

CHAPTER THREE: COLLECTION OF DATA FOR ANALYSIS

This research consists of a case study of one of the main organizations working for Chinese spouses and based in Taipei: CARES. I have based the research questions on the extensive literature review and the findings of this study came from the qualitative analysis of the in-depth interviews and the participants' observation.

ORGANIZATION SELECTION

CARES was selected after an extensive research through the Internet, and contacting the main organizations and government agencies which are concerned with the non-profit sector.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the Center for the Third Sector of National Chengchi University² (Guoli Zhengzhidaxue Disanbumen Yanjiuzhongxin, 國立政治大學第三部門研究中心) and the Himalaya Foundation (*Ximanao Wenya Yanjiu Fazhan Jijinhui*, 喜瑪拉雅研究發展基金會). It provides an updated database³ of all the non-profit organizations active in Taiwan. Another important organization is the Foundation for Women's Rights Promotion and Development (*Funü Quanyi Cujin Fazhan Jijinhui*, 婦女權益促進發展基金會). It provides information about gender-related issues and it has published a useful guide-book on the organizations that are available for women in Taiwan.

² See their website <http://333.nccu.edu.tw/>

³ For the Chinese version see <http://www.npo.org.tw/>, for the English one see <http://www.tpica.org.tw/>

As we have seen, Chinese spouses, once they have arrived in Taipei, have to deal with several legal procedures to obtain their residence permit. Considering the fact that most of these procedures are carried by the National Immigration Agency (belonging to the Ministry of Interiors), a great amount of information can be collected from its counters. Often organizations hand out fliers and informative material through these agencies, in order to reach those women who have just entered Taiwan. Therefore, through this channel, I could access names and contacts of the organizations that offers a service to foreign and Chinese spouses.

Having obtained a list of the organizations that were active in the field, I realized that there were two organizations that promoted the participation and involvement of Chinese spouses in their activities: the Association for the Promotion of Cross Strait Marriage Harmonization and CARES.

While the activities of the first one is only web based, the second one has its central office in Taipei. The Association for the Promotion of Cross Strait Marriage Harmonization has created a digital platform which lets users (mainly Chinese spouses) get into contact with each other. Through this platform they can discuss any issues and problems that they encounter in their daily lives. In addition, they can ask for help for their compatriots. CARES however, offers a physical space where women can meet and carry out their activities. It includes a space for classes and workshops, an office with a telephone, computers and Internet access, and a room for community projects. CARES also offers help for the execution of legal procedures whenever there are difficult cases.

Although both organizations aim to help Chinese spouses, the channels they employ are different. One offers them a digital space to interact, whilst the other one directly helps them, involves them in the activities and tries to favor their integration in Taiwanese society. In other words CARES has tried to build a community for people with the same interests. Having created this group, the organization has worked hard to promote the women's enhancement in, understanding of and integration with the local society.

CARES employs five members of staff, one is responsible for the office while four other ladies are in charge of different areas of interests related to the activities for the spouses. Amongst them, I was mainly in contact with Miss Ellen Ding. She is in charge of all the activities organized by the center and she keeps in contact with the branch in Hualien. Miss Wendy Wang deals with volunteers issues, while Miss Viola Lu deals with the community activities. Another assistant is in charge of the newly created branch in Gaoxiong.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEWS

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data can offer a richer portrayal and explanation of processes and thoughts. They are more concerned to provide vivid and meaningful descriptions rather than numbers and generalizations, whereas quantitative analysis is more effective to summarize great amounts of data on the basis of the statistical projections (Gaskell, 2000).

Especially when investigating sensitive and complex issues, qualitative analysis has proved effective because it is able to offer a holistic and rich overview of the subject under examination. This means that the complexities of some logics, arrangements, explicit and implicit rules will be captured, isolated and interpreted. Qualitative research puts its emphasis on people's life experiences, and especially on the meanings people give to these experiences. Indeed, this methodology lets participants not only discuss their stories but also reflect about them in a way ordinary life rarely afford to the people. Because participants' narratives constitute the object of analysis, qualitative research focuses on how people internalize their experiences. Therefore it is necessary to establish an atmosphere of deep understanding of and interaction with the respondents (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Following this argumentation and considering the fact that this study aims to explore the different representations of the issue of participation and empowerment as perceived by the single individuals, I employed a qualitative methodology to investigate this issue.

Because this study touches upon issues of particular sensitivity and of personal experiences, the in-depth interviews appeared to be more effective rather than group interviews. One-to-one conversations facilitate the creation of a relationship of trust and confidence between the interviewed and the interviewer. In this way the possibilities of provoking situations of anxiety are limited (Gaskell, 2000).

I conducted the in-depth interviews in two stages. The first interview was conducted with one of the social workers employed in the organization. The following fourteen interviews were conducted with Chinese spouses which are part or have been part of the organization.

The first in depth interview aim was to investigate the community communication employed by CARES. Particular interest was placed on those forms of communication which favor women participation.

The in depth interviews with Chinese spouses aimed to investigate whether and how the activities and media employed by CARES have facilitated the process of women empowerment.

It is important to mention that during the several months preceding this thesis writing, I visited several times the organization. I had to ask for several explanations on the organization activities and on women involvement. This was also a way to get into contact with the Chinese women and build a trustworthy relationship with them. The visits, the long chats I had with volunteers and the opportunity of directly observing women in the field have to be considered essential in the understanding of the issues covered in this thesis. Indeed, participant observation is a technique which helps researchers to gain further information not only about single individuals, but also about how they interact with each other and with the surrounding environment. As a consequence the researcher has the chance of triangulating different impressions and

observations with the data collected from the interviews (Gaskell, 2000). The collection of short stories written by the spouses and edited by Lin and colleagues (2007) constituted a source of precious information about women experiences and thoughts.

In the following, an overview of organization and participants selection is provided. In addition some guidelines of the content of the interviews and of the data processing and analysis have to be considered fundamental as proofs of the quality of this research. The second section of this chapter includes an extensive presentation of the collected findings.

1.2 Participants

The participants of this research were selected from the women who attended lectures and activities at CARES. In addition, two authors of the book that was published by the organization (Lin et al., 2007) were also selected. As the women did not all participate in classes and join the organization with continuity, I had to access them through different channels.

Out of a total of 14 spouses, 5 were recommended by CARES personnel, 3 were selected directly by me from amongst those who were participating in the classes and activities. The remaining 6 were suggested to me by the participants.

The criteria for the participants' selection were to pick a group of women that were as heterogeneous as possible. These criteria were based on age, social status, husbands' work, family situation, education, and membership to the organization.

In order to gain an idea of the characteristics of the spouses who join CARES, I also referred to a book that is published by the organization: *Fuwu zai tai dalu pei'ou. Gongzuo zhuanji* (服務在臺大陸配偶工作專輯) (CARES, 2007). This book includes many statistics and data on the spouses who have participated in the forums and activities promoted by the organization between 2006 and 2007.

CARES also has two other centers in Taipei. One is in Hualien and the other is in Gaoxiong. The Hualien branch is well established and has been in close contact with Taipei for several years. However, the branch in Gaoxiong only started its activities at the beginning of this year. The relations and the information flow between Taipei and Gaoxiong are still very confused and irregular. In addition, the spouse in charge of the activities in Gaoxiong recently went back to China. Due to these problems, I have decided to focus only on the Taipei and Hualien centers. I selected three spouses from Hualien. The reason why I decided to extend my investigation to an area outside of Taipei is because it would allow me to explore any potential differences between the main and the local centers.

1.3 Interviews

In order to familiarize myself with the interviewing techniques, I carried out informal interviews (in the form of chats) with a spouse member of CARES. At this stage the interview was based upon questions about life experiences in Taiwan and on personal empowerment. After these preliminary interviews, I adjusted the questions in order to create a more detailed picture of the issue.

The formal interviews were carried out from the 14th to the 28th of June. I interviewed each participant individually at a prearranged time and location, that was jointly identified as convenient. I used the same semi-constructed, open-ended format for the in-depth interviews. Interviews varied in length from a minimum of 50 minutes to a maximum of 2 hours 14 minutes. The majority of the interviews lasted for about 1 hour. Interviews were carried out in Chinese to let the women fully express themselves in their own language. Only two women deliberately decided to have the interview in English because of their fluency in the language. Nine interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed directly into English. Whilst accurate notes were taken for the remaining five interviews.

Interviews were based on a semi-structured model which covered four main areas of interest: background information, CARES membership, participation and empowerment (refer to Appendices 1). Although the four areas included many different questions, each interview focused only on certain questions, depending on the issues raised during the conversation. The interview was structured as a storytelling opportunity

for the interviewee. The women were encouraged to develop their thoughts and offer examples about three main topics: their life experience in Taiwan, their participation in and considerations about CARES activities, and their process of empowerment through these activities. I tried to lead the discussion towards those issues of main interest for this research, for example requesting for clarifications and elaborations.

