

BECOMING TAIWANESE: SELF-PERCEPTION¹ OF THE NEW TAIWANESE IMMIGRANT FEMALES

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ABSTRACT

Southeast Asian and Chinese women have been marrying Taiwanese men since the 1980s. Nonetheless, cross-border marriages were not common until the 1990s, when the "Go-South Policy" was implemented. Unfortunately, these cross-border marriages have become commoditised. In addition, misperceptions broadcasted by the mass media have stigmatised these self-titled Taiwan new immigrant females (or TNIFs). This ethnographic research explores the self-perceptions of a particular group of TNIFs who have moved to Taiwan from urban regions in their homeland. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were employed to gather data, and these two sources of data were triangulated between one another. Research results indicate that many people came to Taiwan seeking a better life and not necessarily for economic reasons. However, their experiences in Taiwan have been largely unpleasant. Nevertheless, by working together with other TNIFs and Taiwanese people, they have come to call Taiwan their "home".

Keywords: cross-border marriages, Taiwan new immigrant females, ethnographic research, self-perception.

¹ The terms "self-perception", "self-image", and "self-concept" are used interchangeably in this study.

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INTRODUCTION

Women from Southeast Asia and from the People's Republic of China (PRC) began to marry Taiwanese men as part of a trend that began in the 1980s. This trend increased rapidly with the 1994 "Go-South Policy", (*nanxiang zhengce* 南向政策)² that sought to accommodate the needs of Taiwanese men who could not find suitable wives at home in Taiwan (Shiu 2003; Wang & Chang 2002). The technical term adopted by the Ministry of Interior for these women is "foreign spouse" (MOI 2006). However, they prefer being referred to as Taiwan new immigrant females (TNIFs, *Taiwan xinyimin nuxing* 台灣新移民女性) (Hsia 2005).

There are 414,699 TNIFs (MOI 2009a), which is close to the number of native Taiwanese wives (NT, the aborigines/indigenous peoples of Taiwan), 494,107. TNIFs represent 1.80% of Taiwan's population whereas native Taiwanese wives constitute 2.15%. Of these TNIFs, 33.71% (139,778) are from Southeast Asia and 66.29% (274,921) come from the PRC (MOI 2009b). Thus, the number of TNIFs (adults) actually exceeds the number of adult NTs. In addition, the number of new Taiwan children (NTC) exceeds the number of NT children by 5,339. Because of their relatively large numbers and given the rapid growth of the TNIF population, educational issues that surround both TNIFs and NTC have become a concern in Taiwan. The data from this study not only underscores the significance of TNIFs but also the urgency of new-immigrant related social policy in a developing Taiwanese society. With more sophisticated knowledge, educators and social workers will be able to design suitable programs for TNIFs, their children and their families.

Cross-border marriages have become commoditised through marriage brokers and they are negatively portrayed in a Taiwanese media that stigmatises TNIFs (Hsia 2002; Wang & Chang 2002). This stigmatisation occurs even though the TNIFs often make significant contributions to their Taiwanese families: as the family's primary wage earner and as the main caretaker of their children (Chen 2006; 2007). Additionally, elements of the media have also implied that the proportion of mentally retarded children who are NTC is much higher than the proportion amongst Taiwanese children (TC) (Wu 2004); a claim that is not grounded in any credible research. These negative stereotypes may induce TNIFs to withdraw from society and lower their confidence levels as well as ultimately affect their self-image (Allport 1979; Chen 2001; 2003; Harrell 1995). Yang et al.

² *Hanyu pinyin* is adopted in this article except internationally conventional usage, such as Taipei, Chiayi, Kaohsiung, and so on.

