

Action Research in the Subjectivation of Marriage Migrants in Taiwan

Hsiao-Chuan Hsia
Professor and Director
Graduate Institute for Social Transformation Studies,
Shih Hsin University

Head, Organizing Committee,
TransAsia Sisters Association, Taiwan (TASAT)

Introduction

- Background of marriage migration
Since mid-1980s; Mostly working class;
Population and source countries;
Conditions: economic constraints,
isolation, discrimination, legal constraints

- Background of this study
Action Research since 1994; Chinese classes since 1995; Formed TASAT in 2003 as the 1st org.; AHRLIM in 2003;
- Achievements of TASAT:
Amendments of Laws and Regulations;
Marriage migrants are at frontlines;
Theater group; Documentary; Giving lectures, etc.

Initiation of "Chinese Literacy Program for Foreign Brides"
July 31, 1995, Meinung, Kaohsiung,



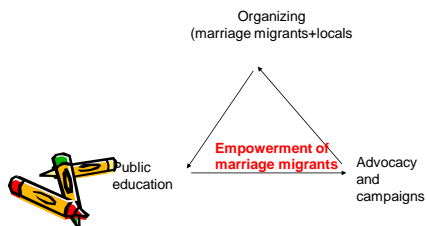
Immigrant women participated in every detail of the process of establishing a national organization—TASAT

Press Conference in 2003 for the Founding of TASA
TransAsia Sisters Association, Taiwan





Objectives and Orientations of TASAT (TransAsia Sisters Association, Taiwan)



Organizing

- organizers training
- volunteers training

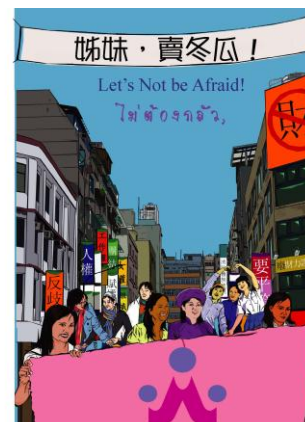


Public Education

- Training Marriage Migrants to become Lectures of Southeast Asian Cultures and Multiculturalism
- Publications (books, documentary films, blogs)
- TASAT Theater
- Awards)



TASAT Theater



Campaigns and Advocacy



Solidarity with other marginalized groups



Linking with International Movement Communities



December, 2006, International Peace Festival, India



December, 2006, International Migrants Alliance, Philippines



September, 2007, International Conference on Empowerment of Immigrant Brides, Taiwan



Oct. 2008, International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR)

Research Questions

- Unlike other types of immigrants, marriage migrants are often isolated in individual households, without ethnic colonies and neighborhoods.
- As the 1st grassroots organization for marriage migrants, it's important to document what it means for marriage migrants to be in the organization.

Research Methods

- How marriage migrants see the changes of themselves in the course of migration: from before migration, to early stage of migration and after being involved in organization?

- 5 of the most active officers, with at least 3 years of involvement.
- Focus groups: drawings of three stages of lives; reflection of experiences in the organization; follow-up questions after sharing of drawings.

Lives before Migration

- quite diverse, narratives range from being joyful to being desperate.



--Joy and love



Manchi: The Sun was big, very shiny... This smiling face is me, being happy and laughing every day... feeling free and unrestrained... with many friends around. I felt happy at work, with many friends and colleagues. This bike was what I rode to work every day.



- Jean: Before I came to Taiwan, I was this Sun, very passionate, lively, and full of impulse and strength. I was thinking to find myself in Taiwan, finding my own path and doing my own things. So this ocean, a peaceful and beautiful ocean represents my hope and dream. I carried a very good hope and thought I could realize my dream and hope in Taiwan.



Desperation and resentment



Pei: A sapling. I felt I almost fell before I came to Taiwan, by a lot of storms.... My brother and mother past away.... At that time, I can say that I had given up everything.... It was like I kept myself alive only for the sake of my father. He kept crying while talking to me and telling me that I was the only thing that he was worried about.... At that time, I actually had thought of giving myself up. But I also worried about my father. So I decide to go to Taiwan, thinking that if anything happens to me, so be it. I also hoped that if I die abroad, it's better because he will not see me.



