



# NEW LIVES NEW ROOTS

Life Stories of Marriage Migrants

a project of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM)  
supported by the Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED)



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# table of contents

Foreword	v
Preface	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
<i>Justine</i> making the best of her new life	3
<i>Diana</i> a life through pain, lies and learning	17
<i>Amna</i> an arranged marriage leading to happiness	41
<i>Erna</i> her journey to a better self	49
<i>Mei</i> becoming an advocate and activist for fellow marriage migrants	63



# foreword

Marriage migration remains to be a hot issue.

While great strides have been made to ensure protection and promotion of rights of marriage migrants (mostly women) and their children, state policies in destination countries and regions continue to be discriminatory. With the worsening of the global economic crisis, marriage migrants join the migrant community who are the first to suffer the brunt. Nonetheless, they continue to struggle and fight.

The release of the book *New Lives, New Roots: Life Stories of Marriage Migrants* comes at opportune time when such a global economic situation puts many migrants at a vulnerable state. From the life experiences of five marriage migrants, one is brought by the stories into the harsh reality that many marriage migrants face – discrimination, racism, cultural differences, isolation, economic difficulties, domestic violence, and many others. It does not only feature a life of hardship and struggle but of empowerment, victory and a commitment to go on and help their fellow marriage migrants.

The book features the life stories of Justine, Diana, Amna, Erna and Mei. While Diana and Amna chose to keep their identities hidden for the sake of their family's security, all five of them bravely shared their stories of struggle with us. With their stories, they hope to inspire

other fellow marriage migrants to continue and strive to make their lives better and more importantly to work with fellow marriage migrants as well as other supportive local groups and individuals in pushing for reforms that will ensure equal treatment and promotion of their rights.

*New Lives, New Roots* puts a human face to the recently-released book by the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, *For Better or For Worse: A Comparative Research on Equity and Access for Marriage Migrants*. While *For Better or For Worse* provides us with a comprehensive look into the current condition of marriage migrants in five destination areas in Asia Pacific as well as the how the state policies in these areas affect them, *New Lives, New Roots* gives us fresh perspective, directly from someone who has experienced it.

The title, *New Lives, New Roots*, is a fresh, inspiring take on how marriage migrants, like flowers, continue and struggle to bloom in a different land.

**Hsiao-Chuan Hsia**

*Professor and Director*

*Graduate Institute for Social Transformation Studies*

*Shih Hsin University, Taiwan*



# preface

Marriage migrants have broken their silence to advance their rights and empowerment.

This book tells of the empowering experiences of five marriage migrants who braved storms and hardships, battled discrimination and all sorts of hindrances and won their places in a foreign country that has become their second home.

Their stories speak of their struggles and resistance to the social ills that beset them - discrimination, social exclusion, lack of services, domestic violence - as well as of the importance of being part of an organization that serves as their support group.

Most importantly, the book reveals amazing achievements - remarkable qualities and skills in organizing, providing welfare and working collectively with fellow marriage migrants to defend their well being and promote their rights.

While names of our two marriage migrants in this book have been changed to ensure anonymity and their protection, all their stories are true: Justine and her struggle through a new life in South Korea, Amna (not her real name) and her arranged marriage, Diana (not her real name) struggling through a life of lies, pain and learning, Erna becoming empowered, and Mei learning to empower herself and others.

Their stories are stories of strength. And while their stories may not reflect the general conditions of many marriage migrants in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Australia, may they be a source of inspiration for many marriage migrants and those of us who continue to support their cause.

**Ramon Bultron**

*APMM Managing Director*

## *Acknowledgments*

APMM extends its most profound appreciation to the five women who bravely told us their stories: Maria Diana of Japan, Erna Chen of Taiwan, Justine Tiempo of South Korea, Yeung Mei of Hong Kong and Amna of Australia. Your words, your life will always be our inspiration.

To Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED) for helping us tell their stories.

To those who have helped in reaching out to our sisters and continuing to be with them in their struggles: Butch Pongos for Japan, Jiazhen Wu of TASAT for Taiwan, Pastor Gloria Hernando for South Korea, and Jane Brock for Australia.

Our special thanks goes to Vicky Casia Cabantac for overseeing the whole project; Yvette Pan Hung-Yu, our intern from Taiwan who has helped in developing Mei's story and sharing with us her beautiful photos; and to Jake Welch and Aaron Ceradoy for helping us with gathering much-needed information.

Last but not the least, Ina Alleco Silverio, whose gift of words breathes vibrant life to the already-beautiful stories of our dear marriage migrants. We cannot thank you enough.

This is a book of marriage migrants.

This is a book of their sacrifices, their  
victories, and their continuing struggles.

This is a book of marriage migrants  
dedicated to all marriage migrants.

# KOREA

## Fast facts on marriage migration in South Korea

36,204 marriages between Korean and foreigners as of 2008. Roughly 10% of registered marriages in Korea involve a foreigner.

Average age difference between Korean men and foreign brides in 2008 was 11.8 years.

7,962 divorces between foreign wives and Korean men in 2008 with the average period of cohabitation 2.7 years.

Marriage migrants with residential status are entitled to work in Korea without special permission.

Resident visas last one year and must be extended before expiring to avoid risk of deportation.

Marriage migrant depends on Korean spouse for references in order to show validity of marriage. Naturalization can be granted to migrant who become divorced for reasons they can prove to be not their fault. If a migrant has parental right over a child from a dissolved marriage they are eligible as well.

Dual citizenship is granted to foreigners with Korean spouses.



# Justine

## making the best of her new life

Justine E. Tiempo is a 39-year old Filipina married to a Korean. She has two children aged two and eight.

Prior to her marriage she lived in a rural, agricultural community with her parents and siblings. Her father was a hardworking farmer and supported his family with the proceeds of his farm which he planted with rice, coconut and vegetables.

“With the proceeds from sold crops, he was able to send me and my siblings to private school. It was not an easy life because there was no money for anything else. After I graduated from high school, I lived with my brother who was a priest for the local parish. I did some chores for him while I attended school. He was the one who paid for my college education,” he said.

Justine was heartbroken when her brother left the priesthood and got married. She was only able to reach her third year in college.

“Our family’s increasing economic needs mounted. I felt desperate. I went to Cebu and found a job in a factory that assembled computer parts. It was not a job I wanted to stay in forever,” she said.

When she went back to her family, one of her cousins approached her with an offer. He asked her if she was willing to marry a Korean and move to Korea.

“I was shocked. I immediately answered ‘no.’ I had never considered marrying a foreigner,” she said. The cousin kept convincing her, however; he told her to decide quickly because it was an opportunity to improve her lot.

She considered everything in her head and told her mother about it. To her surprise, her mother was agreeable to the proposal. She decided she would go ahead and get into her cousin’s scheme or arranged marriages with Koreans.

Justine went to Manila with other young women from her hometown. All of them got into the ship, and from the pier they were taken to the a house maintained by the Unification Church which managed the match-making service for Korean men.

That same night, the police officers raided the house and looked for Koreans who were looking for wives.

“All of us hid inside a room. I was scared and noticed that everyone else was worried as well. I was afraid about what would happen if we were found. I really didn’t know what I was getting into. I prayed quietly the entire time and asked help from God,” she said.

They were not caught.

It was on November 9, 2002 when she first met her future husband.

“He laid down his bridal offerings on the table in front of me -- a lady’s bag, a few dress accessories, a set of cosmetics, a hundred US dollars, and a Korean-Tagalog dictionary. He asked me if I was willing to marry him. I couldn’t speak so I nodded my head instead. It was a very brief meeting. He returned to Korea the following day. I knew, he paid a lot of money for the match-making,” she said.

Three months later, Justine flew to Korea. It was winter, and she found everything pale and still. She saw only a few people.

“For a child from the tropics like me, the entire surroundings appeared too inanimate. I stayed for four months in the Unification Church in Osan. The entire time I taught myself the Korean language. I studied a few concepts of adaptation, about assimilation and integration in Korean society. I also spoke and listened to other Filipino marriage migrants and Koreans,” she said.

In the absence of family and friends, her Filipino wedding was solemnized by an official of the Embassy of the Philippines in Seoul in March 2002. Her marriage, however, was consummated after her Korean wedding which took place the following June.

Justine did not automatically become a citizen upon marriage. She said that she had to go through “a tedious process.”

“On the first year of marriage, as a spouse-dependent, I held a residential status (F2 -1). The following year I applied for naturalization. I declared a statement of citizenship and complied with the Korean government’s other requirements such as the presentation of documents

such as the family registration, marriage certificate, photocopies of my passport, as well as a financial document proving that my family had assets amounting to KRW 30 million.”

“Everything depended on my husband. I had to wait for two years before my naturalization papers were approved. I got it three years after I got married,” she said.

### *Korean Rules and Regulations For Marriage Migrants*

Marriage migrants in Korea are entitled to Residential Status (F2-1) in accordance to Article 12 of Immigration Control Act and Enforcement Decree of Immigration Control Act. Those who have this status are allowed to work in Korea without special permission.

If a migrant intends to stay in Korea for a long time, he or she must acquire alien registration from the immigration authority within 90 days of arrival in the country. Those with resident visa are entitled to one-year stay per application, which can be renewed before expiration. If one fails to apply for the extension of stay within the period, the person may fall into the status of so-called ‘illegal’ sojourner and face the risk of arrest and deportation.

Migrants who stay longer than two years are entitled to a permanent residence status (F-5) or for naturalization as a Korean citizen.

In South Korea, citizenship rules are under the Immigration Control Act and the Naturalization Act. In the application for an extension of the sojourn period or for naturalization, immigration authorities always require the presence of the Korean spouse in dealing with marriage migrants in order to prove the authenticity of the marriage. If the Korean spouse withdraws references required by the authorities, marriage migrants are not allowed anymore to stay in Korea or their application for naturalization gets denied.

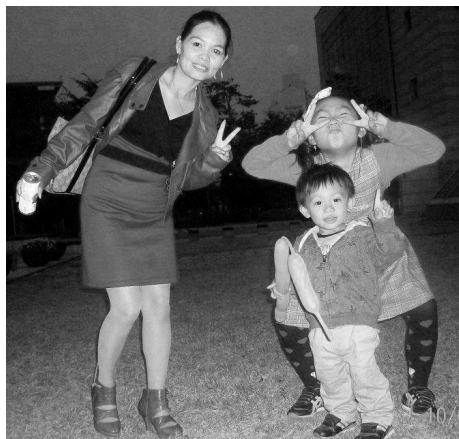


The basic documents required for the application for simplified naturalization are the following: (1) Naturalization Application Form; (2) Photocopy of Passport; (3) Statement for Citizenship Application; (4) Statement of Identity; (5) Family registration, basic registration, marriage certificate and resident registration transcript of the Korean spouse; and (6) Financial registration (to verify the ability of the applicants, or their family, to maintain themselves. Any one of the following documents also needs to be submitted: (a) Bank Balance containing more than KRW 30 million in the name of the applicant or the family; (b) Lease contract or estate registry equivalent to KRW 30 million; (c) Certificate of Incumbency (Attached the copy of Employer's Business Registration certificate); (d) Certificate for the employment expected (Financial guarantee not allowed); (e) Other materials to prove the fact that the marriage status is maintained; and (f ) Photos, Statement of people around, Letters exchanged before the marriage, etc.

After applying for naturalization in accordance with Nationality Act, the applicant will have to wait from one and a half to two years to receive final notice of the approval of naturalization. Thus, marriage migrants actually have to live for a period of four years in Korea with the status of "foreigner."

Justine found the entire process also emotionally draining: six months after she obtained her Korean citizenship, she had to renounce her citizenship as a Filipino.

"I had no choice. It was stated in the Korean National Identity Act that a foreigner who has acquired Korean citizenship must abandon her or his previous nationality. It was only in 2011 when the Philippine government allowed dual citizenship," she said.



*Justine E. Tiempo with her children  
(photo courtesy of Justine Tiempo)*



## *Difficult Adjustment to Korean Life*

Justine gradually began her new life as a Korean citizen. She discovered that her husband came from a peasant family like she did.

“I will never forget that first meeting with my mother-in-law. She considered it her duty to guide me into the family. She asked me the first time we met if I knew why some marriages of Korean men to foreign wives failed and ended in divorce. I was completely anxious, but I answered ‘Omoni (mother), maybe it’s because there’s a lack of mutual respect, understanding and acceptance between the two partners and their families. There should be understanding because the wife comes from a foreign culture and has a different social orientation.’”

Justine’s mother-in-law welcomed her to the family, and even her four sisters-in-law and one brother-in-law were kind to her. The wife of her brother-in-law was a different story.

“From the beginning she was very resentful of my presence in the family. She looked down on me because I was Filipina. She raised her voice at me whenever we spoke. She was often verbally abusive. I couldn’t stand her, and this is why I began avoiding her,” she said.

