

Migration in Taiwan in the 21st century

Dorothy I-ru Chen

Taiwan experiences great demographic change since 1990s as a result of a dramatic increase of female marriage-based immigrants. The total number of non-local spouses reached more than half million in 2016 and the majority of them are female. These non-local spouses mostly coming from mainland China and the Southeast Asian countries(see Table 1 below). Among them, the biggest migrant groups are those from mainland China and Vietnam. This kind of immigration by marriage is not without problems as there are stereotypes associated with these female spouses, such as ‘commoditized women’ and ‘money marriage’.

Initially, most of the marriages were under the arrangements of for-profit agencies. In 2009, the revised Immigration Act added: ‘Transnational marriage match shall not be an operating item. Transnational marriage agencies shall not demand remunerations or contractual emunerations ...(Article 58)’. After that, the number of cross-border marriages gradually decreased.

Table 1 The changing number of non-local spouses from top 7 countries in Taiwan

Year	2007		2010		2015		2017	
	F	Total	F	Total	F	Total	F	Total
Total Num.	365,150	391,117	413942	444,216	470,560	510,250	487,287	530,512
Mainland China	239,363	255,382	279215	297,237	321,661	344,348	329,661	353,684
Vietnam	76,933	77,081	83,999	84,246	92,803	93,441	99,285	10,0410
Indonesia	25,848	26,210	26,551	26,980	28,129	28,699	28,817	29,451
Thailand	6,391	9,269	5,561	7,970	5,799	8,525	5,851	8,703
Philippine	5,767	6,145	6,888	6,468	7,762	8,326	8,453	9,075
Cambodia	4,504	4,510	4,303	4,306	4,281	4,284	4,296	4,300
Japan	1,384	2,560	1,720	3,270	2,403	4,530	2,493	4,750

Source : National Immigration Agency (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.immigration.gov.tw/lp.asp?ctNode=29699&CtUnit=16434&BaseDSD=7&mp=1>

These cross-border marriages lead to the emergence of so-called ‘new immigrant children’, ‘new Taiwanese children’ and ‘new resident children’ despite strong protests from these families, who refuse to be labeled as such. By the end of 2015, these children have been accounted for more than 10% of the total primary school student population. This demographic change became great challenges for schools and educational authorities as these mothers from Southeast Asia were deemed as not being able to provide much academic support for their children. Thus, large funding of additional academic supports for these children has been provided by the government. Nevertheless, after the abolishment of for-profit transnational marriage agencies, Table 2 shows the number of new immigrant children also gradually reduced in recent years.

Table 2 The number of new immigrant children in 2017

Original nationality of parent Total		Junior High School			Primary schools					
		Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Total number	181,301	22,613	25,167	26,114	12,666	14,177	16,257	18,832	20,984	24,491
Mainland China	73,540	7,783	8,823	9,303	6,281	6,811	7,649	8,712	8,790	9,388
Vietnam	72,508	10,607	11,508	11,254	3,811	4,492	5,495	6,684	8,050	10,607
Indonesia	16,350	2,078	2,594	3,162	958	1,075	1,239	1,455	1,795	1,994
Thailand	3,263	345	415	466	257	287	297	357	411	428
Philippines	3,796	418	452	525	308	360	393	383	469	488
Cambodia	3,565	589	608	607	88	136	181	269	435	652
Japan	1,290	122	125	113	148	142	166	169	157	148
Malaysia	1,379	145	147	141	127	164	158	153	151	193
Myanmar	1,687	163	194	219	145	161	170	194	231	210

Source: Ministry of Education. <https://depart.moe.edu.tw/ED4500/cp.aspx?n=1B58E0B736635285&s=D04C74553DB60CAD>

In 2014, due to the growing importance of ASEAN countries in global and regional economy and the recognition that diversity can be a valuable asset for the nation, Taiwanese government announced Southeast Asian languages will be included as the mother tongue language courses in primary and junior high schools within the framework of 12-Year Basic Education. Under the new framework, started from 2018, students in primary schools will be required to learn either Southeast Asian languages (Malay, Khmer, Indonesian, Burmese, Filipino, Thai and Vietnamese), indigenous language or Chinese dialects. At the junior high school level, these mother tongue language courses are listed as optional courses. However, individual schools can make it compulsory within the category of school-based curriculum.

Further reading: Chen, Dorothy I-R. (2018). The changing policy discourse and the implementation of multicultural education in Taiwan in the 21st century – education for new immigrant children and beyond. In K. Kennedy & J. Lee (Eds.). *Routledge International Handbook of Schools and Schooling in Asia*. Oxon: Routledge.