AJWS Vol. 10 No. 4, 2004. pp. 31-57

Middle-class Taiwanese Immigrant Women Adapt to Life in Australasia: Case Studies from Transnational Households

---

Lan-hung Nora CHIANG

Abstract

Most women have joined the stream of immigrants from Taiwan to Australasia as associational movers and supporters rather than as autonomous migrants, as part of the Business and Skills Migration Programs. Previous research on Taiwanese immigrants to Australasia has not included a gender-sensitive dimension and this study seeks to understand the immigrant experience and types of problems faced by women in particular. The term "*tan chi ma ma*" was coined for lone mothers who stay in Australasia with their children during their education, while the men moved back to Taiwan or to other countries to make a living. In spite of their middle-class background and work experiences, the former were excluded from the labor market, and often became full-time homemakers. In this preliminary investigation, four case studies from Australia and New Zealand are presented to illustrate the types of adaptations made by women as "*tan chi ma ma*." In spite of struggling to balance the needs of husbands and children and suffering a number of disadvantages in their new environment, they frequently enjoyed an autonomy and freedom from

AJWS ISSN 1225-9276-44 Ⓒ 2004
Asian Center for Women's Studies; Ewha Womans University Press
http://acws.ewha.ac.kr

responsibilities they had to fulfill toward their extended families in Taiwan, under the control of their in-laws. Apart from the mutual support and bonds amongst other migrant women, these women benefited considerably from Taiwanese associations of various kinds, which provided practical care upon arrival, friendship, and Chinese educational resources for their children. They were also able to contribute as volunteers in the host society and gain in terms of personal growth and self-esteem, despite facing several difficulties in adapting to the new environment. In this paper, the voices of Taiwanese women are represented through a qualitative study to gain an empathetic understanding of their situation.

Keywords

Women's roles; astronaut households; adaptations; Australasia; Taiwanese migrants

> There is a taken-for-granted view that women are the appendages of either protective males or the patriarchal state.
> (Fincher, Foster, Giles, and Preston, 1994a: 150).

> Most migration scholars have treated women as dependents rather than autonomous actors, and as a result, women have been largely invisible in studies of international migration.
> (Kelson and DeLaet, 1999: 3)

Introduction

According to the U.N. Population Division's estimates, the share of female migrants among all international migrants has been rising steadily from 47 percent in 1960 to 49 percent in 2000. It has been pointed out that a majority of migrants to many developed countries in recent decades have been women (United Nations, 1994). However, until the late 1970s, most writings on international migration either focused explicitly on male migrants or seemed to assume implicitly that most migrants were male (Zlotnik, 2003). There has been considerable research on "foreign brides" (Wang, 2001; Hsia, 2000; Chiou, 2003) and foreign women in the labor force, or domestic service workers (Lin, 2000; Barber, 2000), as their problems tend to attract attention from the media, policy makers, or NGOs. However, associational movers from middle-class families such as women and children, or older parents are seldom discussed as their needs and problems are not regarded as significant to the sending or receiving communities.

The invisibility of women in research on international migration is a theme that has emerged frequently in recent migration studies (Willis and Yeoh, 2000). It has been pointed out that this "gender-blind" aspect of migration studies may be related to the unconscious sexism of research on international migration, which assumes that gender blindness guarantees gender neutrality. Since migration studies by population and migration geographers have adopted feminist perspectives and methodologies only quite recently, their contributions to feminist studies in social science are limited.[1]

Gender and Immigration in Australasia

There is a growing literature addressing the question of whether migration leads to loss or gain in the status of women as a result of changes in the distribution of power within the family (Simon and Brettell, 1986). The answer to this question in the Australian context is summarized by the work of Madden and Young:

> Separation from the traditional culture, the introduction to a new culture and the pressures resulting from the immigration process itself all contributed to changes within the family. Most apparent were the changes in gender roles, in part resulting from women entering the work force and increased domestic responsibilities, leading to pressure

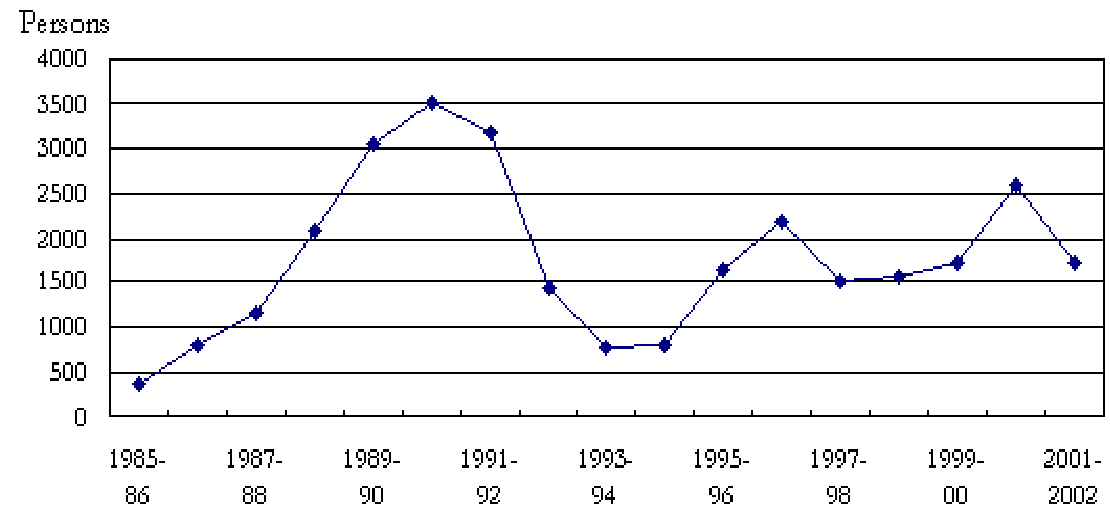
> to change how men and women carry out family life. Despite the fact that women often suffered disadvantages, there is evidence that many of them used the opportunity of immigrating to their advantages (1993: xxiv).

