Being a Mother in a Foreign Land: Perspectives of Immigrant Wives on Mothering Experiences in Taiwan

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Abstract

This paper explores immigrant wives’ mothering experiences in Taiwan. Recently, more and more women from Southeast Asia, mainly Vietnam, marry into Taiwan through the operation of profit-pursuing marriage agents. Due to the intertwining of race and gender, and their marriages associated with commodification, plus the perceived backwardness of their home countries, these women and now their children are increasingly being depicted as a social problem. Based on in-depth interviews with 18 immigrant wives, I reveal that these women’s practices of motherhood in Taiwan are embedded in their motherhood ideology shaped by the gender culture in their homelands, in their transnational marriages associated with commodification, and in the patriarchal family lineage system prevalent in Taiwanese society. The common assumption indicating that immigrant wives are “incompetent” and “powerless” mothers has ignored the agency exertion of these women and simplified their strong tie with their children.

Keywords: motherhood, immigrant wives, foreign brides, transnational marriages, Taiwan, Southeast Asia

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Received: Jan. 06, 2010; Accepted: Apr. 20, 2010