(2003) indicates that 60% of TNIFs are not confident about their proficiency in Taiwanese languages. Concomitantly, TNIFs have been labelled, "Taiwanese dumb daughters-in-law", and "Taiwanese illiterates" (Yang et al. 2003). Some have even argued that they lack sufficient knowledge for providing a good educational foundation for their NTC. Popular media stereotypes, such as the portrayal of NTC as mentally retarded or as developmentally slow (Lin 2001), have led to many misconceptions amongst the Taiwanese: TNIFs only bring problems to Taiwan and they do not contribute to Taiwanese society. Such misperceptions help to place TNIFs in a disadvantaged position within Taiwanese society (Lai 2004; Pan 2004; Hsia 2002; You 2003). The purpose of this research is to explore the self-perceptions of TNIFs. However, this project not only seeks to understand TNIFs better, but also to promote positive relations between TNIFs and the Taiwanese people. With these considerations in mind, three major questions are addressed in this paper: (i) why did TNIFs come to Taiwan, (ii) what have been their experiences in here, and (iii) how do they perceive themselves?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The self-concept of immigrants in their host society is usually affected by how dominant groups perceive them. When the dominant group has a positive attitude towards the immigrants and respects their ethnic cultures, the immigrants in return develop a positive self-perception. Recognition further enhances the positive relations between the dominant and the minority groups (Chen 2003). TNIFs are usually oppressed in Taiwanese society. They are *othered* by their Taiwanese family because their homeland is not as economically prosperous as Taiwan. Consequently, they must reconstruct themselves, striking a balance between themselves and their host country (Chen 2002; Wei 2007).

Regarding the adjustment of TNIFs, Zhu (2002) shows how TNIFs have to overcome many hurdles. Upon marrying Taiwanese men, these women have little knowledge about Taiwan itself; nonetheless, the TNIFs strive to adjust. Especially after giving birth to their children, they become more conscious of their responsibilities of being a wife and a mother. In their pursuit of a better life, the TNIFs also make extra efforts to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers. For example, they take classes in Mandarin, Taiwanese and life adjustment as well as obtain scooter-bike licenses, all after completing a full day of work and fulfilling their roles as wife, mother and daughter-in-law. In addition, they have also developed a non-verbal

system of communication that helps them to be understood; however, their lifestyles come at the cost of being perceived as strange by members of the larger community. Nonetheless, being understood and being able to communicate with Taiwanese people could also be regarded as a type of happiness (Yan 2002).

The process of adjusting to Taiwanese society is a long journey. It requires the support of the Taiwanese family, friends and relevant organisations. Friendships in general and friends from different countries in particular help TNIFs to conquer the misperceptions held by their Taiwanese families, neighbours and the greater Taiwanese society. However, in order to have a successful cross-cultural experience, it is most crucial that TNIFs modify their own life philosophies. That said, most Taiwanese families constituted of TNIFs, sadly, do not realise that they also need to learn about the language, culture and philosophies of the TNIFs (Yan 2002; Zhu 2002). It is important to note that members of a minority group must process the negative perceptions held of them, yet do so in such a way that a positive self-images can be adopted. Ultimately this is an achievement based on self-reflection in the context of friendships and in the context of mainstream culture (Atkinson, Morton & Sue 1989). Finally, these friendship and concerns of the individual collectively influence their self-perception positively.

METHODS

This ethnographic research was developed to understand the self-perceptions of TNIFs. As Carspecken (1996) suggests, it is essential to any research that challenges the exploitation by, and dominance of, a privileged group. Consequently, steps were taken to address power imbalances between the research participants and the researcher. The relevant aspects of this dimension are discussed below.

Participant Selection and Empowerment

The participants in this study are a sample drawn from a much larger study. In this study, 41 participants from 14 counties and cities were chosen in this exploration of TNIF self-perceptions. Table 1 (see appendix 1) illustrates the characteristics of the research participants.

Most of these research participants were generated by school teachers, principals, social workers, and administrators of non-profit organisations. In addition, I had met most of the participants many times

before through their participation in other TNIF related activities. As part of TNIF educational programs, I participated in the following TNIF-related activities: parties; Mandarin classes; village religious festivals; international food events; culture festivals; concerts; exhibitions; family gatherings; and activities sponsored by the Taiwan government or by non-profit organisations, as well as through discussions with husbands and other family members and teaching ethnic language workshops. The locations for this research included the following places: elementary schools, the homes of TNIFs, state-run and non-governmental organisations, village and community centres, churches, international conferences, and TNIF workplaces, as well as their homes in Thailand and in Vietnam. Importantly, this sort of research entailed friendships, the joys of participation and the building of trust. Because most family members, including the Taiwanese husbands, were very suspicious of those with whom the TNIFs associated, I paid a number of introductory visits to their families to earn their trust. As a result of these interactions, families decided whether or not they would permit the TNIFs to maintain a friendship with me. After becoming familiar with the TNIFs and their families, I also questioned the family, the husband, and the parents-in-law. As a result, before the study even began, a mutual trust had already established between the TNIFs and me.

