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Gender, marriage and migration : contemporary marriages between mainland China and Taiwan

Lu, M.C.W.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2003, when I first started my fieldwork in Hukou (新竹縣湖口鄉), a semi-industrial town in Northern Taiwan, I joined my informant Aqin for her grocery shopping in the morning market in the neighbourhood. Aqin is a woman from Sichuan province in the People's Republic of China (PRC), who married and migrated to Taiwan seven years ago. We stopped at a food stand to buy fruits and the woman selling fruits was speaking Hakka to her friend standing beside her. The vender knew Aqin, as Aqin had bought fruits from her before. She whispered to her friend, "*they are 'mainlanders' (waishengren 外省人)*". Aqin apparently heard what she said but pretended that she heard nothing. The vender then smiled friendly at me and said, "*so, you are a newcomer. When did you come?*" Her friend said, "*I am also a mainland. We just came here at a different time.*"

I realised that she must have taken me as one of the mainland brides (dalu xinniàng 大陸新娘), a term commonly used to refer to women from the PRC who marry to Taiwanese¹ men. I thought it was a natural response since I am in the company of a mainland Chinese woman, whose Mandarin accent can be easily distinguished, especially in this area where Hakka people constitute the majority of the population. However, later I came across the same situation very often when I was alone. Similarly, in my second fieldwork site Baihe (台南縣白河鎮), a Minnan populated rural village in Southern Taiwan, I was often greeted with the question, "*you just married in over here! (jiaguolai 嫁過來) Where are you from? China, Indonesia, Vietnam or Cambodia?*"

As a native Minnan Taiwanese, I do not speak Hakka. Fokkienese is my mother tongue and my Mandarin accent is no doubt a Taiwanese one. It puzzled me why in these two localities, sometimes even in urban Taiwan, I was addressed as a mainland Chinese or Southeast Asian woman. The signifiers of the language, dressing code and physical features that differentiate Taiwanese women and mainland Chinese or Southeast Asian women are not always visible. It took me some time to realise that any new face of a young (or not-so-young) woman in these communities would be automatically taken as a mainland bride or Southeast Asian bride, as it had been for some years that no non-local Taiwanese woman married into these areas. Local women

¹ Taiwanese refers to all citizens of Taiwan, Republic of China, including all ethnic groups, i.e. mainlanders, Minnan, Hakka and aborigines. Mainlanders (waishengren) refers to the people migrated to Taiwan from all parts of Mainland China during or after the civil war in 1949 as well as the second and third generations born in Taiwan. Minnan and Hakka refer to ethnic groups migrated from Southern China over the centuries. For the brief history of Minnan and Hakka migration, see description of fieldwork site, p.12. The distinctive features of these two groups are said to be language -- Minnan speak Fokkienese and Hakka people speak Hakka, as well as their kinship structures and gender relations (see Chapter 1, 1.3. Minnan, Hakka and most of the mainlanders belong to the Han ethnic group.

prefer to marry out. The cross-border marriages in Taiwan constitute more than one third of new marriages in peripheral areas in Taiwan in recent years.²

Being treated as a mainland Chinese or Southeast Asian woman gave me some first-hand experiences of how local Taiwanese communities receive them, particularly in the initial stage of their arrival. These women experience a mixture of attitudes towards them, from hostility, contempt, pity, prying, apathy, to warm friendship and acceptance. These attitudes derive from the images the local communities and Taiwanese society as a whole have towards these women and the cross-border marriages, images that were constructed by the media, popular literature, various state policies, academic scholarship, and the actors of cross-border families.

The term *dalu xinni*ang invokes a specific kind of image, which is subtly different from brides from other countries. *Dalu xinni*ang is generally associated either with backwardness and poverty or with calculating, morally questionable women who are willing to do anything for money. “Anything” refers to dirty, labour intensive and low-income jobs and sex-related work.³ The actors themselves and the communities develop various mechanisms and strategies to cope and disguise such stigmatised stereotypes in everyday life. For instance, the friendly woman in the beginning of my narration refers Aqin *waishengren*, a term normally referring to people who migrated to Taiwan from all parts of mainland China during or after the civil war in 1949 as well as the second and third generations born in Taiwan but not to mainland brides, as an attempt to disguise the difference among them. Others call them “Taiwanese daughter-in-law”(Taiwan xifu 台灣媳婦) and their children “Sons of Taiwanese” (Taiwan zhizi 台灣之子). All of these terms, be it stigmatising or friendly, point to the fact that they are considered different from Taiwanese, even after years of marriage and living in Taiwan.⁴ Throughout this thesis I will explain these terms used to refer to mainland Chinese women who are married Taiwanese men, who use which terms and the connotations they carry. However, I choose the term “mainland brides“ to refer to them in general for the reason that this term aptly describe the positions of these women in Taiwanese families and society as a new member waiting to be accepted and approved.

² For numbers of cross-strait marriages over the years, see chapter 2, 2.3.2.

³ I use the word “sex-related” work to refer to a wide range of work involving women using their sexuality and erotica to make a profit which does not always involve commercial sex. The places they work include massage parlours, karaoke bars, night clubs, brothels, telephone sex companies, escort services, etc.

⁴ After I completed my fieldwork in 2004, women’s organizations and some government authority recently adopted a more gender-neutral and inclusive term “New Taiwanese Residents” (Taiwan xinzhuimin 台灣新住民) to refer mainland and foreign brides and their children. However, this term is not commonly used in the media and in daily life yet.

Phenomenological sociologist Schutz (1972) suggests that if we place an individual at the beginning of an imagined line, all other human beings are located in the line with different “social distance”. The distance can be physical with various degrees of direct social interaction. It can also be psychological and moral, with various degrees of shared experiences and traits. The psychological and moral closeness is based on the feelings of empathy and commiseration, the assumption that others have the ability and will to understand how I feel, and vice versa. The physical social distance is limited to contemporaries and psychological distance can be extended to predecessors and successors across time. Individuals categorise people according to the social distance, with which they place them in the line and react to them accordingly. What Schutz does not point out is that the social distance between one individual and others can be changing in different situations and over time, as the ability of empathy can be fostered. However, at a certain point this imagined line is disconnected, dividing the people into one and the other side of the rupture. I call such rupture of the social distances a “border”. The ones before the border are identified as “we” and the ones after are “they”. The membership of the we-group gives certain rights and entitlements that the they-group does not have. The most obvious example is that citizenship, a membership to a nation-state, provides legal rights to its citizens and excludes non-citizens from enjoying these rights. There are other forms of exclusion which is more subtle and criteria of membership more ambiguous that constitutes the social and cultural exclusion within the same nation-state.

