Avital Binah-Pollak

Cross-border Marriages and Mobility

Female Chinese Migrants and Hong Kong Men

Amsterdam
University
Press

Cross-border Marriages and Mobility

New Mobilities in Asia

In the 21st century, human mobility will increasingly have an Asian face. Migration from, to, and within Asia is not new, but it is undergoing profound transformations. Unskilled labour migration from the Philippines, China, India, Burma, Indonesia, and Central Asia to the West, the Gulf, Russia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand continues apace. Yet industrialization in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and India, the opening of Burma, and urbanization in China is creating massive new flows of internal migration. China is fast becoming a magnet for international migration from Asia and beyond.

Meanwhile, Asian students top study-abroad charts; Chinese and Indian managers and technicians are becoming a new mobile global elite as foreign investment from those countries grows; and Asian tourists are fast becoming the biggest travellers and the biggest spenders, both in their own countries and abroad.

These new mobilities reflect profound transformations of Asian societies and their relationship to the world, impacting national identities and creating new migration policy regimes, modes of transnational politics, consumption practices, and ideas of modernity. The series will bring together studies by historians, anthropologists, geographers, and political scientists that systematically explore these changes.

The aim of the series is to offer a forum for writers of monographs and occasionally anthologies on Asian history. The Asian History series focuses on cultural and historical studies of politics and intellectual ideas and crosscuts the disciplines of history, political science, sociology and cultural studies.

Cross-border Marriages and Mobility

Female Chinese Migrants and Hong Kong Men

Avital Binah-Pollak

Cover illustration: A mother and her child standing in front of the sign "Cross boundary coach terminus" in Kowloon, Hong Kong
Photo made by the author

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables

Acknowledgments

This book began as a dissertation at the Department of Anthropology in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. That was when I first came across the phenomenon of cross-border marriages of mainland Chinese women in Hong Kong and cross-border marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men. When I first arrived in Hong Kong, Hong Kong was a "new territory" and through the guidance of my colleagues and professors at the university, the field became an exciting source of inquiry. I would like to thank Prof. Gordon Mathews, Prof. Joseph Bosco and Prof. Siu Mi Maria Tam for their advice and support. I have learned so much!

My Doctoral studies continued at the department of sociology and anthropology in Tel-Aviv University under the supervision of Prof. Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni. I am eternally grateful for her intellectual mentorship and personal kindness. I would especially like to thank her for believing in me and for promoting my ideas and my work. She paved the way for my academic career, and I will always cherish her support and friendship. A special gratitude to Prof. Nicole Constable and Prof. Orna Naftali, my committee members who provided me with invaluable and constructive comments. I could not have done it without their priceless comments and critique. I would also like to thank Prof. Vanessa Fong for reading my dissertation and believing in it. Throughout my research I received several grants; I am grateful to the Doctoral stipend provided by the department of sociology and anthropology at Tel-Aviv University and the Yonatan Shapira Foundation for providing me with travel funds.

Throughout my Doctoral studies I was fortunate to be a member of the Transformations Network. I have benefitted tremendously from the exchange of ideas and stimulating discussions with friends, professors and colleagues. A special thank you to Prof. Dr. Irene Götz, Prof. Dr. Johannes Moser, and Prof. Dr. Jack Picard. They played a significant part in my academic growth and their guidance and belief in me and in my work have provided me with the tools and confidence to accomplish this research.

In the past year I was fortunate to become part of the Technion academic staff and I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Efraim Lev and Prof. Orit Hazzan. Prof. Lev's belief and support enabled me to focus on my research and writing. Prof. Hazzan have shared her personal experience and opened her heart to me. She made me believe anything is possible.

A special gratitude is dedicated to Dr. Nimrod Baranovitch. Nimrod has been my true mentor for many years. He has served as a symbol for academic

excellency and integrity, and from him I learned that there is more than one way to achieve my goals, and that the conventional way is not always the right one for me. I will be eternally grateful for his mentorship and friendship.

To the Sheung Shui families and Hong Kong artists and activists who have so kindly invited me to their homes and opened their hearts, I am deeply grateful! To my dearest friend, Irith Friedman who has always been there for me, I cherish our friendship very much. To my true friend, Iris kloda who has always provided me with new perspectives. To my friends and colleagues: Tzipora Rakedzon, Alex Rau, Hannes Haile, Tsameret Zohar and Miriam Gutekunst. To my parents, Lilia and Ofer Binah who always believed in my abilities and ideas. To my life partner, Amir Pollak, who has always seen me and my career as a priority and has supported my personal growth. To my children Amit and Shaked, this research would not have been made possible without you – I love you very much! This research is dedicated to you.

A special thank you also to this book's anonymous readers who have provided me with extremely constructive and valuable comments. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Amsterdam University Press, for their professional and personal support; this "publication journey" has been so much more than I ever expected.

Avital Binah-Pollak
Haifa, July 2019

Introduction

Between 2010 and 2011 I lived with my family in Sheung Shui, a town in the New Territories, Hong Kong, which is approximately a ten-minute train ride from Shenzhen, China. A short time after my five-year-old daughter began to attend a local kindergarten I discovered that most of the other children's mothers were rural mainland Chinese women who had immigrated to Hong Kong after marrying local men. Almost every day, the marriage migrants I came to know in Sheung Shui met for a Cantonese breakfast after bringing their children to kindergarten or school. Following breakfast, they usually spent their mornings together until it was time to pick up the children from the kindergarten and return home. One day I was invited by Wang Jian, a mother from the kindergarten, to join the group for their daily breakfasts. Usually our meetings continued in the afternoons, and nearly three times each week we had dinner together at one of the mothers' homes. The fathers were usually absent from these gatherings; most of them worked long hours and came home late, while others worked night shifts or were employed far from Sheung Shui and only returned home in the weekends.