With respect to empowering TNIFs, I was aware that my occupation as professor had a relatively high socio-economic status in Taiwan. Thus, in order to secure authentic data, every effort was made to avoid interviewer bias (Campbell 1981). To set the research participants at ease and to allow them to articulate themselves in a comfortable atmosphere, interviews were conducted using a conversational format. As a female, the researcher felt privileged with regard to gender. During the interviews, I tried to affirm participants' self-perceptions, to encourage them to speak freely, and to reflect upon their experiences in Taiwan.

Data Collection and Analysis

This research included the use of several ethnographic techniques. Participant observations and in-depth interviews were conducted, while fieldnotes as well as my own self-reflections were also kept as data. The data set used for this study was drawn from a larger project on the experiences of TNIFs and their educational strategies that were conducted between September 2005 and December 2008. In addition, the interviews for this study were conducted at locations convenient for the subjects. Most preferred conducting the interviews at their own house, when their parents-

in-law were not around. Finally, some subjects were interviewed with their husbands.

I had initially encountered the TNIFs invited to participate in this study over the course of a wide range of different social situations. These situations included the following: literacy classes, life adjustment classes, friends' parties, volunteer training programs, and field trips held by the non-profit organisations. Some TNIFs welcomed me enthusiastically, asking me to stop by their home to chat, to be interviewed, and allowing me to type our conversation directly into the computer. I became personally involved with many participants helping them with needs such as selecting clothes for a fashion show and providing information about jobs, work and leisure activities. Some TNIFs even shared with me how their husbands had sexually abused them.

The protocol of semi-structured interviews was designed to address the following: (i) the reasons for marrying a Taiwanese man, (ii) their experiences in Taiwan, and (iii) their self-image. The length of the interviews varied depending on the time at which they were conducted and the convenience for the subject, but they varied from one hour to several days (in those instances when participants felt comfortable enough to host me overnight).

The interview transcripts and field notes were read in an effort to identify the thoughts of the participants and to develop a coding system. The coding system included major codes and sub-codes to reflect the goals of the study. The information derived from such reading was coded into a set of general categories associated with self-perceptions. While coding, follow-up interviews were also implemented in order to make sure that the data had been properly interpreted. Finally, triangulation was conducted from the contrasts between the observations of interviewee performance and behaviour on the one hand, and their interviews on the other. In addition, conversations with TNIF's friends and family members during pre-interview visits and at various other activities, verified the data provided by TNIFs.

RESEARCH RESULTS

After reading the interview notes, I developed single, as well as cross-case analyses to examine the similarities and differences in the self-perceptions of participants. The research results have been categorised as follows: reasons for coming to Taiwan, experiences in Taiwan, and a critique of Taiwan.

Reasons for Coming to Taiwan

Whether they were persuaded by family members or friends, or whether they decided for themselves to explore their potential in a foreign land, the major reason offered by TNIFs as to why they came to Taiwan was to seek a better life. *What is a better life?* It varied with the individual. They had imagined that in Taiwan, with its stronger economy, they would have a good life. Most immigrant females were quite adventurous, as they had come to Taiwan alone and without any knowledge of the country. Some TNIFs had met their Taiwanese husbands through friends or sisters who were already married to Taiwanese men. Moreover, even once married, most of the participants in this study had neither friends nor family with knowledge of Taiwan. Even though all the participants came from urban areas, they had not had an opportunity to travel abroad. They all expressed that they had only known the name of the country, Taiwan, and that they had no idea what the country itself looked like.

Pursuit of personal happiness and the original family

Some TNIFs were attracted by the economic and democratic developments in Taiwan. However, they confess to having been misled by the *myths* that Taiwan was one of the four economic *Little Dragons*, full of cash and job opportunities. After being introduced to Taiwanese men by their friends, and corresponding with them for a few months, they had been willing to emigrate to Taiwan.

I met my husband through a friend. After corresponding for six months, I decided to marry him without the consent of my parents. A friend told me that all the floors in Taiwan are shiny. I was amazed and decided to give up my college education to marry my husband. In spite of the disappointment of my parents, I was still determined to marry him. How ignorant I was! (PTCO37 interview).

