As she mentioned to me, after her husband's death her first priority was to look after her four children which she had to do on her own by running a grocery shop. She was not ready to put herself in the role of somebody's wife again. At the time of the interview, she was living in a traditional quadrangle house, in which each household has separate living quarters, with one of her sons and his Taiwanese wife. Her youngest son had joined them the previous month from Vietnam with his Vietnamese wife and their two children. In fact, during the past 11 years in Vietnam, her son had worked in a family textile business. When he was aged 38, one of the employees, his present father-in-law, introduced his daughter to him and they got married the same year. Her foreign daughter-in-law could speak fluent Taiwanese when she first arrived in Taiwan, she could also speak fluent Chinese and Cantonese

because her mother is Cantonese. Liañ told me that she was still not very familiar with her Vietnamese daughter-in-law as they hardly lived together but she thought their living in the same house would not affect her way of living. She thought she was still capable of cooking vegetarian dishes and could do laundry on her own.

**Mĩn** had been widowed for the last 34 years. She was 70 years old with two sons. She worked as a seasonal farm worker and sometimes she collected recycling materials to make some extra money. At the time of the first interview, she was living with her younger son, his Taiwanese wife and two grandchildren in a three-storey house. Her older son and his Vietnamese wife had moved out a few years before. Mĩn told me that there were several occasions when she and her foreign daughter-in-law had serious fights over the last 7 years. Her foreign daughter-in-law had stolen her golden jewellery and took away the grandchild's passport intending to leave for her own country. This behaviour of her daughter-in-law made Mĩn angry because she had never shown her commitment towards her son after marriage but was always thinking about going back to Vietnam. These conflicts had distressed her until her older son decided to move out of the family and live separately on their own. Mĩn agreed to it. In fact, she was the one who had pushed her son to get married when he was 35. At the time her son was not interested in marriage. She had asked one of her son's friends whose relative was a marriage broker to introduce a foreign wife for her son. However, she had never expected that her efforts to marry her son off and become the mother-in-law of a foreign daughter-in-law would end up in such a problematic situation.

At the second interview, I did not have much time to talk with her, she was rushing out for work. She told me that the reason she keeps working is to help her older son to pay the house mortgage. She thought her older son and his Vietnamese wife should learn to appreciate what she had done for them. But the attitude of her daughter-in-law had always irritated Mĩn, because she always looks sulky every time Mĩn visited them. At the end of our conversation, she concluded 'in my opinion, Ying's Vietnamese daughter-in-law is the worst one in our village and mine is the second'.

**Mèng** was 57 years old, she was married with four sons. At the time of the first interview, she was working as a farmer and was the head of her family. She lived in a traditional quadrangle house with her husband, mother-in-law, two of her sons (the second and the youngest one), their Vietnamese wives, and four grandchildren. Her older son left his two children with Mèng and went in search of work in another city accompanied by his wife. At that time, both of her sons who had foreign wives had been married for 8 years. Mèng had first persuaded her second son to marry when he was 26. She identified a cross-national marriage agent and accompanied her son to Vietnam for the wedding. In the same year, she took her youngest son, who was then 25 years old, to Vietnam for the purpose of marrying him off. Based on her previous experience, Mèng was confident enough this time to carry out her son's marriage by herself. The reason for Mèng pushing her sons to marry foreign wives was that she did not think that women would be willing to marry her obese farmer sons. Shortly after she had completed her sons' marriages, she let them manage their own families. Neither of her daughters-in-law helped in preparing meals for the family nor shared the housework. Sometimes Mèng's mother-in-law helped the youngest grandson's wife to do laundry as her youngest grandson was her favour.

During my second visit, Mèng's older son's children were no longer living with her. But her third son had left his nine month old infant with Mèng while he and his Chinese wife had moved to China for work. Her second son was not expected to live more than two months as he had a terminal illness. She was apprehensive about his future even though her foreign daughter-in-law was looking after her husband dutifully.

**Píng** was 86 years old. She was widowed with six children – two sons and four daughters. She was economically dependent on her sons and her pension. At the time of the first interview, she was living with her second son and his Indonesian wife, and their 8 year old daughter in a four-storey house. The older son and his wife were living at a distance from them with limited visits but he transferred NT 5000 dollars (around £96) every month to Píng's account. Her second son was 46 when he married his wife. Before that, he had had many blind dates. There were also a few neighbours who suggested that they consider having a foreign wife but Píng and her husband had refused to take this option. It was not until Píng's husband died and one of their relative's son had married a 'nice and docile' foreign daughter-in-law that her

son finally decided to give it a try. Píng asked her older son-in-law to accompany her son to Indonesia. The woman they chose had an Indonesian mother and a father who was a Chinese migrant. Although this daughter-in-law could speak Chinese and a little Taiwanese, Píng described several conflict situations they had experienced which were caused by the difficulties in communication. At the time of the first interview, her son had been married for 12 years. Píng was responsible for looking after her granddaughter while her son and his wife were working full-time. As her son and daughter-in-law had to leave early every morning to travel to work in the city and returned home only at dinner time, it was Píng who was also in charge of domestic work, such as cooking, cleaning and doing laundry.

At the second visit, her life had remained almost the same, she felt obligated to take on the responsibility of childcare and housework while her son and daughter-in-law were busy at work. However, with regard to the relationship with her daughter-in-law, she concluded, ‘it is always better to marry your son rather than keep him single, that is a price to pay so I learnt to go with the flow and ignored the conflict that I and my *sin-pū*<sup>46</sup> had’.

**Shù** was 70 years old and was married with two sons and one daughter. At the first interview, she was a full-time housewife but sometimes needed to work with her husband in the family fields. She and her husband were living with her older son and his Vietnamese wife and two of her grandchildren in a two-storey house. Her younger son’s family was living in Taipei with only holiday visits, as was her married daughter. In fact, her older son had had a Taiwanese girlfriend who would not agree to live with their family in the village after marriage. This was the reason why he married a foreign woman. His friend, whose brother had married a Vietnamese wife with the help of a cross-national marriage agent, recommended him to try this marriage form when he was 40. Shù neither encouraged nor disapproved of her son marrying a foreign wife. But when the marriage was fixed she contributed to the cost of the wedding and the commission fee. During her 6 years’ experience of living with her Vietnamese daughter-in-law, Shù thought her daughter-in-law did the bare minimum of housework and had spent too much money buying unnecessary things like clothes and toys for the children.

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<sup>46</sup> The term *sin-pū* refers to daughter-in-law.

When I visited her for the second time she had stopped working in the agricultural sector due to her poor health. She thought working on the farm was too heavy for her at this age. However, she still needed to do housework and take over the childcare responsibility while both her son and daughter-in-law were busy at work. It was hard for Shù to express her grievances, since her husband and her son thought that the daughter-in-law had become more restrained in her behaviour than before: She came home early and had kept her money for the children's consumption rather than sending it home. Nevertheless, Shù was still not satisfied.

**Shuěi** was married with three sons. At the time of the first interview, she was 65 years old. Her husband was managing a small grocery shop in their village, while Shuěi was working as a part-time farm worker and devoting rest of her time to the family. They lived with her second son and his Vietnamese wife and their 7 month-old baby boy, and her older son's 3 year-old daughter in a three-storey house. Her second son was a sheet metal worker in a factory and according to Shuěi, has a slight limp but it is not noticeable. Shuěi had been trying for many years to persuade her son to marry and had even arranged several blind dates for him but he had always refused. One occasion that a neighbour of Shuěi's offered to introduce her son to a Vietnamese girl who was in the village to visit her married sister but her son was reluctant to go. Thus when her son finally decided to get married, and especially to a Vietnamese woman, Shuěi was surprised. He got the idea through one of his friends who had married a foreign wife with the assistance of a marriage agent. Shuěi and her husband did not accompany him to Vietnam. He went with two other unknown men, who were also using the marriage service of the agent. He got married when he was 37.

On first meeting Shuěi was not satisfied with her daughter-in-law who she thought was too busy taking her own work and ignore the childcare and domestic duties. But her situation was changed by the time of my second interview; Shuěi was not longer complaining about her daughter-in-law as she was given up her wage job in order to help Shuěi when she had undergone spinal surgery.

**Tang** was 73 years old and was a widow with two sons and one daughter. In the past she and her husband had both worked really hard to raise their three children, but her husband had had a stroke at the age of 40. Tang raised her children and looked after

her husband all on her own, until her older son became capable of contributing financially. She believed it was only because of her firm faith in deities that she could face all sort of challenges in life. At the time of the first interview, she was living with her oldest son, Indonesian daughter-in-law and three grandchildren in a semi-detached house where the other half of the property also belonged to them. She bought it for her youngest unmarried son who was working in the north of Taiwan and expected that he would return home after marriage. Her married daughter was living close to Tang and was visiting her frequently. Her son was persuaded, at the age of 34, to go to Indonesia with a relative's Indonesian daughter-in-law. Her relative's son had been married twice before he married an Indonesian wife. Tang did not accompany her son to Indonesia. He stayed there for nearly fortnight to find a wife. Her Indonesian daughter-in-law was a Chinese Indonesian of Hakka ethnicity who could only speak Hakka. Tang introduced her to work in a factory and took her to attend literacy classes soon after her arrival. She believed that this was the best way for her daughter-in-law to adapt to life in Taiwan. During that adjustment period, on weekdays Tang was doing the housework and was looking after the children while her daughter-in-law went out to work, but her daughter-in-law was doing the housework during the weekends. After residing in Taiwan for 12 years her daughter-in-law could speak fluent Taiwanese.

However, at the time of my second visit Tang expressed the opinion that she did not want her unmarried son to marry a foreign wife like his brother but a Taiwanese. She thought that marrying a foreign wife involves a lot of expenses other than the cost of the wedding, such as the commission fee for the marriage agent, flight tickets to visit the daughter-in-law's home and so on. She mentioned a few months before I interviewed that her older son had closed his saving account and had withdrawn three hundred thousand dollars (around £5759) so that his wife and children could visit her family in Indonesia. Tang did not stop him from doing so but she did not want to see her son spend money in this way.

**Táo** was 60 years old. She was married with three sons. At the time of the first interview, she and her husband were growing vegetables on their family farm for a living. They lived with their oldest and second sons and their families in a traditional quadrangle house, although they had divided up the family estates. Her second son was the one who married a Vietnamese wife. He was unlike his two brothers, who

had a higher educational background and their own careers. He was working with his parents in the family fields. Táó developed her interest in transnational marriage through a neighbour's friend, who had a son married to a foreign wife. They told her that their daughter-in-law had a sister who was marriageable. Thus, Táó persuaded her son when he was 28 and asked his older brother to accompany them to Vietnam to marry a wife. They made a private arrangement through the help of neighbour's daughter-in-law so they did not use any service from a marriage agent, but instead Táó gave her NT 6000 dollars (around £115) as thank-you present. After six years of marriage with her foreign daughter-in-law living in Taiwan, Táó was satisfied with her. Her daughter-in-law was not only helping to look after the children of her brother-in-law and shouldering the responsibility of almost all the housework but also provided assistance on the family farm. Táó was preparing to let her foreign daughter-in-law handle the income that they got from the farming, because she wanted her second son's family to save some money for themselves.

At the second visit, Táó had not yet passed their farm business to the second son but she was still quite satisfied with her daughter-in-law. I remembered when I interviewed other women in the same village as Táó, they all gave great compliments to Táó's daughter-in-law as she was diligent and docile.

**Ying** was 68 when I interviewed her in 2006. She was married with two daughters and two sons. The younger son had a Vietnamese wife. Her husband was a village head as well as a farmer. At the time, she and her husband were still working in their own fields. They lived on their own in a terraced house with shared forecourt and toilets. It was about a year previously that both of her sons decided to move out and establish their own living space apart from their parents. In the eyes of Ying, the main reason for her family to live separately was her foreign daughter-in-law, who could not get along with other members of the household. Her daughter-in-law had also persuaded her husband to buy a new house so she could 'enjoy her freedom'. After they moved out, only Ying's son and grandson would visit home during weekends or holidays. In contrast, the older son and his Taiwanese wife were living close to them and they visited Ying almost every weekend, as did two of her married daughters. The reason that her son married a foreign wife was that he met his wife during a stay in Vietnam where he was working for four months. One of his colleagues introduced them. Only five days after his arrival in Vietnam, he called

Ying and said he would marry a woman from Vietnam. He was 32 then. His marriage had lasted 8 years. Ying was very satisfied with her Vietnamese daughter-in-law during the first month after her arrival, because she was diligent in housework. Things soon changed when her daughter-in-law showed differences in spending and diet habits and lifestyle and Ying found the changes intolerable.

At the second visit, I found that her complaints about her foreign daughter-in-law remained almost the same, since they still living apart and Ying never saw her daughter-in-law, thus Ying has no chance to have further thoughts about her. But she provided some stories about her neighbours' foreign daughters-in-law which were negative as well.

### ***Participants from second interviews: January to February 2008***

**Bảo** was aged 63. She was a widow with two sons and one daughter. She was working as a farmer and was living with her youngest son, Vietnamese daughter-in-law, her five year-old grandson and her unmarried daughter in a three-storey house. Her older son and his family lived close to them. Bảo's older son has his own shop in the village and employs his brother to manage the shop. The youngest son got married when he was 27. He got the idea of marrying a foreign wife from a commercial salesman, who brought them supplies once or twice a week in the shop, who had married a Vietnamese wife and also worked as a part-time marriage broker. Although he took the initiative in making this plan, he still asked Bảo's opinion, and she agreed to it. Through the assistance of that individual broker, Bảo's brother, Bảo and her son all went to Vietnam together. She stressed that she was not really satisfied with her foreign daughter-in-law at first sight, because she was too thin. Despite that, her son still wanted to marry her. Although she thought her daughter-in-law look better now, she had not found living with her to be satisfactory. Their co-residence had cause many conflicts in the family. Conflicting situations arose particularly when the unmarried daughter complained about her sister-in-law not doing as much housework as she did, or Bảo suspected her daughter-in-law was sending money back to Vietnam as she rarely contributed her earnings to the household and was unwilling to paid Bảo for childcare.

**Jyú-Hua** was aged 55, was married with three sons and one daughter. At the time of the interview, although she was not employed, she did not fully rely on the earnings

of her husband, who was running a garage. She was working as a commission agent for underground betting from home. She and her husband lived with all of their unmarried children, the Vietnamese daughter-in-law, her father-in-law and an Indonesian domestic worker in a four-storey house. The reason for her son marrying a foreign wife was that he did not know how to date a girl. Therefore, when she saw that her neighbour had married a foreign daughter-in-law, she went to the same cross-national marriage agent. She thought her son's marriage was successful because she had accompanied him to Vietnam 'helping him to choose a compliant wife'. After the marriage, her daughter-in-law was working with her son on a construction site. However, Jyú-Hua did not have to do any housework because she had employed an Indonesian domestic worker. This domestic worker was initially taking care of Jyú-Hua's parents-in-law, after her mother-in-law passed away, she started to use the help of the domestic worker for the household chores along with looking after her father-in-law. At the time of the interview, her son was 32 years old and had been married for 2 years. Her daughter-in-law had suffered a miscarriage the previous year. On the whole, Jyú-Hua was satisfied with her daughter-in-law because she was diligent and docile.

**Nana** was 65 years old and was married with five children, three daughters and two sons, one of who had died in a car accident around ten years previously. Nana worked as a greengrocer in the traditional market. Her husband sometimes helped her, after his retirement from his job as a garbage collector. He was also taking up some odd jobs whenever they were available. At the time of the interview, she was living with her husband, son, her Indonesian daughter-in-law and four grandchildren in a three-storey house. Her daughters were all married but according to Nana they had limited contact with her. The reason for her son to have a cross-border marriage was that she thought her son would never get married because his chances in meeting a suitable girl in his previous job as a truck driver were limited so she persuaded him to go for a matchmaking option. She asked her brother about this because his neighbour had married a foreign wife who was compliant and obedient. Since she wanted a similar daughter-in-law, she contacted the same cross-national marriage agent of her brother's neighbour. At the time of the interview it had been thirteen years since her son had married. During the initial days her foreign daughter-in-law was quite diligent and nice but as time passed her behaviour began to change and

became worse as she became lazier day by day. She did not bother to help with the housework after she returned from work, instead Nana and her husband had to do everything by themselves.

**Pan** was 72 years old and was a widow. She had one son and one disabled daughter. In her earlier years, she was a local matchmaker and a seasonal farm worker. When I interviewed her, she was living with her son, disabled daughter, Vietnamese daughter-in-law and two grandchildren in a three-storey house. She grew vegetables for other farmers in her own backyard to support the family, while her son was only taking up odd jobs after being made redundant. Initially her son had a Taiwanese girlfriend and she had met the girl several times, but their relationship weakened and eventually came to an end when he returned home after being made redundant. Since then, her son had not bothered to start new relationships with other women. Pan felt dejected because none of her matchmaking networks and efforts would work for her son. She sought advice from a *tâng-ki* (spirit-medium) regarding her son's marriage. The *tâng-ki* told her that her son's *in-iân*<sup>47</sup> lay not in Taiwan but abroad. A few years later, her son initiated the idea of getting married to a foreign wife, because he could not be bothered with dating, wanting to save money and energy. Thus, with the help of a cross-national marriage agent, her son married when he was 29. At the time of the interview, he had been married for 13 years. Looking back over her son's marriage, Pan thought it was so true what the *tâng-ki* had predicted, that he would marry a foreign wife, yet she still thought her son could have married a Taiwanese wife. Although she did not clearly say whether she was satisfied with her daughter-in-law or not, but she only wished that her daughter-in-law could be more frugal.

**Sioù-Lan** was 64 years old and was married with three sons. She was a full-time housewife and her husband was a construction worker. They lived with their youngest son and Vietnamese daughter-in-law and two grandsons in a four-storey house. Her other two married sons were living close to them and they have frequent contact with Sioù-Lan. Her youngest son had married when he was 29, he did not use a cross-national marriage agent. It was she who observed and discussed with the neighbours who had foreign daughters-in-law. She found that the Vietnamese

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<sup>47</sup> The destiny that brings a couple to marriage.

daughter-in-law of one of her neighbours 'was docile and obedient to her parents-in-law'. She then asked her neighbour if their daughter-in-law had any sisters who also wanted to marry a Taiwanese man. They exchanged photos after the neighbours' daughter-in-law agreed to it and Sioù-Lan was informed that her sister had just graduated from senior high school and was nearly 20 years old. The next thing she did was to take her son to Vietnam with her neighbours' daughter-in-law to her house to propose the marriage. She was satisfied with her Vietnamese daughter-in-law as her nature was very similar to that of her sister, that is, 'docile and diligent'. At the time of the interview it had been five years since her son married.

**Wei-Wei** was 78 years old. She was a widow with two sons and one daughter. Her husband died early when the youngest son was only seven years old. She was working with her mother-in-law in the family's noodle processing business to support her own family. She was living with her youngest son and her Vietnamese daughter-in-law, who was pregnant, in a two-storey house. However, she did not always stay with her youngest son. As her oldest son was also living quite close to her, she sometimes stayed with the older one depending on her mood. She wanted to keep the family together even after the division of the family property as she was not willing to be forced into a 'take turn plan'<sup>48</sup> for her by her sons. At the time of the interview it had been two years since her youngest son had married a Vietnamese wife. It was her son's second marriage; he had divorced his wife after ten years marriage, about six years previously. The reason for his divorce was his ex-wife's addiction to gambling over which they had many fights because of this issue. Wei-Wei tried to persuade her son to have a second marriage since she was too old to assist in the noodle business. She asked her neighbour who had married a foreign wife to take her son to Vietnam in order to get married. They did not seek any assistance from a cross-national marriage agent. At the time of his remarriage, her son was 42. Wei-Wei was satisfied with her daughter-in-law. She thought that letting her daughter-in-law attend four months of literacy classes is a good idea, because she was able to ask things if she did not understand and she learned fast. Wei-Wei appreciated her daughter-in-law's efforts to adapt to life in Taiwan.

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<sup>48</sup> Wei-Wei described it as '*lùn hué kháu*' in Taiwanese. It is an arrangement between children, normally sons, that each would look after the parents for one month in term.

**Yuan-Yang** was 63 years old, she was married with two sons and two daughters. She had previously worked with her husband on the family farm. At the time of the interview, she was no longer working but her husband was still growing peanuts in their fields. In fact, her sons asked them to stop working in the agricultural sector to enjoy their retirement. But her husband wanted to continue work because he did not want to sit idle. Since they had not yet divided the family property, Yuan-Yang lived with her husband, her mother-in-law, two married sons and their wives and three grandchildren in a traditional quadrangle house. Her older son was the one who married a foreign wife. Before he got married, he did not have any experience of dating, and Yuan-Yang was worried about this. Their friend who had a son married to a foreign wife introduced their agent to Yuan-Yang's family. Yuan-Yang asked her son to give it a try when he was 33. Her husband accompanied him to Vietnam. After four years experience of living with this foreign daughter-in-law, although she was satisfied with her hard work, she still thought that her Taiwanese daughter-in-law was more thoughtful than the foreign one. According to Yuan-Yang, the Taiwanese one would ask her to join them for meals and showed her respect and concern for the family. In contrast, her foreign daughter-in-law was rather quiet. However, when she compared her two daughters-in-law together, Yuan-Yang thought they were not as attentive and helpful as her own daughters.

### ***Informal participants***

There were eight informal participants, four mothers-in-law, three fathers-in-law and one Taiwanese husband, I defined them as informal participants, but their accounts were valuable and had been used in my analysis chapters. I explain why I consider their interview data as informal in each description and show how these participants were connected with my formal participants.

#### **Mothers-in-law**

**Chun** was 55 years old. She is Mr. Lin's (another informal participant) wife and a full-time housewife. She was one of the participants in my second focus group. I did not get much information about her because her husband kept interrupting our talk when I visited her in her house. It was her husband told me about their family life while Chun sitting aside and going along with her husband's opinion. More information about Mr. Lin is provided in the group of fathers-in-law below.

**Guèi** was aged 78 when I interviewed her in December, 2006. She was a widow with two sons. She worked five hours a day in a garlic factory near her house and each day she earned the equivalent three pounds wage (NT\$ 150). But her main economic resource is the support of her youngest son, and the part-time job for her is a kind of leisure activity. She was living with her youngest son, Indonesian daughter-in-law and three grandchildren. At the time, her son had been married for 11 years. Her daughter-in-law is a Chinese Indonesian, who speaks fluent Taiwanese but not Chinese. Her daughter-in-law does home-based work for a local garment factory and is paid piece-rate rather than a daily or weekly wage. She was satisfied her relationship with her daughter-in-law. The reason she became one of my informal participants was that when I interviewed her, her Indonesian daughter-in-law and grandchildren were in the living room watching television and Guèi told me it was alright to interview her under such circumstance, because she could not find spare time for me to interview her as she wants to work in the daytime. But after few questions about her son's motivation to marry a foreign wife, I decided to finish my interview, because I found out Guèi still felt uncomfortable and answered my questions cautiously. However, she participated in my first focus group under the invitation of Jhieh.

**Ruèi** is Mr. Huang's mother. She was married with two sons. At the time of the interview, she was 66 years old. Her husband was working in the family fields and she was a full-time housewife. Her Vietnamese daughter-in-law had been repatriated to Vietnam by her son (Mr. Huang) around nine months before the time I interviewed her. Although she had agreed that her son could divorce his wife, she thought it was the behaviour and attitude of her daughter-in-law that had caused the trouble.

**Zhen** was 56 years old when I met her at the first focus group in December, 2006. I had a very brief talk with her when we were waiting for other mothers-in-law in Jhieh's barn. She was married and had a Vietnamese daughter-in-law. It was her younger son who married a foreign wife. At the time of the interview, her younger son had been married for 4 years. She complained about her Vietnamese daughter-in-law before other women arrived and the focus group began.

### Father-in-law

**Mr. Kuan** was 68 years old and worked as a village head after he retired from farming work. He is Ying's husband. He appeared shortly in the end of my interview with Ying and later joined my interview with Mr. Wang.

**Mr. Lin** was married with two daughters and a son. When we first met, he was 58 years old. He ran a business installing security gates and his only son was working with him. He was living with his wife, Chun, another informal participant, his son, and his Vietnamese daughter-in-law. I met him when I went to his house to invite Chun for my second focus group. He offered me a drink and started to ask me the purpose of doing this focus group and told me how his son married a foreign wife, while Chun sat aside and went along with her husband's opinion. Mr. Lin accompanied his son to Vietnam with the help of his friend's foreign daughter-in-law who introduced her cousin to Mr. Lin's son. When I met Mr. Lin in December, 2006, his son had been married for around one year. He and his wife, Chun, were both satisfied with their Vietnamese daughter-in-law who was six months pregnant. He also appeared in the place where I had my second focus group and dominated most of the discussions when I tried to invite other mothers-in-law express their opinion (see Chapter 3).

**Mr. Wang** was 70 years old and was married with two sons and two daughters. His younger son was not yet married when I interviewed him in 2007. At the time, he and his wife were working on the family fields but his wife also earned wages as an agricultural worker. He was living with his wife, married son and Vietnamese daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. His son married at the age of 35 and when I interviewed Mr. Wang, had been married for 5 years. His marriage was arranged by the local matchmaker who also worked for the cross-border matchmaking agency. Mr. Wang has a very tense relationship with his foreign daughter-in-law whom he considered a very lazy woman who is not doing any housework. Initially, I was supposed to interview his wife who was introduced by Ying but Mr. Wang showed up unexpectedly in her place. He claimed that he could represent his wife regardless of my desire to interview her. Hence, I started to interview him on his opinion about his son's marriage.

### Taiwanese husband

**Mr. Huang** was 40 years old. He was living with his parents and 3 year old son. I was supposed to interview his mother, Ruèi, but he interrupted my interview and expressed his opinion about the risk of marrying a foreign wife. His marriage was arranged by his parents, who persuaded him to get married and sought help from local matchmaker. But after marriage, he did not have a smooth relationship with his Vietnamese wife who was seventeen years old younger than him. He decided to end his four year marriage after his wife had run away for three times. Also, according to Mr. Huang, his wife asked him for NT\$ 500,000 (£10,000) alimony if he wants to divorce her. Thus, he resorted to sharp practice by not renewing her resident permit so she has been forced to leave Taiwan. And he gave her NT\$ 10,000 (£200) and provided only single flight ticket before she is left. At the time I met him he was waiting for the divorce come into effect.

### **Conclusion**

This preliminary information has particular salience for understanding women's experience in the household and family relationships which I will discuss in the following chapters: how their demographic characteristics affected the level of their involvement in their sons' marriage and how residence status and daughters-in-law's background impinged upon their actual routine practices in the household. The next chapter will explore how women were involved in their sons' marriage and the resources and the personal network they utilized to make sure of the completion of marriage.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE MOTHER IN THE MARRIAGE PROCESS

Marriage in traditional Chinese society commonly follows ‘the dictates of the parent, the words of the matchmaker’ (Yuen et al. 2004: 41). It is a normative practice that parents make the decisions about their children’s marriages. As Western ideas of romantic love gradually became accepted by young people in contemporary society, coupled with the social and structural changes that enabled the younger generation to access educational and work opportunities, they can no longer rely on the financial support of their parents. These transformations seem to diminish parents’ authority over their children. However, my study of cross-border marriage reveals the complex and sometimes contradictory interactions between parents and children, where parents, to a great extent, still have influence over their children’s lives. Their desire to preserve the traditional familial culture requires their sons to establish their own family, because once a son is married he is able to fulfil a range of duties, such as carrying on the family lineage, and having a wife to care for domestic issues and serve them. The sons of women in my study, although they recognise this cultural obligation, are disadvantaged by their socio-economic position in finding a suitable Taiwanese wife. Therefore parents, especially mothers, felt it necessary to become involved in their sons’ marriages.

This chapter is about mothers’ first steps in becoming involved in their sons’ marriages. I start by exploring how the normative cultural ideology has influenced my participants’ involvement. I discuss their accounts of their feelings about their sons’ lack of success in finding a local wife. Finally, I describe the way in which they become involved in serial ‘wife-seeking’ activities and their concern for their sons’ marriages. I will illustrate the complexity of contracting a cross-national marriage and the attendant influence of this family life after marriage.

## **Cultural assumptions**

### ***Cultural context and parental responsibilities***

Over the last twenty years the average age of first marriage has increased by more than two years for both men and women. In 1985 it was 28.4 years old for men, 24.9 years old for women and by 2005 it had become 30.6 years old for men and 27.4 years old for women (DHRA 2007). However, under the influence of traditional culture, the idea of ‘being independent at thirty’, from the Analects of Confucius<sup>49</sup>, means that it is expected that by the age of thirty a man should be able to be responsible for himself, and recognise his personal goals. In everyday terms, this is now understood to mean that people think men at thirty should have established their own families and be able to carry family responsibilities. There is also evidence from Davison and Reed’s book, on the culture and customs of Taiwan, illustrating how the boundary between being married and unmarried affects whether a man is to be considered as having reached adulthood (1998). Although nowadays unmarried individuals spend more time invested in education and have gained more access to economic independence, which has made such a cultural perspective no longer as prevalent as in the past, parents still want to see their sons married by 30.

*According to Taiwanese traditional custom, if you marry too late people will laugh at you. [My son] he did not marry until he was forty. Our Taiwanese folks make fun of him, so...his parents’ obligation is to help him to complete his marriage. This could not be more right. (Mr. Wang; aged 70; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

*Thirty. I think, he did not marry until he was thirty. I felt annoyance at being worried about this pattern. I went to a temple in our village, and asked Má-tsóo<sup>50</sup> why he cannot get married. The deity said<sup>51</sup> he is destined for marriage at a late age. [laugh] Being parents is just like this, you always want to assist your child to accomplish their marriage. (Tang; aged 73; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)*

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<sup>49</sup> The accessible online source for the Analects of Confucius is <http://manybooks.net/titles/confucietext02cnfcs10.html#>

<sup>50</sup> *Má-tsóo* is a female deity in Taiwan.

<sup>51</sup> This kind of activity is common in Taiwan, that people go to temples or shrines to consult deities. The deities’ messages are often transferred and interpreted by *tāng-ki*, spirit-mediums. For details of the actual practice see, for example, Nickerson (2001).

These embedded images had an influence on my participants. For example, Mr. Wang said ‘if you marry too late people will laugh’. ‘People’ here is a general term that refers to the pressure of social expectations. As a result, parents are urged to escape the social label accorded their sons as single people<sup>52</sup>, and cultural expectations force them to use various sources and agencies to place their sons in a marriage.