As noted by Fincher et al. (1994a: 149), "A major gender inequity in immigration policy is its under-rating of the significance of women's and thus immigrant women's work." Another study by Fincher et al. (1994b) concludes that "masculinist definitions of skill continue to direct certain immigration selection judgments and that this poses difficulties for women applicants."

In view of the growth of new Asian immigrants in Australia and the lack of research on Taiwanese women among recent arrivals in Australia, this paper discusses the settlement experience of recent Taiwanese female migrants. Using several case studies, I hope to reconstruct and illuminate the experience of migrant women, who have been hidden as the dependents of male migrants.

There is a growing literature on international migration in Taiwan, mainly on women who move in order to work or to marry men in Taiwan. However, Taiwanese women moving in an outward direction, i.e., overseas to foreign countries, are rarely studied. In recent years, there have been more females than males migrating from Taiwan to Australasia.[2] A similar phenomenon has already been observed in Hong Kong, where females in the middle age groups and males in the younger groups have moved to Australia and Auckland (Kee and Skeldon, 1994; Ho and Farmer, 1994). This is also true of Hong Kong-born individuals over 25 years in Vancouver and Toronto (Skeldon, 1997: 227) and is the result of the return of at least one adult after settlement, usually the husband and breadwinner, who commutes regularly across the Pacific and leaves the wife and children behind in Australasia and North America (ibid.: 299). Such patterns explain the formation of transnational families, commonly found among migrants from middle class families.

Figure 1. Settler Arrivals of Taiwan-born in Australia, 1985 - 2002



* Source: DIMA (2002)

Research Findings on Taiwanese Immigrants in Australia

Taiwanese emigration has reached considerable levels in the last ten years, with 20,000 to 25,000 annually heading for major destinations such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Entering Australia under the business migration category, Taiwanese migration peaked in 1990-1 and 1995-6 (Chiang, 2001), and most recently in 2000 (Figure 1).

Using the Australian Census of 1981-1996, we wrote on the employment structure of Taiwan-born people in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, the top destinations of Taiwanese immigrants in Australia (Chiang and Kuo, 2000). Our findings suggest that the unemployment rate among Taiwanese immigrants is among the highest of all immigrant groups. Taiwanese men tended to be more successful economically than Taiwanese women in terms of income levels, occupational status, and labor force participation. Most Taiwan-born male immigrants were engaged in wholesale, retail, hotel, and restaurant businesses, followed by financial, property, and business services, while most females tended to work in educational and community services. In addition, most male Taiwan-born immigrants tended to occupy managerial, executive, and professional positions, while most females were found in clerical, sales, and service positions. Most Taiwanese immigrants in Australia experienced downward social mobility due to factors such as unaccredited overseas qualifications, the lack of proficiency in English and local knowledge, and other institutional discriminatory factors. In spite of their middle-class backgrounds, high educational levels and high entrepreneurial skills, they have not been able to establish businesses or obtain employment because of their poor English and unwillingness to accept jobs that they perceived to be inferior to the ones they held previously (Hsu and Chiang, 2001: 12). A later study found that self-employment or employment in Taiwanese-owned firms is typical of the pattern of economic incorporation in Australian society (Chiang and Song, 2001). As underemployment and downward mobility is common with this recent group of migrants, they need to depend on other sources of income such as their savings and returning to work in Taiwan. Their mobility patterns have created *tai kung jen* or "astronauts,"[3] two household families, returning migrants, cross-cultural education experiences for the second generation of migrants, and new cultural identities, all of which need to be studied in depth within both the sending and receiving communities.

After carrying out micro-level studies based on fieldwork on the residential mobility of Taiwanese migrants, we found that the factors considered in their choice of location included income and housing budgets, children's education, proximity to work and shops, and friends' suggestions. Over time, the residential choices have changed, reflecting individual preferences and experiences, as well as changes in life cycles and fluctuating housing prices. Gradually, there appeared to be a declining preference for houses with swimming pools and gardens because of a lack of time that could be devoted to such activities and people relocated in different housing areas.

Apart from providing a broad picture of economic incorporation, studies have not differentiated between men and women in their reasons for migration, settlement experiences and adaptation (Ip, Wu, and Inglis, 1999; Wu, 2003). In studying the process of decision-making regarding residential choice, Hsu (2002) built a framework of residential mobility based on "needs" and "capital." Unfortunately, the decisions were studied at the household level and therefore ignored the needs of accompanying wives who had been left to manage when their husbands flew back to Taiwan to make a living.

In this paper, women are studied as subjects, particularly in situations where some men have returned, or become "astronauts," while the women and children remained in Australia to continue their lives as migrants. It is hard to say that migration has resulted in a "brain drain" for Taiwan, as many men have returned temporarily to make their living in Taiwan, and the young first generation of Australia-born Taiwanese males also return to find work.