Since Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, the social, political, and economic situation in Hong Kong has changed dramatically. The intensification of cross-border activities and growing political interference from China's central government have resulted in a significant amount of discrimination against mainlanders in Hong Kong. As a result, mainlanders are often labelled as 'outsiders' and 'intruders' in Hong Kong (Yau, 2010). These views have been widely manifested in the media which tend to emphasize a range of negative aspects of mainland China and mainland Chinese immigrants, commuters, and tourists. On 1 February 2012, for example, an advertisement comparing mainland women who cross the border to give birth to locusts was published on the front page of the *Pingguo bao* (*Apple Daily*), a popular local newspaper in Hong Kong (*Pingguo bao*, 2012). That same week, a video of a loud argument between a local passenger and a mainland mother who was giving a snack to her child on the Hong Kong subway train was uploaded to YouTube, attracting more than one million views in only a few days.[1] The video received hundreds of offensive comments, among them 'Mainlanders have no manners', 'they are all farmers', and 'they are not welcome in

---

1   Eating and drinking is not allowed on MTR trains or platforms, and there is a HK$2,000 fine for those who do.

Hong Kong' (Languagelover7, 2012).[2] In the fall of 2014, Hong Kong people's concerns reached a critical point, and large demonstrations which were later named 'The Umbrella Movement,' took place from 28 September 2014 until 15 December 2014. 'The Umbrella Movement' which will be further discussed in Chapter Five signified Hong Kongers' deep concerns about their city's future. These concerns were in the context of Beijing's interference in Hong Kong's social and political affairs.

Considering young Hong Kongers' growing discontent and as a result the heightened social protests over the past few years, the contemporary Hong Kong context creates significantly more social and political tension than it had earlier. This tension further fuels anti-mainland sentiments among different groups within Hong Kong society, especially the younger generation. A survey conducted in 2017 among secondary school pupils in Hong Kong demonstrated that four out of ten participants (nearly 41 percent) did not think Hong Kong should continue to integrate with the mainland. In fact, the participants attributed the tense relations between mainland China and Hong Kong to Beijing's 'intervention' and 'meddling' (Yeung, 2018). The growing disappointment and alienation and increasing tension between mainland China and Hong Kong have a significant influence on the everyday lives of the mainland marriage migrants I came to know in Sheung Shui, all of whom experienced social marginalization. While at the same time, as a result of the dramatic rise of China as a global power, the marriage migrants have become in recent years less critical of mainland China and more critical of Hong Kong and as a result less 'different' and less marginalized.

What were these women's motivations for leaving mainland China? Why did they marry men from Hong Kong? How does social class matter for understanding the women's motivations for migration as well as their experiences as marriage migrants? How has the increasing political tension between mainland China and Hong Kong influenced the women's experiences? How are they negotiating the social and cultural boundaries they encounter in their everyday lives? How are the growing cross-border interactions influencing Hong Kongers' local identity? What influence do these marriages have on Hong Kong's social and political situation, and what made these changes possible? These questions underlie this book, which

2   In recent years, in reaction to Hong Kong's local population's protest against mainland China, there has also been protests by mainlanders against Hong Kongers. For example, in 2013 after Hong Kong locals named mainlanders 'locusts', a Beijing University professor called Hong Kongers 'dogs' on prime-time television. In my conversations with educated urban mainland Chinese people, they often expressed negativity about Hong Kong, such as claiming that Hong Kong people 'only care about money and that they don't have any *wenhua* ("culture")'.

examines the complexities and consequences of cross-border marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men.

   This book aims to expand the discussion of cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men by shifting the focus from discussions about the border as a physical barrier to discussions of situations where movement and confinement interact and define each other (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013: 195). In these situations, the Hong Kong-China border is perceived and examined less as a physical barrier and more as a social-political symbol and discursive resource. My first argument in this book is that cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men have a significant influence on the Hong Kong-China border as well as on Hong Kong's society. The family as an institution has long played a major role in Chinese social life, and marriage is recognized not only as an important institution, but also as a space where individuals 'define and cultivate their own virtue' (Alford and Shen, 2004: 236). By examining the women's motivations for migration and lived experiences in relation to the discursive, political, economic, and social circumstances of mainland China and Hong Kong, I demonstrate how their marital practices are causing the expansion of the border and even influencing Hong Kong's social, economic, and political situation. I also discuss what these changes are and what made them possible. The phenomenon of cross-border marriages serves as an example of how different forms of migration and transnational activities can cause the expanding and blurring of physical, social, and political borders. My second argument is that young Hong Kongers' growing discontent and Sheung Shui marriage migrants' changing views of Hong Kong and their recent identification with Hong Kong as a *Chinese* city have created significantly more social and political tension. In this context, young Hong Kongers are searching for different ways to exhibit a unique local identity. Third, I argue that despite China's tremendous economic growth, the women in my study were eager to pursue *their* dream in Hong Kong because of its legacies of the colonial past – the same past that the Communist Party is currently aiming to overcome. Under the 'One Country, Two Systems' principal, Hong Kong continues to have structural and institutional differences from the mainland. As a result, while mainland China's globalized cities fail to provide institutional mobility to their rural migrants, Hong Kong provides the women with the social and institutional mobility they desire. In this sense, Sheung Shui marriage migrants' desire to immigrate to Hong Kong and their perceptions about its advantages are influenced by hegemonic discourses that are based on the structural dichotomy between urban and rural, centre and periphery, and modernity and tradition.

I situate cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men within two main scholarly fields: marriage-related migration and labour migration. 'Marriage-related migration' is regarded as an umbrella term describing migration for the purpose of marriage, to be reunited with a spouse, and any other situation where marriage is a significant factor in the migration process. However, Piper and Roces (2003) have argued that studies should not regard marriage migration and labour migration as two distinct categories, because in many cases women and men can become wives or husbands as a result of labour migration. The marriage migrants I came to know in the border town of Sheung Shui had met their Hong Kong spouses while working as labour migrants in Guangdong Province. They were young rural women who left their homes in their late teens to work in China's developing Special Economic Zones (SEZ). The area's proximity to the Hong Kong-China border was one of the main reasons they were able to meet Hong Kong men, who often travelled to Shenzhen as part of the close economic ties between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta. In other words, they became wives (and marriage migrants) because of their earlier decision to leave their homes and become labour migrants. Therefore, following Piper and Roces' (2003) idea, their marriages to Hong Kong men and immigration to Hong Kong are intertwined with their labour migration narratives.

I borrow Susan Ossman's definition of serial migration to shed light on the importance of the women's paths. Ossman defines 'serial migrants' as people who have immigrated once, and then moved again to a third homeland. In her book Osman argued, 'in our haste to trace the trajectories of goods, people, or ways of life we may fail to perceive that a specific pattern of mobility may be as critical as culture, language or national origin in shaping individual subjects and ways of life' (Ossman, 2013: 1). The women I came to know in Sheung Shui were/are serial migrants who have lived in three different spaces and crossed several borders. In this sense, they are identified by their movement across borders. However, while Ossman emphasizes the path that people have taken regardless of their origin or destination, in this book I emphasize the women's origin and destination, as they both prominent parts of their changing subjectivity. This theoretical framework, which is based on a gendered analysis of mobility processes and considers women's migration paths, lays a theoretical background for understanding the complexity of the phenomenon of cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men.

