

Changing Families in a Changing World

Leading toward a right family trajectory: Taiwanese mothers' involvement in sons' cross-border marriage

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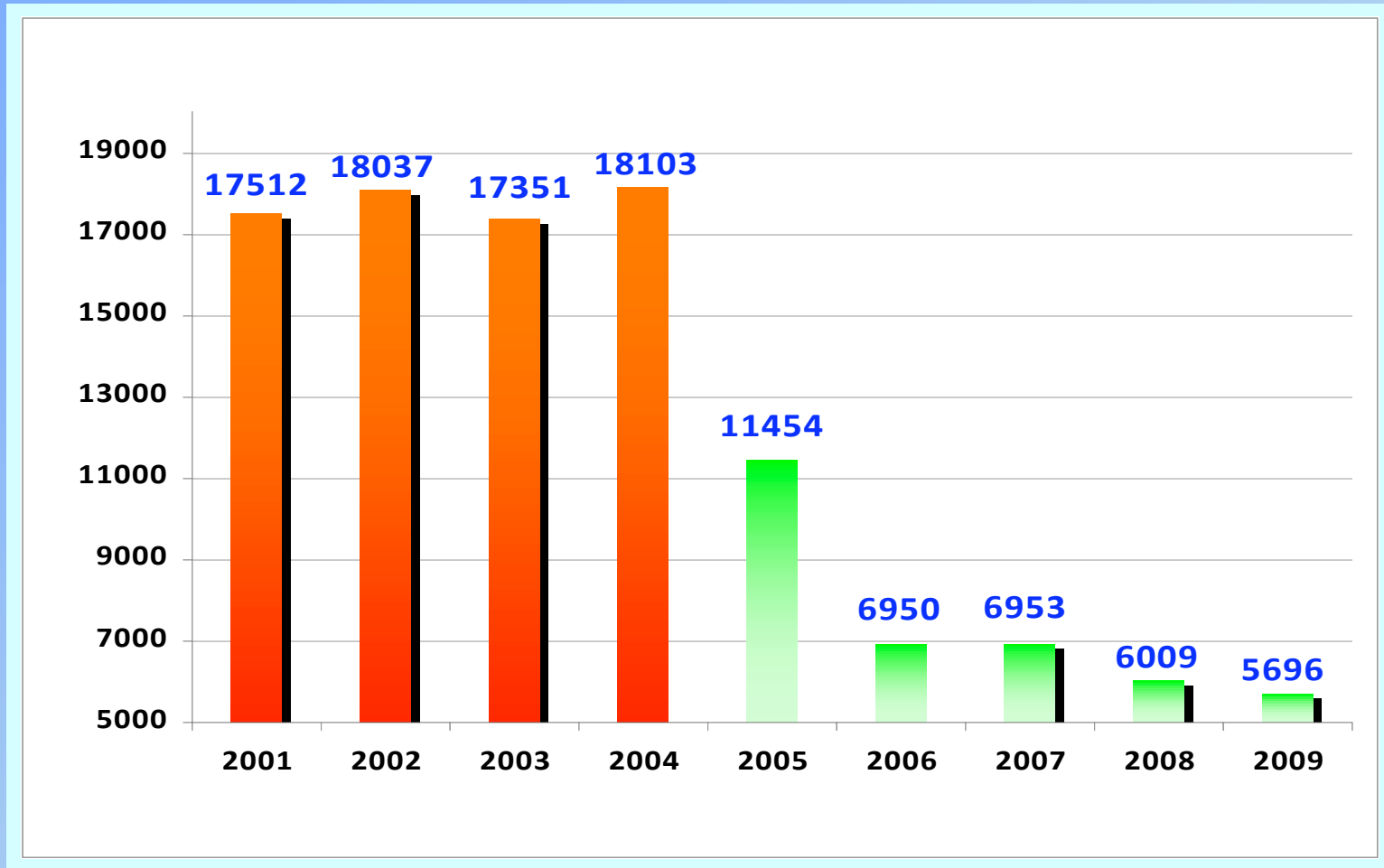
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Introduction

The Phenomenon of cross-border marriage in Taiwan

- The 1990s saw an increasing growth of profit-pursuing marriage agents, although it is said to be appeared from 1980s
- restrict policy is helped to decrease this trend.