“We” and “they” are oppositional concepts that mutually define each other. Because the we-group is composed of people who have different degrees of social distance with me, some without any physical contact, it is difficult to find an absolute common ground shared by all in the we-group. Certain traits are believed to be shared by all members of the we-group, and these traits are used to promote solidarity and mobilisation among the we-group and to differentiate from people in they-groups. These traits are considered to be natural or inherited that they-group do not share. A we-group exists only because a they-group exists, and the antagonism between them reinforces their mutual existence. A we-group with perceived shared traits and a border separating them from they-group is an imagined community (c.f. Bauman, 1990).⁵

It is in this context that I use the term “cross-border marriages” to suggest that there exist various borders, i.e. gender, ethnic, kinship, class and national borders, interwoven and constructed to place mainland brides as a they-group by Taiwanese. The image of mainland brides and the process of image shaping are central to justifying and

⁵ Here I use the term “imagined community” in general sense, not necessarily referring to Anderson’s concept of national identity (1983).

sustaining the borders. These borders are not clearly drawn nor fixed, and actors involved with cross-border marriages challenge these borders individually and collectively with various strategies. In the process of resistance some fronts are broken, some are reinforced and new borders are drawn.

Objective of the research and research questions

My journey of this research project starts with a personal experience. In the early 1990s my father gave up his business in Taiwan due to the economic depression and went to Shanghai to look for business opportunities. Eventually he married a Shanghaiese woman and they lived both in Taiwan and Shanghai. From time to time I heard complaints about my father's wife from my relatives, that she did not respect my grandparents, that she "sold" herself in order to take money back to China, that my father was stupid enough that he could have "enjoyed" her without marrying her, etc. All these stories ended with one conclusion: that all mainland Chinese are *by nature* greedy and ruthless. Without hearing her side of the story,⁶ I already was amazed by these comments, knowing that the same judgement would not be made of a Taiwanese woman if she did exactly the same thing. It seems to me that the common intra-familial tensions and conflicts that could happen in every family are enlarged out of proportion. Later I came across other families of mainland brides, some suffer tremendous difficulties, and some enjoy peaceful and nice marriage life, nevertheless all of them are struggling to cope with the suspicion of family members, hostility of Taiwanese society and restrictive governmental legislation. I started to ask: Where does the stereotype of a ruthless and morally corrupted woman come from and why does it persist so strongly? Is it because Taiwanese husbands of earlier cross-border marriages are from a lower social class and these marriages are often commercially arranged? Is it related to mainland Chinese brides' educational and social backgrounds? Or is it because of existing negative images of mainland Chinese as a result of long-time political antagonism? How are mainland Chinese women perceived differently in comparison to Taiwanese wives/daughters-in-law and other Southeast Asian brides?

In conventional migration theory, economic gains are regarded as the primary motivations for cross-border marriages. Studies of Asian women's labour migration show that women often migrate not only for the economic benefits for themselves but also for their family. It is argued that Asian women are socialized to be filial daughters

⁶ After my parents' divorce I stopped making contact with my father, hence I did not know my stepmother personally. Later in the course of my research, though not intended, she introduced me to her natal family and fellow mainland brides for my interview.

and caring mothers who sacrifice themselves for their parents, husbands and children. Marriage is a strategy of survival or social mobility for the whole family. These women are often deemed victim of globalisation processes and patriarchal family systems and values (Lee, C.K., 1998; Parrenas, 2001; Jacka and Gaetano, 2004; Gilmartin and Tan, 2002). Commercially arranged marriages are therefore often associated with human trafficking and forced migration. However, when I encountered mainland Chinese and Southeast Asian wives in Taiwan, I discovered that very few of them take marriage migration as a way out of poverty and few aim at immediate economic improvement of their natal family or themselves. These women make a decision by themselves in their mate choice and in moving to an unfamiliar land. Most of them are aware of the risks involved and the potential vulnerable situation and stigmas. What prompts them to make such a hasty and risky decision to marry abroad? Why do some middle-class, educated women still choose to marry “out” when China is experiencing a booming economy and shortage of women? A much less frequently asked question in the literature concerns the motivations for Taiwanese men to marry foreign or mainland Chinese women. Furthermore, other than the potential brides and bridegrooms, who else are involved in the decision-making and the mate choice of cross-border marriages?

The last piece of the puzzle in this research concerns how cross-border families, particularly mainland brides, cope with their stigma in everyday life. How do different members of the families develop intimate relations when mainland brides are constantly defined as “the other”? In other words, how do they cross various borders? What is the impact of cross-border marriage migration on gender relations and intra-familial relations?

To summarize, my three main research questions are,

- 1) Why do mainland brides choose to leave China and to come to Taiwan and why do Taiwanese men marry mainland Chinese women?*
- 2) Why and how are mainland brides constructed as “others”?*
- 3) How do members of cross-border families negotiate gender and intra-familial relations?*

I attempt to answer these three research questions by looking at the perspectives of different actors and by examining how these perspectives are formed and whether and how they are substantiated. I categorise these actors as 1) the state (policy and opinions of various government departments), to be discussed in Chapter 3; 2) the market (marriage brokerage industry and matchmaking operations), to be discussed in Chapter 4; and 3) family (kinship and community), to be addressed in Chapter 5. Chapter 1

provides information on the cultural principles and practices of marriage and family in the Chinese society. This information lays a foundation for the later chapters in addressing my three research questions. Chapter 2 discusses the marital and migratory motivations of the cross-straits families. In Chapter 3 I analyse the perspectives of the state and media as well as various social actors influencing the policy-making and image representation. In Chapter 4 I look at the marriage market -- matchmaking practices and monetary transactions in the matchmaking and during the wedding. In Chapter 5 I illustrate the power relations between the members of cross-strait families. These perspectives are not necessarily congruent with each other, yet each of them constitutes some piece of the puzzle that is necessary to understand the whole picture. They are often interlinked and have mutual influences. The concluding chapter synthesises the perspectives of various actors discussed in various chapters and their interrelations and contradictions. I will also show how these findings contribute to the scholarship in the relevant fields.

