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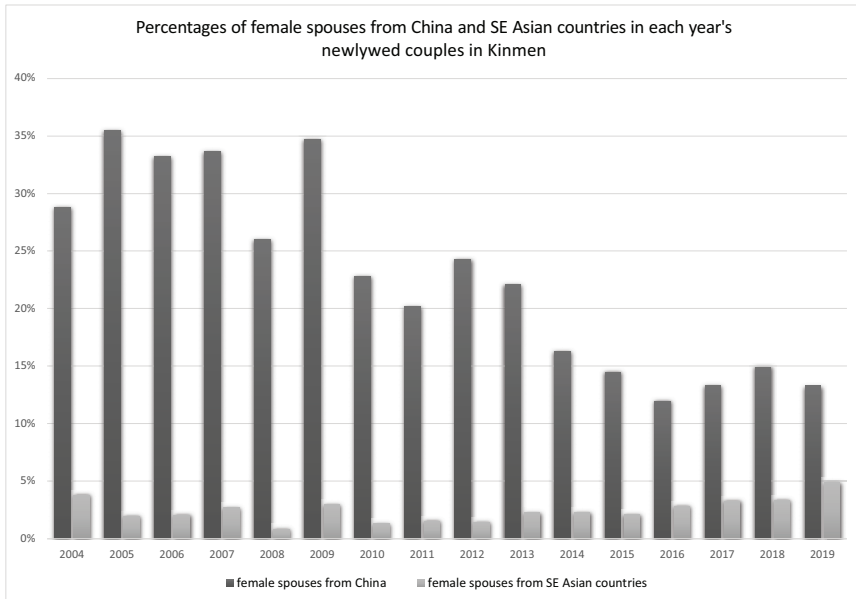
## CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGE ON THE BORDERLAND

During a conversation with several elderly men on the island of Lieyu (Little Kinmen) in 2018, they immediately responded to my research on changing marriage by mentioning the significance of marriages between local men and women from China. One man who had retired from the local governmental bureau of civil affairs was introduced to me as an expert on this issue. This man said that the number of brides from abroad, especially China, had rapidly increased following the end of military rule in 1992. He commented, ‘Frankly speaking, local men in cross-border marriages were all from economically vulnerable families, so were their wives. If this channel for marriage had not existed, this society would have become very chaotic’. Another man added, ‘If the government had not allowed local men to marry foreign spouses in earlier times, half the schools on this island would have been closed now. Children whose mothers are foreign women constitute at least half of the total primary school students’. Nevertheless, as they noted, the number of Chinese brides has declined in recent years because of the surge in China’s economy, particularly in the southeast coastal region from which Kinmen received many brides (see Figure 5.1).

These men’s remarks reflect their views of cross-border marriage as a solution to saving local society where many men engaging in low-skilled or factory work faced greater difficulties in finding a spouse. One female interlocutor said, ‘the young women in Kinmen are too picky (*tiao*), so my younger brother and several men in this village [some of them working in the sorghum distillery] all went to China to look for a bride [around the mid-2000s]’. These comments appear to validate the theory of a ‘marriage squeeze’ that relates to women’s hypergamy in explaining the rise of cross-border marriage in Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan – the receiving sides for brides from Southeast Asia and China since the late twentieth century (Goodkind 1997; Ishikawa 2010; Lee et al. 2016; So

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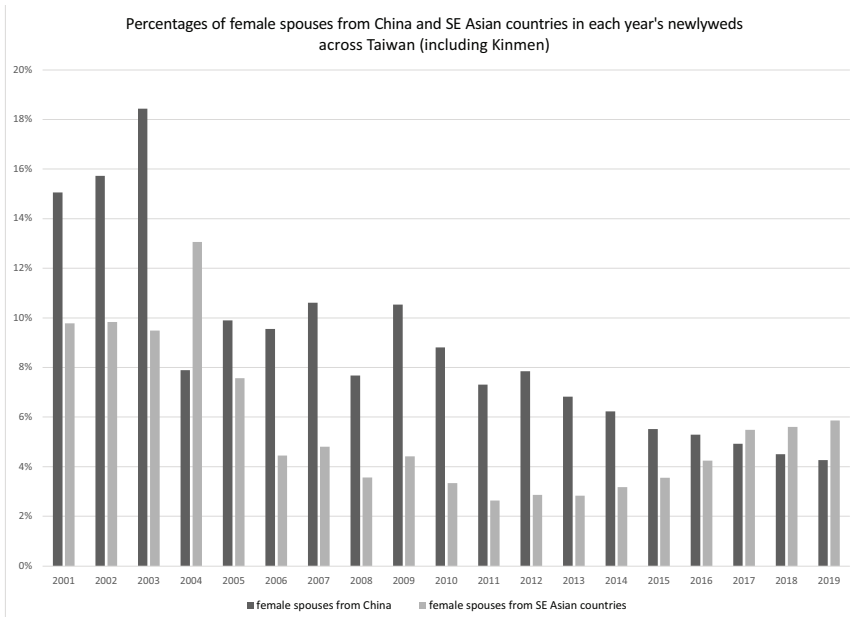
Endnotes for this chapter begin on page 127.



**Figure 5.1.** The significant proportion of female marriage migrants from China in Kinmen and its recent decline. Source: The Department of Household Registration, Ministry of the Interior, Taiwan (<https://www.ris.gov.tw/app/portal/674>).

2003; Yang and Liu 2013). They also echo the bride-receiving societies' official and popular emphasis on foreign brides' reproductive roles in child-bearing and childcare (Faier 2009; Friedman 2015; Kim 2013; Lan 2008; Yu 2020). This conservative vision of a patriarchal family-based social order appears to be persistent and is supported by the Taiwanese government and many individual islanders in Kinmen.

However, my interlocutors' comments did not capture the recent dynamics in cross-border marriage relating to Kinmen's status as a borderland, which has had convenient access to China by ferry since 2001. Thus, I knew some young male and female islanders who met their Chinese spouses during periods of work or study in China, and who resided in Kinmen or China, or maintained two residences across the border after marrying. An employee in a government agency supporting foreign spouses in Kinmen told me that she had seen several cases in recent years of divorced, widowed and economically active older men marrying Chinese women who tended to be much younger than themselves, and whom they had met during sightseeing visits to China. These emerging phenomena began to alter the earlier pattern centring on working-class men in Kinmen and their brides from rural China. This chapter will not discuss these new patterns, but they illustrate the constantly shifting ways in which marriage, human mobility



**Figure 5.2.** The changing dynamics of cross-border marriage in Taiwan in the last two decades. Source: Department of Household Registration, Ministry of the Interior, Taiwan (<https://www.ris.gov.tw/app/portal/674>).<sup>1</sup>

and economy intersect in the age of globalization and changing regional political economies, as well as the dialectics between the local and the global (Constable 2005, 2009).