Indeed, parents’ anxiety about marriage is not solely a concern about their children’s transformation into adulthood, but they also expected that their children would accomplish the obligations brought by marriage, for example: carrying on the family name, worshipping ancestors and looking after parents in their old age (Stafford 1992). Similarly, studying the Chinese family, Wolf (1972), Gallin (1994) and Fricke, Chang and Yang (1994) all indicated marriage as creating a new domestic unit which implies fertility and continuity of the family line, through the arrival of a daughter-in-law who can bear children and carry out domestic labour. These views of marriage see it as a means of creating familial solidarity and continuity rather than a way of life that is based on individual preference. When I asked Jhih why she married her son to a foreign wife, she responded:

*I just think having a daughter-in-law to help me with work, and bear children to accompany me and my husband would be a nice thing. I don’t expect that they will look after us, especially as my son is still relying on us and I am not even counting on his wife [laugh]. (Jhih; aged 64; married; Cambodian D-in-law)*

Jhih’s narrative reveals that women’s fertility, on the one hand, has been considered as necessary to carry on the family name and, on the other hand, it has been used to exert control over their foreign spouses, to prevent them from going out frequently or running away, because they believed that the maternal role would keep these women at home (Shen Hsing-Ju 2003; Wang Yi-Han 2008). However, it is also true that most of my participants, without emphasising traditional practices explicitly,

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<sup>52</sup> Unmarried men are usually referred as ‘*wáng lǎo wǔ*’. It means he is a miserable person because he has no wife to wash his clothes and to cook for him. However, it is a different story for those who are wealthy, they are considered as valuable bachelors, as diamond *wáng lǎo wǔ*, who can easily catch every woman’s eyes.

regard giving birth to a child as a normative obligation of a married woman. Mother Shuěi's remark captures this view of women's marital duty:

*She had not intended to get pregnant when she first came to Taiwan [two years ago]. I told her, if you do not want to give birth to a child then you should not get married and once you are married you should produce a child whether the baby will be a boy or a girl, whether you produce only one child or two, otherwise what is the point that we married only a woman. Maybe it is because of my grievance, but the second year after her arrival she got pregnant. (Shuěi; aged 65; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

There is another concept, the norm of reciprocity, which explains how parents see helping their children as normative familial intergenerational assistance, and with an anticipation of being cared for in their old age. In my study, some of participants reported this concern. Take for example, Mǐn, a widow who has both a Vietnamese and a Taiwanese daughter-in-law. When she spoke about her foreign daughter-in-law's failure to adapt to the family in Taiwan and how she instead dwelled on her natal family, she indirectly expressed her thoughts about security in old age.

*She is not considerate, I mean you just need to raise your children, as they grow up they will help you. You should contribute here, until one day you become old enough and cannot do anything then we can expect our children to take care of us. Like me, if I cannot work anymore, I am also expecting my sons to look after me. [sigh] She never tries to understand, she always wants to return there [deep sigh] I cannot do anything about this'. (Mǐn, aged 70; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

However, not all of my women interviewees were expecting that their children would respect this practical arrangement. Instead they, like other elderly parents, had taken on substantial responsibility for domestic tasks and grandchild care in order to assist their dual-wage-earner sons and daughters-in-law in Taiwan (see Chapter 7). To sum up, on the one hand, parents felt that it was their obligation to assist children when needed, on the other hand, as Hemalin and Yang (2004) found,

they made adjustments and also they were prepared to contribute a considerable amount of help in the expectation of a dependent future. It is therefore not difficult to understand the parents' responsibility in the family, and also why my interviewees used the phrase 'we married' in describing their sons' marriage, where they see marriage as not just the son marrying a wife but the whole family marrying her. It is the cultural norms and familial obligations as a package that have declared and positioned how parents should behave and perform in their children's lives.

***Marriage is not an individual matter***

As Thornton, Chang, and Lin point out, marriage in a traditional Chinese family is not an individual matter:

Romance and courtship by starry-eyed young adults had no place in the marriage process. Instead, mate selection involved complex negotiations carried out in full rationality by the parental generation. Relatives and friends often assisted the parental negotiation, and professional matchmakers were sometimes hired to assist in these important decisions. (Thornton, Chang, and Lin 1994: 148)

In fact, the logic that kinship groups should 'be involved' was the most prominent normative thought running through the interview data. Almost all of my participants talked about persuading their sons to get married, helping their sons to select candidates and assisting them to fulfill their life course when describing their own experiences. I would say that this sense of necessary involvement is not only restricted to cross-national marriage but also still happens nowadays in the marriages of young urbanites in Taiwan. Although there is no research exploring how deeply the parents are involved in their children's marriage process, according to my own experience and stories from my friends, parents normally play a part in negotiating the marriage ceremony and the bride price, and some parents who desire their children to marry someone with a similar socio-economic status might act aggressively to interfere in mate selection. The only difference is that young urbanites play the main role in arranging their marriages and consider their parents' word as a suggestion which they do not necessarily follow. Although I did not collect any formal interview data from Taiwanese husbands to be able to identify the turning

point in their decision to end their single life and marry a foreign wife, there is evidence from some related studies that men who do not initially want to marry constantly experience parental and communal pressure to get married (Tien Ching-Ying and Wang Hong-Zen 2006; Wang Yi-Han 2008). Indeed, seven of my interviewees' described how they engaged in soft persuasion or nonstop nagging strategies to push their sons to get married.

In order to present a clear picture of the involvement of others, I now draw on Dai's experience and describe the actual extent to which other people were involved in matchmaking for her son. Her only son was married to a local woman for only three years. Their marriage ended because the son could not tolerate the wife's bad habits, in particular drinking, smoking, not doing any housework, and worst of all, gambling, which brought financial crisis to the family. According to Dai, her son is a filial person who helps a lot with his father's chicken butchering work during his spare time. After his divorce, his good personal nature soon attracted people around him, such as neighbours, friends, relatives, his father's customers and people who were concerned about him, to try to introduce him to a partner. Dai was also very supportive and encouraged her son to be positive about getting himself a wife as she said 'he is a very pleasant guy'. After a whole year's innumerable matchmaking experiences with Taiwanese women, her son was finally and successfully matched with not a Taiwanese but an Indonesian woman who is, according to Dai, 'not too skinny but not too fat, not too tall but not too short', with much help from active neighbours and a cross-national matchmaking agency.

This example shows that a cross-border marriage involves not only collaborative efforts mediated through the agency of family members, neighbours, friends of the family, and friends of the unmarried person, but also the connections made between local villagers and commercial cross-border marriage agencies<sup>53</sup>. For example, one of the women I interviewed was a part-time local matchmaker; she was confident of her ability and had a great sense of herself as the right person to do this job. When the popularity of the traditional matchmaking business began to decline,

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<sup>53</sup> This type of commercial matchmaking agency no longer exists in Taiwan because, in 2007, the Taiwanese government outlawed profit-making agencies and only allowed them to function as non-profit organisations (See also Chapter 2).

she had to turn her focus to agricultural work in order to cover her own and her disabled daughter's living costs. Over a period of a few years, the cross-border marriage form has become popular in her village. When one of the organised cross-national matchmaking agencies began to develop their business in the village, her reputation was good enough to catch their attention. They asked Pan to resume her previous profession and use her personal networks in the village to introduce them to some potential Taiwanese men who wanted to get married. The commission for a successful case of persuading a Taiwanese man to marry a foreign wife is NT\$20,000 (£400), but the fee is increased according to the number of men she introduces, for instance, for the second successful case she can earn NT\$30,000 (£600). However, this case is only the tip of the marriage operation iceberg; there are still many types of individual brokers or organised cross-national marriage agencies involved. I will explain these forms in the next section by describing how my participants helped to select candidates for their sons through the help of these agencies.

As to six of my interviewees' sons who took the initiative themselves in marrying foreign wives, they might not have been subject to the same degree of pressure as other men experienced from their mothers, but the involvement of others, such as colleagues, friends and acquaintances, who provided matchmaking opportunities or made persuasive suggestions based on their own cross-border marriage experiences, still played a part in these men's marriage decisions. Having described the parental responsibilities and social expectations in the cultural system in mainstream society and its impact on Taiwanese men's cross-border marriage, I now turn to explore how my participants see the cause of their sons' disadvantage in the marriage market in Taiwan.

### **Difficulties finding a Taiwanese wife**

Another way for my participants to explain the reason for their involvement is to admit their sons' disadvantaged positions in the marriage market. According to my participants' accounts, the reason for these Taiwanese men marrying foreign wives can be enumerated as follows: having a rustic and unsophisticated personality which makes them unattractive to Taiwanese women, the lack of opportunities to meet women in their work environment, and modern Taiwanese women setting higher

standards for marriage. They did not mention (or connect with) the cause identified by most existing studies<sup>54</sup>, which have pointed to the economically underprivileged position of men in this situation (Hsia Hsiao-Chuan 2000; Wang Hong-Zen 2001). They also did not explicitly express their wish to marry a dutiful and docile type of wife to retain traditional notions of patriarchal authority and masculine culture within marriage (Tien Ching-Ying and Wang Hong-Zen 2006) but this nonetheless was an expectation (see Chapter 6). My participants do not see themselves in the way that past research has shown. First, my participants put quite a lot of money into marrying foreign wives for their sons so they did not see themselves as economically disadvantaged<sup>55</sup> but in a way they implicitly recognised the problem when they complained that Taiwanese women's expectations are too high. This, however, locates the problem in these women rather than their sons. Also, while they did not actually stress that they were looking for a traditional docile woman, they did complain about Taiwanese women being too modern. However, it is difficult simply to determine whether it is the fact of their disadvantaged socio-economic status that has most jeopardised these Taiwanese men's opportunities for marriage or whether the patriarchal attitudes of the men make them unattractive to Taiwanese women. In order to pull together these concerns, I would now like to begin with a brief introduction to the changes in the agricultural economic background which has shaken my participants' lives.

Tracking Taiwanese economic development back to the early 1950s, we are able to see the continuities and discontinuities between modern and traditional Taiwanese economic conditions. In the early period, the economy of Taiwan was based on agricultural production. However, from the early 1950s to the mid-1980s, the government enacted a series of policies to enhance the development of industry. Through the functions of import substitution and export-led industrialisation programmes<sup>56</sup>, agriculturalists provided cheap labour and local production. These

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<sup>54</sup> Those men in my study who cannot attract Taiwanese women are not mentally or physically disabled as some other studies discovered (see Chou Mei-Jane 2001; Siao Jhao-Juan 2000), where their mothers or family were very concerned about the presumption of who can look after their son in the future.

<sup>55</sup> Nineteen out of twenty of my formal interviewees and five other informal participants reported that they provided financial support for their sons to get married.

<sup>56</sup> Import substitution was achieved quickly in industries where the technology was fairly simple, such as local production of cotton textiles, bicycles, and flour. These were used in the agricultural sector and provided a ready market for the locally produced manufactured goods (Hermalin, Liu and

strategies did help the government achieve successful industrialisation in Taiwan from an economic standpoint, but also had the result of exploiting the efforts of the farmers. Several factors contributed to the exploitation of the agricultural sector: (1) the agricultural sector was taxed to provide capital for the industrialisation programme; (2) farmers were required to sell a considerable quantity of rice to the government at an official price pegged below wholesale; (3) farmers also had to buy their fertilizer from the government, the sole supplier, at a monopoly price substantially above the cost of production (Hermalin et al. 1994; Hsia Hsiao-Chuan 2000). Moreover, from the mid-1980s, the government was striving to enter GATT, which was the predecessor of the WTO. This free trade regime has made the development of the agricultural sector even more difficult. Therefore, under these circumstances, the majority of young people from rural areas chose to move to the city for waged jobs rather than inherit land from their parents or work in the countryside. For example, during the period 1949-1988 the proportion of employed persons, defined as those 15 or older, employed in the agricultural sector decreased from 56.1% to 13.7%, while employed persons in the industrial sector grew rapidly from 16.9% to 42.6% (Hermalin, Liu and Freedman 1994). The implications of industrialisation and the change in economic circumstances have contributed towards the growth in numbers of internal migrants, people from rural areas who have moved to the city for employment (DGBAS 1990).

Although the Taiwanese government's agricultural ministry promoted the development of the 'Production and Marketing Cooperative Unit' (PMCU) in 1992, introduced several measures in an attempt to reduce production costs and improve farming revenues and advocated agricultural transformation, the WTO and the impact of economic recession still made the income from agriculture unpredictable. Therefore, the unmarried men who stayed with their parents in rural areas became situated in a socio-economically disadvantaged position. For example, although the annual income of each person in farming households was NT\$83,261 (£1,601) in 1988 (COA 1998) and increased to NT\$232,095 (£4,463) in 2005 (COA 2005),

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Freedman 1994). Following this import substitution, the government had found its limits in developing the economy, so it then opted for an export-led growth strategy to encourage private enterprises to raise their productivity and to attract investments from both local and foreign hosts for the development of new export industries (Hermalin, Liu and Freedman 1994; Chu Wan-Wen 1995). This policy has successfully promoted economic growth in Taiwan.

compared to the people who worked in non-agricultural sectors, such as industry and service trades, who earned an average of NT\$523,380 (£10,065) in 2005, their wage is far lower (DGBAS 2006a). This also explains why unmarried women who are also from the countryside are unwilling to marry them, as they know the hardship of participating in agricultural work. In five of my participants' experience, before their sons married foreign wives, they had arranged several blind dates for them in or outside the village. In Táo's case, she emphasised the innumerable fruit gifts she had prepared, with little hope that any girl would agree to marry her 'rustic and unsophisticated' son. However, she failed to accomplish her purpose until a neighbour suggested to her that she consider a cross-border marriage, which finally resolved her worry.

In order to explain the form 'rustic and unsophisticated', I translated a number of Taiwanese native terms that were used by my participants, such as: *kóo-ì*, *gōng-tit* and *han-bān*<sup>57</sup>, which mean that the men lack social skills to develop any relationship with women, let alone a romantic relationship, but they are honest and gentle and can be trusted<sup>58</sup>. However, this character became a dilemma because these 'unsophisticated' characteristics have meant that they failed to find wives in Taiwan. Jhih is an example. She has two sons, and it was the youngest son who married a Cambodian. He married earlier than his older brother. Surprisingly, Jhih is not worried about her older son because he is more active and sociable and he was dating a Taiwanese woman at the time. She only worried about her younger son as he works with them in the countryside, so Jhih felt desperately that she had the obligation to provide her youngest son with a wife.

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<sup>57</sup> These three terms can be used descriptively in various contexts but in this study they would be explained as follows: *kóo-ì* means socially inept, *gōng-tit* refers to a simple and straightforward person who lacks interactional skill, and *han-bān* means a lack of talent or ability to handle multiple issues around him or not being good at doing particular things.

<sup>58</sup> These indigenous terms are often used under the circumstances of a blind date when young people meet each other for the first time. Parents who accompany their sons apply these phrases as a guarantee to other unmarried women. Indeed, this is a reflection of traditional concepts to think that these men are reliable husband candidates because they are unsociable so they will pay more attention to work and earn money for their family, and as their wives, they do not have to worry that their husbands will have affair with other women because they are somewhat naive and timid.

*My son worked with us in the fields, he rarely had chances to date with a young lady, he is a quiet and very kóo-ì person. As he turned thirty, we [Jhih and her husband] were already over sixty but still did not have any grandchildren, so I asked him to marry a foreign woman. He had no opinion as I said so. (Jhih; aged 64; married; Cambodian D-in-law)*

A similar description also appears in Jyú-Hua's account:

*He was too 'gōng-tit' to have any idea how to pursue girls, in other words too kóo-ì. That is the reason why he married a foreigner. To be honest it would have been best if we had married a Taiwanese woman, because marrying this one cost me a lot of money. Every time she returns to Vietnam I need to give her money to let her give it to her parents. You see, because of my son's personality I have no alternative but to make him marry a foreign wife. (Jyú-Hua; aged 55; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

However, these farmers are not the only men in rural areas who have difficulty in finding marriage partners in Taiwan. The blue-collar workers who perform manual labour are in the same difficult position, because it might not be easy to find a decent job in rural areas. Although their wage may not necessarily be low, the working environment and the requirement of working different shifts considerably limits their social life. Four women I interviewed had sons who worked as construction workers, gravel truck drivers or garbage men and had limited chances to meet girls in their work environment. According to Fen, the mother of three sons, her sons' work was like that of many other construction labourers, dependent on unpredictable workloads and unstable schedules. In particular, her sons' colleagues often included only old women and men. These were the reasons they were having trouble in meeting Taiwanese women. In this regard, Fen, anxious for her three sons, approached a cross-national matchmaking agency with the help of her neighbour who had also used their services. She reported that 'since my sons will marry one day, why not now? I don't expect to see them having their children when they are too old. With the help of a matchmaking agency they could avoid wasting time and complicated dating processes'. Thus, with this thought, Fen has made all three of her sons marry Vietnamese wives.

This also happened to Shù's son, who works as a mechanic in a garage. Due to the lack of opportunities for meeting girls in his job, he had a late marriage. The only difference is that he was not persuaded by Shù but developed an interest through his friend. Shù recalled:

[a deep sigh] *I did not ask him to marry that one! He used to date with our Taiwanese girls but always failed when he asked those girls to live in the countryside after marriage [sigh]. His interest [in Vietnamese women] was developed by his friend, who had a brother also married to a Vietnamese, so they recommended him to go there as well. They just go and marry, what can I do about that!* (Shù; age 70; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)

In addition to the men's incompetence in marrying Taiwanese women, their lack of knowledge regarding the skills to pursue women and their lack of opportunity to meet girls in their work environment, my participants added one more factor to explain their sons' situation: that is, the high standards that Taiwanese women required in picking a mate. Bǎo said:

*My son was very timid with girls and he also mentioned it is not an easy thing to pursue Taiwanese women. You know nowadays Taiwanese women always want to marry men who have successful businesses and can make great money, they all expected to marry that kind of person, otherwise my son would have many chances to date any girls who came to the shop.* (Bǎo; age 63; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)

Pan's narrative is similar to Bǎo's and highlights that the sense of marriage and its requirements among Taiwanese women was changing. I asked her to describe why women vanish from the marriage market in her village from her point of view as a professional 'muê-lâng-pô'<sup>59</sup>. She told me that women are now different from the past, they tend to be more independent and have a stronger sense of self, therefore they seem inaccessible<sup>60</sup>. She used two examples, one was her niece and the other

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<sup>59</sup> *muê-lâng-pô* means female matchmaker in Taiwanese.

<sup>60</sup> However, if women do not marry by that socially expected age they are ridiculed as this carries a stigma. For example, women who do not marry are commonly called *lǎo chù nyǔ*. This term creates an image that assumes a mature single woman to be an old virgin with an odd temper. There is also a

was a girl for whom Pan had failed to find a suitable man:

*My niece is in her forties, she's got a secure job as civil servant in the farmers' association, I have arranged two blind dates for her and they both failed, until last year her mother asked me to help her again. I introduced a man who worked as a senior high school teacher in XX [place name], they went out three times but ... [sigh], I warned her not to talk about any political issues or the election. She just would not listen to me. Since then, they stopped seeing each other because of this. She is too stubborn.*

*The other girl, she is a lecturer in a university of science and technology. According to her mother, she got her degree from America. You see, what is the point of having such a high degree but still not yet married. I have a family and I am illiterate. No wonder her mother was worried so I suggested to her to cover and hide the fact that she ever went to America. Because you want to select a better one, those men will also want to do so, if a woman is better than a man this would definitely intimidate them. But she does not want to cover her glory. [sigh] What can I do?*

Whatever the reasons, Bǎo's and Pan's remarks reveal their attitude towards hypergamy. Marriage in Taiwanese society had been based on the norm of 'marrying up' and 'marrying down'. This is simply a practice whereby women who are due to marry tended to choose spouses who have a higher academic, economic and social position than they do. The reverse is true for men when they select a wife. Nowadays, however, this trend is changing and such ideological practices no longer hold true for most cultures and sectors among Asian countries (see Constable 2003) and also in Taiwan. For instance, Yang Ching-Li et al. (2006) used government statistical data to analyse the transformation of marital behaviour among men and women in Taiwan. They discovered that Taiwanese women with better educations chose downward marriage rather than remaining single during the period 1970 to 1990, but after the

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Japanese term '負け犬' which has been translated into Chinese as 'bài-quǎn' (败犬), in its literal sense this term means that even an independent, beautiful and competent woman past her thirtieth birthday who is still single and has failed to have a child will be considered as a loser or underdog. These socially discriminating labels have been mentioned and criticised by a number of studies on single women: see Tsai Hsiu-Chuan (2004); Heh Chaw-Tyi (1996).

1990s this same educational group of women did not consider marriage necessary. This phenomenon is related to what several studies have mentioned: although to some extent the traditional idea that women belong at home still influences unmarried women's attitudes towards marriage, single women have more capacity and autonomy to pursue the life they want, and they tend to have a new sense of identity which is not connected with marriage (Tsai Hsiu-Chuan 2004). However, several of my interviewees found it difficult to understand modern women's independent sense of self and their resistance to marriage. And especially from Pan's narratives it is not difficult to derive the conclusion that she believes marriage to be women's true vocation, and to achieve this women should follow the cultural logic, learning to be submissive and perform lower than men in certain ways, such as educationally and economically. However, men's difficulty in finding spouses is not only a matter of women's achievement; it is also a matter of age. While men tend to marry down, and also to seek wives who are younger than themselves, recent evidence suggests that the age gap between Taiwanese men and foreign wives was roughly ten to twelve years (Wang Hong-Zen 2001; Chou Mei-Jane 2001). That is to say, the older the Taiwanese women get the more limited are their chances of finding ideal men and also they will have less willingness to get married (DGBAS 2006b).

In sum, though most mothers referred to their sons' difficulties in the mate selection process with explanations like timid personality and lack of opportunities to meet girls at work, they also ascribed their problems to the characteristics of modern Taiwanese women, who aspire to marry into a higher status family or who have an elevated position. There is a certain ambivalence in my participants' perception that women choose to marry up, which means they indirectly recognised that their sons were not the kind of men who held such higher positions in the economic, social and educational spheres. On the other hand, five mothers and one informal male participant attempted to elevate their sons' value by emphasising their physical appearance as healthy, strong and normal. Just after she described how she mobilised neighbours and friends to push and persuade her thirty-five year old son to get married, mother Mǐn told me: 'my son was fastidious about women, that is why he cannot marry anyone until 35 years old, he is not lame and his face is ok, you know'. Likewise, mother Fen and father Lin described their sons' appearances as:

*My sons are all 180 centimetres [around 6 feet], and physically strong. Three times I accompanied my sons to Vietnam for marriage, they were always the youngest compared to the others. Everyone told me that, 'your son is so handsome, how come that he needs to marry a woman from here?' [laugh] And when they have marriage ceremonies here in the village, everyone gave the same opinion. (Fen; age 57; married; three Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

*Look at my son [pointed to a man who came out from the kitchen], can you imagine that he needs to go there and marry a foreign wife with this appearance? No wonder our neighbours were all surprised and told me that they thought my son was dating with someone so they did not even think about the need to introduce any women to him. Too kóo-ì, my son watched TV after work and sometimes we went to fish together, he does not know how to pursue a woman. (Mr. Lin; aged 58; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

Their remarks are a form of defence that leaves my interviewees reasonably comfortable about their sons' cross-border marriages. In fact, when father Lin said: 'look at my son, can you imagine...', I believed for a second that he was expecting my answer but I am glad he did not. Because I do not know what comment I should have made about his 170 centimetre tall, plump and unattractive son. I had no chance to meet other sons who were described by their mothers as handsome or of standard appearance, therefore I cannot confirm if these men's outward appearances are just as they claimed. Yet, I did happen to see another eight of my interviewees' sons in person and one in a photo<sup>61</sup> and I can understand why they did not say anything about their sons' appearance. To my eye they were not conventionally attractive.

All of this demonstrates a preliminary explanation for cross-border marriage: the existing familial ideology and the lineage culture exert a pressure upon parents and Taiwanese grooms, while the changed economic environment and social structures lead to these men's disadvantaged position in the marriage market. These

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<sup>61</sup> My experiences of happening to meet these sons were various. For example, I met Jhih's son in their barn when Jhih took me to interview another woman, and I met Tang's son when he was about to go out for work. Ying showed me her son's wedding photo when I interviewed her, and I saw one of Mèng's sons in their family fields when Mèng forgot her interview appointment and her Vietnamese daughter-in-law took me to the farm and so on. The most impressive one I met was Ruèi's son, Mr Huang, in a very tense situation and I ended up interviewing him rather than his mother.

elements further justify my participants' involvement as being necessarily right for their sons. Thus, I turn next to an illustration of their practical involvement in helping sons to complete their marriage.

### **Mothers' (and fathers') involvement in the marriage process**

I have classified the very diverse but interlaced process of the involvement of mothers and, to a lesser extent, fathers in getting their son(s) married in four ways: persuading the son to get married; matchmaking; helping the son to select a bride; and providing all or part of the costs. Some of my participants used one of these strategies, while others used several in all combinations.

#### ***Persuading the son to get married***

Thirteen interviewees had been involved in the persuasion process; some had to be very forceful in order to persuade their sons to marry, while other sons were far more easily persuaded. This is not about what kind of persuasive strategies the mothers chose but how their sons responded. Seven of these thirteen participants had to coerce their sons when these men at first rejected their mothers' plan to marry foreign wives. My participants considered that it was an unacceptable response and exerted further parental authority upon their sons. They applied various strategies in order to make their sons step into marriage, for example they imposed their sentiments on their sons, or recruited neighbours and friends to persuade their sons. The following quotes will aptly explain how my interviewees became involved in the 'getting married' pattern:

*Oh, he did not want to marry when I asked him to, so, I requested I-ching's [Mĩn's son's friend] mother's brother, who runs a business abroad as a matchmaker, I said, aunty [I-ching's mother], please tell your brother to persuade my son, his younger brother already got married, if he does not want to, me as his parent, I would be deeply worried about it...don't you think so? If he gets married, then I would not bother. I kept begging him [her son] otherwise he would not want to do it. (Mĩn; aged 70; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

*I deceived my son and said that the reason we were going there [Vietnam] was travel... [laugh] I said: 'we are going there for travel, you should take a week off from your company'<sup>62</sup>... After we arrived [in Vietnam], I told him to look at those girls, if you like anyone then we will marry her, if not then it is fine, no pressure. (Mèng; aged 57; married; two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

Between these two mothers, different kinds of active persuasion were utilised. Mǐn felt it was compulsory to mobilise her social network to make her son's marriage successful, while Mèng chose to lie to her son to accomplish her plan. Under these conditions, their sons had no chance to refuse when everything had already been arranged. In other words, my participants did not just sit still and wait to get their sons' permission but they also took the initiative in trying to seek information about a marriage partner via their social network. Four out of seven active mothers had arranged blind dates for their sons in the village before they turned to cross-border marriage, two of whom were helping their sons to seek their second wives. Once they decided that a foreign wife was the only solution then they started contacting or seeking information about how to get a foreign daughter-in-law through neighbours or friends who had foreign daughters-in-law, or from commercial matchmaking agencies. They were confident enough at that stage to share their investigation with their sons and persuaded them that this was a good way to end their singleness.

There were also cases where mothers did not have to spend too much energy and time on the persuasion process. Six of my participants said that their sons have a good personality, which means they follow their parents' advice and instruction, and one mother mentioned that she initially persuaded her son to marry a foreign wife when he had broken up with his girlfriend and experienced a period of hard times, she then arranged the issue and her son agreed to it without hesitation. One easy persuasion case was Yuan-Yang's:

*Me and my husband were worried that he was not married yet at that age [33 years old] so when our friend mentioned cross-border marriage, we asked his*

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<sup>62</sup> The phrase 'take a week off from your company' implies 'take time off work'.

*opinion and he said it was fine by him.* (Yuan-Yang; aged 63; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)

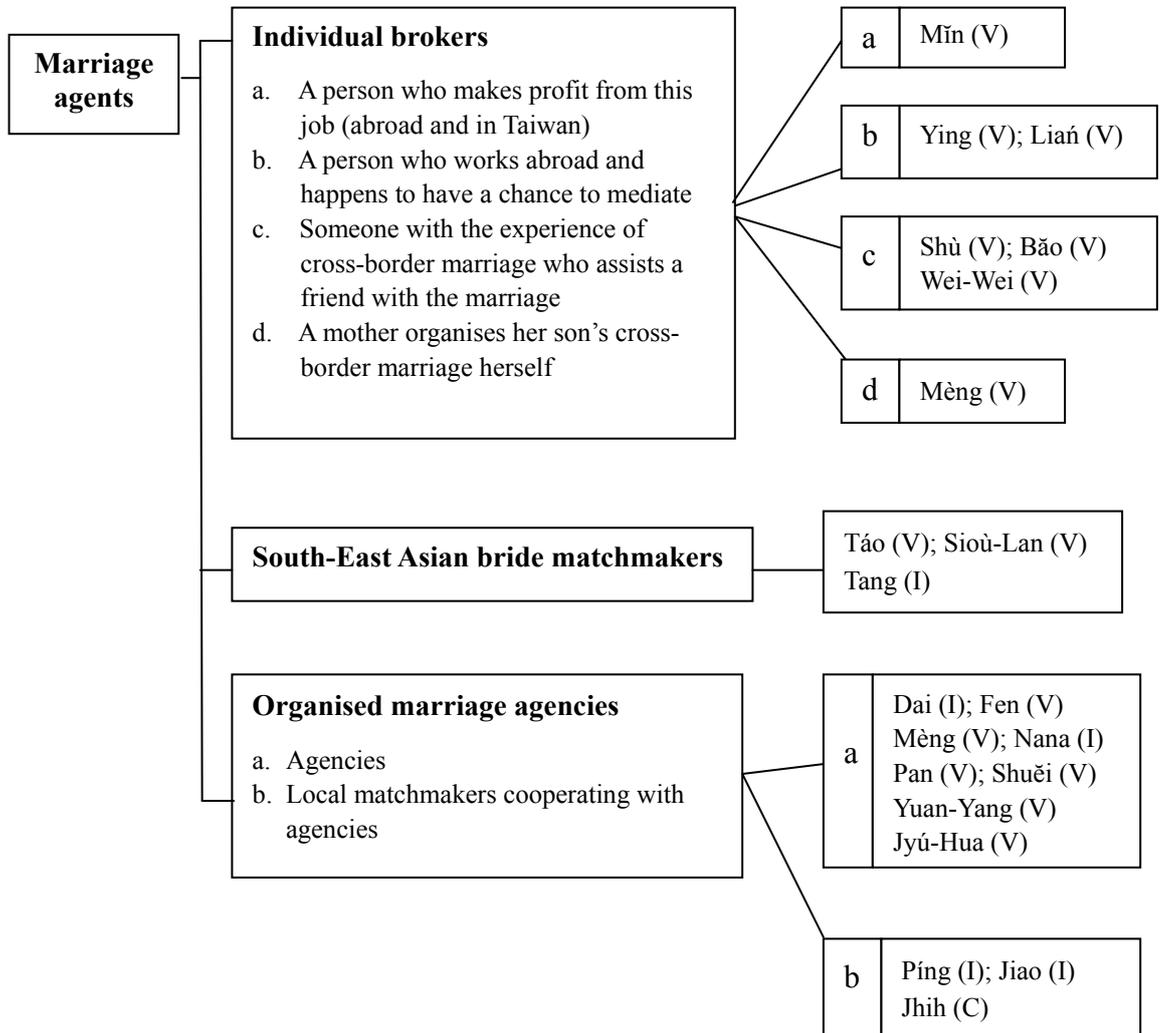
Although this group of participants did not need to force or continuously persuade their sons, their intention was no different from that of the previous group to fulfil the obligation of helping their sons with their marriage and they expected that their sons would have wives to look after the house, care for them, and bear children to continue the lineage. However, this is not the whole picture of the persuasion process. There are also related circumstances, such as their sons' friends and colleagues being involved (see *Marriage is not an individual matter*, above). Seven of my participants said that it was their sons' free choice of marriage partners, they neither persuaded nor encouraged their sons to marry a foreign wife. For example, Shù's son developed an interest through his friend, whose younger brother was married to a Vietnamese wife, then brought him to Vietnam for marriage. Another case is Ying's son, who was sent on a mission to Vietnam for around one year to help with a local factory. His colleague introduced him to a woman, who had also been employed in the same factory as Ying's son, and within a very short period they decided to get married. Ying told me that her son informed her through a telephone call, but she felt happy to hear it at the time, because her son 'is getting married'.