At first I thought that my foreign nationality would be a hindrance in the investigation. However it turned out to be a positive factor. The fact that I am a female also played a great role in gaining their trust. Participants warmly welcomed the fact that a female foreign student was interested in their stories. They considered it as a good opportunity to voice aloud their problems with someone who may have similar feelings (because I am not Taiwanese). Therefore, they found it easier to trust me.

The interview carried out with the social assistants was processed in two steps. The first part was carried out in order to collect general information about the organization purposes and activities. Only Miss Ding was involved in this first step, as she was the longest residing employee. This interview included four main parts: CARES background, community communication, participation, and empowerment (refer to the Appendices 2). A second interview was carried out in order to clarify contradictory or confused points related to the organization activities. This second time, three assistants were involved in answering my questions: Miss Ding, Miss Wang, and Miss Lu. I would like to emphasize the fact that I previously visited the office several times in order to ask questions and elucidate about the organization with the assistants. Therefore the notes

that were taken during these visits were considered as valuable data for my research as well.

1.4 Data processing and analysis

In order to ascertain high quality, reliable data and interpretations I have followed several techniques which helped to reduce threats to validity.

Firstly, I tried to build a rapport of mutual trust between myself and the interviewees. As I had already participated in some of their classes and activities, several women already knew me from before. For those who had not met me before, I introduced myself to them and asked to do the same. Then I focused on the purpose of my research. Interviewees were made comfortable and great interest was paid to what they said. This involved using appropriate body language and inviting them to provide further explanations. Spouses warmly welcomed my friendly tone and attitude. In addition, the fact that a foreigner showed interest in their stories made them keener to open their hearts to me.

Secondly, interviews were organized in such a way that it gave space to the interviewees' thoughts, feelings and experiences. Encouraging them to place emphasis on a subjective explanation of the facts. Interviews began with a request for general personal data and then it progressed to more personal and sensitive issues.

Thirdly, anonymity and confidentiality were explicitly guaranteed to each participant. On a few occasions this played a major role in obtaining trust between the interviewee and myself. It helped spouses to feel more free to tell their stories and thoughts without violating their privacy. The fact that this thesis is in English language was conceived as a positive point for some interviewees. For them this meant that this thesis is oriented to English speaking people who are not part of their sphere of interest. So they were not worried about revealing their names and stories.

Lastly, I have tried to remain as true as possible to the women's stories and expressions, as I translated from Chinese into English. In the cases when participants used specific idioms I wrote both the Chinese characters with an English translation.

I analyzed the interview data deductively, using as a base the considerations that emerged from the literature review. However several themes, were identified thanks to an inductive approach. The inductive approach was useful in interpreting issues that were not covered by the literature review. The process of data analysis started with repeated readings of the interview transcripts and selection from the parts of dialogue that were connected to the three research questions. I then identified key words and recurrent themes and compared them across all the participants' responses in order to carry out a comprehensive and accurate analysis.

FINDINGS

Three main areas of interest were explored in the interviews: a) the community communication techniques employed by the organization and by the spouses, b) how the spouses participated in these mediated and non-mediated communications and c) the empowerment process at individual, organizational and community level through the mediated and non-mediated communication techniques.

In the following I will discuss these main issues focusing on the relationship between the use of communication practices, the women's participation and their process of empowerment. I will also provide an overview of participants' demographics in order to understand their background.

1.1 Participants demographics

The characteristics of the participants corresponded only in part to what has been presented in the literature review. This can be related to two main factors. Firstly, the number of participants is too small to have statistical value. Secondly, most of the statistics mentioned in the literature review date back to the years 2003 and 2004, therefore smooth changes have occurred in the last four years.

As we can see from Table 7, the average age of the participants was 36 years. This outcome is relatively higher than the average age shown in Table 5. The youngest was 26 years old, whilst the oldest was 56 years old. Their husbands' average age was 44 years. The age difference between groom and bride varied from a maximum of 20 years

to a minimum of 3 years. On average, the age difference between couples was 8 years. Two cases in which the woman was older than her husband were recorded.

Spouses' area of origin covered the whole China, including coastal and inner regions, capital and provincial cities. One was from Beijing, two came from province capitals (Shanghai and Chengdu), three came from main cities in their province (Guilin, Dali, Xinxiang), one was from Shenzhen, and the remaining were from the provinces. As discussed previously in the literature review, participants (11 out of 14) met their husbands mainly through relatives and friends. Three met their husbands independently. In this last category, all the males were working and living in China when they first met their spouses. Two of these couples married and lived in mainland China for a few years before moving to Taiwan. When they decided to move to Taiwan it was mainly because of their husbands' business. No one openly revealed that they have met their husbands through marriage brokers.

These women have been in Taiwan for different lengths of time, ranging from 1 to 11 years. While the length of marriages range between 3 and 15 years (with the average length being 7 years). Two couples divorced because of the husband's violent behavior towards his wife. Most of these women entered Taiwan as soon as they were married or a few months after. However, there are 4 cases of women who delayed their arrival on the island. The main reason being that their husbands had a business in China, so they could continue living in China together.

Spouse code	Age	Husband age	Area of origins	Arrival in Taiwan	Marriage date	Children	Occupation in Taiwan	Occupation in China	Husband occupation	Reason for coming to Taiwan	Marriage reason	Meeting channel	Membership to CARES
001	40	60	Sichuan	1997	1993	1	Housewife	Airlines company personnel	Personal business	LD.	Love	Independent	6 years
002	31	44	Shenzhen	2005	2005	0	Administration	Administration	Manager	Marriage	Sharing feelings	Relatives	3 years
003	43	40	Beijing	2004	2004	1	Housewife	Government official	Manager	Marriage	Love	Friends	1 year
004	30	48	Guangxi	2006	2005	2 (from previous marriage)	Housewife	Administration	Employee	Follow husband	Love	Friends	1 year
005 ▲	33	39	Jiangxi	1997	1997	2	Cleaner	Shop assistant	Temporary job	Marriage	No reason	Friends	3 yrs
006 ▲	36	43	Guangxi	2002	2002	0	Housewife	Medicine	Personal business	Marriage	Sharing feelings	Independent	3 years
007 ▲	37	43	Shandong	2005	1996	2	Family business	Medicine	Personal business	Follow husband	Good character; show filial piety	Friends	6 months
008 ▲	31	45	Yunnan	2007	2004	0	Yoga teacher	Yoga teacher	Personal business	Follow husband	Love	Independent	1 year
009 ▲	26	36	Hunan	2005	2005	0	Housewife	Un-employed	Temporary job	Marriage	Good character	Friends	7 years
010	34	37	Fujian	2004	2004	0	Shop assistant	Teacher	Employee	Marriage	Enter new environment	Friends	2 years
011 ▲	56	49	Fujian	2001	2001	2	Housewife	Family business	Temporary job	Marriage	Age	Friends	7 years
012 ▲	37	43	Henan	2000	2000	2	Restaurant	Public administration	Employee	Marriage	Age	Friends	2 years
013 ▲	35	45	Shanghai	1999	1994	3	Restaurant	Yoga teacher	Personal business	Follow husband	Love	Friends	6 years
014 ▲	37	49	Guangdong	1999	1999	2	Nurse	Administration	Employee	Marriage	Age	Relatives	1 year

Table 7: Participants' current demographics (▲: audio recorded)

These women married their husbands for various reasons. Half of them mentioned personal reasons, such as “love”, “sharing feelings”, “sharing life and feelings”. Amongst these there were also women who met their husbands independently. Three women explicitly said that they were too old to get married and they needed to find a husband. They were respectively 49, 29 and 28 years old when they married. One of these divorced after six years of marriage.

Two women decided to marry because they liked their husbands’ character: he was “very nice to me”, “he showed a kind and gentle character”. However, one of these women listed “filial piety to my parents and also to his parents” as one of the reasons why she married. One woman said she married mainly “to enter a new environment”: her husband was introduced to her by friends, they wrote and called each other for a few months and then they decided to marry. Only one case explicitly revealed “there were no particular reasons why I decided to marry”. She also specified that they communicated for one year through telephone and letters. In this period she liked this stranger because he was nice to her. However, a few years after the marriage, he started to behave differently and to be violent to her. She ran away from him in 2004 and obtained a divorce in 2007.

It seemed to me that not all the marriages were consequence of a process of mutual acquaintance. As Fan and Huang (1998) argued, marriage can become a strategy for Chinese women seeking to migrate. In my case study could also be noted a relationship between those women who did not explicitly list “love” as a reason for their

marriage and those who lived in provincial areas before marriage. Findings showed that amongst these 7 participants who came from the province, 6 answered other reasons than love for their marriage. Nevertheless, a deeper investigation should have to be carried out in order to understand if the study of Fang and Huang (1998) could be applied also to the cases of these participants.