What was also missed by my interlocutors was the importance of Kinmen's borderland status in contributing to the rise and dominance of cross-border marriage between Kinmen and China – a local pattern apparently different from the national one, in which the percentages of brides from Southeast Asia are also considerable (comparing Figure 5.1 and 5.2). The border, in its territorial sense of marking the boundary of Taiwan's exercise of sovereignty and separating Kinmen from the Chinese mainland, emerged as a result of the Chinese Civil War in 1949 and restricted the islanders' maritime activities during the period of military rule (Szonyi 2008: 94–95). As my ethnography below demonstrates, this border became porous and permeable in the early 1990s following the waning of military tension between Kinmen and China. I argue that kinship, including marriage, played a significant role in the initiation and restoration of contact between ordinary people on the two sides. Unlike most studies of cross-border marriage between Taiwan and China, which focus on the links between sex and commodification, citizenship and the sovereignty question of Taiwan (e.g. Chao 2004a, 2004b; Friedman 2015; Lu 2005), this chapter explores the role of kinship

in animating this phenomenon. I highlight how kin ties and Kinmen's borderland status jointly promoted cross-border matchmaking, and how this arrangement of marriage might not be subject to patriarchal control because of conflicting elements arising from the differences between Kinmen and China formed under opposing regimes after 1949.

Drawing on ethnographic material collected from people living in Kinmen and China who are related to cross-border marriage in varying ways, this chapter explores the emergence, processes and consequences of marriages between Kinmen and China that have been occluded in the scholarship on cross-border marriage in Taiwan. My ethnography foregrounds experiences of Chinese women who married into Kinmen between the late 1990s and early 2010s, and whom I interviewed or had conversations with during my two periods of fieldwork. The ways in which I came to know these women to a large extent frame the ethnography presented here and its insights. During my first fieldwork in 2013–2014, when my research focus was not on marriage, I carried out interviews with foreign spouses in order to understand family change in relation to Kinmen's post-Cold War circumstances. I approached the local governmental agency which supported foreign spouses for help with recruiting research participants. An employee in that agency invited me to attend a handicraft workshop for female *xin zhumin* (lit. new residents, referring to foreigners married to Taiwanese citizens and living in territories under Taiwan's governance). Through this workshop, I gained consent to interview two women originally from Indonesia and China, and through their introduction, I subsequently interviewed women from China, Vietnam and Myanmar.

I tried using similar methods to recruit Chinese women as research participants during my second fieldwork in 2017–2018. Some attempts succeeded and some failed. One woman introduced by a friend of mine rejected my enquiry immediately by saying that she could not stand any more questions about her marital life from different governmental agencies (as one way to check the 'authenticity' of her marriage) and researchers like me. Another woman whom I met at an event organized by the local government answered, 'You should ask those women whose husbands came along with them because they *bijiao hui shuo* (are more capable of talking). I don't want to talk about my private life'. Indeed, some women who agreed to be interviewed confirmed that they had good marital experiences compared to some traumatic stories they knew. Some stated clearly that they were sharing their stories with me because they were annoyed by prejudiced views of them as greedy and morally questionable shaped by the Taiwanese government and the mass media (Hsia 2007; Lu 2008; Shih 1998). But this does not mean that some of the women I interviewed did not have a difficult time in their marital lives. Through my experiences of finding interviewees and conducting the interviews, I gained insights about how these women perceived and reacted to local social environments and to bureaucratic measures regulating their marriages.

In what follows, I initially describe how the border between Kinmen and China became permeable in the early 1990s, and how cross-border marriages mushroomed as a consequence of reconnecting kin across the waters. I then delineate how the parents of Kinmen grooms participated in their sons' cross-border matchmaking, and how Chinese women made the decision to marry in Kinmen. This is followed by personal stories of my Chinese female informants, which demonstrate how they reacted to the bureaucratic and social boundaries which distinguished them as a special group subject to suspicion and pressured them on a daily basis. Though some of my informants had traumatic experiences in their everyday marital lives, they have stayed in their marriages, mostly for the sake of their children, while navigating ways through which to pursue their personal interests and happiness. The rapid growth of China's economy in the last decade and Kinmen's borderland status have also been used by many Chinese women to negotiate their power and autonomy in their marital families. Their stories reveal the possibilities of unsettling or transgressing the patriarchal norms created by the women themselves, and in some cases, together with their husbands. This chapter argues that the rising number of cross-border marriages between Kinmen and China was an aspect of the transformative capacities of kinship serving to reproduce the patrilineal family, but the conflicting elements involved in these marriages have led to challenging forces, also generated from the intimate sphere of kinship, against this patriarchal institution.

### **Border-Crossing and Reconnecting Kin**

Some weeks after I settled in Kinmen in 2013, I joined a one-day shopping trip organized by some elderly villagers to Xiamen, China, where they bought various goods including dried food, daily necessities and fishing tools to sell back in Kinmen. We travelled between Kinmen and Xiamen via *Xiao San Tong* (as noted in this book's Introduction, local people use this term to refer to the ferry service linking the two sides since 2001). I only realized the problems that these villagers often faced when I helped to put the goods that they had purchased on the X-ray inspection machine for the customs to check in Kinmen's port. One inspector warned one of the villagers not to bring so many things back next time, otherwise he might charge duty or fines for bringing dried food exceeding the permitted amount, which might harm Taiwan's market and food security. This villager appeared to be familiar with the situation. After we came back to the village, he told me that it had become much harder for him to profit from this trade route today than in the 1990s, when smuggling across the waters was very profitable. What struck me later were the links between this informal trade, kinship and cross-border marriage.