- Yadrung: I was a wild cat before I came to Taiwan, loving freedom and roaming around... I was a rebellious kid... and no one could control me. But ... I acted as a nice kid at home. My mother took off from home after she gave birth to me. I was left alone with my grandmother and aunt.... At school, I was called the child without parents, or other names.... Whenever I heard these negatives name-calling, I felt like, "Fuck! I want to become a wild cat!" I felt resentment. Along the way, I became to hide my inner self from outside, protecting myself more tightly, not letting anyone to hurt even one fine hair.... So I had a very strong mentality of relying on myself to stand up.... Since I never had a real home... I longed for a home, a place that could protect me. Then I met my husband. No one introduced him to me and I felt that no one could have the rights to say anything... So I decided to marry to Taiwan.



Feeling Despaired in the Early Years of Immigration

- Despite of various frames of narratives about their lives before migration, all the marriage migrants share the similar experiences of feeling isolation, helpless and worthless.



--Isolated and helpless



Manchi: I drew a house and was isolated in the house every day, not happy and no smiles. All I knew was the house and the next door neighbors... There was only one person in the house, who was me.... My husband went out to work during the day and I just stayed at home cooking, doing house chore, and stayed inside the room sleeping. Sometimes, I cried in the room, missing my home ... [In my drawing] only one chair and one table in the room, only me living in the room.



Yao: I did not know Chinese when I first arrive in Taiwan after we got married. I was like a fish in the river, struggling to find her direction but in vain. No matter how hard she tries, she cannot find the direction. It was like the bean buried in soil, not knowing which direction to go... My thinking was really stupid then, because I did not think of studying Chinese or going out to meet friends before I had babies... only thinking that we will have a happy and bright future after we have babies, without realizing that I will encounter many difficulties in the future...

--Worthless and self-abased



Jean: This is a moon, only half moon.... Entering a new environment, it was very difficult to adjust.... I saw myself as being inadequate, being deficient. Then I saw Taiwan society yet did not know how to deal with it. For some time, I did not know how to face my own deficiency and inadequateness, even I much despised myself.... So [I drew] a spail, which is me, because I felt my speed was becoming very slow in the new environment and I could not follow my own thoughts and my own hopes. The moon appears in the evening, so I could only slowly and silently walk in the dark alone.



--Suppressed and stifled

Yadrung: It's like a chick... I used to be a very independent woman and could do whatever I wanted. Why suddenly after I came to the family Taiwan, I became a chick, meaning that you had a big head with many things in your brain but you could not move, i.e. you wanted to fly but could not... I encountered cultural differences, like language.... But in the process, you really felt like a chick with a big head, with wings, but could not fly. This feeling was very painful.... So I returned back to Thailand after three months and stayed at my home for seven to eight months.... I could not stay in Taiwan because I felt bounded. I had many thoughts and many things I wanted to do, but I felt being tighten up.... Suddenly, a wild cat became a chick... That is, you have little wings and you want to fly but you can't.

Narratives of Empowerment in Organization and Movement: Expansion of their worlds

- Methods
- After joining org. the sense of "we" and belonging expands, from concrete primary groups to abstract people and communities, such as the marginalized and disadvantaged groups nationally and internationally.

--Self-confidence



Yao: After I joined the Chinese classes and other TASAT activities, I worked very hard to learn.... But I was very busy with my family and work.... But I did not think of giving it up and attended when I had time, because it I thought it was a great opportunity for me to learn from others and I had learnt a lot, and it helped me to stand up bravely.... What I drew is a tree, grown from a small pea, though the tree is not yet grown big.... This drawing shows that I feel in TASAT I can use my ability and what I have learnt to help other sisters [marriage migrants]. It is great... and I hope we can expand our organization in the future.

Pei: The tree should not be as big. The drawing is exaggerating a little bit! [laughter] It just represents what I feel in my heart. At present, there is sunshine and rain, but this raining is not like the storm earlier. This rain nurtures the tree and the sun gives it light and much wind. At the present stage, I have grown a lot via these nutrition and sunlight. Though there is still some wind in the process..., that is, encountering some frustration in the process of learning and doing things... [sobbing]. Sometimes the wind feels like a typhoon, sometimes a breeze... But for me, whether there is a strong wind or not, I can still see things I have learnt and therefore have more strength and energy to move forward.