The reasons why these women moved to Taiwan are related mainly to their husbands and families: “follow my husband”, “marriage”, “create a family”. One woman said that the only reason why she moved to Taiwan was to obtain Taiwanese nationality. Although she already lived in China for several years with her husband, they decided to move to Taiwan temporarily in order to have the documents. She thought this could enhance her life. However, she soon discovered that living in Taiwan meant having various kinds of barriers. For example, she could not work, and her education was not recognized.

With the exception of one woman, all the other participants had jobs in China. However, only two spouses were able to maintain the same job as before: one as administrative personnel and one as a yoga teacher. Almost half of them (6 out of 14) are housewives now, four were assistants in shops, restaurants and hotels, one worked as a cleaner in a hospital, and one helped her husband with his business. Five of their husbands had their own business in Taiwan or China, two were in charge of the management of Taiwanese companies, four worked as employees in Taiwanese companies, and three were engaged in temporary activities.

The women's education ranged from junior high school to university: five had obtained a university degree in China. Four attended 3 to 5 years of specialization college, four attended senior high school, with only one stopping at junior high school. The education of their husbands is markedly differently distributed: four had a junior high school diploma, three had a senior high school diploma, three had 3 to 5 years of specialization college, and two obtained a university degree. This confirms arguments that are put forward in the literature review, as for example that the participants and their husbands tend to have similar levels of education.

In contrast to the literature review, none of the husbands belonged to the category of 'people in need of care' and 'veterans'. Three reasons are identified as to why these women do not meet these criteria. Firstly, most of these men live outside Taipei and they are very difficult to reach. Secondly, women married to this kind of men find it difficult to join the organization because they have to spend time caring for their husbands. Thirdly, Table 6 includes also a category 'others' which actually covers more than 74% of the total, and more than likely the women I have interviewed belonged to this last group.

It is also important to note that the statistics provided by CARES on the spouses who joined lectures on Taiwan national policies between 2006 and 2007 were in contrast with some of the beliefs of the Chinese spouses situation. They showed that only 11% of the spouses were married to men with physical or mental impediments, only 8% were in a low income family, and only 28% were married to men over 65 years old (CARES, 2007).

Few participants did not want to make public their family income (for personal privacy), and two said “Sorry, I really don’t know”. The fact that spouses were not informed about the family income can be interpreted as a negative sign. If one of the two spouses did not show excessive concern for this issue, the other one felt frustrated about it. She said that she worked in the family business, and was not paid for her job. She complained that her husband had a very traditional and chauvinistic mentality: he did not let her go out, attend CARES classes, and have any economic independence. In this way he could keep her under his control and power. She did not accept it, but she said that she did not have any other choice since her husband and his family hid her original documents.

Eight participants revealed their family income which ranged from 20,000 NT\$ to 100,000 NT\$. Three families had an income between 51,000 and 100,000 NT\$. Three had an income between 40,000 and 50,000 NT\$. Two respondents had a family income lower than 30,000 NT\$. This means that their monthly earnings were beneath the lowest average family income of Taiwanese families showed in the statistics published by the Accounting and Statistics website of the Directorate-General of Budget of the Executive Yuan.⁴ One of these received government subsidies and her childrens were under the social service’s care.

⁴ Please refer to the Directorate-General of Budget website of the Executive Yuan: <http://eng.dgbas.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=3458&CtNode=1597>, retrieved on July 5th, 2008.

This portrayal is in contrast with the one generally offered by the media, since most of the families had an income which was above 40,000 NT\$. Nevertheless, several participants said that they suffered economic pressures especially in the first years after their arrival in Taiwan.

1.2 CARES: a familiar environment in a distant society

Amongst the 14 participants, 7 were volunteers in CARES, 3 had previously been volunteers, and the remaining were not actively involved in the organization. These women had joined CARES for a period of time which ranged from a minimum of six months to a maximum of six years.

Most of the spouses were introduced to the organization through personal acquaintances. Some of them received information about CARES directly at home or whilst attending classes in other centers. Only one found out about CARES during one of the national forums for Chinese spouses.

In 1999 CARES started to offer a service for Chinese spouses. However it has only been in the last three years that CARES has acquired recognition and trust amongst Chinese women. As some participants have commented, CARES has improved a lot in the last years. Classes are now more various than before, so women have the opportunity to choose from amongst a wider selection of activities.

According to one of the interviews carried out with Miss Ding, the goal of CARES activities is to make Chinese spouses' life happier and to help them in the adaptation process. CARES not only constitutes a physical space where women can meet, talk and stay together, but also a trustworthy place where they can ask for counseling. "Trust" was a word used by Miss Ding to describe the organization's goals, it was also echoed by several women, when they were asked the question "Why did you join CARES?". This organization was a "safe", "peaceful", "trustworthy" and "familiar" environment where they could meet new friends, collect information and learn new skills. As one participant stated:

[spouses] need help, they need only to talk to someone sometimes. And the fact that they have someone available for them to talk is important. You can think that this is a small help, nothing more than a talk. But sometimes this is what a person needs when she is far away from her home. This is a small help which can become very big for those who need it. (Interviewee 013)

CARES aims to provide a sense of belonging and identification by offering a familiar and safe environment for the women. The results of the interviews indicates that this goal was met. Women joined CARES because they could meet with other spouses from mainland China, they felt recognized, and could share information with each other. It was a place where they could find relief from the pressures of their everyday lives.

What they were able to create is a feeling of community and belonging. This is very important. Before I didn't have a group, a job, or any kind of social life. But I needed them! And besides belonging to a group, I needed also to have a social life, which I didn't have at all before. (Interviewee 006)

The organization aims to meet goals which go beyond the personal or group interest. While the women requested mainly entertainment and community activities, CARES also tries to introduce educative and informative lectures. In addition it engages in dialogues with the publics (mainly Taiwanese society and government).

Women recognized the importance of these community projects which were a “help to get integrated and to get to know more about a society we really don’t know” (Interviewee 011).

CARES also helps in the process of community integration. They organize several popular activities in which they explain how to behave in Taiwan, how to communicate with the family members, how to deal with legal issues.
(Interviewee 008)

CARES does not have compiled statistics on the number of spouses helped in almost ten years of service. According to Miss Ding, in Taipei there are more than 400 spouses who attend the courses, lectures and community activities every year. In addition there are 40 volunteers. In Hualien about 200 women per year join the organization, and there are 20 volunteers.

Every semester the organization offers different activities for the women depending on their interests and needs. Last semester, CARES offered lectures (every second Thursday of the month) and community classes. It also offered job search lectures, story telling classes, women empowerment lectures, computer classes, and lectures on

law and national policies. In order to facilitate women attendance, the activities are completely free. In addition volunteers offer a service of babysitting during the classes. Considering the fact that most of these women have children, this service is fundamental for their attendance. Many women come from difficult family situations. Sometimes their husbands do not allow them to join CARES, or they face financial problems at home so they can not pay for extra activities, such as gymnastic or language classes. Therefore, the fact that projects are free removes at least the first barrier to the women's participation.

Activities are open to all Chinese spouses who are interested. However if a class requires the use of specific technologies (e.g. computer classes) a selection has to be made. Generally it is based on a 'first come, first served' principle. If a course requires particular abilities, individuals who meet the pre-arranged criteria will be considered.

It is important to note that four forums were organized all around Taiwan during the first six months of this year. Spouses of each area were invited to take part in these forums with their families. Representatives of the Mainland Affairs Council, of the National Immigration Office, of the Local Government, of the Strait Exchange Foundation, of the Veteran Affairs Commission, and of the Center for Family Abuses also participated. This was an opportunity for spouses to interact with these offices, listen to other spouses stories and to ask questions on issues related to them.

1.2.1 Community communication in CARES: an overview

According to Miss Ding the communication techniques employed within the organization (be them mediated or non-mediated) have four main objectives:

- To promote the organization
- To reach and involve Chinese spouses
- To influence Taiwanese people
- To influence and propose recommendations to the government

Although personal initiatives are welcome within the organization and especially at the community activities level, the ownership of media project and activities belongs to the organization. This is mainly referred to in the media projects which are all registered under the name of CARES.

Their content is mainly related to spouses' needs and activities, as for example, national immigration policies, life adaptation in Taiwan, and job search. Some of the informative material produced by the organization is for the promotion of activities and projects.

While CARES produces most of the activities and media projects, different sources can cooperate for the creation of contents. Lectures are normally organized and scheduled by CARES. The women are involved in a series of community activities that are organized and planned directly by the group or by the teacher of each specific class.

The teachers are often spouses who volunteer their time to teach other women, specific subjects or skills. Aside from the information material created and produced directly by the organization, the other media project in which Chinese spouses have directly contributed is a collection of short stories. The content is created entirely by the women, and published by CARES.