Personal income and husband's consent

Contrary to the stereotype that TNIFs are a homogenous group of poor women marrying men from a wealthier more developed economy, the women in this study represented a wide range of backgrounds and motives. In fact, they are a diverse group, particularly the women originally from

urban areas. While a few of them fit into the stereotype of women with strong financial connections to their original family, a number had very weak financial responsibilities towards their original family and came from families that were well off.

Why do Taiwanese people always regard us (TNIFs) as poor? My family was doing fine in Vietnam even if we were not wealthy. All my siblings all have descent jobs, and they always gave my mother money after my father had passed away. In addition, we also have relatives in America. I was thinking of emigrating to America if I had remained single... My in-laws only gives me a small amount of money for children's food, and my husband never gives me a penny. I do not want to beg them for money anyhow. So, I have never sent a single penny home, even during the Lunar New Year (she said frowningly) (CYCO15 interview).

TNIFs did hope that they could send money to their parents back home for their birthdays, New Year, or for the siblings' weddings. The TNIFs wondered, "Wouldn't Taiwanese people contribute money during these occasions?" Nevertheless, TNIFs are still regarded as simply money-stealers who secretly sent money from their husband's family back to their original family.

Some TNIFs stipulated that they came to Taiwan to improve their financial situation. They expected that this improvement would be achieved through hard work. CYCO14 confessed that it was her responsibility to support both her mother and her younger brother because her mother never worked even when her father was still alive. She also mentioned that her husband initially did not allow her to work, fearing that the other Vietnamese immigrants might contaminate her. After three months, she began to argue with her husband over letting her work to support her mother and brother.

CYCO14: Teacher (the researcher), I told my husband that I wanted to work. "Otherwise you're too old (22 years older than she), why would I marry you?"

Researcher: You really said that to your husband?

COCO14: Yes (she nodded). I came to Taiwan to make money for my mother and younger brother. My father passed away when I was very young. My mother was quite dependent. She had never worked. So I was sent to my aunt and my aunt paid for everything for me. I stayed there until I was 19 years old. I went to night school. During the daytime, I learned how to sew and to make clothes. The wage was so low that I decided to find other ways out... After I told him the truth, he consented only if I could take good care of this Taiwanese family... I worked and saved money. I was able to pay all the expenses of my younger brother's wedding and banquet... I am happy — my husband is diligent, my daughter is adorable. My parents-in-law are nice, and they gave a house to my husband (smile).

Fear of Chinese Exclusion

In the case of Indonesian TNIFs immigration to Taiwan, many described the lack of opportunity in their homeland as the reason for their departure. CYCO11, KHCO38 (Indonesian Chinese) and KCHO39 all agreed that one of the reasons for coming to Taiwan was the exclusion of Chinese in Indonesia since 1998. Because of their Chinese heritage they felt insecure about staying in Indonesia. Indeed the parents of a Chinese-Indonesian female encouraged her to come to Taiwan, where Chinese people were safe and welcome. CYCO11 also added that it had been quite terrifying in 1998 when groups of people began killing Chinese in her hometown.

During the 1998 Chinese Exclusion, I was 19 years old. It was really scary. We had no idea when we might be killed and simply disappear from this world. Therefore, my mother told me to get married in Taiwan, to be free of the fear of the Chinese Exclusion. At that time, there were many marriage agents seeking young women. I am Hakka, and I went to a Chinese school for a while, so there was not much of a linguistic barrier for me. All of my family is still in Jakarta. They just want me to have a good life in Taiwan (KHCO38 interview).

Love inspired marriage to Taiwan

Some TNIFs expressed clearly that they had met or corresponded with their Taiwanese husbands before they were married and that they married them for love. For example, TCCO22 met her husband through their religious activities in Thailand. They both agreed that their religious beliefs had brought them together, though the negative stereotypes of cross-border marriages sometimes disturbed them. Thus, they decided to stay in Thailand and have been associating with friends made through their religious activities. Another TNIF met her husband at their workplace. CYCO13 stated that her husband was her employer's nephew and that he lived nearby. They met each other shortly after she began working at his uncle's business and they fell in love after a few months.

The story of KLCY29 was more like a movie. She and her husband were colleagues in a factory when she first came to Taiwan as a labour worker.