Gender and im/mobility

Variables such as race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and gender are markers of difference that influence people's motivations and ability to immigrate, as well as their experiences at their new destination. Among these variables, gender is significant for understanding different processes related to mobility. For example, it is often argued that women face more restrictions on mobility, and their travel patterns differ from those of men. Although the numbers of women and men migrants have been similar, until the 1970s studies on migration focused primarily on men, while women were presumed to play a passive role as companions (DeLaet, 1999: 13; Mahler and Pessar, 2003). Since the 1980s, there has been a rise in the number of studies concentrating on the predominance of women in migration trends. These studies have mostly focused on the household and workplace, neglecting the role of border regimes and the role of the state in the gendered lives of migrants more generally (Mahler and Pessar, 2003: 819). The deletion of gender from the social and economic dimensions of migration and globalization processes (e.g. Handlin, 1951; Portes and Bach, 1985; Basch, Glick Schiller and Blanc, 1994; Glick Schiller et al., 1992) created a dichotomy in which the gender analysis of globalization was mapped in such a way that the global came to equal masculine and the local, feminine (Freeman, 2001: 1008).

Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that gender is not simply a variable in the analysis of global phenomena, but rather a set of social relations that organizes migration patterns. This means that beyond documenting or emphasizing the presence of women migrants, there should also be 'an examination of how gender relations [which are exercised in relational and dynamic ways] facilitate or constrain both women's and men's immigration and settlement' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 3). Yet, the attempt to 'compensate' for the absence of women in the study of migration has in most cases amounted to studies 'about migrant women', without any significant changes in favour of a gendered analysis of migration itself (Freeman, 2001; Mahler and Pessar, 2003).

Beginning in the 1990s ethnographic studies have begun to focus on the local context in order to highlight how global processes influence the lives of female migrants. Studies began to focus on labour migration, especially from poor and/or rural areas to large cities (Ong, 1991; Parreñas, 2000; Gaetano and Jacka, 2004; Jacka, 2006;); the trafficking of women (Kempadoo, 2001, 2004; Siddharth, 2009); marriage migration (Charsley, 2012; Constable, 2005; Newendorp, 2008); and the commercialization of intimate relations (Constable, 2009; Zheng, 2008). These studies tended to emphasize the local practices of female migrants and contributed to the understanding that

gender and class have a crucial impact on both motivations for migration and the everyday experiences of female migrants.

However, these local analyses of global processes have only partially contributed to the formation of a gendered understanding of migration processes because they continued to portray the local as feminine and as contained within – and thus fundamentally defined by – the global, which is considered masculine. In response, Freeman has called for a different kind of analysis:

> What is called for as well, then, is a feminist reconceptualization of globalization whereby local forms of globalization are understood not merely as effects but also as constitutive ingredients in the changing shape of these movements. A feminist reconceptualization of this sort requires a stance toward globalization in which the arrows of change are imagined in more than one direction, and where gender is interrogated not only in the practices of men and women in local sites but also in the ways in which both abstract as well as tangible global movements and processes are ascribed masculine or feminine value. (Freeman 2001: 1013)

Freeman argues that the understanding of migration processes requires the exposure of the interfaces between global forces and processes that take place at the local level. In other words, studies should aim to create a dialectical relationship between concepts that are perceived as dichotomous, such as global/local, masculine/feminine, production/consumption, and the formal/informal sectors of the economy (Freeman 2001: 1009). One example of this new kind of analysis is Nicole Constable's (2009) research on commercialized intimate relationships and mail-order brides, which refers to changes in the patterns of both local and global processes. Constable's study challenges the dichotomies of private/public, intimate/impersonal, emotional/material, love/money, local/global, and culture/nature. Constable argues that the commercialization of sexuality, intimacy, and marriage is not simply one of the consequences of globalization: rather, globalization offers opportunities to define new relationships and redefine spaces that can change and go beyond norms and gender-conventional spaces (Constable, 2009: 58). Such analyses that consider processes that take place at the local level as a part of global phenomena rather than a result of them, contribute to the creation of a more flexible analysis of the relationship between gender and migration (Freeman 2001: 1012).

In the past two decades, the studies that have contributed to a gendered understanding of migration processes have focused primarily on female

labour migration. Since the 1980s, women from developing countries (especially in Asia) have increasingly migrated to developed countries and regions, usually to work in export-processing regions or as domestic workers. This growing pattern of migration has been framed as the 'international division of reproductive labor' (Parreñas, 2000). This division of labour enables global production by providing a cheap and disposable labour force, thus creating 'a gendered and radicalized world order' (Yang and Lu, 2010: 16). The first major theme discussed in studies of female labour migration is the degree in which women can exert agency and their ability to influence their own fate. For example, in her study on Philippine domestic workers in Hong Kong, Constable (2007) shows that, although many of the women experience great difficulties living away from their families and in many cases suffer from poor employment conditions, they are not docile or passive. The women are conscious of their actions, and strive to resist in their own ways and for their own benefits. Aiwha Ong (1991) demonstrates that, although they are regularly exploited by contracting services and factories, Chinese female migrants still experience feelings of personal freedom since they live as single women in dormitories, have more consumer power, and are able to delay marriage. The female migrants' feelings of personal freedom described by Constable (2007) and Ong (1991) are also attested by studies on rural-to-urban female migrants in mainland China (e.g., Gaetano and Jacka, 2004; Jacka, 2006). According to Gaetano and Jacka (2004: 4), the migrants' experiences lead to a feeling of independence and empowerment, especially since they had left the authority of their parents or in-laws behind.