The distribution of the media material is mainly through spouses, government offices, and mail to those people who require the material. Some of the material is also displayed in front of the classroom where activities take place. This enables the women to access the material from different channels.

The audiences are primarily Chinese spouses. Other groups of people who are often interested in CARES activities and informative material are the government, other organizations, and students.

Although CARES is a self supporting organization, it often receives government subsidies, especially for the activities and projects organized for the spouses. As previously mentioned, in 2005 the Taiwanese government established the Foreign Spouse Care and Guidance Fund with the purpose of sponsoring activities and projects for these women (CARES, 2007). CARES also draws from this source. Other economic sources (independent from the governmental funding) are donations from private people or enterprises. Annual entries come from the membership quota.

1.2.2 Community communication techniques

The communication techniques that are employed can be divided into mediated and non-mediated forms of communication. Mediated communications included both modern (computer, Internet) and traditional technologies (telephone, printed media). Non-mediated communication techniques included classes, lectures and activities.

Spouses have a broad selection of media technologies and tools available for their use: computers, DVD player, DVD library, karaoke, library with books and magazines, telephone, and a notice-board where they can display their personal thoughts. In addition they can have access to a big classroom, and a community activities area (with sofa, chairs, children area, stove, and other cook material). CARES provides most of the material that women may need for their activities, such as minorities clothing, food, lecture papers, and transportation for trips outside the city. Women are also able to request extra material for their activities.

1.2.2.1 Computer

In the area that is reserved for women there are three computers. And they have been available to spouses since last year. They mainly use computer for surfing the Internet and checking their email. Amongst the 14 participants, 10 have an email address and can use the computer. A few of them learnt how to use it through the classes offered by CARES. However a couple of the women said that the computer classes were not helpful for them because the contents were too basic.

During the times that I visited the center, I often found the women surfing the Internet or using the computer. Volunteers access it to insert data about the organization's activities, and to update the website of the organization. Visitors use it to search for personal (job search, email box, entertainment) or community material (special interest issues, recipes, news, English words). Not all women have their own computer at home, so they appreciate the possibility to use it when they visit the center.

If a spouse does not know how to use the computer, then she will often be able to find help from the other women (especially the volunteers). Four spouses have also mentioned the digital platform of the Association for the Promotion of Cross Strait Marriage Harmonization. Sometimes they access it because they can collect information about policies in Taiwan, raise questions, offer consultation and participate in forums with other women, and share personal thoughts, feelings, and stories.

According to the participants, the digital platform and CARES have different purposes. The first is created mainly to speak with strangers who have the same background, whilst the second lets people meet directly and participate in activities designed specifically for that group (Interviewee 003). The possibility of having a public space where women can meet during the day is safer than meeting people through the Internet. Therefore, CARES is a good channel to enlarge connections and to search for trusty friends (Interviewee 008).

The digital platform is used by the organization in order to promote its activities amongst other spouses. Usually volunteers are in charge of updating information on the website and on the digital platform. Although findings show that the Internet is used both by women and the organization, it is important to note that only a small percentage of all the spouses actually use it. According to Miss Ding, women who register for classes and courses via the Internet are still a minority in respect to those who register by phone or directly in person.

1.2.2.2 Telephone and face to face communication

Telephone is another important channel of communication for spouses. Volunteers can use it for all matters related to the organization and the community of spouses. During the main national holidays a special service is offered: all the spouses can call their families in China for free. However most of the telephonic traffic is from the outside, since women use it to call the organization and raise questions or ask for counseling. This hot line service (02 23935943) was established in 2005 with the purpose of assisting Chinese spouses on all issues related to them (law, life, society, problem solving, social welfare, marriage issues, local and family traditions and habits). Volunteers are in charge of answering the phone and offering a counseling service. Whenever they are not in service or the problem is too complicated, volunteers are assisted by the social service assistants. CARES can not always solve their problems, but at least it can offer moral support and suggestions on how to deal with the matter.

From January 2006 to July 2007, volunteers received 940 calls. Women enquired mainly about residency and visa matters (17%), regulations and family issues (62%), classes and activities promoted by the organization (21%) (CARES, 2007). This hotline is very important to the women, as they know that there is always someone available to listen to them, to answer to their questions, and to offer them a help. According to Miss Ding, in the last few years more and more women seek home counseling, especially when they have arguments with their family. She said that in recent times women have become braver about voicing their problems. This is because there is someone who will listen to their words. Through this they find the courage to raise their questions and discuss their problems. A study of telephone counseling in China showed that women with family problems often do not have anybody to share their sorrows. Therefore, the only channel of communication that they can rely on is the telephone (Palmer, 1997). The same happens to Chinese spouses here in Taiwan.

Although the telephone is the most used channel of communication, spouses can also directly consult volunteers or organization assistants. Between 2006 and 2007 were 100 requests of face to face counseling.

1.2.2.3 Community book

Another important media project promoted by CARES is the book *Dalu pei'ou xinqing shouzha. Xinwo xinwo. Ai zai taxiang de gushi* (大陸配偶心情手札·新窩心窩愛在他鄉的故事, Letters from Chinese spouses: New homes, warm love. Love in the stories from the 'others') (Lin et al., 2007). This book is a collection of twenty stories

written by spouses. Women were asked by the organization to write about their experience in Taiwan. The twenty stories were selected because of their originality, content and style. The book also includes the experiences of three Chinese grooms married to Taiwanese women. This was to highlight that the spouses were not just women, but included men as well. There is a small percentage of ‘Chinese grooms’ that reside in Taiwan, and they encounter the same difficulties as Chinese women.

This book presents different kinds of experiences and life stories. Some are more positive, whilst others are sadder. The common point for most of these stories is that the authors found in CARES a way to empower themselves. For the people who were happy CARES constituted a way of investing their time in useful and interesting activities. For the people who felt lonely, depressed and marginalized, CARES provided a channel for them to come out of this hopelessness.

The lectures for spouses’ development arranged by CARES helped me to go through my problems such as sadness, and feeling of being “other”. And finally I could feel at home again. (Chuan Yan, in Lin et al., 2007: 17)

In the last eight years, I always took care of my kid, and I lived a humble life until when I received the notification of CARES activities. This let me turn over a new leaf in my life. (Tan-Mei Qing, in Lin et al., 2007: 21)

We have been married already for six years and I am very used to the life here in Taiwan. Because we do not have any kid and at present I can not work, I accompany my husband for his lectures around the country. The remaining time I also study many things. In this way I can improve myself. This is the happiest moment of my life. (Xie Hong, in Lin et al., 2007: 40)

After classes ended, all my fears of going out disappeared. I could rejoice about the fact that I could make decisions by myself. This was a new rebirth for me, and finally I could pursue life objectives again. (Wang-Hui Qi, in Lin et al., 2007: 69)

The book was distributed to all the spouses. Only one woman said she has never seen the book before. Though, she had previously read some of the stories.

This book was created mainly for the new spouses who enter Taiwan and experience the adaptation process. It is also an attempt to bring to the attention of Taiwanese society the experiences of Chinese spouses in Taiwan. A third recipient is the government. This book aims to help officials reflect on the needs of Chinese spouses and to adjust their policies to be fairer.

One of the interviewee whose story was selected explained that

This book is mainly for those Chinese brides who just arrived in Taiwan. Its aim is to let them know that Taiwan is not so good, and is not so bad either. It wants to offer them an example. It wants to help them to get used to Taiwan faster. So it is not for Taiwanese people, it is for Chinese brides! (Interviewee 012)

Aside from new spouses, other women have found this book interesting and useful. As one stated, “it is a good opportunity to bring out and speak out about our feelings and experiences”. She continued by explaining that “through this book maybe

Taiwanese society will start to concern about our problems and experiences” and it “can get to know about us” (Interviewee 011).

Another woman was very surprised about the idea that this book could reach also Taiwanese society:

I thought it was only for us. I never really thought about showing it also to my Taiwanese friends and relatives. Not even to my husband. I thought they were not interested to read it. But if you tell me that the other spouses showed it also to their families, I will do it too. Yes, it is a great idea! Thank you! (Interviewee 014)

Although the stories were written by spouses, texts were revised if they contained mistakes or incorrect terminology. This refers to particular expressions which are common in China but may be sensitive for Taiwanese people. According to the social assistants this was conducted with the consensus of the spouses, and it was used as a method of explaining to the Chinese women about Taiwanese language restrictions.

One of the aims of this book was to help women to contemplate about their experiences. Writing their stories down, means that they can be shared with more women, as well as the society as a whole.

Prior to the release of the book, a meeting with the press was also organized. The women were invited to speak and tell about their stories. Their complaints and concerns appeared in three national newspapers (*The China Post*, *The United Daily News*, and *The China Times*), and many Taiwanese people requested copies of the book for themselves

and for their friends. Some of them wanted to meet the writers in order to know their stories. People called to encourage and give moral support to the spouses.

