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The Work of Marriage
An In-Married Woman's Perspective

Despite the increasing expression of individual-focused lifestyles, the patrilocal joint household remains common in Kinmen today. This residential pattern is not merely a reflection of persistent patriarchal norms, including continuing male-focused transmission of family property and filial duties, but is also closely related to the financial constraints faced by young couples amid economic changes in Taiwan as a whole. Wage stagnation and recession in some industries on the Taiwanese mainland since the beginning of this century have created a growing inverse flow of young people, from fresh graduates to experienced workers, back to Kinmen to seek other possibilities and to save money by living in their parental homes. Young couples' attempts to purchase housing of their own are obstructed by the rapid rise in local property prices since the establishment of the ferry service between Kinmen and Xiamen in 2001, which attracted many Taiwanese businessmen to invest in Kinmen's real estate. On the other hand, many parents have built modern three- or four-storey houses on their unused family farmland in which they have reserved rooms for their married and unmarried children – in a mixture of care for their children and expectation of their children's company in old age. This has further encouraged their married sons and their wives to accept patrilocal co-residence.

The above phenomena illustrate the dilemma between personal desires and familial obligations that many young people in Kinmen experience today, as I have elaborated in the foregoing chapters. Recent anthropological scholarship has documented similar situations across many Asian societies where conservative gendered norms and patrilocal residence remain the norm. While recognizing the increasing emphasis on conjugal ties and intimacy in these societies, resonating with a global rise of individualism for self-consciously modern or middle-class

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subjects, this scholarship highlights the emphasis that young people place on their familial ties and obligations. This sustaining of kin ties may serve as a safety net or ensure continued upward mobility, or both, in the era of what Beck (1992) has termed 'risk society' (Hu and Mu 2021; Maqsood 2021a, 2021b; Yan 2016, 2021). But, in light of conservative aims to reproduce the family or preserve a given social order, kin ties may also continue to constitute structural constraints and processes within which individuals have to negotiate between personal and collective interests (Donner and Santos 2016; Santos and Harrell 2017).

Building on this scholarship, this chapter traces the interaction between conjugality and wider kin bonds with a focus on in-married women's experiences. While young couples in Kinmen live patrilocally out of filial sentiment, financial constraints and access to help with childcare from paternal parents, tensions or conflicts between family members, especially between female in-laws, can arise. In the preceding chapter on cross-border marriage, we have seen how in-married Chinese women suffered excessive demands for their domestic labour and verbal abuse from their in-laws. Though these Chinese women's difficult experiences were related to their places of origin, the tensions between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law are a well-documented feature of societies with patriarchal traditions across the world (Brown 2004; Gallin 1986; Kandiyoti 1988; Vlahoutsikou 1997; Wolf 1972). This chapter considers the complicated interaction between multiple dyadic relations – wife-husband, parent-child and in-law relations – within patrilocal households over an extended period of time. I demonstrate how my longitudinal study in Kinmen provides insights into the future-making and relational aspects of marriage, illuminating how changes to unequal and oppressive elements of patriarchy could be generated from the intimate spheres of kinship and marriage.

My ethnography centres on a woman called Shu-Hui – a Kinmen native in her late thirties when we met in 2013 – as well as members of her marital family. The family was one of several joint families in a large patrilineal village that I visited frequently between 2013 and 2020. I focus on this family because I interacted with several members across three generations in their extended family, including those who reside outside the village and in Taiwan, and their family stories instantiate how people live their lives within a tight kinship web in Kinmen. My observation of the shifting circumstances of their family over the past several years has enabled me to explore the relational aspects of marriage, especially how both the positive and negative effects of kinship practices resulted in kin ties, including conjugal ties, being thickened or thinned over time (Carsten 2013, 2019; Das 2007; Lambek 2011). It also allowed me to probe into the future-making aspect of marriage by examining what the couple do to maintain their marriage while creating their preferred lives and desired futures. Inspired by their stories and by a theoretical horizon provided by new kinship studies, I use an inclusive and

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expansive term, 'the work of marriage', to denote the reciprocal effects that the couple's investments of various kinds in their marriage had on their conjugal ties.

The significance of my use of the term 'the work of marriage' is two-fold. First, it refers to the actual work that people do in everyday marital lives, including physical labour, emotional input and ethical struggles. Second, it denotes the immediate results as well as the cumulative effects that the mundane work of marriage have on people, moulding their subjectivities and perceptions of their nuptial relationships over time. These effects are part of what kinship does and how (Carsten 2013) – rather than what kinship is – which has become the focus of enquiry in new kinship studies. Relatedness, a key notion in this scholarship, is used to sidestep the biological/social dichotomy which has bedevilled definitions of kinship (Carsten 2000, 2004), and its inclusive qualities encompass what marriage does as part of people's experiences of kinship or intimate relations. Nevertheless, the blurring between experiences of kinship and marriage under the concept of relatedness risks passing over the distinctive status that marriage entails for a person in a given culture. In this regard, Margery Wolf's (1972) concept of uterine family is helpful to allow intersectional analysis of culture and gender in my discussion of the work of marriage.