After having worked in Taiwan for a year, my grandmother passed away. I rushed back to Indonesia without any plan to return to Taiwan. Suddenly, I got a phone call from my husband (a colleague back then) telling me, "I want to pay a visit to you next week". I was completely shocked and wondered why he planned to come to Jakarta...He told my parents that I was his Miss Right. He confessed to my parents that he had loved me when I was still in Taiwan (KLCY29 interview).

Experiences in Taiwan

Some TNIFs suggested that most Taiwanese despise TNIFs and that this ethnic discrimination reveals the ignorance of the Taiwanese people themselves. Still, they also revealed that they had enjoyed their life in Taiwan, and they theorised that individual characteristics and their needs affected how they behaved towards and how they perceived Taiwanese people. The latter group generally had a positive experience.

The "money stealer"

Some TNIFs indicated that most Taiwanese people thought they had fled from poor families, lived in remote rural regions and they had come to Taiwan for a life with luxuries. TNCO1 had been asked, "How much money

are you going to take back to China?" She was very frustrated with the rudeness and discrimination of the older people in her husband's village in. It was especially difficult to endure being called *dalumei* (China girl), which implies a prostitute from China.

Thus, TNIFs must struggle against the idea of the commodification of their cross-border marriages. They are offended by the use of the term "commodification marriages" (*maimai hunyin* 買賣婚姻) because regardless of how much their husband's family may have spent on the marriage, their original family only received between USD200 to USD1,000. All the TNIFs who had met their husbands through marriage agents made this complaint.

Why do Taiwanese people talk about our (TNIFs') marriages like that? Don't they understand it's really hurtful and discriminating? It was the marriage agency in Taiwan and in our homelands that made the most profit. The small amount of money paid to our original families made no difference to them. The family (of the TNIFs) usually received USD300 to USD1,000. Try to think, our parents raised a child for 20 years to marry in Taiwan. Why cannot the Taiwanese families be appreciative? (KHCO39 interview).

The TNIFs believe they have a responsibility to earn money. They came to Taiwan for a better life. "Isn't everyone seeking a better life? Why can't we (the TNIFs)?" wondered KHCO38.

When my husband told me how much money and property he owned, I laughed and wondered why is it that Taiwanese people are not richer than people in the PRC? I tell you (the researcher) the truth, my family is doing much better than my husband's. After having been married in Taiwan for 3 years, I really don't think Taiwan is better-off than the PRC. So why are Taiwanese people so arrogant? (JYCO19 interview).

The impoverishment of Taiwan

The negative feelings expressed here have another side to them. Some TNIFs felt deceived by their husbands once they arrived in Taiwan and discovered the material conditions of their husband's lives. In particular, TNCO1 said, "How could it be possible that the restroom is outside of the house? My parents' house in Shenzun is much better than this".

My family is doing fine. My parents' house is much more beautiful than my parents-in-law's. I lived in Ho Chi Min. It is much more prosperous and progressive than this small town. Here, it is like a village. There is nothing here. Most importantly, my father-in-law always tells the neighbours that I married my husband for money. My husband is very tall and good-looking. You know, I prefer handsome guys... I worked as a tour guide and have been to many places in Vietnam. I graduated from high school, the same educational level as my husband, and this is quite good in Vietnam... My husband is lazy. And most disgustingly, he has a love affair; even my parents-in-law couldn't do anything about it. He didn't want to help out in his parents' drugstore, and he did nothing every day. He ignores me. It was a mistake to marry him and to live in such a remote township (TNCO7 interview).

Name calling

In greater Taiwanese society, many TNIFs experienced verbal abuse and name calling. They are often referred to as *foreign spouses* (*waijipeiou* 外籍配偶) or *foreign brides* (*waijixinniang* 外籍新娘). However, the term *waijixinniang* 外籍新娘, was challenged by the TNIFs. KHCO38 pointed out, "You can only be a bride for a short time. How could we be brides forever?" Furthermore, the character *wai* suggests that these TNIFs will never become part of Taiwanese society, even if they became naturalised citizens of Taiwan, ROC. However, the most derogatory term used to describe the TNIFs is *foreign labour workers* (*wailao* 外勞). Nevertheless, I found that many villagers still used this term reflexively. When I asked them why they used it so, they simply answered, "I don't know. Everyone says so. They are dark (*hei hei de* 黑黑的), the same as the foreign labour workers (*wailao* 外勞). They all come for money".

In spite of these difficulties, the TNIFs still thought that they should stay married to whomever they had chosen and that they must learn to adapt and to enjoy themselves in Taiwan, especially after giving birth to their children.