It was not too long in her married life when she also discovered that her husband was an alcoholic.

“My husband relied on alcohol to function. He used to drink with his friends in the neighborhood after work even when he knew that it would upset me. Then he comes home late in the evening, upsetting me further. Sometimes he was so drunk that he ended up

sleeping at his mother's house. One time I even found him sleeping on our doorstep because he was too drunk to come in the house," she said.

Justine said that she was very concerned for her husband's health and worried about the impact of his alcoholism on their family.

"When he drinks he completely disregards my feelings. It's a good thing that he has never hurt me physically. I realized after a while that I was unconsciously enabling my husband in his alcoholism by making excuses for him and for accepting his attempts to justify his excessive drinking. He used to say that he was only pressured by his friends. It was also a weakness on my part when I allowed him to drink inside our own house," she said.

Justine admitted that it was hard living with an alcoholic husband. "My emotional needs are neglected, and I can't meet his own either because I already feel stressed out by his constant drinking. His alcoholism has had a very bad effect on our marriage," she said.

According to a 2005 survey of Ministry of Health and Welfare, 31 percent of international marriage migrant women who responded to the survey have experienced verbal violence in the last year. Of this, 13 to 14 percent experienced physical violence, 14 percent were forced into sexual intercourse by their husbands, and 9.5 percent were forced into abnormal sexual intercourse by their husbands. Approximately a third of them endure these abuses and violations. Those who reported domestic violence to police are only eight percent. On the question why the respondents did not report the case to the police, 20 percent replied that they wanted to keep their marital life; 14 percent said they did not know how to report the case; 13 percent thought that the police would not solve the problem. The final 10 percent couldn't do anything because of unstable sojourn status.

Her lack of fluency in the Korean language was also a problem. For the first two years, Justine floundered. She found the language difficult to master, and it was not easy for her to adjust to the cultural differences.

“I was unaware to many of the customs and traditions, I was confused by them. There was also the constant feeling of being isolated from all the people here. It is devastating and traumatic for me as a marriage migrant to experience discrimination in so many levels. I was being discriminated against because of my position as a poor woman from a poor country; because I was brown and a Filipino; and finally because I was a woman,” she said.

According to the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, the marriage migrants’ background as working class and from poorer countries is assumed to have negative impacts on their capacities of raising and educating children “properly,” which is linked to lowering the capacities of the host countries to compete with other states in an increasingly competitive global market.

It was fortunate that Justine could turn to her mother-in-law for support.

“She always told me, ‘Don’t let him in to your home if ever he’s drunk; I’ll take care of him!’ She was a typical mother,” she said.

Justine was also able to unburden herself of her feelings of isolation and inadequacy to fellow Filipinos and friends in the HanFil organization, the service institution workers of Osan Migrant Center and the Osan Dasom Women Marriage Migrants Center.

The last is where she studies the Korean language and learns about Korean customs and traditions. The center also offers computer literacy programs, as well as counseling sessions with women from other nationalities. Justine became actively involved in HanFil.

“My participation in the various education and culture activities of HanFil as well as my involvement in the campaigns to uphold the rights of migrants here in Korea has awakened my consciousness as a Filipino. I have since become so much more aware of labor and marriage migration issues,” she said.

Despite the problems with her husband’s drinking, Justine was still grateful that he did not deny her opportunities to learn about Korean society.

“I’ve become confident enough to work as a tutor teaching English to a group of Koreans in a government-owned community center. This has done wonders for my self-esteem. The salary I received helped in paying for the education and other expenses of my two younger siblings back in the Philippines. I was able to help them both finish college. This is probably the best thing that I can say I gained from being a marriage migrant.”

### *Improve Immigration Policies to Help Migrant Marriages*

Justine refused to give advice to other marriage migrants, saying that she was in no position to offer any.

“Can aspiring migrants get the best advice from me? No, they can’t. I don’t want to encourage other Filipinas to marry Korean men. There are, of course, many successful marriages here between Koreans and Filipinas, but it’s not easy to adjust to a life here. The relationship of subordination is not uncommon,” she said.

Justine said that in the last few years, her life as a marriage migrant has been mostly about meeting others like her. She said that she has also tried to help when she meets marriage migrants from the Philippines who encounter problems.

“I have met some who cannot meet the requirements for citizenship or have failed outright to secure citizenship because their Korean spouse or family did not have enough funds of properties equivalent to KRW30 million. Then there are cases when the husband is reluctant to provide the required financial document. Still there are others who experience domestic violence but choose to suffer in silence, enduring everything because they want to remain in Korea and become citizens here. Many fall into relations of subordination and various forms of abuse,” she said.

If there are any recommendations that Justine was willing to make, it was that the Philippine government should help Filipina marriage migrants in Korea.

“The Philippine embassies or consular offices abroad, especially in South Korea, should employ or designate a woman social worker to attend to cases of women, especially those in distress. In the meantime, the Philippine congress should also amend a certain repressive and discriminatory laws such as Article 26 of the Revised Family Code of the Philippines. This would allow Filipinos who are married to foreign nationals to re-marry after a divorce, regardless of who between the two parties involved initiated the divorce. Finally, the Philippine government should recommend regulatory laws to the Korean government when it comes to the contracting of marriages between Filipinas and Korean men. The lack of oversight and monitoring the operations of the Korean marriage matching agencies and brokers has made the phenomenon of human trafficking worse,” she said.

Justine also said that if the Philippine government would only create many jobs with decent pay back in the Philippines, Filipinas would not be forced to take their chances abroad. “In the meantime, however, the least the Philippine government can do is to propose to its Korean counterpart to initiate educational programs for biracial families. Husbands, wives and their children can learn together about foreign cultures besides Korean and Filipino,” she said.

When Justine first arrived in Korea, she felt very lost. She has since then become determined to find her place in her adopted country by learning that she can about it.

“Back in the 1960s, South Korea was largely an agricultural society. Now, foreigners and locals alike feel the impact of its economic and technological advancement. Once it was a country that was often far too overlooked by its neighbors, but now it is known as a newly industrialized and fast-developing economy. I can see the Korean people’s high commitment to education, one of the many things that I deeply admire about them. For them, education is a very important sector. The Korean government considers human capital development as a key factor of success, that’s why it invests a huge amount on education,” she said.

At the time of this writing, Justine was studying Hangeul, the local Korean language.

“I have definitely learned some ways to assimilate myself into Korean culture and society. I hope to finish my senior year in college. I hope to realize my dream of becoming a professional elementary school teacher. Now I know what I am getting into. My life as a marriage migrant has had its ups and downs, but through it all I have been determined to make the best of it,” she said.





(ABOVE) Justine (in checkers) with participants and Joselito Natividad of APMM during the workshop training on lobbying and advocacy (photo courtesy of Joselito Natividad)



(LEFT) Justine with other women leaders during the 2011 International Working Women's Day in South Korea (photo courtesy of Justine Tiempo)

# JAPAN



## Fast facts about marriage migration in Japan

Between 1995 to 2005, the number of international marriages in Japan doubled. Nowadays, six percent of marriages involve a foreigner.

Most Japanese men who in international marriages marry Chinese, Korean or Filipino women. Most of Japanese women in international marriages marry Chinese, Korean and American.

Many of the Japanese men who enter into international marriages are in their 30s or 40s and meet their wives through Internet marriage agencies that charge around \$20,000 for their services. In some cases the men married women that spoke virtually no Japanese and they couldn't speak the language of the women they married. As of 2002, there were over 200 international marriage agencies and over half of them specialized in matches with Chinese women.

In 2003, one in 20 marriages are international and one in 18 divorces are international marriages.

# Diana

## a life through pain, lies and learning

Maria Diana Perez Matsuo is 46 years old and was married to a Japanese national. She described her life in the Philippines prior to her marriage and migration to Japan as “difficult but happy.”

“It was difficult because work was hard to come by; or if you had a job, the wages were far from being enough. Still, it was a happy life all the same because I was with my family, with my children,” she said.

Maria Diana had no plans of marrying a foreigner. It was the farthest thing from her mind, and her first dreams were focused on becoming a nurse. She also wanted to go abroad, but not to Japan.

“I wanted to go to the US because I had an aunt there,” she explained simply.

But life often takes unexpected twists and turns. She met her husband in the most unorthodox way, and one might well be tempted to say that she literally fell victim to him. This was in 1992 and she was 25 years old.

She had a sister who worked in Japan and who eventually married a Japanese. It was from her that Maria Diana learned about how life was in the country which produced both the art of ikebana and the tea ceremony on the one hand; and manga, anime and Harajuku street fashion.

“My sister worked nights and took care of children in the daytime. It seemed to me even then that it was not an easy existence; it never entered my mind to come and work here,” she said.

When her sister asked her to help in raising her own children, Maria Diana agreed. She wanted to earn a little more for her two children. She was then married to a Filipino, but the man had left for the United States for work. He sent money intermittently, and when he did, it was only US\$100 to US\$200 which was far from being enough to cover the two children’s needs.

Her sister then asked her to go to Japan to work there for at least six months, just so she could get a taste of what life was like in a more economically advanced society.

She told Maria Diana that she knew a Japanese who was willing to be her guarantor and help her get to Japan. The Japanese man was then scheduled to go to the Philippines, and he would bring with him papers that Maria Diana would need to get through immigrations. The man’s name was Matsuo.

## *A Rape and A Series of Lies*

It was 1992. Maria Diana met Matsuo at the airport. He told her that he and her sister were friends, that he had at one time been her customer at the place where she worked. He asked her to wait with him for his girlfriend whom he said was from Laguna.

They went into a Shakey's pizza restaurant. He got her a glass of beer, despite her hesitation because she did not ordinarily drink alcoholic beverages. They waited, but the girlfriend still didn't show up.

Matsuo then said that they should go clubbing. They went to Malate, and before she knew it, it was already late in the evening and she became worried about returning home to Angeles City. He invited her to go to the hotel where he was staying.

Not seeing anything malicious or suspicious in his invitation, she agreed. When they got to the hotel, however, the receptionist had a message for Matsuo from his girlfriend that she was not going to be able to come after all.

They went into the hotel room where Matsuo told Maria Diana that she should sleep on the bed while he would take the sofa. It was already late, she was already tired, and she had also taken a few too many beers than her system was ready for. The combination of these factors caused her to immediately fall into an exhausted sleep.

Then she suddenly awoke, her body telling her that something had been done on it when she was unconscious.

She rushed to the bathroom and there she confronted the truth: she had been raped.

“I felt violated. For a few moments I felt rage. Then I calmed myself and tried to rationalize what had happened and what it meant. I told myself that it probably didn’t matter much in the long run because I wasn’t a young girl anyway, that I was already married,” she said.

She confronted the Japanese who did not deny what he did. Matsuo knelt and begged her forgiveness. He tried to tell her that he did not mean to do what he did.

“It was then that I first formed my opinion of the Japanese and what they were like,” she said.

Her traumatic experience aside, Maria Diana found Matsuo a little on the aloof side, quiet but not rude. She remembered what she had heard about Japanese husbands being too demanding, how they supposedly wanted their wives to serve them hand and foot.

They left the hotel room. At the reception desk, the girl there told Matsuo that his girlfriend had already arrived and was waiting for him at the lobby. The girlfriend’s name was Evelyn, and she and Matsuo had been together for the last five years. She was the reason why he frequented the Philippines; her family also received financial support from him on a fairly regular basis.

Inside her head, Maria Diana began to panic. She feared whether or not she would tell her parents. She decided not to tell them, but she still felt greatly worried about keeping such a terrible secret. She also felt angry, but she didn’t know what to do with her anger.

Just before they met with his girlfriend, Matsuo told Maria Diana not to worry about

anything. If she happened to get pregnant, he said that she should just call him and he would help her. Then he handed her his name card.

“It was very awkward when he introduced me to his girlfriend. She was with another friend who was gay. I don’t know if anything showed on my face, but the entire time that the four of us were having dinner, I was feeling sorry for myself. It was an almost crushing kind of self-pity: I didn’t know the man but he raped me...,” she said.

Then, during the meal, she noticed that Matsuo kept close to her side and not to her girlfriend’s. He kept asking her if she was getting enough to eat, if she wanted anything else. His girlfriend sat there being ignored until she grew angry.

The woman turned to Maria Diana and directly asked who she was and why her boyfriend was paying so much attention to her.

“I answered her with the truth: that I was the sister of Matsuo’s friend in Japan and that I was there because I was getting some voice tapes my sister had sent through him,” she said.

After the meal, Matsuo asked her to go with them shopping. This went on the whole day until she went home to Angeles. She did not expect to see again the Japanese who abused her trust, but unfortunately, after one month, she missed her period. She was regular as a rule, so she immediately went to the doctor for a check-up. Her pregnancy test came out positive.

