

## Woman Power Takes off at NCKU with Cross-national WUN Project: “Marriage Migrants in Asia”

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Professor Su-Lin Yu and supporting professors from the National Cheng Kung University’s Center for Gender & Women’s Studies are collaborating with 11 female scholars from Hong Kong, Macau and Japan to launch the “Marriage Migrants in Asia” project, which has been recognized by the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN) as one of the 14 most influential projects of 2018.

Through the conscientious efforts of these knowledgeable women, this unprecedented cross-national collaborative project aims to collect and analyze data acquired from field interviews and historical records. Social-statistics methods will be used to draw comparisons and initiate discussions regarding the findings from the project. The end goal is a holistic understanding of marriage migrants in Asia. The project will provide useful reference material for policymakers around the world.

Founded in 2000, the WUN is the world’s most robust alliance of research-intensive universities. As a leading global higher education network, the WUN focuses on solving global issues. Su-Lin Yu is a professor at National Cheng Kung University. Unable to ignore the plight of marriage migrants, Yu gathered professors from the NCKU Center for Gender & Women’s Studies, including Kai-ling Liu, Mei-tzu Tsai, Tiffany Hsu, Wei-ming Luh, and Le-kun Tan. She also reached out to professors from abroad, including Hsun-hui Tseng from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Susan Broomhall, Samina Yasmeen, and Loretta Baldassar from the University of Western Australia, and Sari K. Ishii from Rikkyo University in Japan. Su-Lin Yu is the first director of an NCKU-backed project to attend the WUN. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to undertake this important work, and conveyed hope that countries from around the world would be able to respect each other’s differences and learn from one another.

Su-Lin Yu recalled past advertisements for foreign brides in Taiwan, especially those for Vietnamese brides: “Vietnamese brides are charming, innocent, pretty and only NT\$250,000.” When one side of a cross-national marriage is disadvantaged, marital conflicts and even domestic violence are often the end result. Drawing from Anna W. Tang’s book *Frail Lotus*, Yu points out that marriage migrants often have to shoulder the burdens of the home and various other hardships. Many are oppressed and restrained by their dependence on their husband’s family. Many end up being deported on grounds of failing to give birth to a son or failure to meet their in-laws’ arbitrary expectations. Some of these marriage migrants are even pressured to sleep with their father-in-laws.

“There’s one woman from Cambodia who married into a Taiwanese family. They lived in the remote countryside. After her husband passed away from an illness, her in-laws treated her like an insane person because she wasn’t able to acclimate to their lifestyle and couldn’t communicate due to the language barrier. They considered having her carted off to a psychiatric ward, or forcing her into a marriage with someone else. Her situation was a very dire one.” Le-kun Tan, a member of the “Marriage Migrants in Asia” project and a specialist in research related to language communication, pointed out that Cambodia is actually a country with mixed languages and cultures. When this Cambodian woman was isolated in a remote rural area, she had little opportunity to interact with and understand wider society in Taiwan. She became trapped in a difficult situation. Sadly, these types of cases are all too common.



It's not all doom and gloom for marriage migrants, however. In recent years, there have been some inspiring cases of marriage migrants who were able to turn their lives around. For instance, Su-Lin Yu recalls the story of famous Vietnamese director Kim Hong Nguyen: "She came to Taiwan and married into a Taiwanese family when she was 21 years old. After suffering domestic abuse for many years, she plucked up her courage and ended her torturous marriage. She took her son with her, found part-time work, and lived a life of hardship for many years. Her second marriage to Tsung-lung Tsai, also a director, was the light at the end of the tunnel. With his support, Nguyen was able to produce a documentary called 'Out/Marriage' about the lives of her fellow marriage migrants. She no longer feels like she is disadvantaged and in need of others' pity. Today, she's a beautiful, independent, confident, and free woman. She's an admirable individual."

Su-Lin Yu is especially grateful to Chen Yuh-Neu, the dean of NCKU's College of Liberal Arts, for her unflagging support of the "Marriage Migrants in Asia" project. The project team is aiming to complete an academic book by the end of 2018. They hope that their efforts will effect positive change in society and ameliorate public preconceptions and misconceptions of marriage migrants. Project-related workshops will be conducted at both NCKU and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. NCKU will also hold lectures and special talks by members of the project, and open up channels of exchange with NCKU students and faculty on gender-related research. The "Marriage Migrants in Asia" project is estimated to conclude in one year's time, but those involved have already agreed to continue their collaboration on other research projects after this project has ended.

Founded on the cusp of the 21st century, the Worldwide Universities Network comprises 23 research-intensive universities across six continents. The alliance exists to pursue solutions to major global issues such as global warming, public health, global higher education and research, and cultural awareness, among others. In 2016, NCKU became the first university from Taiwan to join WUN. The WUN actively invites annual project proposals from member universities. WUN projects must involve three WUN member universities that represent at least two countries.



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