Based on her nuanced observation of family lives in rural Taiwan in the late 1950s, Wolf (1972) argued that sustaining a patrilineal family was inseparable from an informal sub-group created by a mother and centring on her ties with her children, especially sons, which she called a 'uterine family'. The emphasis on mother-son ties reflects the in-married woman's vulnerable position in her husband's family in traditional settings because marriage did not directly make her a member of that family. She had to give birth to a son to solidify her position, and, through nourishing ties with her son, she hoped to secure her son's support to her in old age. While confirming Wolf's conceptual breakthrough, Stafford (2000a, 2000b) notes that Wolf seemed to downplay the significance of the uterine family by viewing it as 'only a way of accommodating to the patriarchal family' (Wolf 1985: 11; see Stafford 2000a: 52). He therefore proposed the cycle of *yang* (care and nurturance) to foreground women's crucial and positive roles in Chinese kinship. However, this emphasis on the positive effects of *yang* in making kinship or relatedness may overlook the darker side of kinship in terms of conflicts and rupture between female in-laws. It is at this point that I return to Wolf's discussion on the interactions between an in-married woman, her husband and her mother-in-law, in light of her concept of uterine family, which reveals the negative impact of the patriarchal structure on a woman's marital experiences.

In Wolf's ethnographic account of the uterine family, women's strategies in coping with the gender inequality inherent in the patriarchal structure led to the damage, marginalization or thinning of conjugal relations. Not only might a woman's relationship with her husband be negatively affected by her focus on rearing

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her son but also, after her son grew up and married, his relationship with his wife might be threatened by this mother-son bond. Wolf pertinently captured how the tensions between female in-laws engendered by the patriarchal structure arose in the forms of open disputes and tacit emotional mistreatment in everyday interactions between the older and younger women. Both women tried to draw the son/husband to her side, and it was usually the mother who won the game (Wolf 1972: 158–60). Besides the structural suppression of conjugality (conventionally through parental control over children's marriages and moral emphasis on filial piety), the strong mother-son ties also worked against the daughter-in-law's interests and her nuptial relationship, even in the case of marriage by choice.

As Wolf's ethnography was situated in a context where women had only recently begun to gain some autonomy through working outside the home, this raises the question of how the suppression or marginalization of conjugality might change with wider social transformations that weakened the patriarchal family's control of its members' labour, income and desires. Moreover, while Wolf portrayed what a married woman's life in old age would be like (1972: 215–29), she did not touch on how an aging woman's illness and need of care might affect the relations between members of her extended family. In what follows, I examine these questions through the double significance of the work of marriage, on the basis of my ethnographic material centred on Shu-Hui's marital experiences over the past several years. This longitudinal study of family lives, I argue, brings to light how kinship and marriage not only create pressure for individuals to fulfil the conservative aim of preserving the patriline but also generate transformative challenges to the patriarchal order – though this is often unremarked and occurs at a gradual pace in everyday lives.

Conjugal Intimacy and Patrilocal Co-Residence

It has been widely documented in contemporary non-Western societies that 'love marriage' has been associated with people's self-shaping as modern or middle class, and the rise of the individual who actively pursues personal feelings and desires (Cole and Thomas 2009; Donner and Santos 2016; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006). Though none of my interlocutors in Kinmen, whose family backgrounds, education and careers vary, used *xiandai* (modern) or *zhongchan jieji* (middle class) to describe who they are or want to become, the lifestyles that they pursued appeared congruent with those described as 'modern' or 'middle-class' across the globe. Romantic love is indeed significant in many of the marriages of young people whom I interviewed or met in Kinmen.[1] Notably, 'love' is not always the term that my informants used to express their intimate feelings towards their partners. Maqsood (2021a, 2021b) observed in urban Pakistan that women described their husbands' love for them using English words such as 'caring'. Similarly, my

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interlocutors used other registers to describe their conjugal relations and intimacy, such as *hedelai* (get along well or feel compatible with each other) or *thiànn-bóo* (in Hokkien, lit. indulging one's wife). Members of the younger generation are obviously different from their parents in their espousal and open expressions of their nuptial intimacy.

Yan's (2003) ethnography of changing private lives in post-reform China has compellingly shown how the rising pursuit of 'love marriage' among young people has involved materially securing conjugal privacy and intimacy. They may demand an individual room specifically for themselves in the patrilocal joint residence, or take a further step and ask for early division of family property in order to establish their own nuclear household. In Kinmen, as explained at the beginning of this chapter, many couples take patrilocal joint residence for various interlinked reasons. But there were several cases in which young couples received housing or support to buy a new residence from the wife or the husband's resourceful parents upon marriage and formed nuclear households. I also knew several couples who decided to move out of the paternal parental home by renting a residence with a view to securing their spatial privacy and freedom.[2]

Young couples who live in the husband's parental home also find ways to ensure conjugal privacy and happiness. Usually, it is not a problem for the young couple to have an independent room for themselves and another room(s) for their children, but the entire stem or joint family tends to use the same kitchen and eat together. Similar to young couples' behaviour in Pakistan (Maqsood 2021a, 2021b), my informants resorted to consumption to gain private space and time for themselves or for their nuclear family by eating outside and by booking a trip to Taiwan or to other countries. For example, Wan-Rong, a woman who was originally from Taiwan and moved to her husband's parental home after marriage, arranged a trip, with her husband's help, to Taiwan for several days during the Chinese New Year holidays every year just for her nuclear family. This is significant because the Chinese New Year is a time for family reunion and there are various rituals in Kinmen which take up women's time and labour in preparing food offerings, and Wan-Rong does not go to visit her parents (who are no longer living). Wan-Rong and her husband just want to find a time when the husband and children can take a longer break from work and school, and enjoy themselves together far away from home.