“My husband had only been gone for seven months; there was no way I could pass off the baby in my stomach as his. I looked for Matsuo’s business card and called him. It was hard going -- people didn’t have cell phones then,” she said.

Maria Diana was finally able to reach Matsuo through a letter. It took some time before he responded, and when he did, he told her through a letter that he didn't believe her when she said that she was pregnant and carrying his child. After that, he didn't contact her anymore.

Left desperate, she brought two tablets of a drug which she had heard had abortifacient effects. It was supposed to be a cure for ulcers, but was prohibited to pregnant women. Maria Diana took the tablets and prayed that she would miscarry.

On the morning of December 24, Maria Diana got her wish. She was immediately taken to a hospital in Tondo, Manila and given a dilation and curettage (D&C) procedure.

"I was angry the whole time. I kept telling myself that that I would take revenge on the Japanese for raping me, getting me pregnant and then leaving me alone to fend for myself. My family didn't know what was happening to me the entire time, and they were shocked when they saw me when I got home from the hospital because my clothes were spattered with blood," she said.

To allay their fears, she told them that she was in a vehicular accident and wasn't it a good thing it was only a little of her blood that was spilled?

January came and went, and she rested the entire time. In February, Matsuo called.

"He again asked me to forgive him. He said he had to think for a long time about what I had told him, about the pregnancy. He said that he had heard from a Filipina in Japan that in the Philippines, it was easy to get pregnancy tests and doctors could be bribed to say that a woman was pregnant even when she wasn't," she said.



All her anger resurfaced, but Maria Diana struggled to keep it out of her voice. She told Matsuo that she was still pregnant.

“I lied to him because it was the only way that I could avenge myself. He began sending US\$300 every month and promised that he would send P75,000 when the time came for me to give birth,” she said.

Her plan continued without a hitch except for the fact that someone told Matsuo that Maria Diana was already married and that she was not really pregnant. He stopped sending money and sent a letter telling her how hurt he was over her lies. He also told her that he loved her.

“I went on with the lie and insisted that I was pregnant. After that he wrote again and this time, he no longer doubted my story. He asked me if I had already given birth,” she said.

As fate would have it, Maria Diana’s sister in Japan had also given birth. The sister sent pictures of her newborn, and it was these pictures that Maria Diana forwarded to Matsuo. Every month she sent Matsuo pictures of her nephew whom she passed off her as son.

“Matsuo sent more money. The whole time I didn’t feel the least bit guilty because I knew that fooling him and getting his money was the only way that I had to get back at him for what he did to me,” she said.

When Maria Diana’s sister from Japan came home for a visit, Maria Diana was forced to tell her the truth and why she was keeping up a charade with Matsuo. The sister did not agree with her, but said that she understood.

Matsuo then also decided to come and visit. The sister let Maria Diana present her child as Matsuo’s.

From then on, Matsuo returned to the Philippines every year. Everytime he was scheduled to arrive, Maria Diana wrote her sister in Japan and asked her to also return to the country with her son. It was a complex process of deception that was only made possible because her sister had enough money for airfare. They made sure to schedule the sister's arrival a good five days before the Japanese came so they could prepare.

"My sister was with me everytime I met with Matsuo. We wanted it to appear that she was the one who was taking care of the boy because it was obvious that he preferred her to me," she said.

The Japanese was overjoyed over the boy, believing him to be his. The boy's surname was the same as Maria Diana's -- Perez. When the Matsuo asked to see the birth certificate, she was already prepared because she had one made in Recto, the Manila district where forgerers offered their services in broad daylight. There they made fake IDs, diplomas, college records, and even birth and death certificates.

With the fake birth certificate bolstering her claims that Matsuo was the father, getting the Japanese to give financial support was no longer a problem. It came regular as clock work; and eventually the amount increased because Matsuo wanted Maria Diana and the boy to get a place of their own.

As for their relationship, Matsuo offered to marry Maria Diana, but it was not possible because she was already married. Eventually, however, Maria Diana discovered that her own husband had married someone else in America. Even before he did, however, he had all but abandoned her and their two children -- he had stopped sending financial support and stopped calling or writing.

Five years later, in 1996, Maria Diana and Matsuo got married, first in civil rights, and in 1997 in church. She was able to pass herself off as single after securing a new birth certificate and certificate of no marriage for herself in Mabalacat, also in Pampanga.

She got pregnant almost immediately after the wedding, but even at the time he believed that his firstborn was Ronald, who was actually Maria Diana's nephew.

"My sister helped me keep the lie going the entire time. In exchange for helping me, I was the one to shoulder Ronald's upkeep as well as the needs of our family. She stopped sending money, and only did so when there were emergency," she said.

It was not possible for her to go with Matsuo to Japan because of the technical and legal difficulties created by her fake status as a previously single woman. Also, she had not told him she had two other children besides Ronald and their own real child.

A whole year passed and her son and Matsuo's turned a year old. They named him Kenjie. In 1997, Matsuo came to visit and got her pregnant for the third time. After that, it was four years before he was able to visit again.

"His support continued. He said that it was not possible for him to visit me because life was harder in Japan because of the economic crisis, but he never failed to send money for his children. I didn't tell him it was completely fine because at least then her sister did not have to return to the Philippines with Ronald," she said.

The lies, however, began to weigh on Maria Diana and it became increasingly difficult for her to keep up the facade.

## *A Marriage Based on Lies*

In 2003, Matsuo came home to his wife with a lot of money.

Upon her husband's instructions, Maria Diana had rented a house where she and their children were supposed to live. What she didn't tell Matsuo was that she also lived there with the rest of her family -- her parents and other siblings. Everytime Matsuo was supposed to arrive in the Philippines, the family would transfer to a local hotel and stay there until the Japanese left.

"I didn't want him to know that I let my family stay with me in the big house he wanted me to rent. I didn't want him to know that I used his money to support my entire family," she said.

One time, however, Matsuo came without telling her beforehand. The refrigerator was empty, everything was in disarray. Because he did not say that he was coming, Maria Diana was unable to ask her sister to return to the Philippines with Ronald whom Matsuo still believed to be his eldest, his own flesh and blood. She told him that Ronald was visiting relatives in a far off province.

In the next 15 years, Maria Diana was forced to move houses 19 times. She had to prevent Matsuo from visiting her without previous warning and catching her by surprise.

In his 2003 visit, however, he failed to get on his return flight to Japan. He could not remember Maria Diana's address in Pampanga because she frequently changed it, but he remembered where a mutual friend lived and asked him to take him back to Maria Diana's house.

When he arrived at the house, Maria Diana had barely time to tell her family to hide themselves in one of the rooms. Matsuo, however, found them and expressed shocked surprise at finding so many people inside the small room.

Again, Maria Diana lied and told him that her family was only visiting. It turned out that the Japanese had already begun to ask neighbors and other acquaintances questions. He had also gone to Maria Diana's sister in Japan to question her about why Maria Diana kept changing addresses.

"I pretended to take umbrage. I asked him if he didn't trust me, then he could do whatever he wanted to do. He fell silent," she said.

But Maria Diana had already reached the end of her rope of lies. Before Matsuo left, she finally told him the truth. She told him how Ronald whom he called "Kaide" was not really his son; that she had actually aborted what could have been their first born child.

"I told him that it everything was actually his fault, that he was the one who set things in motion. I was surprised when he apologized. He again knelt in front of me. He told me that it was so painful to hear the truth because it was Kaide who had given him the strength to work hard, but he understood why I did what I did," she said.

Maria Diana then asked him why he still didn't take her back with him to Japan. They had previously agreed that when he turned 65, he would retire in the Philippines. At the time, Matsuo was 60 years old.

"I told him that it was worrisome to me, him being alone in Japan when he was getting along in years. I didn't want to be left behind for another five years, so we agreed that that he would fix the papers and I would follow him to Japan," she said.

In late 2003, she was finally able to go to Japan. That first time it was for five months. In 2004, she returned to the Philippines, and after renewing her visa, she went back to Japan. She talked to her children and asked them about moving to Japan with her if and when she was granted residency rights; it was then that she learned about the immigration policy that if a foreigner was seeking residency, the partner who was the Japanese citizen should inform his relatives. It was called “*kusisetuhun*.”

Every six months she returned to the Philippines while she processed her papers. She did not have too many difficulties with the immigration officers.

“Their questions were pretty straightforward, mainly why I was in Japan and why it was only then that I decided to live with my husband there after years of being married. I told them because my husband wanted it that way. They didn’t question that,” she said.

As for her own first impressions of her new country, they were not very positive. She found life as a foreigner sad.

“I didn’t do anything but cry during those first few weeks. Everything was so quiet. There were so many cars parked everywhere, but there were hardly any people,” she said.

Maria Diana tried to find a way to be with her sister, but her husband told her that she had to find work. He told her that she should work nights.

“I balked at that -- what was I, a prostitute?!”

She also discovered that many Japanese did not speak English. She thought most Japanese spoke the language because Matsuo did. She had not known enough about the Japanese and the Japanese culture before she left the Philippines. She did attend a few seminars, but

mostly they dealt with where to go if she ran into difficulties and what to do. No one told her about the problems she would encounter because of the language difference, and that she would have to learn Nihongo if she wanted to be understood.

### *Policies on Marriage Migrants in Japan*

The Nationality Law of Japan stipulates the following conditions to become eligible for naturalization:

- One has to have been continuously living in Japan (with fixed address/es) as a permanent resident for five years or longer;
- Must be 20 years old or older with competence under laws of the home country;
- “Should be a good citizen” without a criminal record;
- Should have sufficient assets or skills to independently sustain life in Japan;
- Should be willing to renounce citizenship of home country;
- Has never attempted nor advocated to destroy the Japanese government established under the Constitution of Japan by violence, nor has membership to any political party/ies or any other organizations that has attempted or advocated the same.

There are also required personal documents for an application for naturalization. They include the following:

- Application form;
- Explanatory document of why one needs to naturalize (must be hand-written in Japanese by the applicant);
- Resume;
- Affidavit;

- Description of relatives;
- Description of how the person will support himself or herself in Japan;
- Description of how the applicant will operate his or her business in Japan if the applicant has one;
- Map of the residence;
- Required documents from public agencies;
- Certificate of competence under the home country's law;
- Employment Certificate;
- Diploma;
- Certificate of nationality (or in case this is not available, family registration, certificate of lost-nationality, birth certificate; or in case all they not available, the passport);
- Documents to certify the applicant's profile in the home country (birth certificate/marriage certificate/relative certificate in the applicant's home country, etc.);
- Family registration in Japan;
- Certificate of residence of the applicant's Japanese family;
- Certificate of alien registration;
- Certificate of tax payments (withhold slip and certificate of tax filed the previous year, among others);
- Commercial registration (in case the applicant is a business owner or board director of a company);
- Certificates of assets (certificates of bank deposit, securities, real-estate registration etc.);
- Driver's license;
- Photos (2 copies 5cm x 5cm in size, taken within the last six months);
- Snapshots of the applicant and his or her own family;
- Other documents, if required by the Ministry of Justice.

On record, there is a high rate of approval for naturalization in Japan, about 90 percent.



However, analysts say that this is because many applicants for naturalization tend to withdraw before they even make the application. Most applicants hire legal officers to help them in the application process. The tedious and strict process of screening for eligibility discourages many applicants to continue with the application, not to mention the monetary requirements involved.

In addition, the fact that all documents to be submitted must be written in Japanese puts tremendous pressure on the applicants plus the fear of not being able to express themselves in the local language during the actual interview discourage many to pursue their application for naturalization.

### *A Difficult Relationship Ends in Divorce*

In the meantime, Maria Diana did not get to meet any of her husband's relatives. She spoke with them over the phone about financial matters.

"I told them about that the house I had bought in the Philippines and how much I needed to complete the payment. One of his siblings promised that they would try to give her the needed money. I don't know what really happened but I think they gave Matsuo the P100,000 for the house, but he only gave me P15,000," she said.

It was winter when she arrived in Japan and she had only a few clothes, and even her underclothes were from her sister. Matsuo told her to buy clothes from thrift stores, and many were itchy to her skin.

It was in Kyoto where she first worked. She went there on her own, riding a van to go to a club where she was to work as a dishwasher and kitchen help. She received one *lapad*

(10,000 yen or US\$120) while the talents received US\$600. She was told that she had to learn Nihonggo. One of the Mamasans (a woman in charge of a geisha house or bar) taught her Nihonggo and in turn she taught the woman English.

It was a very sad existence for her.

She was terribly homesick. She was given an allowance of two *lapad* (US\$240) but instead of buying food or other personal necessities, she used it to buy phonecards which some of the club talents sold. Most of her money she put away to send home to the Philippines, but she kept some to buy the phonecards.

“Homesickness ate away at me. I used to stare out the window during my free time and feel so lonely. There was nothing out there but ricefields. I found it difficult to sleep at night. Back at home I was used to waking up early, but there was nothing else to do in Kyoto. I would have ended up crying most of time if it hadn’t been for the Filipina talents who were kind enough to talk to me and listen to me,” she said.