### ***Matchmaking***

Matchmaking means to set up a date and arrange a meeting for marriage, and these activities in the past were often conducted by local professional matchmakers or acquaintances. Following the emergence of cross-border marriage, the organisations and operations of the commercial matchmakers have become more diverse and complex. To choose an ideal type of agent for the marriage service, some interviewees seek help from organised marriage agencies while others prefer to obtain the services of an individual broker or a South-East Asian bride matchmaker. I have depicted my participants' involvement in the matchmaking process in diagrammatic form in order to understand these operations more fully (see Figure 4). Although all of my participants applied one type of service for their sons' marriage, not every mother became involved in the matchmaking process. There are fourteen interviewees who helped their sons to contact the intermediary brokers and arranged

matchmaking meetings, with many of them also experiencing the persuasion process.

Figure 4: The marriage agents my participants selected



Note:

1. V: Vietnamese; I: Indonesian; C: Cambodian
2. Although I interviewed 20 participants, the reason for the total number coming out as 21 is that one woman (Mèng) arranged her sons' marriages in two ways, the first time was operated by an agency and the other time she arranged the entire process by herself.

The first category shows that several of the mothers chose individual brokers. The reason they used this type of service was often that they were introduced by an acquaintance who had gone through the same marriage experience. Most of the time,

individual meetings are arranged by these brokers rather than mass meetings<sup>63</sup>. However, there was one interviewee who had participated in a mass meeting with the help of an individual broker. Bão accompanied her son to Vietnam with the services of an individual broker who is not a professional matchmaker but has personal experience of marrying a foreign wife. In fact, she did not participate in the persuading process, it was her son who raised the idea of marrying a Vietnamese after the broker persuaded him. She recalled that her son was excited about having this opportunity. She said:

*My son told me one day after he returned home from work, he said: 'Má [mother], that salesman who often came to the shop, he asked me whether I am interested in marrying a Vietnamese wife, so what do you think?' I told him I am not the one who wants to get married, you are, so make up your own mind. I also reminded him of the risk of finding that the woman is not the right person. My son told me: 'if she does not listen to me, I will scold her, if she is still reluctant to follow what I say and lazy to do housework, I will divorce her. But that man said the women from Vietnam are obedient, so I don't think this will happen'. He was confident enough about this, so I told him 'it is your choice I won't stop you.'* (Bão; age 63; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law).

Underpinning Bão's narrative was an assumption that 'marrying a foreign woman means having an obedient wife'. This commonly accepted myth that cross-border marriage is grounded on having a docile wife leads to a justification of the belief that foreign wives are disposable if they do not behave in a proper manner. This is built up and strengthened by agencies or individual brokers with the aim of profit-making and it did work out successfully for their business operation. Taiwanese grooms are persuaded to marry wives with traditional characters, which are defined as docile, devoted to family, diligent, obedient, and so on. In this regard, Wang Yi-Han (2008) also mentions the agencies that operate the cross-border marriage market as playing a substantial role in influencing the bride trade. This is

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<sup>63</sup> The mass meeting is commonly conducted by organised marriage agencies. This type of meeting form is that Taiwanese grooms wait in a hotel while the agents arrange and bring many girls to meet them. According to my participants' experience, they met these bride-candidates in the conference room of the hotel. These girls stand in a row and then either the Taiwanese grooms or their relatives who have accompanied them there ask questions through an interpreter to a girl they are interested in and select one among these candidates.

reflected in the way they groom the young women and train them to behave and act in specific ways in order to be attractive to Taiwanese men. Such a manipulative way of organising the commercial market has helped to sustain and boost this global market over the years.

When the marriage trip was arranged, Bǎo and her son held high expectations of marrying a wife such as the broker had described. Bǎo's brother also accompanied them to Vietnam. Unlike other individual brokers, who usually arrange an individual meeting, theirs set up a mass meeting. Bǎo began by describing the selection process in the matchmaking meeting; she said that while they were waiting in the conference room, several girls stood in a row for them to choose. She believed, based on rumours, that some of the candidates might have been divorced, and she asked her son to be aware of this. During the meeting they were able to ask questions through an interpreter in order to choose the girl they wanted. After Bǎo and her son selected a candidate, they had a sightseeing tour the next day. During the eight days they were in Vietnam, she was satisfied with her daughter-in-law, because she served Bǎo with devotion. At least at that moment she believed that her son had picked the right candidate and she would have a cooperative and nice daughter-in-law when this Vietnamese moved to Taiwan<sup>64</sup>. For the whole marriage trip Bǎo spent NT\$300,000 (£6,000), which included four return flight tickets, living costs, and the commission fee, and she guessed that her daughter-in-law's family might only receive NT\$50,000 (£1,000).

Another choice of marriage service for my participants is that provided by marriage migrants, i.e. women from South-East Asia or mainland China who have married into Taiwan. These women, as Lu M. Chia-Wen (2005) notes, unlike the individual entrepreneur brokers, do not take this work on a regular basis and do not depend upon this business for a living, unless they in time become an individual entrepreneur broker or operate a matchmaking agency. Hence, since these women are not actually professional brokers, why are there still some people using this channel? There are two reasons which emerged from my data: some of the women reported that they tend to think it is the most secure way to find a good foreign daughter-in-

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<sup>64</sup> I will explain their life after marriage in the next chapter.

law<sup>65</sup>. On the other hand, they can make sure that the bride price has been given directly to the bride's parents and the money they spent on the marriage was less than the average fee that institutional matchmaking agencies will charge. For instance, Taó's second son's marriage was contracted by a Vietnamese wife, who introduced her younger sister to him. Taó came to know of this woman from her neighbour that she had a friend whose neighbours had an industrious foreign daughter-in-law. She then immediately asked for information about this family from her neighbour and decided to visit them to ask for a matchmaking opportunity, because she believed that 'birds of a feather flock together', so this Vietnamese must have a good sister as well.

However, the Vietnamese intermediary informed Taó that if they did not like her sister, she would introduce another girl to them. In fact, when she and her oldest son<sup>66</sup> and second son went to Vietnam to meet the sister in their house, she did not like her at first sight as she considered this sister to be too slim. But the Vietnamese father kept persuading them and described what a docile and nice daughter she was. And he also mentioned that his daughter was sent by a Taiwanese footwear manufacturer to Taiwan to learn the production process for three months, and returned to Vietnam where they had a branch to handle a production line. Considering the capability of this sister of doing a job like that and the sincerity of her father, Taó and her oldest son finally decided to marry this woman to her second son. Although their decision seems to be dominant, her second son did not reject this arrangement. In her case, she did not pay any matchmaking fee but only provided NT\$6,000 (£120) thank you money to her daughter-in-law's sister. Apart from this expenditure on thank you money, Taó also paid for her daughter-in-law's sister and sister's husband and child's flight tickets and living costs. Taó said that in this trip to Vietnam, she spent around NT\$220,000 (£4,400). She also stressed that the bride

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<sup>65</sup> A common situation is that these foreign wives have been asked to introduce their sisters to parents-in-law's neighbours' or friends' sons. These women did not take the initiative to cater this matchmaking service, but since their parents-in-law publicised their diligent performance of domestic duties to neighbours or friends, this then prompted them to ask if these wives have any sisters who also want to marry into Taiwan because these Taiwanese kin believe that the same personality and performance will appear in their sisters as they are all from the same family, the most secure way to find a good foreign daughter-in-law.

<sup>66</sup> Taó's oldest son also accompanied them to Vietnam for his brother's marriage. Taó explained to me that she asked her oldest son to go with them because she thought he had a higher education and worked in a very good company, so he could help to make the right decision for his brother.

price of NT\$100,000 (£2,000) was also given to her daughter-in-law's parents without any intermediary.

There is another situation, where foreign wives were recruited by a commercial matchmaking agency to recruit both women from their homeland and Taiwanese men. Ying's Vietnamese daughter-in-law took it as a part-time job, and this work, according to Ying, earned her daughter-in-law around ten to twenty thousand NT dollars in every successful case (£200 to £400). In my sample, one interviewee chose the services of a foreign wife who worked for an organised marriage agency, while two others chose diligent foreign wives' sisters for their sons.

Some participants used commercial marriage agencies, which often combine an efficient and tight network between local matchmakers and organised agencies from both Taiwan and South-East Asia. Unlike other participants, who travelled abroad with agents, Jhih and her son had selected the candidate from photo portfolios in a Taiwanese matchmaking agency four years before. First, she contacted a local matchmaker, called *muê-lâng-pô* in Taiwanese, and said that she would like to find a foreign wife for her son. The *muê-lâng-pô* took them to one of the branches of a matchmaking agency in the city, so they could see some photo portfolios of South-East Asian women. In case they were not satisfied, the local matchmaker mentioned that they could go to another branch for this. However, her son did not want to, as Jhih said:

*My son was too lazy to travel city to city just to look at more photos, so he made his decision at the first agency we visited. Otherwise, we could have gone to some other agencies to look at a few more girls' photos. (Jhih; age 64; married; Cambodian D-in-law)*

After accomplishing the photo selection process, her daughter-in-law was taken by the agency from Cambodia within three months. The only thing that Jhih had to do was to pay for the services of the agency and for the wedding expenses in Taiwan. In this way, Jhih and her son benefitted from the service that the agency provided in terms of time-saving and not having to travel to a foreign country.

Mèng was an unusual case. Unlike the other mothers, she contracted one of her son's marriages to a foreign woman all by herself without involving any other intermediary agent. This is a rather unusual practice and also the only case in my sample. Mèng had four sons; her second and fourth sons were married to Vietnamese women. The first cross-border marriage, that of her second son, was arranged by an organised marriage agency. Mèng told me that she tried to remember every detail from the first matchmaking trip including the flight, the hotel, the price of the taxi and the location of the photo studio for wedding pictures and some other arrangements. These actions made her feel capable of dealing with the whole marriage process for her fourth son during the second trip. According to her, she asked the owner of a local hotel<sup>67</sup>, who is also in charge of a matchmaking business, to organise an individual meeting for her son. But the first bride candidate had a greedy grandmother who asked Mèng to add more money onto the bride price or she would marry her granddaughter to another man. With this condition, Mèng decided to give up this candidate and ignored the fact that her son liked her. She told me that: 'Although I have money to pay for what that grandmother required, I cannot marry this one, what if her grandmother kept asking for money from her after she came to Taiwan?' However, she found another woman for her son the next day. Compared to the first cross-border marriage in which Mèng spent almost NT\$700,000 (£14,000), the second trip to Vietnam for marriage was nearly four times cheaper than the first one (NT\$200,000 (£4,000)).

These mothers' contacts with matchmaking agencies reveal how a series of decision-making and negotiation practices are operated. My participants did not randomly pick one source of brokering service but collected and compared the information they received from acquaintances. They chose agencies according to their own preference and considered their selection as the most secure way to find a good daughter-in-law. Although some studies, for example Lu, M. Chia-Wen (2005)<sup>68</sup> and Wang Yi-Han (2008), suggest that the majority of organised marriage

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<sup>67</sup> From my interview data, the brokers in South-East Asia normally consisted of entrepreneurs in the hotel or hostel industry, since they could easily provide places for matchmaking programmes. They arranged through a local matchmaker to bring women or call them to the hotel to meet the men. In addition, they also cooperated with Taiwanese brokers, either local matchmakers or organisational brokers, to provide photo portfolios of women for men in Taiwan who are unable to travel to South-East Asia.

<sup>68</sup> Derived from her study, Lu M. Chia-Wen (2005: 286) concluded that there are three factors for why

agencies in Taiwan conducted most of their business in Vietnam, my research shows that this might not be a necessary rule. Eleven of my participants chose organised marriage agencies, four of whom have Indonesian daughters-in-law, while six have Vietnamese ones, and one has a Cambodian. For those mothers who helped their sons to contact agencies or intermediaries, neighbours and friends were the main influence on which country they chose.

### *Helping sons to select a bride*

My participants started off with high expectations of finding an ideal wife for their sons, fueled by media propaganda of what an ideal wife should be: traditional, hardworking, domesticated, virtuous etc<sup>69</sup>. But basically, it is characteristic of this type of marriage that neither these Taiwanese grooms nor their mothers have the time for courtship or experience of South-East Asian women to really make an informed choice. How do they choose the right women? I found that my participants' and their sons' choice of mate was based on the bride candidate's outward appearance and their interactions with these potential wives. Among nine of my participants or their husbands who travelled to Vietnam or Indonesia with their sons to select wives, five of them made the decision for their sons, while others listened to their sons' opinions and respected their choice. When I asked Bão who made the final decision in the selection process, she said:

*I did suggest to my son to choose her [current daughter-in-law] at the time, because she kept a smiling face at every moment. I asked her to stand forward, I wanted to see her more closely, but she looked thin and weak. My brother told me 'I don't think this one can take too much work.' But I thought she might not take enough nutritious food here, I told my brother she is alright and we can*

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marriage agencies tend to broker marriages for Vietnamese and Cambodian women rather than Indonesian and Chinese women: (1) Vietnamese and Cambodian women are cheaper, the bride price paid to the bride's family and the logistic expenses of the matchmaking tour are lower and the brokerage profits are higher; (2) brides, particularly mainland brides, often resort to matchmaking for their relatives and friends, in competition with the brokerage agencies; and (3) it is difficult to provide 'after-sales services' to mainland brides who often hold brokers responsible when their expectations of husbands are disappointed. This seldom happens in the case of women from South-East Asia.

<sup>69</sup> An advertisement by marriage brokers claimed that '... Vietnamese girls are very traditional, innocent, pretty, pure, and lovely. Without complaints or demands, they are very obedient. So they can adapt to Taiwanese society easily and the conflict between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law can be avoided... Men will not be refused by Vietnamese girls, so it is easy to get married. Besides, the figures of Vietnamese girls are really excellent so they can produce good babies...' (quote in Wang Yi-Han 2008: 44)

*make her better and put on some weight in Taiwan. And my son agreed with my thought, so we chose her. (Bǎo; age 63; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

Jyū-hua also accompanied her son to Vietnam and helped him to select a bride candidate. Although she said it was her son's choice, she still said:

*I accompanied him to the mass meeting, he asked me if she is fine when he saw my daughter-in-law. Well, I mean she wore a red plain T shirt with a skirt, and looked demure and shy. I didn't see any inappropriate feature so I said this one seems nice. But I still asked him to make a final decision, and he chose her in the end. (Jyū-hua; aged 55; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

These mothers tend to claim that they provided only suggestions but did not make the final decision for their sons. However, I found that my participants considered that their opinion was also vital for their sons to make the 'right decision'. Bǎo, for example, was very satisfied with her Vietnamese daughter-in-law because she treated her respectfully. And Mèng told me that the reason she suggested her son should pick her first Vietnamese daughter-in-law was due to her impression of this woman. She kept asking her during the matchmaking meeting whether she could 'bear their family burden of poverty in Taiwan' or 'carry large agricultural workloads for them', and the answer of her daughter-in-law was always 'yes'. Such negative descriptions of life in Taiwan, Mèng explained to me, were to test if her daughter-in-law really wanted to marry her son.

Other criteria for finding a suitable wife might also have been taken into account, such as physical build, and age. For example, Fen chose her sons' wives with a concern for proper build which required that her daughters-in-law should be tall enough to match with three of her 180 centimetre tall sons, while Mèng considered age as important because she thought the younger the purer.

There were also some mothers who did not accompany their sons abroad to help to choose the bride. Most of them had engaged the services of individual brokers, who were often their acquaintances, or the agents their neighbours and friends introduced. This might to some extent have eased their worries and perhaps

they believed that these agents would help their sons to select a better woman. For example, Jiao, after comparing several agencies her friends and neighbours had used, chose the one with a good reputation in the community, because the foreign wives they had introduced had been diligent women. Although she did not go with her son, just before the agent took him to Indonesia she told him:

*You cannot just pick a random woman for my son, please be aware of those who are already married and divorced, or who had a child before. Do your best to find my son a docile and diligent wife. You are only allowed to introduce the nice ones to my son. Remember this!* (Jiao; aged 65; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)

To sum up, whether my participants were directly or indirectly involved in their sons' mate selection process, they had one central criterion for their future daughter-in-law: that she should be someone who shares the same belief in women's traditional role in the patrilineal family. However, in this cross-national form of marriage, parents who make marriage choices for their sons are taking a risk. They no longer benefit from having a detailed background of the girls' family conditions, their personality, and reputation in the village that they enjoyed in the traditional matchmaking practice, where an experienced local matchmaker sought to match couples with similar family status so that both families would have a higher possibility of finding their ideal spouses. But mothers who helped their sons to choose wives in this cross-national context could only compare the information given by profit-making agencies or their acquaintances who had already been involved. The outward appearance and ideal criteria for a daughter-in-law without any evidence then became their only choice in this marriage market.

### ***Providing all or part of the costs***

All these ways of arranging marriage will come in the end to a money issue. According to related research<sup>70</sup>, the fixed fee for cross-border marriages is charged to cover the travel expenses of both the matchmaking trip and the bride's travel to Taiwan, the bride price, the paperwork and the wedding ceremony as well as the

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<sup>70</sup> The related research was summarised from the research done by Hsia Hsiao-Chuan (2000), Lu M. Chia-Wen (2005), Wang Hong-Zen and Chang Shu-Ming (2002).

banquet in the bride's natal home; it also includes the service charged by the agency. In the early 1990s, the price of matchmaking was NT\$350,000-450,000 (£7,000-9,000) but by the late 1990s, competition had brought it down to NT\$200,000 (£4,000) (Lu M. Chia-Wen 2005). However, these are the figures that various studies have shown, on the other hand, my participants were talking about sums of money that ranged from NT\$200,000 (£4,000) to NT\$1,000,000 (£20,000). My participants' understanding of the money they spent was that it did not just include the fee they paid to the agencies, but also 'the money they spent on the foreign bride', such as the travel expenses for the brides to return to their own countries to either renew their visa or visit their family, and the pocket money that women give to their foreign daughters-in-law when they return to their homeland. Therefore, when they talked about the money they had spent it was always much greater than the average given in the statistics.

*Tang: I spent almost a million NT\$, er, approximately NT\$900,000 (£18,000), this included NT\$450,000 (£9,000) in the first trip [to Indonesia] and when she had been taken back [to Taiwan] we still needed to pay NT\$500,000 (£10,000), to the matchmaker. Besides, I let her return to Indonesia four times and also to process her passport, each time I gave her NT\$100,000 (£2,000), these then cost me NT\$400,000 (£8,000).*

*HM: So, did you pay all this money?*

*Tang: Yes, I paid this money, my son and I work extra hard in order to let her return there [Indonesia]. It cost us around NT\$100,000 (£2,000) each time.*

*(Tang; age 73; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)*

A similar narrative is provided by Shù, who not only explained the money they had spent but also the motivation. Initially, Shù did not support her youngest son's plan to marry a foreign woman, the idea was developed by his friends. Her disagreement with her youngest son was then eradicated under the concept of parental obligation to children. However, she gave in only because of the norm of parental obligation to children. She angrily explained why she finally decided to support her son.

*Let me tell you, I am not hardhearted enough to not support my son in this situation. Our purpose in making money is to let our sons marry sin-pū, and give birth to offspring. This is what humans will do, otherwise you are left with much money and your sons have no wives, then people will talk about this, it is unacceptable. (Shù; age 70; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

However, her older son was not convinced. He did not accept that Shù had spent massive amounts of money on his younger brother but given little to him and not treated him equally. According to Shù, she was more concerned about the younger son than the older one, who lived in the city and had a well-paid job. She could not overlook the disadvantaged position of her younger son. This explanation brings out the difficulties parents face in providing money for their children. Most of my interviewees were born between 1921 and 1950, and became daughters-in-law between 1941 and 1970. In the 1950s, almost all families were agriculturalists. Children often worked with their parents in the fields and they gave their earnings as matter of course to their parents to support the family. Since children were economically dependent on parents, it was expected that parents would provided dowries or bride price to enable their children to marry. And these parents still recognised their financial obligation to their sons, even though the boundary between economic activities and familial structure has gradually changed and those children are not necessarily working with their parents in the fields and no longer contributing their earnings from outside jobs.

So far, I have shown that the different ways in which mothers assist their sons in this marriage form through various practices. It is therefore clear that the marriage is not only a relationship between husband and wife, but with the whole family. In other words, through the involvement of my participants in their sons' cross-border marriage, we can see the implicit assumption that the marriage system is still constrained by parental authority.

To sum up, most of the women were involved in some way in their son's marriages; only one of my participants was not directly involved in arranging her son's marriage. That is Liañ's case, and the reason for her lack of involvement in her youngest son's cross-border marriage was due to the circumstances of her son's

business. He went into a textile factory with his oldest brother in Vietnam before he married. His wife was introduced to him by her father, who took the initiative in matchmaking his daughter and his business colleague. In addition, Liañ told me that, through the whole marriage process, she did not pay much attention to it, since her oldest son was in Vietnam at that time and also willing to assist his younger brother with a proportion of the wedding money. The modes of parental involvement in accomplishing their sons' marriage are summarised in Table 9.

*Table 9: Parents' and others' involvement in the marriage process*

<b>Ways of helping son's marriage</b>	<b>Mothers (n)</b>	<b>Fathers (n)</b>	<b>Others (n)</b>
A. Persuading the son to get married (this includes not only persuading son(s) to marry but also actively contacting marriage brokers)	13	0	7
B. Matchmaking	14	0	6
C. Helping son to select a bride			
a. accompanying son(s) to South-East Asia	6	2	0
b. selecting photo portfolios in Taiwan	1		
D. Providing all or part of the costs	19	0	0

Note:

1. The category of others includes neighbours, relatives, friends, colleagues.
2. The reason I put zero in the Fathers' column in the category of providing costs is considering the different circumstance of mothers, which means that fathers may also contribute money to their sons' marriages when the mothers' marital status is married. Except for the widowed, only one interviewee was the breadwinner, so she provided money without her husband's assistance. However, I only interviewed mothers in this study and they all referred to themselves as money providers, so I only count the number of mothers in this category.
3. There is only one woman who was not involved in any way in helping her son's marriage.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated how my participants became involved in selecting foreign spouses for their sons, which further reveals that their involvement is not just a ‘wife seeking’ activity, but reflects an underlying cultural ideology. These rural mothers were wedded to the idea of women’s subordination to the family but they were actively working to perpetuate it through various negotiations and different forms of involvement in their sons’ marriages. Thus, their agency was exercised in the interests of patriarchy. They support the patriarchal system by helping their sons to select a docile wife and establish another traditional family. More than half of my participants persuaded their sons to look for a partner abroad, and nine of the parents participated in the mate selection process. These active involvements have not only demonstrated the parental authority that still plays a part in children’s marriage but also shows that marriage is not an individual matter. In the next chapter I will explore the next phase in their continuing involvement and their understanding of their changed role as mothers-in-law.

## CHAPTER 6

### LIFE AFTER A SON'S MARRIAGE: WHEN EXPECTATION MEETS REALITY

As the last chapter has made clear, cultural heritage and socio-economic factors exert a profound effect on the construction of cross-border marriages. I have described how women rationalize their involvement in their sons' marriage, seeing themselves as essential. I also showed how they apply various strategies to ensure the success of the marriage. Specifically, it appears that these women exercise considerable control over their sons' marriages, and might further extend their authority to the life of their foreign daughters-in-law in the family. In fact, while most existing literature discusses the integration of marriage migrants into the marital family, I consider whether this necessarily comes into effect only through the efforts of foreign wives themselves. Because mothers-in-law have been so involved in finding wife for their sons, they have to live with the outcome of their interference. Inasmuch as different cultural functions, language systems and dissimilar social expectations are implicated in the living out of the transnational marriage form, these are challenges to mothers-in-law's customary family practices. This chapter examines the contradictions that women face between their expectation of having a traditional daughter-in-law and the reality of finding it difficult to shape their foreign daughters-in-law into their ideal model. The chapter also considers how they recognized and interpreted these contradictions and what strategies they used to meet the challenge that came from not only their daughters-in-law but also from their own families. Before examining these experiences, it is important to introduce the ways in which women set out their position as mothers-in-law and developed their expectations by the terms they used to define their foreign daughter-in-law.

#### **To define the 'daughter-in-law': The experience begins with the usage of terms**

According to Han-Chinese cultural norms, children learn the use of (kinship) terms early in life<sup>71</sup>. Everyone is inevitably being reminded and is expected to use the proper terms to address others of different positions (Blum 1997). However, there

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<sup>71</sup> Western anthropologists have also discussed the terms of address and references between participants is important for an individual to identify and recognize his/ her status, social relationships and kinship (see for example Beidelman (1963); Cohen (1994); Sagarin (1973)).

has been no research done on the real family practices of kinship terms in this cross-border marriage context. In fact it is important to look from this perspective because through the choice and use of terms for foreign daughter-in-law was important to the transformative moment in which women become mothers-in-law and this practice to some extent demonstrating how mothers-in-law feeling tangled when they interpreted the relationship with their foreign daughters-in-law. Therefore, the discussion of term usage has two axes here: the first is women's expectation that their foreign daughters-in-law are able to use the proper kinship terms, by which practice these women perceive that their daughters-in-law acknowledge the familial relationship. Secondly, women use various terms to define their foreign daughters-in-law in different contexts.

I shall begin with the discussion of how the marriage migrant woman is taught to use the kinship terms in her husband's family. For example, Dai, when talking about the first time she met her Indonesian daughter-in-law, said:

*When my son brought her home that night, he prompted her to speak, 'Jiào má-mah'<sup>72</sup> [call [her] mother] then she calls me 'Má'<sup>73</sup>. I was delighted that she does that and is able to speak our language. (Dai; aged 68; married; Indonesian D-in-law)*

Yet the instruction that Dai's son gave to his wife to use the correct term for her new in-laws might also be given by the matchmaking agent. Some of the mothers-in-law reported the experiences they had in South-East Asia when they accompanied their sons to marry wives. Bǎo said:

*She didn't call me Auntie at the time but immediately called me Má. I don't know who taught her this, but because she called me 'Má', I then felt it seems I picked a child accidentally from outside and that's not bad. (Bǎo; aged 63;*

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<sup>72</sup> The Romanization of Taiwanese of vernacular terms used in this chapter like *má-mah* (mother), *pá-pah* (father), *A-ma* (grandmother) and *ta-ke* (mother-in-law) and so on (see also Table 10), can be derived from the online source of 'The dictionary of common vocabulary in Taiwanese (Mín nán yǔ) which is available at <http://twblg.dict.edu.tw/tw/index.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> To either use the terms like *má-mah* or *má* to address mother-in-law has no any different in literal sense but it might contain a personal preference and self-perceived kind of intimacy when used it.

widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)

Mannheim and Tedlock (1995:8) make the point that ‘kinship relations are emergent in interaction, rather than reflected or expressed by use of kinship terms, ... Only by speaking the terms does the relationship emerge’ (in Blum 1997: 360). This is an apt description of my participants’ experiences; kinship naming has a covert meaning which helps to build up their relationship, which is hierarchical. In particular, some of my participants mentioned that when they were someone’s daughters-in-law the naming practice was rather asymmetrical. That is, a woman should use the kinship terms appropriate for a young wife and a young daughter-in-law to use. She cannot speak the same kinship terms as her husband to his senior relatives but she was taught to adopt the naming routine that a junior used. For example, she has to call her husband’s patrilateral aunt great aunt, and address his patrilateral uncle as great uncle and so on (Table 10).

*Table 10: The difference of using the patrilateral kinship term between married couple*

Practice between H&W Family Character	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife
	<i>Name of address</i>		<i>Name of reference</i>	
<b>Grandfather</b>	a-kong	a-kong	a-kong	tsa-poo-tsóo(great grandfather)
<b>Grandmother</b>	a-ma	a-ma	a-ma	tsa-bóo-tsóo (great grandmother)
<b>Father</b>	pah pah	pah pah	pah pah	ta-kuam (father-in-law)
<b>Mother</b>	má-mah	má-mah	má-mah	ta-ke (mother-in-law)
<b>Older brother</b>	ko-koh	tuā-peh (uncle)	ko-koh	tuā-peh (uncle)
<b>Younger brother</b>	sió-tī or first name	first name <sup>1</sup>	sió-tī	sió-tsik (uncle)
<b>Uncle / Aunt</b>	a-peh / tuā-koo	peh-kong / koo-pô (great uncle / great aunt)	a-peh / tuā-koo	peh-kong / koo-pô (great uncle / great aunt)

Note: 1. when a married woman addresses someone who has a more junior status than herself in the family, she can use their personal name.

But, according to my participants, this naming practice has been considered normative and is almost always observed in their generation. In short, women ‘by acquiescing to the terms’ and recognizing the ‘behaviour associated with the terms’ (Blum 1997: 362), entered into their husbands’ family with limited power. Therefore, any uncooperative behaviour of these new family members is considered

disrespectful to the family elders.

*No first name or surname, even when we have a conversation, she talked to me without any title or name. Only if you say something good to her, she will then call me Má. (Ping; aged 86; widowed, Indonesian D-in-law)*

*She never does that! [loud voice]. No! No! Only when she needs you to be her servant then she will.... Like last time she forgot to hang out her clothes, she asked her daughter in front of me and said: 'ask "A-ma"[grandmother] for help'. (Shù; aged 70; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

The importance of using a kinship term also featured in the focus group, when women expressed indignation about how they felt neglected and disrespected when their foreign daughters-in-law refused to call them 'Má'. It is actually the bargaining of power through the operation of term usage. Jhih began with a conflict situation she had recently experienced with her Cambodian daughter-in-law; it happened two weeks earlier when Jhih's older son and his Taiwanese wife returned home for a visit. Her foreign daughter-in-law acted angrily towards Jhih at that time and even, according to Jhih, vented her anger on her child by kicking the baby walker as her own daughter was sitting on it. Jhih assumes the foreign daughter-in-law is jealous about the older son's family, who have always been treated hospitably when they return and she never asked her Taiwanese daughter-in-law to do any housework, but instead considered her as a guest. Although she knows her foreign daughter-in-law expects to have similar treatment to her Taiwanese sister-in-law, Jhih still thinks the foreign one is narrow-minded, and other mothers-in-law echoed her opinion.