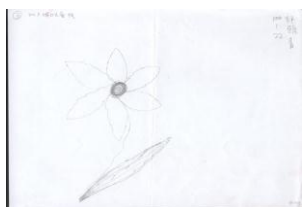


--Finding fulfillment and direction for life

Manchi: The present is what I drew, a big circle, like my life now. Very abundant and colorful. In the circle, there are trees, sun, moon, flowers, fruits and grass. It means that my life becomes colorful with many things.



Yadrung: After joining the Chinese classes of TASAT, it is like a flower with thorns... I never gave up what I was originally like. I always want to learn and to be free and have my own mind and do what I want. I have been with TASAT since I joined in 2002... I have found the wild cat I originally was, that is, I want to learn more and do more.



Jean: It is a carabao. It supposed to have her body and stand in the field, but she has not yet. It represents that... I have found my head, since I joined TASAT... Carabao is a ground and solid animal, using her determination and strength to realize what she wants. ... Before I joined TASAT, I despised myself, felt lost and saw my inadequacy, so I could not even find the head... Then I joined TASAT, I found my head... At least I know my inadequacy will not affect what I want to do. I can learn what I am inadequate of... Now I am continuing to search for my body and my own field. ... The body symbolizes my home, family and my own things, while the field symbolizes that I hope to learn in the process of participation, so that I can help myself and others. This carabao continuously search for her things, and strive to forge ahead.



--Helping others

Yao: I can use my ability and what I have learnt to help other sisters (marriage migrants). It is great... and I hope we can expand our organization in the future

Yadrung: I want to use what I have learnt to help other. I was always being bullied and discriminated, so when I came to this environment, whenever I hear some unfair treatment, I immediately got angry. I must do something to change these things. Since in my home country I was too young and could not resist. When I got here and have this opportunity and capacity, I feel I have found my original self... At TASAT I am like a flower, though not a real role model, but I hope everyone feels happy when they come to TASAT, like smelling the fragrance and appreciating the beauty of the flower...



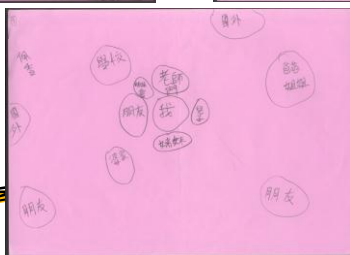
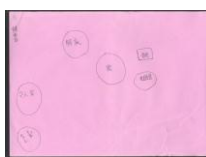
--Expansion of life world: from personal, to communal to historical subject

Pei: There were me, my father, my sister and friends. A bit farther... there are factory, and the house of the match-maker outside [my family]...

When I newly arrived in Taiwan, the closest to you is husband's family... and then the market, and farther away is a school... I had not attended school yet, but I knew there was a school... I saw some sisters (marriage migrants) on the neighborhood when I went to market or on the road... so I gradually knew some sisters in the neighborhood... I drew my father and sister farther away [from me] though we were still in touch...

Then the third drawing become very colorful! After joining TASAT, it becomes that aside from my son, there are teachers, sisters, friends of TASAT around me... Then, there are also school and the house of my mother-in-law and my father and sister, also a bit farther. There are also friends that live far away from me, not just in Taipei, to expand further, after joining TASAT, I am able to see politics and developments for immigrants in other countries. I got to see them, but in the drawing it is not clear yet, because I only begin to know a little, not too much. So I just drew a bit to show that it begins to appear.





Dialectical Process of Growth

- Method
- Hit the walls:
 - pressure from work and family

Yao: It should be the high point when I started to attend the Chinese classes. Because at that time... there were many sisters attending... and they were very passionate and helping each other and learning. I also worked very hard and was determined to study Chinese.... The moral of studying Chinese was very high then.... But after a while, because I was outside often, there was some tension in the family. Also, I started to work again and began to feel tired.... It was about 2005 when Yadrung and I went to teach Thai language, I got ill... I really could not stand, so I felt like leaving [TASAT]. I really felt like giving up at that time, feeling like leaving, though I did not tell anyone.... I did not contact anyone during that time, just being busy with work and the family.