In the case of Shu-Hui – the female protagonist of this chapter – in addition to eating out and having fun outside of Kinmen, she and her husband created a space for their nuclear family by reconstructing his family's old house. Shu-Hui's husband, Jia-Cheng, was the youngest of five sons and the only one who lived with his widowed mother in the parental home. When I moved to Shu-Hui's marital village in 2013, their house was under reconstruction. The old house was a traditional-style building, consisting of two single-storey living spaces originally

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separated by a small courtyard between them, plus an external kitchen. Shu-Hui had been living with her mother-in-law in the front part of the house after her marriage and after giving birth to two daughters. The reconstruction was to turn the courtyard into a roofed space for a living room, and to renovate the rear part as a work and study space and two bedrooms for the couple and their school-age children. Shu-Hui's nuclear family moved into the new living space after the reconstruction was completed, but they still used the old kitchen to cook everyday meals and came to the front common room to dine with the grandmother. However, this balance between her desire for a space for her nuclear family and the norm of patrilocal co-residence involved Shu-Hui in a compromise.

In a conversation in their new living room, Shu-Hui once told me that, instead of reconstructing the old house with the money that she and Jia-Cheng had saved after several years of hard work, she originally wanted to buy a new modern house in a neighbouring village. But she eventually went along with Jia-Cheng's wish to stay in his beloved natal village and look after his mother, who would never agree to move away. It was for the same reasons, as well as Jia-Cheng's lack of money when he married, that Shu-Hui accepted patrilocal co-residence. Though Shu-Hui did not say so explicitly, my familiarity with the couple suggests that her affection for Jia-Cheng contributed to her compromise. When I talked about my new research on marriage on a visit to their home in 2017, Jia-Cheng said in front of his wife and children that his marriage with Shu-Hui was out of *ai* (love), and it was Shu-Hui who made the first move.[3] Back in the early 2000s, Shu-Hui happened to see Jia-Cheng in her uncle's workplace and she asked her uncle to introduce them to each other. Jia-Cheng said that he was a poor man without money and higher education, but Shu-Hui, a woman with a university degree and from a good family background, was still willing to marry him and had endured hardship in their early marital life. The following sections depict how this couple's mutual affection and Jia-Cheng's appreciation of Shu-Hui's compromise or sacrifice are objectified in their work of marriage, informing their actions and shaping their shared sense of their union.

Rupture between Female In-Laws in Mundane Daily Lives

I became familiar with Shu-Hui much later than with her mother-in-law, husband and children. My participation in the village's voluntary group, mainly composed of female villagers between the ages of fifty and eighty, led me to befriend Shu-Hui's mother-in-law, Ming-Yu, who was in her late sixties in 2013. As I volunteered in numerous village activities, such as cleaning the village's public spaces and assisting with preparing food for participants in village funerals, I soon gained positive recognition from Jia-Cheng who was a young leader in managing the village's affairs. I was often invited by Ming-Yu or Jia-Cheng to have lunch or dinner

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at their home, and I thus became close to Jia-Cheng's two daughters as well. Shu-Hui was almost absent in these public village events and during my visits to their home because she looked after her clothing shop in the market town from morning to late evening almost every day. Shu-Hui's absence from daily activities in her marital household fuelled Ming-Yu's negative judgements about this daughter-in-law and the obvious rupture between them.

The rituals of ancestor worship carried out at different levels in Kinmen – by an individual family, a patrilineage branch, or a patrilineage as a whole – manifest the resilience of patrilineal values in organizing local lives (Chiu 2017). Most old and middle-aged female homemakers I know arranged their daily and annual schedules by prioritizing the numerous dates for worshipping ancestors and local gods for which they had to prepare food offerings. For various reasons, the total number of ancestral rituals that Ming-Yu's family attended to in a year was much greater than those of other families. Ming-Yu prepared food and carried out the rituals mostly by herself until 2017 when illness seriously affected her ability to remember the duties of worship. When I lived in the village in 2013–2014, I often helped Ming-Yu by laying out the offerings on the table and burning the ghost money for ancestors or gods. Ming-Yu was not a talkative person and was rather shy and reserved. But, like other old village women, as she became accustomed to my presence, she volunteered various things about herself and her five sons.

Gradually I learned about Ming-Yu's married sons' families – apart from Jia-Cheng, three sons live in Taiwan and one lives in a market town in Kinmen. I also heard Ming-Yu's commendation of or complaints about specific sons and daughters-in-law. Her fourth son – whom Ming-Yu deemed to have a similar personality to herself – and daughter-in-law appeared to be her favourite. Ming-Yu proudly told me that this couple were both school teachers in Taiwan and, despite their heavy workloads, managed to give birth to four children – two boys and two girls. She also emphasized that this couple were very *guai* (well-behaved and filial) because they, especially the daughter-in-law, always assisted Ming-Yu with ritual preparations when they came home for the Chinese New Year holidays and other festivals. Ming-Yu's praise of her fourth daughter-in-law was often articulated along with her critique of Shu-Hui, who, Ming-Yu asserted, 'doesn't know anything about cooking and ancestor worship because she was spoiled by her natal family'.

As we have seen throughout this book, the preservation of patrilineal traditions in Kinmen has sustained a vision of a patriarchal family-based social order which serves as the framework in reference to which people take action and make moral judgements. For local women of Ming-Yu's generation, it was normal for the work of marriage for a woman to extend far beyond the unit of the conjugal family. A woman was evaluated by the extent to which she fulfilled patrilineal duties, including daily dutiful care of her parents-in-law and dead ancestors

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(through ritual) and procreation of male offspring to continue the agnatic line. It appeared that Ming-Yu's preference for her fourth son and his wife was built on a combination of specific mother-son ties and this couple's individual achievements and compliance with traditional patrilineal obligations. By contrast, Ming-Yu's negative judgements about Shu-Hui focused on the young woman's failure to fulfil this extensive work of marriage.[4]

The ways in which Ming-Yu judged her daughters-in-law by reference to patriarchal gendered roles were common among other senior village women. I often heard these women's evaluations when volunteering with them – implying that these women tried to find moral support for themselves by extending a personal judgement into a social one. For example, during a volunteering activity, I once heard a woman in her early seventies ask a middle-aged woman next to her whether she was afraid of her mother-in-law. When the younger woman answered yes, the older one remarked immediately: 'That's it. When I entered my marital household, I was very afraid of my mother-in-law. I followed her every instruction and worked hard every day. Now, look at my daughter-in-law, she always stays in their [conjugal] room'.