Informal trade or smuggling between Kinmen and coastal China emerged immediately following Kinmen's demilitarization and flourished throughout the

1990s (Juan 2003; Yang 2011). Initially, people from the two sides only traded on the waters but gradually more and more people from China landed on the shores of Kinmen to conduct transactions. A wide range of products from China, from fresh fish and fruits to crafted objects and daily necessities, filled the small, licensed and unlicensed, grocery shops and stalls in market towns and tourist sites throughout Kinmen in this period (Szonyi 2008: 216–18). What was communicated between people from the two sides was not, however, only goods but also kin ties and marriage.

Ray, a Chinese man in his mid-sixties living on the island of Dadeng (opposite the north side of Kinmen) whom I met in 2017, told me that he had taken part in *zousi* (a term he used, meaning smuggling) in the 1990s. He said that his elders on Dadeng often recalled their mobility across the sea prior to 1949 and many families were connected with Kinmen by kinship and marriage in very recent generations. These intimate memories and economic incentives motivated unauthorized border-crossing adventures by Ray and his fellow islanders. Ray started his trade together with a friend in another village on Dadeng whose mother had married there from Kinmen, and who resumed contact with his maternal uncle in Kinmen to enable his business. Through some tips from his elders and help from his trading partners in Kinmen, Ray reconnected with his distant kin in Kinmen who had preserved their lineage's written genealogy, which suggested that Ray's ancestors had moved from Kinmen to Dadeng about two centuries ago. Ray ceased his informal trading in the late 1990s, but he maintains regular contacts with his distant kin in Kinmen. He also served as a matchmaker, brokering two marriages between women from Dadeng and his male relatives in Kinmen.

I heard about another scenario reflecting the direct connection between smuggling and matchmaking during my attendance at a handicraft workshop in 2014 as I sat around a table with a number of Chinese women. At one point, one woman asked where I was from. I said that I was from Taiwan and asked her the same question. She replied that she was from Weitou, a village in southeast China, opposite the east side of Kinmen. She continued, 'You probably don't know where it is, but many residents of Kinmen know because they went there to smuggle seafood and fruit, even drawing alongside the shore to trade with us previously'. Another woman asked her whether she had married in Kinmen because of that business connection. She answered yes, and said that many women from her village also married in Kinmen, including her younger sister.

The informal trade between ordinary residents in Kinmen and China eventually encountered the Taiwanese state's shift to stricter control of its borders in the form of two laws regulating activities in Taiwan's territorial waters.<sup>2</sup> Since July 1998, in light of the new laws, the local police in Kinmen, allied with the military, have seized dozens of intruders from China. Ray was once arrested and jailed for several months before being deported back to China. This tightening control

of the border and the launch of the *Xiao San Tong* ferry service in 2001 made informal trade no longer profitable for people on both sides. Nevertheless, the restoration of connections by people on the two sides continued and has facilitated the establishment of many cross-border marriages in the following decade, posing new challenges for the Taiwanese state.

The above-described practices of border-crossing resonate with the conceptualization of borders as processual from the standpoints of different actors (the state, NGO, ordinary people, etc.) in the growing interdisciplinary literature on border studies (e.g. Johnson et al. 2011; Newman 2006; Paasi et al. 2018; Wilson and Donnan 2012). Scholarly attention has been paid to the changing conditions of national and international political economy of borderlands, and to the forms of migration, commerce and smuggling that pose challenges to the sovereign power of states. At the same time, researchers have investigated how states try to retain the rigidity of borders through various new measures, such as the employment of technical devices and biometrics, in a performance of sovereignty. These bordering practices by states are familiar in the form of the Taiwanese government's regulation of cross-border marriages, for example, in a border-interview system for Chinese spouses which was set up in 2004 in order to filter out 'fake marriage' (Chen 2015; Friedman 2010a).

Recent scholarly discussions note the overlap between the concept of the border and the concept of boundary (Fassin 2020; Fischer et al. 2020). The concept of boundary is usually traced back to Barth's (1998 [1969]) discussion of ethnicity, and has been expanded to encompass a multiplicity of potential criteria, such as race, language, religion, class, gender and sexual orientation, which are used to distinguish between groups. 'Boundary work' concerns how similarities and differences are produced and is not necessarily related to states, while bordering has to do with states and the exercise of their sovereignty. As Fassin notes, though these two concepts can be theoretically differentiated, recent developments across the world suggest that 'borders cannot be thought of without the boundaries they establish or reinforce, and boundaries have to be analyzed in relation to the justifications they provide for the control or even the shifting of borders' (2020: 19).

This entanglement between border and boundary is palpable in the Taiwanese government's different treatment of spouses originally from China and those from other countries. As several studies have shown, due to Taiwan's special relationship with China, the Taiwanese government's policies of pre-entry interview, residency and citizenship for Chinese spouses are different from those for spouses from other countries (Cheng 2017; Friedman 2010b, 2015; Lan 2008; Momesso and Cheng 2017). Friedman's (2010b, 2015) work, especially, pertinently captures the interrelated anxieties of the Taiwanese state's exercise of sovereignty and dealing with Chinese spouses' 'similarity' to Taiwanese citizens through differentiated legal and political treatment. Recent research on marriage

migrants has moved beyond a focus on this state-individual nexus in conceptualizing citizenship to the family as a primary site where citizenship is negotiated and contested (Chiu 2020; Chiu and Yeoh 2021). The focus of this chapter is not on citizenship; instead, I unpack how kinship and practices of bordering and making boundaries, especially in the intimate sphere of the family, significantly shaped my Chinese female informants' marital experiences and their attitudes to Taiwanese citizenship.

### **Kinship Networks and Matchmaking across the Border**

Cross-border marriages between Kinmen and China significantly increased in the early 2000s when many islanders from Kinmen went to China to visit their distant kin, to do business, and to invest in real estate using the convenient *Xiao San Tong*. These intensive communications between the two sides appeared to return to levels seen in the era prior to 1949 when Kinmen was part of Minnan (southern Fujian province) where people shared a common dialect (Hokkien) and cultures, and were connected by marriage. These cultural similarities and social networks based on kinship and economic ties encouraged cross-border matchmaking. There were people in Kinmen and China who were called 'professional matchmakers' (*zhuanxie meiren*) as they earned profits through organizing matchmaking tours for Kinmen men to China – a popular way of transnational matchmaking across Asia (Freeman 2011; Lu 2005, 2008; Yamaura 2015a). But these professional matchmakers mostly operated within their own social networks and under the guise of helping kin or friends, unlike the commodified matchmaking often seen in Taiwanese-Vietnamese marriages (Tseng 2015, 2016). For example, I heard from several villagers in Kinmen that a man in their village had been detained in Xiamen in 1949 when transportation between the two sides was suddenly interrupted.<sup>3</sup> This man visited Kinmen soon after travel became possible and, probably after being asked by his kin and acquaintances on both sides, he started an informal business of matching Kinmenese men and Chinese women. He passed away some years ago, and before that, he had successfully brokered numerous cross-border marriages for his natal village. As I demonstrate below, the salience of social networks in cross-border matchmaking enabled parents in Kinmen to easily intervene in their sons' marriages on the one hand, and mitigated the uncertainties of marrying across the waters faced by Chinese women on the other.