The owner of the club also came to look her over. She had heard some of the club staff say that the man was something of a sex maniac. Then she was told that that she was to be trained to oversee the other staff in the club and in the others that the man owned. She was also told that she would accompany him to the Philippines when he recruited more workers. She didn’t stay in Kyoto, however; she stayed there only two weeks before her sister came for her and she went to Nagoya.

Because she worked, she only saw Matsuo only on the weekends. They met in motels. Then she found work in other places; her hands cracked and bled from washing so many dishes. When she tried running the pachingko machines, her hands also hurt because she wasn’t used to the work.

One time, she told her husband that she was going home to the Philippines but she actually stayed in Japan. She received his letters sent to the Philippines after her children forwarded them to her. Her answers, in the meantime, were also sent to the Philippines where her children also put them in new envelopes so the stamps and postal marks would not be from Japan.

It took two years before her children were given eligibility to go to Japan. This was in 2005. They received their invitation letters in July 2006.

In the interim, she worked as hard as she could, taking in all sorts of employment. She sold Mitsubishi spare parts and did other odd jobs. She didn't exactly experience discrimination for being a foreigner, but it was sometimes hard for her to find work because she spoke no Nihonggo. She could understand well enough when the Japanese gave orders, but they couldn't understand her when she spoke English or tried to respond in what little Nihonggo she knew.

Her husband, in the meantime, was not steadily employed. They lived in a very small house. When her children came, she left them with her sister who happened to live close by.

"We had a harrowing experience one time. Someone entered our house and ransacked it from top to bottom. It was like they were looking for something. They looked like they Yakuza. Whoever they were or whatever they were, other Filipinas said that our area was a scary place to live in," Maria Diana said.

Then, she applied to get her on house. Her sister refused to be a guarantor, so she looked from someone else to vouch for her in the agencies. She thought of her in-laws.

“I wrote one of Matsuo’s siblings who at one time promised to give me money for a house. I complained to them how Matsuo did not give me money and how he forced me to work as a bar girl. They were angry and disowned him completely for his disgraceful behavior towards his wife,” she said.

In the end, she and Matsuo divorced. All in all, their time together as a married couple in Japan lasted only a year.

“What broke the marriage was how he practically sabotaged my children’s eligibility for citizenship. He was my guarantor during the process at the immigration office. We were interviewed separately, but what I didn’t know was how he gave answers greatly different from mine. He told the immigration officers that he would be unable to support the children if they came to Japan. He told them his salary was not enough when in truth it was. He said that my children were uneducated and had no skills because their life in the Philippines was very harsh. When he was asked why he invited the children to Japan, he said it was only because it was what their mother wanted. He implied that it was only me who wanted them there and he was only going along to make me happy,” she said.

Because of the things that Matsuo said, the children were only allowed to visit but denied eligibility for citizenship.

Maria Diana also discovered unsavory things about her Japanese husband when they lived together. He was stingy with money. He didn’t even look for his own jobs, he forced her to look them. When it came to the house, she was left on her own to look for a guarantor and to fill the rest of the requirements.

“There was also a lot to be said about his personal hygiene,” she said. “He rarely bathed -- only once a week, and even then I had to wheedle and beg. He had body odor, not just

because he didn't bathe but he smoked all the time. He stank because he didn't change clothes. It was a very stressful time for me, especially when our children came. I would've been able to tolerate not having money, about having to baby him, but I was exhausted all the time," she said.

A good thing that can be said about Matsuo, however, was that he never got physically abusive. If asked, Maria Diana said, Matsuo would have probably said that she was the one who got physical.

Throughout the beginning of her new life in Japan, she was forced to rely on herself. There were no migrant organizations then, but Maria Diana counted herself very fortunate to have made acquaintances and friends with other Filipinos in Japan. It was to them that she ran whenever she encountered any difficulty or when she had questions.

"I was already an independent person before I married Matsuo and moved to Japan. I had a strong personality that could not be undermined by my husband even if he tried. I knew my rights as a wife; I wasn't like the other wives who merely bent to the wishes of their partners," she said.

Maria Diana's awareness of and belief in her legal rights strengthened when she joined Migrante Japan. It was joining the organization that allowed her to learn more about local laws, and everything else that could help make her life in Japan better and easier.

### *Advice to Marriage Migrants in Japan*

After decades of living in Japan, Maria Diana has already gained a wealth of experience that she's willing to share with other Filipinos who plan on marrying a Japanese or living in Japan.

“I don’t regret marrying a Japanese. I didn’t learn their language, but I’ve learned much about their laws, their culture, their idiosyncracies. I know concretely how it is to live here, and how to cope without falling into subservience to anyone. If you’re married to a Japanese or any foreigner, I’ve learned that it’s important to know your rights and not to let yourself be exploited or oppressed,” she said.

Maria Diana is not bitter either about how her marriage turned out. Though she and Matsuo are already divorced, they still communicate.

“We’ve become better friends since we divorced. What’s important was that I had legal status here in Japan. Just so long as a migrant has legal papers, she can get the support she needs from the ex. This is why it’s important to be part of an organization like Migrante Japan because you learn your rights and if things go wrong between you and your partner, you do not have to feel desperate and alone because you don’t know where to turn to for help. If you know your rights as a divorced woman, for instance, you can assert for yourself.”

She even has advice to give migrants on marriage to foreigners.

“Not all relationships with foreigners will turn out bad. Many turn out happy. What’s important is that they get to truly know their intended partners. After all, this also goes for marriages between people who belong to the same nationality or culture. It’s important to know the character, personality, habits and quirks of their partners,” she said. “This is so you enter the marriage knowing what to expect.”

According to Maria Diana, there should be no illusions when marrying a foreigner. There will be differences, she said, many of them, and some of them will not be good.

“Here in Japan, some men look down on women, especially if the women are not highly educated. The relatives of the men also have tendencies of being condescending because they think your husband met you practically on the sidewalk. This isn’t the norm, but it does happen. When you go to Japan, make sure that you know more than just how to sing or dance -- make sure that you also know the language so you can speak out for yourself and defend yourself on your own terms,” she said.

Maria Diana herself learned Nihonggo but is in no way an expert.

“I continue to study it, to try improve my ability to speak and understand it. It’s hard, but I have no choice but to persist. All I ever think of whenever I begin to feel weary and discouraged is how much my family back in the Philippines needs me and the money I send them. I can earn more, get better work if I am fluent in Nihonggo; but it’s very hard. I never really wanted to come here much less stay here for a long time, but since I’m already here...”

As for the Philippine government, she shook her head over what she believed to be its shortcomings when it comes to helping overseas Filipino workers and migrant Filipinos.

“All the government wants to do is to send Filipinos overseas, not just to marry but to work. Why are so many Filipinos forced to live abroad? Because there are not enough good jobs in the Philippines. There are no opportunities to better oneself through productive and steady employment. So many Filipino women put their lives in danger just so they can find work abroad and earn money to send home to their families and loved ones. Not everyone is successful in this, and in fact, maybe only one in every five find success or are in completely safe and okay conditions. The Philippine government should address this,” she said.

## *Dilemma About Returning to the Philippines*

These days, Maria Diana still harbors dreams of returning home to the Philippines. It's where she also wants to die and be buried.

"I don't like the tradition here of cremation. They burn you and then put you inside a box as if you were a Christmas present...", she said.

She had learned about the cremation tradition when she asked her ex-husband about what she should do if he fell ill and died. He told her that he should go to the city hall and ask for assistance there. His body, he said, would be cremated and afterwards she would be given his ashes and whatever else remained of his bones.

All in all, Maria Diana can be proud of the life she has managed to build. She remains in good terms with her ex-husband whom she promised she would take care of in his old age if he wanted. Their children are in school and are in a study-now, pay-later scheme for college.

"Neither of them want to go to college and would rather return to the Philippines, but I think it's only because they don't know what life is like in the Philippines. Life here in Japan may not be a bed of roses, but it is still better. Poverty takes on a whole different meaning back home, and my children have not really experienced it because they haven't lived there for so long," she said.






(ABOVE) Marriage migrants attend a Migrant Workers' Speak-Out in Fukushima  
(photo courtesy of Cesar Santoyo)



(LEFT) Marriage migrants pose with Joselito Natividad of APMM during a training workshop on lobbying and advocacy  
(photo courtesy of Joselito Natividad)

# AUSTRALIA



## Fast facts about marriage migration in Australia

42,098 'partner' visas granted in 2008-09. This includes 34,399 spouse, 7,010 fiancé and 689 interdependent visas.

The fiancé visa is a temporary visa that allows a prospective spouse to stay in Australia for up to six months. Interdependent visas require a period of committed relationship of 1 year and include gay and lesbian couples

Initial spouse or interdependent visa status is temporary for 2 years but permanent after. After 2 years of permanent residency migrants may apply for naturalization.

A temporary spouse or interdependent visa holder may legally work and study in Australia. Medicare is available to them but not social security or student subsidies.

Time allowed for preparation of evidence on a claim of domestic violence is 28 days.

Women marriage migrants are not eligible for free legal service due to their provisional residency status.

# Amna

## an arranged marriage leading to happiness

Amna is 28 years old and lives in Australia. She had a happy life as a single woman. She lived with her parents and though they were economically well-off, she still made money for herself by tutoring the neighbor's children. A university graduate with a degree in social work, she also studied psychology and journalism with the intent of one day doing public service work perhaps with the government or with a non-stock, non-profit organization.

All her life, however, she had known that she had been engaged to someone since she was three years old. Her own parents entered an agreement with another family.

Amna had just completed her degree when her future parents-in-law sent her a marriage proposal. She was then 23-years old, and it was then that her life began to drastically change. It turned out that future parents-in-law and their son had already made all the arrangements for the wedding and all she had to do was to show up at the marriage ceremony.

“Marrying someone who is a citizen and resident of another country was not one of my aspirations in life. It wasn’t like I had any choice, however, because my mother had me engaged to the son of his sister when I was very young. I didn’t know much about my future husband; he was all but a stranger to me,” she said.

There was a period when Amna was beset with apprehensions when she was told that she was going to be married to an Australian. She had been used to living with her own family where she was the youngest child.

“I lived a sheltered childhood because my parents and the rest of my siblings were protective of me. While they were happy that I was getting married and because I did not go against their wishes, they were also sad because they knew I would have to leave them to go to Australia,” she said.

Amna and her fiancée then began communicating through frequent phone calls and Skype. When he asked her if she was happy to be engaged to him, she said yes.

Amna’s future husband and mother-in-law went to South Asia and when they returned to Australia, Amna went with them. There was some level of tension because the mother-in-law’s husband had died only 20 days previously.

When she first arrived in Australia, she found it beautiful and felt that she could live there forever. During moments of homesickness, however, she also felt that she wanted to leave.

“It was my first time to live without my parents and outside my own country. It was very hard not to feel afraid that something bad would happen to me and my family wouldn’t be there to help me. All my life until then I had relied on my parents and siblings for everything,” she said.

Coping with homesickness was so difficult for Amna that she sometimes wanted to run away.

“For the first six months it felt like I was living inside a box, but I didn’t have the right to cry,” she said.

It was a good thing that her new husband was very supportive and understanding. He often took her out of the house so they could spend time alone together. They talked about day-to-day things but also discussed Amna’s fears and worries. It was during this period when her husband suggested that Amna go back to school.

“It was something that I wanted to do. I felt so much better,” she said.

It took a little over a year to adjust to the new culture, but because she was determined to give her new married life a good start, she strove to focus on only positive things.

“I really worked hard on motivating myself that Australia offers many opportunities for migrants. But I still wished that I can go back in my country to work as psychologist and serve communities in need there,” she said.

### *Increasing Number of Immigrant Filipinas in Australia*

According to the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrant’s “For Better or For Worse”, marriage migrants represented one of the largest groups of arrivals to Australia through the family migration scheme in the mid-1980s. Many of them came from developing countries such as the Philippines. It was reported that in 1971, there were fewer than 1000 Philippines-born women in Australia. By late 1985 the number had risen to 19,000. Additionally, during the 1987-88 financial year, Australia accepted 6362 adult immigrants from the Philippines. More

than 65 percent of them were women, Based on a study that came out in 2011, the number of spouses migrating to Australia has increased greatly over the past 10 years.

### *The Process of Getting a Visa*

Getting a residency visa was not a difficult process for Amna because her husband was an Australian citizen. She applied in February and got her visa in mid-April.

Based on the residency rules and policies of Australia, the spouses or de facto partners of Australian citizens or permanent residents are granted a spouse visa on successful application. A separate visa covers those in 'interdependent' relationships, including gay and lesbian couples.