Major Research Questions and Methodology

In Taiwan, in spite of a closing gap in educational achievement between the genders, and women's rising socio-economic participation, women generally still play traditional roles at home. To summarize the status of middle class women in Taiwan, gender stereotypes are still based on the traditional roles of women as emotional supporters of successful men and "normal" families. However, women still bear the double burden of laboring both inside and outside the home. Family responsibilities are fulfilled at the expense of pursuing self-interest in work, recreation, social participation and other personal life goals (Chiang, 2003). There is a persistent low employment rate for women, as childcare is insufficient and household help is difficult to obtain (unlike Hong Kong or Singapore). As a result, women who left work to take care of their young children do not re-enter the labor force easily.

As the middle-class dominates in the community of Taiwanese migrants, one can assume that women are expected to play "subordinate" roles in the migration destinations. Thus, they would be expected to experience marginal positions in Australian society as their supportive roles in the family are intensified, without the presence of the men whom they followed/joined as associational movers. Although in many cases, women became free from control by their in-laws, their exit from one kind of patriarchy may only mean entering a different and new one. As new household "heads" in Australia, they were saddled with responsibilities in both Taiwan and Australia. My research questions therefore were: 1) How do women fare when they become "lone mothers" in their new society and how do they cope with the ensuing difficulties in this situation? 2) What types of cultural capital (such as new networks) do they build up in order to adapt? 3) Under what circumstances are they disadvantaged or empowered? 4) Does migration enforce a traditional gendered role, or does international migration provide women an opportunity to liberate themselves from subordinate gender roles in their countries of origin?

In collecting data for previous research projects, I conducted in-depth interviews with 20 women migrants out of a sample of 103 informants in Australia and New Zealand in order to learn about their struggles and to gain greater insight into their experience.[4] By representing their voices, I hope to illuminate the lives of these women and to make their experience of economic and social incorporation into Australasian society visible. Finally, I hope to compare their settlement experiences with other Chinese by drawing on the limited existing literature (Man, 1995; Waters, 2002; Ip and Lever-Tracy, 1999).

Between July 1999 and February 2001, I conducted a qualitative study, based on in-depth interviews with individual Taiwanese migrants in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, Perth, and Auckland. This followed an appreciation of statistics from the Australian Census that provided a background to the questions raised (Chiang and Kuo, 2000). As Skeldon pointed out, "the macro census data are only circumstantial but at least they reveal a distinct pattern of ethnic Chinese migration . . ." (1997: 229) ". . . and the real impact of Chinese migration to North America and Australasia, however, must await sensitive micro-level field research in destination cities" (ibid.: 235).

The interviews were conducted on varied occasions: after church gatherings or volunteer meetings, after Chinese martial art training classes, at morning tea or social gatherings in the evening, at the workplace or during parents' meetings at local Chinese schools. I conducted over one hundred interviews with 41 women and 62 men from such migrant households, using unstructured and open-ended questions. The focus of the interviews was the different employment experiences and residential mobility of the immigrants. A snowball sampling technique was employed, as it was difficult to establish a sampling frame. The selection of Taiwanese informants, however, took into consideration their place of residence, gender, occupation, and immigration status.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, techniques of participant observation were used. Being a woman, it was easier for me to access female migrants living with children. I visited the homes of several "astronaut" families, i.e., those headed by women whose husbands flew back and forth to Taiwan to work after initially settling in the new countries. I was invited to dinner with these "lone wives" and offered a place to stay if I visited them again by myself. I took advantage of these occasions to listen to these women who were eager to tell me their stories. Four case studies illustrate the variety of female settlement experiences in Australasia and may provide deeper insights and research questions for a larger project in the future.

Preliminary Findings of "*tan chi ma ma*" in Transnational Households in Australasia

The terms, "lone mother," "lone wife," and "astronaut wife," have been used interchangeably by Waters (2002) to denote Chinese migrant women whose husbands return to Taiwan, leaving their wives and families to stay on in the new countries. They usually do this after a period of a few months to two years following immigration with the whole family and after obtaining permanent residency or citizenship. I prefer to use the term "*tan chi ma ma*" in Mandarin Chinese since the word "*tan chi*" means "living alone," and the word "*chi*" has the same sound as "wife" in Mandarin. I will use the four case studies to illustrate the diversity of single-female headed households living in Australia.

An Insider's Story in Auckland

Mrs. Li (a pseudonym), whose sister is a colleague of mine at the university, had already been settled in Auckland with her two teenage children for four years. The first week of settling down was a hard one for them:

> In the first few weeks, we all stayed together in an empty room in this big house, waiting for the furniture to arrive.

I met Mrs. Li three times, twice in her beautiful house and once in a restaurant. She was more than willing to talk about her life in Auckland and wanted me to stay as long as I could in the evening while she cooked a big meal for dinner. At one point, she was in tears, telling me that she felt like a "single parent":

> Quite often, I faced the difficulty of being a single parent here. When the children (particularly my son) misbehaved, I called my husband in Taiwan to discuss this matter with him.
>
> Actually, by western standards, my children are fine. Jim is in high school and Fanny is finishing her study in the university. I would like her to move on to graduate school in Sydney, but she does not want to leave me behind in Auckland; she is a very understanding daughter. My son is a bit unstable; sometimes, he refuses to help in housework, and even to brush his teeth.

