



The Otherness of Adopted Daughters-in-Law: Analyzing the Alternative Mother– Daughter Relationship in Taiwanese Literature

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ABSTRACT

The present study discusses the situation of adopted daughters-in-law in Taiwan. Two novels and six short stories are selected for analyzing the custom of raising adopted daughters-in-law, which is specified to the Han society till nowadays. Moreover, Third Feminisms and Western theories of mother-daughter relationship are used to examine in detail the adoption of daughters-in-law and particularly female subjectivity in Taiwan. After interpreting the novels and short stories, it can be inferred that the relationship between an adopted daughter-in-law and her adoptive mother was actually more similar to that between a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law than a biological mother-daughter relationship. Hence, adopted daughters-in-law tended to experience unfavourable treatment. Moreover, the mother-daughter relationship between an adopted daughter and her biological mother was disconnected in a social structure characterized by a preference for sons over daughters. The adopted daughters-in-law are the sacrifices of the unfair social system. The real source of oppression for women is the intricately designed patriarchal society. However, some

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exceptions in the texts also remind us that if we are more aware of the problem, we will be able to build a bond between adoptive mothers and adopted daughters, and together we can fight against the patriarchal society.

Keywords: *Adopted daughters-in-law; Taiwanese literature; Third World Feminisms; female subjectivity; otherness; mother-daughter relationships.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Taiwanese literature has attracted extensive academic attention, and the media (e.g., TV drama series) have frequently featured local topics to present scenes and moments of life from Taiwan's past to television audience. Various plots depict how girls adopted to be future daughters-in-law were abused, implying the previously common practice of daughter-in-law adoption in Taiwan. In Taiwanese culture, little daughter-in-law adoption is categorized as adopting a daughter. Although adopted daughters-in-law (or *sim-pua* in Minnan language, literally meaning "little daughter-in-law") are also regarded as daughters to a certain extent, their lives and how they are treated in the adoptive family can differ tremendously. According to my knowledge and reading of Western literary theories, Western studies on mother-daughter relationships have mostly focused on analyzing the attachment between biological mothers and daughters, but neglected the family tie and psychological workings between adoptive mothers and adopted daughters. Recently, when reading *Grandmas' Stories*, I found to my surprise that adopting daughters was extremely common in my grandmother's generation. In fact, my grandmother had been an adopted daughter as well. Therefore, I became deeply interested in the practice of daughter adoption and related literary works. After investigating relevant data and records, I was surprised to find that among all types of daughter adoption, the custom and problem of daughter-in-law adoption are unique to the Han people. Accordingly, I will focus on daughter-in-law adoption in this article, hoping to shed new light on the studies of mother-daughter relationships from a perspective alternative to Western perspectives.

The background on the daughter-in-law adoption is going to be introduced for readers to further understand literary works on this custom firstly in this paper. Next, I will analyze the texts to explore the relationship between daughters in law and adoptive mothers in Taiwanese literature, as well as the various problems,

originated from this custom. Then the tradition is compared with the adoption in the West in terms of the mother-daughter relationship and the attitude towards adoption. Finally, an analysis is presented to explore the relationship between daughters in law and adoptive mothers in Taiwanese literature as well as the various problems originated from this custom. The oral literary Works *Grandmas' Stories* [1] and the *Disappearing Grandmas in Taiwan* [2], Peng Hsiao-Yen's novel, *Shun-Niang* (literally "Shung-Ying, the Girl with Single Transverse Palmar Creases") [3] and Liao Hui-Ying's novel *The Falling Lotus* [4] are included for analyzing the problem of daughter in law adaption.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DAUGHTER-IN-LAW ADOPTION