In order to answer these three questions, I need to ask the following sub-questions:

On motivations for cross-border marriage

In order to explain migratory behaviour, conventional migration studies see (voluntary) migration as a rational choice, often driven by economic deprivation and opportunities. Derived from this assumption, scholars and policy makers study the macro-structural factors prompting people to leave their home region/country (push factors) to a place where they have more economic opportunities or where their labour is needed and of higher value in relative or real terms (pull factors). This is largely used to explain labour migration. It can be problematic to explain marriage migration with the push and pull factors because the marital decision is driven by cultural and social factors rather than by an economic logic, though it has to be noted that material conditions shape cultural and social perceptions. The key question here is, how do the motivations for cross-border marriage relate to the political economy and cultural perceptions of love and marriage? In order to answer this question, I need to go back to general perceptions of marriage and marriage regimes and overall migration trends in Taiwan and China.

Chapter 1 discusses the cultural principles and practices of marriage and family in the Chinese society. Although the information in this chapter deals with marriages between nationals in both Taiwan and China, it provides a reference for studying how cross-strait marriages are similar or deviant from the norms of local marriages. I start with a summary of the traditional perceptions and practices on marriage and gender

relations in literature, historical accounts and anthropological studies. The summary is based on the characteristics of Chinese family and kinship (*jia* 家) associated with Neo-Confucianism and applied only to the dominant Han ethnic group. In view of the long history and wide geographic diversity, any attempt to generalize would be an impossible task. I do not deal with the characteristics of the family in ethnic minority groups as well as of aborigines in Taiwan because the demographic data show that of the majority of cross-strait couples belong to the Han group in China and Taiwan. This is followed by an overview of the contemporary development of marriage regimes in China, with attention paid to the radical engineering process under the socialist ideology during the Maoist era and the changes in the era of economic reform. This is followed by the contemporary development of marriage and family in Taiwan, with special attention paid to differences in sub-ethnic groups, i.e. Hakka, Minnan and the mainlanders. In these two sections I address multiple dimensions of demography data, marriage law, family composition and structure, household economy, ideals of femininity and masculinity, matchmaking and marital rites, inter-generational relations and social support systems and gender division of labour at home.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of internal and international migration in China and Taiwan from a gender perspective. In existing scholarship marriage migration is often conflated with women's labour migration, and more specifically, commercially arranged marriages are compared with sex trafficking. These scholarships often place women as victims of globalisation process. This chapter sets out to examine whether marriage migration shares the same context of political economy that causes women's labour migration by analysing the demographic data, migration flows and migration motivations. Marriage migration is a specific form of migration that is highly gendered, as in most cases it is women who are uprooted from their natal family and are relocated to the new family following the Chinese patrilocal system. I will address a few issues that call for further scholarly efforts. First is the need to develop a linkage between political, socio-economic factors and personal motivations for migration in order to challenge the economically determined framework of conventional migration studies. Second is the linkage between internal and international migration, which share similar motivations and can often be treated as a continuous experience. The third is the relations between labour migration and marriage migration. In Chapter 2 I will also present demographic profiles of the cross-strait couples in comparison to couples of local marriages and other cross-border marriages in Taiwan. These demographic profiles will be used in later chapters to examine whether certain images and stereotypes towards cross-strait couples can be supported.

On the formation of images and borders

The conventional studies of (limited) citizenship of immigrants and migrants often address the issue of exclusion from the perspectives of legal and formal rights (Castles and Davidson, 2000). Recent scholarship starts to address the issues of social and cultural exclusion of immigrants. I analyse all forms of political, social and cultural exclusion by asking how these borders are formed and why a particular image persists. I argue that the state, the marriage brokerage operations and the cross-strait families each play a part in forming and strengthening the borders between mainland brides and Taiwanese.

In chapter 3 I examine the discourse of government documents, seemingly objective demographic data, media representation and popular literature, academic work on the issue of cross-strait marriages. These discourses are analysed in the context of the political process of democratisation in the post-authoritarian rule and nation-building process in Taiwan as well as the cross-strait interaction in the period between 1992 and 2004. In various periods the legislation governing and images of cross-strait marriages and mainland brides develop and change, and an image of mainland bride as calculating and morally questionable stood out and was constantly reinforced. Why? Corresponding to these images, the Taiwanese government hesitates to grant mainland brides political citizenship, set criteria for brides of low-income family to work, but is rather generous in providing the same standard of social protection that Taiwanese women enjoy. What are the principles guiding the criteria of citizenship and the distribution of welfare resources? What are the underlying assumptions for gender relations, ethnicity and class in these principles?

The images towards cross-border marriages and mainland brides do not only relate to who they are; it is also attributed to what they do and why they do it. The majority of cross-border marriages are mediated and matched. The way the couples are matched and money transactions involved are considered as commercially arranged, or in Chinese words as “trade marriage” (maimai hunyin 買賣婚姻). How are commercially arranged marriage perceived in Taiwan and China? What are the differences in practices and meanings of matchmaking and marriage transaction in commercially arranged marriage and in “normal” marriage? How do these practices and meanings affect migrant women’s status in kinship network? The task of chapter 4 is to investigate at the marital decision and matchmaking practices of cross-border marriages in the light of traditional and contemporary practices in both Taiwan and China. I intend to challenge the discourse of trafficking in women and commodification of women in feminist scholarship and activism which regards women in commercial marriage

migration as traded commodity. However, a closer look at match-making/brokerage operation shows that cross-border marriage involves complex, localised social networks as all marriages do. Study of these networks and processes gives a picture that women are not a faceless commodity, but active agents in making their life choices. Having said that, the market and institutionalised marriage brokerage has eroded the traditional matchmaking practices and to some extent altered their meaning and the perceptions about them.

