

## Teaching other People's Children: Helping foreign brides' children to meet academic and social challenges in Taiwan

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### ABSTRACT

An increase of foreign brides in Taiwan is a recent phenomenon. Foreign brides have produced 1 out of 8 new born children in Taiwan. This paper focuses on academic and social behaviors of elementary children from these inter-racial marriages in Taitung, Taiwan. Many of these children have experienced different cultures and child rearing practices from their foreign-born parents which may impacts their school performance. It is important for teachers to understand the best practices in working effectively with these students and their parents. Structured interviews were utilized to collect data from elementary teachers in Taitung, Taiwan to ascertain how teachers perceive these students' learning and social behaviors, as well as, how they interact with the children's foreign-born parent. Results from this study indicated that individual difference among the New Taiwanese and the stereotypes of these new immigrants need to be studied further.

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### Introduction

It is human nature to search for a better way of living. Therefore, migration is a common trend in human history. Inter-racial marriages are one important contribution to migration. As a result of globalization in the last few decades it has enhanced international interactions and inter-racial marriages. In the West, countries such as the US, Canada, and Germany, mail order brides are a unique phenomenon for females (Kuo & Chen, 2006). However in the East, during the past recent two decades, many young females from Mainland China and South Asia were married into Taiwan to avoid the economic hardship in their home countries. These interracial or interethnic marriages in Taiwan are new phenomenon. The booming economy during the 60's and 70's in Taiwan generated high income and created more educational opportunities for females in urban areas and changed living conditions and the outlook on their lives. Many females obtained opportunities to study overseas to pursue higher education degrees. On the other hand, in rural agricultural areas young males had difficulties in finding a suitable mate. As a result, a number of males have tried to find their brides from outside of Taiwan. The increased number of immigrant brides and the children they have given births to, have created a remarkable human force and changed the dynamics of the society. Educator Chang (2007) urged the government to pay close attention to educating these children or it will be an issue in the society. According to statistics from the Bureau of Interior Affairs in Taiwan (Bureau of Interior Affairs, 2012), children who were born to these immigrant brides consist of a noticeable portion in Taiwan. The Board of Interior Bureau indicated

elementary school students' mothers from other countries have shown an increase from 10.66% in 2001 to 13.37% in 2004, and declined to 7.8% in 2011. This group of new immigrants has produced 13.2 percent in 2004 to 7.8% in 2011 of children in Taiwan (See chart 1). After two decades of immigrating foreign brides, a new term, "New Son of Taiwan" or "New Taiwanese", was created in the late 80's to describe the children who were born to these foreign-born brides (Wu & Lin, 2005). Critics argued that the term has a negative connotation and implies that they are foreigners forever (Wu, 2009). However, this group of children has attracted attention from teachers and educational professionals.

In this study, research questions include: How does the New Taiwanese academic performance different from the performance of mainstream children? To what extent are these New Taiwanese' mothers involved in their children's education? Are these children's learning behaviors different than local children? And, what support do schools and teachers need to educate these New Taiwanese?

Chart 1. Mother's Birth Place and to Whom the Number of Children Were Born from 2001 to 2011

Year	Native Taiwanese	Foreign-born	Native Taiwanese %	Foreign-born %
2001	232,608	27,746	89.34	10.66
2002	216,697	30,833	87.54	12.46
2003	196,722	30,348	86.63	13.37
2004	187,753	28,666	86.75	13.25
2005	179,345	26,509	87.12	12.88
2006	180,556	23,903	88.31	11.69
2007	183,509	20,905	89.77	10.23

2008	179,647	19,086	90.40	9.60
2009	174,698	16,612	91.32	8.68
2010	152,363	14,523	91.30	8.70
2011	181,230	15,397	92.17	7.83

Resource: Bureau of Interior Affairs February 7, 2012

## **Perspectives**

### **Stereotypes of Immigrant Brides**

Researchers found that most Immigrant brides are from lower social economic status families in Mainland China or South Asia (Chang, 2006); they normally have middle school or less education backgrounds and most of them are married to spouses from rural or remote areas, or, some males with mental or physical disabilities. After they married in to Taiwan, many of their husbands and his families treated them as cheap labor. According to the 2012 Bureau of Interior Affairs, the majority of these immigrant brides are from South Asia (60% in 2004 to 40.4 % in 2011). The cultural and language barriers have enhanced stereotypes toward this group of new immigrants (Kuo & Chen, 2006).