*Jhih: She is narrow-minded. I don't mean to criticize about this, you see, how often do they [older son and his wife] come home to visit us? They even have less chance to stay overnight. If she [Taiwanese daughter-in-law] lived with us, I would definitely ask her to help with cooking, wouldn't I? But she [Cambodian], she lives with us, she is part of the family for sure, isn't it her responsibility to share the housework? I didn't ask her to contribute any salary she earned to this family, I didn't need to rely on*

*her, so, for what reason is she venting her anger on me?*

Zhen: *Yes, of course, too selfish.*

Ying: *These foreigners! Our Taiwanese relatives appreciate how much the elders have contributed to the family. I think they [foreign daughters-in-law] just won't bother about it.*

Jhih: *You know, these days she plays cold war with me. She hasn't ask me to eat dinner since last week. She is willing to say: 'A-ma tsiáh-png' [grandmother, come and eat] and ask my husband: 'pah pah tsiáh-png' [father, come and eat], but not me.*

Zhen: *She didn't ask you to have dinner [laughs].*

Jhih: *I requested my ta-ke to admonish this younger one [Cambodian], she should tell her 'this is wrong for not asking your ta-ke to have dinner; she doesn't abuse you or shout at you, so you cannot behave like that.' Am I right! You [Jhih's ta-ke] are the eldest member of the family, you cannot remain silent, and spoil her.*

Zhen: *Oh! Don't even mention my one! My son asked her: 'why don't you call má, 'Má'?' She replied with a provocative voice: 'why should I? You tell me why should I?'*

Jhih: *'Who do you think you are? [loud voice]. Do you think that you are the boss!' Does your son ask her in this way?*

Zhen: *Yeah, my son told her 'no matter if she is right or wrong, she is still your ta-ke, you have to respect her because one day you will become someone's ta-ke, if your sin-pū does not respect you what will you think?'*

By referring to the manner of telling parents-in-law that a meal is ready, women do not intend to emphasise the importance of using a kinship term but beyond that to start the respect daughters-in-law should show to their elderly. That is to say, giving respect to the elders is essential and expected in the traditional family context; show concern for them; talk with them nicely and help them in their work. These remarks reveal the contradiction between women's inherent hierarchal status as mothers-in-law and their actual limited authority when interacting with their foreign daughters-in-law. This presents the necessity of interpreting women's actual life experiences and practices in a transnational family context. However, the importance of using the correct kinship terms was evident not only through foreign

daughters-in-law's reluctance to apply them but also when I asked my participants what was the best thing about having a foreign daughter-in-law, rather than listing the contribution they made to the family, several of my interviewees immediately described how they feel when their daughter-in-law demonstrated consideration for them by addressing them as *Má* or *Má-mah*. For example, Nana said:

*Although she doesn't like to clean the house and pays less attention to the children, the only good thing about her is she always asks me to have a meal when she finished cooking, she says 'Má! Pah! Meal is ready.' She does call me: Má! (Nana; aged 65; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

This parallels the findings of Sandel (2002) that using a correct kinship term to address one's kin folk is considered as a positive manner. It seems that, when I look at it the other way round, through the use of kinship terms, mothers-in-law are the party who are seeking the approved family status and acceptance from their foreign daughters-in-law. But how do they recognize their foreign daughters-in-law's status and position in the family by practicing this naming routine? Here I distinguish between terms of address and of reference. I observed the terms of address they used to their foreign daughters-in-law during the interview<sup>74</sup> and how they referred to their foreign daughters-in-law when talking about them (see Table 11).

Having divided the two situations of the name and term usage that mothers-in-law applied to their foreign daughter-in-law, I now describe in detail how the terms have been used by my participants.

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<sup>74</sup> In both first and second period of fieldwork, I had chances to hear that my interviewees called their foreign daughters-in-law by name. For example, they asked daughters-in-law to offer me a drink or snack during the visit or they asked daughters-in-law to look after grandchildren when we had the interviews.

Table 11: Women's choice of terms to refer and to address to their foreign daughters-in-law

Term usage  Participants	Terms of reference <sup>1</sup>								Terms of address
	names-family; personal etc. names	guā-lô- foreign worker	guā-kok á- foreigner	ua□t-lâm-á - Vietnamese	by nationalities	pronouns: that one, this, ours, she, this women	guân-tsi-bín-Aborigines huan-á- barbarian	sin-pū- daughter-in-law	Personal names <sup>2</sup>
Bǎo 63	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	
Dai 68			x		x	x		x	
Fen 57	x		x	x	x	x		x	x
Jhìh 64	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Jiao 65	x					x			
Jyú-Hua 55			x	x		x		x	
Liañ 75			x	x		x		x	x
Mèng 57	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Mǐn 70	x		x			x		x	
Nana 65		x	x			x		x	
Pan 72			x	x		x		x	x
Píng 86						x		x	
Shù 70			x	x					
Shuěi 65	x	x	x			x			
Sioù-Lan 64	x		x		x	x		x	
Tang 73					x	x		x	
Táo 60				x	x	x		x	
Wei-Wei 78		x	x	x	x	x		x	
Ying 68	x		x	x	x	x		x	
Yuan-Yang 63			x		x	x		x	x

Note:1. The Romanization of Taiwanese pinyin as 'ua□t-lâm-á' (the use of □ means there is no pinyin equivalence); 'guā-lô'; 'sin-pū' was confirmed by Professor Ang Uijin, Department of Taiwanese languages and literature, National Taichung University. The base combination of forms and characters can be derived from 'The Taiwan Language Phonetic Alphabet (TLPA) System' which was promulgated by the Minister of Education in 1998. It is also available at <http://www.ntcu.edu.tw/tailo/word.htm>.

2. When my participants used daughters-in-law's first name to address them does not necessarily mean that they have harmonious relationship with their daughters-in-law but only the common usage on a day-to-day basis.

As many of these terms operated in the women's accounts, I shall keep referring to one woman, Mèng, who used most of the terms I distinguish in Table 11, as an example to demonstrate how the terms shift in different contexts and on different occasions. Her account is also representative of the majority of my participants' practices. In the following quotations I put the terms that my participants used to refer to their daughters-in-law in bold, in order to highlight the difference of term usages.

First, the family (sometimes personal) names were used when women described a conversation they had with either others or their foreign daughters-in-law. As Mèng said to me:

*My daughter-in-law, she's the wife of my younger son. Once I heard her shouting at my mother-in-law for no reason, so I said, 'Wen-Wen'<sup>75</sup>, everyone can shout at her but you. She does your laundry and you are her grand daughter-in-law!' (Mèng; aged 57; married; two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

Second, the terms of reference used to refer to someone when talking about them with other people. There were five different forms that most of my interviewees used to refer to their foreign daughters-in-law, which were a) 'guā-lô' (foreign worker); b) *guā-kok á* (foreigner); c) name their daughters-in-law by nationalities (my Cambodian); d) '*ua□t-lâm-á*'<sup>76</sup>; e) pronouns: that one, this, ours, she, this woman, etc. In Mèng's case, the term *guā-lô* appeared both before and during the interview. When I was introduced to her by Aunt Kao, she asked if I wanted to know more about the *guā-lô*. At that moment, I replied immediately to clarify that my research focuses on the experience of the mothers-in-law who had foreign daughters-in-law in the family not women who had foreign domestic workers. To my surprise, she replied that those two terms were the same. This conceptual ambiguity was not the only case in my fieldwork experience. What they meant was: there is no difference between the terms 'foreign workers' or 'foreign spouses'. I hesitated to deal with that message at the time<sup>77</sup>. It particularly concerned me whether my

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<sup>75</sup> Wen-Wen is the pseudonym for Mèng's Vietnamese daughter-in-law's first name.

<sup>76</sup> '*ua□t-lâm-á*' refers to people who come from Vietnam (*ua□t-lâm*).

<sup>77</sup> I question if their knowledge of this term usage was built on the phenomenon of work migrants in

participants were aware of the inappropriate terms they used, such as calling their foreign daughters-in-law *guā-lô*.

*Oh, it's really hard to reach a balance between the Taiwanese sin-pū and the foreign sin-pū. The Taiwanese sin-pū said that I cared more about the **guā-lô** rather than her whereas the **guā-lô** complained I liked the Taiwanese sin-pū better. Well, I don't know which one I'm more fond of. (Mèng; aged 57; married, two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

In another term, *ua□t-lâm-á*, it is actually the suffix 'á' that frames a derogatory sense when it applies to a geographical, nationalistic or ethnic name. Said Mèng during the interview:

*I always told these **ua□t-lâm-á** that having one child is enough, because I could not help worrying about the future. I think since you only want to take money away from us and bring it back home, I don't believe you love this family. Am I right? So what's the point of having more children? [...] If she had two children, how would I be able to raise them after she left! (Mèng; aged 57; married, two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

This term is used specifically to refer to people from Vietnam; therefore, it can only be used when women have Vietnamese daughters-in-law or when women talk about someone else's Vietnamese daughters-in-law in conversation. As regards the other nationalities of South-East Asia like Indonesia or Cambodia, there has no specific term which with the derogatory suffix 'á' my interviewees can applied it to refer to their daughters-in-law from Indonesia and Cambodian. They instead used pronouns like that one, and she or directly apply foreign daughter-in-law's nationality to talk about them. However, this nationality term usage, either applied by individuals or in the group talk, can be used to emphasize where daughters-in-law were from; to address daughters-in-law or to distinguish and recognize daughters-in-

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Taiwan. That is, since Taiwan opened the gate for migrant workers in the early 1990s, 'foreign worker' (*wailao* in Chinese and *guā-lô* in Taiwanese) refers to general migrant workers, either males or females, from South-East Asia. These have become the terms related to everyday Taiwanese vocabulary. In this sense, it is not difficult to see why my participant considered using the term *guā-lô* to refer to their foreign daughters-in-law who also came from South-East Asia is not at all inappropriate.

law by nationalities. For instance, when I asked Mèng's opinion about the difference between Taiwanese and Vietnamese daughters-in-law, she answered:

*When they just came, during the first year, they were really nice to me. So I think, indeed, marrying these **ua□t-lâm-á** [Vietnamese] was so much better than our Taiwanese, as you know that my **Taiwanese** sin-pū is really lazy.  
(Mèng; aged 57; married, two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

Using pronouns as I have mentioned above is another means of expression. For example, this; that one; she; her; this woman; etc, all these figures surround the talk when women refer to their daughters-in-law during interviews. This piece, which I have selected from Mèng's account, provides several types of pronouns she used to indicate only one Vietnamese daughter-in-law:

*Before marriage, I was thinking to marry **this one** [first Vietnamese daughter-in-law] will be much easier, since **she** will be living abroad and will stay away from her hometown. I didn't think of how **she** behaves now, unwilling to stay at home and always going out with other people **she** met from work. (Mèng; aged 57; married, two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

This form was used in even more diverse and vivid ways when women had a chance to talk and discuss with others about their foreign daughters-in-law in the focus group. To some extent, it helps women to mark and define who owns a particular person. For instance, when Ying admired Guèi, who has an industrious and thrifty Indonesian daughter-in-law, other women began to add comments:

Ying: *I mean, if my son married a woman like **yours**, I would definitely say she is qualified, very industrious and obedient. I think **Indonesians**, they are relatively obedient [compared] to others.*

Jhìh: *I also feel that **Indonesian** is better.*

H M: *What is your anticipation of an ideal daughter-in-law?*

Guèi: *If **she** is obedient to us and is able to listen to what we say, then it is enough.*

Zhen: *Yes, follow what we say.*

Jhih: *As long as **she** would co-operate with us to get things done. I asked you to go East then you won't go West, and asked you to go West then you won't go East, am I right!*

Guèi: *If **she** is obeying it's enough.*

Zhen: *Yes, and not wasting things, if **she** doesn't waste money and food it's enough.*

Guèi: *The only thing I am concerned about with **ours** is that **she** never asked me to eat after she prepared a meal.*

Jhih: *Oh, **she** has always asked those children to invite you, hasn't she?*

Guèi: *I know, **she** asked her children, like my little granddaughter will yell A-ma, dinner!' [laugh] But she never does that.*

Ying: *Compared to **yours**, **ours** does that. **She** does ask me every time when a meal is ready, but I was annoyed by the fact that she ignored everything I told and asked her to do. **She** is really pushing it.*

These possessive pronouns, like ours, yours, seem to be used as an act to mark their daughters-in-law as in-group members. Although this verbal reading might also be emphasized by the women who have only Taiwanese daughters-in-law, the status of exotic others makes women suspicious of their foreign daughters-in-law's intentions and reactions. In some contexts, they drew conclusions from the gossip they heard in the village and the discriminatory public talk about the dangers of marrying migrant women, this then reinforced their distrust. They used demonstrative pronouns, such as: these foreigners; they; this kind of foreign women, to refer to foreign wives in general as well as to criticize and put down their daughters-in-law. Although each woman, after exchanging their experiences in the focus group, replied and said something good about their foreign daughters-in-law, there still remained the gap that women need to compromise between territories of foreign and native, different and similar in this family form.

Beside the above terms of reference, there was only one case where a mother-in-law referred to her daughter-in-law as an aborigine and a barbarian. It was due to the clash of different personal habits, dietary preferences and expenditure behaviours between Jhih and her Cambodian daughter-in-law.

*These foreigners are just like our **guan-tsū-bîn** [aborigines], do you know **huan-á**<sup>78</sup> [barbarian]? No matter how I teach her, she just cannot understand. She doesn't know how to appreciate the foods we eat, you know rice, she dumps it when we cannot finish it, and she doesn't want to eat the left over vegetables or meat. Compared to them, we won't do that, you know? If food is not stale, we can still eat it but she is not like that, she throws everything away. (Jih; aged 64; married; Cambodian D-in-law)*

The last usage is the form of reference by using the proper kinship term *sin-pū* to indicate their daughters-in-law. This term can be used in any situation when a mother-in-law talks to others about her daughter-in-law or introduce her. It is not common for the daughter-in-law to be called *sin-pū* by the mother-in-law.

*Around one or two months ago, I had a fight with my younger son when I told him that I found my younger **sin-pū** was acting suspiciously. He doesn't believe me. (Mèng; aged 57; married, two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

I have so far demonstrated how the terms operate and are modified by my participants when talking about the interaction with their foreign daughters-in-law in everyday life. My participants might not be aware of the potential meaning of some of the derogatory terms they used, as when one of the interviewees often mixed up her daughter-in-law's Vietnamese nationality with Indonesia. But through this naming practice, a certain social identity was imposed on these immigrant wives<sup>79</sup>. What comes after their mother-in-law identity is the way they evaluate their foreign daughters-in-law and introduce the family custom and rules to the newcomer, the foreign daughter-in-law.

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<sup>78</sup> 'huan-á' is a derogatory Taiwanese term used to refer to aborigines in Taiwan before 1980s. But following by the aboriginal 'name rectification' movement in 1984, this term is no longer used, instead 'guan-tsū-bîn' is now use to refer to aborigines.

<sup>79</sup> In 2003, some women's organizations took action to compel the government to change the term 'foreign bride' to 'foreign spouse' in all official documents. Following this action, they also held the 'Do Not Call Me A "Foreign Bride" Movement', the organizations urged the government to rectify the term 'foreign brides' to 'new immigrant women', which was voted as the favourite term by immigrant spouses themselves.

### **Women's way of evaluating their foreign daughters-in-law**

Previous research on women's lives in the Chinese family has pointed out that a woman's status as daughter-in-law is usually constrained by the patriarchal system, into inferiority and compliance (Gallin 1986, 1994; Lang 1968; Lin Chin-ju 2005; Wolf 1972). The narrative accounts of my participants brought out their expectations of having the kind of daughter-in-law who has inevitably inherited the traditional forms of obedient and diligent daughter-in-law. They not only drew on previous knowledge as a daughter-in-law for the model of measuring their daughters-in-law's performance, but also collected information about foreign wives from gossip roundup in the village to judge and check the behaviour of their foreign daughter-in-law.

### ***Memories of being a daughter-in-law***

*Being a daughter-in-law in my generation was very difficult. My ta-ke was really dominating, she wanted to control everything and she always scolded me. You think, when most of the women of my age were daughters-in-law they could not expect to have an easy life. [Being a] daughter-in-law is now more flexible, you can sleep as long as you like, you don't have to bother with cooking. Before, if I didn't wake up at 3 o'clock in the morning and prepare to cook, my ta-ke would make a noise by building the fire in the stove...you cannot complain about this [sigh], if you do then you will be treated nastily. Really! It is difficult to speak out, I can only hide it in my mind. (Ping; aged 86; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)*

This remark shows that women in Chinese society have been imbued with cultural rituals and norms which lead them to believe that they are obligated to perform certain behaviours that fit into a particular role in the household. Most of my participants experienced their life cycle as daughters-in-law from the 1940s to the 1960s. In that generation, women had less chance to access higher education and gain economic independence. The prevailing social norm that predominated in patriarchal society has led my participants to believe in a properly defined form of womanhood and act accordingly. For example, Mèng told me that she had been taught to be an ideal woman, that is, one who follows the norm of the 'three

obediences and four virtues<sup>80</sup>. An ideal woman would follow this doctrine unflinchingly in all situations, never modifying it. She believed it was natural for women to obey their parents-in-law and husbands. This 'internal constraint' (Yuen et al. 2004:17) has influenced women's autonomy and behaviour. For example, when his wife, Ying, complained about how her Vietnamese daughter-in-law irritated her, father-in-law Kuan reported that women of Ying's generation were very traditional in their attitude and had few opportunities to rebel against the traditional way of life:

[sigh] *it is different now, before, like her generation* [finger points towards Ying] *she could not do anything to change the traditional way of living, even if she had packed all her belongings intending to leave the house, she still had nowhere to go [...] and now if you did something bad to her, she can go to that...that association of protection*<sup>81</sup>. (Kuan; aged 68; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)

Similarly, Bǎo applied her experience of being a daughter-in-law as a strategy to deter her Vietnamese daughter-in-law from rebelling against her authority. Although her strategy failed in the end, her story reveals the obvious asymmetrical status between senior and junior family members in the previous generation.

*I told my sin-pū, 'you have no similar situation like mine. In the past, if I talked to my ta-ke in the way you talk to me, she would definitely have given me a slap for that. If you were me, would you let her slap you across the face? [...] So don't talk back while I am trying to teach you'. And then she replied: 'humph! It all depends on you. You talk to me in that way, I then have a choice whether to talk back or not'. You see, I can't do anything about that.* (Bǎo; aged 63; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)

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<sup>80</sup> The three obediences are to: obey one's father when at home, follow one's husband after marriage and follow one's son when old. The four virtues are: moral discipline, proper speech, modest appearance and diligence.

<sup>81</sup> In Taiwan, there are several advice centres run by both governmental organisations and NGOs which offer counselling and sometimes provide refuge, for example in the NGO case, 'The Vietnamese Migrant Workers and Brides Office' (VMWBO) runs three shelters, providing refuge for brides as well as migrant workers.

These illustrations highlight the experiences which have constrained women as daughters-in-law in the previous generations and include the hierarchical relationship within the family. Furthermore, their difficult situation can be seen as not only culturally constructed but also the result of their social environment. My participants expressed the feeling that they were born into the wrong generation, one in which they encountered a laborious period of agricultural transformation. At this point, as well as working in the house, women were also required to work in the fields. From my interviewees' descriptions, their work, in both domestic and public spheres, never seemed to end. There is some evidence in Tang's experience that she took it upon herself to shoulder most of the responsibilities, even if her mother-in-law did help some of the time.

*I married my husband at the age of 22, then he went into military service during the second year after we married. You know, I gritted my teeth to work outside in the fields with my sister-in-law. Only two of us worked in nearly five-acre fields. I had to walk twice a day for nearly an hour each time to carry manure with a pole on my shoulder and back to the fields to put on the soil [laugh]. To look back on my life, I think I have worked hard enough....But inside [the household], my ta-ke was cooking and cleaning the house. When we worked in the fields...uh...I was responsible to do the farm work, she looked after our children. (Tang; aged 73; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)*

Having a husband away for the mandatory two years of military service was a common experience among many of my participants in the early stages of marriage. For them, spending quality time to develop a relationship or getting support for adjusting to marital life was difficult to achieve. Instead, women living in the patrilocal arrangement were undoubtedly supervised by their mothers-in-law to become familiar with the familial practices of their husband's family and their duties as a daughter-in-law. In her study of Chinese rural women, Chen (2004) describes how the intergenerational division of labour between mothers- and daughters-in-law mirrors the traditional sexual division of labour, inside and outside work. That is, when the younger daughters-in-law worked in either agricultural fieldwork or waged jobs outside the household, the mothers-in-law were more likely to be in charge of domestic chores and child-care. This work arrangement was largely lived up to by

the majority of my interviewees. Like Tang, Shuěi, recalls that her husband's family estate was divided (*fēn jiā*) at the time she married him. This division meant that Shuěi's husband remained with his mother and two other younger brothers and one younger sister in the same household, while two older brothers-in-law, who were married, lived separately from the widowed mother. Although Shuěi did not mind living with her mother-in-law, the combination of inside and outside work absorbed much of her time and energy, even if her mother-in-law shared the housework with her.

*At that time, me and my sió-koo<sup>82</sup> [husband's younger sister] were mainly working outside, while my ta-ke helped with child-care and other domestic work like cooking. But after I returned home, I also needed to do some inside work<sup>83</sup> such as raising pigs and tending to domestic fowl, spraying insecticide in the land and cutting sweet potato leaves. I also rose early to cook breakfast for the whole family but my ta-ke prepared both lunch and dinner. And now, I don't care who does what and who doesn't, if you are willing to do housework then do it, if not it is also fine by me. (Shuěi; aged 58; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

In fact, her remark indicates not only how the domestic work was divided between women of different generations but also raises the question of why daughters-in-law still did much housework while they were engaging in outside agricultural work and their mothers-in-law were taking charge of the inside work. As Chen (2004) argues that the daughters-in-law do not benefit from participating in waged jobs, they still are sharing domestic chores with their mothers-in-law. The experiences of my participants further suggests that the reason for them to take up the housework of their mothers-in-law is due to their awareness of their own position as daughter-in-law, and their fear that a lack of devotion in family matters will make their mother-in-law annoyed. This apprehensive emotion emerges from both Mǐn's and Jiao's accounts. Mǐn spoke in a very loud voice when she talked about her

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<sup>82</sup> *sió-koo* refers to the way of calling husband's younger sister.

<sup>83</sup> What she meant the work like raising pigs and tending to domestic fowl, spraying insecticide in the farm and cutting sweet potato leaves as the inside jobs rather outside work is because in some of the rural household setting the pigpen and coop is build next to the farm house with small land for growing vegetable. That is why my participant considers this as inside work.

experience of being a daughter-in-law:

*Oh~ it was a hard life. Just by looking back on my life will made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. My ta-ke is not like what I am now, I let my sin-pū have all the freedom and hope they [daughters-in-law] won't shout at me. Ah~ I think you can picture it yourself, what a hard life women in our generation had before. When I was a sin-pū, even if I felt exhausted when I returned home from the fields, I still needed to remain standing and hold my child in my arms to feed him. Because if I sat down I wouldn't have been able to get up again. I remember one day when I sat down to feed my child, my ta-ke came to make me feel rather uncomfortable, she said: 'oh~ how arrogant youth is nowadays, I am still working and someone already wants to take rest.' Ah~ I won't say any more, because the younger generation will not take it seriously. (Mīn; aged 70; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

According to Jiao, despite having a fine relationship with her mother-in-law, her fear of her mother-in-law influence the way in which she behaved with her mother-in-law, which is terrified.

*If my ta-ke was cooking when I returned from the fields, I definitely took off my bamboo hat and farm gloves in a hurry and took over her work immediately. I didn't dare to let her continue to prepare the meal for the family. Although my ta-ke would not 'tsau-that' [humiliate] me if I didn't do so, I was still frightened. (Jiao; aged 65; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)*

With such previous experience, most of my interviewees mentioned becoming aware of their inferior status as daughters-in-law, but they chose to remain silent in order to avoid conflict. That is, in either cultural or social practices, these women chose not to violate the regime. These experiences of subordination in the past helped the women to reduce hierarchical relations between themselves and their own daughters-in-law today. However, despite this, they all still expressed a desire to have model compliant and diligent daughters-in-law. As in Táo's and Mèng's cases:

*People nowadays are not that conventional. The fine line between ta-ke and sin-pū is no longer definite [laugh]. If you really want to compare, this one is better than my oldest [Taiwanese] sin-pū because she rarely helps me to cook. But this one [Vietnamese], I never help her to cook. Every day, when she returns from the fields, she always rushes to prepare the meal in order to catch up with dinner time. I hardly need to tell her what to do, she works very hard [laugh]. (Táo, aged 60, married, Vietnamese D-in-law)*

*I really want to make this relationship work well. I even told them, I married you<sup>84</sup> with an attempt to treat you as my child not as a ta-ke would treat a sin-pū. Because being a sin-pū is different, if you are a sin-pū, you have to do everything. (Mèng; aged 57; married; two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

As a result of knowledge built up from past experiences, women inevitably develop expectations and begin to create an ideal image of what a proper daughter-in-law should be. Women tend to think that the requirement of domestic work does not necessarily mean their foreign daughters-in-law will be ill-treated, just that they will experience the same circumstances as they did when they were someone's daughter-in-law in the past. The patriarchal family system seems to prevail in women's memories and their everyday life practices. The ambivalence here is when they claimed that they want to treat their daughters-in-law more kindly and with more consideration than they have been treated, but they still want to hold on to patriarchy because the pay off for being a downtrodden daughter-in-law is one day they become a mother-in-law. However, the patriarchal bargain is breaking down and the expectations of these women are offer to recognise (Kandiyoti 1988) (see the section '*The strategies employed to establish an ideal relationship*').

In contrast to the mode of cross-border marriage, these rationalised expectations of mothers-in-law might also attach to Taiwanese daughters-in-law. In my case, thirteen of my participants not only had foreign daughters-in-law but also Taiwanese daughters-in-law. Only three of the Taiwanese daughters-in-law were co-

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<sup>84</sup> In the particular way that my participants expressed in their accounts, it appeared that they considered marriage as a family matter, rather than a decision made by their sons. Therefore, my interviewees very often used the description 'I married or we married you' to refer to their sons' marriages during the interview.

resident. The ones who were not living with their parents-in-law then benefitted since my participants had no chance to inspect whether their Taiwanese daughters-in-law are performing the expected and proper behaviour at home. For those who do stay with their parents-in-law, their language capability and their understanding of the culture might contribute to a less stressful situation at home, leading to fewer conflicts. For example, Ying was co-resident with both Taiwanese and Vietnamese daughters-in-law before they moved out from her house a year ago. When I asked her opinion about the two daughters-in-law she said:

*My older sin-pū treated me with respect, before they decided to move out she discussed it with me in advance. Because she had considered that the children were growing up and needed their own space, but I know she also kind of can't bear this younger one's behaviour. There was a time she [Vietnamese] refused to take her turns to cook, but she is cheeky, she showed up for dinner when the older one finished cooking. So I can understand why the older one threw a toy to the ground, sort of a way to release her anger, and then this younger one started to shout at her and said, 'pah pah, you see! Sister-in-law bullies me'. [sigh] How can you stay with this kind of person? (Ying; age 68; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

In the eyes of mothers-in-law, filial piety is represented neither by daughters-in-law being devoted to undertaking domestic labour nor by their living with parents-in-law. It is a matter of respect. To regard parental opinion as an essential resource to make family decisions and to show your respectfulness by giving your concern and using appropriate greeting behaviours was not only emphasised by Ying but also by most of my participants.

Despite judging the hierarchical status among women in the family, it is obvious that the women also manage family solidarity and mutual responsibility (Finch and Mason, 1993). With the close ties and interactions set alongside women's sense of obligation within the household, the significance of problematic discourses on married, immigrant women creates an insecure atmosphere which somehow influences and challenges the balance of the whole family structure and women's expectations of the ideal daughter-in-law.

### ***Gossip roundup: The collective sense of foreign daughters-in-law***

*This is a rumor that has passed on from person to person in the village, telling of a family in Pi-lin county [a pseudonym]. I was told their oldest child is already nineteen years old, maybe is a senior high school student. The tragedy happened when the husband wished to put the bankbook and the title deed under his foreign wife's custody. 'Aren't you worried that I will take everything away from you?' the wife asked. The husband, who believed in his wife with his whole heart, did not think there was a reason not to trust his beloved. After all, they had been married for twenty years. The wife still looked for confirmation of what her husband thought: 'You really trust me?' But after one month, the husband returned home from work and found that his wife had already left. She withdrew all the money from the bank, leaving nothing to her husband and two children. Two millions! [Loud voice] You know, she took two millions away and disappeared. (Ying; age 68; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

The first time I heard this narrative was from Ying. She included a specific place, actors and patterns to lend verisimilitude to the story. Then during the interview process, I encountered different oral versions of this story from my participants. By the end of my first fieldwork, there were already five interviewees besides Ying and one unexpected interviewee, father-in-law Wang, who had used it to illustrate their worries about foreign daughters-in-law. However, such story may one day become an urban legend like 'the vanishing hitchhiker'<sup>85</sup>, as no one could prove its authenticity. My participants may or may not discover a gold-digger kind of wife in their sons' marriage or in their community but the wide dissemination and acceptance of such story shows how they react to situations involving personal resentment and worries when their foreign daughter-in-law sending money back home. For them, the gossip is very much like Suls's definition: 'used to obtain information in order to make comparisons between oneself and others' (Suls, 1977:165). For example, Jhieh made enquiries of her neighbour about others foreign spouses' behaviour in money issues:

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<sup>85</sup> See for example Brunvand, J. H. (1981). He has collected and analysed the meaning of various American Urban legends in his work, discussed how these stories have been transmitted and possessed over the century.

*She [neighbour] told me there is one in the other village and her husband is disabled, kind of having a leg problem. They said that one is frequently appropriating money for her natal home and eventually moved all the money away. My one is getting to be the same, so I told her, 'you cannot mimic that kind of behaviour, you have family here and your children need money to eat and study. You shouldn't concern yourself too much about that side [natal family]. [...] since you are wedded to here, you should act like us', I told her this angrily. (Jhah; aged 64; married; Cambodian D-in-law)*

Mĩn draws conclusions from circulated rumours and public comments on foreign spouses and her observations of her own Vietnamese daughter-in-law's actual behaviour. She said:

*They just want to take money back home. If the children grew up...oh! [loudly] They will not be staying in Taiwan and will pack all the money home. You know? There were a lot of people said so, many...many people and even in the news report. To be honest, if you have a child, you should focus on looking after your family. You can't, and you shouldn't keep paying attention to your natal family. You have brothers and other sisters to support the family income. If they can't afford the expenditure then we sent them some money. You can't just provide it frequently, if your husband doesn't earn much money. (Mĩn; aged 70; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

Apart from this image of the foreign daughter-in-law as gold-digger, there appear to be other categories of daughter-in-law labelling that also cause Taiwanese kinsfolk's anxiety, such as the disobedient woman<sup>86</sup>; the importance of ID to a daughter-in-law; her habit of putting the mother-in-law's family second. The response to these labels seems, to some extent, to be shaped by public discourse, for even some of the participants who shared a good relationship with their foreign daughters-in-law still received warning from their local community who advised

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<sup>86</sup> The typical advertising commercials foregrounding a 'foreign bride' often create an attractive image of obedient wives who fit the traditional women's role in terms of taking charge of the domestic sphere. These have been created to persuade men to find their spouses from South-East Asian countries. However, it is an image that often misleads people, creating further conflict situations within the family.

them to be wary of their foreign daughters-in-law. For example, Wei-Wei described an affair that had happened the previous year, when her daughter-in-law was scheduled to visit her family in Vietnam, how neighbours suggested and warned her to prevent her Vietnamese daughter-in-law from going back to her natal home:

*Last year when she was about to leave for Vietnam, people told me to stop her. I know they don't wish to see us waste our money, if she refused to come back. I told them, it doesn't matter, she has to go home anyway because if I had married off my daughter abroad, I would miss her as well. It is the same. If she returns then we are lucky, if not, it is just like we gambled away our money, that's it. (Wei-Wei; aged 78; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

Since she was confident of her daughter-in-law's loyalty, Wei-Wei viewed the negative judgment of foreign women's possible desertion as simply a gossip. However, she still responded to the situation in concluding that if her daughters-in-law run away, then it is bad luck. This negative gossip can be seen as a mechanism that to a great extent helps to build up or consolidate women's knowledge of their foreign daughters-in-law's possible reactions, and these public conceptions then become a 'foreign bride only' checklist for women to examine. In particular, some of my participants were influenced by these conversations, they started interpreting ordinary or probably comprehensible practices as conspiracies, suspecting that the foreign daughter-in-law was planning to harm the family or the mother-in-law. Such suspicions are seen to be confirmed by the way that the young woman's actions appear to be motivated by loyalty to her original family, and in which the acts have been regarded as a violation of customary practices in Chinese society<sup>87</sup>.