While there is a number set each on the number of visas that may be granted, the number has been set at a level higher than expected arrivals and as a result, eligible spouses are not denied a visa on grounds of a quota on visas.

The most recent statistics from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC or the Department) indicate that in the 2008-2009 financial years [July to June] 42,098 'partner' visa arrivals were recorded, an increase from 39,930 in the previous year.

This includes 34,399 spouse, 7,010 fiancé and 689 interdependent visas. The fiancé visa is a temporary visa that allows a prospective spouse to stay in Australia for up to six months. In that period, the sponsor and applicant should marry and lodge an onshore application for a spouse visa.

If the marriage does not take place, the visa expires and the applicant should leave

Australia before the date of expiry. This visa allows a non-Australian considering marrying an Australian an opportunity to see the country and to gain an idea of the life with their potential Australian spouse in Australia before committing to a marriage.

For a de facto or interdependent relationship, a period of committed relationship of one year is a normal requirement, though shorter periods may be enough if special circumstances exist. The people in this type of relationship usually live in the same residence, or intend to when re-united in Australia. The rules allow for temporary separations due to employment and visa restrictions in the partner's home country.

The criteria considered when assessing a spouse visa application are that the relationship is genuine, continuing and exclusive; the marriage is a legal and valid marriage, or will be, in the case of a prospective marriage; and the sponsoring Australian citizen or permanent resident is able to sponsor her or his spouse (that is, they have not sponsored a previous partner in the past five years).

The initial spouse or interdependent visa is temporary (two years). At the end of this period the visa becomes permanent (another two years). There is no need for a new application, as the original application is for an initial temporary visa and a permanent visa after the period of the temporary visa.

The permanent visa will be granted if the relationship remains genuine and continuing at the time of decision. Immigration officials will usually do some investigation.

The couple will be asked to provide evidence to support the claim that the relationship remains genuine and continuing at the time of decision.

After two years as a permanent resident, the visa holder may apply to become an Australian citizen.

### *A Supportive Husband Makes All the Difference*

It has been three years since Amna got married and began living in Australia. She and her husband still do not have children, but are looking forward to having them. She suffered one miscarriage, but she said that they will continue trying.

Amna credits her successful entry and adjustment to life in Australia to her husband whom she said taught her much about the Australian way of life. According to her, he has been very patient explaining to her even the most mundane things about living in Australia, such as where to go for groceries and how to talk to people. Most importantly, he taught her how to access community services.

“With my husband’s help I have been able to live and improve in a multicultural environment. I have learned how to use take full advantage of the golden opportunities that Australia offers to migrants,” she said.

Amna firmly said that people who want to live in Australia should take study and training courses.

“I suggest to all those intending to migrate to Australia that before they come here, they should already be to some level informed about the country, culture, language, and the values and manners of the people. When I came here I did not know anything about Australia; perhaps this is also a factor that contributed to my initial problems of adjustment. Also, it’s very important to undertake studies and training in order to prepare oneself for employment,” she said.



A temporary visa holder may work and study in Australia. The government will not subsidize studies, thus full fees are payable but may be tax deductible. Medicare, the national health scheme, is available to the temporary visa holder. Social security benefits are not available. These include unemployment payments, job search assistance, youth allowance and study allowances.

A permanent visa holder may access subsidized study and social security benefits. They also may sponsor family members in other categories such as skilled migration and parents. The permanent visa holder may proceed to Australian citizenship even if the relationship ends, so long as the Department accepts the relationship was genuine and the break-up or end of the relationship was not part of a false relationship concocted for the purpose of obtaining a visa and, eventually, citizenship (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, N.D.).

Amna already has plans for the immediate future. She said that she wants to learn more about Australian culture. She has already completed the Diploma in Community Services and at the time of this writing, she was applying for a job in the community services sector.

# TAIWAN

## *Fast facts about marriage migration in Taiwan*

*In 2005, there were more than 350,000 foreign brides in Taiwan*

*In 2002, 27.4 percent of registered marriages in Taiwan were cross-border marriages. This rose to a third of the total in 2003.*

*Majority - 93 percent - of marriage migrants in Taiwan are from Mainland China and countries in Southeast Asia*

*In 2004, immigrant spouses account for almost half (49%) of the total foreign population in Taiwan*

# Erna

## her journey to a better self

Erna Chen is 31 years old. She has lived in Taiwan for the last 10 years. When she looks back on her life, she says that moving to Taiwan and marrying a Taiwanese were never part of her plans, but she has never had a reason to regret either.

Erna originally hails from Indonesia. At work, she had a colleague who visited Taiwan often because her husband lived there and had actually migrated there a long time ago. The colleague's father-in-law owns an Indonesian restaurant in Taiwan and had an acquaintance who in turn ran a repair shop. One day, the repair shop man asked the father-in-law if he could introduce an Indonesian woman to his son. The colleague's father-in-law agreed, and later arranged for Erna to meet the man's son. Erna dated the man's son soon after, and after three months of dating, they married.

Erna's family was completely against Erna's decision to marry a foreigner and move abroad. She went ahead with her own plans, however, and when her family saw how determined she was, they finally gave their blessing.

Erna's new parents-in-law attended the wedding in Indonesia while Erna and her husband settled all the registration papers for their marriage. "The whole process was very complex that in the end, we found a marriage agency to help us with some of the work," she explained.

Before she arrived in Taiwan, Erna had heard that Taiwanese men had a tendency to towards being violent and alcoholic. She already heard that Taiwanese men also liked to womanize.

"I was discouraged in the beginning, but I thought about everything long and hard. I had to come to terms with the truth that I was actually willing to take a chance, marry a foreigner and live abroad because life in Indonesia was very hard. I crossed my fingers and hoped that I would be lucky enough to have a good marriage. I hoped that everything would turn out for the best," she said.

Erna's prayers were heard; she found her parents-in-laws were kind people. "My husband and in-laws helped me a lot. They were extremely patient with me during my period of adjustment to life in Taiwan. My relationship with my husband and in-laws is better than I could have ever hoped," she said.

### *Residency Rules and Policies in Taiwan*

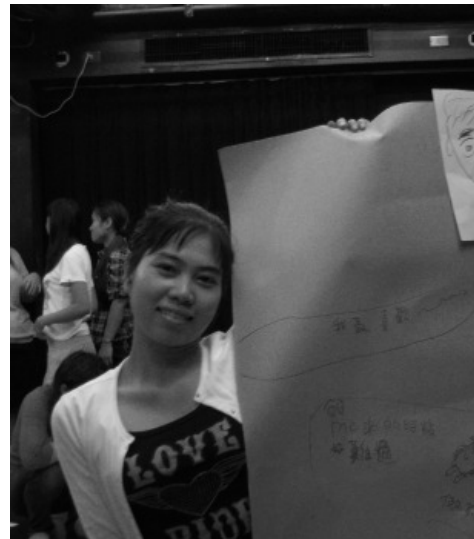
Based on the APMM's "For Better or for Worse: Comparative Research on Equity and Access for Marriage Migrants," the Taiwan government did not really have an immigration policy on marriage migrants until the number of marriage migrants became very significant. The government's attitude suddenly changed in late 2002. As of mid-2002, government officials, including both at the levels of central and local governments, did not consider the issue of marriage migrants as within their scopes of business. They simply wished that the "foreign

bride” phenomenon was a short-lived “fad.” During this time, the only government agencies dealing with marriage migrant issues were the National Police Agency and the Department of Health, which reveal the government’s perception of marriage migrants as potential criminals and threats to national health and “quality of the population.”

In late 2002, however, two newly-released statistics dramatically shifted the government’s positions. According to the statistics released in 2002 by the Directorate-General of Budget, one of every four new marriages in Taiwan was between a citizen and foreigner, most of whom are women from Southeast Asia and Mainland China. More importantly, at the end of 2002, the Ministry of Education indicated that one out of eight new-born babies was born to the family of a “foreign bride.”

On February 21, 2003, Premier Yu Shyi-kun chaired the meeting of Commission for Women’s Rights and Welfare under the Executive Yuan (Taiwan’s executive branch), on the agenda of “Assessment and Action Planning on Related Problems of Foreign and Mainland Spouses.” This meeting concluded that starting from 2004, the government will allot budget to take care of foreign and Mainland spouses. Every ministry began to call for meetings discussing “foreign brides” issues to come up with policies and programs.

As indicated in the latest Flowchart for the Application for Naturalization in Marriages between Foreign Nationals and R.O.C. Citizens and Household Registration revised by MOI in December 2009, marriage migrants must apply for the Alien Residence Certificate (ARC) at NIA offices after they arrive in Taiwan. The ARCs are valid for the maximum of three years and must be renewed before expiration date. They can apply for the “Certificate of R.O.C. Naturalization Candidature” when they have more than three years of legal residence and at least 183 days per year.



(ABOVE) Erna Chen and her son,  
(UPPER RIGHT) Erna as interviewee),  
(RIGHT) Erna (left) with other participants  
during a drama workshop  
(photo courtesy of TASAT-Taiwan)

Also, the ARC holders must apply for abdication of their original nationality before they can apply for naturalization. In other words, they practically become “stateless” between the stages of holding Naturalization Candidacy Certificate and applying for Naturalization. In addition to abdicating their original nationality, marriage migrants are required to provide Certificates of sufficient property or professional skills to be self-reliant or to ensure personal sustainability, Certificates of the basic language command and Common Sense of National Rights and Duties of Naturalized ROC Citizens, and police criminal record certificates, in order to be eligible to apply for naturalization.

In the meantime, being naturalized as R.O.C. citizens does not entitle them to full citizen rights. They must apply for Household Registration Certificate and collection of Identification Card to be full Taiwanese citizens. After obtaining naturalization certificates, they must apply for Resident Certificates and then Registered Permanent Residency Certificates. To be eligible for applying for the Registered Permanent Residency Certificates, they have to reside in Taiwan for a certain period of time: one year without departure from the day of naturalization; or for two years with more than 270 days per year; or for five years with more than 183 days per year.

With all these complicated procedures and requirements, marriage migrants must overcome enormous difficulties in order to obtain both citizenship and Identification Certificates (ID) to be entitled stable legal status in Taiwan.

### *The beginning of a new life*

As in the case of many marriage migrants who marry foreign husbands, Erna had to contend with difficulties caused by the language difference. Erna was not daunted.

“I’ve experienced hardships over the years, but thanks to my kids, my husband and my mother-in-law, with their encouragement and support, I exerted my best effort to learn Chinese. In the beginning I could say only a few sentences in Chinese; but because I was determined to become fluent in the language, I spent my first six months in Taiwan attending a Chinese class at the Mandarin Daily News, learning Mandarin Phonetic Symbols and basic words,” she said.

Erna felt that paying NT\$7000 for monthly tuition was too expensive, so she also made efforts to study on her own using the books she bought from Mandarin Daily News. Two years later after her first child was born, she went to the primary night school to study Chinese. Her husband and mother-in-law were only too glad to encourage her.

“It was painstaking work, but worth it. At that time my son was only six-months old and my mother-in-law had to take care of him while I went to school. When my son was older, I took him with me to my classes,” she said.

It was not easy for Erna to attend school and take care of the baby at the same time. She tried to find a baby-sitter, but finding no one, she took him with her every night to school.

“It was particularly hard whenever the weather was bad and it rained. I had to hold the umbrella while pushing the stroller against the wind because I only walked to school. There were times when I really wanted to give up, but my family’s support kept me going. I told myself that I live in Taiwan now, so it was important that I learn Chinese,” she said.

Erna’s efforts paid off in the end. She graduated with distinction and top honors. “If I had not been expecting the second child, I would have kept studying Chinese,” she said.



## *Joining TASAT*

When Erna first arrived in Taiwan, she discovered that the Taiwanese government didn't have formal migration law and policy.

"I found out that marriage migrants couldn't work without working permits. Applying for permanent residence or naturalization was even harder. One of the notorious requirements for foreign spouses seeking naturalization is the NT\$420,000 financial proof," she said.

Migrant rights advocacy groups like the Taiwan's TransAsia Sisters Association (TASAT), however, campaign to push the government into relaxing some of the restrictions for marriage migrants. Now there is a Household Registration Office and other departments that provide services to migrants.

Immigration regulations in Taiwan are highly gendered. This means that the government does not grant citizenship to foreign women as an inalienable right. There is on the other hand a precondition to citizenship: their status is defined as the wives of Taiwanese men. Before the Immigration Act was amended in 2008, marriage migrants whose marriage with Taiwanese spouses end before they obtain citizenship, even if the divorce resulted from domestic violence, will be deported after their visa expires.

Erna is of the opinion that besides the anti-migrant laws and policies, the language barrier is the most urgent problem that all marriage migrants face.

"Without the ability to express ourselves, we do not only fall victim to the discrimination of the public, but our children are looked down upon in society. Teachers, government officials

and the general public consider our children as incapable of learning Chinese the same way the mothers are thought to be,” she said.