Before Mr. and Mrs. Li migrated, they owned an import-export business in Taiwan. Upon his arrival in New Zealand four years ago, Mr. Li looked hard for work. They tried different businesses, but failed. That was why Mr. Lin went back to the business they had built together in Taiwan. Mrs. Li still plays a vital role in his business in Taiwan, by giving advice on the phone.

"Auckland is not the place to do the kind of business we want," Mrs. Li said. They had tried to do so for three years and it was Mr. Li who made the major decision to move to Auckland for the sake of the children's education and to find a place with fresh air because of their son's asthma. A significant part of her life in Taiwan had been spent playing a subordinate role in the extended family she married into and living on a different floor in the same apartment with her parents-in-law. When she first got married, she did all the cooking and cleaning, and waited on the large extended family members, while her younger sisters-in-law looked on. She was very hurt when her parents-in-law criticized her for not doing things the way they expected. She finally found a way to relieve herself of household responsibilities by hiring a maid, while she participated fully in her husband's business as the *lao-pan-niang* (wife of the boss). She became much happier after that, although her education in horticulture at a major university in Taiwan was not useful to their business. By coming to New Zealand, she became liberated from the demands of her parents-in-law. Although her mother in-law later did many things to please her, she still felt as if she was treated as an "outsider" in spite of all her efforts. This was typical of relationships between daughters-in-law and the families that women marry into in Taiwan.

In spite of frequent communication with her husband and her natal family in Taiwan, Mrs. Li missed Taiwan very much. Whenever she visited her mother and sister in Taiwan, the experience was one that she treasured each day and felt that her time with them was too short. Mr. Li only visited New Zealand about three times a year. An intelligent woman, Mrs. Li gradually managed to overcome her difficulties in New Zealand. She now drove well, had made quite a number of friends and pursued her hobby of gardening in the extraordinary natural environment of Auckland.

This case study from New Zealand helps explain the types of problems commonly faced by "*tan chi ma ma*." Many Taiwanese people moved to New Zealand because it was much easier than immigrating to Australia. Their first move there was a stepping-stone in order to subsequently go on to Australia, which offered better economic opportunities. New Zealand in fact tops the rest of world in the number of migrants who move to Australia each year.

A Promoter of Chinese Education in Perth

Perth was a city I had not included in my earlier studies, but I visited the city to conduct a questionnaire survey for the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (OCAC) in July 2003. Over a week I met with a family headed by Mrs. Du, with whom I spent several hours each day, listening to her stories. Living in a thirty-year-old house, Mrs. Du came to Australia seventeen years ago with the first wave of Taiwanese migrants. As she put it:

> The Taiwanese came to Australia like a swarm of bees (*i woh fung*), mostly for the education of their children.

Compared to her relatives and many other immigrants in Perth, Mrs. Du was already an "old-timer" (*lao chiao*). Her English was fluent and she could handle day-to-day matters independently and spoke with an Australian (Perth) accent. She has an extended network of friends, including both Taiwanese and other nationals. With her help, I was able to collect 35 completed questionnaires from the Taiwanese community for the OCAC within a week. She was a good contact person among the Taiwanese living to the north of the Swan River and knew all the Taiwanese associations, despite her disenchantment with ethnic politics and a few individuals.[5] She was one of the mothers who stayed with her kids while her husband flew back for his business, based in the Philippines and Taiwan. Her oldest son had finished his university education in Australia and had returned to work in Taiwan, while the second and third sons were still living with her. Her husband came to visit the family three times a year and stayed in Perth for three weeks every time. Mrs. Du remarked:

> I have noticed the changes in my husband over the years . . . he is not as "chauvinistic" as he used to be . . . . Every time he is home, he never goes anywhere. Apart from attending dinners given by friends, he would only go fishing.

While living apart, they spoke on the telephone twice a week. While I did not hear the conversations, I did feel that her husband was trying to control her even though he was not in Australia, by ensuring that she was doing her duties well at home in Perth. He would also have liked her to stay home more often, instead of being so active in the Chinese language schools.

She pretended to be "weak" when her husband returned home and let him make decisions as well as do the yard work. According to Mrs. Du, some wives staying in Perth complained to their husbands the first day they returned home. This is because the women were used to living by themselves for so long. Some even said that their husbands actually stayed much longer than expected and they could not wait for them to return to Taiwan, because they were so used to their independence.

During the week she introduced me to her best friends at a birthday party for an "astronaut husband" who flew in from Kaohsiung. The company of ten was exclusively Hokkien Taiwanese with the exception of one couple who spoke Hokkien but originally were from Fiji and Singapore. Apart from the common Hokkien dialect spoken, all of them liked to tell jokes and sing Karaoke, a popular pastime among the Taiwanese. I later met her two brothers-in-law and their wives who got together every day in their internet café in the city. This was the usual gathering place for young people and their parents in Perth. The place provided Chinese novels for reading, Taiwanese bubble tea and snacks, computer games, DVD movies, and was frequented mostly by young immigrants of the same kind. Its location at the edge of Chinatown and near the railway station helped to attract customers. It was not surprising that immigrants hung around such premises that served as information centers, a place to kill time and a happy change from the "boring" lifestyle of Perth, especially in the evenings.

