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Shin-Mei Kao

**Narrative
Development of
School Children
Studies from
Multilingual
Families in Taiwan**



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Narrative Development of School Children

Studies from Multilingual Families in Taiwan

 Springer

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Multilingual Families and Their Children in Taiwan

Abstract As regional boundaries diminish along with the expansion of global traveling, the formation of mixed marriages has become more common in Taiwan in the past three decades. A mixed marriage is defined in the EU countries as a marital relation, in which one partner is native-born and the other was born abroad (Lanzieri 2012). Though with this definition, children born to immigrant families composed of two foreign-born parents are excluded from the picture, this is still the simplest and clearest definition for research and statistical purposes. This book also takes this definition for the discussion. In a multilingual family, the two spouses come from different ethnic backgrounds, and speak different native languages (L1s). Thus, in this book, a multilingual family in Taiwan means a family in which one of the spouses does not use Mandarin Chinese, dialects of Chinese, or an aboriginal language of Taiwan as his/her L1(s), and the other spouse is born locally and uses the above mentioned languages/dialects as his/her L1(s). Chapter 1 introduces the societal and cultural backgrounds of the children of multilingual families (hence, CMF) and specifically the children born to Southeast Asian Mothers (hence, CSA).

Keywords Mixed marriage • Multilingual family • Immigrant families • Children born to Southeast Asian mothers in Taiwan • Societal factors

1.1 What Is a Multilingual Family?

As regional boundaries diminish along with the expansion of global traveling, the formation of mixed marriages has become more common in Taiwan in the past three decades. A mixed marriage is defined in the EU countries as a marital relation, in which one partner is native-born and the other was born abroad (Lanzieri 2012). Though with this definition, children born to immigrant families composed of two foreign-born parents are excluded from the picture, this is still the simplest and clearest definition for research and statistical purposes. This book also takes this

definition for the discussion. In a multilingual family, the two spouses come from different ethnic backgrounds, and speak different native languages (L1s). Thus, in this book, a multilingual family in Taiwan means a family in which one of the spouses does not use Mandarin Chinese, dialects of Chinese, or an aboriginal language of Taiwan as his/her L1(s), and the other spouse is born locally and uses the above mentioned languages/dialects as his/her L1(s).

1.2 Southeast Asian Immigrants in Taiwan

Since Taiwan's immigration laws were not fully established until 2007, marriage had been the sole source for in-bound population in Taiwan before. According to the statistics of the National Immigration Agency of Taiwan (National Immigration Agency 2012), till the end of 2012, altogether 153,828 new immigrants had moved to Taiwan due to marital relation. Among them, 87.8 % came from Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Cambodia (see Fig. 1.1). Almost 97 % of these Southeast Asian immigrants were females, and male new immigrants mostly came from regions outside Asia (see Fig. 1.2). These female new immigrants formed families and born children in the new land. According to the report of the Census Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior, Taiwan, ROC (Ministry of the Interior 2014), 34.6 % of these new immigrants had received junior high school education, 31.9 % had elementary education, and 2.9 % were illiterate in their native languages. About 21.2 % of them had received senior high school education, and only 9.4 % had received higher education. Compared to highly-educated Taiwanese women, of whom 70 % had received education of senior

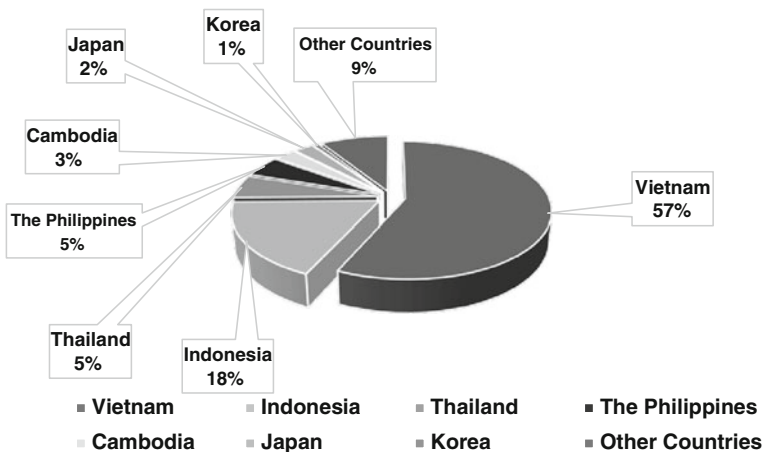


Fig. 1.1 Nationalities of new immigrants to Taiwan by marriage till 2012 (Sources from the Department of Statistics, Ministry of the Interior, ROC 2014)