On negotiation of gender and intra-familial relations

How do the mainland brides cope with stigmatised images in the community in everyday life? What are the strategies of maneuvering among different kinship members and building a new social support network? How do they negotiate autonomy and freedom? In extremely tragic and disempowered situations, where can they escape? These strategies are developed within a limited economic and social capital rendered available to them, and are grounded in inherited cultural notions of what can and cannot be done, which is common experience for every newly wed bride and daughter-in-law when they enter a new kinship network and before they are accepted as full member of the kinship network. However, the process of gaining acceptance is much more difficult and complex for mainland Chinese brides as compared with local Taiwanese women. Some may never gain full recognition and are treated as outsider after years of marriage, yet some manage to win approval and sympathy from the kinship network. Here I will apply the anthropological studies on human relatedness to challenge the idea that Chinese society is patrilineal and that biological kinship overrides other social relations. I will illustrate that the border and for mainland Chinese women are not rigid and unchanging and it can be “crossed”. The rationales of border and exclusion based on gender, ethnicity and kinship network at times provide openings for mainland brides, who exercise their agency and develop various strategies to win acceptance and approval. I will discuss different dimensions of these strategies, includes maneuvering among different kinship members, the economic and social capitals secured outside the kinship network, the meaning of paid work and financial autonomy, etc. I make efforts to give a picture of mainland Chinese brides as active agents rather than passive victims, however, in many sad and tragic instances, some mainland brides choose to escape from abusive conditions but are led into more vulnerable situations, becoming sex workers or illegal workers.

Contribution and limitation of my research

Other than challenging the existing scholarship and filling its gaps, I adopt a few approaches with the hope that it will propose a new framework of understanding cross-border marriage migration. The first contribution of my research thesis is to analyse migration, both in the aspects of migratory motivations and migrants; positions in receiving societies as a process rather than a one-time event. That is to say that migrants may not benefit immediately and directly from the act of movement, yet the decision is made and strategies are developed in view of long-term benefits and security. This is what makes marriage migration different from short-term, temporary labour migration. It is crucial to bring the temporal dimension into the study of marriage migration and study the experiences at different periods of a life course.

Secondly, I study migrants' experiences in the web of relations in the receiving society, i.e. the interplay of the impacts of policies and regulations, the interests of the market that includes marriage brokerage and the labour market, as well as relations with family members and other social networks. The relational approach, particularly the inter-generational relations, is new to the studies of marriage migration as the existing scholarship often conceptualises marriage as relations between two individuals in the framework of the nuclear family.

Another contribution is to take into account cultural notions during the political and socio-economic changes. It not only provides a deeper understanding of guiding principles of human relations and behaviours, it also explains these changes in light of historical continuity and does not see it as a new phenomenon disconnected from the past. This is particularly important since in the discipline of migration studies migrants are often placed in separate categories and are treated distinctively different from the people in the host countries. By doing so it reinforces the "otherness" of migrants and justifies their exclusion.

The above mentioned approaches are reflected in the research methodology I choose. In order to study the relations of cross-strait family members and their daily experiences, I adopt ethnography as my main research methodology. This means that I have to choose the locations where cross-strait marriages are concentrated and the presence of mainland brides visible. As my initial research inquiry suggests that ethnicity may be an important factor contributing to mainland Chinese women's being otherised and marginalised, I chose two fieldwork sites in Taiwan where three distinctive "sub-ethnic" groups reside, i.e. Minnan, Hakka and mainlanders. All of these three groups belong to Han ethnic group and are influenced by the normative ideals of family described in Chapter 1. As mentioned earlier, aboriginal communities were left

out because the statistical data show that only a minority of aborigines opt for cross-strait marriages. The family organisation and gender ideology in these three sub-ethnic groups are distinctive and constitute the core of their ethnic identity. A comparison of three groups will render valuable insights. In addition, I follow two of my key informants back to China during their visits to their natal families. The latter is an attempt to explore the relations between migrant women and their natal families. However, due to the time constraints my fieldwork in China does not provide sufficient information for me to deal with this aspect of migration properly. Therefore most of the research findings in China, which are exploratory in nature, unfortunately are not incorporated in this thesis. The relationship between the mainland brides and their natal families either in China or overseas and the transnational family network will be in my future research agenda.

The focus on family relations and experiences in close-knit communities and my choice of methodology and fieldwork sites only allow me to document cross-strait families in rural and semi-industrial areas. The nuclear families in urban areas may have different experiences although they are subjected to the same policies and popular images. In rural and semi-industrial communities the cross-border and cross-strait marriages are predominantly matched by matchmakers. Therefore my research does not pay too much attention to the middle and higher class couples of “love marriages” who met each other through business contacts.

I also do not address extensively self-organisation and the political and collective action that mainland spouses and their husbands take to resist the stigmatised images and to claim their rights in the public domain. This is mainly because the majority of mainland women in rural communities are confined within the kinship network and very few of them choose to join these actions in view that it will bring more stigmas to them. Fortunately, the views and experiences of better-educated women with higher political consciousness are well articulated in the public forum such as newspapers and websites and are well documented by other scholars (Chao, 2006).

Another limitation of this research that is open to further investigation concerns the male mainland spouses. Statistically they are a minority among mainland spouses as more than 90% of cross-strait marriages are between Taiwanese men and Chinese women.⁷ My encounter with male spouses during my fieldwork shows that they are more likely to meet their Taiwanese wives through business contacts and less likely to be matched as compared to mainland Chinese women. Most of them live in urban areas and in all fieldwork sites I choose they are not present. Therefore I make a

⁷ Demographic profiles of cross-strait families, see Chapter 2, 2.3.2.

methodological choice to leave them out. Nevertheless a study of male spouses and their relation with the wives' family would offer interesting insights as it challenges the cultural norms of patrilocality. I intend to pursue this inquiry in the future.



Map 1: Across Taiwan Strait⁸

⁸ Source: Visual Information Center, USA. Updated April 2, 2007
http://www1.apan-info.net/Portals/45/VIC_Products/2007/04/070402-ChinaTaiwanDisputePrimer.doc

Brief description of three fieldwork sites

As mentioned earlier two fieldwork sites in Taiwan are chosen in view of their ethnicity and economic activities. The first one is Zhongxing village in Hsinchu county where veteran soldiers and the Hakka group lives. The economic activities here are a semi-industrial and agricultural. The second is Baihe town in Tainan County where Minnan group reside. The main economic activities are agriculture and tourism. In both places sex-related work such as massage parlours, beer houses and karaoke bars are present. Detailed descriptions are provided below.