- don't know what and how to do in the organizations

Yadrung: It is the lowest point in 2005, the bottom of the valley. ... I was then the Chair of TASAT, so I felt tasks and responsibilities heavy.... I felt like to forge ahead but did not know what to do. Then some people criticized me behind my back.... I felt like giving up, leaving TASAT in 2005. I did not want to give myself too much pressure. I did not want to take the responsibilities and tasks... But the other side of me felt it was a pity if I gave up, because I just began to learn Chinese, become a lecturer [for Thai cultures and languages]. That is, I was inspired but still could not grasp it.... This process was very difficult and then I really wanted to evade.... Many things happened in TASAT then.... like everyone was giving up... I felt like I had learnt something but I could not elaborate myself and did not know to apply what you had learnt....

- Sour feelings with others

Yadrung: ... Some people criticized me behind my back.... I felt like giving up, leaving TASAT in 2005. ... I kept encountering some mean people who talked behind back and made troubles...

Manchi: Sometimes in TASAT, when we learnt to communicate as a group, we had some problems but we did not know how to express, or were afraid to express it, worrying that if we did not express properly we might got into fights. So it turned out that we did not openly discussed problems.

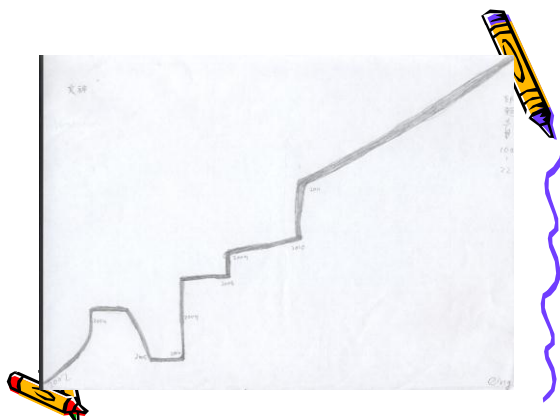
- Frustrated when others leave or become inactive

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- Getting up from the low points

- companionship and support

Yadrung: Then a volunteer, Shusha, chatted with me about the problems.... Hsiao-Chuan was in Canada then... We had discussions via skype... Hsiao-Chuan asked us: "What is it that you feel a pity if you give up? What is it that you feel angry about? What do you think that TASAT has brought you? So we started discussing about it. Later I discussed with Shusha about what would happen if we give it up and we realize it would be a big pity.... Then I proposed to become the staff of TASAT office... The strength given by Shusha and others were tremendous. So I felt it's ok.



➤ Trainings

Yadrung:..We had many problems then...Hsiao-Chuan invited Ramon to give us a training and gradually we found our direction. Before that, we were just busy doing things without knowing what we were doing.... The training helped us to begin to return to the original point where we started, such as how you joined TASAT and what we had done in the process. Gradually, we got some direction and ideas about how to move forward. Since then, we have training every year. What impressed me most was that Ramon facilitated a training about how to do social investigation. He asked us to observe someone, like a game, like a mystery gift was given by friends... But this game can apply in organizations. I think it is awesome. We could know how to understand a person and how to work together to find direction. I found these trainings are very impressive. I like it a lot.

➤ Exposures

In 2008, we went to Philippines.....Because we had chances of exposure and sharing with organizations abroad, we learnt that these organizations are doing the similar things and they also have problems with family. I asked them a question: What do you do when some officers' families are against what they are doing? How does the organization help overcome that? She said that this problem, though personal, you should bring to the organization and the organization is responsible to help handle it. After hearing her reply, I immediately cried. Because I was facing great tension with my family then. So it kept bothering me. So I wanted to learn from others about how to deal with it. I hit bottleneck then. So I feel it's very worthy that I went there for exposure.....

- Transformation from crisis to leap-forward via reflecting on history of the organization and the self and reassessing the purposes of joining organization

Yadrung: Although in the process of preparing for Sept 9 march in 2007, we encounter many problems. However, no matter what, I would not let go.... I realize that it is not easy to take the route of grassroots organization.... I felt like we were in the same boat. As long as no one from us in the boat started jumping. That is, we in the same boat, should be more united. No one should let go first so we can beat all the troubles...