### **Cultural Identity**

Educators and researchers have paid close attention to this trend especially when these children enroll in elementary schools. Some studies found that most of these immigrant brides' children did not identify with their mother's cultures even though they perceived their cultural identification with their mother has had a significant positive correlation with cultural integration in Taiwan. However, these children seldom participate in their mothers' cultural

activities (Wu, 2009). There is a call for teachers to have freedom to modify curriculum and educational reforms to meet the needs of these children (Kuo & Chen, 2006).

### **Educational Concerns for Children of the Immigrant Brides**

The term, “New Son of Taiwan”, implies that these new-born children were from either a mother or father who is a foreign-born person but resides in Taiwan. After 2005, they were identified as “New Taiwanese”. Studies on these New Taiwanese have produced mixed findings. Some studies concluded that these students academically were behind mainstream students; however, some argued that they did not necessarily perform worse or less than the mainstream. Wang & Wen’s (2007) study found that these children’s logic, comprehension and application competencies are better than mainstream students. In 2005, a report from the Board of Education indicated an 8.2% of the New Taiwanese who had language development delay. However, after they entered school, during the learning process, the gap had significantly narrowed, when they reach four to six grades there is no difference in learning performance between the New Taiwanese and mainstream students (Chen, 2004).

As for peer interaction, appropriately 20% of these elementary age students have social issues, such as being involved in physical fights and being bullied, especially children with language barriers (Lu, 2004). Another study found that these New Taiwanese get along well with peers due to their personalities and character traits (Huang & Tang, 2007).

### **Significance of This Study**

Many studies have been conducted in Taiwan regarding foreign brides (Kuo & Chen, 2006; Chiang, 2006). However, few studies were found regarding teachers’ experiences and perceptions of the New Taiwanese’ learning and social cultural behaviors. The variety of

individual differences was a factor influencing their behavior and academic performance among this group of New Taiwanese. It is critically important to obtain first-hand information of these children's learning and social behaviors, as well as, understand their cultural adaptation in order to teach them effectively. The results from this inquiry will help the educators to have a better understanding of these children when they have New Taiwanese in their classrooms. Further study will be needed, using a larger sample to draw meaningful conclusions in order to help teachers be more effective missionaries for the nation's future.

### **Methodology**

Documents and government statistical data relevant to children, who were born to foreign-born mothers and how their parenting impacts their children's education, are the frameworks for this inquiry.

This inquiry utilized structured interviews of elementary teachers in Taitung, Taiwan. During this structured qualitative interview, the process needed to develop a schedule which listed the wording and sequencing of questions (Patton, 1991). In summer 2012, eighteen elementary teachers from four schools, two in urban areas (Taitung Teachers' College Lab and Bao Sung) two located in rural areas (Fong Tien and Kong Lou), were participants of this study. Among them, thirteen teachers were female and five were male. The interviews took place either at their schools, or in a coffee shop not far from their schools.

### **Findings of This Study**

According to the Foreign Brides Social Worker Association (Personal interview with Director Huang, July 10, 2012), up to May 2012, Taiwan had 465,053 foreign brides, 312,903 from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Marco, and 152,150 from South Asia. Taitung had 3,811

foreign brides and among them 2,419 were from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Marco, and 1,392 were from South Asia (See Chart 2).

Among the Eighteen teachers (See Chart 3) the majority of them (16/18) had six or more years of teaching experience. Other than one administrator who is not teaching in classrooms, totally they have fifty-three New Taiwanese in their classes during 2011-2012 academic year. The report from these teachers found that the foreign brides' birth place, the motivation of their marriage and the educational values that they perceived, impacted their children's learning and social behaviors.