As older women often implicitly or explicitly critiqued their daughters-in-law at gatherings of village women of different ages, it was very likely that a daughter-in-law living in the same village would know how her mother-in-law talked about her. Despite this, Shu-Hui admitted openly several times that she had no interest in learning how to do the rituals and that she was bad at cooking. Though Jia-Cheng might sometimes become angry at Shu-Hui because of her lack of care over household chores, as I heard from Ming-Yu, the couple have maintained a mutually understanding and supportive relationship. They have supported each other's decisions about their careers, such as Shu-Hui's small shop in the market town and Jia-Cheng's investment in various business projects. Wolf (1972) suggests that the strong mother-son ties produced by the oppressive patriarchal structure might lead a son to align with his mother and against his wife when he had to take sides. But she did not consider how a mother's unequal treatment of her children might affect the ties between the mother and a specific child as well as other relationships. Ming-Yu's preference for her fourth son was obvious from her talk about him, and was recognized by Sui-Hui who felt that Ming-Yu had not paid due attention to Jia-Cheng. I never heard Jia-Cheng comment on this matter; rather, I observed him protecting his ties with Shu-Hui by assisting his mother in cooking and ritual preparation whenever he could, and dismissing potentially harmful questions about Shu-Hui from his mother and close villagers.

However, Shu-Hui was not unaffected by the male-focused living environment and associated expectations. During my first fieldwork, both Shu-Hui and Jia-Cheng claimed that 'it's enough to have two children' (*sheng liangge jiuhaole*), even though they were daughters. But, when I paid a visit to them in

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late 2015, I was surprised to find that Shu-Hui had just given birth to a third child. Shu-Hui said that she had long felt the pressure from others to produce a son, so she discussed it with Jia-Cheng and they decided together to give it a try. Their decision to have a third child resembles a case in China that Santos (2021: 5–8) describes, in which childbirth was not a couple's 'free choice' but an 'intimate choice' that involved complex moral negotiations between multiple actors and their values, such as the expectations to have a grandson from the husband's natal family.[5] Though the birth of their third daughter understandably disappointed Shu-Hui and Jia-Cheng, as well as the grandmother, to some extent, they explicitly expressed their love for the baby. Shu-Hui became a stay-at-home mother engaged in full-time childcare afterwards, and started learning how to cook from other young mothers in the village, with support from her husband and two school-aged children.

Predicaments of Elderly Care and Ethical Struggles

Shu-Hui closed her clothing shop in early 2014 because the profits were lower than predicted, and she then found an administrative post in an acquaintance's company. Shu-Hui seemed realistic about closing her business (she also persuaded her husband to give up some unsuccessful business projects) and appeared not to be particularly ambitious about her career. This might explain her acceptance of becoming a homemaker after giving birth to her third child, and in the face of her mother-in-law's worsening health condition. During my stay in the village in 2013–2014, Ming-Yu had occasional serious headaches that prevented her from getting enough sleep, and her ability to remember things was declining. In my visits over the years between 2015 and 2020, while Ming-Yu was physically able to move around and could converse with others fluently, her loss of short-term memory worsened noticeably. She almost immediately forgot what she had just said and done, and this caused numerous minor and more major problems. Her waning short-term memory eventually prevented her from doing most housework, including cooking and routine worship of ancestors and gods, which she had carefully attended to for decades. Though Shu-Hui had been trying to take over this work – which she had intentionally avoided before – and look after her mother-in-law, the tensions between these two women had not eased but were becoming more severe, as demonstrated in a scene below.

On one of my visits to Shu-Hui's family in 2017, I was invited to have dinner in their home as usual. As Jia-Cheng had a business appointment that evening, he asked Shu-Hui to save time by buying takeaway food and bringing it home. After Shu-Hui brought the food home, I helped to set the table and chairs for dinner in the old common room. Ming-Yu then entered the room and greeted me enthusiastically but frowned when seeing the takeaway food on the table, without

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saying a word. Shu-Hui showed Ming-Yu the bowl of noodle soup intended for her. Ming-Yu took the bowl quietly and retreated to a chair a bit away from the table, though I asked her to sit beside me. Over dinner, conversation between the three adults and two school children was rather limited as Shu-Hui was busy feeding her baby daughter while Ming-Yu focused on slowly eating her noodles. Shu-Hui's two elder daughters finished their meals quickly and, with their little sister, went to the new common room in the rear part of the house. Ming-Yu then claimed that she was full and put her bowl on the table, with nearly half her portion remaining. As Shu-Hui responded that she would clean up the table, Ming-Yu left the house to go somewhere else.