According to Yang Cui's historical point of view [5] and Lin Mei-Rong's anthropological study [6], the system of daughter-in-law adoption originated from the unreasonable system of bride price. The Ming and Qing governments imposed strict regulations on coastal residents in China who intended to go to Taiwan. Particularly, the governments banned Han women from going to Taiwan. These policies not only resulted in an exceptionally small number of Han women on the island but also created real difficulties for men in Taiwan to marry Han women at that time. This circumstance gradually gave rise to the custom of paying exorbitant bride prices, a practice that lasted for an extended period and caused profound problems. The problem of bride price had been one of the major problems in Taiwan during the period between the late Qing to the entire period of Japanese colonization. Therefore, "families in the middle and upper classes competed in the amount of bride price and dowry, whereas parents in the lower class married their daughters to collect exorbitant bride prices, thus transforming the problem of bride price into one involving the buying and selling of humans" [5]. Moreover, some parents exchanged their daughters with other families' daughters to save on wedding expenses and bride prices,

treating the adopted daughters as candidates for future daughters-in-law and thus creating the system of daughter-in-law adoption.

Originally, adopted daughters were different from adopted daughters-in-law because the former was raised as a daughter rather than a bride, whereas the latter was adopted to be a daughter-in-law to the adoptive parents and a wife to their son to bear children and continue their family line. The goals of adopting daughters and daughters-in-law were greatly different. However, by the time of Japanese colonization, adopted daughters were gradually confused with adopted daughters-in-law, maids, and prostitutes. Girls adopted as daughters could actually become a daughter, daughter-in-law, maid, or even prostitute. Therefore, the system of daughter adoption in Taiwan referred to the generalized practice of adopting and raising a girl. The system of daughter adoption is inseparable from Taiwan's immigrant history. According to history, this system had been practiced in China for a long time. Generally, people gave up their daughters for adoption for financial or superstitious reasons, or for enhancing family ties and interpersonal relationships. By contrast, families typically adopt daughters to save on wedding expenditures, increase available labor, compensate for the loss of children they experience, or even for creating joyful events that would bring luck or to increase the adoptive parents' possibility of expecting a son and thus an heir. Nevertheless, daughter-in-law adoption became prevalent in Taiwan because the three bans on migration to Taiwan during the Qing dynasty resulted in men outnumbering women, increasing women's value in the marriage market and thus the bride price amount. Accordingly, the practice of adopting daughters became prevalent. This practice became most common in the Japanese colonization period; it was also during this period when the practice changed and deviated. Because of legal requirements, people started to report their adopted daughters-in-law as daughters to household registration officials. Because maintaining maids was banned, consequently, these girls were registered as adopted daughters. Finally, due to the introduction of the Japanese geisha, girls purchased to be prostitutes were registered as adopted daughters as well. Hence, women became seriously objectified [5].

In the daughter-adoption system, daughters-in-law adoption is also a type of marriage custom, generally known as a marriage of adopted

daughters-in-law. No grand and public ceremonies are held for this type of marriages; instead, only simple ceremonies within the family are conducted to enact this marriage (or *sat-tso-tui* in Minnan language, literally meaning "being pushed together"). This type of marriages is typically referred to as "minor marriage," whereas the formal process of marrying a wife is called a major marriage. Generally, a major marriage involves formal marital ceremonies, and the families of the bride and groom remain in contact and even provide mutual financial support. Although a minor marriage is more economical than a major marriage, the two families become completely unrelated after the payment for adoption; both families do not gain further reputation, long-term social relationships, and economic benefits. Some families choose a minor marriage for economic reasons, whereas some do for other reasons. According to Arthur P. Wolf, some well-to-do families also adopted and raised daughters-in-law to prevent possible conflicts between mothers- and daughters-in-law from dividing the extended family. By doing so, they expected the adoptive mother and the adopted daughter-in-law to develop a quasi-biological mother-daughter relationship and get along well when the girl grows up to marry the son officially. In addition, being unable to return to her birth family, the adopted daughter-in-law would become more identified with the adoptive family. Nevertheless, sometimes the bride and groom in a marriage may lose sexual appeal to each other because they were raised as brothers and sisters, according to anthropologist Westermarck's theory of incest taboo. Moreover, the son may refuse and would have to be forced by his parents to accept a minor marriage should he instead wish to have a major marriage that guarantees decency and economic benefits. Consequently, the forced marriage tends to fall apart. In addition, the cases of adopted daughters-in-law being abused, forced into prostitution, forced to marry another man were frequent as well [6]. In short, adopted daughters-in-law mostly face a tough life ahead.

3. MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP AND ADOPTION IN THE WEST

Western studies on mother-daughter relationship have mostly focused on psychoanalytic discussion. Those emphasizing mother-daughter connection have mostly traced such connection back to the daughter's experience and memory in the mother's womb explored the period of pre-oedipal complex and analyzed through

psychoanalysis the identity transformation after the daughter enters a patriarchal system [7]. This type of discussion typically emphasized the connection between biological mothers and daughters, which is inadequate in explaining the relationship structure and personality development of as well as the mutual interaction between an adoptive mother and an adopted daughter [8]. Moreover, studies on the aforementioned topics are also lacking. Therefore, studies on daughter-in-law adoption as an alternative adoption and marriage system unique to the Han culture are scant.

The intention of adopting children in the West is often contrary to that in China. Generally, people in the West adopt children simply to experience being a parent, raising children, and learning to be a parent and enjoy the moments with the children [9]. Contrarily, Chinese people adopt and raise children mostly to produce an heir or have someone to look after them when they grow old. Out of self-interest, Chinese parents impose more requirements and strict restrictions on their foster children in comparison with their Western counterparts. Particularly, adopted daughters and daughters-in-law face considerable demands and pressure from their adoptive parents.

4. LITERARY IMAGES OF ADOPTED DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW AND AN INVESTIGATION INTO MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS

In both oral literature and fiction, the images of adopted daughters-in-law can generally be divided into two types: *sim-pua-ong* (literally “daughter-in-law king,” meaning daughters-in-law being treated and loved like a true daughter) and *sim-pua* (i.e., wretched, mistreated daughters-in-law). Unfortunately, the cases of the latter typically outnumbered those of the former. *Sim-pua-ong* are raised as daughters, and most of them are breastfed by the adoptive mothers, and thus are loved and cherished as a biological daughter. Moreover, these adopted daughters-in-law sometimes receive more favorable treatment than biological daughters or general daughters-in-law do because daughters are to marry and become daughters-in-law to another family someday, whereas an adopted daughter-in-law will always stay with her adoptive parents (i.e., her future parents-in-law), support the family, and produce heirs. By contrast, daughters-in-law wedded through major marriages lack the attachment developed from childhood to their parents-in-law, thus experiencing more

difficulties in establishing a rapport with their mothers-in-law. However, if the adoptive parents are harsh and mean, then the adopted daughter-in-law becomes equivalent to a maid, slave, or production machine. Moreover, she may be frequently abused or even sold to other families or institutions. In addition, the adopted daughter-in-law is also deprived of the opportunity to establish an attachment to her biological mother. Each of the aforementioned scenarios is to be found and examined in the following textual analysis. All the positive and negative experiences of being an adopted daughter-in-law basically arise from the deep-rooted patriarchal thinking in China, which affects women’s fates substantially.

Almost all adopted daughters-in-law cannot exempt themselves from housework or farming labor that usually entails physical and language abuse. For example, because of her father’s addiction to opium that led to poverty, the protagonist in “Grandma in Zhaodianwei” in *Grandmas’ Stories* was sold to another family requiring labor as an adopted daughter-in-law for six dollars when she was six years old. The protagonist in the story describes, “When I first came to the Chen family, I had to do everything including fetching water and rinse rice. Besides, I had to get up at five in the morning, fold the quilts, and then start chopping firewood to build a fire for cooking. I would get beaten on my head with a fist if I made mistakes” [1]. After the protagonist married the son of the adoptive family at 20 years old, she had been completely devoted to the family. She had to rise up early to prepare cake, make sesame oil, serve incoming customers, and cook for the entire family. At night, she was responsible for washing all family members and workers’ clothes before she could go to sleep at three in the following morning. This amount of labor for housework and business had already exceeded the ordinary workload bearable for a single person. In addition to work, she gave birth to and raised many children, which also depleted her physical strength and health.