Chart 2. Foreign Brides in Taiwan and Taitung

Location	Mainland China, HK & Marco	South Asia
Taiwan	312,903	152,150
Taitung	2,419	1,392

Resource: Social Work Association, May 2012

The four elementary schools consisted of two urban and two rural schools with one urban school having 38 New Taiwanese out of 1,150 children, another one with 34 New Taiwanese out of 302. The two rural elementary schools: Fong Tien and Kong Lou had 20 New Taiwanese out of 234 children and 34 New Taiwanese out of 315 respectively, at an average of close to 10 percent of the student population in these rural schools.

Chart 3. Participants in this Study

School	Taitung Teachers' College Lab	Fong Tien	Kong Lou	Bao Sung
Female	5	2	5	0
Male	1	2	2	1

Total	6	4	7	1
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(a) Academic Performance

When asked about their new Taiwanese students' academic performance, the participants reported that at the beginning of these children's learning, if the children's mothers were from Mainland China, they had less language barriers than those with mothers from South Asia. However, even those who were behind academically at the beginning, normally caught up with the class after being in schools for one to two years. In one rural school (Fong Tien), teachers reported the children's reading ability as weak, but their math academic performance as being sound.

(b) Social Behavior

The participants were asked to rate these students' social behaviors on a 1 to 5 scale with (1) being the least frequent and (5) being the most frequent. The participants reported that these children like to interact with teachers (41.2%), a few of them being shy due to lack of confidence in themselves (29.4%). When asked about their interactions with peers in class, they reported that these children normally interact with a few peers sitting near them (47.1%). One participant reported that some students lied (11.8%). When asked about their pro-social behaviors, teachers reported that they were not proactive but in some situations they would help teachers to clean the white board (47.1%). When asked about if the students share materials or food, teachers answered when their mothers visited their native countries they would show and talk about their gifts to the class if asked to do so (41.2%) or shared food (35.3%).

[Insert Table 1 Here]

(c) Learning Behavior

The participants were asked to rate these students' learning behaviors on a five-point scale from 1 to 5 with (1) being the least frequent and (5) being the most frequent. When inquired about their attentiveness in class, teachers gave them a 2-3 (35.3%), meaning some were attentive but at times they were easily distracted. They rarely asked questions in class (52.9%), did not volunteer to answer questions (58.8%), or seldom sought answers by themselves (35.3%). Some students sought opportunities to be with the teacher after class (41.2%) but rarely asked questions after class (58.8%). Some of them always turned in homework on time (35.3%), however, their homework was not always neat (35.3%), nor correct (23.5%).

[Insert Table 2 Here]

(D) Student's Cultural Behavior

The participants were asked to rate these students' learning behaviors on a five-point scale from 1 to 5 with (1) being the least frequent and (5) being the most frequent. Almost all participants reported that these students rarely volunteered to share cultural experiences (58.8%); they did not volunteer to introduce their foreign-born mothers (58.8%), with only one exception that the student would volunteer to introduce his mother if she physically was present at the school (4). They did not understand their foreign-born parents' birth place (76.4%), but after visiting their mothers' native land, they would mention more frequently of their mothers' native land (23.5%). None of these children reported that they are proud of their parents' culture (100%).

[Insert Table 3 Here]

## **Conclusion and Suggestions**

Issues related to these new immigrants have been identified in literature. They include: Language barriers cause difficulties in communication; Cultural differences increase conflicts within the family; Different motivations of marriages produce an unstable marriage; Cultural biases cause alienation within society; Coping and psychological adjustments impact marriages negatively; Domestic violence and challenges of rearing and educating the next generation (Hsueh, 2007). The Board of Education has developed many programs to help these new immigrants, including language programs, cooking and evening schools, job training, etc. The society in general has accepted this new asset though some issues remain unresolved due to personality and individual motivations to marry in Taiwan. The new immigrants bring new life and new energy to Taiwanese societies. Their off springs will be the future of Taiwan. This human power is a precious resource for the development of Taiwan in all aspects. However, from the reported data that none of these New Taiwanese was proud of their parents' culture is alarming. The school and the local government need to educate the new immigrants local culture and create revenue for them to share their culture and involve their families.