I stayed with Shu-Hui, who had just started to enjoy her noodle soup. Regarding Ming-Yu's behaviour, Shu-Hui sighed and said, 'It's not that she didn't like the noodles but she just dislikes anything I do. She doesn't like the food I cook either'. Shu-Hui gave me some examples of her daily predicament in coping with her mother-in-law's resistance to her provision of care. Though Ming-Yu disliked Shu-Hui's cooking, she usually ate the food at dinner time when Jia-Cheng was present. But things became very difficult in the daytime when Jia-Cheng was at work, as Shu-Hui described: 'During weekdays when only mom, me and my baby were at home, I often had to buy takeaway food as lunch. I couldn't cook because mom was unwilling to help me take care of the baby. But mom barely ate the food I brought back'. Initially, Shu-Hui thought that Ming-Yu might simply dislike takeaway food, but this was not the case. One time Shu-Hui and her friends – a number of young mothers in the village – conducted a test. One of Shu-Hui's friends delivered the takeaway food to Ming-Yu without revealing the truth that the food had been bought by Shu-Hui. Ming-Yu happily received the food and finished all of it. With this example, Shu-Hui concluded: 'She is determined to be against me (*ta jiushi gen wo zuodui*)'.

The predicament and pressure that Shu-Hui faced came not only from her mother-in-law's direct rejection of care but also from her siblings-in-law's suspicions about the appropriateness of care. As Ming-Yu gradually lost her ability to manage household chores, sometimes her sons and daughters-in-law living in Taiwan were unable to properly judge her condition on their occasional return visits. There was a period during which Ming-Yu was able to cook several dishes of food to welcome the return of her sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren, though she barely cooked in daily life. These sons and daughters-in-law thus did not find Ming-Yu's health condition particularly worrying until Jia-Cheng and Shu-Hui told them about their mother's troubles. In a conversation between me and Shu-Hui about a serious problem caused by Ming-Yu in 2018, Shu-Hui said that though her brothers-in-law did not criticize her or her husband directly, they blamed them for not paying sufficient attention to their vulnerable mother. 'But, was it possible for us to restrict her movement or to keep an eye on her all the time? They [her broth-

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ers-in-law and their wives] were not here so they didn't know what really happened here and how much trouble we have gone through', Shu-Hui complained bitterly with her voice raised. She then remarked in a distressed tone: 'Things are very tough for those who are left behind to look after their parents'.

Shu-Hui's feelings of distress and bitterness generated by her failure to earn her in-laws' recognition of her efforts are shared by many of my older and younger female interlocutors in Kinmen. This problematizes a tendency to understand the notion of *fengyang* (respectfully caring for the elder) through its positive aspects (Stafford 2000a, 2000b), without due attention to negative responses from the care-receiver which result in tensions between the care-receiver and care-provider, and between the care-provider and third parties. Veena Das's (2012, 2018a, 2018b) discussion of ordinary ethics considered in Chapter 1 provides a window onto these female care-providers' emotional suffering and ethical striving in their everyday persistence of caring for their parents-in-law. Their strength to endure the challenges of elderly care are continuously complemented by their ethical struggles with social norms and personal feelings and by relatedness-making with others from whom they receive support in carrying out the work of marriage.

Reconfiguring Relations within and beyond the Nuclear Family

After Shu-Hui closed her small enterprise in 2014, her relations with her two school children became notably closer. Though she still had a full-time job, she came home to dine with her family every evening and became more involved in her children's lives. A young village woman who is close to Shu-Hui told me that, when Shu-Hui revealed her pregnancy with a third child, her second daughter became unhappy and even cried and patted her mother's belly. My interlocutor interpreted this girl's reaction as her realization that there would be one more child sharing her mother's love and attention, which she had only recently begun to receive. Fortunately, the baby girl's birth was eventually welcomed by her two elder sisters, who assist their mother with housework. Moreover, because Shu-Hui's second daughter is very close to her grandmother who had looked after her earlier when her mother ran the small shop, Shu-Hui usually relied on this daughter to attend to Ming-Yu, for example, by calling her to dinner and reminding her to take her medicines. I witnessed on several occasions how Shu-Hui looked relieved when she could rely on her daughter to conduct these minor tasks of care, which saved her from confronting rejection or silence from her mother-in-law.

With the birth of her third daughter, Shu-Hui appeared to enhance the solidarity of her uterine family, and she and her daughters have deepened their emotional bonds with each other. In Wolf's conceptualization, the father is not quite a member of this informal group and may even be 'the enemy'. From what I observed, Jia-Cheng, the husband and father, is not excluded but is rather an important

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source of physical and emotional support for Shu-Hui and his three daughters. At my numerous dinners in their home in recent years, Shu-Hui did the cooking, sometimes with Jia-Cheng's help. Several times, over the dinner table, Jia-Cheng told me with a smile of pride on his face that Shu-Hui had made significant progress in cooking. While Jia-Cheng, currently the only breadwinner of his family, was very busy with his work, I witnessed that he shared the work of caring for the baby and attending school events of their two elder daughters whenever he could. Jia-Cheng's involvement in housework and childrearing may be less connected to his recognition of gender equality than to his affectionate ties with his wife and children, but his input in the work of marriage did signal certain changes in family relations in the younger generation. He and some young married men I knew in Kinmen illustrate new expressions of masculinity, which emphasize both a man's ability to provide for his family and his emotional and physical engagement in strengthening the bonds between members of his nuclear family (see Wong 2020 on similar phenomena in China). With all the family members' input to maintain the course of everyday life, Shu-Hui's nuclear family has become much more solid than before.