In addition to discussions about the exertion of agency by female labour migrants, studies have also focused on the politics of labour identity. In her study of women factory workers in Shenzhen, Pun Ngai (1999) argues that three major factors influence female migrants' new social identity inside the workplace: the urban/rural dichotomy, regional disparities, and gender inequalities. Based on a study of rural domestic workers in Beijing, Sun (2009) shows that, although most rural migrants leave home to escape their rural identity, their geographical mobility usually does not help them shed rurality. Instead, in their new urban surroundings they become more 'rural' and less 'civilized.' Images of the poor rural migrant are part of a hegemonic discourse based on a structural dichotomy between 'centers and peripheries, knower and known, and the independent and the dependent.' This structurally unequal relationship means that those who migrate to the 'center' from the 'periphery' (for example, less developed provinces) become subalterns in the city, and are almost always considered to have low *suzhi*

('quality')[3] (Sun, 2009: 618). Sun further argues that class differences and the rural/urban dichotomy are not sufficient for understanding the low social position of labour migrants, highlighting the migrants' body as a major site of subordination: 'The subordination, peripheralization, and exploitation of the rural migrant by her urban employer is a result of the numerous ways in which the migrant body is made to take on a subaltern and outsider status' (Sun, 2009: 638). This analysis sheds light on important questions I discuss throughout this book: Which social and cultural boundaries did Sheung Shui marriage migrants carry with them after immigrating to Hong Kong? Have these boundaries 'moved' with the migrants – does physically crossing the Hong Kong-China border necessarily mean that social and cultural boundaries have been crossed as well, and to what degree?

The transnational turn within migration studies helps shed light on these types of questions. 'Transnationalism' is defined as 'the processes by which migrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement' (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc Szanton, 1992: 1). In other words, instead of focusing on the integration of female migrants at their destination, more attention is being paid to the women's feelings of belonging to two or more destinations (Altink and Weedon, 2010). In this sense, the place of origin and the symbolic baggage it carries continue to impact the immigrant's experiences at their destination. This analysis is highly important for understanding Sheung Shui marriage migrants' experiences in Hong Kong as well as the marriages' impact on contemporary Hong Kong's social, economic, and political situation. First, while Sheung Shui marriage migrants reported that they were eager to shed their 'rurality',[4] they continued to be viewed by many Hong Kongers as 'mainlanders' and

---

3   During the 1980s, the Chinese government attributed China's failure to modernize to the *suzhi di* ('low quality') of the population, especially in rural areas (Anagnost, 2004: 190). As a result, China introduced the policy of 'Raising the Quality of the Population' (*tigao renkou suzhi*). The policy's main aim has been to improve professional skills and academic and educational achievements in order to advance China's position as an economic power in the global arena and create a strong China in relation to the Western countries. Over the past three decades, the term *suzhi* has become a major component in contemporary China's governance and society, and it has had a significant influence on rural migrants' motivations for becoming labour migrants and on rural migrants' experiences in the city. The term and its implications will be further discussed in Chapter Two.

4   Anagnost (2004) argued that while the middle-class urban family strives hard to build 'quality' into their child in order to become a neoliberal subject, rural migrants struggle to reach the city in order to escape rurality (Anagnost, 2004: 192). Similar to China's labor migrants who move to China's cities with the hope to increase their '*suzhi*,' Crossing the political border between mainland China and Hong Kong, Sheung Shui marriage migrants hoped to cross the social and cultural borders as well.

were usually placed at the margins of Hong Kong's society. Second, Sheung Shui marriage migrants often described belonging to both mainland China and Hong Kong. The marriage migrants continued to communicate with their mainland Chinese family and friends on daily basis, even after they had received their Hong Kong Identity Card and permanently settled in Hong Kong. Furthermore, even after their permanent immigration to Hong Kong, Shenzhen continued to be a significant part of their journey. Most of the women spent many years living and working in Shenzhen before meeting their spouse, and they considered it a familiar place and often missed it. The close distance between Sheung Shui and Shenzhen enabled them to travel to Shenzhen on regular basis, for shopping, getting a haircut, visiting a favourite restaurant, or meeting friends and relatives. While these transnational ties supported them emotionally, they also enhanced their sense of belonging to the mainland. The fact that they kept a strong attachment to the mainland has caused the blurring of the social, cultural, and political border between mainland China and Hong Kong, eventually challenging the idea of Hong Kong as a separate entity, both in mainland China and in Hong Kong.

Marriage-related migration

In the early 1990s the phenomenon of marriage-related migration was relatively scarce. With the increase of transnational activities, there has been a dramatic rise in transnational and cross-border marriages around the world. In East Asia, for example, the phenomenon rarely existed in the 1990s, but by 2012 foreign brides comprised between 4 and 35 percent of newlyweds in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan (Kawaguchi and Lee, 2012). Migration-related marriages in East and Southeast Asia are usually characterized by three typical features: An exceptional gender disparity as men from wealthier regions tend to marry women from developing or poorer regions, a relatively low socioeconomic status of the local men compared to the local population, and a large age difference between the husband and wife (Constable, 2005; Jones, 2012; Jones and Shen, 2008).

Since the field of marriage-related migration is relatively new, no conclusive conceptual system has yet been developed (Charsley, 2012). These types of marriages are often described as transnational marriages, cross-border marriages, marriage migration, or migration-related marriages. In the volume *Transnationalism Marriage: New Perspectives from Europe and Beyond*, Charsley (2012) emphasizes the importance of establishing a decisive

conceptual system to describe this marriage pattern. For example, she makes a clear distinction between transnational and cross-border marriages. She argues that transnational marriages can be related to any type of marriage that crosses national boundaries, while cross-border marriages are specifically linked to ethnic diversity. In other words, the important distinction that Charsley makes is between inter- and intra-ethnic marriages (2012: 14-15).

Williams (2012) agrees with Charsley (2012) that transnational marriages can involve any type of transnational activity. Yet, she situates cross-border marriages 'on a continuum between those that are firmly transnational and those that are clearly not' (Williams, 2012: 33). As opposed to emphasizing the importance of ethnicity as a central aspect for defining 'marriage-related migration', Williams highlights the lack of formal status or citizenship of one or both partners as an important factor, as well as differences in class, interests, or status (24). Yang and Lu (2010) also argue that the phrase 'cross-border marriage' emphasizes geographical, national, racial, class, gender, and cultural borders. Following Yang and Lu (2010) and Williams (2012), in this book I use the term 'cross-border marriages' to describe marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men. This term highlights the idea that, although both partners share a similar ethnic background, the mainland wives cross political, social, and cultural boundaries.