The female protagonist in “Discontinuous Happiness” was given by her father to his friend, and was adored by the entire adoptive family, particularly the grandfather-in-law. According to her account, “Even his biological children and grandchildren were less adored than an adopted daughter-in-law by the grandfather” [1]. By the time she was five to six years old, the protagonist was allowed to drink milk from a baby bottle.

After marriage, her husband had extramarital affairs and left home. Consequently, she was forced to return to her birth family, supporting the birth family while earning money to raise her first daughter living with the adoptive family. Out of guilt, the protagonist's adoptive mother actively sought another husband for her adopted daughter-in-law, who was later persuaded to accept this arrangement. However, after a short period of a laborious life but happy marriage, the relationship ended after the husband died of liver disease. Thereafter, she had to rely on herself to raise her five children. Unfortunately, by the time her children grew up, she became ill and died because of overwork. Regardless, her adoptive mother did try her best to help her.

In "The River of Time," the protagonist was sold to be an adopted daughter-in-law due to her paternal uncle's resentment against her. The protagonist was loved and adored by the adoptive family; however, her marriage with her adoptive brother was broken off because of his reluctance to marry her. Afterwards, the adoptive mother suffered a mental disorder because of her unfaithful husband and had to be looked after until her death solely by the protagonist, who later returned to her birth family. After returning to her birth home, the protagonist still had to do strenuous work including all housework (e.g., washing clothes, cooking, feeding chicken and ducks, herding cattle, and looking after children) and farming (e.g., picking tea leaves, reaping rice, and harvesting sugar cane) after returning to her birth home. At the age of 20, she met a married man and gave birth to one boy and five girls. The relationship continued for two decades until the man's death. At the age of 42, the protagonist married a man and gave birth to one boy and one girl. However, the family became too large to sustain and the relationship underwent constant fights and quarrels because both the protagonist and her husband had already had children before this marriage. Although the protagonist was much adored by her adoptive family, she basically led an extremely strenuous life [1].

In *The Disappearing Grandmas in Taiwan*, the protagonist depicted in "Adopted daughter: Weng Huang Zhou" was a mistreated and unloved *sim-pua*. Because of her birth family's preference for sons over daughters, she was given to another family when she was approximately one year old. However, she married another man because she did not get along well with her designated husband. In contrast to all her sisters, who were

adored by their adoptive families, Weng had to herd cattle and work continuously since she was nine years old. In addition, she had to withstand hunger or brutal beating if she failed to pick the required amounts of tea leaves. Moreover, she had to wash everyone's clothes in the adoptive family and would be beaten if the clothes were not considered clean. Since Weng was five or six years old, she had to build a fire early in the morning and carry water from a faraway well to fill a large tank. When she was 14 years old, she was required to take turns with her sister-in-law to cook, feed the chicken, and work outside with her adoptive father. Weng was beaten brutally if the adoptive family were not satisfied with her performance. Nobody in the family felt sympathetic for her. The adoptive mother pinched and bruised her frequently; moreover, the mother had used a kitchen knife handle to hit Weng, causing heavy bleeding and later a lump on the head that never went away. Weng usually wore tattered clothes, and the ones given by her birth family would be taken away by her adoptive sisters. Although the birth family was aware of this condition, they were not willing to intervene because they feared of being complained as "bad relatives by marriage." Instead, the birth parents thought their daughter can only accept her fate even if "she was abused to death." The birth family was wealthy and reputed, and therefore they were reluctant to jeopardize their reputation for a girl. Later, the adoptive brother married another woman rather than Weng, who was married off at the age of 21, when someone proposed to her. The adoptive mother could not wait to marry her off. Weng only brought two pairs of undergarments and no dowry when she married. After marriage, Weng was frequently beaten by her mother-in-law and husband. In addition, she was blamed for not giving birth until she was 25 years old. Concurrently, her workload remained the same, and she also took on the same amount of menial work as the men did. Afterwards, Weng's husband died, and she had to work hard to raise her children. Finally, as her children grew up, Weng's life gradually improved. Her life in the constant beating, scolding, abuse, and menial labor passed [2].