#### *Parental Intervention*

The numerous anecdotes I heard from various interlocutors, including Chinese spouses, suggest varying degrees of intervention from the grooms' parents in cross-border marriages. The most impressive story was from a local friend's



uncle, Mr Huang, who had arranged his eldest son's marriage to a Chinese woman in the early 2000s. In my friend's company, I visited Huang's modern four-storey house in 2017 where he resides with his wife, married eldest son and his family, and his unmarried second son. My friend did not try to introduce me to the eldest son when we met, as he looked shy and seemed to prefer not to be too visible. During a short conversation with the second son (who was friendly but shy of talking with me), I learned that his father had made great efforts to get his older brother married. I then shifted to their father for the details.

Unlike his two sons, Mr Huang was talkative and, thanks to my friend's presence, open in sharing with me how he had found a bride for his eldest son. Huang said that he was worried about his eldest son, who was in his late twenties and did not have a stable job at that time, so he took action to help him settle down. He consulted his relatives in Kinmen and was recommended to contact a female matchmaker in China. He paid for a first visit to China to meet her and chose a woman from a list prepared by the matchmaker. He then took his eldest son for a second visit to China to meet the selected woman. After meeting each other, the Chinese woman took the young man on a two-day sightseeing tour in the neighbouring area. The two young people felt comfortable with each other, and kept in touch by international phone calls for some months before they decided to marry. My friend added that the expensive charges for international calls were all paid by her uncle.

The marriage followed common customs on both sides in terms of paying bridewealth and hosting wedding feasts. As described in Chapter 3, parents in Kinmen usually spend a great deal on their sons' weddings; Mr Huang was no different. As requested by his affines, he paid RMB 86,000 (about USD 10,000 in the early 2000s) as bridewealth – an amount that was not too demanding by Kinmen standards but generous at the time in China. Mr Huang also prepared additional money for monetary gifts (*hongbao*) for various people on the bride's side. The bride's parents hosted a small-scale wedding feast to entertain their relatives and some guests from Kinmen whom Huang invited as witnesses. After his daughter-in-law completed the bureaucratic procedures imposed by the Taiwanese government for Chinese spouses and arrived in Kinmen, Huang hosted a large wedding feast and invited all the households in his village to the celebration.

### *Chinese Women's Motives for Marrying in Kinmen*

Although Mr Huang appeared to intervene seriously in his eldest son's marriage, it was his son's decision to marry the woman who initially had been chosen by his father. Similar phenomena also occurred in other cross-border marriages in which the groom's personal preference mattered most in his choice of spouse. On the side of the bride, the stories that I collected suggest that the bride's own decision

also mattered most there, and this decision was usually inseparable from the social networks in which the woman was embedded.

Cultural similarities between people in Kinmen and Minnan have no doubt contributed to the popularity of cross-border marriage. Most of my Chinese informants were born in the rural parts of Minnan and speak the dialect of Hokkien also used in Kinmen. The economic conditions of their hometowns were on average less good than the conditions in Kinmen in the early 2000s. They tended to give up education early either of their own volition or due to their family's financial difficulties, and usually started working in their early teens. Several women became migrant workers in the factories or service sectors in Xiamen, Shenzhen and Hong Kong, and some of them met their husbands in their workplace (see also Binah-Pollak 2019). Other studies have pointed to the future-making and relational aspects of marriage that this book focuses on. They document how many women's motives for transnational marriage were linked to their imaginings of upward mobility and a materially better life elsewhere. Moreover, these imaginings were often extended to include better futures for their children from their current or an earlier marriage (Binah-Pollak 2019; Freeman 2011). But these desires might be balanced or compromised by other concerns. Many Chinese women explained their preference for marrying within East Asia by articulating their desire to live closer to their homeland so that they could often visit their natal families and also perhaps children from a first marriage (Freeman 2011; Yamaura 2015b). For most of my Chinese informants, one key factor affecting their decision was the 'similarity' they felt in relation to Kinmen.

Like their Kinmen husbands and parents-in-law, for my Chinese interlocutors, similarity was not merely about shared cultures and dialect but about familiarity built on the social networks and intensive contacts between Kinmen and their homeland. Several informants recalled that they were called to matchmaking meetings with men from Kinmen by a relative who had married in Kinmen or who had connections with people in Kinmen. For example, Shu-Ting's meeting with her future husband was arranged by her cousin who had a business partnership in the tourism industry with this man's father. Shu-Ting agreed to marry after only five or six meetings with her partner (whose mother was mostly present too) because she thought that she already knew enough about her future marital family. She also emphasized that, after marriage, she did not find any difference between her pre-marital knowledge and the actual conditions of her marital family.

As most of my Chinese informants have relatives or acquaintances who married in or often visited Kinmen, they already knew before marriage that Kinmen was not as advanced and prosperous as urban Taiwan. By contrast, some women from Southeast Asia, who had married in Kinmen through commercial matchmaking services, told me that they were deceived into thinking Kinmen was a developed place. But Kinmen's rural environment still shocked some of my Chinese

informants upon arrival. One informant said that though she had some preliminary understanding about Kinmen, such as its size and number of residents, she was still surprised by the reality when she came in 2001. She described Kinmen as ‘*xiangxia* (countryside) that was even more like *xiangxia* than my natal village’. Despite this kind of initial shock, my informants generally accommodated to life in Kinmen which is slow-paced and lacks entertainment and, as they claimed, they can always have fun by simply going to the prosperous city of Xiamen. This geographic proximity to China, as well as the generous benefits and social welfare provided by local government as noted in this book’s Introduction, were said to still make marrying in Kinmen an attractive option for Chinese women who have witnessed their country’s surging economy in the last decade.