Scholarly work about migration patterns has mostly emphasized the economic aspects of migration and neglected marriage for, or as a result of, international migration (Kofman, 1999). Studies that do focus on marriage-related migration have tended to emphasize the negative aspects associated with these marriages, such as the relationship between transnational marriages and the trafficking of women and children; sex work; 'Mail-Order Brides'; domestic violence; and convenient or 'fake marriages' for the purpose of obtaining a visa or citizenship. In many cases, marriage and migration within national boundaries is often associated with the victimization and marginalization of women as well (Uberoi and Palriwala, 2008). Uberoi and Palriwala carefully suggest that 'without discounting the ubiquity of the abuses', other aspects of marriage migration should be considered 'beyond "victimization"', and that there should be a 'balanced and context-sensitive consideration of [the] changing dynamics in the nexus of marriage and migration' (2008: 23). They argue that these aspects include a possible change in gender roles within both the new family and the sending society and natal family, economic stability, escape from persecution, and even increased autonomy. In other words, different contexts of transnational activities generate different experiences, and in certain contexts marriage migration can be a means for achieving geographic, social, and economic mobility. A significant

contribution to the study of cross-border marriages is the volume *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia* (Constable, 2005). The studies in the book explore the perspectives, motivations, and experiences of the men and women involved in cross-border marriages, and it views these marriages as a result of both local and global processes. Another significant contribution is its focus on the depiction of women as having an active role, without neglecting their limitations and the 'different degree of agency' they exhibit (ibid.: 3). Constable suggests that, while we are used to thinking about these marriages as upwardly mobile for women, they should instead be viewed as 'paradoxical hypergamy': in most cases the women's economic status improves dramatically after marriage, but their social position in the receiving society and their husband's family is relatively low (ibid.: 10).

In general, gender relations can be labelled, measured, and analysed in diverse ways and at different levels of abstraction. In academic literature, 'gender order', 'gender regime', 'gender culture', and 'gender model' are some of the terms used to describe relationships between men and women (Grimsrud, 2011: 3). While these concepts highlight an overall system or power structure, they tend to neglect individual practices (Forsberg and Stenback, 2017). The concept of a 'gender contract' recognizes power relationships in men's and women's everyday practices (Hirdman, 1991). According to Hirdman's analysis, gender contracts function at three levels: the metaphysical, which includes cultural ideas; the structural and institutional, such as in work or politics; and the individual, between men and women in relationships and the domestic sphere (Hirdman, 1991: 78). While previous studies about marriage migration have not emphasized the importance of the gender contract as an organizing concept, the pattern of gender relations which I have identified reveals the 'gender contract' between Sheung Shui marriage migrants and their spouses. As I further discuss in Chapter Three, since these marriages involve mobility, I have added a geographical dimension to this analysis (Valentine, 2007).

In China, marriage-related migration is considered a relatively new phenomenon (Fan and Huang, 1998: 231). Even though statistically marriages with non-mainland Chinese account for no more than one percent of all annual registered marriages in China (National Bureau of Statistics China, 2012; Friedman, 2010: 11), they are important for understanding social and economic processes in contemporary China. These types of marriages include marriage across vast geographical distances within mainland China, such as with a spouse from a distant province (Fan and Huang, 1998; Davin, 2016); marriages between different ethnic groups (Freeman, 2005; Schein, 2005); marriages between mainland wives and western expatriates (Farrer,

2008, 2013); marriages across the Taiwan strait (Friedman, 2010, 2012); and marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men (Choi and Cheung, 2016; Choi and Fong, 2018; Choi, Cheung, and Cheung, 2012; Lau, 2008; Lin and Ma, 2008; Newendorp, 2008, 2010; Ornellas, 2014; So 2003). Since Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, about one third of all marriages registered in Hong Kong have been between mainland women and Hong Kong men. As I demonstrate throughout this book, the high number of cross-border marriages is a result of unique social and political changes on both sides of the border. While I place significant emphasis on the 'marriage' aspect of this migration pattern, I also emphasize the unique socio-economic structure and specific context of the border that this phenomenon is a part of.

Cross-border marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men

Until the late 1970s, most mainlanders who immigrated to Hong Kong were young single men who entered Hong Kong illegally after escaping the political and social turbulence in China. Since the 1980s, on the other hand, most mainland immigrants to Hong Kong have been women who entered legally through the One-way Permit scheme (OWP) (Ornellas, 2014: 49). Table 1 illustrates that since the mid-1980s the number of mainland men entering Hong Kong has declined and that most OWP holders from mainland China were women who moved to Hong Kong to join their spouse.

Table 1   One-Way Permit holders entering Hong Kong by gender (these numbers are comperatives, i.e. the number of males entering for every 1000 women entering)

	1986	1996	2006	2014
Males	673	493	579	491
Females	1000	1000	1000	1000

Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2015: 26

Table 2 illustrates the number of marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men since 1991. The rise in the number of cross-border marriages since the late 1980s can be attributed to the signing of the Sino-British declaration in 1984 and Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2015: 45). The decline

in the number of marriages since 2006 is most probably a result of two major circumstances. First, China's economic development and as a result the general improvement of women's position in society, as well as the increasing educational and employment opportunities available to rural women (Wong, 2016). Second, the increasing political tension between Hong Kong and the mainland has caused growing resentment towards the immigration of mainland Chinese into Hong Kong. Although the total number of cross-border marriages has decreased in recent years, since 2014 their percentage of the total number of marriages registered in Hong Kong has remained steady at around one-third.

Table 2   Number of marriages with brides from the mainland and grooms from Hong Kong

Year	Marriages where grooms are Hong Kong residents and brides are from the Mainland (registered in HK)	Total marriages registered in HK	Percentage of cross-border marriages
1991	590	36126	0.16
1996	2215	35354	6.2
2001	5169	31346	16.5
2002	7724	30439	25.3
2003	10185	33629	30.3
2004	13126	38983	33.6
2005	16775	39882	42
2006	18182	45870	39.6
2007	15978	43265	36.9
2008	14206	42911	33.1
2009	13751	46987	29.2
2010	15400	44944	34.2
2011	16506	49420	33.4
2012	16930	51465	32.9
2013	15737	46587	33.7
2014	15266	47492	32.1
2015	13123	43497	30.1
2016	12303	41608	29.5

Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2018)[5]

5   I chose to show the data from 1991 because then we can see the beginning of the increase in the number of cross-border marriages. Then I chose to show every year since 2001 so that the readers can get a sense of the variations in the number of marriages which took place during the time the book mostly refers to.