However, under what circumstance did the gossip take place in women's lives? Gilmore (1978) draws on three different social contexts from a Spanish community: a) the street, b) the neighbourhood, c) the entire town as a unit to describe how people benefit from these circumstances to receive and exchange

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<sup>87</sup> Judd (2003) noted that the formal model of Chinese kinship organization has changed over time. Married women have more autonomy to retain close ties with their natal family in the name of respect and care for aging parents, to perform regular visits to their natal family, to provide financial support and parental care and sometimes under certain situations that they could stay as a long-term co-resident with their natal family. However, these practices, in my participants' accounts, have a different interpretation.

gossip. My participants, most of whom live in the immediate vicinity and work with people from other villages in the fields, easily gain information from either street talk or public interaction. Moreover, the gossip-mongering is not only limited to women who have foreign daughters-in-law but extends to their family members, acquaintances, other non-related but curious and enthusiastic neighbours, and sometimes even matchmaking agents who also provide suggestions for women to discipline their foreign daughters-in-law. Not all of my interviewees were influenced by this atmosphere of gossip. For example Wei-Wei, as I have mentioned, is not interested in the gossip, which some of my participants like Yuan-Yang, Liañ and Fen lived outside the village so they did not have much access to discussion. But there are also a few superficial reasons for women like Shù, Mǐn, Jyú-Hua and Nana who reflect traditional doctrine and think that no one can judge other people's family business<sup>88</sup>, so there is no point in discussing it, and sometimes the husbands admonished them against gossip but they were still involved in all kind of conversation about foreign wives in the village. These factors to some extent helped mothers-in-law to distance themselves from direct involvement in gossip, however the influence of hearsay remains pervasive.

### **The strategies employed to establish an ideal relationship**

Having an ideal family relationship, which involved the sense of continuing the ethical values of traditional culture, was what all of my participants expected. It usually means that the senior members as parents can hold the privilege of control over children in the household and that the younger generation is obedient, loyal and respectful. However, the form and content of an ideal family relationship has not always been recognized and adopted by every member in the family. In particular, the character of cross-border marriage presents cultural differences in values, ritual, lifestyle, behaviour, and so on in familial settings (Shen Hsing-Ju 2003; Nakamatsu 2003). This is not often appreciated by my participants who rely on the patriarchal framing of traditional knowledge. Although most of my participants were aware of the differences in between cultures, they basically expected that the young women would adapt to Taiwanese culture<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup> As a Chinese proverb says, '*cíng guān nán duàn jiā wù shì*' which means even an upstanding official finds himself worthless in hearing a case of domestic disputes.

<sup>89</sup> There are four major ethnic groups in Taiwan, the Hoklo, the Hakka, the Mainlander and the

Drawing on their own vivid experience as a daughter-in-law and a collective sense of marriage migrant women creates a particular knowledge for them to deal with the relationship with their foreign daughters-in-law and related family members. There are three stages through which these relationship operated. Stage one is the newly-wed period from one to two years, when the foreign daughters-in-law have a mission, given by the Taiwanese family, to become pregnant and give birth to a child. They have less chance to access the outside world so my participants were more able to inculcate the family rules and traditional idea in these marriage migrants' mind. However, once these foreign daughters-in-law commence work outside the family they have more chance to develop their economic and individual autonomy; my participants then began to worry about the possibility of losing a good traditional daughter-in-law. They exert pressure on these young women to remind them should always put family well-being before personal interests and aspiration. I divided this stage as stage two between two to four years. Stage three, ranging from year four and above is defined by the regulation that foreign wives can process their application for naturalization after three years of legal residence.

In Table 12 below I have broken down the practices that my participants discussed in their interviews into three stages which I have identified in my analysis of the transcripts. The discussions which follow these tactics will explain how the kind of mentality with which a woman reacts is related to her own expectations of family solidarity. However, it can be seen that these scenarios overlap one another in the way they interplay and unfold.

### ***The practice of 'kneading dough'***

*Do you know she is so behind the times? I bought her a hair dryer as one of my gifts when my son and I visited her in Vietnam. Can you believe she didn't know how to use it? To me, helping her to assimilate into Taiwanese culture and lifestyle is just like the process of kneading dough, what product are you going to make, bread or dumpling? That all depends on you, you know! [...] I am shamelessly boastful about the effects we made. When we go out together,*

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Aboriginal. The main population in the area my participants lived is the Hoklo ethnic group and most of my participants' Taiwanese daughters-in-law were also descended from this ethnic group. Therefore, they do not have much knowledge of negotiating difference or get the chance to learn from other cultural practices.

*nobody knows she is a Vietnamese unless she starts talking.* (Mr. Lin; aged 58; Vietnamese D-in-law)

*Table 12: Women's strategies and their application during different marital stages of foreign daughters-in-law*

	<b>Stage one (1-2 years)</b> Newly-wed, adapting to life in Taiwan	<b>Stage two (2-4 years)</b> Developing individual autonomy	<b>Stage three (4-above)</b> Establishing a new way of living
The practice of 'Kneading Dough'	Mèng; Jih; Pan; Siòu-Lan ; Tang; Yuan-Yang; Mr. Lin		
Love her like a daughter	Bǎo; Dai; Fen; Mǐn; Mèng; Shù; Nana; Tang; Táó; Jyú-Hua; Siòu-Lan	Dai; Fen; Tang; Táó; Siòu-Lan	
Direct and indirect admonishment		Bǎo; Jiao; Jih; Mǐn; Mèng; Nana; Shuěi; Ying; Mr. Huang	Bǎo; Jiao; Jih; Mèng
The manipulation of the naturalisation process			Bǎo; Jih; Mǐn; Mèng; Ying;
Tug-of War: Mother-son relationship conundrum		Bǎo; Mèng; Ying	Bǎo; Mǐn; Mèng; Ying; Mr. Wang

One of the informal participants, Mr. Lin, has only one son. Through the introduction of his friend, whose son married a foreign wife, they went to Vietnam with the friend's daughter-in-law. She took them to meet her cousin and arranged the marriage for them. Mr. Lin told me that he knew the woman's cousin was clever when he saw her, without any talk he could tell from only looking into her eyes, and he even added about this potential bride candidate that 'she looked white'<sup>90</sup>. What he explained to me, after his narrative of the kneading dough theory, was that clever is the first criterion of a daughter-in-law who is able to understand the message her in-laws delivered, and the 'white appearance' is an additional bonus for them to cover the fact that they their son married a foreign wife and helps them to distance themselves from all kinds of stigma that cross-border marriage families attract. At the time of interview, his daughter-in-law had lived in Taiwan for nearly one year and was six months pregnant. Lin's wife Chun continued to talk:

<sup>90</sup> What he meant about 'white' is not actually indicated his daughter-in-law looks like a westerner. He got the image about women from South-East Asia often have darker skin than Taiwanese, so the 'white' refer to a lighter skin as well as a kind of description saying his Vietnamese daughter-in-law looks like a Taiwanese.

*Ours is not pretty but she is docile and willing to learn, she adopted our life soon after her arrival in Taiwan. Like what she cooks is not different from us, not oily and not spicy. In fact, my husband and my son prefer the food she prepares over mine. I think the point is we should not treat her like that [she meant like a foreign woman], I always consider her position is not different from mine when I was a daughter-in-law. How would I know what my husband's family life was like when I first married? I learnt from my ta-ke, so I knew what to do in this family. Same as her; we teach and she adopts! (Chun; aged 55; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

Many Taiwanese families like Chun and Lin expect their foreign daughters-in-law to actively learn their familial practices and integrate into Taiwanese society within a short period. This aim of assimilating marriage migrants has been criticized by scholars for not paying respect to these women and ignoring the value of their different cultural background (Fung Heidi and Liang Chi-Han 2008). For example, most families in my study taught basic Taiwanese vocabulary and conversation<sup>91</sup> to their foreign daughters-in-law as they arrived in Taiwan. The initial purpose is to smooth communication but the fundamental work is to show these young women their position at home and tie up their self-concept to fulfil the traditional familial obligations.

Normally, the process is that first they teach these foreign spouses how to greet and call parental family members by their correct titles, and second they provide vocabulary instruction about how to define and name things that are related to the household, such as vegetables, foods, and home appliance. Third, they, in particular mothers-in-law, begin to give orders to the young woman in the household on the division of domestic work projects and, for some families, they demonstrate the process and skill of doing agricultural work to these migrant wives, expecting that once they are ready they can contribute labour to the family fields. All these activities, to some extent, are similar to what Mann (1991) and McLaren (2003) have mentioned in their studies; that the young daughters in Chinese society were trained, mostly by their mothers, to be competent in female duties before they married. These

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<sup>91</sup> The primary interviews were conducted in rural area in Taiwan where a large proportion of the local residents speak Taiwanese rather than Chinese.

foreign wives also experienced a set of instructions and guides to wifely roles but the difference is that these practices were provided by their in-laws, who intended to make them accept rules that came down from tradition. Therefore, young spouses from abroad in the first stage of being newlywed should perform in a certain way that conforms to the husbands' family. As Mr. Lin said of his daughter-in-law's behaviour at home: 'We do not forbid her from going out, she does not want to hang out with other people. I think she just could not bear to leave the house for too long'.

In line with other studies (Shen Hsing-Ju 2003; Wang Hong-Zen 2007) most families have tended to forbid their foreign spouses/daughters-in-law from going out to work or participating in social activities with other foreign wives. They attempted to prevent these women from making connections with other migrant women because they suspected that the migrant networks might activate information exchanges about their experiences in Taiwanese families and increase the risk of losing a diligent and obedient wife. For example, at the second of my interviews, Jhih told me that she felt regretful for letting her Cambodian daughter-in-law go to work outside<sup>92</sup> and she believed that her situation is not the only case:

*I was told there is a man who married a Vietnamese woman. At the beginning, she was quiet and worked without complaining. But...well, I mean it is not bad to have a foreign daughter-in-law only if she stays at home and doesn't hang around with friends. Like ours, she used to spend most of her time at home after work, but now she uses her mobile phone to contact other people we don't know. She is changed...they will eventually change, it's just a matter of time.*  
(Jhih; aged 64; married; Cambodian D-in-law)

This remark reminded me of an opinion which given by Mèng at the first time of the interview, she compared her inability to control two of her 'incorrigible' Vietnamese daughters-in-law were subject to bad influences from outside friends to her neighbour, Jhih, who used to prohibit her daughter-in-law from meeting others so she could keep her deferential. But Jhih might not know that Mèng had already

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<sup>92</sup> Her Cambodian daughter-in-law was initially working with them on the family farm but later went to work in a hennery for two years, which was the type of job Jhih approved of. But her daughter-in-law was not satisfied with the earnings so she changed her job to 'betel nut beauty' with the help of her Indonesian friend whom she met in the hennery.

predicted her daughter-in-law would inevitably change when Jhih agreed to let her daughter-in-law go out to work.

*Jhih, my neighbour, has married a Cambodian for her son. She did not let her sin-pū go out to mix with others. She kept her home and working with them in the family fields. I admit that it is the best way to make our sin-pū docile. But now she is letting her go out to work, I can definitely guarantee she will become just like my one. They all wanted to earn more money, and yes they can earn more money in the karaoke job. They won't consider it is wrong to date with someone else other than their husbands in the KTV<sup>93</sup>. (Mèng; aged 57; married, two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

These narratives all point to a thought that applying mobility restrictions to a foreign wife is necessary at the first stage. Although some other participants have a more optimistic attitude towards their foreign daughters-in-law, there are still some implicit rules that they assume the bride should follow. Sioù-Lan, has a son who has been married to a Vietnamese daughter-in-law for around five years. She talked about her daughter-in-law's activities during the week and said that she sometimes went out to do grocery shopping with her older sister who also married a Taiwanese man. After I heard this I told her 'it is nice to have someone else she is familiar with to share her life experience in Taiwan', Sioù-Lan said:

*Yes, her sister often comes to visit her and they also contact each other by phone. You can see she did not take her mobile with her [points to the mobile phone on top of the television], she only uses it to talk with her sister after work, she never uses it to call friends. She is a very nice sin-pū, very clever. Well, not all of them are bad; there are still some good women though. For those who are bad, they must hang around with other foreign women. What I think is setting a good example for her. You can picture if a ta-ke likes to ride a motorcycle and go out to meet friends regularly then the younger one, of course will imitate. (Sioù-Lan; aged 64; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

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<sup>93</sup> The meaning of KTV here is very different from the place that provides only karaoke entertainment, but addresses a local feature in Taiwan, indicating women who provide sex services in the name of 'xiǎo chī duàn' where supposedly they serve food. This kind of place is sometimes also involved with gambling services.

Even so, she tended to think that setting a good example is the way to prevent daughters-in-law from picking up bad habits from friends. The sentence ‘For those who are bad, they must hang around with other foreign women’ is indeed a repeated and common expression that appeared in most of my participants’ accounts. These unsure and anxious feelings about group activities and group gatherings of foreign wives were highly related to media presentation like ‘Gambling foreign brides’ (Lo Ting-Mei 2006); ‘Police caught half naked Vietnamese wives in the karaoke bar’ (Chiang Chih-Hsiung 2007); ‘Escaping foreign wives’ (Yuan Shih-Chung 2007).

Apart from the restriction of a daughter-in-law’s mobility, there is another way my participants have exerted influence in stage one in order to adjust these marriage migrants to Taiwan. This influence is neither to process an actual verbal or direct doctrinal and hegemonic control, nor to give a cold treatment for their foreign daughters-in-law. Consultation with a spirit-medium provides another chance for my participants like Tang and Pan<sup>94</sup>.

*I still remember, during the first month after she arrived in Taiwan, they had a lot of arguments. They were incompatible and she kept mentioning she wanted to go back to Indonesia. I went to the temple to consult Má-tsoó [female deity], and Má-tsoó told me [represented through mediums (tâng-ki)] that my daughter-in-law has something bad on her because she happened to see someone’s funeral in the village and that is a really ominous sign for the newly wedded bride. But after I followed the guide they started to become better until now. So I haven’t participated in any funerals since then because I just don’t want to cause any trouble for them. (Tang; aged 73; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)*

Under the operation of ‘medium cults’ (Nickerson 2001), Tang regarded her son’s family disputes as having to do with supernatural forces, the pollution of death rather than the transition period into a different culture, values and familial practices experienced by a cross-border newly wedded couple. Although she did it with good

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<sup>94</sup> For others of my participants, they might not consult deities, through the help of spirit-medium, about how to modify foreign daughter-in-law’s behaviour in this stage, but there were few of them (Táo, Nana, Ping) had used this strategy before their sons’ marriage (they asked questions like: when will he get married? Where is his *in-iân*? (a marriage fate which bring a couple together)).

intentions, this move emphasised her desire to mould her young daughter-in-law to behave how she wanted and to maintain the peacefulness of the family.

### ***Love her like a daughter***

In her study of the interactions between mothers- and daughters-in-law in England, Cotterill (1994) points out that these two groups of women had very different perspectives towards their in-law relationship, in particular most mothers-in-law viewed the interaction with their affinal kin positively and some described their daughters-in-law as their friends or like a daughter, while some daughters-in-law perceived it negatively. They considered the in-law relationships to be unlike the biological bond and closeness to their own mothers and the rigid formal relationship between them often ‘precludes open dialogue and self-disclosure’ (Cotterill 1994:73) and it might lead to an eruption of conflict. This perceptual gap can also be found in the experiences of my participants. More than half of the women said that they viewed their foreign or Taiwanese daughters-in-law as their own daughters but only five of them were satisfied with their relationship. For example, Pan felt disappointed that her foreign daughter-in-law never attempted to show gratitude for her efforts. She expresses her thought in this way:

*After she married into our family, I let her do whatever she wanted. I had no particular opinion or commands, I wasn't like the others. I treated her like my own daughter or even better than my own daughter. I am not lying or making myself sound good. Some of my neighbours said I spoiled her too much. Once, I gave her a golden necklace but it was just like other stuff I gave her, she went and sold it for various reasons, like providing it for the use of her brother's bride price. She took away all the gold I gave her and even my granddaughter's. So I stopped giving her any gifts. I am working so hard to save money in order to help make ends meet, I don't buy any gifts for myself but she took everything I gave her to her natal home. What do you think I should do about her? (Pan; aged 72; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

Apart from being angry that her daughter-in-law took many things back to her natal home, Pan's frustration is rooted in the fact that she works so hard to contribute to the good of the household and to treasure her daughter-in-law but these

intentions only feed into her daughter-in-law's lack of appreciation. It is an inescapable fact, however, that when women began with the good intention of treating their daughter-in-law as their own daughter, they still expected a positive reciprocal interaction. That is, when mothers-in-law thought that they provided unconditional love to their daughters-in-law and claimed that they have left behind the traditional kind of hierarchical status, this does not mean that they ignored what a woman should do in the role of daughter-in-law and learn to adapt to her new surroundings. Therefore, the idea of loving her like their own daughter has covered up the potential internal conflict which often distracted women's mentality.

For those who were living in harmony with their foreign daughter-in-law, they approved and were satisfied with these young women's behaviour. This harmony might not fit with what Taiwanese psychology scholars have discussed, that women should consider a daughter-in-law as an insider rather than an outsider (Kung Hsiang-Ming 2001) and stand from the opposing side to view their relationship (Li 2002) to avoid conflict. Yet, in this very rural agricultural society, the ideal relationship between women in different generations is hierarchical. They might have a daughter-in-law who swallowed her protests in an attempt to avoid causing dissent in the household (in the newly-wed period), or who recognized her obligations and self-fulfilment in the family. This deferential behaviour of a daughter-in-law helps to position her as being like a daughter in the eyes of her mother-in-law. Siou-Lan, who is satisfied with her Vietnamese daughter-in-law, talked about her way of managing a good relationship between women in different generations:

*If we have a foreign sin-pū we should love her like our own. If she is not doing right, we can teach her and tell her what is right, [...] but if you are too fussy about everything she does and don't guard your tongue to question her like where she has been going or why she did not tell you what she has been doing outside. This is not just too much as if your position is higher than the ancestor but will also make us deserving of less respect<sup>95</sup>. (Siou-Lan; aged 64; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

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<sup>95</sup> This is a delicate way by referring to her status is inferior to the ancestors thus she is not a dominant kind of mother-in-law.

Although Sioù-Lan disagreed with the practice of parental authority, she inevitably talked about how she could ‘help’ her son’s wife to adjust to their family life without a superior type of attitude but a ‘mother’s’ way of consideration. However, to measure what counts as right behaviour or wrong attitude still depended on my participants’ attachment to traditional values.

### ***Direct and indirect admonishment***

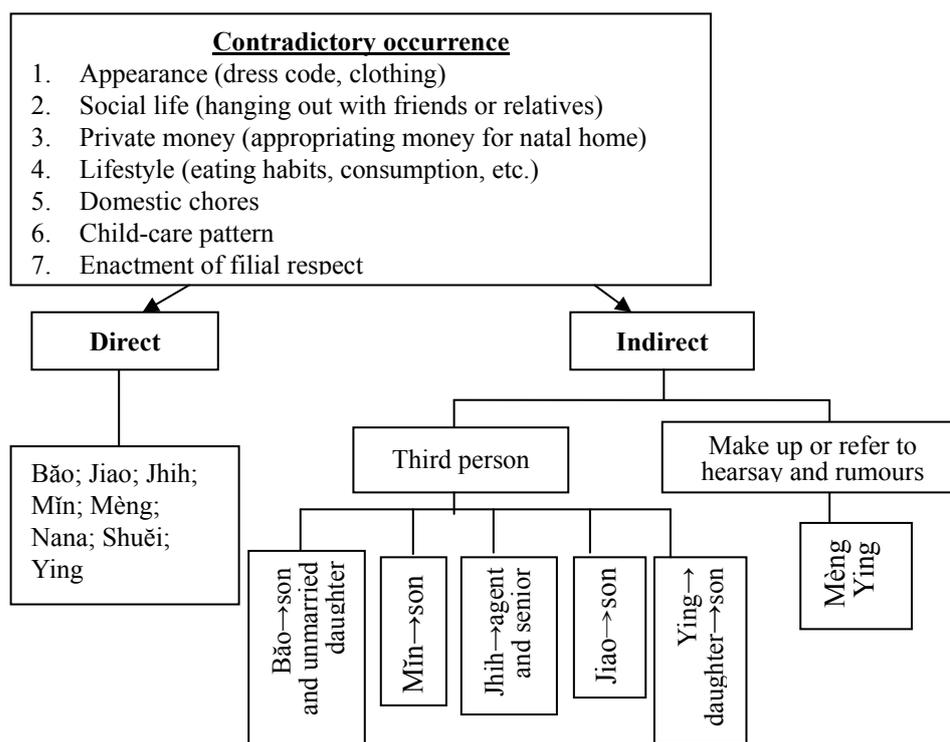
Nearly half of my participants had employed the strategy of admonishment when a foreign daughter-in-law began to change. This situation often happened when the daughter-in-law had a regular part-time or full-time job after the first child was born. Since they were participating in the workforce and gaining economic independence, the stirring of individual desire to practise their own lifestyle increased the conflict between women in different generations. I refer to this period as stage two. My participants applied two types of admonishment during this stage, one direct and the other indirect. The direct admonishment consisted of immediately expressing their discontent. The indirect practice was to use a form of proxy complaint, either framing it as having been made by a third person or by referring to hearsay and rumours as a way of indirectly warning their daughters-in-law to perform and behave in the particular way that they required in various matters in the family (see Figure 5).

As Figure 5 shows, eight of the twenty participants employed direct pressure when faced with contradiction. For example, Shuěi applied direct admonishment when she was annoyed by the careless housework of her foreign daughter-in-law<sup>96</sup> or when she found out her daughter-in-law was using contraception to avoid pregnancy (see Chapter 5 for this example). She described herself as an impatient person who could not be bothered to think of another strategy to cope with her daughter-in-law’s uncooperative behaviour.

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<sup>96</sup> Despite her poor health, the higher standard she had in doing housework meant that she tended to do all the tasks at home rather than waiting for her Vietnamese daughter-in-law to do them. However, she complained about this arrangement.

Figure 5: The occurrences in processing admonition strategy



Some women engaged in both direct and indirect admonishment. For example, Ying was annoyed by the fact that her Vietnamese daughter-in-law began to wear fashionable clothes<sup>97</sup> and dropped the rural appearance which she had presented when she first arrived in Taiwan. After several unsuccessful direct admonishments, Ying then told her daughter-in-law about criticisms made by villagers, in an attempt to make this foreign woman become aware of her dissatisfaction.

*I told her: 'people are saying all kinds of things about your appearance, like you wearing beautiful high heels and fashionable clothes, everyone who sees you will suspect you have a job as a prostitute'. I told her on purpose but she said: 'you Taiwanese people always like to make up things which are not true'. And I replied: 'who knows what you are doing all the time with such dress, so stop faking'. (Ying; aged 68; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

<sup>97</sup> Although no literature describes women's dress standards in rural areas, Mills (1997) points out that when rural Thai girls started working in the city, they tended to dress in a very fashionable and beautiful way when they visited their hometown. This was a way of showing that they had moved towards a modernised kind of life in the city and demonstrating their mobility. This might to some extent help to explain why my participants considered the modern dress code and the daughter-in-law's behaviour of pursuing beauty inappropriate for women living in rural areas.

Another case is Mèng, who exaggerated the situation she heard from a neighbour who confirmed that her younger Vietnamese daughter-in-law was hanging out with other foreign friends. She said:

*She took her kid with her when she went out, she taught him to say that they went to the library. But one day someone called me and said that my sin-pū was hanging out with some friends in the city centre. I told her when I got the chance: 'as your ta-ke I think I have the responsibility to tell you this for your own good and I hope you won't get mad. I haven't told your husband yet. Don't go out and associate with friends so frequently. People have seen you and taken a picture of you with some other man, they want ten thousand dollars from me to keep them quiet. Think about what will happen if your husband finds out, so I won't tell him but you have to promise me that you won't go out too often'. I mean she always told me she is going out for work and asked me to look after her child. She left at three in the afternoon and returned home around ten at night. Is this normal? [...] I guess she probably went to do the KTV job. (Mèng; aged 57; married, two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

It is obvious that these two mothers-in-law failed to demonstrate their authority and keep their daughters-in-law obedient even though they employed both types of admonishment. Meanwhile, Jhih appealed to her mother-in-law and *muê-lâng-pô* for help when she was not satisfied with the attitude of her daughter-in-law in doing housework. She said that she required her daughter-in-law to clean the house during the weekends so that she could have some rest because, during the weekdays, she not only needed to work with her husband in the fields but also undertook most of the domestic work like cooking, laundry and bathing the grandchildren while her daughter-in-law was working outside. Although her daughter-in-law agreed to do some housework during the weekend, in practice she often did nothing. Therefore, Jhih asked the *muê-lâng-pô* who had brought her daughter-in-law to Taiwan to discipline her. When I asked Jhih if the daughter-in-law followed what the matchmaker told her, she replied:

*Yes! When the muê-lâng-pô brought her here she said 'Remember!! It is important not to spoil her, do not hesitate to require her to do housework. Once you let go of your discipline she will then be hard to change'. I asked the muê-lâng-pô to teach her and she is now a bit changed in a good way. I don't want to say too much to her otherwise she will be unhappy and she will say that I am nagging too much [laugh]. My son..., every time I discipline her, my son will say 'Stop! You don't need to be fastidious about everything she does'. (Jih; aged 64; married; Cambodian D-in-law)*

This tactic of using a third party to do the direct admonishment is also evident in other participants' experience. For example, Ying asked one of her married daughters to tell Ying's son that he should not indulge his Vietnamese wife with plenty of pocket money and a generous mind. And Bão had many complaints about her daughter-in-law over issues like financial arrangements, social life and housework. Although Bão mentioned that she sometimes asked her unmarried daughter to provide instruction and show her how to do things right at home, she still believed that the mother of a daughter-in-law was the key person to modify her daughter-in-law's bad behaviour. In the Chinese context, a mother is expected to train her own daughter with various domestic skills and cultural norms in order to make her a better daughter-in-law when she marries (Wolf 1972). However, Bão understood that this outlet for complaint is impossible in this marriage setting.

*If I had a choice between a Taiwanese and a foreign daughter-in-law, I would definitely choose the Taiwanese one. Even if I have a bad one, I can just ask her mother to discipline her. I will say 'she is your daughter, she might listen to you. Because what I say to her, she never obeys. I am teaching her for her own good not mine. I wish they could manage the household and live more frugally so I am nagging her,' that's all I want to tell her mother. I won't complain too much to make them uncomfortable. But I am not able to do that, I don't know where to call or how to communicate in their language. (Bão; aged 63; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

The strategies these mothers-in-law applied might not always be successful, but the purpose of using either direct or indirect admonishment is to provide a way

for women to negotiate a better position when conflict happens. For example, indirect admonishment enabled them to reduce the number of direct confrontations as they did not want their daughters-in-law and their sons to view them as nagging and over-critical mothers/mothers-in-law. However, a few mothers-in-law explained that the reason why they did not consider admonishment a good way to exert control is indeed that they were afraid of upsetting their sons, breaking up harmony in the family and causing conflict. For example, when Shù complained about the lack of concentration and paucity of effort that her Vietnamese daughter-in-law put into the household chores and family life, she was still concerned about the feelings of her son.

*Before, she would go out and come home really late. I asked my son to tell her it is too far over and beyond the family boundary, people can only tolerate things to a certain degree. But, you know, as long as my son likes her, he can decide whether to scold her or not, can we keep expressing our protest? Of course not!! (Shù; aged 70; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

### ***The manipulation of the naturalisation process***

According to the regulation of naturalisation in Taiwan, there is series of procedures<sup>98</sup> for immigrant wives from South-East Asia to follow in order to transfer their original nationality to Taiwanese. Generally, this immigration process takes at least four years for completion. However, this standard requirement might not always be observed by either the marriage brokers or the in-laws of foreign brides, especially mothers-in-law. Why does this issue still become a battle for mothers-in-law? Many husbands and mothers-in-law believe that getting an identity card for migrant women may raise the risk of losing them. Therefore, to ensure that immigrant women devote loyalty to the family, in-laws have exerted various measures like the level of obedience, the involvement in child rearing, the frequency of hanging around with other foreign wives, the connection with natal family, and, even the etiquette on greeting parents-in-law and so on. These measures and inspections, which apart from governmental regulation, are simultaneously the practice of authority serving the interests of familism. This strategy was often

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<sup>98</sup> See Appendix C

employed at stage three after my participants have processed their discipline tactics and found it failed to fulfil their expectation. Jhih and Bǎo's experience can be cited as examples:

*Initially, our agent told me it's about time [fourth year of her daughter-in-law's arrival] to apply for an identification card for my sin-pū and there should be something like four hundred thousand dollars [£ 7,692]<sup>99</sup> in my son's savings account. But I am not going to do this so far [fifth year]. I mean if she wants to stay then she stays, because she has become attached to bad habits from her friends lately, she acts differently now. I don't know how much longer she will stay here. It is just not a suitable time, if she thought that I am too good to her [in an ironic way], she can leave anytime. I can't forbid her from getting away can I? (Jhih; aged 64; married; Cambodian D-in-law)*

*She told me the other day that she wants to apply for an identification card. I replied to her 'Ok! Where is the money? You give me the money and I will apply for it for you, as long as you give me twenty thousand [£385] I will apply for it for you.' I threatened her in this way. How can I help her when she is not settled and still thinks about going back to her natal home? I believe helping her is only adding an extra burden in the current stage [sixth year of the marriage]. Seriously, if she became involved in sex work, we would get into trouble. If she has no ID card then we can divorce her easily. (Bǎo; aged 63; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

Both quotations show that protecting the family integrity justifies mothers-in-law's control of the naturalisation application process. For them the privilege of taking charge of the family's expenditure and their own suspicion made restriction the only way available for them to relieve their anxiety and resentment. Their expression might sound heartless but the foreign daughters-in-law's 'not settled' performances have jeopardized my participants' understanding of the norm that

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<sup>99</sup> The financial requirement of naturalization Jhih mentions here has already been abolished in 2008. In the original scheme, the criteria to ensure personal sustainability included that the amount of savings deposits in domestic financial institutions or value of other movable property within the last year should reach the minimum of 24 times the basic wage (NT \$414,720). The basic wage NT \$17,280 is promulgated by Executive Yuan-Council of Labour Affairs.

women should consider the family as a whole. Therefore, these insecure mothers take rigorous action to delay or deter their foreign daughters-in-law from applying for naturalisation. In my study, there were ten daughters-in-law who had got their Taiwanese citizenship and four women had foreign daughters-in-law who had been living in Taiwan for less than three years and were not qualified to apply for it. Apart from these participants, three women said that they were going to ask someone if they know how to complete the naturalisation process while another three interviewees claimed they were still considering whether to apply or not. For those who were reluctant to help, helping their daughters-in-law to apply for naturalisation was the last trump card for making sure that their sons' marriage will survive. For example,

*Don't you know once they get the ID card, they can share half of my sons' property whether my sons agreed or not? If they don't have the ID cards this will not happen. I am not lying to you, my first foreign sin-pū is fooling around with other foreign wives and always talking about how they want to go back to Vietnam. She also does not pay any attention to her child and his wellbeing. Humph! If she has an ID card we will then lose everything because you not only cannot divorce her but will also be stuck in such a terrible situation and forced to bear with her bad behaviour. On the contrary, if she has no ID card we can send her back and delete her from the certificate of registered residence easily<sup>100</sup>. (Mèng; aged 57; married; two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

Scholars have pointed out that the immigration policies of Taiwan tended to establish a class stratified kind of measure to avoid recruiting 'non-economic immigrants'<sup>101</sup> who will 'lower the population quality' (Lan Pei-Chia 2006; Tseng Yen-Fen 2006). However, ordinary people like Taiwanese family members of marriage migrants have already processed their own 'family regulation'. Their regulation transcends state authority by setting the threshold for these foreign spouses in order to secure family well-being. For immigrant wives, the double

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<sup>100</sup> This is quite a common situation that has been reported by the press as, Cheng Hsueh-Yung (2006) 'Abominable! Refuse to extend residence permit, disguised way of divorcing wife', I had also happened to interview a husband, Mr. Huang, who used this tactic to divorce his foreign spouse.