Among my Chinese informants, Xiao-Yun’s story is particularly intriguing and illuminates the common pressure on women to marry early in post-reform China and the nature of cross-border marriage as a gamble in a woman’s life. Xiao-Yun was born in rural Minnan and started working in childhood because she had no interest in studying. At one stage, she became a migrant worker in Xiamen and was then summoned back home to help in her brother’s fishing business. One day when Xiao-Yun was about twenty-four years old, her sister’s friend, whose daughter had just married in Kinmen, asked if she would like to meet a man from Kinmen. Xiao-Yun was initially a bit resistant but her sister (who was married in a neighbouring town) encouraged her strongly because the sister had longed to marry in Taiwan but had not had the chance. Xiao-Yun said that her sister did not really know the difference between Kinmen and urban Taiwan, but she herself had heard about Kinmen’s resemblance to rural Minnan. But, given that she was approaching the local upper limit of marriageable age of twenty-five and had not yet found a suitable local man, she decided to give herself a chance by meeting the man.

Xiao-Yun consented to marry within one week after the first meeting, not because of her satisfaction in the man’s appearance or his economic situation. As she described it, ‘He was quite reticent and we barely talked with each other. His appearance was ok for me and I didn’t care about appearance very much. I knew he worked in construction, but I thought I could earn a good living as long as I worked hard’. Pressured by the matchmaker who had spent too much time on this trip, Xiao-Yun went to a local temple to ask for the god’s advice by drawing lots. The lot, with a written message on it, suggested that Xiao-Yun marrying in Kinmen would be fine though there might be a tough period in her marital life. Xiao-Yun deemed it acceptable advice and made up her mind to marry. As she remarked, ‘Anyway, it’s my fate. If I didn’t have a good fate, my life would not be good wherever I went. So, I decided to take this gamble (*duzhu*)’. Like Xiao-Yun, most of my Chinese informants did not initially intend to marry abroad, and some of them mentioned pressure to marry before they were ‘too old’. Given that they

had not found a good match locally, marrying in Kinmen seemed a viable alternative in spite of the risks of living and marrying under a different political regime.

### **Chinese Women's Post-Marital Experiences of Difference and Differentiation**

Though many marriages of Chinese women in Kinmen involved being introduced by their relatives or acquaintances, their feelings of similarity and familiarity in relation to Kinmen usually faded soon after they settled. Shock and disappointment arose not only because of Kinmen's rural landscape and dullness but also because of differences in ways of life between Kinmen and China. While the gendered division of labour within households in post-reform China still tends to be patriarchal (Hu and Mu 2021; Liu 2004; Xie 2021), studies have shown how young married women have taken active roles (usually with their husbands' cooperation) in maximizing their conjugal interest and challenging generational hierarchy. Yan's (2003, 2006) ethnography in rural China in the late 1990s revealed the rise of conjugal power through demanding an earlier division of family property and the establishment of a nuclear household, usually at the cost of the husband's parents' interests. However, with increasing pressures from marketization and state policies, nowadays young couples and their parents(-in-law) seek to cope with housework and childcare with restricted time, resources and space by emphasizing intergenerational cooperation and emotional intimacy (Xie 2021; Yan 2016, 2021; Zavoretti 2017).

In contrast to the above shifts in family relations in post-reform China, my Chinese informants found Kinmen to be far more patriarchal, traditional and conservative than they could imagine before marriage. Though we have seen changing intergenerational relations and young people's growing emphasis on personal desires in present-day Kinmen, in local patrilocal joint households, the everyday organization of household chores could be very patriarchal and traditional, especially from the standpoint of outsiders from abroad, including in-married Chinese women. Almost all of my informants took patrilocal residence after they arrived in Kinmen, living together with their parents-in-law and even their married and unmarried siblings-in-law. Several women faced parents-in-law's demand for total obedience and their responsibility for all the household chores. The amount of work and frequency of preparing rituals of ancestor worship in local households were commonly mentioned by my informants as demands that they found difficult to adapt to – this was also true for young married women who are native to Kinmen or from Taiwan (see next chapter). Despite the religious and ritual revival in post-reform China and growing up in Minnan where ancestral rituals are performed on certain important dates, in-married Chinese women were shocked by the number of rituals and the details of preparation (of food offerings

in particular) which they had to learn from their mothers-in-law (see Chiu 2017). During a talk with my neighbour who had married in from China, she said that she once asked her husband jokingly, 'Is it because your life in the past [the period of military rule] was too hard that you [Kinmen islanders] performed so many rituals so that you could eat more and better than usual (as the offerings usually become the worshippers' lunch afterwards)?' Her husband just answered her impatiently, 'You said it'.

Some of my Chinese informants admitted that their marital experiences were generally good compared to many sad cases they knew of in which Chinese women suffered verbal abuse from their husbands and in-laws, and even physical violence from their husbands. Indeed, I observed and heard about local elderly people's different attitudes towards daughters-in-law from China. Some elders, like Mr Huang who had actively intervened in his son's marriage and visited China several times, tended to be open and less demanding of their Chinese daughters-in-law. Shu-Ting, whom we met earlier, said that her pre-marital knowledge about her in-laws and her post-marital experiences were consistent. Her parents-in-law treated her well, and she was asked to 'help' her mother-in-law to prepare food offerings for ancestor worship, not to do it all by herself. Moreover, she told me that her parents-in-law gave in when her husband rejected the idea of having a second child after she gave birth to a daughter, despite their hopes of having a grandson. This flexible response, as Shu-Ting explained, may have been related to her parents-in-law's prior experiences of living in Taiwan for years. Interestingly, several of my Chinese interlocutors linked their parents-in-law's open attitudes to their previous residence in Taiwan, whereas studies focusing on Chinese spouses living in Taiwan have described the prejudices and unjust treatment of parents-in-law (Chao 2004b; Friedman 2015; Lu 2008). This kind of opinion of my Chinese interlocutors, as well as my neighbour's remarks on rituals in Kinmen as described above, suggest that they treat Taiwan (specifically the Taiwanese mainland) and Kinmen as two distinct places subject to comparison with each other. The homogenization of Kinmen is related to its nature as a borderland far from the Taiwanese mainland and earlier experiences of military rule, which in their perceptions, have made Kinmen more traditional and conservative than 'Taiwan'.