Number of registered marriages of foreign spouses from South-East Asia (2001-2009) ★



Research method

- **In-depth interview and one focus group**
- **Fieldwork**
 - **First interview: from mid-November 2006 to January 2007**
 - **Second interview: January 2008**
- **Characteristic of Twenty women**
 - **Age 57-86**
 - **Half of them (10) still need to work**
 - **Foreign daughters-in-law**
14 Vietnamese, 5 Indonesian, 1 Cambodian

Mothers' interpretation of sons' difficulties in finding a Taiwanese wife

- 1. having a rustic and unsophisticated personality**
- 2. the lack of opportunities to meet women in their work environment**
- 3. the modern Taiwanese women setting higher standards for marriage**

Mothers involvement in the marriage process

- 1. Persuading the son to get married**
- 2. Matchmaking ★**
- 3. Helping the son to select a bride candidate**
- 4. Providing all or part of the costs**

Matchmaking ★

Marriage agents

Individual brokers

- a. The person who makes profits from this job (abroad and in Taiwan)
- b. The person who works abroad happens to have a chance to mediate
- c. The one who has experience of being married to foreign wives and assists a friend with the marriage
- d. A mother has a contract to her son's cross-border marriage

South-East Asian bride matchmakers

Organized marriage agencies

- a. agencies
- b. local matchmakers cooperating with agencies

The strategies employed to establish an ideal relationship

- Women's way of evaluating their foreign daughter-in-law: **Memories of being a daughter-in-law** ★
- **Strategies**
 - The practice of 'kneading dough'
 - Love her like a daughter
 - Direct and indirect admonishment
 - The manipulation of the naturalisation process
 - Tug-of-war: The mother and son relationship conundrum

Memories of being a daughter-in-law

*Being a daughter-in-law in my generation was very difficult. My ta-ke [mother-in-law], was really dominating, she wanted to control everything and she always scolded me. You think, most of the women of my age [86] who are daughters-in-law cannot 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).

A Daughter-in-law's obligation and behaviour

- **Three obediences and Four virtues**

Three obediences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•obey one's father when at home•follow one's husband after marriage• follow her son when old
Four virtues	moral discipline; proper speech; modest appearance ; diligence

- **Yuen, Law and Hos' (2004:17) internal constraint**

*I told my sin-pū [daughter-in-law], ‘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.*

(Bảo; aged 63; widowed; Vietnamese D-in-law)

Strategies

	Stage one (1-2 years) Newly-wed, adapting to life in Taiwan	Stage two (2-4 years) Developing individual autonomy	Stage three (4 years and above) Establishing a new way of living
The practice of 'Kneading Dough'	→		
Love her like a daughter	→		
Direct and indirect admonishment		→	
The manipulation of the naturalisation process			→
Tug-of War: Mother-son relationship conundrum		→	

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 doesn'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, nobody knows she is a Vietnamese unless she starts talking.***

(Mr. Lin Shan; aged 58; Vietnamese D-in-law)

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 [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 mother-in-law, 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)

Love her like a daughter

- The different perspectives towards in-law relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (Cotterill 1994)
- Treat your daughter-in-law as an insider rather than an outsider (Kuan 2001; Li 2002)
- A mother's way of consideration?

*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)

Direct and indirect admonishment

- **direct disciplining:** my participants voiced their discontent on their own behalf
- **indirect way:**

This practice consists of either a proxy complaint, framing it as though it were that of a **third person** in the family or sometimes a **neighbour**, or **exerting a kind of social pressure by referring to hearsay and rumours** to warn their foreign kin and requiring them to behave properly.

*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)

[...] *someone called me and said that my sin-pū was hanging out with some friends in the city centre. [...]*

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 [£217] 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'.

(Mèng; aged 57; married, two Vietnamese Ds-in-law)

The manipulation of the naturalisation process

- The normal immigration process takes at least four years for completion.
- But for many husbands and mothers-in-law: getting an identity card for migrant women may raise **the risk of losing them.**

*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] 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)

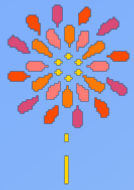
Tug-of-war: The mother and son relationship conundrum

*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)

- **Mother's over-interference**
- **'caught in the middle' son**
- **The contradictory interpretation about intimate relationship between their sons and foreign daughters-in-law.**

- Conclusion



Thank you for listening!!