<sup>101</sup> The term 'non-economic immigrants' refers to marriage migrants and migrant domestics in Tseng Yen-Fen's (2006: 94) paper.

restrictions involve not only the over-elaborate governmental formalities and bias in naturalisation but also the paternal domination. However, there are still exceptions to this forceful control. Two mothers-in-law reported with dismay that the daughters-in-law applied for naturalisation without getting their approval. Ying considered this to be a conspiratorial act,

*Speaking of her, she knows everything. She is very active in handling all sorts of information and things. Actually I didn't know she had already got an ID card before my son told me. That woman took the certificate of household registration from my son and then did every process herself. It was really annoying. I have no clue what she is going to do next. (Ying; aged 68; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

It seems that when a foreign daughter-in-law is aware of her right and realizes the need herself in the unfamiliar and hostile social environment, she develops her own agency to negotiate and challenge the inequality. However, it is contradictory to the mother-in-law's agency, which is moulded by the social and familial obligation that women should not only obey seniority and be faithful to the family but also should hold back her personal needs to follow the familial order. Therefore, conflicts arise between them.

Apart from the familial concern, there is another issue that might obstruct the application process. Generally, to apply for naturalisation denotes a lot of administrative work. This often makes Taiwanese families decide to transfer their responsibility to matchmaking agencies and rely on their service. In addition, before the government modified Article 7 of the Enforcement Rules of Nationality Act on October, 2008, to abolish the threshold limit on savings accounts, some agencies would lend money at usurious rates or illegally provide fake certificates of sufficient property to their clients<sup>102</sup>. According to my interview data, commission fees ranged from £350 to £770 but with fake certificates the price would go up. Compared to this, the official charge, when applying for naturalisation on your own, is only £20. For some families who have limited economic resources, the higher amount of the

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<sup>102</sup> See Lin Hsing-Fay (2007)

agent's commission eventually leads to a financial strain for them. This will also add their unwillingness to accomplish the application for their foreign daughters-in-law.

***Tug-of-war: The mother and son relationship conundrum***

*I told my son that she says she's going to do a manicure for someone else, but I never saw her take the equipment. She is such a liar. And sometimes she says she's going out to sell cosmetic products and she stays out all day. She just can't bear to stay at home. My son said to me: 'I can't do anything about it. I don't know what she's doing either. What can I do? Are you asking me to divorce her?' And I say, 'Ha! You, as a man, you can't discipline your own wife. You have no strategy'. (Ying; aged 68; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

Mothers helped their sons to complete their marriage in the hope of finding another woman to relieve their own caring responsibilities and to support the family. Yet the pervasive stigma surrounding foreign spouses and their vastly different background has made mothers hold back their trust and consider whether they should pay more attention to these newcomers. The conflicts between mother and son then arise when a mother is over-interfering in a son's marital life. The discussion of the mother-son relationship conundrum focuses on how much interference mothers might reasonably engage in and how they perceive and interpret their interaction in the familial context after their sons get married. The experiences that pertain to the dilemma of mother and son might happen during different life stages, for example, I found a few cases that might occur during the early stage of marriage when parents expected the foreign daughter-in-law to get pregnant as soon as she married, but the sons might support their wives' decision to defer pregnancy. However, I did not attribute this occurrence as a conflict situation between mother and son because my participants often chose to blame their daughters-in-law but not their sons<sup>103</sup>. Apart from this assumption, my participants, in general, reported their resentment toward their sons during stages two and three. As in Ying's case, she was satisfied with her foreign daughter-in-law at stage one when this young woman helped out with most of the domestic work. But she eventually changed into a different person and began doing

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<sup>103</sup> For example one of my participants, Shuēi, reported her dismay when she found out that her Vietnamese daughter-in-law was taking oral contraceptive pills to avoid pregnancy in the first year of the marriage. However, I do tend to think that her son was involved in his wife's decision.

things that Ying did not understand. The above quote shows how Ying attempted to ‘remind’ her son to be aware of his foreign wife and of his losing masculine prestige. In addition to Ying’s experience, there were four other participants who also mentioned a similar anxiety, the reason for making complaints about their daughters-in-law to their sons was expecting that the sons would either persuade or pressure their foreign spouses to act in a certain way. However, they felt that daughters-in-law often in turn act adoringly and plead with their husbands, which renders mothers’ attempts useless. One informal participant, father-in-law Wang, interpreted his son’s status in this way:

Mr. Wang: *Not only has she taken all my son’s money, but she also wants to have him under her thumb, for him to be her slave. And now she wants to control me and my wife as well. My wife has to work in the fields and cook as well, but she just turns up for meals when they are ready and she leaves her dishes on the table and goes back to her room. She does nothing.*

Hsing Miao: *Does your son know about your resentment?*

Mr. Wang: *My son has just drunk her ‘fu’<sup>104</sup>. You know that? It is like the ‘tâng-ki’ who told people to burn the fu and mix the ash with water. So my son does whatever she tells him.* (Mr. Wang; aged 70; married; Vietnamese D-in-law).

This conversation illustrates the common idea that my participants perceived their sons as incompetent to discipline their wives. Attributing their sons’ obedient behaviour to the practice of black arts by their daughters-in-law reflects the worries of the cultural belief that ‘men superior and women inferior’ is on the decline, paid no regard to whether the conjugal relationship can mould an intimate interaction between married partners. Their sons might not necessarily ignore the feelings of their parents toward their wives as there is also evidence from several qualitative studies of cross-border marriage that the husbands often expressed the feeling that they were ‘caught in the middle’ between wife and parents (Chung Tsung-Fa 2004; Wang Yi-Han 2008). However, it is hard to blame the parents’, in particular mothers’

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<sup>104</sup> *Fu* is a writing of talismans which normally can be got in the temple in Taiwan. It is also a common practice that people believe it has a power to resolve difficult situations in the life time or change a person’s personality by burning *fu* and mixing the ashes with water and ingesting them. However, Mr. Wang did not actually mean that he saw his daughter-in-law practice it but used it as a metaphor to exaggerate the degree of his son’s obedience.

reaction in seeing the respectfulness of a husband to a wife as a performance of weakness. As I have mentioned earlier, most of my participants had married a husband who went on two years of military service shortly after the marriage, since then the women devoted their energy to both household and field work, and even when the husband had returned my participants had already stepped into the next stage of nurturing children, contributing to the familial lineage. Marriage for them is only a basic unit to support the family function. They, in turn, pay more attention to building up the mother-son reciprocal relationship rather developing conjugal intimacy. This biological bond between mother and son and its attendant caring responsibilities has somehow a growing expectation of a mother towards a son and also influences the relationship between themselves and the daughter-in-law (Gallin 1986; Kim 1996; Kung Hsiang-Ming 1999b).

However, there are some basic elements that might also contribute to the influence of mother-son interaction, such as the economic, marital and health status of mothers/parents, and the number of sons. For example, a mother benefits from her economic independence, she does not need to rely on her son and daughter-in-law to support her even if she is widowed. Comparing the condition of Bão to Mĩn, although they are both widowed, and have two sons, Bão has more authority than Mĩn as she still provides financial assistance for her younger son. Her son tries to appease his mother by faking obedience when Bão complains about his Vietnamese wife.

*I told my son that she sent all the money she earned back to her natal family. She only worries about her family's well-being. She should also be concerned about us since she married you. My son told me: 'Just leave her alone, and let her do whatever she wants'. I told my son maybe when she's finished helping them to build their new house she'll go back home. You need to be careful not to let her take your child back with her. If she does that, then all the money and effort we've spent raising him will have been wasted. My son told me that he wouldn't let her take the child. The child is ours not hers. If she remarried, our son would have to call someone else father and I won't let that happen. So if she wants to go, just let her. (Bão; aged 63; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

The number of sons a mother has is also an integral part of considering the mother-son relationship, for example Nana, after her older son died in a car accident, has regarded her younger and only son's well-being as her mission. Despite her son's intolerable behaviour, she can only bear the consequences.

*Every since my son started earning money, I've never gotten a chance to use any instead I can't conclude how much he spends of our money. He never thinks to take care of his parents.[...] I could say that I've been through hell and back in this marriage and fulfilled my duties but my son does not even appreciate how much effort me and my husband have put in for him. He and his wife only helped out with some domestic tasks once or twice during these years. Both of them spent more time than me at home but they just couldn't be bothered about helping us to run this family. He wants me to work to death! I am not lying or exaggerating. My son spoils her too much. [...] I asked my son to tell his wife to help but he wouldn't. (Nana; aged 65; married; Indonesian D-in-law)*

To sum up, among all of my participants, only Mīn talked about wanting two of her sons to look after her in the future. Most of the mothers-in-law were in a stable economic and physical condition and the main concern to them is the harmony of their sons' marriage rather elder provision. Yet on the one hand, they want their sons to have a smooth marital relationship, on the other hand, they expect their sons to help to make their wives become the kind of ideal daughter-in-law that mothers required. In this sense, if the foreign women behaved in a certain way that they wanted then the intimate relationship between the son and daughter-in-law would not be criticised by mothers. On the contrary, when a daughter-in-law misbehaved, the harmony between husband and wife became a barrier for mothers to exert control.

## **Conclusion**

The establishment of cross-border marriages has not only helped Taiwanese men to become husbands and fathers but has also moved my participants to the position of mother-in-law. Despite the fact that most of them were not becoming a mother-in-law for the first time, my participants have one thing in common and that is the sacrificial

kind of self-fulfilment in the patrilocal family; they believe that ‘the familial values were enough to override any feelings of an individual woman’ (Yuen et al. 2004:135). They could tolerate and accept their downtrodden status when they were someone else’s daughter-in-law and anticipated that their devotion would be recognised by their husband’s family and keep the family on the right trajectory. With this experience, my participants have a strong desire to pass down the values of this tradition to their daughters-in-law. In other words, they began to learn how to be a mother-in-law and started to manage another layer of family relationships as mother and son, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, grandmother and grandchildren in the household.

I have discussed some of the strategies my participants employed in an attempt to modify their daughters-in-law’s behaviours in order to make them match their ideal family function. This is associated with the ambiguous interaction among women in different generations, because the position of mother-in-law in modern society does not help women to gain a similar power status as their mother-in-law had previously. But the form of commodified marriage has contributed to the rationalization that a Taiwanese in-law has a certain authority to control foreign daughters-in-law, who come from developing countries with lower social-class status. My participants assumed the foreign daughter-in-law would obey them as they should have understood their inferior position in this marriage system. The contradiction then arises when my participants advocated patriarchal practices while the daughters-in-law showed their resistance to their guidance and their sons chose to support their wives rather than them. However, not all of my participants shared a tense connection with the younger generation, but the relationship of rapport required a daughter-in-law who could act obediently in families.

**CHAPTER 7**  
**WOMEN'S NEGOTIATION AND CHALLENGES**  
**IN EVERYDAY PRACTICE**

In the last chapter I looked at the women's active engagement with their role as mothers-in-law and I used the concept of bargaining with patriarchy (Kandiyoti 1988) to explain how a woman engages various strategies to secure her position and authority at home as well as to preserve and strengthen a traditional familial function. Although women who took such strategies might sacrifice other women, like their daughters-in-law, or even their sons' marriages, they drew on traditional family ideology and their commitment to the family's well-being to provide legitimacy for their actions. However, when talking about these strategies and their meaning for the women who applied them, it is important to examine in more detail their interactions with the foreign daughter-in-law in everyday practice. Because women's strategies were not fully developed by simply having an obedient or an uncooperative daughter-in-law, it is very much related to the consequences of their negotiations in everyday practice. This is also the reason I have left this discussion to the last; many of my participants mentioned that their foreign daughters-in-law were very obedient when they first arrived in Taiwan. Therefore my participants found it easier to reshape their foreign daughters-in-law to become one of their family members during the first stage while these young women tried to become familiar with the functioning of a Taiwanese family (see Chapter 5). But, following more interaction in negotiating different lifestyles between women in the family, more clashes occurred and the older women began to develop strategies to manage disagreement.

I therefore begin this chapter by continuing to develop my analysis of women's bargaining and negotiation in the family through examining three main themes which have emerged from my interview data: domestic work, childcare arrangements and domestic violence. A closer analysis reveal that the women still face difficulties when negotiating with their foreign daughters-in-law in familial practice because of the differences in age, generation and culture. These domains set the scene for the subsequent discussion of how they uphold conventional practice and expect their foreign daughters-in-law to follow it, how these activities challenge

their knowledge and experience and how they perceive themselves to have adapted to the cultural differences and varied lifestyles in practice.

### **The women's conflict in domestic, customary and dietary practices**

Women of the older generation, like my participants, inevitably expected to take charge of domestic chores as a young wife in the traditional familial system. They were trained to be proficient in both domestic and farming work when they were still young. These practices that they learnt in their natal home somehow had to be modified when they married, in order to follow and fit into the familial practices of the husband's family. However, this kind of adjustment to a post-married life for a woman is particularly problematic when my participants have a foreign daughter-in-law. Since these young women were from different cultural backgrounds, they used different language systems and had different diets and ritual performances, and these circumstances challenged my participants' knowledge of traditional approaches in the household. My participants needed to adjust themselves to the different lifestyles of their foreign daughters-in-law. Thus, the differences between them created all sorts of practical problems, from how to make their daughters-in-law partake in family practices like ancestral rituals, religious beliefs and housework, to the adaptation to differences which often require negotiation, and these can plainly be difficult to resolve.

There were various representative subjects which revealed the clash and co-ordination between my participants and the different dietary preferences and customary practices of the foreign daughters-in-law. I shall describe each of these identified patterns through the examples each interviewed mother-in-law provided for me. First is the dietary preference:

*She really likes to eat very hot food. I cannot adjust to this. We Taiwanese relatively are not very keen on eating hot food. But I won't stop her as long as she can eat that, and if I am not able to eat it, I can have another meal instead, right! [laugh] People ask me if I am used to my sin-pu's cooking. I always reply, 'if I like it I eat more, if I don't like it I eat less'. We cannot change her since she is already attached to that habit. (Wei-Wei; aged 78; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

Dietary preferences is a common topic when studying cross-border marriage (see Lim Khay Thiong 2006; Siao Jhao-Juan 2000). As many of my participants described, South-East Asian cuisine is rich in flavour like hot and sour, while Taiwanese people prefer food that is less strongly flavoured, but they still chose to respect their foreign daughters-in-law's dietary habits with alternative application. For example, Wei-Wei ate whatever her daughter-in-law prepared and only when she could not bear the flavour of the meal did she eat another dish instead. Jhih and a few of my other participants asked their daughters-in-law to leave the spicy sauce aside in another container or bowl, and Fen let her three Vietnamese daughters-in-law cook and share food together, while she prepared separate dishes for herself and her husband. However, there was still one mother-in-law, Ying, who complained about this eating habit and attributed it to her daughter-in-law's mischief.

*These foreigners always eat very spicy and hot food, mine is also like that. When I had my eye operation, I told her 'I cannot eat any hot food now and it was what doctor suggested, so don't add too much pepper to the dish. If you want to eat then serve my dish before you add in any spicy sauce'. But she never listened to me, she deliberately ignored my request. (Ying; aged 68; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

The other conflict situation my participants encountered was the different cultural and customary practices. This came about when foreign daughters-in-law began to practice some elements of their own culture. My participants somehow failed to understand it, and in fact tended to feel threatened by such practices, which they saw as undermining the family. For example, one of my interviewees acquired a red braid from the local temple for her grandson to wear around his neck. A red braid is seen as a symbol of being blessed by the gods. Two weeks later she found that her Vietnamese daughter-in-law had changed the red braid to a white one. Significantly for my participant, the colour white is considered by the Chinese to represent misfortune. My interviewee misinterpreted this as a deliberately malicious action and drew the misinformed conclusion that her foreign daughter-in-law was plotting against the family. Similar situations regarding unfamiliar cultural practices also caused two of my participants, Ying and Bǎo, to complain about their Vietnamese daughters-in-law.

*She is offhand and also mischievous, you know? I have never heard that people offered a raw chicken to the ancestors, she bought a cock and a hen, raw! I told her no one would do this, you should cook [the chicken], she replied that this is their custom. I asked the people from Vietnam who are working here, to see whether this is true, [they said] 'No! Always cooked!' Someone said, 'she seems to be practising some black art', so we [Ying and her husband] and the younger generation are afraid of her. (Ying; aged 68; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

*At the beginning of her marriage, I tried to teach her how to worship the deities and ancestors, but she won't do that with me. One day, I told her, 'you should be more diligent to complete the work I asked you to do, I won't take over the jobs you leave, you have the responsibility to finish them'. After that, she went to the third floor [where they place the deities statues and ancestors plaque<sup>105</sup>], and burned three joss sticks to invite their whatever god. You know, she complained to their god. She was afraid to leave her incense stick in my censer, but stuck it into the flowerpot instead. After I saw it I warned her not to insult the gods in this way, she then never does that, let alone help me to do worship. (Bǎo; aged 63; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

In fact, ancestor and deity worship in Taiwan has been considered as a familial obligation and for most rural families this ritual practice should be undertaken regularly in everyday life. There are several essential Chinese festivals like the hectic period before and during the lunar New Year, the Dragon Boat Festival and ghost month<sup>106</sup>. But things are even more complicated because each family honours their ancestors on the anniversaries of their death. The form of worship and the kind of offerings made, such as fruit, rice wine or tea, cooked pork or chicken etc, also varies in different families. Therefore, when foreign daughters-in-law learn to follow these Taiwanese customs, they do not always know if they are

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<sup>105</sup> Normally, the 'Shén mìng tīng', where deities statues and ancestors tablets for family members to offer sacrifices are placed, is located in the main hall of traditional quadrangle house. But in the case of a multi-storeyed house, this shrine is placed in the top floor. This placement is also demonstrated the importance of deities and ancestor spirits. In the common situation, a house will have one or more deities statues or tablets and one ancestors tablet with each name of ancestors added on it.

<sup>106</sup> A detailed introduction to each of these festivals is given in Davison and Reed's (1998:51-60) book about Taiwanese culture in general.

doing it correctly. For example in some studies, Taiwanese in-laws consider these young foreign women to be incompetent to carry out this ritual (Wang Yi-Han 2008). However, the cultural distance can develop into a strategy adopted by foreign daughters-in-law in order to resist familial practice and control, as happened in Ying's case. There are no clear boundaries or guidelines to provide both mothers-in-law and foreign daughters-in-law with a clear picture of how to modify and adapt to their different cultural backgrounds.

As with dietary preferences and cultural practices, my participants also dealt with the discontent they felt over the profligacy and domestic negligent of their daughters-in-law. The following examples are two of the many complaints made about the character of their foreign daughters-in-law:

*I don't think that my son could save any money, she spends money without thinking. You see... those pairs of shoes! I mean you are not running any shoe business. You see [points to the shoes by the front door] only children's shoes can make a mess. And you see [points to the corner] those heaps of clothes, and not to mention these toys [stands up and picks out one toy from a box] [sigh]. It is hard to speak out. I tell you, the one I have in Taipei, she is our Taiwanese, she is a very abstemious person. She didn't buy any toys for her two children. (Shù; aged 70; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

*I only requested her to tidy up the house and be concerned about her own children. You know, it is always messy when I return home from work, especially the kitchen. Aren't we supposed to clean dirty dishes after we cook or finish meals? She does not, she leaves it until the whole table and the top of the kitchen range become filthy and grimy. This is what I cannot tolerate and always take over to clean. To be honest, I feel embarrassed by telling this to you. (Nana; aged 65; married; Indonesian D-in-law)*

These experiences reveal the tensions that can be created in practising all kind of household activities. It is clear, however, that trying to carry out different cultural practices in everyday life is not the only cause of conflict between women: their dissimilar ideas about the wifely role can also create dissent. As mother-in-law

and daughter-in-law share similar position in the household - 'the primary woman in her primary family' (Apter 2009: 72), each feels threatened when the other tries to establish their own lifestyles. In Shù's and Nana's cases, they criticised their daughters-in-law's lifestyle to establish their ideas of being a good wife. But their daughters-in-law did not attempt to follow the domestic routines set by the mothers-in-law. The differences between them persist in female norms then became another reason apart from culture that caused women's conflict in the household. The phrase 'Jiā jiā yǒu běn nán niàn de jīng' explains that every family has its own difficulties in mediating and negotiating family relationships and issues of diversity. Therefore, to discuss the gaps that exist between Taiwanese mothers-in-law and foreign daughters-in-law, indeed, between Taiwan and South-East Asia, it is more important to see how these parties negotiated and adapted to their difference in life practice.

Nevertheless, as I have pointed out in the above discussion of cultural and personal clashes, there is another issue which arises from the interview data that encourages me to rethink the idea that practice at home is not only related to cultural matters but also of life style changes that have accompany technological development, which has an influence on women from rural areas. By the early 1960s, access to electricity of variety domestic appliances and was followed by the spectacular growth of the Taiwanese economy. In the 1970s, people had relatively more ability to pay for household equipment such as refrigerators, televisions, washing machines, motorcycles and so on (see Hermalin, Liu, and Freedman 1994). Although the development of modern technology in Taiwan largely favoured a decrease in the domestic workload, this transformation has, to some extent, been challenged by older women living in rural areas. From my interviewees' accounts, during the period when they were daughters-in-law, manual labour still occupied most time in the household. Liañ reported the following experience from her life as a daughter-in-law in an agricultural family:

*People in the past generation, [especially] sin-pū, should build the fire to cook, carry water to wash the clothes, feed pigs. There were whole lots of work needing to be finished. I often woke up early in the morning, at 3 o'clock, and returned to bed at 12 midnight or sometimes 1 o'clock. It depended on the workload, so nothing to compare with now, you can cook easily by just turning*

*on the gas, people from the past were much more hardy.* (Liañ; aged 75; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)

This heavy domestic labour entirely engaged women's time. Although, after industrialization, many technological products helped to reduce the domestic housework of women continue to carry on causing tensions. This ambiguous contradiction prompted me to think about Cowan's work on gender and technology in America, where she argues that the industrial revolution in the home has actually contributed additional anxieties to women (Cowan 1976). This is because contemporary women are required to reach increasingly higher standard of cleaning the domestic efficiently. Similarly, some of my interviewees, although their ways of doing domestic work have remained unchanged until now, still think that working with technological help means that their daughters-in-law will get more benefits. When Shù was interviewed, she said:

*Nowadays, to be a daughter-in-law is much easier than being a mother-in-law!* [loud voice] *She doesn't need to do anything* [when she returns from work], *I bathed the children, I finished everything. She just needs to put clothes into the washing machine and switch it on. Ours* [Shù and her husband's clothes], *I still wash them by hand, so you think, is her life harder than ours?* (Shù; aged 70; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)

A few women expressed the same opinion. Jhìh commented on the case of her neighbour, whose foreign daughter-in-law often quarrelled with her. This was because she thought her daughter-in-law should wake up at 5 o'clock in the morning to cook for her son, before he goes to work at 6 o'clock. Jhìh said:

*If that were me, like this, I said if you don't want to wake up in the early morning, you can prepare rice the day before by using the electric rice cooker. You just need to set the time and keep it warm, isn't it easier, right?* (Jhìh; aged 64; married; Cambodian D-in-law)

Jiao said:

*I asked her to wash clothes every day, [sigh] no matter how I teach her, she still doesn't know. I mean like infant's clothes are pretty clean, so you can wash them with soap by hand. You shouldn't mix them with adult's clothes because our clothes are dirty and always full of dust. No! She mixes them all together.*  
(Jiao; aged 65; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)

Although these replies show that my participants considered electrical gadgets to be transformational to the carrying out of domestic tasks, their complaints about their foreign daughters-in-law's performance of housework not only indicated a clash of women's customary practices but also the additional meaning of doing housework. In other words, many of my participants considered doing housework as women's obligation, despite the ways in which technology has brought convenience to life. Therefore, the tension between Taiwanese mothers-in-law and foreign daughters-in-law extends beyond differences in cultural background, dietary preference, personal habits, and expenditure behaviours, concerns I have mentioned earlier. This is actually based on the self-adjustment and understanding of mothers-in-law in both their current life and their interaction with the new family member, who happens to have a different ethnic background and who has brought a more complicated and unfamiliar set of practices to the homes of these elder women. This conflict sometimes also extended to another experience for my participants when they became grandmothers.

### **Childcare arrangements and responsibility**

*After she delivered a girl, she has not had any sign of pregnancy during these years. I have tried to provide Chinese herbal medicine to nurture her body but it is still ineffective. I don't know if her body was too weak to be able to produce another baby or what, she just cannot. Otherwise, I had expected that she could have at least two children, because being an only child, my granddaughter seems lonely. However, my sin-pū still gave birth to at least one child, it is better than to adopt one.* (Píng; aged 86; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)

The arrival of grandchildren is an important family event and carries the positive meaning of a flourishing lineage for my participants. This quote shows how a mother-in-law, in order to make her daughter-in-law produce one more child, employed various methods to prepare her daughter-in-law's body for pregnancy. As in this study, the decisions about pregnancy and the practice of motherhood were mentioned as important and so the parents of the husband should be involved. For them, when to have a child and how many children to produce is not something only to be discussed between the marital couple. Although the birth of a grandchild relieved my participants of their duty to help to continue their husband's lineage<sup>107</sup>, in this marriage form their intention in particular has been questioned and critiqued as an act of 'sexual control' over the 'marriage migrant woman' (Lan Pei-Chia 2008: 849). It has been seen as a strategy applied to limit these young women's mobility through the necessary practice of motherhood. However, putting aside the women's mission to produce descendants, it is obvious that, after the birth of a grandchild, the provision of childcare services involves more complicated negotiation between my participants and their foreign daughters-in-law. In fact, the experience of being a grandmother was not always positive and joyful. Instead, the normative responsibilities of grandparent to grandchildren had brought an onerous workload for them, and the fact that the grandchildren's biological mothers were from a different cultural and ethnic group, who have different parenting norms and practices, sometimes resulted in considerable ambivalence.

### ***Who can do it right?***

Most of my participants remained co-resident with their sons and foreign daughters-in-law and offered either long-term childcare support or short-term babysitting for them. According to these mothers-in-law, taking care of grandchildren involved mainly physical labour, such as bathing, feeding, taking grandchildren to school, and this work was mostly done by my participants. For example, in Jhih's case, she not only did favours for her Cambodian daughter-in-law, babysitting two grandchildren

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<sup>107</sup> The deep-rooted traditional cultural beliefs and value system has made a woman believe that helping her husband to continue the lineage is her duty (for alternatives to this idea see Yuen, Law, and Ho 2004). With this concern, some studies point out that Taiwanese in-laws required marriage migrant women to produce male progeny (Li Guei-Song 2004). However, I did not find that my participants regarded this issue as a necessary requirement, instead they told me that as long as their foreign daughters-in-law produced a child it did not matter whether the child was male or female. This thought might be because most of them have grandsons from their other children or the foreign daughters-in-law have already produced a male child.

(aged 1 year and 3 years) but also provided permanent childcare for her working and non-co-resident Taiwanese daughter-in-law. Along with her childcare labour, she still needed to work with her husband in the fields. Therefore, she sometimes sought help from her own mother, who was 90 and who lived close to her, to look after grandchildren during the busy farming season. I asked her if she felt over stretch at dealing with both childcare and work that included domestic and field work. She said:

*It is our duty to look after grandchildren when my sons and sin-pū are working outside, I am not the only person who carries this responsibility, A-kong [grandfather], my husband, also helps me with childcare when he returns from the fields. He plays with these children or takes them out when I am preparing meals. He loves these children. Indeed, he always remembers to buy cookies for them. (Jhih; aged 64; married; Cambodian D-in-law)*

Jhih's remark suggests that she regarded the grandfather's role to be an assistant rather than a primary parent surrogate who should be engaged in direct childcare or spend the same quantity of time as her with the grandchildren. In fact, an analysis of the living conditions of elderly people, aged 50 to 64 in Taiwan, indicates that 10.55% of them were providing childcare for their adult children on daily basis (DOS 2005). There is also evidence from several countries on grandparenting which suggests that grandmothers find it much easier to take up childcare responsibilities, whereas older men perceive their role as grandfather to be subordinate to other family roles (Kivett 1985; Strom et al. 1999; Mason et al. 2007). However, I am not intending to emphasize a certain kind of gender role function, but to reflect how this gendered perception was frequently strengthened by the women themselves. Most of my participants drew clear boundaries that excluded men like their own husbands and sons from doing women's work. For example, Jiao, who shared child-rearing with her Indonesian daughter-in-law who had a part-time job after giving birth to her first daughter, but later her daughter-in-law wished to work full-time and asked if Jiao could provide day-care for her. Jiao said:

*She just delivered a baby boy seven months ago, I asked her to look after this one by herself, because she did not spare one penny from her earnings for my labour. She wanted to work full-time in a factory and asked me to take care of*

*her children but I refused. How could I afford to pay for these two children's living costs if she intended to give me only two thousand dollars [£38] every month? I was helping her to watch over my granddaughter, I take her to school in the morning and bring her home when I finish my work in the fields, I bath and feed her and make sure she goes to bed early. I do almost everything but gain nothing. I have to consider myself now, so I told her if you want to work then wait until this boy grows older. (Jiao; aged 65; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)*

It is clear that, for Jhih and Jiao, caregiving is a task, like other domestic tasks, that is assumed to be the responsibility of women. For example, Jiao did not ask her son to manage daily parenting activities but required her daughter-in-law to quit her part-time job and pay more attention to the children. This concern also appeared in most of my participants' experiences, they explained the love of the father by describing how their sons played with their children or took them from place to place after work, whereas mothers undoubtedly should attach themselves to their children. They did not talk about the emotional well-being of the grandchildren, their concern was more about practical tasks of childcare. They criticized or made fun of some tasks that their daughters-in-law had performed for their children, such as using an incorrect bathing method, an improper way of dressing the children (which always made children catch a cold), chaotic control over sleeping time and so on. Jhih provided a vivid example of how she was annoyed by the way that her daughter-in-law bathed the toddler boy.

*Let me tell you, the way she washes this boy is odd, who will do it like that! I only take off his clothes after I have washed his hair; this is to prevent him from catching a cold. When I wash and rinse his hair I am always careful to avoid his eyes and ears. I also pay attention to his safety when I bath him, I lather and rinse with one hand, while firmly supporting him with the other. But she, she lets him sit on the floor and pours water onto his head. My grandson always screams when she bathes him. I told her it is wrong to let him sit on the cold floor and it is dangerous to let all those bubbles and water get into his ears. I want to teach her, she just would not listen to me. I guess I won't be surprised if one day this boy became deaf. (Jhih; aged 64; married; Cambodian*

D-in-law)

Half of my interviewees shared a similar view, especially when their grandchildren were between the stages of infant and preschool. They considered that these young mothers were not as well-equipped as themselves to care for their children. However, this perception of incompetent mothers was also mentioned by some single-culture studies which explored the tension between mothers- and daughters-in-law regarding childcare (Chuang Hui-Chun 2004; Cotterill 1994). These found that even though they both belong to the same culture, tension persists between mothers- and their foreign daughters-in-law even when they both belong to the same culture background.