Zhongxing is a veteran's settlement (*juancun* 眷村) situated next to Hukou military camp in Hukou xiang,⁹ Hsinchu county in Northern Taiwan. *Juancuns* are settlements of veterans who came from China after the civil war in the late 1940s. There are two kinds of *juancuns*: the first are official housing compounds built by the military to accommodate higher rank military officers and their families. The second are informal and at times illegal housing settlements built by lower rank soldiers upon retirement. Lower rank soldiers were not provided housing, therefore upon retirement they often purchase houses or simply occupy land and build simple huts surrounding the military camps, informal settlements developed over the years.¹⁰ This kind of informal settlements spread all over Taiwan near the military camps and Zhongxing village is one of them. Due to its informal nature, the boundary of the Zhongxing *juancun* does not entirely coincide with the official administrative unit village (*cun* 村). Nevertheless as estimatedly 90% of the population of Zhongxing village are veteran soldiers and their spouses and children; the remaining 10% are local Hakka and aborigines who rent housings from veterans while working in Hukou Industrial Zone nearby.¹¹

⁹ Xiang (鄉) is the tertiary administrative unit at the same level as township, but normally used in rural region. Village (*cun* 村) is also an administrative unit under Xiang.

¹⁰ Some veterans, mostly single ones, stay in the Veteran Domiciliary Centres. There are 14 Veterans Domiciliary Centres all over Taiwan and 4 other self-paid care centres for veterans, all built and managed by the Veterans Affairs Commission, Executive Yuan, Taiwan. According to the Statistic Year Book of the Veterans Affairs Commission (2005), there are estimated 99,837 veterans in total, among which 8,574 (8.59%) live in the free or paid care homes; 4,863 (4.87%) live in China and 83,661 (83.8%) live out of veteran homes in the beginning of 2005.

¹¹ The Household Registration Record in Taiwan does not indicate the ethnicity of individuals (i.e. Minnan, Hakka or mainlanders) with the exception of aborigines as a separate category. The percentage here is told by the village head of Zhongxing village Mr. Hsu and verified by former village head Mr. Gan. (Interviews with Mr. Hsu and Mr. Gan separately in May and June 2003) Both Mr. Hsu and Mr. Gan are Hakka.



Map 2 Fieldwork sites in Taiwan, Hukou township, Hsinchu county and Baihe township, Tainan county¹²

1. Zhongxing village, Hukou xiang, Hsinchu county, Taiwan (新竹縣湖口鄉中興村)

Many of the low-rank soldiers remained single for most of their life,¹³ thus the sex ratio of the unmarried is extremely high.¹⁴ In 2002, the total population of Zhongxing village

¹² Modified from http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/taiwan_pol92.pdf. Source: University of Texas.

¹³ The reasons why many of low-rank soldiers remained single are explained in Chapter 1 1.3.3.

¹⁴ The sex ratio is a demographic term referring to the number of males per 100 females. Among 513 single household in Zhongxing village 360 are male and 153 female. The sex ratio of singles is therefore 235. (Source: Household Registration Office, Hukou xiang, Hsinchu County, Taiwan.).

is 5,333, with 1,758 households, among which 513 are single households. The sex ratio of singletons is as high as 235. Starting from the late 1980s, after the connection between Mainland China and Taiwan were resumed, large numbers of veterans have married Indonesian and mainland Chinese women. By mid-2003, there were 346 cross-border marriages in Hukou xiang in total, with 164 mainland brides, 88 Indonesian brides and 55 Vietnamese brides.¹⁵ This figure includes both Hakka and veterans soldiers in Hukou xiang. As village and ethnically specific data are missing, I conducted a household survey among the veterans in Zhongxing *juancun*. According to my survey, there are 46 mainland brides, 3 Indonesian brides and 2 Filipina brides who married veterans and live in Zhongxing *juancun*.¹⁶ The average age of the veteran husbands is 75.7, and that of their mainland wives 46.7; the average age gap of cross-strait couples is 29 years and the average years of marriage is 6 years. This is slightly higher than the national average of cross-strait couples.¹⁷ The veteran husbands are retired lower-rank soldiers and their main source of income is their monthly or biannual pension. Some veterans have accumulated a large sum of saving and own houses over the years. 98% of the mainland wives had marital experiences in China and have teenage or young adult children from previous marriages; and the majority of mainland women married to veteran soldiers have jobs and earn income in Taiwan. Majority of veterans are retired and do not work. Veterans come from different parts of China, with an average level of primary school education, and speak various dialects or heavily- accented Mandarin. Their mainland Chinese wives too are from different parts of China, with the majority coming from the same province/region of their husbands. The mainland spouses speak dialects and Mandarin which is less accented than their husbands’.

The houses in the veterans’ settlements are meagre with minimal facilities, which were initially built for single veterans as temporary housing. Streets are narrow. A standard house in Zhongxing *juancun*, in which I myself lived during my fieldwork in Hukou, is less than 20 square meters consisting of two small bed rooms, one living room, kitchen and the bathroom. Most of them are not equipped with air-conditioning. Because the houses are built with low ceilings without heat insulation and the

¹⁵ There are also 7 Filipina brides, 8 Thai brides and 3 Cambodian brides. The rest are male spouses, mainly from Thailand. Source: Household Registration Office, Hukou xiang, Hsinchu County, Taiwan. The total number of cross-border marriages is much higher than the figure because the Household Registration Office only started calculating the number of foreign and mainland spouses since the beginning of 1997. Therefore those who married before 1997 is not included. The figure here is compiled from 1997 till May 2003.

¹⁶ A few more cross-strait couples are absent and temporarily visit their relatives in China.

¹⁷ The national average age of veterans who marry mainland women is 69.6 and that of their mainland wives 45.5 in September 2003 (Han, 2003). Detailed demographic data see Chapter 2, 2.3.3.

ventilation is bad, many veterans and mainland brides sit outside the house along the streets during the day, either playing Chinese chess or gossiping.