Formerly a head nurse and the oldest daughter in the family, Mrs. Du was assertive and even domineering like many first-borns in Taiwan. She disliked gossip, but knew everything that was happening in the Taiwanese community. She was extremely busy, and filled up her time with daily routine and errands, unlike some other Taiwanese who had adopted the relaxed lifestyle of Australians. She headed the Chinese school under Buddhist Light Temple and organized Chinese classes for students over the weekends. Her busiest time of the year was July when teachers from Taiwan came to give special demonstrations on teaching Chinese. During one class, she stood in front to make sure that everyone had paid attention to the Mandarin "power teachers." I cannot call her a full-time homemaker in the real sense of the word, because of her devotion to community work. Unlike most Taiwanese housewives or migrants who spent their time gardening, golfing, fishing, and visiting one another, she had devoted her energy in the "right places," such as learning English, helping new arrivals, and organizing Chinese cultural activities. I would not regard her as a "lone wife" or "lone mother" either, as she spent more time outside her home than a lot of mothers. She did not adhere to a religious faith as many Taiwanese do, but had developed very good relationships with other Taiwanese.

In my view, she was a good mother, wife and daughter-in-law. But her parent-in-laws in Taiwan still gave their unsolicited advice, asking her not to devote too much of her time to the Chinese school that she headed. In spite of past domination by her in-laws, she had forgiven them and had become a "model" daughter-in-law in her husband's family. As she put it:

> I do not expect my daughter-in-law to behave the way I do with my mother-in-law, and I act as mediator between my own daughter-in-law and my 85 year old mother-in-law who now lives close to the young couple in Taipei. I let my husband know gradually that I do try to comply with his parents' wishes so that he is not caught in the middle.

However, still remembering the days of her own oppression, she said that she would never marry again in a future life.

The Tzu-chi Mothers

In all the four Australian cities I visited, I was assisted in my fieldwork by the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-chi Foundation (*Tzu-chi*), which is one of the biggest Buddhist associations that originated in Taiwan. Apart from religious activities, I found that they were engaged in philanthropic work, visiting old people's homes and the handicapped, delivering hot meals to the aged, and so on. In many ways, they built bridges between the Taiwanese and other Australian communities. They help immigrants when they first arrived and provided help to those in need later on as well. I had the chance to talk to several "*tan chi ma ma*" who were volunteers of *Tzu-chi.*

As a mother of two children, Ms. Su, a *Tzu-chi* member in Brisbane was introduced to us by another member from Melbourne.

Her husband could not find work in Australia and had gone back to work in his gas station business in Taiwan, while supporting their three children who stayed on in Brisbane. Formerly, a part-time worker in Taiwan, Ms. Su had been a *Tzu-chi* member from way back in Taiwan. While managing two households at the same time, Ms. Su also made sure that her children went back to Taiwan to learn Chinese every summer.

Mrs. Yang, whom I met on a flight from Brisbane to Taipei became my main contact in Brisbane, since a lot of Taiwanese come to buy fruit from her persimmon farm. Originally from Kaohsiung, she had been a resident in Brisbane for twelve years. She and her husband came for the education of their only son, while applying for immigration from the same agent as several friends. She used to fly back four times a year to Taiwan to take care of their business, while her husband remained with their son in Brisbane and worked on their persimmon fruit farm. As she got very tired of flying back and forth, she chose to settle in Brisbane to spend more time with her son who is now twenty years old. He was in the second year of a TAFE course in computer science. She said: "*Tzu-chi* Foundation helped me to be at peace with myself and my family. Even though my son failed in school (a private university) in Australia. I feel that I have done my best, and I do not blame anyone, nor care about what other Taiwanese say."

Mrs. Yang was once a *Tzu-chi* volunteer in Kaohsiung before she migrated. In Brisbane, she found volunteer work that was spiritually fulfilling. Even though she had lived in the same Australian suburb for twelve years, she hardly spoke English. She only shopped in the Asian market, read and watched Taiwanese newspapers and TV, and spoke Hokkien and Mandarin. She never watched Australian television channels nor did she have Australian friends over to her farm, but did not have any problems in getting around in Brisbane. Whether or not her son will go back in Taiwan for work was a minor issue for her, but she was quite sure that her son would not marry a white Australian woman. For the moment, she was quite happy to be a mother in Australia and live in two cultures at the same time.

In doing fieldwork in Melbourne, I realized how desperate one could be while living in a suburb of Melbourne without private transportation or a cell phone. Mrs. Wang caught my eye as the only woman on the executive board of the Taiwan Business Association of Melbourne. She was also a devout *Tzu-chi* member since her days in Taiwan and devoted most of her time to the Foundation since she migrated. She came to Australia with her husband and children in 1991 for safety reasons, since many of her wealthy friends were threatened in Taiwan. They decided to settle in Melbourne despite the bad weather as they placed high priority on education for their children in Melbourne. They chose to live in the neighborhood of a private primary school, near a station on the railway line. Her husband who initiated the idea of migration thought that Australia was much safer than the United States. Before immigration, she worked as secretary to the Director of the Water Resources Bureau of the provincial government. Although they were well-qualified as business migrants when they applied for immigration, her husband could not find work in Australia after looking for a while. After two years, her husband decided to go back to Taiwan to continue his business there. He used to fly once every two weeks to Melbourne to visit the family, while she became a "*tan chi ma ma*." Unfortunately, her husband died in a car accident in Taiwan, leaving her and her two sons in Melbourne. While finding solace from the *Tzu-chi* Foundation through her volunteer work, she also got involved in two other organizations. She realized that it was not easy to find work because of her poor English.