By contrast, the fate of the protagonist in "The Wife of a Taiwanese Imperial Japan Serviceman: Hsiao Chen Feng" was completely different. Hsiao was sent to be breastfed by the adoptive mother because the first baby girl of the adoptive mother died prematurely; thus, she was sent to soothe the bereaved mother. In addition, Hsiao was sent away by her birth family because her

biological mother intended to save her breast milk for Hsiao's older brother. Hsiao led a comfortable life in the adoptive family and would have been a so-called *sim-pua-ong* if she was not eventually raised as a daughter. Her adoptive mother and grandmother doted on her, refused to let her work, and frequently took her out to play. In a time when most people walked barefoot, Hsiao often had shoes to wear. Her adoptive parents were at her disposal, tolerating all her tempers. The labor services assigned to her during the war were taken over by her adoptive parents because they could not bear letting her work. When Hsiao turned 18 years old, she fell in love with a man and married him. After marriage, although her parents-in-law adored her, she must look after all the housework and thus became busy and had to toil. After Hsiao gave birth to her first daughter, her husband was dispatched to Southeast Asia as a Taiwanese serviceman for the Imperial Japanese Army. Concurrently, Hsiao was evacuated to the countryside and led a relatively peaceful life. After her husband survived the war and came back to Taiwan, they had another five children, and their life gradually improved. After her children established themselves, Hsiao eventually became a grandmother and began to enjoy hiking, exercising, and folk dancing in her free time, leading a carefree and happy life. She was the luckier one among these adopted daughters-in-law who later became grandmothers [2].

"A Mother Giving up Her Daughters for Adoption: Zeng Lin A-Zhu" is another story worth mentioning [2]. It depicts from the perspective of a birth mother the experience of giving away daughters for adoption and their individual fate in the adoptive families. Zeng had given birth to three sons and seven daughters, and all the daughters except for the oldest and youngest ones were given to other families due to her poor financial conditions. The third daughter was adopted and cherished by a friend of the family. After the daughter died of illness, the adoptive family held a ghost marriage for her, formally marrying her to the foster son they adopted later. Zeng's second daughter was adopted as a daughter-in-law by Zeng's third sister-in-law of her maternal family, and the daughter gave informed consent to this arrangement. The second daughter was much adored by the adoptive family (i.e., a *sim-pua-ong*). When she was ill, her adoptive mother(-in-law) took care of her day and night. However, after she grew up, her adoptive brother was unwilling to marry her.

Although the mother(-in-law) was reluctant, she was forced to return the girl to her birth family for another marriage arrangement. Zeng's fourth daughter had been given up for adoption twice. In the first adoption, she was bought back because of not being loved by the adoptive family. She was given up for adoption the second time in the hope of securing a better life due to the poor financial condition of the birth family. However, although she was adored by the second adoptive family, she was frequently ill and was later sent back to the birth family. Zeng's fifth daughter was given up for adoption by Zeng's youngest sister-in-law. Originally, the fifth daughter was adored by her adoptive mother; however, her older sister-in-law, who was also an adopted daughter-in-law in the family, bullied her out of jealousy. Moreover, the adoptive mother developed a different personality after having a stroke, frequently beating her and giving her substantial work to do. After graduating from the elementary school, she had to earn a living for the adoptive family and give all her salary to her adoptive mother while frequently having to go hungry. Later, when she fell in love with a man and was about to marry him, her adoptive family requested for a considerable bride price, as if they were selling her. However, Zeng did not dare to reclaim her daughter for fear of complaints as a "bad relative by marriage." Contrarily, Zeng's sixth daughter was a *sim-pua-ong* because the adoptive family did not have a daughter and treated her well. The only downside was that she could not fulfil her wish of receiving an education. After growing up, she refused to marry her adoptive brother because they were not romantically attracted to each other. Instead, she developed a relationship with another man. Her adoptive father (-in-law), being dissatisfied with her behavior because he too was married under the daughter-in-law adoption system, did not have a satisfactory relationship and insisted on marrying her off as a daughter. Although Zeng gave up her daughters for adoption due to poor financial conditions, she also adopted other people's daughter as her daughter-in-law out of the worry that poverty may deprive her sons of the chance to secure a wife. In addition, she thought that adopting and breastfeeding a baby girl can help develop a strong mother-daughter bond between them, and the girl would assist with the housework in the future. She treated her adopted daughter-in-law better than she did with her oldest daughter. However, the daughter-in-law, who was originally arranged to marry Zeng's oldest son, married the second son instead. In short, although many