During the first four years living with my husband's family, I isolated myself completely, without any communication with anyone. Here (her current home) is much more backward than Saigon... It has a dissymmetrical ugliness. When I was in Ho

Chi Min, my friend told me, "The floors in Taiwan are shiny". The reality is so different from the myth... I frequently asked myself why I am in Taiwan, and I couldn't believe that I was actually here. Visually, there is a huge difference. Therefore, I shut myself up, and didn't talk to anyone. Later, my mother told me the maxim, "Follow whoever you marry" (*jiajisuiji*, *jiagousuigou* 嫁雞隨雞嫁狗隨狗). In addition, my in-laws are really nice to me. Examining my marriage from a different perspective (*zhuan ge niantou* 轉個念頭), I started to appreciate them and to accept this place (PTCO37 interview).

Learning to tolerate permanent discrimination

There were Taiwanese people who sincerely cared for TNIFs. Nonetheless, Taiwanese society in general was not very welcoming. Perhaps the most unpleasant experience is the permanent state of discrimination against TNIFs. Because they are from foreign countries, they can never be regarded as Taiwanese. And while they appreciated the sincerity of many Taiwanese people, they also recognised that there would always be an unbridgeable gap between the TNIFs and the Taiwanese, even if they were to become naturalised.

No matter how wonderful we (TNIFs) are, Taiwanese people will never recognise us as Taiwanese. Look at the job opportunities, the process of naturalisation, the negative gossip among the neighbours, and the label of *foreign spouse*. Since it is permanent, we (*waijipeiou* 外籍配偶) have to learn to tolerate these enduring prejudices. Well, we decided to become Taiwanese wives. This is our fate (CYCO13 interview).

Taiwanese people regard the Chinese living outside of China as neither Chinese nor Taiwanese. Indonesian Chinese share a similar culture and language with the Taiwanese people, yet they (Taiwanese people) exclude us (Chinese Indonesian) as soon as our mouths open and they hear the different accent. Why do they have to be so arrogant? Because they are rich and we are poor? Look at the TNIFs suffering from domestic violence. Their husbands are usually lazy and irresponsible. The mother-in-law in particular, tends to bully their daughter-in-law from Southeast Asia, to confine her in the cage of home and

work place, or by treating her differently. If we were Taiwanese, they wouldn't dare to treat us in that way (PHCO interview).

Critique of Taiwan

After having lived in Taiwan for a few years and after having associated with different people and organisations in the country, the participants came to perceive themselves differently than when they began their lives in Taiwan. Most have come to realise that there are always both kind and unkind people. They stipulated what is most crucial is that you "know who you are" and you "work hard for your dream". It is this mentality that allows them to collaborate with Taiwanese people and to create a happy life in Taiwan.

Despite the prejudices of greater Taiwanese society, some TNIFs revealed their gratitude to their husbands and his family for their understanding. On the other hand, amongst those who did not live with caring family members, they suggested that without the friendships of volunteers and teachers, they would have returned to their motherland.

There are always good and bad citizens in a country. Since it is our choice to be here, we have to carefully choose who we would like to hang out with. I like to be myself. I have learned not to be affected by the outside world (out of her house) too much. I can't stop people from gossiping, but I can ignore them. Currently, my life focus is my daughter and my husband. I want them to be very healthy and happy. I want my girl to have a good education. I want her to be educated in Taiwan; the education here is better (than Cambodia). It's not my personality to attend public demonstrations. Hopefully, in the future, I will be able to run my own cosmetics company (CYCO10 interview).

The blessing of life in Taiwan

Both JYCO11 and CYCO10 revealed that they used to have miscommunication related problems. JYCO11 in particular complained that her husband always sat with her parents-in-law for tea, and that he chatted when she had to do the laundry or put the children to bed. When she was exhausted, her husband would finally come upstairs to inquire about how the

children were. She was tired of the routine but felt helpless. In addition, she also had perceived herself to be emotionally mistreated and had felt suffocated before she compared her experiences with other TNIFs, who were not allowed to participate in many activities. She felt blessed that her husband and parents-in-law allowed her to go to literacy classes and to other activities. After having met other TNIFs, she realised how lucky she was. Her husband not only drove her to activities, but he also worked as a volunteer in her office.