Shu-Hui's transition to becoming a homemaker has not limited her social life but rather expanded her circle of friends within the patrilineal village. During my first fieldwork in 2013–2014, while Shu-Hui had good interactions with some women who were wives of her husband's friends and agnates, she was rather detached from these social networks because of her full-time occupation. Things changed after Shu-Hui gave birth to her third child. In my numerous visits to Shu-hui in recent years, I observed that she had befriended more young mothers in the village – again, wives of Jia-Cheng's friends and agnates – and had frequent meetings with them. They routinely took an after-dinner walk around the village together with their children, and often had a chat over afternoon tea in Shu-Hui's home. As Shu-Hui told me, she has received much emotional and practical support from these friends, who had taught her how to cook, helped to care for her baby girl, and advised her on how to interact with her mother-in-law – as described earlier, when Shu-Hui and her friends conducted a test to see Ming-Yu's reaction to takeaway food.

The social circle involving Shu-Hui and her friends on the surface resembles the women's community described by Wolf (1972: 37–40) but has distinctive differences. The female community that Wolf observed decades earlier was built on in-married women's sharing of space and time together when doing domestic chores outside the house, such as washing clothes on the riverbank and cleaning vegetables at a communal pump. Similarly, Ming-Yu became especially close to some women whom she met regularly when serving food offerings to the common ancestors in the ancestral buildings of her marital village. In other words, the women whose husbands belong to the same lineage branch (i.e. the same circle of

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ancestor worship) tend to be closer to each other, and thus there are several women's communities within the village, and the boundaries between them are blurred.

With women's increasing employment outside the home after marriage and childbirth, the space and time for the formation of women's communities were much reduced. In Shu-Hui's case, her new social circle was formed on the basis that most women are currently full-time homemakers because they had preschool children, and some women's husbands preferred them to stay at home to attend to the heavy household chores, including caring for aging parents-in-law. But, unlike the older women's communities in which their husbands were barely involved, these younger women's husbands are important in bringing their wives together initially, and now and then take part in their wives' sociality. These young couples also create a larger community, with their children included, by holding various joint entertainments (e.g. barbecues) in their leisure time. In so doing, these young couples manage to increase intimacy between members of their nuclear families but also maintain good relations with wider social networks, which are essential when they are in need of help.

Shu-Hui's energy for the difficult work of caring for her mother-in-law is arguably inseparable from her enhancement of ties with members of her nuclear family and wider social networks. Though disputes and ruptures occurring within these circles upset Shu-Hui from time to time, she continuously engaged herself in activities that sustain these ties and bring her joy. She made significant changes to herself through trying to fulfil the normative roles expected of an in-married woman in this patrilineal community, i.e. by being a full-time homemaker taking care of children, parents-in-law and household chores. Her self-adjustment was difficult and her female companions in the village have served as a cushion to tolerate and soothe her negative feelings generated from domestic work. But these female companions also reminded Shu-Hui about avoiding making 'complaints' publicly, and that all women in Kinmen endure the same pressure and burden of work. Rather than simply drawing on the patrilineal framework to restrict Shu-Hui, these women advised her to respond to the normative expectations pragmatically so as to maintain her marriage and her life in this patriarchal community as smoothly as possible. But these pragmatic responses did not occur without Shu-Hui's ethical striving to maintain a lifeworld including people she cares about (Das 2012), for whom she has made changes to herself and compromises (see Papadaki 2021 on similar scenarios of women's self-change and compromise in marriage in Athens).

The Work of Marriage and Time

I do not know how Shu-Hui and Jia-Cheng imagined their conjugal relationship before they decided to marry based on their affection for each other. As shown in previous sections, Shu-Hui made several compromises from the beginning of

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her marriage by accepting patrilocal co-residence, then giving up the purchase of a new modern house, and learning to cook and taking care of her ill mother-in-law. Though I use the term 'compromise' several times in this chapter, Shu-Hui did not use the Chinese terms for compromise or sacrifice in her narratives about her marital life. When describing a situation or result related to her husband that diverged from her original plans or desires, Shu-Hui always said, '*meibanfa* ("I could not do anything" or "it was not up to me"), because that's what he [Jia-Cheng] wanted'. While this short phrase suggests Shu-Hui's suppression of her individuality and submission to Jia-Cheng's desires, it does not mean that her thoughts and desires were not recognized and valued by her husband.

In updating the family news from Shu-Hui, Jia-Cheng and their children in the past several years, I noticed that they often mentioned how a decision was made collectively by Shu-Hui and Jia-Cheng. The children talked about how family trips to Taiwan or abroad involved the opinions of both their mother and father, and the plan sometimes suited their mother's preferences more, and sometimes their father's. Both spouses mentioned how Shu-Hui's previous enterprise and Jia-Cheng's several business projects were established and terminated through the couple's discussion and joint decision. Though Shu-Hui tended to go along with Jia-Cheng's plans when she had doubts, her advice was listened to and followed by Jia-Cheng when things did not go as well as expected. Jia-Cheng told me several times that his investment in various new projects, with Shu-Hui's support, was not aimed at immediate material gains but at material security for their three daughters in the future. The relational aspect of marriage suggests the potential challenges to the two persons in a conjugal relationship to assert their individuality as they may sometimes make compromises for one another or take decisions together to attain a collective aim – which is linked to the future-making aspect of marriage.