It was these unjust misconceptions that prompted Erna to become a member of TASAT and get actively involved in migrant affairs through the Southeast Asian Culture’s Lecture Group and theatre troupe. Erna and other TASAT members go to schools, government organizations or communities to introduce the cultures of their countries of origins and share migrants’ life stories. They also participate in the various campaigns of the basic sectors of the Taiwanese people, interacting with them through lectures, dramas and various kinds of activities.

“We want to create a platform for communication with as many people as possible so that we can be understood and accepted by society. In fact, my involvement in TASAT started when I saw its recruitment notice for its theatre troupe in 2009. I love drama and had attended several drama classes before, so I immediately joined TASAT’s performance class. The first day I went to class, everyone was so nice. There were teachers and volunteers who took care of participants’ children. They were all very kind to me and my kids. They even organized entertaining and educational lessons for children while adults enjoyed their class. Such a thoughtful and caring arrangement encouraged me to become more involved in TASAT, and I signed up for Southeast Asian Culture Lecture Group several months later,” she said.

Erna took a three-month training course with the Southeast Asian Culture Lecture Group and learned how to talk to the public about different cultures of Southeast Asia.

The goal of the lecture group was to bridge the gap between foreign spouses and Taiwanese. It wants to destroy stereotypes and lessen if not remove misunderstanding between people,” she said.



(ABOVE LEFT) Children of marriage migrants during a kite-flying workshop

(ABOVE) Children of marriage migrants during a music camp organized by TASAT

(LEFT) A drama workshop organized by TASAT

(photo courtesy of TASAT-Taiwan)

Because of her obvious enthusiasm, Erna was elected to the TASAT board in 2010. She said that it was a perfect opportunity for her to gain deeper knowledge about TASAT's vision and mission. Soon after she was also elected as the theatre troupe's deputy head.

"I am always grateful to my colleagues in TASAT for their confidence in me. Their support has made me feel confident and I am encouraged to do more and to try to help other marriage migrants," she shared. As of this writing, Erna was taking a translation course organized by TASAT in collaboration with some professors at the National Normal University.

"I want to develop another skill to help more migrants."

### *Domestic violence and lessons learned*

In the meantime, since she joined TASAT, Erna has discovered that many immigrant women have bad marriages.

"Before I was in TASAT, I had heard about this but I didn't know anyone who was actually in a bad marriage so I couldn't sympathize. Now I know that many immigrant women suffer from domestic violence at the hands of their husbands or other family members. In some cases when the husband can't provide for the family, the wife's complaints may put pressure on the husband and this leads to spousal abuse," she said.

Erna gave the example of an immigrant woman who was a good mother and an ordinarily dutiful daughter-in-law. When she refused to stay at home as a housewife as her mother-in-law wanted her because she wanted to go school, conflict erupted. The woman was subjected to domestic violence by her family.

“The immigrant woman didn’t know what to do, so she called TASAT to seek for help. At first, TASAT’s workers tried to ease her mind and calm her down. Then they talked to the mother-in-law, helping her to make up with her daughter-in law. The most important thing that TASAT workers did was to help the immigrant woman to realize the importance of maintaining good communication with elders. Keeping good relations with in-laws and elders did not have to clash her pursuit of studying Chinese. The younger ones should continue listening and be respectful. In the meantime, if the elders and in-laws continue to be abusive, they can be charged by the police,” she said.

### *Recommendations to the Indonesian government*

While her own experience as a marriage migrant has been generally positive, Erna still believes that a lot can be done to improve the lives of marriage migrants in Taiwan.

“I hope that the Indonesian government can establish more service centers both in Indonesia and in migrant-receiving countries which provide protection and assistance that help immigrants especially with language problems because the newly arrived immigrants can’t express themselves well and encounter many difficulties,” she said. “It is important for the Indonesian government to protect its citizens’ well-being and rights,” she said.

In the meantime, Erna also has advice to offer those who want to marry foreigners and live abroad.

“They should make sure to have a basic understanding of their future husband’s language. Understanding the language is absolutely essential. You can’t live without communicating with your family or any other people. If you can learn the language before you leave your own country, it will help you to adjust easier to a foreign life,” she said.

Erna also said that women should also spend time to know more about their future husbands, understanding what they and their families are like.

“All this should be taken into consideration before one decides to enter a marriage with a foreigner. One shouldn’t be hasty in making such life-changing decisions. One should also give oneself and the partner time to really know each other. This way, the marriage stands a better chance of lasting and being happy,” she said.

Erna wants people who want to enter cross-border marriage to consider all the difficulties that are without doubt in store for them.

“They should prepare for it before deciding to marry a foreigner. Finally, if one really wants to marry a foreign husband, it’s very important and helpful that one joins community organizations or any other group that can enrich one’s life, making it more meaningful and fun,” she said.

At the end of the day, Erna is full of gratitude to her organization, saying that it empowered her and made her a braver person.

“From a mute and powerless marriage migrant, I have, with TASAT’s help, become a rights advocate who can speak up for migrants. It was an unexpected journey for me. I’m truly grateful to be a part of TASAT, witnessing and contributing to its commitment to empowering marriage migrants. I believe that there will be more and more migrant women willing to challenge injustice and fight for our rights,” she concluded.



*A TASAT drama workshop  
(photo courtesy of TASAT-Taiwan)*

# Hong Kong

## Fast facts about marriage migration in Hong Kong

Estimated 1.2 Million marriage migrants as of 2010

35% of Registered Marriages involve a spouse from PRC. Other marriages involve spouses from Philippines, Thailand, Nepal, & Sri Lanka.

\$39,000 HKD-Obstetric Service Charge for non local women, not including those with a dependency visa. \$300 HKD for local women.

One-way Permits (OWP) for Marriage Migrants from PRC in 2010 is based on a daily quota and wait time is approximately 4 years.

Marriage migrants from PRC cannot work without a One-way Permit. Two-way Permit (TWP) available for 3 month periods. Approximately \$300 HKD each time.

Permanent Residency to HK only offered after 7 years of living here after OWP granted.

Non-Chinese Marriage Migrants Can apply for one year 'dependent visa' to a HK spouse. Three year extensions can be made after that.

They Can work immediately after receiving their dependent visa.



Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center, Hong Kong  
photo courtesy by Rey Asis



# Mei

## becoming an advocate and activist for fellow marriage migrants

Y eung Mei is a young-looking 48-year old with three children. Her eldest is 22 years old, the second is nine and the third is seven.

She first came to Hong Kong in the year 2000, but she married her husband who was a Hong Kong citizen two years before then. She and her husband met in the Mainland where he owned a trade company and she worked for him. After they got married, he returned to Hong Kong and for the next 12 years she lived alone in the Mainland. She managed to visit her husband in Hong Kong within that period only once, and the visit lasted only five days because it was with a group.

“At that time, it was impossible to go to Hong Kong alone. We didn’t have any opportunity to get a Hong Kong entry permit from the China government. It only set up the system for the

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Travel Pass in 2003. The Chinese government was very strict and it still is today,” she said.

More than 518,000 mainland Chinese, many of whom are wives and children, have migrated to Hong Kong since the 1997 Handover. In the meantime, an estimated 20,000 marriages between Hong Kong men and Mainland Chinese women take place every year.

According to Mei, Mainland people who got married in the 1980s up to the 90s had to wait a minimum of 10 years before they could get entry permits to stay with their families in Hong Kong.

“Before 1997, the Beijing government had not yet established a proper Hong Kong entry permit for us. After that year, the government came up with a point system, giving those of us who lived in the Mainland but with families in Hong Kong one point for every day that passed for the next 10 years,” she explained.

Still, there was some level of corruption in the process.

“If a person had a good relationship with the local government in his district, and if he could pay, he didn’t have to go through the point system. I know of some people who paid more than 100,000 RMB to officials just so they could go to Hong Kong earlier than others who were registered in the point system,” she said,

After 1997, another policy came into effect, and the point system was made more efficient. The government posted announcements on their website or local government offices posted the lists in their bulletin boards.

“There was more transparency in the system after 1997. The policy changed gradually. In 2003, marriage migrants only had to wait for seven years. By 2009, the waiting period was lowered to five. In 2010, the waiting period was pegged at four,” she said.

Since 2003, marriage migrants with visiting permits are allowed to stay three months in Hong Kong before returning to their countries of origin. They have to apply for a new permit to be able to go back to Hong Kong.

### *A Long Waiting Time for Immigrants to Enter Hong Kong*

According to the APMM's *For Better or For Worse*, there is a daily quota of 150 people allowed per day from Mainland China into Hong Kong. In addition, the daily quota is dependent upon an exit visa granted by the Mainland Chinese authorities. In other words, a One Way Permit (OWP) cannot be given without an exit visa. Mainland China ultimately decides who can enter Hong Kong under the OWP scheme.

The daily quota is broken down between the following categories: a) spouses, b) children with right of abode, c) persons who need to care for their parents in Hong Kong, among other groups. Ninety percent of the OWPs, however, are given to groups a) and b), as of 2003.

According to Associate Professor Leung Hon Chu, the wait time to receive an OWP may be anywhere between four-to-five years before they are allowed to stay in Hong Kong, especially if the applicant entered and stayed in HK for more than seven days. In the meantime, the spouse may apply for a two-way permit (TWP) which allows her to enter Hong Kong for a period of three months at a time. She must then return to Mainland China and wait for a couple of weeks and re-apply to re-enter Hong Kong.

The fee for the application varies but it is approximately HK\$300 each time they apply for re-entry under the TWP. This will be the continuous cycle until one is granted the OWP which may take four-to-five years. After receiving the OWP, one may enter Hong Kong but will not be granted permanent residency until she has lived in Hong Kong (and remained married) for an additional seven years. In addition, she may work or attend school but only after she has received her OWP. However she may neither receive welfare services nor public housing until she has received the permanent residency. In sum, 11 years must pass before permanent residency is granted and she may receive any social services. However, in some cases marriage migrants from Mainland China wait a much longer period.

### *First Impressions Proven Wrong*

While she waited for her permit to be processed, Mei stayed alone in the Mainland. Her husband visited her once a week. Back then she already had ideas about what life in Hong Kong was like because she saw programs and commercials on television. She also saw movies made in Hong Kong, and she fell under the impression that everything in the Special Administrative Region was luxurious and beautiful.

When she finally arrived in Hong Kong, she saw that her impressions were wrong.

“I don’t think life here is so much better than what I was used to in China. The environment is not as good as I thought,” she said.

When she first came to Hong Kong, she and her husband rented a flat which was divided into 10 separate cubicles by thin board and asbestos walls. Each room had a burner, but there was only one bathroom which everyone had to share.



*Mei: becoming an advocate and activist for fellow marriage migrants*



(ABOVE) New Arrivals  
League organizing a press  
conference in 2011

(LEFT) Ms. Yeung Mei

(photo courtesy of New Arrival  
Women's League)

It turned out that in Hong Kong, her husband lived with his family, and the place they had was already too crowded to accommodate other people. It was impossible to have Mei and her child live there when they finally got their entry permits.

“Whenever I visited Hong Kong in the remaining years before my permit was finally approved, my husband rented a small room for us. In the first 10 years of our marriage when we lived apart, he had gotten used to a lifestyle where he lived like a single, unattached person: he ate take-away meals, stayed overnight with friends. The small place he rented was meant only for sleeping. When our daughter and I arrived, he suffered a shock because he wasn’t used to living with others on a full-time basis,” she said.

According to Mei, her husband found it hard to adjust to the pressures of married life and to the life of a full-time father. It did not help either that the cost-of-living rates were increasing in Hong Kong.

“Before, we only saw each once every week; but when my daughter and I came, he was seeing me every day. There were also little problems, like for instance he couldn’t watch all the television shows he wanted because I was there and I was following other shows. Our daughter also wanted to watch TV because of the cartoon programs,” she said.

Mei said that her husband felt a little lost and had to adjust to her presence.

“But I think my adjustment process was harder than his. After all, I was new to Hong Kong, it was a strange place to me; I think I also felt lost. We had adjustment period for each other. For women, the pressure might be bigger than men because everything was new and strange to me,” she said.

There was also some tension when her husband tried to exert control over her.

“When he was at home, he always wanted to be in charge, but it was impossible because of course he had to go to work every day so he couldn’t watch me all the time. At night when he got home he was too tired and in no mood to talk, so we could hardly bond with each other as a family,” she said.

Mei adopted a sensible “take things as they come” attitude towards her new life in Hong Kong. She told herself that she had waited a long time to get there, so she was determined to make the best of everything. After her eldest began school, she resolved to find a job.

### *Different Employment Requirements*

“I came here feeling confident that finding work would be easy because I already had employment experience. I thought it would be easy for me to land a job, but I found out that the standards of Hong Kong employers were quite different from those in the Mainland,” she said.