daughters given out for adoption experienced different fates, they all blamed their birth mother for giving them up when they saw her. Therefore, it can be inferred that daughters would still rather live with their birth mothers regardless of their mothers' poor financial conditions.

In *Duanzhang Shun-Niang*, A-Cai is Shun-Niang's adopted daughter-in-law [3]. She was adopted because Shun-Niang's oldest son Jin-Shui had suffered from epilepsy and needed a baby girl with luck and longevity as a daughter-in-law to bring good fortune. Shun-Niang was still breastfeeding her second son Jin-Shi then, and therefore she breastfed A-Cai as well. Since then, Shun-Niang had treated A-Cai better than she did her own daughters. Shun-Niang let A-Cai wear beautiful clothes and accessories, combed her hair every day, and agreed to exempt her from foot binding because she could not bear hurting A-Cai. Nevertheless, the arrangement of marrying A-Cai to Jin-Shui had always troubled Shun-Niang (192) because it was the only matter that Shun-Niang must insist on despite her usual compromise to A-Cai's wishes. As a tough and unyielding woman, A-Cai made major financial decisions in the adoptive family and was a good helper to Shun-Niang; however, she was prone to suspicion, jealousy, and selfishness. A-Cai tried but failed to run away from the arranged marriage. After marrying Jin-Shui, A-Cai gave birth to three daughters and then one son two months after Jin-Shui's death. Although A-Cai already had an affair with a worker in the adoptive family, Shun-Niang tried her best to defend her and identified with her loneliness and sorrow. The mother-daughter relationship between them was harmonious and moving in that the mother adored the daughter and the daughter respected the mother.

The female protagonist in *The Falling Lotus*, Xu Lian-Hua, was not as fortunate as A-Cai. Lian-Hua was adopted as a daughter-in-law by the Liu family [4]. She married the family's second son, Mao-Sheng, who later fell in love with a prostitute, divorced Lian-Hua, and took away her children. Lian-Hua's older sister-in-law Jin-Feng at her adoptive family once said, "Lian-Hua has to do all housework but has never experienced any happiness in this family. In the eight years after she married your unworthy younger brother, she had no regular meals and was beaten and scolded by him. That wretch divorced her immediately after property division, and she'd probably not get a cent from him" [4]. Afterwards, Lian-Hua was looked after by Jin-Feng, who