Some of my Chinese informants had bitter experiences of interacting with parents-in-law who financially supported their sons' cross-border marriages but had limited knowledge about China and recent developments there. These elders tended to have prejudiced views about Chinese brides as women intent on taking money back to China. Fuelled by media discourse and local rumours, they established a social and moral boundary marking Chinese women as 'questionable others'. They sought to prevent their daughters-in-law from *bianhuai* (becoming rebellious) by restricting their contacts with other Chinese women and the world outside. This was made worse by the Taiwanese government's earlier policy of

strict regulation of Chinese spouses' rights to work. Before modification of the relevant laws in 2009, Chinese spouses faced an eight-year passage to citizenship and typically a two-year delay in obtaining residency and work permits compared to other foreign spouses who obtained residency and the right to work immediately upon arrival. As several studies have documented, Chinese spouses generally expressed strong criticisms of this earlier policy and many had to work 'illegally' because their husbands did not earn enough to feed the family (Chao 2004b; Friedman 2015; Lu 2008). Often when Chinese women could apply for a work permit, they encountered difficulties from their husbands or parents-in-law who questioned their motives in earning money and demanded that they stay at home for housework and childcare. Several of my Chinese informants had similar experiences, and I was told that this restriction of Chinese spouses' rights to work had resulted in several divorces because the in-married women felt hopeless in such an underdeveloped and enclosed environment.

Yue-Hua, who met her future husband and decided to marry him during his matchmaking tour in the late 1990s, shared with me her tough experiences in the early period of her marital life. She admitted that her quick decision to marry was taken because she had wanted to change her environment, and because of her husband's strong interest in her after meeting several women during the trip. Yue-Hua's parents, uninformed about this matchmaking meeting and anticipating that their daughter would marry nearby, agreed to the marriage, but told Yue-Hua that she would have to be responsible for this decision whatever the consequences might be. Though Yue-Hua had heard about the differences between Kinmen and urban Taiwan, she was surprised by the underdeveloped nature of Kinmen when she arrived, especially compared to her hometown, a coastal city in Minnan that was economically advanced and is even more prosperous now. After she arrived, Yue-Hua and her husband, the eldest son of his parents, lived with his parents in a village far away from the market towns in Kinmen, which further prevented her from having contact with the outside world. During the initial few years, constrained by her in-laws' demanding that she do all the housework, childbirth, and her lack of the right to work, Yue-Hua lost almost all communications with people outside of her marital family and became depressed. This was worsened by her husband's frightening short temper and frequent verbal abuse. Yue-Hua was afraid that her husband's temper might lead to physical violence against her and their children, and she had returned to her natal home in China. She stayed there for two to three months and eventually returned to Kinmen because of her husband's constant phone calls and pleas for her to return.

When I interviewed Yue-Hua in 2014 (and met her again in 2018), she looked confident, beautiful and in great spirits. She told me that after the above incident in which she 'left home' (*li-jia-chu-zo*), she tried to communicate with her husband who did not earn much as a fisherman and may have felt strong pressure to

feed the large family. She began to ignore some of her parents-in-law's demands and to go outside with her children by taking a bus tour around Kinmen. She happened to get to know some women who were also married from China at the bus station, and they became friends and often organized meetings afterwards, which served as a helpful channel for Yue-Hua to release the pressure and negative emotions accumulated in her marital family. After her two children entered public kindergarten, Yue-Hua went out to work in the service sector to share her husband's burden of providing for the family and, more importantly, to allow her to have a disposable income of her own. She told me, 'Women must be economically independent, otherwise they have to ask money from their husbands for anything they want. I don't like this kind of dependence'. Similar remarks were made by several of my Chinese informants who resorted to work so as to break through the intersecting barriers set up by the Taiwanese government and their marital families regarding their places of origin.

### **Pursuing Personal Happiness beyond Patriarchal and Territorial Boundaries**

The story of Yue-Hua shows that her gainful employment outside the home was an important way to rebuild her confidence, autonomy and independence threatened by government policy and her marital family's excessive demands on her 'free' labour. During my two meetings with her, she emphasized that she now only cares about her own and her children's well-being and happiness. She has probably stayed in the marriage for the sake of her children whom her husband does love and help to take care of. After completing our interview in 2014, I accompanied her to a new shopping mall which had just opened in Kinmen (which targets Chinese tourists through duty-free luxury goods) where she bought some bread and sweets for her children and husband. The prices of these were much higher than the products sold in local bakeries but Yue-Hua said that she now felt alright about spending money that she had earned. She also said that she now spends money on things that make her happy.

Xiao-Yun, who had drawn a lottery and received a message from a god that she would encounter some difficulties in her marital life, found that her widowed mother-in-law (who was in her late forties when Xiao-Yun married) had a huge debt because she was addicted to gambling. Moreover, her mother-in-law, who did not work despite her relatively young age, asked her eldest son, Xiao-Yun's husband, for money for gambling and alcohol. Xiao-Yun initially did not know about the debt but when the monthly allowances she received from her husband constantly shrank and she could hardly buy food and necessities, she interrogated her husband to get at the truth. She then told him that she would help to clear the debt by working 'illegally' (because she had not obtained a work permit yet) while

her mother-in-law helped to look after her new-born son. However, her mother-in-law still drank a lot and often left her child unattended. Xiao-Yun was ultimately relieved when her first child was old enough to enter kindergarten and her mother-in-law started to work part-time. It took ten years for Xiao-Yun to clear the debt; after that, she tended to ignore all affairs related to her mother-in-law even though they still live under the same roof. Xiao-Yun now focuses on her own work and a small business selling sorghum liquor, trying to save money for a house – a dream that was sacrificed due to her mother-in-law’s debt.

Both Yue-Hua and Xiao-Yun barely talked about their husbands and their relationships during interviews. This might have been because they had very limited knowledge about their husbands before marriage and their husbands did not provide support and care for them when needed. They stayed in the marriage, as they said, for their children and because their experiences of going out to work at a young age had trained them to be strong. When they regained their confidence and autonomy through working outside the home, they were able to dismiss the socio-moral demands of wholehearted devotion to their marital families and obedience to their parents-in-law. While Yue-Hua and Xiao-Yun single-mindedly carved out ways to pursue personal happiness, the story of Xin-Ru shows that her alliance with her husband based on their mutual affection enabled them to counter unjust accusations from the husband’s family.