Frankly, I don't see any hope for my homeland; even 30 years from now it will be same. I don't think it'll change. Look at the government and the societal tensions. In 1998, there was a sudden riot. Innocent people were killed and some women were raped. I was scared to death. Compared to that, Taiwan is a heaven. I have met good people who helped me. I like learning, including cooking, Mandarin, fashion shows, etc. I enjoy doing everything that could be beneficial to myself or to my family. I am also happy to work as a volunteer. As for language and culture, I didn't know if I should present my Indonesian culture or language because I wasn't proud of it. But after having participated in different activities that sought express the cultures and languages of TNIFs, I now enjoy doing Indonesian fashion shows, teaching other people about Indonesia, and preparing my native foods for Taiwanese friends. I appreciate indeed all the people who have been helping and encouraging me. I want to live in Taiwan and I want to work here (CYCO10 interview).

Those who have children at the K-12 level appreciated the Taiwanese education. The facilities and the teaching methods were much better than those in their homeland. In general, the teachers tried hard to help their children, and they did so without bias towards them.

Taiwan is good. My children's school teachers' are sincere and responsible. In addition to teaching my children the usual subjects, they also teach Mandarin. When I was young, there was a war and my family had to migrate from Cambodia and Vietnam. Therefore, I didn't have much schooling. Being literate is a blessing. I always encourage my children to study

hard. The facilities here are much better than in Cambodia. Life here is easier. I am satisfied (TNOC4 interview).

CONCLUSION

Whether persuaded by others, or whether they had initiated the process themselves, this ethnographic research found that TNIFs came to Taiwan for better lives. Their motives are no different from those that move the Taiwanese or any other individual in the world (Boonmathya 2006). Some confessed to having been attracted by the economic developments in Taiwan. Some hoped to earn money to support their original family as well as take good care of their Taiwanese family. Some Indonesian Chinese married Taiwanese men to avoid Chinese Exclusion in Indonesia. Nonetheless, regardless of their reasons for coming to Taiwan, TNIFs faced discrimination.

All TNIFs expressed the injustice of being oppressed, simply because they come from a country that is economically less developed. TNIF experiences reveal an ethnocentrism associated with Taiwanese society: one marked by a general ignorance of TNIFs in it. It is this context that forces TNIFs to learn how to sustain themselves. A second category of TNIFs suffered from a type of name calling marked by a use of such terms as, *foreign spouses* and *money stealers*. A third category of subjects in this study recognised that there were both caring and ignorant people, and in recognising this, they have emerged from their Taiwan experiences, empowered. These individuals have enjoyed their life in Taiwan. Being able to marry a Taiwanese man and living in Taiwan has been a blessing. This category of TNIF regards Taiwan as another *home*.

The results reported here are preliminary. Moreover, they are focused on TNIFs that come originally from urban areas. Many of these women express regret for having married a Taiwanese man. This outcome may yet reflect a situation in which their original home town was more developed and urbanised than their husband's. A more comprehensive understanding of TNIF self-perceptions demands that we examine TNIFs across a range of different backgrounds.