Perhaps many other immigrants who could not find employment found consolation in volunteer work in religious associations. This was certainly true of many female migrants whose husbands had left for Taiwan. Most of the members of religious associations were women, but none of these organizations were headed by women. Membership in religious associations provided not only an instant bonding for the newcomers but also practical help such as information on schools and houses when they first arrived and car rides for those who did not drive.

In Brisbane, the location of the *Tzu-chi* Foundation next to an Asian grocery store helped attract new members and people who needed assistance. The Sydney office is near the Eastwood station, while their Melbourne office is located in Box Hill. A large number of Taiwanese migrants engaged themselves in voluntary activities and so they found opportunities not only for meeting other Taiwanese persons or friends from the same circle, but also for acquainting themselves with their host society.

The Real Single Mother

To this day, I still remember how pale and yet determined Mrs. Sun looked while keeping a big house and fighting a law suit against her ex-husband to retrieve her property in Taiwan. She was probably an exception amongst the Taiwanese migrants as a divorced women who accepted support from welfare temporarily from the Australian government. Before she immigrated with her former second husband to Australia in 1993, she was a young reporter whom I first met in Taiwan many years ago. As the wife of a wealthy entrepreneur of small and middle businesses at one time, she recalled:

> Many of our friends who made it in our medium and small businesses (*chung hsiao chi yeh*) were threatened by burglars and kidnappers . . . and they decided to leave Taiwan.

Her big house in Linfield, a wealthy suburb of Sydney, was not near any other Taiwanese home. She once had two maids and a chauffeur, but now took care of the house all by herself, her immediate task was to make her hedge look good for the neighbors in the community and to comply with the rules of the City Council. Being quite well known and popular among her Taiwanese girlfriends, she once entertained many friends in her big house. She was not formally employed, but her name card showed that she was helping a friend in a law firm, while working as an overseas reporter for her former newspaper firm in Taiwan. She was not embarrassed among the Taiwanese about receiving welfare from the Australian government temporarily as she was helpful to new immigrants in so many ways. While taking good care of her children, she was determined to fight for the property that she thought her husband owed her in Taiwan. Part of her financial support came from her first former husband who paid the school fees of her children from both marriages. She felt safer in Australia than in Taiwan after she had successfully obtained custody of her second child under Australian law, which is more favorable to single mothers. When I was interviewing her, she did not seem to mind the hardship and looked at her eight year old daughter with contentment. I therefore could not tell if she was stranded financially, or frustrated at all about her present state of affairs.

She used to fly back to Taiwan once a month. As she put it, "it is like living in Taiwan, but coming to Australia for a holiday break." Australia then seemed to be her safe haven and she did not seem to be worried about what to do or where to live in the future, since she had her two children with her and she was determined to win her law suit. She was aware of the "freedom" she had in upholding her ideals while staying in Australia, although her friends in Taiwan thought quite differently about her ordeal. She had converted to Christianity over the years and found strength from her religious faith. In spite of her busy life, she was one of my best informants and volunteered to help me find another real "*tan chi ma ma*," another divorced woman, down the road.

Conclusion

The four case studies discussed above reveal a diversity of personal experiences of independent Taiwanese immigrant mothers. As a consequence, in the absence of the "astronaut" husbands who used to head their households, the women had become autonomous actors in the host society. Over the years and during my research, I have found that the male and female migrants I have interviewed changed their work and/or places of stay and were actively engaged in various social activities. They had undertaken activities that were quite different from traditional Taiwanese activities like singing and folk dancing. These women had thus re-invented the Australian custom of drinking tea in the morning, using the occasion to build bonds and to forge a sisterhood among newcomers. Their everyday experience and the pain of separation from the family became secondary as they found new networks and niches. They provided help to new arrivals in settling down in Australia and New Zealand. In substance, they were not as "localized and immobile" as the women in the transnational families described by Ong (1999). Although some of the Taiwanese chose to live close to one another and linked themselves with a large variety of associations, they were not as isolated and helpless as the Hong Kong women living in Vancouver, as reported by Man (1995). Common to these few cases of Chinese women in "astronaut families" was the low sex ratio of migration, and the increasing number of "*tan chi ma ma*" as their husbands returned to work in their homelands.

Gender-blindness concerning migrants and migration and the apparent 'invisibility' of women in studies of internal and international migration have only recently become topics of interest in their own right. By studying the subjectivities of female migrants, we may fill this gap left by traditional theory of migration and policy studies. So far, the research on Taiwanese female migrant women was fragmented and circumstantial. Ip and Lever-Tracy (1999: 76-7) wrote:

> There is emerging a new element of women entrepreneurs in some Asian communities because of the changing attributes of recent immigrants from these countries and the changing position of women within these communities . . . . With more work experiences and self-confidence, professional migrant women are tending to seek more personal independence, challenge, achievement and fulfillment by becoming their own bosses. Rather than undifferentiated experiences of exploitation and oppression for migrant women, running their own businesses can become a liberating experience.

My previous qualitative research (Chiang and Song, 2001) shows that only a handful of Taiwanese women are equally lucky in their business experiences. Man, on the other hand, depicted the Chinese immigrant women who had recently migrated from Hong Kong in the following manner:

> Many of these highly educated, urbanized women do not necessarily enjoy a "liberating" or "less oppressive" experience when they settle in Canada. Rather, they experienced an escalation of traditional roles, unequal distribution of household labor, gender and sexual oppression both at work and in the home. While some may experience improved family relations, others suffer communication problems and marriage breakdown. For many women, their power and status inside and outside the home actually deteriorated when they migrated to Canada. Moreover, those who had professional careers in their home country experienced a loss of economic power through unemployment or underemployment (although some of their husbands also experienced such loss). They also experienced diminished buying power, and a general lack of opportunity (1995: 320).