It was between 2000-2001 and Hong Kong fell into a phase of economic recession. More people found it hard to find and keep paid work. In the meantime, the employers who were hiring still maintained requirements that Mei did not meet. She first tried to get a job in a beauty salon because she used to run one back in the Mainland. The employer, however, did not take her on when she admitted that she didn’t know how to use the various beauty equipment.

“I worked in a beauty salon for 10 years in the Mainland, but we did facial treatments by hand. I still believe that facials done by hand are better than the treatments made with

equipment, but when I applied for work the manager of the salon said that facials in Hong Kong can only be done with equipment and not with bare hands,” she said.

After her first failure, she went to apply for a job in a restaurant as a waitress.

“I was not familiar with the work. I had thought that it would be easy, but I found out that after cleaning the tables and clearing the dishes and plates we had to find other work to do. There were almost no break periods. It was also a blow against my self esteem, having my co-workers look down on me because they always had to tell me what to do or how to do the chores. I stayed only 10 days in that job because I couldn’t take feeling so degraded,” she said.

She hastened to explain that she really tried her best at being a waitress. She even told the boss that she was willing to work overtime and not get any day-off, but in the end it still did not work out.

Finally, she found work at a small beauty salon that could only serve two customers at a time.

It was while working there that she realized that despite the fact that she was Chinese like her customers and co-workers and she spoke Cantonese, the cultural differences between them were still very big.

“Hong Kong people speak English often, and they use English words in ordinary conversation. There were instances when I couldn’t exactly understand what my customers were saying. I had to learn all by myself what certain words meant. My boss didn’t trust me with the customers when he found out that I couldn’t understand some of what they were saying so



he made me wash towels and other cleaning jobs around the parlor instead. I suppose he did lose some customers because I misunderstood instructions,” she said.

Her bad work experiences took a toll on Mei. She knew that the recession was not going to end so soon and there were not many opportunities for newcomers to Hong Kong like her. She decided to stop working and instead became a stay-at-home mother and wife.

To ease her feelings of uselessness and inadequacy at having failed at her attempts at employment, she let herself get pregnant.

“Back in the mainland we were allowed to have only one child per family. I had always wanted more children so I got pregnant. My eldest was then already 12 years old when I got pregnant again. It was also a way to fight boredom because I was on my home all day what with my husband at work and my eldest at school. I considered getting pregnant again a good decision because it made me feel that I was contributing to my family here,” she said.

This was also the case when she had her third child.

### *The New Arrival Women’s League*

It was in 2003 when Mei became involved in the “New Arrival Women’s League.” It was, she said, an organization that was formed by church members.

“It was like the Catholic group Caritas, but it was not connected to or managed by any single church. I joined because there was a woman there whom I knew before in the mainland and who had also moved to Hong Kong. Her husband had died, so she also wanted to be part of some kind of support network,” she said.

According to Mei, the group has a different name in Chinese which means “the same root.” It meant that all the members were all from the Mainland and that they were forming new roots in Hong Kong where they would all work towards a bright future.

“We even designed the logo of our group around the concept of ‘the same root,’” she said. “Joining this group was an important turning point in my life.”

In 2003, the Hong Kong government stopped issuing financial subsidies to the New Arrival Women’s League. Mei said that it was quite a shame because by then they had social workers and they were able to help newcomers from the Mainland. Then, in 2004, the Hong Kong government also passed a law stating that newly arrived immigrants have to stay in Hong Kong for at least seven years before they can qualify for membership in the social welfare system and get access to social services such as public housing and the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance.

“The Hong Kong government did not want support our group anymore. In the Mainland, no one talks about individual rights or social justice or protecting one’s rights. But in my new group, I was encouraged to fight for my rights,” she said.

### *Unjust Policies Against Mainland New Arrivals*

Mei said that from the beginning she believed that the government’s policies when it came to marriage migrants from the Mainland were unjust.

“We abided by the laws and waited a long time to be reunited with our husbands, wives and children in Hong Kong. Women, in particular, were treated like second class citizens when in fact we also contributed to society – we worked, we paid taxes. I was able to share my

grievances to my organization, to the other members who were women like me who came from the Mainland and made sacrifices to get here. We wanted to be treated the same way Hong Kong people were; we deserved the same rights," she said.

Despite the Hong Kong government's move to withdraw its support for organizations like the New Arrival Women's League, Mei and the other group members were determined to keep the organization going. They pushed to make it an independent association and had it registered with the police authorities.

Mei and the other members exerted various efforts to secure funds for their group. They charged membership fees at a very low rate (HK\$10 a year) because most of the members were poor. The association was officially formed in 2004, and Mei focused on helping in the group's social welfare committee. By 2004, some professionals who worked in social work-related fields became the group's advisors and helped them process the legal documents to further legitimize the organization. The group was also registered with the Hong Kong Inland Revenue Department as a non-government organization.

In the meantime, because the group was registered with the police, it could legally hold rallies. Then, the group was able to get a grant from Oxfam because their professor-advisors helped them put together a proposal. Because of the grant, they were able to get funding for one entire year. With the money they were able to hire a full-time social worker, rent a small space as an office.

In the course of their work, Mei and the other officials of the group discovered that there was a huge gap between what the social worker advised to the members and what the organization wanted for its projects. Some minor disagreements also arose because of the language difference and the educational levels of the members.

“Some of our members did not have formal education, and sometimes there would be misunderstandings between them and the social worker. We realized then that if we wanted to get things done, we should rely mainly on ourselves because we – the members – all came from the Mainland and for a great part we understood each other, we knew what each other wanted because we essentially wanted the same things: to live a decent life in Hong Kong, to live in dignity,” she said.

Mei’s group participated or even led rallies in front of the HK government offices against policies they saw to be discriminatory or unjust against marriage migrants and other migrants.

“We were being treated as a minority in Hong Kong, but we were also Chinese. We came from various provinces in China, so we were minorities. Hong Kong is a part of China; Mainlanders, people in China come from 56 ethnic communities. Given this, as minority groups, we have many issues that the government should attend to,” she said.

Mei also participated in many meetings sponsored by the social welfare department of the Hong Kong Legislative Council often because she believed that the people of Hong Kong should be aware of the issues the Mainlanders who moved to Hong Kong were facing.

“We realized how important it was for our organization and other similar groups whose members were newly arrived from the Mainland to be able to speak out. Our participation in the debates and discussions the government called for was important for the cause of marriage migrants,” she said.

By 2005, the funding from Oxfam ran out, and the funding agency told Mei’s organization that it will not continue giving financial support. After the money ran out, many members and even some officials of the group left.



(ABOVE LEFT) A parade raising issue on poverty in Hong Kong  
 (ABOVE and LEFT) A parade organized during the 2011 International Women's Day  
 (photo courtesy of New Arrival Women's League)

“There was no money, and it was understandable that people needed to support themselves before they could support the group. Those like Mei who remained exerted extra effort to find new funding and new members to bolster the organization.

“We read research papers trying to get funding; we joined the activities of other organizations such as fora and meetings. We ran everything by ourselves and it was exhausting for us,” she said.

At that time, Mei’s group had a total of 128 members. Mei herself only became one of the main leaders involved in the decision-making processes in 2005 after many other officials left.

“We started from being a fellowship to becoming an independent organization. It was a difficult transition because before, as a fellowship, we could access the services of a social worker and secure a place for regular gatherings. When we became an independent organization in 2004, we had to sustain the group ourselves and it was a heavy task,” she said.

### *A Mother and An Activist*

It was on March 2005 when Mei qualified for public housing. She considered it an achievement not for herself but for the cause of marriage migrants’ rights.

“It was an important achievement because it meant that my family and I didn’t have to keep moving. There had been instances when we had to move because the landlord of the flat we were staying in didn’t like us; sometimes we moved because the flat was in terrible condition and the landlord didn’t do anything to improve it. I felt that fighting for marriage migrant

rights also meant fighting for better housing conditions. Housing is an important issue for many marriage migrants because some couldn't find decent places to stay in because they were mainlanders and they were discriminated against," she said.

Mei encouraged herself constantly, telling herself that it was a good thing that she was a full-time mother so she could continue to do her work for her organization.

"I was a mother and I was also fighting for the rights of my children. I wanted the government to listen to what us mainlanders in Hong Kong felt and thought about our experiences, about how we were being treated by the law and society," she said.

She had given birth previously, in 2002 then again in 2004. Whenever she attended the meetings in the Legislative Council and delivered a speech, she asked the person who sat next to her to hold her children.

There came a time, however, when she had to focus on her growing children and their welfare. During this time, Mei became inactive in the organization. It was only when her two younger children were successfully enrolled in school when she was able to return.

"By that time, many of the old members were back again, as well as many of the leadership committee members. Most of the remaining members didn't even know that the organization was on the verge of collapse. They still visited the office and helped clean it. We even found a letter of resignation from the group president, but we didn't open the envelop to read it," she said.

Mei had not forgotten how life was like in the Mainland, how there was censorship and organizations did not have the freedom to develop or hold activities as they wanted. It was

only when she became a member of a group in Hong Kong that she realized that they had the freedom to organize and that censorship was illegal.

### *Strengthening the Source of Their Strength*

One day after coming back from their office, she told herself that it would be wrong to simply let their association to dissolve.

“It was our source of strength. One day after I had taken my children to school, I invited a few former committee members for a meeting to discuss the future of our association. I tried to convince them that it was important that I came back to this office and thought our associate cannot be closed; it is the source of our strength so we really need it. I talked to them and tried to convince them about jumpstarting it. Thankfully they agreed with me. At that time we had no money, no support. We had to start from zero. Despite all that, we believed that we could do it,” she said.

Mei and the others were very frugal and practical in running the association. They hosted only small activities and worked towards ensuring that many of the members attended the monthly meetings. To lower phone bills, some of the members volunteered to call the others from phones in their own homes. During the first meeting, 26 members came.

“I told them that I was an acting president, and they agreed. Then we asked help from one of our landlords in the office building to help us develop the association because he was familiar with the processes of running NGOs. I took my children with me when I asked permission to pay the monthly rental fee later than usual because our association had a limited budget because we were starting all over again. I promised him that I will handle the organization and run it well,” she said.



The man then looked at Mei and her children and agreed.

“He told me ‘I know you will try your best. If you run the organization well, I might not ask you to pay the rental fee’. It was a big encouragement. Our organization could save HK\$3,000 a month and this was a huge help,” she said.

Mei and the others started a reading club as the first activity of the reinvigorated association. They collected stories from newspapers, picked out several books. They discussed reports that had to do with marriage migrants.

To help raise funds, they sponsored a “Banquet of Poverty” in late 2005. Because the members came from different provinces in China, they cooked simple dishes. Unfortunately, no one came to the banquet because at the time it was held, there were big protests against the World Trade Organization in Hong Kong. They only managed to collect HK\$3,000 and it all came from their association advisors.

To further develop the organization, Mei thought to renew and strengthen contacts with other Hong Kong organizations that were campaigning about other social issues. They were invited to the activities of these groups like symposia and fora where issues like the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and residents’ retirement policy were discussed.

“The former chairperson of the Legislative Council who was also a professor from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Mr. Fernando Cheung Chiu Hung, was our advisor. He often sent letters inviting us to attend meetings in the Legislative Council. At first I did not understand why we had to attend these meetings, but I felt that because he was our advisor, he was telling us to attend them because it would be good for our association,” Mei said.



(ABOVE) A parade calling for  
HK government's equal treatment  
of mainland Chinese marriage  
migrants and their children  
(RIGHT) Participation of New Arrival  
Women's League in the July 1  
rally  
(photo courtesy of New Arrival Women's League)



It was not only the Legislative Council meetings that Mei attended.

“We often joined the activities of other social movements. We went to protest rallies, parades so we could learn more about running an organization and holding various activities. It was a practical move. Those organizations welcomed us, and they also wanted to build an alliance with us. Everything helped to increase our awareness,” she said.

In 2006, Mei and her group tried a second time to hold a fundraising banquet.

“This time, our landlord helped me put together a promotion strategy. He suggested that the date of our party shouldn’t clash with another social activity. He also emailed his friends and invited them to attend. I followed his example and asked one of our advisors to also help promote our banquet. We held it on December 16, and it didn’t clash with other Christmas activities of other groups. All the promotional work we did paid off because we succeeded in getting HK\$30,000!” she said.

The success of their activity meant that they were also able to send proposals to various sponsor organizations. From them they were able to get another HK\$30,000 to support their operations and administrative costs for a year. They were also able to launch several projects like workshops, empowerment trainings as well as the monthly meetings.

By 2007, the association earned HK\$60,000. They started their own programs for new arrivals and how to help them apply for public housing. We also had a program to help single mothers to get financial aid from Comprehensive Social Security Assistance.