1.2.2.4 Non-mediated communications

The non-mediated forms of communication include activities, lectures and projects organized by CARES and also by spouses.

As previously mentioned the organization's main concerns are educative and informative activities. These projects can include several areas of interest: lectures on laws and regulations (in order to ensure that women have a better understanding of their rights and duties), classes and activities on everyday life issues (family communication, parents and children's relations, Taiwanese culture), painting classes, projection of movies with discussion, story telling classes, computer classes, activities for the Chinese New Year celebration, and voluntary activities.

A spouse confirmed the importance of joining CARES, by saying that women can understand China through the other girls and Taiwan through what they learn in the center (Interviewee 010). Often these spouses, before coming to Taiwan are not aware of the problems that Chinese women face on the island. According to one of the participants, she could not access Taiwanese government websites in China. Therefore it was difficult for her to collect information. Lectures on national policies help spouses to be aware of their rights and duties in Taiwan (Interviewee 003).

Taiwanese consorts are invited to participate in classes, especially to family communication lectures. These courses aim to facilitate the expression of personal emotions between family members. The spouses found them helpful, especially when they have problems relating with the family members.

CARES also offers training to women who are searching for a job. During these classes, the women are provided with information about the Taiwanese labor market. The women are also given guidance towards different kinds of jobs and professions. This will depend upon their disposition, skills and family situation. According to one spouse, who used to work as a government official in China, these classes are designed for a low level job market. Therefore they do not suit the necessities of those women who aim for more sophisticated occupations (Interviewee 003).

Voluntary projects for the community try to facilitate the integration of Chinese spouses with Taiwanese community. Contact is kept with two other institutions (for old people), one in Taipei and one in Jilong. On the last day of each month volunteers pay a visit to them.

In the case of a very poor family, we can give help bringing them food or visiting them. With veterans or old and sick people we do the same. (Interviewee 011)

According to a spouse, these activities are meaningful and helpful, both for spouses and Taiwanese society. The interaction between these two marginalized groups enables them to both become empowered. The women feel useful (within society)

because they are helping others. While those in need of care receive the assistance that no one else would offer them. One participant reflects that these activities encourage strong bonds to develop between the two groups, similar to the relationship between a parent and child (Interviewee 010).

A variety of activities are organized directly by the spouses, and these are community activities. Currently there are yoga, cooking, traditional dance, aerobics and English classes. These activities are taught by volunteers who are Chinese spouses and are happy to share their skills with other women. The only exception is the English teacher who comes from the US.

As the yoga teacher explained “I was attending the English class and I proposed them [Chinese spouses] the yoga class. And they liked the idea. So we asked CARES about it. And they accepted” (Interviewee 008).

Cooking classes seemed to be the most popular amongst the spouses. They take place every Wednesday at lunch time. Each week one woman is in charge of a special dish. She buys the ingredients and then she teaches the other girls how to cook and prepare the dish. This seemed to me a joyful moment, in which women help each other and discuss their local traditions and food. At lunch time they all sit together and savor the food commenting and giving suggestions on how to improve it. One of the participants showed particular appreciation for this, saying that her cooking abilities had

improved a lot. Her husband is happier. So if he is happy, she is happy too (Interviewee 004).

1.3 The significance of CARES communications

As previously mentioned in the literature review, the significance of community communication lies in the promotion of people's participation and in the achievement of their empowerment. Therefore, studies on community communication practices have to be accompanied also by the analysis of these two concepts. Interviews included several questions on participation and empowerment.

1.3.1 Participation in CARES

Following Berrigan (1979) pattern I divided the issue of participation of women into three main areas: access, participation and self management. As we can see from the following, CARES was characterized by a semi-horizontal and a semi-bottom up approaches. This means that participants were involved only in some spheres of the organization and of its practices (e.g. selection of projects and their contents, access to technical facilities). Whilst other spheres such as decision making, formulation of policies and plans, were mainly run by the organization assistants.

1.3.1.1 Access in CARES

As the social assistant explained, women access the communication system through a freedom of choice and selection of communication tools. This means that spouses can interact with the organization, and are able to criticize and comment on

activities and projects. Visiting the center, it was evident that women are in constant contact with the social service staff (who cares about their ideas and suggestions). At the end of each course women are asked to comment on the class, parts that they liked or did not like. The comments are placed on the notice-board in the corridor and collected by the social workers to be analyzed and filed. However both social assistants and the women agreed that even though the women were free to propose ideas the final decision lay with CARES.

Miss Ding explained that some women were more willing to propose and comment, while others were shyer and preferred to passively accept what is offered by the organization. One of the spouses who appeared to be very active and was involved also in her local community of residence, stated that not all the spouses were open to learn and discuss. According to her the more a woman is educated the more active she is. Education is important because without it individuals do not aspire to improve themselves (Interviewee 001).

Although the spouses are free to suggest activities and ideas, they do not all have the time nor the interest to do so. 5 out of 14 women said that they have never been involved in activities and project selection and proposal. This is because of a lack of time, a low attendance to the center, and a lack of opportunity to do so. A few women also said that since the organization provided a broad selection of projects and activities, women just needed to choose those they liked the most. However, one spouse emphasized the

fact that there is an interrelation between women's requests and the organization's decisions:

They ask for our point of view about activities. For example they ask us what we like, and what we don't. The communication process is very good here. They also consider our interests in order to decide the activities for the next year.
(Interviewee 008)

All the spouses agreed that they were able to choose from amongst a wide selection of media and non-media tools. As previously mentioned, in the community area there are computers, books, magazines, DVD player with DVDs, karaoke, cooking tools, telephone. The most used facilities are telephone, computers, cooking tools, books and karaoke. Women appreciated the fact that they have these tools at their disposal and they like to use them. Only two spouses said that they did not access technical facilities because they seldom visited the center and because they already had all they need at home (Interviewee 003, Interviewee 008). CARES also provides the equipment for the classes for free of charge. When women required minority dresses for the traditional dance course, the organization supplied them.

1.3.1.2 Participation in CARES

Participation consists of the involvement of the public in the production process of media projects. However participation can also be extended to the access of civil society groups to the public affairs of a nation. This means the opportunity for the individual or the group to affect public affairs.

Within the organization, women have the opportunity to participate in the definition of programs, activities, contents and scheduling. One participant emphasized the fact that every three months volunteers meet with organization assistants. They discuss issues related to the volunteer activities and the organization's accomplishments. Past and future activities are commented and proposed, six volunteers are selected as representatives and participate in these informal meetings (Interviewee 009). Spouses' representatives are elected annually during a meeting in which all the women can participate. Women will select two delegates from amongst the volunteers. Afterwards, these representatives will choose the remaining four volunteers.

Aside from the main activities which take place at a fixed time (for example every second Tuesday of each month at 2.00 pm there is a lecture on prearranged issues), community activities are more flexible. They are arranged in cooperation between volunteers and organization. As stated by Miss Wang, it is necessary to obtain organization approval for the use of the classroom in order to avoid clashing with other activities or meetings. Community activities are managed directly by the spouses and the teachers, (who are spouses as well). The main problem with these self organized activities is the lack of continuity. They depend on teachers' availability. Considering the fact that women often go back to China to visit their relatives, classes have to be interrupted when the teacher is not available. This is the reason why aerobics classes are now suspended. As soon as the foreign professor will leave the country there will be the same problem for the English classes too.

When considering participation in the outside world, examples are rarer. According to Miss Ding some women are active both personally and as a representative of their group. For example, spouses have written letters to the National Immigration Agency requesting for more equal policies. These have to be considered as supporting actions to the activity of mediation carried out by CARES when dealing with the government. This alliance between spouses and the organization was a positive step toward improving the women's condition. Firstly, they were brought to the attention of the public. Secondly, the government started to listen to their requests and complaints.

Another important example occurred during national forums. On these occasions volunteers were invited to share their stories, problems and thoughts with the other women and with the guests (who were mostly representatives of governmental and private institutions). This benefited the mutual dialogue and exchange of information between spouses and Taiwanese institutions.

On other occasions the women had the opportunity and the will to speak out. For instance, during the book release, writers were invited to take part in the event. One spouse was quoted by *The China Post* as saying:

'The government and administration give us a lot of constraints compared with spouses from Southeast Asian countries,' said Yang Yun-fang with a heavy hearth. (Bruyas, 2007, November 11)

However the majority of the spouses seemed to not have developed a sense of public awareness yet. Amongst all the women who were asked “Have you ever taken part in any public demonstration for your category?” only one said that she did it once (Interviewee 011). The others answered that they had never participated, because they had no time or because they were not in Taiwan at the time the demonstration was carried out. This shows a lack of concern towards the sphere related to public affairs that would benefit their community.