- As the scope of "we" expands, the moments of feeling discontent are only temporary

Jean: I don't have any low points...because I feel that the low points of frustration is only temporary point in the process.... I felt that everyone has some emotions in the process.... It's nothing after it is released, so I don't think it takes up space in the river of my life.... We live in the society, in an organization and everyone is unique with her own ideas...If there is only my idea in the organization, this organization is in danger and not moving forward, not learning things.... Sometimes when we have different ideas and have tension and arguments. I just try to accept it and see things from different positions, so that we can make progress collectively... I have this thought because when I first joined TASAT's workshops for training multicultural lecturers, the moments when I entered it, my things were appreciated and accepted. By the same token, if others have different ideas than mine, I don't necessarily to agree or follow them, but we cannot negate them. I think this is an environment where we share and learn from each other. So we cannot see differences as conflicts or reasons that prevent us from moving forward. So I simply see I as an temporary emotion and get out from it.

Most Important Learning in Organization and Movement

• Respect

Yao: I have been to other groups...but they are not like us... Our organization principles are very different... They just tell you what to do, not listen to your suggestion or opinions... In TASAT, we learn that we can express our views and realize what we want.

Jean: What I have learnt from TASAT is being mutual. Before I was not at all like that. I could say that I had always been doing things my way. If people had opposite opinions, I would oppose it vigorously. But in TASAT I have learnt that we should share and have mutual acceptance...

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• Equality and Rights to Speak Out

Pei: The most important thing I have learnt from TASAT is basic human rights. That is, to realize that everyone has the same rights and the rights to speak out. You can voice out your thoughts. On the other hand, you are willing to accept others thoughts for consideration... Perhaps because when I was in Cambodia, I hated it that people with more money had more rights....So I feel very strongly about equality.



• Collective efforts to make changes

Pei: When I went to the Philippines, I discovered that the people are fighting, including old and young and they educate their kids to have the ideas. I was inspired to see that though they are in danger... like some were murdered by the military, they are still continuing to fight bravely. .. I feel that all the people are so united and committed and that's why no one is afraid. Like Yadrung said earlier, when she saw some many sisters together, she felt no fear in her heart, even in front of hundreds of police men... It's the feeling of solidarity that make people not afraid... I feel happy doing these things. They make me feel meaningful and therefore happy... Some people might ask, "Is what you are doing making any differences?" My answer is: Of course! Or else, why would we do it?... If things are not changed yet, we will work harder to make it change!



• Knowledge: how politics work, how to analyze

Manchi: I learnt how to analyze things and see things from many different perspectives... Sometimes empathy is not enough. So you need methods to solve problems and skills to tell other how to solve problems. ...I have learnt this by constantly listening to our sharing in classes or discussion at meetings. At the beginning, we say things very vaguely and make things very blurred. Then gradually we learnt that we have to be specific and concrete. And by continuously practicing how to speak... and later we realize that to analyze one thing is to open it up and discuss it's different aspects closely and then put things together to have a clearer and comprehensive analysis.

...I know and understand more about the problems in politics, and who are in the governments are responsible for which rules and regulations. I become more knowledgeable because I have seen and learnt more things.



• Reflexive (self-critique)

Yadrung: By being integrated and collaborated with the indigenous peoples here in Taiwan, I began to reflect on the ethnic relations in Thailand. I was from the city and did not know much about the indigenous peoples in northern Thailand. We also have stereotypes against them.

Manchi: Before I also had stereotypes against migrant workers, feeling that it's because of them that the Taiwanese have negative images about we Vietnamese.... After I went abroad to attend activities, I realized that migrants and immigrants from different countries are facing the same problems.

Pei: I did not know much about the Filipino peoples. After I went to the Philippines and learnt about their organizations, I am very impressed by them and feel we can a lot from them.



Subjectivation

Alain Tourain's concepts

- Subjectivation
- Historicity
- Personal subject
- Historical Subject

My intervention

- The need of communal subject between personal and historical subjects
- Needs of constant reflection at both individual and collective levels
- Methods of subjectivation: Role of Action Research



Roles of Action Research

- Constantly identify the problems and find ways to break through
- Levels of problems: individual, inter-personal, organizational, structural (national, regional, global)
- All have potentials to become "organic intellectuals"—need skills and opportunities—demystify knowledge and intellectuals



Conclusion

- Marginalized people are not automatically united-- "divide and rule" tactics + psychological needs for survival
- Importance of organization
- Dialectics in organization
- Belongs and discontent
- Danger of politics of identity
- Moving towards politics of recognition
- Roles of action research in the process of subjectivation