Among the cases Mei’s association dealt with was of a single mother who didn’t meet the CSSA requirements so she had to work harder to make ends meet. She asked her elder

mother to come to Hong Kong from the Mainland to take care of her child. The grandmother, however, was remiss and the grandson took the MTR on his own and was caught by the police. The mother almost got sued.

Mei also started to recruit new members in public housing estates. Many of the public housing estates in Hong Kong are provided by the HK government to low-income families. Their association cooperated with local communities to host parties and shows and they were able to recruit several new members through these events.

“We helped new members and encouraged them to speak out about their situation and needs. Most of them could not adequately describe what their problems were, but they really needed help so we encouraged them to be more confident,” she said.

Yeung Mei in particular taught the new members to practice communication skills so they can explain their needs to the Hong Kong Social Welfare Department. Many of the new members were shy or embarrassed about explaining their difficulties when they met with social welfare officers. The women were afraid to speak so Bee, Mei’s friend and member of the association, helped and trained them to speak and rehearse what they wanted to say.

“After these sessions I went with them to the social welfare department, but I knew that we had to meet with the right people from the right department. If we talked with someone who could not make the decisive decisions, all our practicing would be rendered useless. I took the women to send their petitions to the director of the department and always worked. The women succeeded in getting their CSSA,” she said.

Mei often accompanied the new members whenever they had to go to the social welfare department; she also asked them to practice how to speak logically and how to organize their sentences when speaking.

“It was practicing the principle of ‘teach them how to fish and it feed them for a lifetime.’ I didn’t want to give them answers immediately or spoon-feed them. I wanted them to get used to defending their own rights and this was better for them than having someone else always speaking out on their behalf,” she said.

In the meantime, Mei also began training other members to become involved in the leadership committees. The General Assembly selects which members can attend the decision-making meetings.

“The number of committee members depends on how many members we have in that year. Sometimes we have seven to nine committee members. Because all of us are unpaid volunteers, I didn’t want to put too much pressure for them. Mostly, I make the final decisions when it comes to objectives of organization and the committee members agree. I always hope that they real do agree with me instead of just being tolerant or grudging in their agreement,” she said.

Mei’s organization was also committed to changing the mind of the Hong Kong public when it comes to marriage migrants.

“Because we often join protest actions, some locals automatically think that we are anti-Hong Kong government. Some have typecast us, thinking that Mainland marriage migrants are too lazy to work and we’re all just greedy so we want access to the CSSA. This is not true; it’s very unfair to us,” she said.

Mei explained that their group has assisted many Mainland marriage migrants in a variety of ways, such as how to apply for CSSA and public housing. The group has also helped women with their difficulties related to sending their children to school.

“Even back then we still had a long way to go. Aside from these tasks that our association had, we still had to work out the problem of finding a long-term space for our meetings. Usually I had to arrange two places for our monthly meetings: one for our members; another for their children. These places had to be separate, meaning in two different places. Why? Because if they were in the same place, the parents would not be able to concentrate on the meeting because they would always be distracted with their children. Often I asked favors from schools and churches for this,” she said.

Yeung Mei’s group held their meetings at the end of every month. Sometimes they used church facilities; sometimes they met in the students’ activity center in colleges. The latter was often used as a day-care room whenever there were meetings. It was college students who were also volunteers in the association who took care of the children. If there were no student volunteers at the time, some of the members who were not in the leadership committee did it.

“Usually 2:30-4:30PM is our meeting time. I prepare the agenda, and this includes preparations for the venue for both the meeting and the day-care. I make sure that we use the two hours to be productive instead of just chatting. I also invite speakers to discuss different social issues,” she said.

Mei’s determination to make the meetings productive also stems from the fact that the members pay their own way to get to the meetings.

“There’s no transportation allowance for members. I don’t want us to spend money and attend an activity that didn’t result in us not learning anything useful. Our speakers also come for free. We have no funds to give honoraria either. In the meantime, I hope our sisters can learn different aspects of social issues and not hear about them only from me so I try to bring in new people and build networks with other groups,” she said.

## *Exposing the Truth About Marriage Migrants Issues to the Public*

In 2008, Mei became one of the speakers of the “Gender Equality Forum” in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She shared with the audience the different issues Mainland marriage migrants in Hong Kong face. She discussed the government’s policies on new arrivals. She also shared several cases when women newly-arrived from the Mainland needed help but the government failed to assist them and in some cases even ignored their pleas.

“I also shared with them my own experiences in dealing with cases. I tried to present a different perspective to the audience about what life was like for marriage migrants. I told them that it was the government’s duty, everyone’s duty to give a hand to new arrivals, no matter if they get a Hong Kong ID or not because they are married to Hong Kong citizens and they are prospective citizens,” she said.

Mei was gratified to note that members of the audience were receptive to what she shared.

“They were so surprised to realize that what many of their beliefs about marriage migrants were wrong and that in fact marriage migrants face a difficult situation when we come to Hong Kong. Since 2004, the Hong Kong media has portrayed us in a more or less negative light, all but saying that we were lazy. It got worse when the government closed down social services for new arrival marriage migrants. The media supported the move without really understanding how bad it was,” she said.

After the forum, an NGO, “HER Fund” gave Mei’s association funds to put together a book on new arrivals.

“Some students went to stay with our members and wrote stories about the members’ experiences. These students went with the members everywhere, staying in their houses, even accompanying them to work when it was possible. After the book was published, our members were all happily surprised when they read how they were described by the students. They were depicted as strong women defending their families and their rights. It was a very good experience, both for our members and the college students. Our members have become more confident since the book came out,” she said.

In 2010, the public was abuzz over the book. Mei said that there were positive reviews and negative opinions about the content of the book.

“Our issues were given more more attention and the issue of new arrivals was more discussed. Still, there were those who clung to their misconceptions and continued to judge us. Some locals think that all Mainlanders are rich and that all of us earn a lot of money from making investments in the Hong Kong. They mistakenly believe that all of us simply came here to buy expensive things or to give birth and siphon off funds from social welfare that should instead be going to locals,” she said.

“It’s most unfair because the truth is most Mainland marriage migrants come from poor families. We come here to be with our families and we are more than willing to work hard to support ourselves without having to rely on dole-outs from the government. We don’t want to become permanent residents to steal benefits away from local Hong Kong citizens.” Mei shook her head over how how locals even speak out against Mainlanders in public places.

“They make snide remarks about how our clothes are cheap, how we talk funny because we have accents. It is true that many of us Mainlanders wear cheap clothes, the ones that cost



only HK\$10. Many of us are poor but we have dignity. It's unjust when we walk in the parks with our children and some people look at us and we can practically hear them thinking that we're lazy and that we don't want jobs. Experiences like these pushed me to think well and deeply about how we need to work hard to fight for our rights," she said.

As for Mei's family, they were worried about her work as a crusading social activist.

"My parents worry about me, they tell me I shouldn't get involved in government issues. They're afraid that the government will arrest me. I explain to them that we need to uphold social justice, that we should be given equal rights with local residents. They listen to me, but they still worry," she said.

The truth was, Mei explained, her parents are simply uncomfortable with talking about human rights. In contrast, Mei's husband is 100 percent supportive of her activities and advocacy.

"In the early days, he used to ask me about why I was out all the time. Now he knows the reasons and he approves," she said.

As soon as she arrived home, Mei shared her experiences with her husband. She told him about her meetings, the people she met and discussed with.

"My husband often knows more about social issues and he is a very good listener. He also shares with me many good ideas. To show his support, he does the housekeeping chores when I am out. He cooks and takes care of our children. He even helps with our association, buying materials, taking money to the bank for us," she said happily.

## *Hong Kong and China Should Change Their Policies on Marriage Migrants*

Through the years, Mei has also put together proposals as to how to improve the condition of marriage migrants. These involved changes in policy, and if she had her way she would give them to the governments of Hong Kong and the Mainland directly.

“The Beijing government should shorten the waiting time for marriage migrants to reunite with their families in Hong Kong. There have been cases when in the interim, the husband dies and the wife doesn’t know who to turn to for help. Four years is still too long a waiting period,” she said.

She also has suggestions for Mainlanders.

“Mainlanders should think twice if they want to give birth in Hong Kong. Hospitals here cannot accept too many women to use their birthing facilities. Even after 1998, the government of Hong Kong said that even if children of Mainlanders born here will be residents, it doesn’t mean that their lives and those of their mother will be easy. Many agencies in the Mainland try to entice people to come to Hong Kong saying that life here is easy and wonderful, but they’re not honest. People are encouraged to come here to give birth, but they don’t know that there are complications,” she said.

In Hong Kong, Mainland Chinese marriage migrants experience institutionalized discrimination in which they are charged HK\$35,000 for obstetric services, including a penalty if they do not book in advance. Antenatal checks have added cost.

Non-local women who give birth in Hong Kong public hospitals are considered non-eligible patients (NEPs) and as such, are charged an exuberant amount of money for the same services a local patient may receive. Most of the NEPs, however, are from Mainland China. Out of the 3,960 NEPs who gave birth in public hospitals in the first five months of 2009, the majority are mainlanders.

Mei wants the Hong Kong government to establish a system to inform people from the Mainland coming in through customs about the policies on children born in Hong Kong to Mainland residents.

“Children are considered Hong Kong citizens so they can stay in Hong Kong, but the parents can’t. The government should have these policies explained to the Mainland Chinese people. Agencies who tell misleading stories and make false advertisements should be stopped,” she said. “If these agencies don’t stop, people come here and their lives do not always turn out for the best. Most of them become part time helpers, and they still have to take care of their own children. It’s a hard situation.”

All the difficulties she has encountered in her own life aside, however, Mei confidently said that she is “blessed.”

“I have a good husband and my children are good. We have a simple life. There are no major pressures. I am a volunteer in an organization that helps people. I am fulfilled,” she said.

Mei said that she has many plans for the association.

“I am going to develop more training projects for our members. I want more women to realize that they have rights. Just because you have been unlucky, it doesn’t mean that you

can't change your life. I hope we can make our organization stronger, and find more new members to help. I want to strengthen communication between our members and the locals, to lessen discrimination if not eradicate it totally," she said.

Finally, Mei said that she has had no regrets with how her life has so far turned out.

"My family life is good; my relationship with my in-laws is also doing well. I am able to handle my work without at all neglecting my family life. What gives my life meaning is helping others to get on the road towards a life in Hong Kong that has dignity," she ended simply.



2011 Parade calling for providing retirement protection and benefits for marriage migrants

(photo courtesy of New Arrival Women's League)



## *About the APMM*

The Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) is a regional migrant center committed to support the migrants' movement through advocacy, organizing and building linkages for the advancement of migrants' rights.

Established in 1984, the APMM continues to work towards helping build a strong movement of migrants of different nationalities in Asia Pacific and the Middle East (APME). We envision this as organized into a strong migrant movement, actively defending their rights, advancing solidarity with people's movements in the countries where they are working and linking up with their peoples' movements in their home countries.

To do its mission and achieve its vision, the APMM conducts advocacy, education, research, organizing, welfare and linking work. These are expressed in the various thematic programs of the APMM that include Marriage Migrants, Migrants Trade Union, Undocumented Migrants, Domestic Work as Work, Development and Forced Migration and the Faith Communities Witnessing With Migrants. APMM also receives interns and volunteers to augment its personnel and promote the cause of migrant workers in the region.



## About AMM♀RE

The AMM♀RE, or Action Network for Marriage Migrants' Rights & Empowerment, is an international network for the advancement of marriage migrants. It is composed of 16 organizations of marriage migrants, networks and institutions working for and with marriage migrants and migrant workers in general, and church groups coming from nine countries and regions.

Since its inception, the AMM♀RE has conducted several conferences and workshops as well as researches on the conditions of marriage migrants, laws and policies of destination countries and regions on marriage migrants as well as the attitudes of local people on them.

Its ongoing campaign, UNVEIL, is focused on ensuring protection of marriage migrants and calling for their empowerment against violence. The UNVEIL campaign is AMM♀RE's contribution to the international campaign against VAW (Violence Against Women). The violence here, for AMM♀RE, is not only focused on domestic violence but also on the oppressive state policies that affect marriage migrants.

**AMM♀RE**

**Action Network for Marriage Migrants' Rights & Empowerment**







## *About the book*

*New Lives, New Roots:* Life Stories of Marriage Migrants is a collection of stories of struggle, of hardship, of victory, of hope.

It tells the stories of five women, of five marriage migrants who struggled against discrimination and all sorts of hindrances and won their places in a foreign country that has become their second home.

It tells the stories of Justine, a Filipina living in South Korea, Amna, a woman from South Asia now living with her husband in Australia, Diana, a Filipina in Japan, Erna, an Indonesian in Taiwan, and Mei, a Mainland Chinese marriage migrant in Hong Kong.

With their stories, they hope to put a face to the many struggling marriage migrants in many parts of the world, inspire them as well as those who continue to support the cause of marriage migrants.