As Taiwanese women have never enjoyed a similar professional and family status to women in Hong Kong, it would be hard to assume that their experiences are similar to those of Hong Kong women in Canada. A study on Chinese women in New York City by Zhou (2000) analyses diverse circumstances from different stories of working class and middle-class women, revealing the influence of deep-seated Chinese patriarchy on women's roles.

The tentative findings of this study call for a re-examination of international migration theory by incorporating women's experience. In the era of globalization, transnational households are inevitably a new social phenomenon, commonly found in major destinations of migration. Better immigration policy should be built on gender-sensitive research. In view of the heavy traffic between Taiwan and Australasia, an increase in direct flights during the lunar new year or public holidays is urgently needed to encourage family reunion.

This paper attempts to fill in the gap in migration literature with a feminist perspective by looking at women's roles in astronaut families. Migration theories have assumed that women play passive roles and so are called associational migrants. However, there are now a higher proportion of women among migrants, simply because of the prevalence of astronaut families, which usually means the absence of men in the countries of destination. This is so in spite of a general subscription to traditional gender roles. There are several theoretical aspects regarding the contribution of this paper. It partially fills the gap by studying women and helps to address gender-bias in migration. Second, it draws attention to the notion that women's roles in the traditional family become more flexible when the middle-class family moves abroad. Third, there are sub-cultural differences between Chinese women from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Due to the paucity in studies on cultural diversities relating to women immigrants, a systematic comparison would be required in the future. It would also be interesting to research men's perspectives on their adaptive strategies in transnational households and would help to construct a more comprehensive picture of gender relations among the immigrant population.

In conclusion, middle-class Taiwanese immigrant women have varied experiences in Australia. These may not only be focused on securing new employment that corresponds with their qualifications, as over the years, they have cultivated a new Australian lifestyle with a Taiwanese outlook. As members of Taiwanese associations in Australia, they have forged new bonds with one another and volunteered help to others as they enter the emerging Australian society. In the process, they have become empowered through their wider social participation. A new pattern of localization in the host society has emerged as a result of the process of globalization that brought these women to Australasia.

Notes

1. Twenty five years ago, when I studied rural-urban migration, I

was the first to study female migrants in Taiwan (Chiang, 1984). I have since noticed that women move for several reasons, using different adaptive strategies and have varied impact on both the recipient and sending societies. To this day, "gender-blindness" is still common amongst geography teachers and researchers in Taiwan, in spite of the rapid growth of literature on feminist geography internationally.

2. The sex ratio was 81.1 in 1996, and 82.2 in 2001 (Female=100).

3. The term astronaut (*tai kung jen*) was first used to refer to immigrants from Hong Kong who kept their jobs and businesses in Hong Kong while sending their families off to stay in Australia and Canada. I also include women who traveled regularly between Hong Kong and Australia to maintain their jobs and ensure an income for their families, while their husbands stayed in Australia to manage their newly set up households in the host society (Tam, 2003: 182; Pe-pua et al., 1996: 51-2; Mak, 2001: 169). In the case of Taiwan, "astronauts" tended to be male breadwinners who frequently fly between Taiwan and the new country.

4. Among the 103 informants we interviewed in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne, 41 were female and 62 were male. Seventy-seven people were 40 years of age or older, and most arrived at Australia between 1989 and 1990 when they were between 30-40 yeas old. Forty-two had received tertiary education, while 20 and 30 had graduated from high schools and junior colleges. Fifty-seven entered Australia as business migrants, 25 as independent individuals, and 9 as family reunion migrants.

5. Without Mrs. Du, I would never be able to meet the thirty-five Taiwanese respondents in a week and finish my questionnaire survey, but it was with a sigh of relief that I left Perth, cared for and "controlled" by someone who acted like my mother, big sister, prefect and nurse in the week that I stayed at her home. However, since she was so kind and hospitable, it was hard to tell her that I value individual preference and personal freedom.

References

Barber, P. G. (2000), "Agency in Philippine Women's Labour Migration and

Provisional Diaspora," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 23(4): 399-411.

Chiang, N. H. (1984), "The Migration of Rural Women to Taipei," J. T. Fawcett, S. E. Khoo, and P. C. Smith (eds.), *Women in the Cities of Asia*, Boulder, Co.: Westview Press.

Chiang, N. (2001), "Taiwanese," J. Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People*, Melbourne, Australia: Cambridge University Press.

______ (2003), "The New Women of Taiwan: Participation and Emancipation," Occasional Paper No 1, Pingtung, Taiwan: National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Chiang, N. and L. Kuo (2000), "An examination of employment structure of Taiwanese immigrants in Australia," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 9(6): 459-481.

Chiang, N. and Y. L. Song (2001), "She hui chieh cheng hua hsia te hun yin yi min yu kuo nei lao dung shih chang: Yi yueh nan hsin niang wei li" ("Employment patterns of Taiwanese migrants in Australia"), *Journal of Geographical Science*, 29.