Xin-Ru was one of the very few Chinese women whom I interviewed who spontaneously talked about her husband, with only affection and praise, and showed me her husband’s photo on her smartphone. She and her husband have only a one-year age gap; both married early and then divorced, and each has a child from their previous marriage. When Xin-Ru was in her mid-thirties in the early 2010s, she was called back from Xiamen to her hometown nearby to meet her future husband who was introduced by a relative’s friend. She initially resisted the meeting because she was enjoying her single status, but her parents wanted her to remarry because she was still young. The same pressure was applied to her husband, who was pushed by his parents in taking this matchmaking trip. Eventually they met and found that they got along with each other. They stayed in contact through QQ (a Chinese instant messaging app) and then decided to marry. Xin-Ru told me that she thought that her husband would be a man who *thiànn-bóo* (in Hokkien, lit. indulgent to his wife) so she agreed to the marriage. She also stated several times during the interview that her husband is very *thiànn-bóo*.

Xin-Ru initially lived with her parents-in-law, her younger brother-in-law’s family, and divorced elder sister-in-law after arriving in Kinmen. She told me that her parents-in-law treated her and her brother-in-law’s wife (who was from Taiwan) unequally as she was asked to do most of the housework and cook dinner for the entire extended family every day. Xin-Ru initially accepted these demands for her husband’s sake, even during the difficult times of her pregnancy. However,



her husband's attempts to assist her with household chores were obstructed by her parents-in-law who said that their son was tired from working all day outside. Similar situations occurred time and again, and ultimately Xin-Ru started to challenge her in-laws' requests. For example, she suggested that she and her brother-in-law's wife could take turns in cooking dinner, but her parents-in-law and sister-in-law rejected this and said that Xin-Ru had more time because she did not work outside. When Xin-Ru said that she could also work, her in-laws refused and insulted her by saying, 'You Chinese women only care about money and want to take money from us back to China'. Her husband defended her and answered back, 'My wife's natal family is much wealthier [than us], and do we have money for her to take?'

As the conflicts between the couple and their family members escalated, Xin-Ru's husband finally decided to give up his share of family wealth and move out. On the first Chinese New Year after they moved out, they visited the parental home for ritual ancestor worship. However, they were questioned about whether they still hoped for a share of the family property. After this they avoided visiting the parental home and taking part in the ancestral rituals. Xin-Ru said that she was pleased with her current life with her beloved husband and son in their nuclear household, and she has a job which has allowed her to make several good friends, also married from China. But she has not applied for Taiwanese citizenship, which requires her to cancel her household registration in China (see Cheng 2017). This is because she has housing in China and a first son, who lives in China with his father. Moreover, keeping her household registration in China gives her power and freedom as she can choose to go back whenever necessary. Indeed, her connections and property in China were her backup when she started countering her in-laws' unjust treatment and verbal abuse as she could simply return to China with her husband and son.

Xin-Ru's decision not to apply for Taiwanese citizenship is not rare, as confirmed by an employee in Kinmen's agency supporting foreign spouses, because many marriages between Taiwanese (including Kinmen natives) and Chinese citizens were connected to the couples' pre- and post-marital economic activities across the border. But Xin-Ru is indeed different from most of my Chinese informants who had no valuable personal assets in China before marriage, and had married before the surge of China's economic power. Nevertheless, the opening of *Xiao San Tong* in 2001 contributed to the growth of the tourism industry linked to duty-free shopping focusing on Chinese visitors, which provided Chinese women with economic opportunities. There are numerous guesthouses in Kinmen operated by Chinese women, who use social media, such as QQ and WeChat (a Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment app), to attract Chinese tourists and provide customized tours and services. For example, they take their Chinese customers to various stores in Kinmen to purchase items such

as milk powder, nappies and skincare products made in foreign countries such as Australia, Japan or South Korea because they are safer and cheaper than those sold in China. They create comfortable tourist experiences for their customers by assisting in packing their customers' purchases and delivering them to the port. Mr Huang's daughter-in-law had engaged in this kind of business for some years before I visited their home. She was absent when I visited, and we saw her husband washing a new car outside the house. Mr Huang told me that this car had been bought by his daughter-in-law who has earned remarkable profits from her tourist business and had just recently expanded her business. He seemed proud when describing to me his daughter-in-law's ability to establish and manage a successful business.

Xin-Ru's unwillingness to apply for Taiwanese citizenship and many Chinese women's tourism businesses building on *Xiao San Tong* appear to challenge and even undermine the Taiwanese state's bordering measures. These businesses' reliance on social media used by the vast Chinese population to attract customers also suggests the power of technology and China's huge consumer market to penetrate Taiwan's border. Chinese women may have been disappointed by the undeveloped environment of Kinmen's borderland upon arrival, but now make use of this borderland status for its economic possibilities. Rather than realizing their own visions of a good life directly through marriage, they created their desired lives through hard work and their abilities to absorb and use knowledge of new trends and technology. They were no longer bounded by the local society and the Taiwanese state's demands of their reproductive roles within the home.

## Conclusion

The cases of cross-border marriage in Kinmen, in various regards, resemble those on the Taiwanese mainland that have been scrutinized in a growing interdisciplinary scholarship. They all show how the Taiwanese state's bordering practices are entangled with its bureaucratic and discursive boundaries separating Chinese spouses from other foreign spouses and from Taiwanese citizens. This entanglement is also tied to a vision of a patriarchal, family-based social order that the Taiwanese state still supports, as shown in other policies encouraging heterosexual marriage and childbirth. Though the laws regulating Chinese spouses' residency, work rights and citizenship have been relaxed in the last decade, official discourses reveal the persistent emphasis on Chinese women's reproductive capacities not only for their families' well-being but also in the national interest (Friedman 2015). Chinese women's post-marital lives in Taiwan also reveal demands for their reproductive capacities and the boundary work of marking them as 'questionable others' from their husbands, in-laws and surroundings, mirroring state and media discourses. This chapter contributes to this scholarship by

highlighting a local perspective, showing how kinship and Kinmen's borderland status have jointly produced marriages between Kinmen and China that have also challenged the Taiwanese state's power of bordering.