The participants feel hopeful for this group of students. Their parents' educational background different; therefore, they have different needs and need different support from society. One teacher commended that these students are not different from local students, there is no need to offer anything more to bother them, otherwise, it might give them the idea that they are not good enough. Participants reported that some training or orientations at the beginning of each academic year would provide information about these students and allow

teachers to share and exchange their experiences working with this group of new immigrants. Their experiences with these children would be helpful insight when interacting and communicating with them. Schools not taking advantage of cultural resources to enrich teaching was another concern among educators. Further study, with more participants, will be needed to gather more information on New Taiwanese's learning and social behaviors in order to help teachers, new immigrant parents, and the New Taiwanese.

Reports from participants indicated that many behavioral individual differences among these New Taiwanese. However, most of these foreign-born parents care for their children's education and are willing to support their children's academic performance. It was also noted that these teachers addressed new immigrant mother's behaviors, and noted that they influenced their children's behaviors. According to their observations, mothers from Mainland China normally were more assertive and cared more about their children's education compare to mothers from South Asia. One reason could be less language barriers. On the other hand, in urban areas some of these children's mothers were indifferent to their children's education or seldom involved in their children's school activities, possibly because they were eager to make money to support their native families.

Among these participants, two were administrators. Their comments included that the more the recent immigrants were involved in outside family activities, the more they cared about their children's academic performance. They also commented that the more support they had from their husband's family; the more they participated in their own education and their children's education. One suggested that teachers to visit the New Taiwanese's foreign-

born mothers' native land on government expense would greatly improve their empathy toward the new immigrant and their children.

This inquiry may shed light to many educators for further investigation. As one of the participated administrators mentioned: The society needs to see them as assets and focuses on their strengths"; and "Teachers as well as administrators need more training to appreciate their uniqueness" (Personal interview with Dr. Wong, July 13, 2012). Taiwan society will benefit from these new immigrants and their off springs when we treat them with equity and respect.

Table 1  
Social Behavior of New Taiwanese (N=17)

The New Taiwanese demonstrated:	Frequent*	Moderate** Frequent	Less Frequent***
Interact with teachers	23.5%	41.2%	35.2%
Get along with peers	23.5%	47.1%	17.6%
Prosocial behavior	29.4%	47.1%	29.4%
Sharing materials	5.9%	41.2%	47.1%
Sharing food	0%	35.3%	52.9%

\* Frequent means scores 4-5 on a five-point scale.

\*\* Moderate frequent means score 3 on a five-point scale.

\*\*\* Less frequent means score 1-2 on a five-point scale.

Table 2  
Learning Behavior of New Taiwanese (N=17)

The New Taiwanese demonstrated:	Frequent *	Moderate* * Frequent	Less Frequent** *
Attentive in class	29.4%	35.3%	35.3%
Ask questions in class	29.4%	41.2%	52.9%
Volunteer answers	5.9%	29.4%	58.8%
Seeking answers by self	23.5%	35.3%	35.3%
Seeking opportunity to be with the Teacher after class	41.2%	23.5%	35.3%
Asking questions after class	0%	35.3%	58.8%
Turn in home work on time	0%	35.3%	64.7%
Home work is neat	47.1%	11.8%	35.3%
Home work is correct	52.9%	23.5%	23.5%

\* Frequent means scores 4-5 on a five-point scale.

\*\* Moderate frequent means score 3 on a five-point scale.

\*\*\* Less frequent means score 1-2 on a five-point scale.

Table 3  
 Cultural Behavior of New Taiwanese (N=17)

The New Taiwanese demonstrated:	Frequent*	Moderate** Frequent	Less Frequent***
Volunteer to share cultural experience	11.8%	29.4%	58.8%
Volunteer to introduce his/her parent	11.8%	29.4%	58.8%
Proud of their new immigrant parent	5.9%	11.8%	82.3%
Understand their parent's birth place	0%	23.5%	76.4%
Proud of their parent's culture	0%	0%	100%

\* Frequent means scores 4-5 on a five-point scale.

\*\* Moderate frequent means score 3 on a five-point scale.

\*\*\* Less frequent means score 1-2 on a five-point scale.

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