Because these marriages comprise such a high percentage of marriages registered in Hong Kong each year, this phenomenon has a tremendous influence on Hong Kong's society. For this reason it has caught the attention of different scholars in recent years. The first theme discussed in these studies on cross-border marriages between mainland China and Hong Kong is the female migrants' everyday experiences in Hong Kong both before and after receiving permanent residency (e.g., Choi and Cheung, 2016; Choi and Fong, 2018; Lau, 2008; Newendorp, 2008, 2010; Ornellas, 2014). Newendorp's study (2008), based on ethnographic work conducted between 2001 and 2002 at a social welfare centre in Kowloon, focuses on the difficulties experienced by marriage migrants while trying to adapt to their new environment in Hong Kong, where they are often treated as 'outsiders'. In a later article based on new interviews with some of the same women conducted a few years later, Newendorp (2010) demonstrated that, as opposed to the somewhat passive description of the migrant women in her previous study (2008), her new findings demonstrate that some of the women had gained positions of responsibility, were taking pleasure in their jobs, and were focusing on their new employment as a positive way to characterize their life experiences in Hong Kong. Newendorp concluded that the women's workplace provided a 'way' into Hong Kong society. More recent studies tend to focus on the influence of increasing anti-China sentiments on marriage migrants' integration into Hong Kong. For example, Wong, Ng and Chou (2017) stress the female migrants' mental health and need for social services. As part of the discussion of marriage migrants' everyday experiences and the integration process, studies also focus on shifts in the identity of female migrants. For example, Lau's (2008) study centred on the different themes and practices that the marriage migrants need to learn to 'acquire' their new identity. Lau maintains that after immigrating to Hong Kong, the women go through a process of losing their 'mainland identity' and gaining a local one.

So (2003) examines the phenomenon of cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men from a different perspective. His main intent is to understand Hong Kong men's motivations for marrying women from across the border. The first reason he has discovered is related to Hong Kong's demographics: statistical data demonstrates that for the past few decades there has been an imbalance in the gender composition of the population of marriageable age in Hong Kong. So argues that as a result of the massive flow of mainland immigrants into Hong Kong during the 1970s the gender ratio increased from 109.2 males per 100 females to 115.8 males per 100 females. He further argues that not only do men outnumber

women, but migrants from the mainland are in a disadvantaged position in Hong Kong and it is easier for them to find wives in the mainland than in Hong Kong (So, 2003: 525).

A second explanation for Hong Kong men's motivation to marry women from across the border is related to the social position of the men (So, 2003). Hong Kong men who marry mainland women are usually working-class. According to So, Hong Kong working-class men find it easier to marry a mainland wife since 'they have much more to offer to rural mainland Chinese women than they can offer to Hong Kong women of similar age and education' (ibid.: 524). In addition, Hong Kong men believe that mainland women are 'more stable, less sophisticated, and less picky than Hong Kong women, and thus would give them a greater sense of control and security' (ibid.: 525).

While the dramatic disparity in the sex ratio might explain marriages that took place during the 1970s and the early 1980s, they fail to explain why the number of cross-border marriages spiked during the late 1990s after Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty. Based on the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department (2012), while an imbalance in the sex composition continued to exist at the end of the twentieth century, it was certainly not as acute as it was during the 1970s and the 1980s. Moreover, like the studies focused mostly on the implications of the marriages on the women's everyday lives and on Hong Kong society, So (2003) did not explore the social, economic, or political context of the mainland Chinese side of the border.

My ethnographic data and its analysis both differ from and mirror the existing scholarship on cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men. While I have adopted some of the concepts which were used in previous studies about mainland marriage migrants in Hong Kong in order to examine the everyday experiences of the women, I do not focus on the women's integration process or their desire to integrate per se, but rather on their everyday experiences as a strategy to cross borders. I explore how migrant women's lived experiences are interwoven with social class and ethnicity. Further, I focus on the interactions between political, social, and cultural boundaries to provide a more complex understanding of the women's changing subjectivities, the changing nature of the Hong Kong-China border, and the changing nature of Hong Kong itself. Thus, this book explores the social, economic, and political conditions that encouraged the women to leave their rural homes in their late teens, immigrate to one of China's coastal cities to become labour migrant and as a result meet their future spouse and immigrate to Hong Kong. Following Freeman (2001), I

hope to expose the crossing points between the marriage migrants' local practices and the structural conditions, their mobility constraints and opportunities, as well as their actions as (mobile) agents. I focus on both the physical and symbolic journeys of mainland women who marry Hong Kong men and highlight the different meanings that mobility and immobility have in contemporary China and Hong Kong. One of my main goals is to understand the different ways the women negotiate the Hong Kong-China border in their everyday lives. The changing 'nature' of the physical and symbolic border between mainland China and Hong Kong is an important component of this examination.

The phenomenon of cross-border marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men raises questions about im/mobility, identity, and belonging. As my fieldwork progressed, my understanding of these concepts changed accordingly. Relativism is often used to reduce or emphasize the importance of specific situations or experiences. The idea of relativism is obviously not new, but it helps raise important questions about our understanding of marriage migrants' motivations and experiences. I started my fieldwork with the idea that Sheung Shui marriage migrants are victims: victims of a structure which drove them to leave their homes at a young age and migrate to a faraway destination; victims of a new society which marginalizes them; victims of a certain type of gender contract which leaves them in the domestic sphere. However, as my ethnographic work progressed these perceptions gradually changed. Throughout this book I describe and discuss these changes and argue that not only are these women not victims, but they have found ways to negotiate the boundaries they encountered. Their immigration to Hong Kong has had a significant part in the changing nature of the Hong Kong-China border and of Hong Kong itself.

Chapter outline

This book is structured to provide an understanding of the phenomenon of cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men mainly from the wives' perspectives. The major principal of the methodology is holism, which is the understanding that all of the properties of a given system cannot be explained or understood by looking at the individual pieces; rather, the individual pieces can only be understood by looking at the whole. In other words, to understand the perspectives of Sheung Shui marriage migrants I pay significant attention to the 'wider world that both impacts upon and transcends the phenomenon' (Horst and Miller, 2013: 18).

The women's journey is situated in a unique social and political context that is influenced by conditions on both sides of the border. The border between mainland China and Hong Kong is treated not merely as a physical border but also as a social and cultural boundary. This kind of analysis recognizes that people and cultures exist on both sides of the border and that the border is constantly negotiated by the people and commodities that cross it.

This introduction has focused on two major theoretical issues: marriage-related migration and the relationship between gender, migration, and im/mobility. Although I regard this migration pattern as 'marriage-related migration', the women's marriages to Hong Kong men are linked to their experiences as labour migrants. By discussing these topics, I create a theoretical ground for presenting my ethnographic data and discussing the motivations and experiences of the women. While the main purpose of this theoretical grounding is to analyse the ethnographic data, one of the book's main goals is to highlight important theoretical issues such as the position of borders within migration studies, the relationship between gender and migration, and the different meanings of im/mobility in contemporary China, Hong Kong, and beyond.