Outside the veterans' settlement, Hukou is a semi-rural area populated with Hakka. The historical record shows that the earlier immigration of Minnan and Hakka people into this area can be dated as early as three hundreds years ago during the reign of Kangxi emperor in Qing dynasty, before which this area was populated with aborigines. In the early eighteen century the area gradually became a Hakka settlement and aborigines were forced to move to inland hilly areas. The ancestors of the Hakka in Hukou came from Chaozhou and Huizhou regions in Guangdong province in China. Traditionally agriculture was the major economic activity, however, with the establishment of Hukou Industrial Zone in 1978, Hukou started to receive influx of immigrants from less developed neighbouring regions from all ethnic groups. Nevertheless, Hakka still constitute the majority of the permanent population except in the veterans' settlements. Agricultural labour constitutes less than 20 percent of the population.¹⁸ Similar to the veterans' settlement, Hakka villages also have an imbalanced sex ratio among single men and women, and many men have difficulties finding local wives and opt for marrying Indonesian brides of Hakka origin. In Zhongxing village, Hakka men who marry mainland or Indonesian women have an average age of 42, while the brides are much younger, ranged from age 18 to early 20s. All Hakka husbands and wives have no previous marriage. Rural Hakka households are large, with several generations cohabitating together or living close-by and they often have a degree of collective family economy.

2. Baihe town, Tainan County, Taiwan (台南縣白河鎮)

Baihe town is situated in Tainan County in Southern Taiwan. The majority of the local population belongs to the Minnan ethnic group; although historical record shows that some 20% of the population had a Hakka origin but their Hakka identity is no longer visible due to the process of assimilation (Baihe Chenchí, 1997).¹⁹ The immigration of Han Chinese to Baihe can be traced back to 1661 after Koxinga defeated the Dutch and started to develop a Han settlement around Tainan city. The peak of influx of Han immigrants arrived during the later part of the 17th century after Qienlong emperor of the Qing dynasty lifted the ban on cross-strait migration in 1760. The majority of the

¹⁸ Information provided in the official history record of Hukou xiang (Hukou Xiangzhi, 1995).

¹⁹ It is common in Taiwan that some Hakka who lived in dominantly Minnan regions adopted Fokkienese languages and customs and "became" Minnan. Some were not aware of their Hakka ancestry. In these cases they no longer maintain distinctive Hakka features such as lineage organization and gender division of labour (see Chapter 2). Minor differences only exist in the rituals of ancestral worships.

Minnan immigrants came from Guangzhou in Fujian province. Located at the juncture of two trading routes between coastal and hilly communities, Baihe gradually became a trading centre for agricultural and hunting commodities. Agriculture and husbandry remain major economic activities up to today. The majority of the local population engage in agricultural activities or work in the informal sector such as eateries and small trades in the markets. The main agricultural activities are rice and fruits growing, with supplementary husbandry and fishery.²⁰

Similar to many rural towns, Baihe experiences flows of out-migration of young labour forces to urban areas in the industrialisation process, leaving ageing peasants in marginalised and difficult situations. According to the land policy in Taiwan, in order to protect the agricultural industry, some lands in rural areas are designated for agricultural activities and cannot be transferred or sold for other purposes. With Taiwan joining the WTO, the prices of agricultural products have dropped drastically and it is not cost-benefit effective to farm any more. Many farming lands have been laid barren or have only minimal vegetations planted in order to secure government agricultural subsidies. In 2002, the agricultural population composes 43.11% of the total population in Baihe, with nearly 90% owning agricultural lands. Since late 1990 it is observed that the agricultural labour (those who do not own land and are employed by land owners) have increased gradually. This is likely due to the increasing unemployment rate in the cities that prompts earlier migrants to return to the rural areas.²¹ Like Hakka families, Minnan families, particularly agricultural households also practice multi-generational cohabitation. In 2002 every household has in average 3.4 persons.

In recent years Baihe sees the booming of the tourist industry. In summer Taiwanese tourists visit Baihe to see lotus flowers and enjoy the views in the countryside, while in the winter they visit a hot spring resort in a neighbouring town. The tourist industry provides some employment opportunities and attracts workers from poorer and more isolated towns in the neighbourhood. As a result, the entertainment industry such as massage parlours, karaoke bars and night clubs also attract some mainland and foreign brides and provide them job opportunities.

With a total population of 38,000 in Baihe, the percentage of cross-border marriages goes as high as 37% of total marriages in the year 2002, among which two third are cross-straits marriages.²² The majority of the cross-border couples are matched

²⁰ Information provided in the official history record of Baihe township (Baihe Zhenzhi, 1997).

²¹ Baihe Statistic Summary, Baihe Town Office, 2002: 45

²² Source: Baihe Registration Office. There exist no public data on the number of cross-border marriages at the township level. The figure is a result of my participating in the first nationwide census of mainland and foreign spouses in Taiwan in November 2003 together with the officers at the Baihe Registration Office.

by local brokers or matchmakers. The husbands age at mid-30s to mid-40s and brides at early or mid-20s at the time of marriage. For the majority of them it is their first marriage. The brides are from various provinces in China, with the majority from Qonghai city in Hainan province in earlier years and recently more from Fuqing in Fujian province.

Although the cross-strait couples in Minnan, Hakka community and in veterans' settlement share the characteristics of larger age gap between husbands and wives (as compared to national average), the age, marital experiences and family composition in rural Minnan and Hakka communities share more similarity. The pattern of cross-strait families in the veterans' settlements is rather distinctive. In Chapter 2 I will further analyse these features.

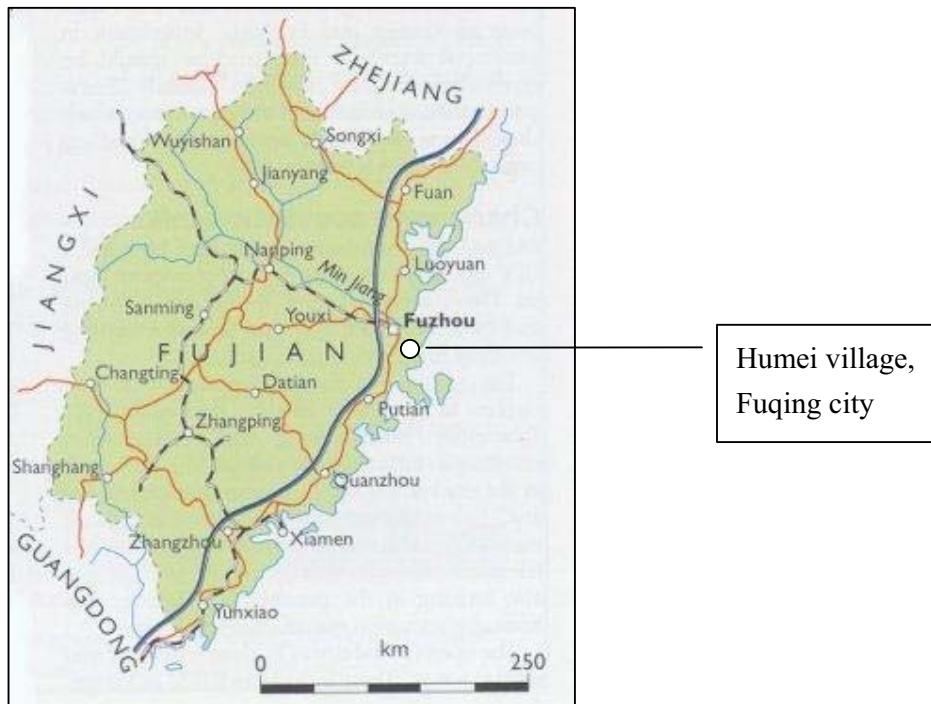
3. Humei village, Fuqing city, Fujian province, PRC (中國福建省福清市湖美村)