1.3.1.3 Self-management

The women were not able to participate in the decision making of the organization. This was justified by social assistants by saying that the spouses were not ready to do so, the participants affirmed that this was not their duty. According to them the organization already has its own employees in charge of that. When asked “would you like to do that?” a few women answered that they would like to. This is interpreted by them as an opportunity to learn new things and to help the organization. However, they also recognized the fact that they would need to be trained first, in order to acquire the competence and the understanding to do so (Interviewee 001, 002, 008).

1.3.2 Participants’ empowerment

Empowerment is the second essential feature in community communications. Empowerment and participation are in a mutual relation, since the fulfillment of one determines the implementation of the other. Community communications always have an effect on their community of interest. They are created to provide news and information

relevant to the community and to engage the community in public communication. This will lead to the empowerment of the community itself (Jankowski, 2002: 7). Because community communications are conceived as a tool for the “politically disenfranchised”, through their usage, individuals get power and gain the ability to increase their involvement into their community. As consequence the entire community gains influence and power.

In order to investigate the issue of empowerment, firstly it is necessary to understand how a group or an individual are in a state of powerlessness. Interviews showed that Chinese spouses, once they entered Taiwan, had to face several problems and difficulties. This put them in a status of powerlessness. Some of them got used quite fast to the new reality, while others needed longer time and external help.

1.3.2.1 From a normal to a powerless life

All participants said that when they were in China they had a happy and satisfied life. Living in a familiar environment and surrounded by their families and friends, they felt recognized and protected. With the exception of one, they all had a job and independence. Some of them lived independently, while a few lived with their parents.

The majority met their husbands through mutual friends or work colleagues. They would date for one or two years before they decided to marry. Four said that it was not in their plans to go to Taiwan, but they had to because of their husbands' business. Almost all of them, (regardless of how long it took them to adapt) used the term “strange”

(*mosheng*, 陌生) to describe Taiwan upon their arrival. They did not know their husbands, their families, the environment, the culture, the rules, and the people. Four of the women said that at the beginning they wanted to fly back home because the situation in Taiwan was unbearable.

Prior to moving to Taiwan the women were not aware of the difficulties they were going to face. This is because in China information about the Taiwanese regulations and immigration procedures are difficult to access. In the mean time the Taiwanese partners are often uninformed about these issues. As one participant said:

Before coming to Taiwan most of the women don't know anything about the problems they will face here in Taiwan. In China we can not get much information about Taiwan. Especially for those issues related to documents. However now more information can be collected, the situation is easier than before. Husbands know about these problems, they know that there are some difficulties once they marry a Chinese woman. But they don't really know what these difficulties are, which aspects of a person and family life they can affect. They like a person, and they think about love and about creating a family. They don't worry too much about these other problems. These are legal problems. They are related with bureaucracy, laws and the government, not with the family.
(Interviewee 006)

From amongst the interviewees, there were three that said that they did not face particular difficulties, therefore their adaptation process was very easy and fast. They associated it to the fact that they came from cities which are similar to Taipei: Shenzhen, Shanghai, or Guangzhou. They also had a good relationship with their husbands and

families which was a positive point in the adaptation process. Eight had different kinds of problems which were gradually solved in about two or three years. Three women had to go through complicated matters which made their adaptation process very slow.

All the problems faced by the participants, can be traced back to three main spheres: personal, family, and society.

1.3.2.1.1 PROBLEMS IN THEIR PERSONAL SPHERE

The most common problem all women faced was the lack of friends. The second problem was not being able to find a job (at least for the first two years because of rule restrictions). The fact that women could not go to work, affected their family's economy, and diminished their possibility of meeting new people and making friends. It was described as "home confinement" by one of the spouses, which in the long run negatively affected women's psychological well being. It is important for them to go out and to follow their own interests (Interviewee 003). Some participants affirmed that at the beginning they passed the time by watching TV, reading books or listening to the radio.

Participants liked to compare their previous life in China with their life here in Taiwan. In mainland China they could have their own independent life, their friends, and their jobs, here in Taiwan they have to depend completely on their husbands. This is not only a matter of economic dependence, but it affects all the spheres of their life. They can not do anything without their husbands, they can not open a bank account, they can not

even have a telephone contract without their husbands' signature. "I hate it" a participant said (Interviewee 003).

An intricate bureaucratic problem is obtaining the ID. As mentioned in the literature review Chinese women wait up to 8 years to get the naturalization. Although only four participants listed this as one of the problems they encountered, all the spouses were aware of the unfair national policies related to Chinese spouses:

Documents are still a problem. A Chinese spouse needs about 8-9 years to obtain the citizenship. This is a long time, too long. And it is even longer if compared to other spouses from Vietnam or other South East Asian countries. This limits also the personal development. (Interviewee 006)

Without ID women can not work, but in order to obtain the ID they need to obtain first a resident visa. When possessing only the resident visa they need to fulfill specific criteria in order to have a job permit. This means that during the first 8 years it will be very difficult for them to obtain a job. This can constitute a great problem, especially for the low income families. Some husbands do not have permanent jobs, and the income they make is too low to support the whole family. As one of the participants said, "when your child is hungry, you really feel that this is inconvenient and troublesome" (Interviewee 012).

Women felt unsatisfied not only because they could not work, but also because they could not access the jobs related to their studies. This is because the education of

mainland China is not recognized here in Taiwan. Seven participants complained about this matter. They were those who obtained higher level of education in China, such as university degree or attended senior high school specialization courses, but were unable to use them in Taiwan.

Three participants also mentioned a language barrier, as most people in Taiwan speak Minnanese, Chinese spouses can not understand what they say. Therefore women often go to Minannese classes to be able to communicate with locals.

1.3.2.1.2 PROBLEMS IN THEIR FAMILY

Having arrived in Taiwan, participants often had to live together with their husbands' families. This means, not only mother and father in law, but also their siblings with related offspring. Some families can have more than ten members all living together. In some cases this situation was only for a limited period, while in other cases it was prolonged for years. According to participants, in China when couples marry, they normally leave the parental home and search for an independent accommodation. Therefore living with other people seemed very inconvenient for them. Five participants complained about a lack of privacy at home.

The fact that these couples have to share their houses with their elders can also be related to their economic situation. In Taipei rent and life expenses are higher, the only way for a low-income family to survive is to remain in the parents' home. From amongst

the participants who had declared their family monthly income, only those with higher incomes actually lived independently.

For some, the family situation was very complicated. Two women suffered from violent husbands, and obtained a divorce after a long bureaucratic procedure. They now live in Taiwan with their children. Another woman complained about her husband's inclination to drink:

The biggest problem right now is related with my husband. He often comes back drunk and when he does it is completely another person. He has no control over his life and action and this is bad. He comes home and he messes up everything at home. I can not say that he is bad at me, but still I don't like when he is drunk, because he is without any control. We quarrel a lot. In addition, he wastes too much money with alcohol, and this is very bad because we don't have so much money at home. I really don't like this. And I said it to him, but every time he asks me sorry sorry. Then he does it again. He should have to stop going out with his friends. (Interviewee 010)

As presented in the literature review, these problems are related to their personal and family sphere (loneliness, lack of freedom, chauvinism), as a result Chinese spouses often suffer from depression.

1.3.2.1.3 PROBLEMS WITH TAIWANESE SOCIETY

Women complained about Taiwanese society and mentality. Taiwanese society was described as hostile and unfriendly. Some participants emphasized the fact that Taiwanese society is actually good, it is only certain individuals who create problems.

Taiwanese society as a whole is ok, but if you consider individuals singularly you might meet bad people. For example there were people who accused me of sending money to my parents, and to be here only for money. They thought I was a mail-ordered spouse, so they asked me how much money my husband paid to bring me here. And they also said to me “your family might be very poor!” There are many people here who think that mainland China is very poor, so they think that Taiwan is better than China, and they think that the economic situation is also better here than there. So they thought that I sent money back to my family. But my family is ok in China. (Interviewee 005)

As mentioned in the literature review, spouses are still suffering the consequences of the distorted media portrayal of the 1990s. Many Taiwanese people consider China as an underdeveloped country, they often have a distorted view of how life is on the other side of the strait.

This distorted view influences the way in which Chinese spouses are perceived in Taiwan. According to a participant, Chinese spouses are still being negatively labeled (Interviewee 001). For instance, Taiwanese call Chinese women *dalu xinniang* (大陸新娘) or *dalumei* (大陸妹) which is a derogative term.