Magee (2021) notes that in marriage counselling in the US, where individualism and the association of marriage with religious and social ties are both valued, the question of how spouses can retain their individuality in a long marriage frequently came to the fore. People were advised that some degree of personal transformation and enduring individualism are both necessary to make their marriage work. The term 'individualism' (translated as *ge-ren-zhu-yi* in Chinese), which may be narrowed and equated to egoism as Yan (2003) observed in China, is not a term that my young informants used to refer to themselves, but their growing demonstration of individuality through referencing personal rights and desires is palpable. Rather than suggesting repression of their individuality, the deep participation in each other's lives that I describe for Shu-Hui and Jia-Cheng reflects how their words and actions marked their solidarity as a marital union. When Shu-Hui remarked that 'things are very tough for those left behind to look after their parents', she viewed herself and her husband as a union in facing together the prob-

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lems, suspicions and blame of others. When Jia-Cheng commended Shu-Hui's significant progress in cooking, he appeared to take on the burden of Shu-Hui's numerous failed attempts and eventual achievements. This couple demonstrates how their marital union is strengthened through their engagement in each other's lifeworlds, viewing each other's desires, problems and feelings as their own.

Just as clients of marriage counselling in the US were advised to make certain personal adjustments to keep their marriages going, such self-change, as part of the work of marriage and the time involved, are also significant in Shu-Hui's experiences. The patriarchal environment of Jia-Cheng's natal community which Shu-Hui married into and lived in presented more challenges for Shu-Hui than for Jia-Cheng in their marital lives. For the first decade of her marriage, Shu-Hui did not submit to the patriarchal norms demanding that she concentrate her labour and time on housework. Despite the tensions with her mother-in-law due to her avoidance of housework, Shu-Hui had her husband's support. At the same time, Shu-Hui supported Jia-Cheng's ambitions in his career and investment of time, labour and money in his natal village's affairs. It was this mutual support through a decade that sustained their marriage and encouraged Shu-Hui to make significant changes to herself by focusing her labour and time on her family and household chores when her mother-in-law had an increased need of care. We see the work of time (Das 2007) in generating changes in actors in a marriage and their relationships with others, not through open conflicts or rebellion but through the mundane work of caring, tolerating and tinkering with injury through mutual help and pursuing shared happiness in life. As suggested in Carsten's (2019) discussion on the gradations of kinship and temporality, the thickening or thinning of marital ties over time has much to do with the extent to which a couple engage themselves in the actual everyday work of marriage.

The processual character and potential for change implied in the idea of relatedness or gradations of kinship help to enrich our understanding of people's marital experiences, including both bright and dark moments in their marital lives, all of which together are important to the survival or end of their marriages. The story of Shu-Hui illustrates the work of marriage and time in her self-change and her endeavour to take on the roles and work expected of an in-married woman in the local patriarchal setting. Through their involvement in each other's lives, Shu-Hui and her husband shared the burden that a marriage entails in their society but also the joy that they themselves create through family trips and joint entertainment with wider networks. Their marital experiences cannot simply be evaluated by the criteria of how they divide housework or share family decision making, or whether they have prioritized conjugal interest over familial obligations. However, as demonstrated in the course of Shu-Hui's marital life, it is also important to note how patriarchal norms remain resilient and powerful in shaping gendered expectations that are unequally experienced

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by women today. But it is also important to detect how a couple collaborate innovatively and ethically to maintain their marriage while upholding familial duties and wider social bonds.

Conclusion

The rapid global expansion of a neoliberal economy and marketization since the late twentieth century has had two seemingly contradictory consequences, which are particularly prominent in Asia: the dominant trend of 'love marriage' manifesting personal freedom and emotions on the one hand, and the continued popularity of joint living arrangements in both urban and rural settings on the other. Recent scholarship has explained these intriguing phenomena as ordinary people's agency and pragmatic responses to the intersection between the weak provision of social welfare under neoliberal governance and ordinary families' joint efforts to tackle resource constraints and to secure upward mobility (e.g. Donner and Santos 2016; Ochiai and Hosoya 2014; Maqsood 2021a, 2021b; Yan 2016, 2021). Ethnographic evidence from different social settings shows how young couples try to pursue conjugal intimacy and desires, which are potentially threatened by the lack of privacy in stem or joint households. Consumption, which implies the powerful penetrative force of marketization, appears to be a common means employed by people across the world to attain and materialize their conjugal intimacy and happiness as well as to mark their modern or middle-class subjectivities. While joint households are usually driven by economic concerns, family members also emphasize their emotional intimacy, which is important not only for the harmony of extended households but also for individual members' moral personhood and fulfilment of their familial obligations.

The instances of young people's marital lives described in this chapter can be understood as part of a wider new dynamic between practices of kinship and intimacy and neoliberal economy and governance as sketched above. In revisiting Wolf's theorization of the uterine family, this chapter has explored the inherent tensions between multiple dyadic relations in a patrilineal extended family from the perspective of an in-married woman. Wolf's ethnography echoes a Chinese idiom, '*xifu ao cheng po*' (even a submissive daughter-in-law will one day become a domineering mother-in-law), which captures the changes that marriage potentially involves for a woman and the shifting power dynamics between female in-laws. This conventional assumption of an in-married woman undergoing a long-term linear transition from being a powerless young bride to a powerful old woman in the patrilineal family is no longer generally applicable today as families have lost absolute control of its members' labour and desires. Nevertheless, Shu-Hui's marital experiences and the stories in the previous chapters indicate that young people's exercise of personal autonomy and pursuit of personal desires

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are very often entangled with their gendered upbringing, their emotional ties with their parents, and their ethical struggles.[6]

Set against the tensions between female in-laws noted by Wolf, my longitudinal study in Kinmen has highlighted the relational and future-making aspects of marriage through focusing on an in-married woman's marital stories over the past several years. I have used the phrase 'the work of marriage' to encompass the process and a wide range of work and relationships that an in-married woman is expected to engage with in patrilocal households, but also to grasp their impact on the woman herself and her conjugal ties. During this process, the relational aspect of marriage requires the woman to constantly interact with others, including her husband, children and kin, which may involve her compromise or collaboration with others in order to sustain her marriage and make her marital life compatible with her desires. The work of marriage is inseparable from a woman's visions of desired futures for herself and those whom she cares about, and for which she may make compromises or changes to herself over an extended period of time, but this also creates challenges for the patriarchal order.