In addition to Hukou and Baihe, I have an opportunity to follow a key informant to visit her natal home in Humei village in Fuqing city. Located near the provincial capital Fuzhou, Fuqing is an economically fast developed area receiving growing foreign investment, among which a large percentage consisted of the remittances of overseas migrant families and workers from Fuqing. Fuqing has a long tradition of labour emigration to Japan, North America and Europe, and in recent years Singapore and Taiwan. It is also an area notorious for human smuggling.²³ Humei village is at the outskirts of Fuqing in the poorer area of the region. Though classified as a rural area in China's registration system, there are only a few agricultural activities left. The majority of the productive labour force has migrated overseas or to other parts of China, leaving only the aged and the young in the village. With a little more than 200 households, there are some twenty men and women who already migrated to Taiwan via marriage and more are planning to go. Every family in Humei village has a few members, both men and women, currently working or married abroad.²⁴ The majority of those who marry Taiwanese have prior marital experiences with young children in Humei taken care of by elder parents.

²³ The illegal Chinese immigrants in the Dover tragedy in which 58 were found suffocated in a truck to UK in June 2000, as well as 23 Chinese cockles drowned in Morecambe Bay in UK in February 2004, are all from Fuqing and nearby towns.

²⁴ For instance, my key informant has four sisters and one brother, all of them are away from home. They respectively migrate to Argentina, Japan, Singapore, Macao and two are in Taiwan. Other than my informant herself and her brother who married Taiwanese, the others are illegal labour migrants. With the money the family earned abroad, my informant's two sons started a business venture in Gueizhou in Southwest China. Her youngest daughter, aged 15, went to Shenzhen in Guangdong province to work in a hair salon. The family rarely have opportunities to see each other, and my visit during Chinese New Year in 2004 was one of them.

I stayed in Humei village only for a month during the Chinese New Year in 2004. Although short, the fieldwork was very intensive as it was a rare chance for all the family members who migrated to different parts of the world to return home and have a reunion. During this month I attended two weddings and several matchmaking gatherings between Taiwanese men and Fuqing women. It is particularly interesting to observe how migration, whether for marriage or for labour, change the economic and social positions of individuals and their kinship in the community which otherwise can never be achieved by other means. How the change of socio-economic positions motivates a chained migration and how migrants develop strategies of pulling economic and social capitals and maintain the links between the natal communities and migratory destinations are inquiries that I would like to investigate in my future research.



Map 3: Fieldwork site 3: Humei Village, Fuqing city, Fujian Province²⁵

²⁵ Modified from <http://www.paulnoll.com/China/Provinces/Province-Fujian.html>

Research methodology and some reflections

Taking into consideration that this research inquiry is largely concerned with private domains and that the research subjects are a socially stigmatised group, I decided to use ethnography as my main research methodology. This is also in view that the earlier research on cross-border marriages in Taiwan conducted by sociologists mainly adopts the methods of in-depth interviews and partial participant observation (Hsia, 2002; Wang 2001; Han, 2002), which are limited to relatively long-term observations of daily life activities and the interaction with their kinship network and the wider community. I hope the present ethnographic research will complement these earlier studies and provide other insights.

Derived from the anthropological discipline, ethnography is not only a method of data gathering, it also renders epistemological significance on studying a given society and/or culture from holistic perspectives and the multiplicity of complex conceptual structures. Geertz uses a metaphor to describe doing ethnography as trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalised graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour. The task of ethnographer then is to sort out the structures of signification (1975: 10). I use the metaphor of a map that conveys the multiplicity of worldviews of a given community.

I spent in total fifteen months in the fieldwork from April to August in 2002 and from April 2003 to April 2004. The first three months in 2002 was spent in gathering governmental statements, public discussion on related legislation and popular representation in the media, both written and visual, in Taiwan. In this period I also gathered demographic data in order to determine the fieldwork sites and criteria and sampling of informants. Time was also spent in investigating matchmaking and marriage brokerage process by interviewing matchmakers/brokers operating on various scales.

In the years 2003 and 2004 I spent a full year in ethnographic fieldwork in the three field sites described above. I spent in two fieldwork sites in Taiwan roughly five months, including the preparation of entry and departure. In the last two months I followed one of my key informants back to China to visit her natal family as well as to collect secondary and demographic data in Fujian, Shanghai and Beijing in the PRC. This research therefore has its limited focus on the matchmaking practices and the family life in Taiwan. Multiple research methods are used to complement this shortcoming and to provide secondary and background information:

