

Abstract

**Globalizing Households in Taiwan:
Ahead of Its Time or Behind the Clock?**

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Recent household transformations and their policy challenges in Taiwan can be summarized as a population implosion in search of solutions at a global scale. Taiwan is experiencing one of the fastest demographic transformations in the world, with the previous concern about population explosion now reversing to a profound apprehension of collapsing household and population structures. By 2005, the fertility rate in Taiwan has already fallen to 1.2, one of the lowest in the world. In parallel, the population is also rapidly aging. Underlying these trends are declining marriage rates, rising divorce rates and late marriages. Nowadays one out of every three women in her 30s is unmarried. The ramifications for all of society are manifold, including shrinking labour force, declining school age populations and rising unemployment in education professions, and problems in caring for the elderly, which used to be done by the family, especially the daughter-in-law, instead of public agencies. The magnitude of the population crisis is so huge that some observers call it a 'Population Tsunami', and some even view it as an 'Issue of National Security.'

Partly in response to this crisis, householding in Taiwan has been turning toward global solutions. While more and more Taiwanese young women remain single, for example, men are finding spouses abroad, resulting in a remarkable ratio of 1 in every 3.5 newly married couples having a non-Taiwanese spouse. In 2005, the total number of foreign-born spouses already exceeded 300,000, and they are taking on traditional roles such as giving birth, doing housework and taking care of the elderly in the family. One out of every 7.5 new-born babies has a foreign-born mother. In addition, 120,000 foreign workers in health care and domestic work are now indispensable to the daily management and continuity of households in Taiwan.

Policies to incorporate household members coming as immigrants to Taiwan are still far from accommodating. Migrants have, over time, been facing discrimination or rejection in getting citizenship and related social rights. From this perspective, Taiwan's household transformations, while ahead of most countries in the world, remains behind the clock in coming to terms with the new realities of global householding. In the very recent years, however, as the population crisis becomes more apparent and NGOs are mounting campaigns for better treatment of both foreign spouses and workers, some inclusive social policies are beginning to emerge.