Ethnographic material on cross-border marriages between Kinmen and China has shown how changing forms of kinship have enabled the reproduction of the patrilineal family in a post-Cold War context featuring an increasingly individualized and commercialized pursuit of intimate relations. The economic asymmetry between Kinmen and rural China in the 1990s and the memories of close ties between the two sides before 1949 encouraged informal trade as well as cross-border matchmaking. The establishment of the *Xiao San Tong* made it easier for people on both sides to further their communications through kinship-based activities, including collaboration in restoring ancestral rituals and investment in real estate in China, and matchmaking. Nevertheless, this cross-border matchmaking was different in nature from the old pattern of matchmaking across the region of Minnan prior to 1949 because of the long-term separation of the two sides under mutually opposing political regimes. These different lived experiences were the source of tensions (e.g. in practices of ancestral rituals, and perceptions of generational and gender hierarchies) in these cross-border marriages which, together with the Taiwanese government's bordering practices, significantly affected the marital lives of Chinese women, often in a negative sense.

Kinmen's borderland status and close ties with the Chinese mainland prior to 1949 meant that kinship ties were a prominent motor for arranging marriages between Kinmenese men and women mostly from the Minnan region of China. Nevertheless, not all Kinmenese men and their family members had close contact with people in China or up-to-date knowledge about China before they married a woman from China. This resulted in divergent marital experiences among the Chinese women married in Kinmen. Some women whose marital families had contacts with China said that their husbands and in-laws treated them well, though they were often expected to take on the gendered work of childbirth, childcare and managing the household.

By contrast, some women were not only required to do all the housework in a large joint household but were also constantly subjected to their in-laws' suspicion and verbal abuse. There were numerous cases of divorce and domestic abuse telling of Chinese women's traumatic marital experiences, although the stories of my informants also show their resilience in overcoming hardship and pursuing their personal interests and happiness. Many Chinese women make use of Kinmen's borderland status, the expanding market of Chinese consumers, and technology to establish their own enterprises as well as to build their confidence and independence. Through their resilience and agency, they have the capacity to challenge and overcome the Taiwanese state's and local patriarchal society's attempts to confine them within the home and the territorial borders of Taiwan.

Chinese women's interactions with their parents-in-law within patrilocal households also provide a critical lens onto the problems in intergenerational and in-law relationships within extended families. These in-married women's twofold 'outsider' status (Oxfeld 2005) – as an outsider to her marital family and as an outsider from China – put them in very difficult positions when their in-laws have strong, prejudiced views about 'Chinese brides'. The stories of Yue-Hua and Xiao-Yun show how, by behaving as 'obedient' sons to their parents, their husbands did not help them. These men's 'ignorance' of their wives' suffering may have been related to a socialization suffused with gender inequality and a lack of affection in their marriages.

In contrast, Xin-Ru's story illustrates her husband's disobedience of his parents and renouncement of his share of family property because his parents' excessive demands and verbal abuse of his wife endangered his marriage, and probably his dignity as well. Leaving his parental home would have been a very tough decision for Xin-Ru's husband, or he could have moved out years earlier (though Xin-Ru's endurance may also have deferred the decision). The emotional alliance and cooperation in pursuing conjugal well-being between Xin-Ru and her husband resembles the nuptial intimacy that Yan (2003) highlights in young people's marriages based on romantic love in post-reform China. These cases suggest the significance of the couple's affectionate ties with each other in reconfiguring hierarchical intergenerational relationships between the young couple and the husband's parents in Chinese families (especially for the wife and her in-laws). Although I interviewed few younger married men in Kinmen, the foregoing stories also illuminate my observation about local men's relationships with their parents, which are complicated by their personal ties, the social-moral norms of filial piety, and their rights to inherit family property.

These Chinese women's stories demonstrate challenges to the conservative visions of marriage and the family of many Kinmen islanders in the local patriarchal context. While many of these women's marriages were associated with kinship-based networks in which they were embedded, they sought to create their own lives through their own choices and actions without being bound by expectations and restrictions from their marital families and the Taiwanese government. Their efforts to pursue their desired lives and futures, with or without the support of their husbands, have contributed to the growing reconfiguration of the generational and gender hierarchies in local patriarchal families discussed in the previous chapters.

The experiences of my Chinese female informants are similar to those of Chinese women marrying Hong Kong men. They also maintain physical and emotional attachment to the Chinese mainland because of its geographic closeness, and try to secure personal freedom and autonomy in the face of patriarchal demands (Binah-Pollak 2019; Chiu and Choi 2020). The comparison of cross-

border marriages in Kinmen and in Hong Kong is theoretically and politically suggestive, especially regarding the interconnectedness between these marriages and the political positions of these two borderlands alongside their changing relations to China. Binah-Pollak (2019) notes how the pursuit of a new political subjectivity in Hong Kong in recent years has led many Hong Kongers to emphasize the separation of themselves from residents originally from the Chinese mainland, including marriage migrants. Though my Chinese informants also encountered prejudice due to their places of origin, they generally feel comfortable about living in Kinmen and can openly ask for their rights and entitlements to be met because local government and society in general prefer to maintain amicable relations with China, as noted in this book's Introduction. This comparison brings to the fore how kinship and marriage are also political processes that have important effects beyond the control of formal politics. Given recent rising tensions between Hong Kong and China and Taiwan and China, which are closely linked to the growing assertion of political subjectivity among the populations of Hong Kong and Taiwan, which is at odds with the expectations of China, further research and comparison of cross-border marriage in Kinmen and Hong Kong may provide fresh insights into these political entanglements.

### Notes

1. The available data for Kinmen for Figures 5.1 and 5.2 starts from the year 2004 but cross-border marriages emerged in Kinmen many years before. The original official data already distinguished foreign spouses by gender and by nationality or place of origin. Female spouses from China mean those from the Chinese mainland, with spouses from Hong Kong and Macau excluded. Female spouses from Southeast Asian countries mean those from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos.
2. These two laws are the Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone of the Republic of China (1998) and the Law on the Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf of the Republic of China (1998) respectively.
3. There are many stories about this kind of displacement in Kinmen and Xiamen. I also heard from my informants in Kinmen that they knew some men who were residents of Dadeng and were recruited by the Chinese Communists to be boatmen to ship their soldiers to Kinmen for an attack in late 1949. These boatmen tried to hide after landing, and then married local women and stayed in Kinmen.