1. Household registration records in the local government offices in Hukou and Baihe that give information about cross-strait couples' ages and age gap, occupation, education, and year of marriage. Because in Hukou there exists no specific data on veteran soldiers I conducted a household survey myself.
2. Life-story interviews with both husband and wives of cross-border couples. In Hukou, I conduct in-depth interviews with twelve couples, that include five veteran husbands and their mainland wives; four Hakka husbands and their mainland wives, in two cases I also interviewed the parents-in-law; three Hakka husbands and their Indonesian wives. In total 27 informants were interviewed in Hukou, at least twice each, in combination with many informal visits and chats. In Baihe it was more difficult and time-consuming to enter the existing kinship network. I interviewed 10 cross-border families, with couples and parents-in-law and other kinship members. Outside these two fieldwork sites, I have also interviewed 34 informants of cross-strait couples (including both husbands and wives) in Taipei, Taoyuan, Taichung, Kaoshiung and Chuanghua, many of whom are members of FATS.
3. Participating and observing daily routines of the informants, particularly the wives. This includes working in factories, farming, selling vegetables in the markets, shopping/marketing, cooking/domestic work, visiting friends, religious activities, hospitalisation, etc. as well as being invited for countless dinners. Following their activities allowed me to have an integral picture of the life of these migrant women, their interaction with the local community, and their perception of Taiwanese society as well as the comparison with their own home society.
4. I have also interviewed various people in the community, such as neighbours, the heads of the villages, local civil servants, social welfare workers, medical doctors, (unprofessional) match-makers, etc. who have close contacts with cross-strait couples. I also spoke with the head of two major Hakka and Minnan clans and the women of different generations to grasp the overall ideas and the changes in Hakka and Minnan kinship networks and the ideals of femininity and gender relations.
5. I have worked as an intern in a marriage brokerage agency briefly in Taichung which also recruits female domestic migrant workers. In addition, I interviewed several marriage brokerage agencies of various sizes and establishments.

6. In Hukou, I participated regularly in an evening literary class in a primary school catered for foreign and mainland Chinese brides for three months. For many younger Vietnamese and Indonesian brides, this is the only occasion that I could talk to them freely without the intervention of their husbands and parents-in-law.

7. I encountered a mainland Chinese woman working in a massage parlour in the neighbourhood in Hukou. In this massage parlour I met many other women who either escape from their marriages or do sex work without their husband's knowledge. Their experiences had enriched my research in a great deal and helped me to challenge the line between "real" and "bogus" marriages.

As a result of my methodological choice, in these three sites I mainly interacted with couples of relatively lower social and economic status and with those who married via matchmaking. To supplement and to contrast their experiences, I also interviewed other couples from "love marriages", i.e. who are from middle class, higher education and professional background who met via business contacts and who live in urban areas. I met some of them through random encounter, but most of them belong to a self-organised group, the National Association of Cross-straits Families (FATS, also known as Mainland Bride Association) in Taipei. I participated in the social and political activities organized by this Association, including two major demonstrations against restrictive regulations. A virtual community, an online forum organised by middle-class, professional couples, is very active and articulate brides often write lengthy, personal articles sharing their experiences and views on relevant events. Upon permission I draw sources from this forum.

As a female researcher, I am bound to have a gender-specific relationship with my informants. Though trained in women's and gender studies, I do not want to focus only on women's experiences alone, as I believe that gender relations can only be analysed from the perspectives of both men and women. However, during my fieldwork I found it more difficult to talk to men than to women, particularly with the husbands. Partly due to the segregated gender domains it is easier for me to be part of the "women's network" and not possible to join "men's circle".

Although I am a native Taiwanese, I also experienced the "borders" when I enter the fieldwork sites. However, the distinction of the insider and the outsider, or the emic and etic knowledge generated accordingly (Eriksen, 1995: 36), does not apply in my research. First of all, the members of the cross-borders families themselves have mixed ethnic background, that me being a Minnan Taiwanese does not always grant me "insider" status and advantage. Though mainland and foreign brides are socially

excluded in the community, they act as insiders when receiving me and guiding me into the community network. For instance, in Hakka areas the Indonesian brides often helped translate when I talked to their husbands and parents-in-law who hesitated to speak Mandarin though they are capable of doing it. In this circumstance it is the ethnic identities as Hakka versus Minnan (I) that draw the border between them and me, not the national identities as Taiwanese and Indonesian. Another example is that when I interviewed the veterans retreated from mainland China, it was often their mainland Chinese wives who helped translating when I had difficulties in grasping veterans' heavily accented Mandarin. My being a Minnan young woman often caused initial suspicion from veterans; as they are the group that experienced the most hostility from the local Taiwanese population. On the contrary, their mainland wives were not so sensitive to my ethnic background and were more open to my friendly gesture.

Only in a few occasions when my European partner visited me, I had the honour to be invited to men's drinking sessions by acting as his translator. It shows that at this circumstance the gendered border is stronger than the ethnic and national border. Nevertheless, the gendered border seems to diminish when I relate to older men of my father's age. If I had been a male researcher, I would be able to participate in men's talks but would never have been allowed to talk to women freely. Another reason is that given the stigma and stereotypes on cross-border couples, some of the husbands are extremely defensive to any inquiry. In some occasions the husbands and unfriendly fathers-in-law threw me out of the house. Others accepted my interviews, but often took defensive positions or insisted on the authority of knowledge by assuming a role of teacher and not allowing me to speak. Interestingly, their mainland wives, equally or more stigmatised, tend to welcome me and are eager to share their experiences.

Being a Western educated, urban middle-class woman of course created gap between my informants and me. Initially I was very anxious about the gap and tried very hard to integrate into the community. As many researchers have experienced, the efforts of "living and talking as locals" often became a joking material for the locals. It only revealed my poor imagination and assumptions toward the rural life and these couples, which themselves were influenced by popular images. My education background and the role as researcher did not give me authority in the community; rather, my informants took me as a student who came here to learn the way of life from them. After living with the community for some time I was allowed to move freely and to some extent participate in their daily life particularly with women. Initially, I hesitated to acknowledge that I had a European male partner, knowing that the imagination toward the West might cause my superior status, as well as knowing that this kind of relationship (not legally married and, with a foreigner) may not be

sanctioned. Later, I realised that my unmarried and childless status as an “old” woman way passed marriageable age gave me no legitimacy to raise any question related to intimate and sexual life, and it was not possible to win their trust if I refused to share my personal life. To my surprise, sharing my personal relationship triggered long and enthusiastic discussion on the differences of marriages in the West, China and Taiwan. The fact that I was not legally married did not seem to constitute a problem at all, as long as they knew that my parents had approved my relationship. This shows that the social sanction of marriage is more significant than the legality. Mainland and foreign wives were keen to know how I negotiated the cross-cultural relationship in a foreign country and felt comfortable that I too identified with their experiences of exclusion.

My research is a result of keeping a balance between the “sameness” and “difference”. The “sameness” allows me to build affinity with my informants based on shared experiences, while the “difference” gave comparative perspectives offered by my informants and myself. The research process taught me that the multiple borders of ethnicity, class, gender and age are mutually shaping, constantly changing and negotiable, as my informants experienced. My task as a researcher is to elaborate the process of border construction and their referential framework of these borders.