Although normally women would not reveal family secrets in public, in my focus group I found they were actually willing to share their experience as a part of their coping strategies. I shall demonstrate one more conversation which derived from a focus group, in which one participant described how she felt that her daughter-in-law did not value her own child and how she considered herself as a suitable child caretaker and other participants responded to her resentment.

Zhen: *There was one time, I don't know why, that she slapped her child very hard and she said: 'it was an accident, he just happened to come and my hand tapped him'. It's obvious she did it on purpose and how can you say it was just carelessness. Saying you were careless does not mean you're not guilty. You are guilty.*

Jhih: *No, to be honest, yours doesn't love her child.*

Zhen: *Yes that is sure.*

Jhih: *Don't you say that she used a belt to slap her child's face? If that had blinded him, it would have been a waste of time to have him in the first place. [...] Mine loves her two children very much.*

Guéi: *Yes, mine is very attentive to her children.*

Zhen: *Mine's just like a stepmother. [...] I told her: 'if you always want to vent your anger on your child, you shouldn't have one'.*

Guéi: *Didn't you say that she wanted to take her child to a nanny [...] if she is asking someone to look after her child, she has to pay a lot.*

Zhen: *Of course, NT \$8,000, but I only need NT \$5,000. If you asked someone to look after him, you need NT \$8,000 plus he doesn't get bathed in the evening and gets no snacks. [...] Last New Year she took her child to a nanny and I wanted to know who it was. I just think that if anything happened to our child, at least we'd know where to pick him up, right? So I followed her on my motorcycle and she was riding really fast, faster than me, and I fell off going round a corner. I was so desperate to find out where she was going that I picked the bike up and kept chasing, but she'd disappeared. But I know she took the child to X [nanny's name]. Is she better than me?*

These quotes indicate that when mothers-in-law tended to preserve their ideal kind of parenting and specific childrearing methods and ignored their children's and daughters-in-law's approaches to parenting, they crossed the boundary between 'being involved and interfering' (Mason et al. 2007: 692). Although many of my participants told me that they only providing physical childcare labour for their adult children and would not bother to interfere with their children's way of bring up their own children, they often actively interfere when it came to education. Their concerns can be divided into three main types: they were worried the daughter-in-law was neglecting the education of her child, that she was attempting to teach her 'inferior' mother tongue to her children and that she was incompetent to pass on proper Taiwanese language or cultural knowledge to their grandchildren. For example, Nana complained that her Indonesian daughter-in-law paid no attention to her own children's education and felt that her school-aged grandchildren lacked proper study skills and effective study habits. In one of the summer vacations, she managed to take her first, 12 year old, grandson to her sister's *bǔ xí bān*<sup>108</sup> in Taoyuan in the northern part of Taiwan, which was quite far from where they lived. She urged her grandson not to contact his mother to avoid distraction while studying, because Nana thought her daughter-in-law would only indulge her grandson. There were also a few mothers-in-law who sent their grandchildren to *bǔ xí bān* in the village who mentioned although they did not feel competent in helping grandchildren to do homework, they always plan ahead for grandchildren's education. They save money

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<sup>108</sup> This is a company that offers intensive tuition in Chinese composition, English, mathematics etc., as well as homework supervision during evenings and vacations.

to pay for grandchildren's educational expenditure when grandchildren were still at the preschool age.

Another participant, Pan, said that she was worried that her daughter-in-law would try to teach her own mother tongue to the children as she considered the language of the country her daughter-in-law came from as inferior to the Taiwanese language. Pan put it in this way:

*After she gave birth to these two children, I was worried that they might only be able to speak Vietnamese. Last time she took my granddaughter back to Vietnam for two months and after they returned my granddaughter then acted weird, she only spoke Vietnamese to her mother for a long while and she was not as smart as before but became a bit dull. Fortunately, she is staying here now and she became smart again. (Pan; aged 72; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

The last example is Mèng who, although she did not prohibit her grandchildren from learning Vietnamese, emphasised that her two daughters-in-law's incompetence in using the Taiwanese language to educate their children is indeed corroborated by an expert, the school teacher:

*Not only me but the school teacher thinks it is not a good idea to let my foreign sin-pū help the children with homework because they do not even pronounce our language properly. For example, we say tsiáh-tshài [eat vegetables], they say tsiáh-sái [eat shit], that is what the teacher implied. (Mèng; aged 57; married; two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

These experiences show that women considered their daughters-in-law to be inadequate in helping the children with homework due to their illiteracy and inability to pass on knowledge in the Taiwanese way, but still the capacity of their daughters-in-law to use certain kinds of language might sometimes create a suspicious atmosphere between them. Mèng, as mentioned above, did not want her Vietnamese daughters-in-law involved in their grandchildren's education, but she did expect that

her daughters-in-law could teach their mother tongue to the children. She told me that she just wanted her grandsons to understand what other relatives said when they visited Vietnam with their mother. But both of her daughters-in-law were reluctant to do so<sup>109</sup>. She began to doubt their intentions and suspected that they were hiding something which they did not wish their sons to know and report to their grandmother.

Compared to these participants' experiences, there were also two mothers-in-law who did not live with their grandchildren. Ying and Mĩn had relatively less chance to be involved in childcare activities but they still provided either financial support for their sons to relieve the burden of raising children or paid regular visits to their sons' home to check if they could provide practical childcare support. Other participants like Dai and Táo once offered childcare services for their preschool-age grandchildren when their sons or foreign- and Taiwanese daughters-in-law were working outside the family. However, these grandmothers' involvement in childcare was not always joyful and positive, although most of them justified their interfering as the action of sharing their knowledge of childcare and fulfilling their obligations to the family.

### **The joys of grandmotherhood?**

Twelve of my interviewees provided either daily babysitting or after-school care when their adult child and daughter-in-law were out at work or engaged in full-time childcare for children who lived away from them. Among these experiences, some participants performed housework while also taking care of the grandchildren, and in a few cases they looked after the grandchildren with help from a co-resident daughter or a non-working foreign daughter-in-law. However, not all of them were willing carers because of the need to spend time earning money, especially if they were widows, or because of poor health. Nevertheless, they still persuaded themselves that grandmothers caring for grandchildren is natural.

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<sup>109</sup> In Fung Heidi and Liang Chi-Han's (2008) study, quite a number of foreign daughters-in-law who lived with their parents-in-law expressed concern that parents-in-law might misapprehend their intentions in teaching Vietnamese to their children and judge that they wanted to sow discord between the family members, so they preferred not to teach it or chose to use the language with children privately.

Having said that, the willingness of my participants to provide care for grandchildren extended beyond merely their duty, instead, some other lived experiences, such as coping with financial difficulty, health problems and whether there is someone else who can help, also influenced the level of their involvement. For example, when it comes to financial concerns, some studies point out that this is the fundamental factor that decides whether women contribute their labour to childcare (Lin Chin-Ju 2007). Grandparents with better economic conditions will tend to employ a nanny to look after grandchildren and release their physical burden (Hu Yow-Hwey and Chou Ya-Jung 1996b). In Jiao's case, her work in the fields was the main source of income after her husband died a long time before. When she helped with the childcare she stopped working but gained no payment from her only son and Indonesian daughter-in-law. For a secure old age, she refused to look after her second grandchild, but her daughter-in-law ran away to the distance city a few months after I interviewed her and did not intend to return (see Chapter 4). Jiao was then forced to take up the full-time caring job for her two grandchildren and raise them with no assistance from her son. At the time of the second interview, she told me that her son was working in Taipei but she did not receive any money from him, instead she had to rely on some paid farm work she took occasionally. When she needed to work a half day in the fields, she asked her neighbour to watch over her two year-old grandson, while her granddaughter attended primary school.

There were also participants with limited finances who received a small amount of money from their sons but still babysat for them. For example, Bǎo; although her son regularly paid her only five thousand dollars a month for childcare, her Vietnamese daughter-in-law complained about this amount of money. Bǎo compared the common childcare price in rural areas, where it costs six thousand dollars a month to employ a nanny for half-day care, to what her son paid her. She emphasised that five thousand dollars was not nearly enough to cover what she spent on her grandson with meals and snacks, let alone the energy and physical labour she contributed, which she did not calculate. She told me that she often had to leave her grandson with her unmarried daughter and to work on the family farm for extra money. She said:

*How can I do both work and childcare at my age? I asked her to give me five thousand dollars [£96] every month as a payment, she then exaggerated her money and said we all relied on her<sup>110</sup>. Isn't it ridiculous? I asked her to do the calculation, five thousand dollars is worth nothing, and told her if I have to rely on this money then I will starve to death. [...] To employ a nanny she needs to pay a salary, shouldn't she pay for me? I terminated my work to be able to look after this child. Besides, I am the grandmother. Who else like me is willing to provide everything she wanted without haggling over it? When I told her that, she said 'I did not ask you to do that'. Doesn't it sound silly? He is my grandson, of course I am willing to do so, do you think a nanny would use her own money to buy snacks for him? (Bão; aged 63; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

In fact, according to the government statistical data on day-care services for children under three years old, Taiwanese mothers pay an average of NT\$12,692 (£244) per month to a nanny, while 24-hour care is charged at an average of NT\$18,725 (£360) (DGBAS 2006b). By giving these figures, I do not mean to relate the grandmother's intention to provide childcare as a hope to gain commercial benefit. Rather, I want to point out that for the adult child who cannot afford commercial costs of childcare, grandparents seem good solution. And the parents, like Bão, rationalized grandparent assistance with child-rearing under such arrangement as an obligation. This illustrates what researchers have mentioned that, based on the concept of lineage continuity and expansion and the importance of family solidarity and harmony, Chinese people are willing to provide unconditional love and assistance to offspring (Yeh Ming-Hua and Yang Kuo-Shu 1997). In addition, this cultural norm justifies the obligation of the grandmother to provide childcare for her children (Chia Hao-Fei and Chen Ping-Hwa 1999).

Other factors, such as health conditions, have also influenced my participants' attitudes towards childcare. Women who are experiencing poor health might find their ability to provide care limited and their willingness to care for grandchildren

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<sup>110</sup> Bão asked her daughter-in-law to provide a regular financial support for childcare expense, which is five thousand dollars [£96] every month, but her daughter-in-law gave neighbour an impression that she contributed a lot of money to the family.

reduced. Shuěi, when I interviewed her in 2006, was virtually a full-time caregiver who had primary responsibility for the children of two of her sons, one was a girl aged three and the other a boy seven months old. Although her Vietnamese daughter-in-law could help with childcare after work in the evening, Shuěi still needed to take care of her older son's daughter while both her son and daughter-in-law were working in another city. She complained about this arrangement:

*She wants to work, if I cannot help her who else can [sigh], and it is really annoying that I'm stuck in this situation. My burden is harder than hers, I mean it! I am not only spending my time tending to her child and my older son's three year-old daughter but I'm also needed to prepare meals for the family. If she is off from work, she takes her child out to have fun and I am still the one who needs to cook. Every piece of my bones is damaged now. When I look after this boy, I don't have the strength to carry him in my arms but on my back with a baby carrier [sigh], you see with my body in such condition I still force myself to pick up things she left behind. (Shuěi; aged 65; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

After she complained about her Vietnamese daughter-in-law, I asked her about the Taiwanese daughter-in-law; would she share the work of the household when she returned? Shuěi then told me that both of her daughters-in-law were the same, they were just not bothered to do any work and even when they did, they did it with such laxity that she still needed to do it again. She blamed her Vietnamese daughter-in-law mainly because of their co-residence, she thought the housework and childcare were not only her responsibilities but also those of the daughter-in-law who lived with her. However, in 2007 when I went to visit Shuěi for the second time, she was unable to do any housework after spinal surgery, instead, her Vietnamese daughter-in-law had quit her job to help out with childcare and domestic work. There was a lack of support from other family members. This situation, in which women mainly relied on the source of patrilineal family members for childcare responsibility, has actually undergone a significant change over the past twenty years. Lin Chin-Ju's study (2007) found that, compared to the women who got married in the 1970s, women in the 1990s chose to seek help from their natal families for babysitting and domestic work when they had a full-time waged job. Understandably, considering the

fact that the families of the foreign daughters-in-law were not residing in Taiwan, my participants barely mentioned any expectation of assistance from their daughters-in-law's maternal side. For those who had both Taiwanese and foreign daughters-in-law in the same house, I expected them to have a different arrangement and division of childcare work. But I found that it is always the foreign daughters-in-law who shoulder both the domestic and childcare work-load.

Yuan-Yang, for example, although she assured her two sons that she would enjoy doing the childcare after her retirement, really did not contribute much. Her Vietnamese daughter-in-law was more burdened with the domestic work, childcare and elderly care of Yuan-Yang's mother-in-law, who suffered from dementia. Though this Vietnamese daughter-in-law was paid by her father-in-law and his brother for the care of the elderly<sup>111</sup>, eventually this triple burden made the help of the Vietnamese daughter-in-law very difficult. However, where was the Taiwanese daughter-in-law? Since the Taiwanese daughter-in-law was brought up in the same culture as her mother-in-law, she knows the attributes of a good daughter-in-law. She had a proper paid job out of their home, which also helped to elevate her position inside the family. These two positions together were sufficient for her mother-in-law to feel pleased and satisfied with her and to justify her escape from household responsibilities. In a sense, this leads to a kind of empowerment of the Taiwanese daughter-in-law without the need for her to impose herself.

Looking at my participants' grandmothering experiences, it is not difficult to see that such factors as financial stability, health concerns or cultural norms influenced women's willingness to provide childcare. But how did they respond to the meaning of being someone's grandmother? I found that my participants did not make comments on their role like 'provider of family cohesion and identity', 'transmitter of family values', or claim that caring for their grandchildren boosts self-esteem and satisfaction, which have appeared in many western studies (Hirshorn 1998: 200; Pruchno 1999) but according to their narratives, they did give much weight to their role as a grandmother. Nevertheless, in this marriage context, it involved more complicated circumstances that gave different meanings to their

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<sup>111</sup> They paid her NT\$10,000 (£192) every month, which was very low compared to the minimum monthly payment for migrant domestic work, which is NT\$15,840 (£304).

grandmother's identity. Most of my participants, like Tang, who helped raise grandchildren, have defined their grandmother's role as merely another part of her familial responsibility to maintain the solidarity of the family.

*Having grandchildren is something that deserves to be celebrated, if my sin-pū is not able to get pregnant I will be shamed to face our ancestors. So no doubt it is my obligation to assist them in childcare issues. But raising three children is not an easy job if you don't have enough money. Although someone told me to forbid my sin-pū from working outside and suggested that I should keep her home and make her do some family farm work, housework and look after these children and I know they are worried about whether I can manage all these works by myself, I still think it is not secure to rely on only my son's salary. The best decision is to let them both work outside and earn more money for a better life, what I can do is to help them as much as I can. (Tang; aged 73; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)*

Some participants, like Bǎo and Jihh, have a rather tense relationship with their foreign daughters-in-law, involving negative emotions in negotiating over childcare issues. When there is conflict, the needs of the mothering role are given a lower priority. They treated their mother-in-law's authority as more important than a consideration of the grandchild's needs. They talked about the possibility of sending their daughters-in-law back because of these young women's uncontrollable behaviour, despite this idea never having been approved by their sons, and my interviewees were prepared to take on parenting work as a consequence. In fact, this came up in one of the informal interviews I had with mother-in-law, Ruèi. Her son, Mr. Huang, was undergoing a divorce process as he thought that his Vietnamese wife would never pay attention to the family and also suspected her of having an affair with another male foreign worker. Ruèi supported her son and believed that becoming a proxy parent under this circumstance was a part of her grandmother's identity.

In addition, in accordance with these participants' experiences of participating in childcare activities, I found that eight<sup>112</sup> of them described how they felt proud of being the grandmother of smart grandchildren. I was confused when their answers were not actually based on my questions, such as what is the responsibility of a grandmother or how many grandchildren do you have. Yet, I did not think they were reacting defectively to public view on the children of foreign women. Sometimes scholars and experts' observations about the children of families with cross-border marriages claim that they tend to be developmentally disabled<sup>113</sup> or have low academic achievement due to their parents' inferior socio-economic position in the first hand, but when the women described how smart the mixed-blood children are I then realized they might have different opinions from this idea. For example, Pan and Yuan-Yang described their grandchildren as:

*Responsibility? Of course I have the responsibility, I expect them to grow up to be a successful person. I mean, fortunately, I have two smart and good-looking grandchildren. Everyone in the village gave good compliments to them, especially my granddaughter, everyone said she is beautiful. And she, without any teaching, greeting everyone she met in the village, even the school teacher thinks she is clever. No wonder people said that the mixed-blood child is smarter. (Pan; aged 72; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)*

*Oh, he is energetic. For sure the children of foreign mothers are smart, like my grandson, he is only two years old, but do you know how he came out with many ways to just peel a peanut? He tried first with his hands but found out he couldn't, then he grabbed a rock to hit it and when he failed, he left it on the ground and kept stepping on that peanut until it opened. Who would react like him? (Yuan-Yang; aged 63; married; Vietnamese D-law)*

The grandchildren's smart kind of performance for these grandmothers was not their school achievements but their daily life performance. Through offering

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<sup>112</sup> This number includes one of the informal participants, Ruèi.

<sup>113</sup> Simultaneously, there are some opposite opinions held by scholars. For example, Lan Pei-Chia (2008) and Tseng Yen-Fen (2006) argue against this social accusation of problematic mixed-race children and immigrant mothers and suggest that it is indeed an act of the nation state to differentiate the class of migrants from local residents and tends to produce classism.

these observations, my participants reinterpreted the quality of mixed children from their own perspective and expressed the joy of having them. Only one interviewee actually pointed out her concerns about social criticism of mixed-blood children.

*Talking about my two grandchildren I have to say that they are very smart, [...], I am not worried about their education because my sin-pū supervised their homework every night, they don't need go to bǔ xí bān like other pupils but still perform quite well [...]. It is not true that children born to foreign mothers are bad. (Dai, aged 68, married; Indonesian D-in-law)*

However, there were still several participants who sounded worried when talking about the capability of their sons and foreign daughters-in-law to educate the grandchildren. For example, Jhih felt that she had a duty as a grandmother to look after her grandchildren when they were young, but she told me she does not know how far she can go to provide both financial and caring assistance for her younger son and his Cambodian wife. She described it this way:

*My son is han-bān<sup>114</sup>. He only knows how to work with us in the fields, he earns less money. My sin-pū doesn't have the ability either; neither of them can earn more money for these children, let alone to talk about the children's education. I hope our government will appropriate some money for this group of families to raise the children and educate them. Otherwise, how can I do it? I can't stay forever with them. (Jhih; aged 64; married; Cambodian D-in-law)*

These examples help to illustrate the negotiations of grandmothers in families with cross-marriages. Whether they provide childcare or not, they all have to try to negotiate their responsibilities as a grandmother. They were not only concerned about childcare activities and the balance when allocating their time to childcare for working Taiwanese and foreign daughters-in-law, but they also sought to clarify the stereotype of mixed-race children derived from media presentations and public common beliefs, to avoid the possibility that their foreign daughters-in-law would take away the child. For them, the grandmother's role involves more than the

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<sup>114</sup> 'han-bān' is a Taiwanese term which means a person is lack of talent or ability to handle multiple issues around him or not good at doing particular things. (see Chapter 5 footnote 57)

negotiation between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law and a woman's fulfillment to maintain the unity of family.

### **When faced with domestic violence**

There have been numerous studies on domestic violence against immigrant wives<sup>115</sup>. Chen Yu-Shu and Hsieh Wen-Yen (2003) and Pan Shu-Man (2004) in particular conducted studies about South-East Asian women who immigrate to Taiwan through marriage which indicated that the mothers-in-law to a great extent contributed to their sons' violent behaviour by provoking or encouraging their sons to behave violently towards their wives<sup>116</sup>. Though my research focus was not about domestic violence<sup>117</sup>, it is pertinent to mention here that the position of these participants and the role they adopt in the marital setting creates issues that precipitate domestic violence of which they themselves might not be aware. Although I do not have many such cases in my study<sup>118</sup>, it is important to examine how my participants reacted to this issue. The types of violence are divided into verbal and physical abuse according to five of my participants' descriptions<sup>119</sup> of their sons' behaviour, which most of the time was initiated or supported by my participants. Traditional gender ideology, the maintenance of masculinity and the influence of media presentations were emphasized among them. For example, when I asked how my participants felt about the relationship between the son and the foreign daughter-in-law, one of my participants, Mǐn, described the situation between them and brought out her idea of how to preserve marital harmony when she said:

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<sup>115</sup> According to the government statistical data, there were 8345 reports of foreign spouse abuse between 2008 and March 2010 in Taiwan (DSPC 2010).

<sup>116</sup> In a study of wife abuse in the Chinese context, Gallin (1992) found that older women often considered their daughters-in-law to affect their position of influence with their sons, in particular for women who depended on their sons for resources, and for this reason they may encourage their sons to exert violence against their wives.

<sup>117</sup> In fact, according to some scholars' definition of domestic violence (Chen Yu-Shu and Hsieh Wen-Yen 2003), mothers-in-law who prohibit their daughters-in-law from going out to work or to participate in any social events, or intimidate the daughter-in-law, or use children to control the mobility of daughters-in-law, can be counted as using psychological and verbal abuse.

<sup>118</sup> There was a fleeting mention in the focus group, when one woman, Guèi talked about how her Indonesian daughter-in-law is intimidated by her son who got a bad temper.

<sup>119</sup> This part of the analysis about domestic violence was focused mainly on the women's opinions about their sons' violence against their foreign daughters-in-law. Five of my participants, including three formal participants, Jiao, Mǐn and Shù and two informal participants, Mr. Wang and Ruèi, have reported such matters.

*I really don't know how to say it, they always fight! How can I say it, being a parent I am bound to worry, aren't I? You know that. We don't want you to fight. Since we married you, you're a member of our family. Even if you beat your husband or he beats you, you still have to tolerate each other, don't you? But this one, if my son scolds her, she will shout back in language we don't understand. So I told her: 'If men scold you, you shouldn't fight back. You just ignore him.' But she just cried, although my son didn't beat her. I told her: 'That is nothing. You don't need to cry. Crying brings bad luck and we are pretty peaceful'. I told her: 'If he scolds you, just walk away and get on with your own work. If you can't bear it any more you can come to me. If my son is wrong, I will tell him off, you know?'* (Mĩn; aged 70; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)

This remark shows that Mĩn is deeply influenced by traditional culture that stresses men as superior and women as inferior. For mothers-in-law who were involved in intra-family violence, such an ideology has exacerbated their sons' behaviour problems. As in Mĩn's case, she taught her daughter-in-law to be stoic and to adapt to her surroundings, as the better way to live a peaceful and stable life in her new home. In this sense, her son's verbal violence cannot be named as violence if he does not cause any physical injury. Similarly, there were also a few participants who did not identify with their foreign daughter-in-law who faced marital violence, claiming that women who were beaten had disobeyed the norms of female virtue.

*She's always going on about divorce. When my son beats her, she says 'divorce'. So I said to her: 'Aren't you afraid that people will laugh at you? You see, you have already got two children, why are you still talking about divorce? A marriage needs give and take. You always need to show consideration for your husband'. Am I right? For example, when he comes home from work you should ask him if he's had dinner yet or if you need to prepare something for him.* (Jiao; aged 65; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)

*When we sent her back, I cried a lot. She'd been here for four years and we had developed a bond. Like, when she brought food home she asked me if I wanted to eat and when she went to the night market she would ask: 'Má can I get anything for you?' Nobody told her to behave in this bad way. When she finished work at five o'clock, she would go to visit her friend to play and wouldn't come home until eight or nine o'clock. She just didn't want to do anything serious. So my son scolded her and asked her to behave herself, and she always reacted very badly. (Ruéi; aged 66; married; Vietnamese D-in-law)*

As shown in these remarks, Jiao and Ruéi hold a very rigid gender norm and believe that a woman should respect her husband and treat marriage as a source of livelihood. This view reflects a rationalization of domestic violence, although a mother-in-law like Mǐn believed that she could use her parental authority to handle the domestic friction if her daughter-in-law appealed to her to intervene with her abusive husband. In fact, I had experienced a terrifying situation when I attempted to make an interview appointment with Jiao; her son was shouting at his Indonesian wife. Jiao answered the door with a smiling face as if there was nothing happening at the time. She told me it was fine to interview her straightway only if I did it in another place because 'my house is too noisy at the moment'. We later went to Jih's<sup>120</sup> barn and I asked Jiao at the beginning of the interview if it was alright to leave her daughter-in-law at home with her angry son. She said:

*Well, don't worry! Their fight will be finished soon. I mean I don't want to complain about this, she does nothing, she only stays at home and cooks and looks after the children. She only needs to concern herself with her marriage and the children. And me, I let her do what she wants, nobody disciplines her. But if my son tells her to do something she will become really upset. Like tonight, they were fighting again and she cried as well, and I just ignored it when my son was yelling at her. (Jiao; aged 65; widowed; Indonesian D-in-law)*

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<sup>120</sup> It was Jih who introduced Jiao to me. They are neighbours and their houses are close to each other. When we arrived at Jih's house, Jiao simply said 'Those two are fighting again'. Jih looked at Jiao with a worried frown and asked what happened between them. According to Jiao, her son was annoyed that his wife did not give medicine to their sick baby boy according to the doctor's prescription. Jih later brought us to the barn next to her house and said I could do my interview there.

Given this, Jiao seemed to have no sympathy with her daughter-in-law's situation and thought it was the behaviour of this young woman that had brought the trouble on herself. Despite having such an attitude, Jiao was once abused by her deceased husband. She happened to bring out this memory when we talked about her experiences as a daughter-in-law. She told me it was her husband who had given her difficult times in the past. According to her description, he slapped and scolded her when she failed to complete the farm work, even though she was overburdened, like she could not lift the heavy vegetable basket onto the motorcycle and carry it home. However, she failed to bargain with her subordinate position and instead chose to persuade herself that 'it is common that a man asserted his masculinity in this way, I tried not to break up my marriage so I endured his behaviour'<sup>121</sup>. Her fatalism about the violence resulted from being 'respectful' of family and marriage, together with her identity as a woman who should depend on men. The notion of the patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti 1988) also helps to explain why Jiao chose to endure her abusive husband. As she considered her best interest to be served by supporting the status of the family, she then protected it even if doing so perpetuated violence against her. Similar thoughts can be applied when my participants faced their sons' marriages. Although they did not engage in active and direct physical violence, like some of the mothers-in-law described in Chen Yu-Shu and Hsieh Wen-Yen's (2003) research to protect what they believed to be patriarchal logic, they approved of their sons' violent behaviour and sometimes engaged in cold sarcasm or used verbal violence against their daughters-in-law. And the immigrant wives who suffer from such exploitative conditions as Abraham (2008) and Pan Shu-Man (2001) observe are reluctant to approach government agencies or non-governmental organizations for help due to various reasons, such as the language barrier and not being familiar with the social service resources, and worries about losing their legal right to stay in the host country when divorced.

The media presentations and community influence also help to perpetuate violence against women through denigrating and criticizing the foreign wives with particular cultural beliefs, practices and customs. Some of my participants were influenced to some extent by such comments and then urged their sons to exert

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<sup>121</sup> Ko Ling-Chan (2006) also discusses how the practice of masculine gender roles and the face-oriented behaviour help to increase the chance of violence against women.

control over their foreign daughters-in-law<sup>122</sup>. Under these circumstances, an alliance between a son and a mother can be disruptive and can influence the relationship between the couple. On the other hand, if a real compatibility had developed between their son and foreign daughter-in-law, the women's tactics would have failed easily (see Chapter 6). But this often does not mean an end to the conflict, many of them, after receiving no support from their son, complain to a third person such as a daughter, husband or neighbours. The third person often acts in an important role in their conflict situation. If they try to persuade the parties concerned to find a compromise, their protest might become weakened. On the other hand, if the third person sings the same tune as my participants' resentment, it could lead to another conflict situation that arises between mother and son.

Mèng complained about one of her Vietnamese daughters-in-law to the neighbours when she played mahjong with them; she did not know that her complaint would reach to her son's ears. One afternoon her son came to her angrily and questioned her in a loud voice, saying:

*Why did you tell other people that my wife is having an affair with another man? My wife said that you want to play me against her, but I am telling you it is not working and you had better not to do it again. (Mèng; aged 57; married; two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)*

Although I cannot prove whether or not Mèng accused her daughter-in-law of having an affair to the neighbours, the cycle of conflict was continually carrying on. She listed several fights she had had with her son that were caused by arguing with her daughter-in-law's behaviour and their fights had made Mèng's mother-in-law step in and ask Mèng's son to apologise to Mèng. This is an unusual example where Mèng's son used verbal violence against his mother. Most of the sons, according to my participants, tended to ignore their mothers' protests or tried to compromise with their mothers on the one hand but protect their wives on the other. The important point is that, in order to understand how domestic violence is constructed, the full range of interactions in the context of family and society should be explored.

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<sup>122</sup> See Chapter 6 'Tug-of-war: The mother and son relationship conundrum' for an example.

## **Conclusion**

I began this chapter by discussing the more specific interactions between my participants and their foreign daughters-in-law in family life to explain the background of the strategies that women used to manage their family relationships, which were discussed in Chapter 6. Although for most of my participants, in the politics of dealing with difference they tended to assimilate their foreign daughters-in-law, making them follow unfamiliar rites and respect the familial authority with limited room to negotiate, the foreign daughters-in-law, in the narrative accounts of my participants, seemed find ways to resist their control. When I look at what happens in practice in family life, the foreign daughter-in-law seems to be constrained by the unfamiliar culture, language and lifestyle practices, but these differences sometimes help to create a better negotiating position. The example of Ying's interaction with her Vietnamese daughter-in-law in ancestor and gods worship brings this out very clearly. There were some circumstances I have noted, where my participants tried to seek a balance for their life with foreign daughters-in-law, whether in adjusting dietary habits or providing childcare labour when their sons and foreign daughters-in-law went out to work. But again when they negotiated these practices they might have more clashes and more tension could arise from it, they might come to adjust their tolerance for disputes, so the relationship between mothers-in-law and foreign daughters-in-law cannot be explained simply by the idea of who is an exploiter and who is a victim.

I have also examined the controversial issue of domestic violence that arises from cross-border marriages where the Taiwanese grooms want their wives to be more docile, more passive. The standpoint and position of my participants towards such matters is important in immigrant wives' experiences of domestic violence. The powerful notions of maintaining family harmony and gender hierarchies are used by my participants as an explanation of why they considered that their daughters-in-law should tolerate their abusive husbands. This practice was very visible in the examples of Jiao's and Mǐn's attitude towards their sons and foreign daughters-in-law's fights. However, the reverse situation of the son shouting at his own mother was also visible in the example of Mèng's tense relationship with one of her sons when the neighbour told him of Mèng's complaint about her Vietnamese daughter-in-law. This example is unusual in that Mèng was angry about her son's disrespectful behaviour but still

perpetuated this conflict cycle. Thus I found that my participants showed strong senses of cultural belief that women should do their best to contribute to the family unity and well-being even where the living conditions are intolerable.