They asked me strange questions about China, what we eat for example. They called us ‘dalumei’. This idiom is now changed with the more proper ‘dalupei’ou’ [Chinese spouses]. ‘Dalumei’ means money, while ‘dalupei’ou’ is more appropriate, less offensive. (Interviewee 013)

The general thought of Taiwanese people is that you, as a Chinese spouse, need money. You are not here for feelings. They despise us. I really believe that a few women come here for money, but you can not generalize. Because 3 over 10 do that, this doesn't mean that all of them behave like this. We are all from different places, from different situations. To generalize is very unfair. (Interviewee 007)

The women who arrived here in the late 1990s have noticed a change in Taiwanese societies' attitude. People today are more open and respectful. Previously the number of spouses who entered illegally was higher, currently the immigration flow is more controlled. This, together with the fact that the Chinese economy has improved a lot in the last decade, favored the entrance of women for genuine reasons.

The reasons why spouses come to Taiwan are different. I would say that those who enter Taiwan illegally decreased. Before, because the economic situation of Taiwan was very good, many people entered illegally. But now China economy is better, so it's different from the past. More people can move more easily, and illegality drop down. Before many women came for money, now they are fewer. (Interviewee 013)

Looking at these examples and interacting with the spouses, society gradually opened up and adjusted its discriminatory attitude. However, as the social assistants and most of the participants noticed, this is a very slow process.

1.3.2.2 The way to empowerment

In the literature review, family pressures and loneliness indicated that the women would be more prone to depression. Legal problems limited their sphere of action, and social discrimination hindered their integration into society. All these problems

contributed to the spouses' status of powerlessness. According to Lord and Hutchinson (1993), powerlessness can grow as a consequence of social isolation, poverty, abuse and inappropriate service and systems. In this case study all these factors played an important role. When they entered Taiwan, spouses perceived themselves as socially isolated, in some instances they did not have good economic conditions, they suffered husband's violence, and they suffered legal constraints imposed by the government policies.

All these factors contributed to their weakness and unhappiness. Without external help they found it difficult to gain control over their life. CARES became a reference point of assistance for these spouses. Thirteen participants explicitly confirmed that they are happy now. Though many said that in mainland China they were happier. They unanimously said that in CARES they have found happiness and satisfaction that they could not find anywhere else in Taiwan. Four participants also said that, besides the organization, other factors that influenced their process of empowerment: personal efforts, family, the church, faith.

The fact that CARES contributed to the personal empowerment of each woman was evident from the interviews. However, empowerment can occur also at organization and community levels. These two stages were more difficult to define and identify in this case study.

1.3.2.2.1 PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

Each woman provided different examples to support her personal empowerment. It seemed to me that the starting point for all the women was the extension of social

relations through the organization. Women could break their status of loneliness and apathy when they joined CARES. They could learn new skills, and they could help other spouses and the society as a whole, therefore this gave them a greater feeling of social fulfillment.

For examples spouses said that:

Yes, CARES helped me a lot. I can speak to other girls and here I can experience a feeling of family and group belonging. We become one confident of the other ones. (Interviewee 011)

Yes, my life has improved a lot. I can not say that this is only because of CARES. But what they were able to create is a feeling of community belonging. This is very important. Before I didn't have a group, or a job, or any kind of social life. But I needed them! And besides belonging to a group, I needed also to have a social life, which I didn't have before. (Interviewee 006)

Sharing interests, thoughts and experiences with other people helped women to improve themselves and to open their hearts to the others. One participant mentioned that, speaking with friends and debating different ideas made her reflect on her actions. In addition, it distracted from her everyday pressures and she felt that she could release her feelings (Interviewee 004).

Another participant stated that CARES helped her to smile again after three years of sorrow and loneliness (Interviewee 003).

The weekly activities enabled women to learn new skills and abilities, e.g. language speaking (English and Miannese), handicrafts, cooking, dancing, and computer skills. Physical activities such as aerobics and yoga help women to feel better physically and mentally (Interviewee 002).

They could apply them use these skills outside the organization. For example, several women who were not able to use computer are now able to do so, thus improving their job prospects.

The computer classes were very helpful for me. Now I can use computer, even if just the basics. I can use it for job, but also to speak with my family at home.
(Interviewee 005)

They also offer a line for counseling requests. You can call them or just go there whenever you need to ask for information or suggestion [...].And no one would have told me how to do with documents. Yes, they helped me a lot. (Interviewee 005)

Women associated the result of their integration and the improvement of their family happiness to their participation in the organization. Through the eyes of the people who are part of the organization women could learn more about Taiwan, its culture and its rules. One participant said that in China people are more direct while in Taiwan politeness is very important. Therefore she gradually learned how to behave and how to deal with people without disrespecting them. She learned this in CARES. She found it helpful not only for her integration into society, but also once she started her new job (Interviewee 010). Other spouses had similar feelings:

This is a help to get integrated and to get to know more about a society we really don't know. Everything is of help, attending classes, speaking to other people, staying with them. (Interviewee 011)

Lectures on family communication helped them improve their mediatory skills with the other members of the family. Two women mentioned the lectures on parents and children communication, and they said that these classes helped them to deal with problems related to their children's development(Interviewee 012, 004).

Meetings on national laws and regulations improved their understanding of national policies on immigration and of spouses' rights in Taiwan. As presented in the literature review, collection of information and enhancement of knowledge are important steps towards people empowerment. Indeed women not only gain control of their personal life, but they also enhance their awareness of matters related to Chinese spouses. For example, I noted that all the participants were able to explain the legal issues related to Chinese spouses in the present and in the past. One woman gave me her personal view, that Taiwan and China should be united rather than divided. She spoke with confidence about her personal right of residing in Taiwan and of being recognized as a Taiwanese because she is married to a local man (Interviewee 010). Another participant showed a concern for spouses in Taiwan:

However this problem related to the right to work is not only my problem. Many women face this problem, because this is related to government politics. For other countries spouses the situation is very different, for example Vietnamese

women can obtain the documents much faster than we do. This is unfair towards us, Chinese spouses. In some family, in addition, if there are economic problems, this is an additional problem because women can not work so they can not help the family. Especially if they have kids. In this case they have to ask for help to the elders. In this way the pressure are even stronger. And I think that 8-9 years is really too much to obtain the citizenship. (Interviewee 008)

Voluntary activities helped to enhance the control that spouses have over their own life. Helping the organization and the other women had a double effect. On one hand the organization and the group was empowered, and on the other hand individuals could gain more power:

The more you help people the more satisfied you are. To be a volunteer you have to attend some classes, where they explain to you how to deal with different situations. You learn about family communication and also about laws and regulations about Chinese spouses. We have to know all these issues. (Interviewee 13)

Volunteers are required to attend special training. These two month courses take place once a year and include talks and lectures with experts and professors. Through these courses women learn how to deal with the everyday issues and problems that are related to voluntary activities. Focus is placed on legal and psychological issues, in order to let women gain more confidence with the counseling job (which is one of the main duties of volunteers).

I learned to be confident when they call me or when they ask me information or help. At the beginning I really didn't know how to solve some problems, how to answer them, and I had always to ask the help of someone else. Now it is

different, I know quite well how to handle most of the situations. (Interviewee 006)

At the beginning you feel that you don't have the capacity to do that. But then you understand that you have already passed through the same difficulties, so you have the capacity to help other people. (Interviewee 012)

The collection of stories was an opportunity to empower women, especially the writers. For example one author was quoted in *The China Post* as saying:

'I already died once, now I have come back to life,' she added, while explaining how writing this book helped her to overcome her ordeal. (Bruyas, 2007, November 11)

Miss Ding noted that women become more motivated once their stories were published, as they received encouragement and affections from the public. One participant, whose story was published, said that she was touched by the fact that her story was selected. It was a personal achievement for her that kept her spirit up.

1.3.2.2.2 ORGANIZATION EMPOWERMENT

In this case study, women's contributions at the organizational level, was mainly from the volunteers. As a spouse said:

It is a double way help: they help us. We help them in organizing activities, however our contribution is smaller. This is because our capacity is limited. We can help for small issues, family problems, but not for great problems. (Interviewee 006)

This “double-way help” also has a strong impact on the external community. The fact that spouses trust the organization, empower the organization. For this reason CARES is considered by the government as a trustworthy agent when dealing with Chinese spouses issues. Therefore the government listens to CARES because it knows that spouses rely on the organization.

Internally, CARES has empowered a lot in the last few years, thanks to spouses participation, and volunteers help. One participant said that today CARES is more organized, the classes have more variety and volunteers constitute a great help for the organization (Interviewee 012).

Volunteers are trained to improve the organization’s capability and possibilities. Most of the face to face and telephonic counseling job is carried out directly by volunteers. Their competence in dealing with spouse issues is not derived only from the training but also from their personal experience. This is also a factor which contributes to the internal empowerment of the organization. For this reason senior volunteers are always available to help and advise new volunteers.