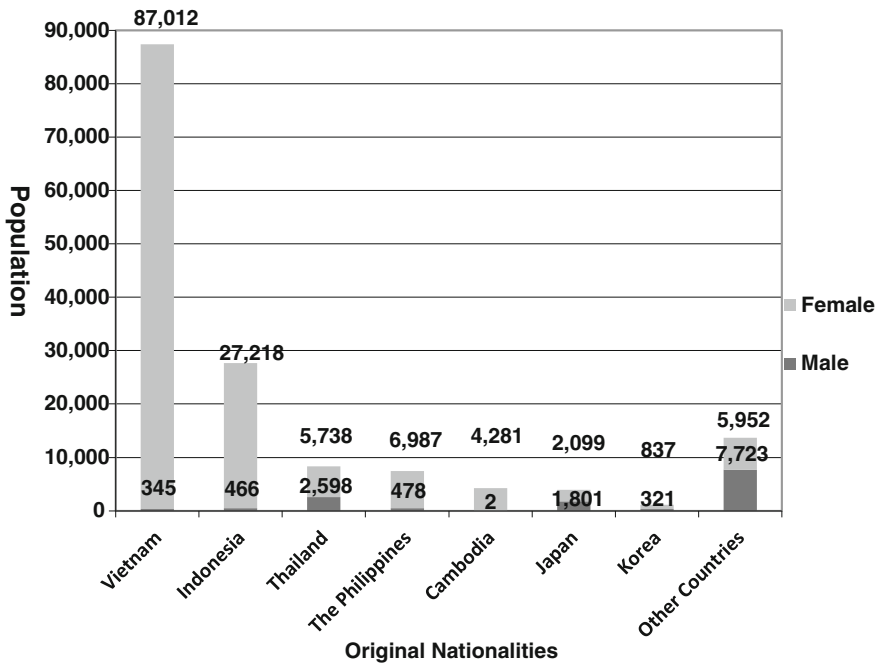


Fig. 1.2 Female versus male new immigrants to Taiwan by marriage till 2012 (Sources from the Department of Statistics, Ministry of the Interior, ROC 2014)

high school level or above, the female new immigrants were more disadvantageous in the aspects of social status, job opportunities, and financial independency.

In addition to challenges of adapting to new families, environment, and society, the female new immigrants from Southeast Asia in Taiwan also needed to learn the local language(s). Statistics show that though many these new immigrants gradually learned to speak the mainstream language, Chinese Mandarin, and/or other popular dialects such as Southern Min and Hakka, only about 10 % of them became literate in Chinese (Wang王順民 2003). In other words, a great majority of these female immigrants may encounter server difficulties in handling bureaucratic and legal matters independently, not to mention managing schooling matters and providing academic assistance for their children in their educational process.

1.3 Children of the Taiwanese Multilingual Families

The issues related to children born to multilingual families (hence, CMF), and especially children born to Southeast Asian Mothers (hence, CSA) have attracted great attention of the government, parents, media, educators, and researchers due to the increasing number of these children registering in the elementary and junior

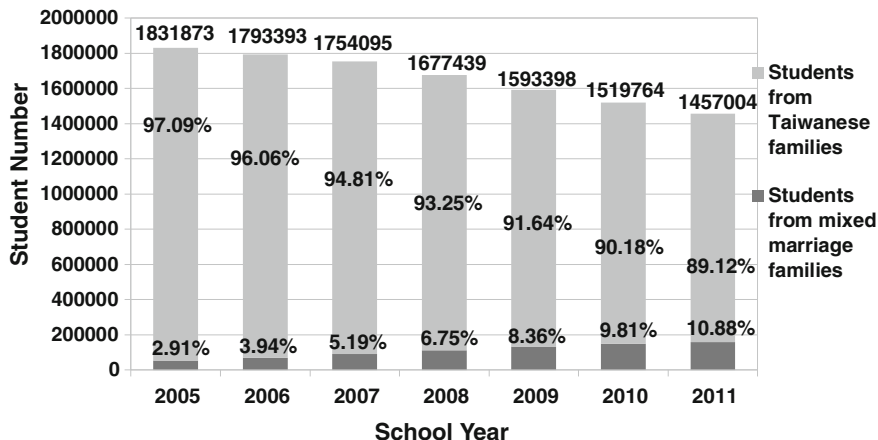


Fig. 1.3 Growth of students from mixed marriage families at elementary school in Taiwan from 2005 to 2011 (Adapted from the statistics of Ministry of Education, Taiwan, ROC 2012)

high schools in the past few years. Figure 1.3 presents the official statistics of the proportion between students born to Taiwanese families and to mixed marriage families, registering in the elementary school in Taiwan from 2005 to 2011. The figure shows a constant decrease in the total number of grade-school students from 2005 to 2011, which is probably due to the constant decrease of birth rate in Taiwan in the past one or two decades. However, the figure also shows a constant growth of grade-school children born to mixed marriage families. This societal trend results in an increase in percentage of children born to mixed marriage families from around 2.91 % in 2005 to 10.88 % in 2011. In other words in 2011, one in every 10 children in the elementary school in Taiwan belonged to the CMF group.

In addition to the growing number of CMF students, the statistics also pointed out that about 96.16 % of the 3,477 elementary and junior high schools in Taiwan accommodated students born to foreign parents. In addition, the average percentages of CMF students were 61.47 and 37.50 in per elementary and per junior high school, respectively. Geographically speaking, CMF and their families lived in metropolitan areas in Taiwan, especially in the suburban districts in New Taipei City, Kaoshiung City, Tainan City, and Taichung City. Agricultural counties, mountainous villages and remote islands have comparatively fewer CMF students.