Another important aspect of understanding these marriages is the Hong Kong-China border, which the text moves back and forth across. Chapter One focuses on the unique characteristics of this border, starting with a discussion on the border as a theoretical construct. I then review some of the historical events that have defined the relationship between Hong Kong and the mainland and have influenced and shaped the uniqueness of this border. I explore the physical and symbolic aspects of the border: how it acts as a resource, and how it may constrain the wishes, dreams, and activities of those wishing to cross it.

Chapter Two focuses on the marriage migrants' motivations for crossing the border. I argue that in order to understand the women's motivations for marrying Hong Kong men and immigrating to Hong Kong, their motivations for leaving their homes in China's rural areas should be considered as well. While the women did not consider their marriages a means to a calculated end, the institutional constraints on mobility on the mainland side of the border highlight the effect of the marriages in providing the women with a desired mobility that was out of their reach in mainland China. Unlike the case of rural migrant workers, the women's cross-border marriages enabled them to gain legal status in Hong Kong, which entitled them to social privileges and to 'building quality' into their children. The significance of obtaining a Hong Kong Identity Card is related to how Hong Kong was envisioned by the women before and after crossing the border, as well as to

how 'the other side of the border' was mediated by the Chinese state and other social agents. Chapter 2 also discusses the marriage migrants' views that, although the economic gap between mainland China and Hong Kong has decreased dramatically over the past two decades, many of the cultural and social gaps continue.

Chapter Three closely introduces the group of marriage migrants I came to know in the border town of Sheung Shui. The pattern of gender relations which I have identified reveals the 'gender contract' between Sheung Shui marriage migrants and their spouses. I discuss the three levels in which these gender contracts function: the metaphysical, the structural, and the individual. I begin with the metaphysical level, which includes cultural myths and representations. Then I discuss the structural conditions and emphasize the link between gender, space, and economics. Last, I focus on the individual level and demonstrate how the marriage migrants' everyday experiences in Hong Kong reflect their changing subjectivities. I focus on their social gatherings with other mainland marriage migrants such as joint breakfasts, afternoon gatherings with the children, and playing the Chinese tile game of Mahjong. The chapter reveals that, as opposed to their previous dynamic experiences as labour migrants in Shenzhen, most of the Sheung Shui marriage migrants do not work outside their homes, and their children's schedules are the major anchor of their everyday activities. This social structure leaves them in the home sphere, at the margins of Hong Kong's society. In other words, their place of origin and the symbolic baggage it carries, continues to influence marriage migrants' experiences in Hong Kong.

Chapter Four focuses on the centrality of the children's education in the lives of these mothers, who regard Hong Kong's educational system as a desired destination and a site that will have a significant impact on their children's future. As part of their pursuit of 'higher *suzhi* ("quality")', the mothers dedicated a significant amount of time to their child/ren's schoolwork and other learning activities, and these activities played an important role in their everyday lived experiences.

While Chapters Two, Three, and Four present the women's perspective, Chapter Five focuses on the struggle, disappearance, and reappearance of a Hong Kong local identity vis à vis the growing number of cross-border activities. Since this book focuses on cross-border marriages, it might have been more reasonable to focus on the views that the spouses hold about mainland China. Just as the men were mostly absent from the marriage migrants' lives, however, they were also relatively absent from the field. That being said, when I had the opportunity to interview one of the spouses,

I often heard their discontent with the political and social situation in Hong Kong, and these voices are heard throughout the book. The voices which were very prominent in the field were those of Hong Konger artists and activists, who in most cases perceived the mainlanders as intruders. I present rich data to show that while the Chinese authorities are constantly emphasizing the idea that Hong Kong is an inseparable part of China, young Hong Kongers strive to maintain the border as a rigid divide. In this sense, the actions of the young activists were not and could not be separated from the mainland marriage migrants' everyday lives, even though they belonged to two separate social groups.

My concluding thoughts revolve around three main theoretical implications. First is the complexity of processes of belonging and exclusion in a new destination. On the one hand, Sheung Shui marriage migrants experienced social isolation in their everyday life, which was closely related to Hong Kong people's fear of their city's future. On the other hand, the legal citizenship granted them many of the social benefits that they lacked as rural *hukou* (registration status) holders or rural labour migrants. Furthermore, despite the fact that they are confined by social and cultural boundaries, the marriage migrants also manage to negotiate these obstacles in their everyday lives. Hong Kong's social benefits, especially the education system which allows them to build 'quality' into their children, contribute to their feelings of belonging. Second, I examine the complex and changing meanings of im/mobility as an interpretive construct, and its implications for anthropological studies of migration. Last, I discuss the changing 'nature' of the Hong Kong-China border for the migrant women, their children, and for Hong Kong people more generally.

Methodological issues

Like other anthropological studies, this study began when I realized that the phenomenon of cross-border marriages between Hong Kong men and mainland women was a manifestation of unique socio-political circumstances, and became eager to learn more about it. After my daughter began to attend a local kindergarten in Sheung Shui, I was invited to have breakfast with several mainland marriage migrants whose children attended the same kindergarten. I quickly realized that Sheung Shui was in fact a fascinating site for an anthropological enquiry. The group I spent most of my mornings with from that first time onwards included six women, but often other marriage migrants who lived nearby also joined. All of the women were

originally from mainland China; they were between the ages of 33-40, had completed nine years of education, were married to a Hong Kong man, and had one or two children. During the period I conducted my first fieldwork, between 2010 and 2011, most of the children were of kindergarten age. In many of the public and private kindergartens in Sheung Shui, a half day of kindergarten lasted between 9 AM and 12 PM, and a full day ended at 5 PM. Mainly due to financial reasons, all but two families sent their children for half days of kindergarten. Most of the mothers' day was dedicated to taking care of their children; only during the few hours of the morning sessions did they have time away from them.

Almost every morning after they brought their child/ren to the kindergarten, the women went to have breakfast together, and it soon became my everyday habit as well. We often went to a traditional Cantonese tea house and spent between one to three hours eating, drinking, and chatting. These breakfasts were an important part of the Sheung Shui marriage migrants' schedule and at the restaurant we usually encountered other groups of mainland marriage migrants who also met there for breakfasts.