Despite the help offered by the volunteers, most of the other spouses’ contribution is very limited. The spouses seemed to rely on the organization incentives to participate, rather than directly proposing ideas for projects and activities. However according to Miss Ding this has improved in the last few years, not only individually, but also as a

group. Previously women were inclined to wait for the organization input, now they are more independent. They know what they need, where they have to go, and what they have to do. This could be connected to a couple of factors. Firstly spouses today are more informed (for example, they can use Internet and search for information for themselves). Secondly they help each other, not only inside the organization but also outside. This occurs especially when the women who have been longer in Taiwan help those women who just entered the island and do not know anything about the local system and habits.

Organization empowerment is also reflected in spouses empowerment. According to Miss Ding, the fact that women have an organization which advocates for them and that they are directly involved in, strongly empowers them. Therefore spouses today are more active and dare to speak out. This is a consequence of the cooperation and mutual trust between spouses and the organization. While women have learned to articulate their needs and problems, CARES works as an agent for them and brings to the public's attention their demands.

1.3.2.2.3 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Community empowerment consists of recognizing the importance of the “collective bargaining power of the group” (Pardasani, 2005: 122). It can be achieved through group lobbying, advocacy activities, participation in national and regional forums and meetings. At this level emphasis is placed on the individual identification in a group and on the recognition of its power.

As we could see from the findings, all the participants were aware that due to CARES they can gain higher influence in society. They agreed that Chinese spouses are not powerful enough to be able to do this without CARES. When asked “Why do Chinese spouses need CARES?” women gave very similar answers.

We, Chinese spouses, are not powerful enough, we don't have the capacity to reach the government and influence it. We don't dare, we are scared to act by ourselves. We can not enter offices, court, and government by ourselves!
(Interviewee 012)

Chinese spouses don't have the time, neither the money to go ahead by themselves. We are here because of our family, we have kids, and we have to take care of them. We don't have the time to do what CARES is doing for us.
(Interviewee 012)

We can not do by ourselves what CARES is doing for us. We don't have enough information and knowledge. So we don't have power and influence to act as CARES acts. CARES has helped a lot. But still we need to do something as well. They give us the way, but we have to walk by ourselves. (Interviewee 011)

The empowerment Chinese spouses achieved, was related to two main areas: their image in Taiwanese society and their rights. Women contributed to this individually, but the main empowerment was carried out by CARES. The organization became the mouthpiece of Chinese spouses in Taiwan.

According to Hsia (2005), Taiwanese society today has a better opinion of foreign spouses. This is a consequence of the activity of several organizations which have

advocated for them, starting from the 2000s. According to the participants, they felt that their status within Taiwanese society has improved in the last few years. They have gained the respect of their neighbors, and the government has adjusted its behavior (e.g. it changed the title 'Chinese brides' with the more correct 'Chinese spouses') and some of its policies according to their needs. However, as we could see from the participants' narratives in the previous paragraphs, Chinese spouses still suffer the effects of discrimination and isolation.

The two main methods of empowering the spouses community are the women's own personal conduct and the work carried out by CARES. Individually, each woman's own personal conduct affects the way in which Taiwanese people view Chinese spouses. Spouses were aware that the way in which they interacted with local people could influence the entire society's opinion of Chinese spouses (Interviewee 003, 014). Therefore it is necessary to understand and integrate with Taiwanese society. During lectures, women are taught to search for dialogue rather than confrontation with locals, to try to understand Taiwanese, as this can facilitate the integration and mutual understanding.

As a representative of CARES, women interact with Taiwanese society whenever they engage in public activities. An example can be the voluntary activity to help Taiwanese people. One negative point to this though, is that most of these help old people, so the area of influence is limited only to a small segment of Taiwanese society.

Another channel is the book published last year by CARES (Lin et al., 2007). It was distributed amongst the spouses to other organizations, the government and to Taiwanese people. Spouses said that they showed the book to their family and friends in order to let them understand spouses' feelings and thoughts:

I gave it also to Taiwanese people. They said that it is funny. It is interesting for them to know about our experiences and difficulties, about our feelings.
(Interviewee 013)

This book was designed as a way to publicly express the women's experiences. Therefore, trying to target policymakers as well as single women and Taiwanese society. As social assistants emphasized, the government has its own vision of Chinese spouses. Therefore CARES would like to influence it in order to favor the adjusting of policies according to the women needs. The book alone could not determine any great change at governmental level, but a positive feedback was shown by the governmental offices. For example, the National Immigration Office required some copies of the book in order to distribute them through its counters.

As we previously saw, CARES has been involved in a constant dialogue with the government with the purpose of adjusting its policies in accordance with the women's needs. Women are not directly involved in this part of the activities. However they are aware of CARES influence and power and of the fact that through the organization someone will listen to them.

In addition, CARES often communicate with the government. They know our needs, so they can explain the government about our situation and requests. In this way the government can adjust its policies. This is good for Chinese spouses also. And I can say that in the last few years, we could notice a few improvements.
(Interviewee 006)

For example one of the last achievements of CARES (obtained after a long mediation with the government) was the new regulation for Chinese spouses, whose husband had passed away. Previously women without Taiwanese ID had to go back to China, as of last April they could continue residing in Taiwan if their children were still here.

Another example is the addition of a new criterion to the list for job permit requests. Now women with children under 18 years old have the opportunity to work when in possession of a resident visa.

1.4 The case of Hualien

CARES started to organize forums and lectures in Hualien in 2001. However training for volunteers started only in October 2007. Regular classes started in January 2008. The existence of the center in Hualien is related mainly to a spouse who offered her time and energy to organize and take care of all the projects in this area.

1.4.1 Hualien versus Taipei

The center in Hualien is organized differently respect to the one in Taipei. In Hualien CARES do not have a space where spouses can meet, and it relies on the rooms

offered by local organizations and institutions (e.g. a local church). As a consequence, the organization identity is weaker than in Taipei. Spouses often confuse what is organized by whom, since most of the times lecturers are sent by CARES, classes are funded by the government and rooms are offered by the local church.

Despite this, the center in Hualien provides the women with more freedom to active decide. Although the spouse in charge of the activities in Hualien is in constant contact with the social assistants in Taipei, she has the freedom to decide and organize activities on the basis of the needs of the spouses in this area.

As a consequence, spouses are provided with a selection of classes which are more suitable to their needs and interests. This is because Hualien has developed differently from Taiwan, therefore the spouses have different demands and needs. For example, in Taipei, women are more aware of national policy issues. Miss Ding stated that, this can be related to two factors. Firstly, the flow of information is faster in the capital city. Secondly, the local government of Taipei has sponsored more activities and funds for Chinese spouses than other municipalities. In such a vivid and stimulating environment, spouses have the possibility of learning faster and of accessing more complex information. Whilst, in Hualien the flow of information is slower and the environment is less stimulating.

Miss Ding stated that this reflects the spouses' requests which tend to be less complex than those from Taipei. Therefore it is necessary to let Hualien spouses organize

themselves in order to create an environment which is in line with their needs and lives. Courses (e.g. computer classes, cooking classes, preparation to the driving license exam) are all chosen by spouses depending on their needs and requests. CARES accordingly provides them the material and the lecturers.

Despite the freedom that is enjoyed in Hualien, I did not notice a great involvement of the spouses. Out of 3 participants, only one showed personal concern about the organization and about the public sphere. She is the one who maintains communication with the center in Taipei and volunteers to speak during national forums. The other two participants (although they work as volunteers) do not care about organizational matters. All the responsibilities lie upon the third interviewee. The other spouses assist and help her, but are not eager to make decisions or to take on responsibility.

Likely the other participants from Taipei, the process of empowerment could be noticed mainly at the personal and organization level. Whilst at the community level women seemed not having developed strong community awareness yet. It is important to note that CARES started its regular activities in Hualien only this year. Spouses have lived in Hualien already for several years. This means that their process of empowerment was stimulated by other actors. For example, the three interviewees said that the local church community played an important role in their integration and adaptation phase.

The fact that other institutions can help spouses to get integrated is very important. Apart from the national forums which are organized all over Taiwan, CARES can hardly help those women who can not reach the organization. Therefore, it is necessary to rely on other organizations and institutions which are active in the areas not covered by CARES. Relations between CARES and these local institutions should have to be gradually developed, as in the case of Hualien.

1.5 Conclusion

As we could see from this chapter, the 14 participants and the social service assistants offered interesting narratives on the issues of communication, participation and empowerment. Additional information could also be collected from the spouses' short stories published by the organization (Lin et al., 2007).

According to the collected data, CARES mainly relied on traditional media rather than on modern ones. Women involvement was limited only to the first two levels of participation, denying the self-management level. Empowerment was met mainly at the micro level (personal empowerment). Empowerment at the macro level proved to rely mainly on the organization efforts rather than on women activities (organizational and community empowerment).

While this chapter has been based mainly on participants' personal account of facts and stories, a more comprehensive explanation will be offered in the next chapter. Indeed, it will offer possible assumptions on the reasons why participants gave certain

kinds of answers. This part will be based on the debate presented in the literature review and on scholars' findings.