As we have seen, Shu-Hui was not a docile and submissive bride after entering her husband's family and her mother-in-law Ming-Yu could barely control her. But Ming-Yu's resort to moral judgements, which earned her social support from other villagers to some degree, harmed Shu-Hui's reputation in the village. While Shu-Hui made a compromise by accepting patrilocal co-residence, she and her husband Jia-Cheng pursued in various ways their conjugal intimacy and desires in order to maximize their nuclear family's well-being. The later changes, with Shu-Hui becoming a full-time homemaker caring for her baby girl and ill mother-in-law, were therefore striking. Shu-Hui's failed attempt to give birth to a son suggests the persistent power of patrilineal ideology in Kinmen which constantly pressures young couples to redraw their visions of a good life to fit the conservative vision. Her mother-in-law's illness seemed not to weaken the latter's mobilization of moral accusations from other villagers and of her non-co-resident sons and daughters-in-law against Shu-Hui. But Shu-Hui's third pregnancy and her adjustments were supported by her alliance with her husband in the work of marriage over time that has solidified their marital union, as well as their relatedness in wider social circles. Shu-Hui and her husband have worked together to sustain their family and to seek secure and promising futures for their daughters.

While Shu-Hui's marital experiences were shaped by various circumstances that were particular to them, what she encountered was by no means unfamiliar to other in-married women in patrilocal households in Kinmen and Taiwan. In the numerous marital stories that I heard in Kinmen, such as those described in Chapter 5, it was not uncommon for in-married women to become depressed due to harsh treatment by their co-resident in-laws and their husbands' ignorance of their suffering. Shu-Hui and her female friends in the village (some of whom married

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in from China) were perhaps fortunate in that they could form a mutually supportive community via their husbands, and include their husbands and children in pleasurable activities together which constantly revitalized ties within and beyond their nuclear families. Though Shu-Hui and her female companions tended not to straightforwardly challenge patriarchy, they enabled certain changes in their marital and parent-child relations. In Shu-Hui's case, the mutual affection and support between her and her husband in the first decade of their marriage encouraged her to invest more time and labour in deepening her ties with her husband and children, who have also made a physical and emotional input. This involvement of the entire nuclear family in pursuing shared happiness and well-being is very different from the family lives and parent-child relations envisioned in traditional Chinese patriarchy. While the oppressive and unequal patriarchal elements may not be obliterated in the short-term, new dynamics within and beyond individual families have increasingly unsettled the hierarchical and unequal relations of patriarchy. Children learn from their parents that gender stereotypes in local patriarchal environments can be challenged and changed, and that wider kin and social ties can be supportive of their creation of new ways of life and new futures.

Notes

1. Throughout this book, I have used the term 'marriage by choice', instead of 'love marriage', to describe the younger generation's marriages. This is because several of my younger informants, in cases of cross-border marriage and marriage between two citizens of Taiwan, highlighted their 'volition' rather than 'love' for their partners in the decision to marry. Nevertheless, they also mentioned that their decision of marriage was inseparable from pressure from their families and surroundings as discussed in the previous chapters.
2. These couples tended not to buy a new residence of their own because the husbands may inherit housing from their parents in the future and, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, they may be dissuaded by the high prices of local property.
3. Jia-Cheng actually emphasized the term '*ai*' intentionally when speaking because '*ai*' was not a term he and his coevals usually used and, in so doing, he expressed his trust in me as we often talked to each other jokingly. But, immediately following this phrase, he described how he and Shu-Hui had got married and his feelings of affection for and appreciation of Shu-Hui.
4. Ming-Yu's strict judgements of Shu-Hui were also arguably related to their co-residence. Based on her semi-structured interviews with married women and men on Taiwan, Chung (2021) notes that a couple that forms a nuclear family away from the husband's parental home is more likely to have a fairer share of housework due to much less intervention from the husband's parents. The physical distance between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law not only reduces the former's intervention in the latter's marital life but also shields the young woman from constant examination by the older woman on a daily basis. Moreover, this physical distance allows a daughter-in-law to more easily comply with her mother-in-law in their meetings but disobey her when they are apart, as described by Shih and Pyke (2009) for Chinese immigrant families in the US.

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5. Santos (2021) links these negotiations regarding a couple's intimate choices around childbirth to the wider contexts of the Chinese government's campaigns targeting the eradication of the custom of son preference since the 1990s, in resonance with the global advocacy (for example, through the United Nations) of gender equality and son-daughter equality. The Taiwanese government proposed similar policies of family-planning and son-daughter equality from the 1970s onwards. According to current health-related laws in Taiwan, gender selection during pregnancy is prohibited.
6. Despite differences in our theoretical and methodological approaches, my ethnographic material from Kinmen and Kung's (2019) findings in urban Taiwan both suggest that the power dynamics between female in-laws are not simply determined by the resources, such as education, income and occupational status, available to the young and older women respectively. Kung argues that a daughter-in-law is usually affected by the traditional filial norms emphasized by her husband and mother and thus behaves respectfully towards her mother-in-law. I agree with this argument while also highlighting a daughter-in-law's daily ethical struggles and feelings of frustration, bitterness and resentment resulting from her mother-in-law's negative response to her provision of care.

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