Table 1.1 further displays the constructive sub-groups of these children's family backgrounds. Region-wise, children with Southeast Asia parents form the largest group, taking 62.04 % of the total population. In this sub-group, children born to Vietnamese parents took the largest proportion (40.34 %), followed by children with Indonesian (13.04 %), Cambodian (2.55 %), Pilipino (2.36 %), Thai (1.93 %), Burmese (1.11 %), Malaysian (0.63 %), and Singaporean (0.08 %) parents. Children with parents from northeast Asian countries, like Japan (0.47 %) and South Korea (0.27 %) took a very small portion (0.74 %). Children with parents from Mainland China form the second largest sub-group among all the regions, taking

Table 1.1 Nationalities of Taiwanese elementary school students' foreign-born parents in 2012

Region	Ranking	Nationality	Number	Percentage	Accumulative percentage
Southeast Asia	1	Vietnam	63,969	40.34	40.34
	3	Indonesia	20,676	13.04	53.38
	4	Cambodia	4,048	2.55	55.93
	5	The Philippines	3,746	2.36	58.29
	6	Thailand	3,067	1.93	60.22
	7	Myanmar	1,762	1.11	61.33
	9	Malaysia	1,004	0.63	61.96
	14	Singapore	123	0.08	62.04
Northeast Asia	10	Japan	738	0.47	62.51
	12	South Korea	432	0.27	62.78
Asia mainland	2	Mainland China	56,724	35.77	98.55
North America	11	USA	609	0.39	98.94
	13	Canada	181	0.11	99.05
Other Regions	8	Countries in Europe, South America, Africa, and Oceania	1,505	0.95	100
Total			158,584	100	

Source Adapted from Ministry of Education, Taiwan, ROC (2012)

35.77 % of the total population. However, because Mandarin Chinese is spoken as the national language in both Mainland China and in Taiwan, both the children and their Mainland Chinese parents encountered less difficulty in adapting to schooling and life in Taiwan than those with non-Chinese backgrounds. Overall, children with parents from Asian regions outside Taiwan took 98.55 % of the total population. The remaining 1.45 % of the children was born to parents from regions in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Oceania. Taking into consideration of the ratio between female and male new immigrant shown in Fig. 1.2, it is clear that the non-Taiwanese parents of the students from Asian regions outside Taiwan were mostly females; in other words, these children were born to families with Taiwanese fathers and foreign mothers.

1.4 Controversial Views Toward CSA

The general public in Taiwan held a rather simplified and bias view about CSA as a group of socially disadvantaged children who performed less successfully at school than their average peers do. This phenomenon has intrigued studies in

education and sociology in Taiwan. Earlier studies, mostly based on data collected by surveys and interviews, had reached rather controversial findings. On the one hand, it was found that due to the social and educational disadvantages of their mothers, the CSA's academic performance was inferior to their counter peers at school. For example, based on a large scale survey in Pingdong, the south-most county of Taiwan, Chung et al. (鍾鳳嬌、王國川、陳永郎 2006) suggested that the CSA demonstrated a slower cognitive and verbal development in the early age and performed less successfully at school later, compared to children with two Taiwanese parents. Cai and Huang (蔡榮貴、黃月純 2004) found that the CSA often spoke Chinese Mandarin with accents similar to their southeast Asian mothers, which consequently resulted in less articulated speech when they grew older. This often resulted in forming prejudice against CSA's academic performance from their teachers and peers at school. Cheng (鄭栞之 2007) attributed the reasons of the CSA's slower verbal development primarily to the lack of sufficient parental input during their early years. The study pointed out two factors for the inadequate help and guidance from the family: their mothers' low education level in their native languages and illiteracy in Chinese. In addition, it was also found that since traditionally Taiwanese fathers spent less time with the children, the fathers played little role in the development of the CSA, and thus these children's schooling problems were left to their socially disadvantaged mothers.

On the other hand, there were also studies showing no significant differences between the CSA and average Taiwanese children at school. For example, Hsieh (謝慶皇 2004) pointed out that the lower socio-economic status of the CSA did not significantly co-relate to the children's academic performance. In addition, no significant difference was found in the academic achievement in Chinese as a school subject between the CSA and their counter peers. Chen (陳湘琪 2004) compared the intelligence, language abilities, and academic performances of 50 first-grade CSA with 50 matched children of Taiwanese mothers and found no significant difference between the two groups in all three aspects. The Ministry of Education, Taiwan released the first official survey about CMF in 2004 (Ministry of Education 2004). This study sampled 281 schools in Taiwan, and investigated the academic achievement and the after-school life of 7,027 students born to Southeast Asian mother (CSA). The report concluded that this particular group of CMF performed rather well in language arts, but needed help in math and science. In addition, the report pointed out that there is positive correlation between the mothers' communication ability in Chinese and the children's academic performance. This survey, unfortunately, omitted the CMF with non-Chinese fathers.

These results were mostly obtained from surveys and interviews about the students' academic performances from classroom teachers and administrators. Only a few surveys asked the students to respond to the academic problems they encountered or invited the students to give their perception toward their school lives.