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Appendix 1

Table 1: Profiles of participants from urban areas of SE Asia

| Code | Age | YM | ED | OP | Introducer | Child | HL | LL |
|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------------|------------|-------|-----|-------|
| TNCO1 | 31–35 | 11 | MS | housewife | friend | 2 | PRC | N |
| TNCO2 | 41–45 | 10 | HS | housewife | agent | 2 | KH | Y |
| TNCO3 | 31–35 | 11 | MS | farmer | agent | 2 | ID | Y |
| TNCO4 | 41–45 | 12 | ES | worker | agent | 2 | KH | N |
| TNCO5 | 26–30 | 9 | UV: IC | cook | agent | 2 | VN | Y |
| TNCO6 | 36–40 | 14 | ES | worker | agent | 2 | KH | N |
| TNCO7 | 41–45 | 10 | JS | housewife | sister | 3 | VN | N |
| CYCO8 | 31–35 | 14 | JS | interpreter | agent | 2 | VN | Y |
| CYCO9 | 31–35 | 10 | MS | interpreter | agent | 1 | VN | DV |
| CYCO10 | 31–35 | 10 | JS | worker | friend | 1 | KH | DV |
| CYCO11 | 26–30 | 10 | MS | interpreter | agent | 3 | ID | N |
| CYCO12 | 36–40 | 5 | UV | accountant | free love | 1 | VN | N |
| CYCO13 | 26–30 | 6 | MS | housewife | free love | 1 | ID | N |
| CYCO14 | 26–30 | 6 | ES: IC | worker | agent | 1 | VN | Y |
| CYCO15 | 36–40 | 12 | UV: IC | housewife | agent | 2 | VN | Y |
| CYCO16 | 26–40 | 9 | HS: IC | worker | agent | 2 | VN | Y |
| CYCO17 | 21–25 | 3 | ES | housewife | agent | 1 | VN | Y |
| CYCY18 | 41–45 | 14 | UV: IC | interpreter | friend | 2 | ID | Y |
| CYCY19 | 31–35 | 4 | UV | housewife | agent | 1 | CHI | N |
| YLCO20 | 41–45 | 5 | HS | housewife | agent | 0 | VN | N |
| NTCO21 | 36–40 | 16 | MS | worker | agent | 2 | ID | N |
| TCCO22 | 36–40 | 14 | MS | worker | free love | 2 | TH | N |
| TYCO23 | 26–30 | 11 | ES | housewife | agent | 1 | KH | N |
| TPCO24 | 26–30 | 10 | MS | housewife | friend | 2 | ID | Y |
| TPCO25 | 31–35 | 15 | HS | worker | friend | 2 | VN | N |
| KLCY26 | 26–30 | 9 | HS | worker | friend | 2 | ID | Y |
| KLCY27 | 26–30 | 5 | HS | worker | friend | 2 | ID | Y |
| KLCY28 | 31–35 | 8 | MS | housewife | friend | 1 | ID | N |
| KLCY29 | 36–30 | 4 | HS | housewife | free love | 0 | ID | Y |
| | | months | | | | | | |
| KLCY30 | 31–35 | 12 | NS | volunteer | agent | 2 | ID | Y |
| KLCY31 | 36–40 | 6 | MS | housewife | agent | 2 | VN | Y |
| KLCY32 | 36–40 | 6 | HS | worker | agent | 0 | VN | widow |
| ILCO33 | 31–35 | 8 | NS | volunteer | agent | 2 | VN | DV |
| TTCO34 | 36–40 | 9 | HS | housewife | friend | 2 | VN | Y |
| TTCO35 | 36–40 | 14 | MS | housewife | agent | 1 | CHI | widow |

(continued)

Appendix 1 (continued)

| Code | Age | YM | ED | OP | Introducer | Child | HL | LL |
|--------|-------|----|--------|-----------|------------|-------|-----|----|
| PTCO36 | 36–40 | 13 | MS | housewife | agent | 1 | CHI | N |
| KHCO37 | 31–35 | 13 | UV: IC | worker | friend | 2 | VN | Y |
| KHCO38 | 31–35 | 14 | MS | worker | agent | 1 | ID | DV |
| KHCO39 | 26–30 | 13 | MS | worker | agent | 2 | ID | DV |
| KHCO40 | 31–35 | 14 | MS | worker | agent | 2 | ID | N |
| PHCO41 | 26–30 | 10 | HS | volunteer | agent | 3 | ID | Y |

Note:

1. In the category of code: TNCO = Tainan County; CYCY = Ciayi City; CYCO = Chiayi County; YLCO = Yulin County; NTCO = Nantou County; TCCO = Taichung County; TYCO = Taoyuan County; TPCO = Taipei County; KLCY = Keelung City; ILCO = Ilan County; TTCO = Taitung County; PTCO = Pingtung County; KHCY = Kaohsiung City; PHCO = Penghu County
2. YM = years of marriage; ED = education; OP = occupation; HL = homeland; LL = live with parents-in-law.
3. In the category of education (ED): NS = no schooling; ES = elementary school; MS = middle school; SH = senior high school; UV = university; IC = incomplete.
4. In the category of introducer: "Friend" = corresponding through letters or phone calls after being introduced by friends, either in Taiwan or in the TNIF's homeland, "free love" = either the TNIF or the Taiwanese husband initiated the relationship.
5. In the category of homeland (HL): KH = Cambodia; ID = Indonesia; PRC = Peoples' Republic of China; TH = Thailand; VN = Vietnam.
6. In the category of "live with parents-in-law": Y = yes; N = no; DV = divorced.