Chiou, S. W. (2003), *Hsing pieh yu yi tung* (*Gender and Migration*), Taipei: Shih Yin.

DIMA (Department of Immigration and Multi-cultural Affairs) (2002), "Immigration Update," http://www.immi.gov.au

Fincher, R., L. Foster, W. Giles, and V. Preston (1994a), "Gender and Migration policy," H. Adelman, A. Bovowski, M. Burstein, and L. Foster (eds.), *Immigration and Refugee Policy: Australia and Canada Compared*, Vol. 1. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Fincher, R., L. Foster, and R. Wilmot (1994b), *Gender Equity and Australian Immigration Policy*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Ho, E. S. and R. Farmer (1994), "The Hong Kong Chinese in Auckland," R. Skeldon (ed.), *Reluctant Exiles? Migration from Hong Kong and the New Overseas Chinese*, New York: M. E. Sharpe.

Hsia, H. C. (2000), "Tzu pen kuo chi hua yu kuo chi hun yin: tai wan te "wai chi hsin niang" hsien hsiang wei li" ("Transnational Marriage and

Internationalization of Capital─the Case of the 'Foreign Bride' Phenomenon in Taiwan"), *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*, 38: 45-92.

Hsu, J. C. (2002), "Ao chou tai wan yi min chu chu ti te hsuan che yu chueh che kuo cheng: yi hsueh li, pu li szu pen chi mo erh pen wei li" ("Residential Choice and Decision-Making Process of Taiwanese migrants in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne"), unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Chinese Culture University, Taipei.

Hsu, J. C. and N. Chiang (2001), "She hui chieh cheng hua hsia te hun yin yi min yu kuo nei lao dung shih chang: Yi yueh nan hsin niang wei li" ("Residential Choice and Mobility of Taiwanese migrants in Sydney and Brisbane"), *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of China*, 29: 39-71.

Ip, D. and C. Lever-Tracy (1999), "Asian Women in Business in Australia," G. A. Kelson and D. L. Delaet (eds.), *Gender and Immigration*, New York: New York University Press.

Ip, D., C. Wu, and C. Inglis (1999), "Settlement Experiences of the Taiwanese Immigrants in Australia," *Asian Studies Review*, 22(1): 19-97.

Kee, P. and R. Skeldon (1994), "The Migration and Settlement of Hong Kong Chinese in Australia," R. Skeldon (ed.), *Reluctant Exiles? Migration from Hong Kong and the New Overseas Chinese*, New York: M. E. Sharpe.

Kelson, G. A. and D. L. DeLaet (eds.) (1999), *Gender and Immigration*, New York: New York University Press.

Lin, C. J. (2000), "'Wai yung cheng che' yu nu jen chih chan: nu hsing chu yi che lueh tsai szu kao" ("The State Policy that Divides Women: Rethinking Feminist Critiques to 'the foreign maid policy'"), *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*, 93-151.

Madden, R. and S. Young (1993), *Women and Men Immigrating to Australia: The Characteristics and Immigration Decisions*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Mak, A. (2001), *Relocating Careers: Hong Kong Professionals and Managers in Australia*, Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, The University of Hong Kong.

Man, G. (1995), "The Experience of Women in Recent Middle-Class Chinese

Immigrant Women from Hong Kong: An Inquiry into Institutional and Organizational Processes," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 4(2-3): 303-326.

Ong, A. (1999), *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Pe-pua, R., C. Mitchell, R. Iredale, and S. Castles (1996), *Astronaut Families and Parachute Children: The Cycle of Migration between Hong Kong and Australia*, Canberra: Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research.

Simon, R. J. and C. B. Brettell (1986), *International Migration—the Female Experience*, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld Publishers.

Skeldon, R. (1997), "Migrants on a Global A Stage: The Chinese," P. J. Rimmer (ed.), *Pacific-Rim Development: Integration and Globalization in the Asia-Pacific Era*, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Tam, M. (2003), "Empowering Mobility: 'Astronaut' Women in Australia," E. W. Y. Lee (ed.), *Gender and Change in Hong Kong: Globalization, Postcolonialism and Chinese Patriarchy*, Vancouver: UBC Press.

United Nations (1994), *The Migration of Women: Methodological Issues in the Measurement and Analysis of Internal and International Migration*, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic: International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women.

Wang, H. Z. (2001), "She hui chieh cheng hua hsia te hun yin yi min yu kuo nei lao dung shih chang: Yi yueh nan hsin niang wei li" ("Social Stratification, Vietnamese Partners' Migration and Taiwan Labor Market"), *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*, 41: 99-127.

Waters, J. L. (2002), "Flexible families? 'Astronaut' Households and the Experiences of Lone Mothers in Vancouver, British Columbia," *Social & Cultural Geography*, 3(2): 118-134.

Willis, K. D. and B. S. A. Yeoh (2000), "Gender and Transnational Household Strategies: Singaporean Migration to China," *Regional Studies*, 34: 253-264.

Wu, C. T. (2003), "New Middle-class Chinese Settlers in Australia and the Spatial Transformation of Settlement in Sydney," L. J. C. Ma and C.

Cartier (eds.), *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Zhou, Y. (2000), "The Fall of 'the Other Half of the Sky?' Chinese Immigrant Women in the New York Area," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 23(4): 445-459.

Zlotnik, H. (2003), "Migration Information Source—The Global Dimensions of Female Migration," http://www.migrationinformation.org/issue_mar03.cfm