As my research progressed it became clear that the particularity of the (border) town of Sheung Shui enabled me to witness the significant changes Hong Kong has undergone in the past few years, and to unravel the complexities of the Hong Kong-China border. The changing 'nature' of Sheung Shui, from a residential space to a research site, brought up a challenge: How would my decision to explore the phenomenon of cross-border marriages influence my relationships with the mainland marriage migrants I had come to know? How could I become an ethnographer? While numerous studies have been written on the meaningful friendships that often emerge during the ethnographic process, and on the complexities that such relationships often bring with them (e.g., Coffey, 2002; Rabinow, 2007[1977]), few studies explore what happens when friends become informants. As opposed to being an outsider researcher who enters the field, Taylor (2011) wrote about being an 'intimate insider' – a situation that 'reshapes the researcher's role in and experiences of her own culture and those within it' (Taylor, 2011: 3). Although I did not know the marriage migrants for a long time before I began my 'official fieldwork', our personal circumstances as migrants, women, and mothers brought us closer and, similar to Taylor (2011), I often felt like an 'intimate insider'. As an ethnographer, it was not an easy task to balance between my personal commitment to the women and my professional interest in their everyday lives as a scholar. Yet, after discussing my planned research with several of the women, I was glad to discover that they were actually quite enthusiastic about the research and were seeking

to contribute. Coffey (1999) has pointed out that friendships should be regarded as a positive contribution to ethnographic studies:

> Relationships we create in the field raise our awareness of the ethnographic dichotomies of, for example, involvement versus detachment, stranger verses friend, distance verses intimacy [...] Friendships can help to clarify the inherent tensions of the fieldwork experience and sharpen our abilities for critical reflection [...] They do affect the ethnographer's gaze and it is important that that should be so. (Coffey, 1999: 47, cited in Taylor, 2011: 4)

My attempts to balance between my personal relationships with the marriage migrants and the endeavour to learn as much as possible about their everyday lives is in many ways similar to the dilemma of balancing personal and professional circumstances mentioned in Goldstein-Gidoni's (2012) study about Japanese housewives:

> Only in retrospect, and only after allowing myself the removal of what I have come to see as the artificial border between the personal and the professional, could I realize the relevance of my own personal experience as a young mother to my 'professional' interest. (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2012: 21)

My changing role from a friend to an ethnographer also highlights the fact that my preliminary position in the field enabled the birth of this study. Similar to Connie Sutton's (1998) discussion of never choosing motherhood as a topic of research, I often felt that the field 'chose me'. My personal circumstances, mainly the presence of my daughter, was most probably the main reason I was invited to breakfast for the first time. Yet, my daughter not only enabled me to enter the field, but she also played a key role in the study. In retrospect, the marriage migrants' children were a key element in their everyday lived experiences and were very important for understanding their motivations for migrating across the border and settling in Hong Kong permanently. As I further discuss in Chapter 4, Sheung Shui marriage migrants' reaction to my parenting methods was different from the reactions I received from Beijing mothers (Binah-Pollak, 2014). In this sense, their personal parental ambitions were reflected not only in their educational practices but also in their perceptions of my parenting and education methods.

During her fieldwork in extreme conditions of poverty and infant mortality in Brazil, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1993) never excluded her daughter from

the research, even at times when it became emotionally difficult for her daughter. Similarly, Poveda (2009) discusses the idea of offspring as research collaborators. While an ethnographer's personal circumstances are often relevant to the professional endeavour, conducting participant observation with children also entails certain problems that are not present in other research settings (Poveda, 2009). Over the course of my fieldwork, I often felt situated between these two descriptions. On the one hand, the presence of my daughter made it much easier to attend the afternoon gatherings, learn about the local kindergarten, and discuss their everyday dilemmas as mothers with the marriage migrants. On the other hand, it was difficult for my daughter to learn Cantonese, make friends, and adjust to Hong Kong's strict education system. Overall, she experienced hardships in Hong Kong, but still continued to be part of the fieldwork and the research.

The phenomenon of cross-border marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men is linked to several different sites. I therefore conducted multi-sited ethnography and followed 'the thread[s] of cultural process' (Marcus, 1995: 97). In a comparative study about pregnancy in Japan and Israel, Ivry visualized pregnant women's experiences 'as a social path, a journey with stations' (Ivry, 2010: 22). Following the ideas of Marcus (1995) and Ivry (2010), I traced the 'route' of the women and 'followed' it. This route included ethnographic work among two major social groups, Sheung Shui families and young Hong Kong activists and artists.

The study is based on ten months of fieldwork conducted in Hong Kong and Shenzhen between 2010 and 2011. In addition, I conducted shorter stretches of fieldwork in 2012 (one month), 2013 (one month), and 2015 (two weeks). The ethnographic work included participant observation and interviews (informal, unstructured, and semi-structured) of families that included a mainland wife, a Hong Kong husband, and one or more children. Most of my informants were families who lived in Sheung Shui, a town in the New Territories, Hong Kong. Studies about cross-border marriages between mainland China and Hong Kong often describe the women as 'mainlanders'. For example, Newendorp (2008, 2010) refers to the women in her study as 'mainland immigrant wives'. As opposed to many of the mainland marriage immigrants who reside in Hong Kong's relatively poor districts, the women I came to know in Sheung Shui did not experience concrete financial difficulties. In this sense, they were not a 'representative group' of 'mainland marriage migrants' in Hong Kong. However, the term 'Sheung Shui marriage migrants' that I use throughout the book challenges 'mainland marriage migrants' as a fixed term, and it situates social class as an important factor in the analysis. Further, the term 'Sheung Shui marriage

migrants' also signifies the importance of legal citizenship, and underlines the women's mobility pattern as a journey. The second part of my fieldwork included participant observation and interviews with young Hong Kong social activists and artists. Through their daily activities, this group of young Hong Kongers strived to preserve the social and cultural boundaries between Hong Kong and mainland China by emphasizing Hong Kong's unique local identity.

Like the journey of the marriage migrants, my ethnographic inquiry did not have a specific starting or ending point. After leaving the field I continued to maintain 'thick' communication with key informants through email, Facebook, and We Chat online chats. The longitudinal nature of my study enabled me to witness changes in the women's everyday practices in Hong Kong, which proved to be very meaningful for my understanding of their experiences as wives, mothers, and migrants. The conversations and interviews with the women were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, and conversations with the social activists and artists were conducted in English. Unless mentioned otherwise, the names used throughout this book are pseudonyms.