I should highlight two particular points after exploring these actual interactions that women have with their foreign daughters-in-law, other family members and their community: firstly, that the conflict or harmony relationship that women developed through everyday practice with their foreign daughters-in-law would explain the type of strategies my participants chose to apply to manage an ideal family function; and secondly that power and control operate in complex ways in these interactions and negotiations between women, sometimes being practiced by foreign daughters-in-law who apparently are in rather powerless positions.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

In 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> June 2010, I have presented a part of my research finding at a conference in Edinburgh<sup>123</sup>, talking about the conflict situations Taiwanese mothers-in-law experience with their South-East Asian daughters-in-law in families with cross-border marriages and how they apply various strategies in order to shape their daughters-in-law into an traditional role. One of the conference participants raised a query about the contribution of my research; she suggested that it is already well-known that women have contentious relationships with their in-laws, and the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in particular is known to be problematic, so what does my research offer that makes it different from others? It is true that the image of difficult intergenerational relationships between women is pervasive, but their life experience culturally, historically and individual variable. That is, although women might all have experienced emotional burdens and contradictions in their role as a mother-in-law, the difficulties they have encountered do not sit firmly in any specific category. For example, the mothers-in-law of Taiwanese daughters-in-law in Gallin's (1994) research were powerless due to their economic dependence, while my participants lived in situations fraught with conflict as they tried to adapt to the dissimilar cultural beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour of their foreign daughters-in-law at the same time as they struggled to find a way to communicate with these young women who had a limited knowledge of Taiwanese or Chinese.

When I began this research, I noticed that most existing studies on cross-border marriage had focused on the narratives of the foreign spouses, thus silencing the voices of their mothers-in-law. These older women, like their sons, have been portrayed as exploitative others. However, clinging to the stereotype of interfering, manipulative mothers-in-law does not help in exploring the dynamics of the relational activities that go on in the family. By listening to the mothers-in-law's side of the story, my research has incorporated historical, social, and cultural factors into

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<sup>123</sup> The title of the paper I presented in CRFR's international conference (Changing family in a changing world) in 2010 is: Leading toward a right family trajectory: Taiwanese mothers' involvement in sons' cross-border marriage.

the analysis and investigated the experiences of mothers-in-law in relation to their sons' cross-border marriages. Inspired by Kandiyoti's (1988) work, which discussed the ways in which women strategise within the constrained setting of patriarchy, I have paid attention to the ways in which women interact with their sons and foreign daughters-in-law both before and after the marriage. From the initial raw data I can see the influence of internal cultural values on the women's behaviour and attitudes. They encouraged, persuaded and helped their sons to establish their own family in an attempt to fulfil their parental duties. They expected their foreign daughters-in-law, who are described by the transnational marriage agencies as diligent and compliant women, to respect and obey them as they respected and obeyed their own mothers-in-law in the past. After their sons' marriages, women may feel relieved because they have successfully enhanced the chances of continuing the ancestral line, but the contradictions began to emerge when they embark upon a new life with their foreign daughters-in-law in the same household. These family dynamics became even more obvious because my research was done during two different periods. As a result, I was able to observe the transitional changes within these families over a period of time.

In this conclusion, I summarise the themes of women's experiences in families with cross-border marriages by presenting how patriarchal ideology and neighbourhood gossip function in framing the agency of mothers-in-law. I will also highlight how women understand and deal with the cultural differences between themselves and their foreign daughters-in-law.

### **Existing parental control over the marital decisions of children**

In traditional Chinese society, it is common for parents to find a partner for their children to marry. This kind of arranged marriage system has given parents control over the younger family members, helped to continue the family line and provided better opportunities to find someone with a similar family background. However, with the effects of modernisation, the younger generation wanted more freedom and choice over their own marriage, and therefore the influence of this marriage form has weakened. Nevertheless, when looking at the phenomenon of cross-border marriage, there appears to be evidence showing that parents were still taking part in their sons' marriage process to a greater or lesser extent. In response to the disadvantaged socio-

economic position of their sons, which left them with limited opportunities of finding a Taiwanese woman to marry, my participants pursued the option of finding them wives from South-East Asia, with the help of various transnational marriage agents.

My data has shown that my participants not only had high expectations for their sons to accomplish marriage but also that they were endeavouring to turn their anticipations into reality. I have classified their involvement into four strategies: (a) persuading the son to get married (b) matchmaking; (c) helping the son to select a bride; and (d) providing all or part of the costs. Some of them used one of these strategies; while others used the whole combination. In one extreme case, which I described in Chapter 5, a woman travelled to Vietnam and contracted her son's marriage by herself without any intermediary being involved. This case appears to add weight to current findings on the different types of marriage agency. In most literature it was organised marriage agents, experienced individual brokers or South-East Asian bride matchmakers who mediated the marriage. I also had one case where my participant played the role of middleman and received commission from an organised marriage agency for introducing potential Taiwanese grooms from her village. Moreover, a significant factor, demonstrated through women's practices in this marriage process, is these mothers' ability to progress their concerns and negotiate with enterprise agencies, which is remarkable given that these are rural and uneducated women. They emerge, not as passive individuals constrained by their disadvantaged position, but as active and resourceful agents who sought every opportunity to preserve the values of patriarchal culture and fulfil their parental obligations.

### **The complexity of women's negotiation**

In common with other research, my findings have shown that mothers-in-law and foreign daughters-in-law experience conflicts in the household due to their dissimilar cultural background, language use, lifestyle and expectations towards family life. However, the clash between them was evident not only in the difficult adaptation to their differences but also in mothers-in-law's past experience as a daughter-in-law, the use of kinship terms and the impact of gossip, which all contributed to the complexity of women's in-law relationships.

My participants took their own previous experience as a model against which to measure the performance of their foreign daughters-in-law. They were proud of the way they had treated their elders in the past, especially their mothers-in-law, with respect and proper behaviour, and they drew from these experiences and criticised their foreign daughters-in-law for being incorrigibly unsophisticated and not listening to them. Although some of my participants had both Taiwanese and foreign daughters-in-law, they rarely complained about the attitudes of their Taiwanese daughters-in-law. Taiwanese daughters-in-law benefit from both cultural affinity and economic independence, and they make use of their positional advantage to avoid being blamed for their absence from domestic duties. This parallels the finding of Sandel (2004) that mothers-in-law preserve certain cultural practices in the contemporary generation and expect their daughters-in-law to perform in the same way, while most young women tend to ignore these expectations and use their agency to express their displeasure by refusing to use proper kinship terms or doing things in a way that deliberately irritates their mothers-in-law.

When it comes to using kinship terms, I have shown in Chapter 6 how women choose the term by which to address and to refer to their foreign daughters-in-law. I argue that these terminological usages are not merely applied in order to define the position of their daughters-in-law but also involve a complex set of emotions when women turn their thoughts towards their foreign daughters-in-law in conversation. In many cases, my participants asserted that they lived in harmony with their foreign daughter-in-law, but looking at the derogatory terms they sometimes used when referring to them, such as ‘that woman’ or ‘these foreigners’, clearly contradict their claims. In addition, they also criticized their foreign daughters-in-law when they failed to use a correct kinship term or address them with respect. This finding helps to provide a different perspective and contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic interaction between women of different generations in the household.

I also found that the influence of gossip in the women’s community was important in affecting mothers-in-law’s impressions of their foreign daughters-in-law. Moreover, it is not just the women who have foreign daughters-in-law who gossip about their daughters-in-law but family members, acquaintances and other non-

related neighbours who all joining in with the dissemination of negative view about South-East Asian women. The negative images attached to foreign wives were disseminated across the various groups in the village. Since the images of gold-diggers and runaway wives stick to South-East Asian spouses, and these are commonly associated with problematic family relationships, my participants often regarded their daughters-in-law with suspicion. Indeed, some of their matchmaking agents would also make suggestions that they should watch over their foreign daughters-in-law. By the use of various strategies, they tended to monitor every move their foreign daughters-in-law made and endeavored to exert control over these young women; such behaviour of mothers-in-law inevitably created distance from the daughters-in-law and added to the tension of their relationship in the household. However, not all of my participants were influenced by such gossip, but they still received advice from others to keep an eye on their daughters-in-law.

When talking about the implications of these factors and their influence on women's intergenerational relationships, it is important to examine how women formulated strategies to preserve patriarchal forms. A very contradictory thought emerged when I heard women portray themselves as 'daughter-in-law for the second time' as they attempted to emphasise their lack of choice in taking on the burden of domestic chores and childcare, which was supposed to be the obligation of their foreign daughters-in-law. My data show that these women were not as vulnerable as they claimed; instead they actively engaged in varied strategies across different family life stages in order to achieve their expectations of having a docile daughter-in-law and ideal family (see Chapter 6). These strategies included how women provided instruction and guidance for their newly-wed foreign daughters-in-law on familial practice and at the same time they demonstrated their acceptance by loving the daughter-in-law like a daughter. However, when a daughter-in-law attempted to rebel against the mother-in-law's demands, other strategies like direct and indirect admonishment or delaying the naturalization process would be applied to influence the behaviours of the daughter-in-law. The use of such strategies, however might lead to difficulties in dealing the relationship with their sons, the husband of foreign wife, as their sons might not support their mothers' attempts to control the foreign spouse. Yet the ways in which my participants justified their interfering were influenced by traditional family ideologies and their commitment to the wider family's well-being.

However, these strategies did not always bring about a successful transformation of a miscreant foreign daughter-in-law.

My participants were also conscious of differences in practices and attitudes towards household chores and lifestyle. For example, some of my participants voiced apprehension that their foreign daughters-in-law do not worship the ancestors and deities in the same ways they had been taught and they were afraid that these dissimilar practices would lead to misfortune, while other mothers-in-law could not stand the profligacy of their daughters-in-law<sup>124</sup>. I have also demonstrated that women of different generations have different habits when it comes to the use of electrical gadgets to carry out domestic tasks and this difference has more or less influenced the interaction between them. In dealing with these contradictions, my participants either refused to adjust themselves to this current setting or struggle with it, as their experiences were tied up with knowledge derived from historical and personal traditions (see Chapter 7). It was difficult for them to fully accept the native culture of their foreign daughters-in-law. Indeed, some of my participants discovered that their foreign daughters-in-law possessed sufficient agency to escape from domestic tasks by doing things wrong in a deliberate manner and leaving the work for them. However, some mothers-in-law did seek ways of accommodating unfamiliar practices and expected to fit both lifestyles into the household. Although women's conflicts over domestic, customary and dietary practices have been examined in many studies on transnational marriage, a perspective from the side of the mothers-in-law has generally been ignored.

By analysing my participants' stories, my study provides an overview of the experiences and practices of women who are mothers-in-law within families with cross-border marriages. I argue that these women do not necessarily hold absolute power in this family setting, despite the constraints place on their foreign daughters-in-law and their disadvantaged position as immigrants. Yet these mothers-in-law have developed strategies to negotiate to maintain their power and ideal family practices. Through studying these women's stories I expanded the knowledge of family with foreign daughters-in-law and therefore added the new dimension to the

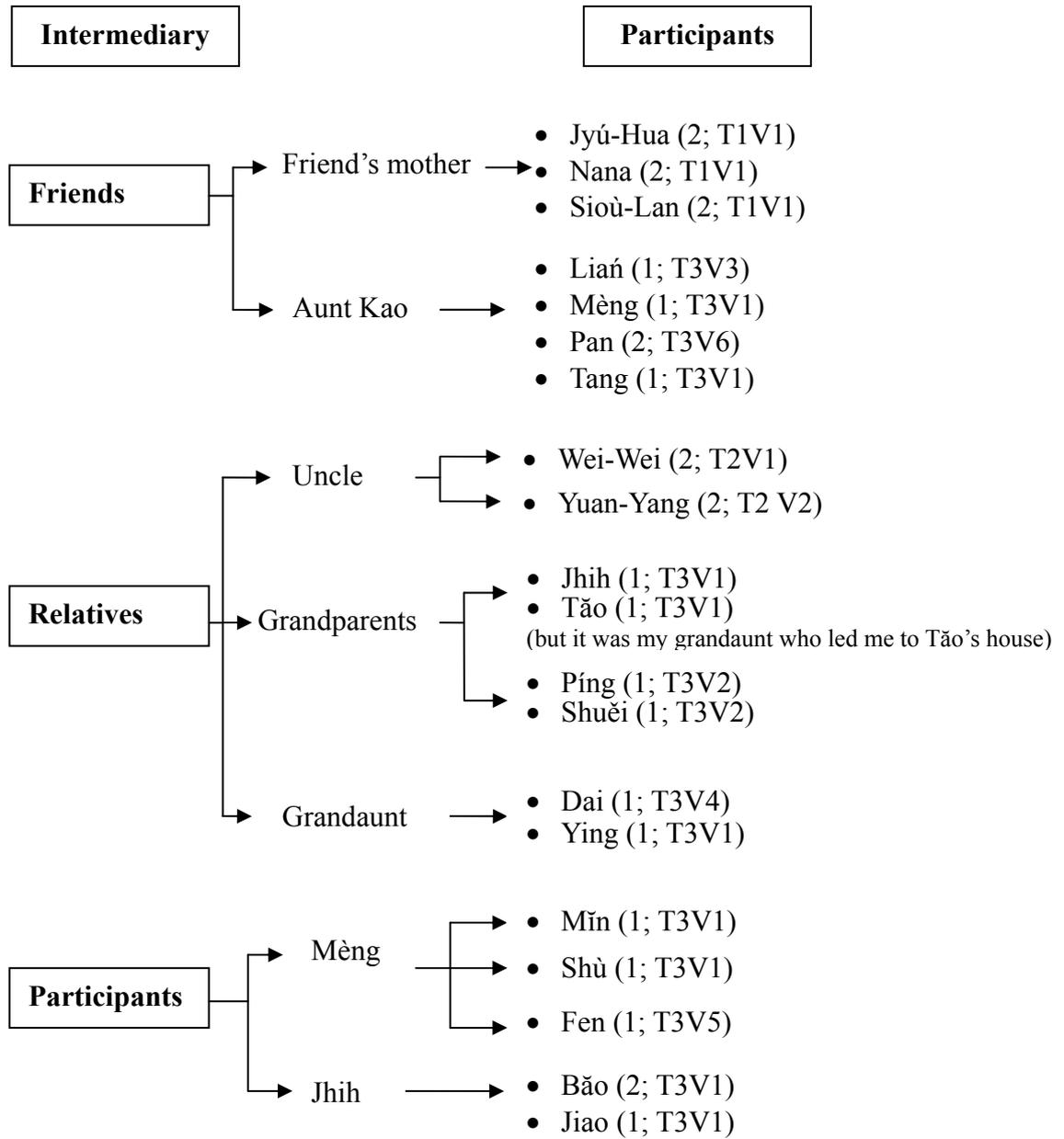
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<sup>124</sup> More examples can be seen in '*The women's conflict in domestic, customary and dietary practices*' in Chapter 7.

study of cross-national marriage relationship.

One limitation of this research is the fact that I collected only the views of the mothers-in-law, due to time constraints, but I notice that if I had compared the insights of other family members it would have enriched my research. I discovered this because I happened to interview some men who wanted to be interviewed instead of their wives and mothers. The issues that emerged during these interviews brought an added dimension to the practices of patriarchy concerning marriage and family. It is this revelation that makes me realise it would have been useful if I could have collected the views of different groups to enable me to grasp the complete nature of women's lives within families with cross-national marriages. Such a study could be valuable in the future. A longitudinal study would also provide a further understanding of women's interactions throughout different times. And this research could also be extended through a comparative study of the experiences and perspectives of the mothers-in-law of foreign daughters-in-law within both rural and urban setting or added to a study of women in urban area whose sons married a foreign wife, which would give an added dimension to the understanding of women's negotiations within this marriage form.

**APPENDIX A**  
**THE SAMPLING FRAMES**



Note: Jyú-Hua (2; T1V1): she participated in the second phase of fieldwork, and she was from Township 1 Village 1.

**APPENDIX B**  
**INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP GUIDES**

**Interview Guide**

**The involvement of the mother-in-law in the cross-border marriage**

1. Why did your son need to find a foreign wife?
2. How did your son find his foreign wife?
3. Did you help him in any ways?
4. How did you feel about your son marrying a foreign wife?
5. Did any of family member or relatives provide any comments or responds on it?
6. How do other people in the village react?
7. Did you know anybody else in the village with the foreign daughter-in-law?

**The practice and experience of being a mother-in-law**

1. What were your own experiences of being a daughter-in-law like?
2. How do you think things had changed today?
3. Before you have a daughter-in-law, what would you imagine it will be like?
4. What is being a mother-in-law like today?
5. How is your relationship with other daughters-in-law? (asked when appropriate)
6. What is it like of have a foreigner as a daughter-in-law?
7. Do you find any difference of being a mother-in-law in the context of cross-border marriage? If so, in what way?
8. You said that you got Taiwanese daughters-in-law and foreign daughter-in-law, do you think of any difference between them? (asked when appropriate)
  - 1) You said that you only got foreign daughter-in-law; do you think that the thing will be changed if you have a Taiwanese daughter-in-law? (asked when appropriate)
9. Do you have any other sort of relationship with them (Taiwanese and foreign daughters-in-law)?
10. Is there any different since your foreign daughter-in-law has a child?
11. Do you help her in 'doing the month'?

12. Can you tell me something about your grandchildren?
13. Do you think that your foreign daughter-in-law is good mother?
14. Do you think her Chinese will have a problem to help her child with school?
15. What do other family members (e.g. other daughters-in-law, daughters, sons, or relatives) think about your foreign daughter-in-law?
16. Does this have any influence upon your impression of her?

### **Intergenerational division of labour**

1. You said you live with your son and his wife, could you describe the daily activities you have done with your foreign daughter-in-law in the household?  
(asked when appropriate) →to question 2  
You said you did not live with your son and his wife, how is the residential arrangement you made with your son? (asked when appropriate)
2. What are your views on your foreign daughter-in-law's domestic work?
3. Have you provided any supervision for your foreign daughter-in-law in the domestic task? Can you provide some examples on this pattern?
4. Could you tell me what kind of difference between you and your foreign daughter-in-law are difficult to handle?
5. What did you do if you find it's difficult?

### **Ending**

1. Do you like to be a mother-in-law of a foreign daughter-in-law?
2. Would you recommend marriage to a foreign bride to other men in your village?
3. When other women in your age who have the same chance like yours? Will you encourage them to tell their son married to a foreign wife?
4. What is the best thing about having a foreign daughter-in-law?
5. Can you also tell me what the worst thing is?
6. Is there anything or any idea you want to bring up before we end the interview?

## Focus Group Guide

### **Unpacking the experience of mothers-in-law in the cross-border marriage family**

1. What is it really like to be a mother-in-law today?
2. What do you think about young women nowadays in Taiwan?
3. What is it like to have the son who is married to a foreign wife?
4. What are the advantages?
5. How about the disadvantage?
6. Do you think the foreign daughter-in-law make a better marriage than a Taiwanese daughter-in-law?
7. What do you think of helping foreign daughters-in-law to settle down in Taiwan? Is it easy or difficult? Would you give me some examples of what experience do you have?
8. The media always portrayed the negative images of the 'foreign bride', how do you think of that?
9. What do you think about the issues of communication between you and your foreign daughter-in-law?
10. Is there anything or any idea you want to bring up before we end the session?

## Personal Background Form

This form is intended to know your personal background, please answer the questions according to your actual condition, thank you.

1. Age : \_\_\_\_\_

2. Marital status:

1. married    2. widowed    3. divorced  
4. others (please note) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Job of husband: \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your main resource of financial?

1. self-earning (wage job, rental, investment, saving and so on)  
2. husband's earning (wage job, rental, investment, saving and so on)  
3. children's support  
4. pension or insurance benefits  
5. government subsidization  
6. others (please note) \_\_\_\_\_

5. How many children do you have? (n) \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Male (n) \_\_\_\_\_ ; Female (n) \_\_\_\_\_

➤ Briefly information about their personal condition

	Married	unmarried	others (please note)
Male			
Female			

6. Who do you live with? (multiple choice questions with multiple answers)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. partner (husband)           | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Taiwanese daughters-in-law(n)_____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. married sons (n)_____       | <input type="checkbox"/> 7. foreign daughters-in-law(n)_____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. married daughters (n)_____  | <input type="checkbox"/> 8. grandchildren (n) _____            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. unmarried sons (n)_____     | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. others (please note)_____          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. unmarried daughters(n)_____ |  |

**7. Foreign daughter-in-law's personal background (nationality, age and years of marriage)**

nationality age/ length of time in the marriage	Vietnam	Cambodia	Indonesia	Thailand	Philippines	others
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						

**8. Does your foreign daughter-in-law have a waged job outside the family?**

1) yes (job title : \_\_\_\_\_)

2) no

a) but family businesses (please note): \_\_\_\_\_

b) but family agriculture fieldwork

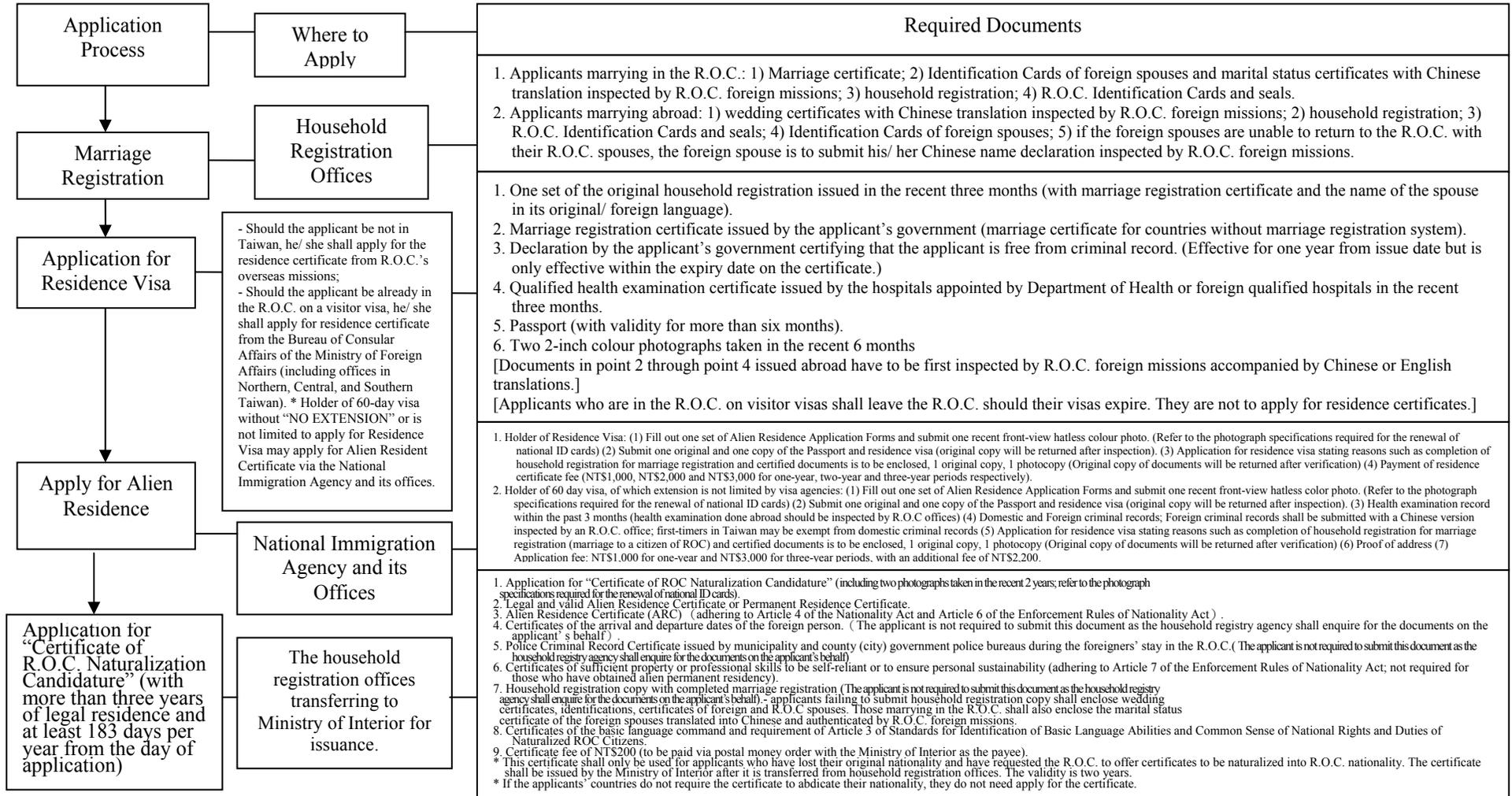
c) but subcontract home worker (housing factories)

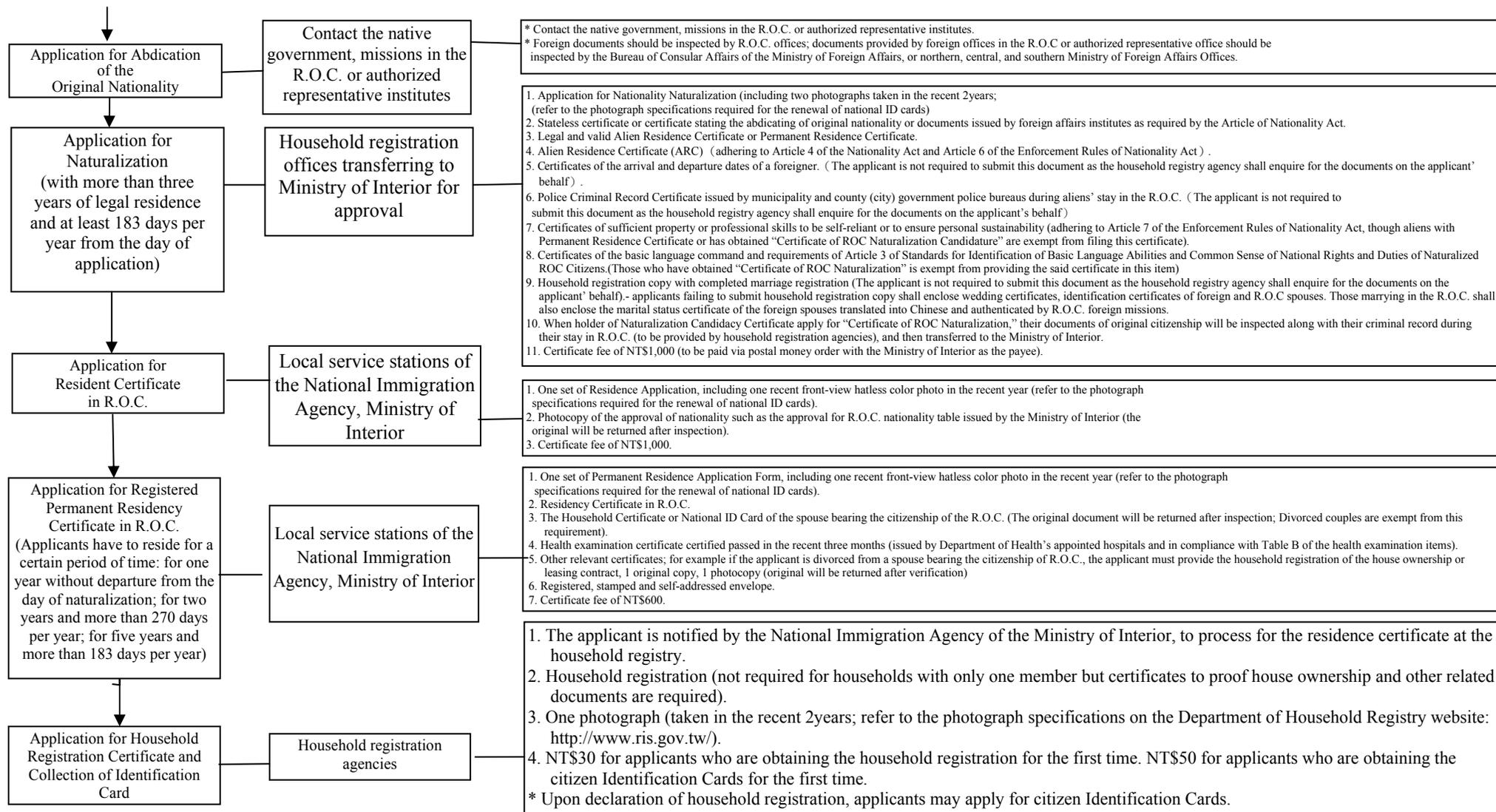
d) housewife

## APPENDIX C

### Procedure of applying for naturalization of foreign spouses

Flowchart for the Application for naturalization in marriages between Foreign National and R.O.C. Citizens and Household Registration





Revised by the Ministry of Interior in December, 2009

## GLOSSARY

### Romanisation of Chinese/Taiwanese words

In this thesis, the following terms have been used:

1. Mandarin words have been romanised according to the Hanyu Pinyin system as use in Taiwan. In five instances.
2. The pseudonyms of the interviewees have been romanised according to the Hanyu pin-yin system recommended by the Taiwanese Government from 2008 (see [http://www.edu.tw/files/site\\_content/M0001/pinyinshouce.pdf](http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/M0001/pinyinshouce.pdf))
3. The Romanization of Taiwanese pinyin as vernacular terms used in this thesis can be derived from the online source of ‘The dictionary of common vocabulary in Taiwanese (Mǐn nán yǔ)’ which is providing by the Taiwanese Government (see available at <http://twblg.dict.edu.tw/tw/index.htm>.)

<b>Taiwanese pronunciation</b>		
Terms	Chinese	Translation
A-Ma	阿媽	Grandmother
A-Bú / Má / Má-mah	阿母/ 媽/ 媽媽	Mother (see footnote 72, 73)
A-î	阿姨	Aunt
A-kong	阿公	Grandfather
Fu	符	A writing of talismans (see footnote 104)
Gōng-tit	憨直	A simple and straightforward person who lacks interactional skill
Guā-lô	外勞	Foreign worker-especially refer to migrant worker from South-East Asian
Guā-kok á	外國仔	Foreigner
Guan-tsū-bín	原住民	Aborigines
Han-bān	預顛	A lack of talent or ability to handle multiple issues around him
Huan-á	番仔	Barbarian
In-iân	姻緣	The destiny that brings a couple to marriage
Kóo-ì	古意	Socially inept
Lûn hué kháu	輪伙口	Meal-rotation (see footnote 48)
Má-tsoó	媽祖	Female deity
Muê-lâng-pô	媒人婆	Matchmaker-especially refer to female matchmaker
Pah Pah	爸爸 (指稱公公)	Father/ Father-in-law
Shén mìng tīng	神明廳	A room in the house for family members can worship the ancestor and deity (see footnote 105)
Sin- pū	媳婦	Daughter-in-law
Sim-pua	童養媳	Child bride
Sió-koo	小姑	Husband's younger sister
Ta-ke	婆婆	Mother-in-law
Tâng-ki	乩童	Spirit-medium
Tsiáh-tshài	吃菜	Eat vegetables
Tsiáh-sái	吃屎	Eat shit
Tsiáh-png	吃飯	Have meal
Tsau-that	蹣跽	Humiliate
Ua□t-lâm-á	越南仔	People who come from Vietnam

<b>Chinese pronunciation</b>		
Bǔ xí bān	補習班	A company that offers intensive tuition in Chinese composition, English, mathematics etc., as well as homework supervision during evenings and vacations
Cīng guān nán duàn jiā wù shì	清官難斷家務事	Even an upstanding official finds himself worthless in hearing a case of domestic disputes.
Fēn jiā	分家	Divide the family estate
Jiā chǒu bù kě wài yáng	家醜不可外揚	Do not wash your dirty linen in public.
Jiā jiā yǒu běn nán niàn de jīng	家家有本難唸的 經	Every family has their own difficulty in mediating and negotiating the family relationship and issues of diversity
Wáng lǎo wǔ	王老五	Unmarried man (see footnote 52)
Xiǎo chī duàn	小吃店	Normally it refers to a type of snack shop but in this context, the place might be involved with karaoke entertainment and sometimes gambling service (see footnote 93)

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