arranged another marriage for her. Lian-Hua enjoyed a happy marriage for 10 years until her husband died and left Lian-Hua, their adopted daughter, and a son behind. The adopted daughter Xiu-Zi was close to her adoptive mother Lian-Hua and offered her great help in doing housework and taking care of her younger stepbrother. After her adoptive stepfather died, Xiu-Zi mended socks to provide financial assistance to her adoptive family and even planned to stay single for the rest of her life for Lian-Hua. Lian-Hua also treated Xiu-Zi well and even better than she did her own children [4]. When Xiu-Zi was faced with a premarital pregnancy, her adoptive mother and stepfather adopted her daughter as their own to retain her reputation. Later, they arranged another marriage for Xiu-Zi. After marriage, Xiu-Zi lived a happy life and supported the five family members of Lian-Hua with her husband. Afterwards, their livelihoods improved gradually. Dao-San, Lian-Hua's son and Mei-Jin, Xiu-Zi's daughter born out of wedlock individually married and established their own families, and Lian-Hua reunited with Jin-Cai, her oldest son from her previous marriage (their second son died prematurely at the age of five). Finally, Lian-Hua having weathered through years of hardship welcomed a life of comfort and joy. This mutually supportive relationship between an adoptive mother and adopted daughter surpassed many biological mother-daughter relationships.

Among the aforementioned eight texts, the short oral stories mostly present a troubled and intense relationship between adoptive mothers and adopted daughters, whereas the two novels present a relatively positive one. This difference, in my opinion, originates from the fact that the protagonists in the novels are adoptive mothers. Nevertheless, all literary works discussed in this chapter have faithfully presented the low status of most adopted women in the society of that time [10].

In short, the aforementioned accounts reveal the following characteristics of adopted daughters-in-law. Most of them have to undertake hard physical labor and face the destiny of becoming a production machine for producing an heir. For an adoptive family, the purpose of adopting a child daughter-in-law is to increase available manpower or prepare a future wife for the son [11]. A child daughter-in-law must undertake the responsibilities of a daughter-in-law, namely undertaking a huge amount of housework and giving birth to children to continue the husband's

family line. Either adored or abused, a daughter-in-law cannot be exempt from these responsibilities [12]. In fact, adopted daughters-in-law were commonly abused mentally or physically. The pattern of relationships between the child daughter-in-law and the adoptive mother is not only related to the tradition of mothers-in-law abusing daughters-in-law in China but also, as I believe, closely associated with the blurred definitions of adopted daughters-in-law, adopted daughters, and maids in Taiwan during Japanese colonization. Typically, adoptive mothers rarely treated their adopted daughters-in-law (i.e., *sim-pua-ong*) as their own. These adoptive mothers loved their adopted daughters-in-law mostly because they had breastfed them or because they had not given birth to any daughter and thus raised them as their own [13].

Regarding the relationships between adopted daughters-in-law and their biological mothers as described in the aforementioned texts, the birth families gave up their daughters for adoption usually because of their preference for sons over daughters or their poor financial conditions [14]. By doing so, the birth families could obtain monetary compensation (i.e., human trafficking in disguise), reduce expenses, or enable the adoption and raising of a daughter-in-law to be their son's future wife. Therefore, although the natural mother-daughter bond may be strong, men's concern for continuing the family line was prioritized, and daughters were inevitably sacrificed to fulfil this mission in the face of a deep-rooted patriarchal ideology [15]. Moreover, social norms outweighed family affection, which can be clearly observed in the account that the birth families did not dare to reclaim their abused daughters. The birth families would be deemed "bad relatives by marriage" if they went into conflict with the adoptive families for their daughters. To avoid incurring an unfavorable family reputation, the birth families would let their daughters be abused to death rather than come forward to request fair treatment for them. Accordingly, these stories and accounts reveal how concepts and public opinions in a patriarchal society suppress and distort the natural mother-daughter bond [16].

According to Wen-Yu Chiang in her *You Yan You Yu* (literally "*Words and Remarks*"), "The *sim-pua* system resulted in the mobility of the female population; however, this mobility was not directly related to a family's financial condition." [17] Birth parents would adopt a daughter-in-law while giving up their own daughter for adoption in

the name of financial difficulties. In other words, the economic burden of the family was not alleviated. "Therefore, the buying and selling behaviour in exchanging one's daughter for a daughter-in-law still originated from men's greatest mission of continuing family lines and the systems derived from this structure entrenched in a patriarchal society. In other words, women exist only for the accomplishment of this goal" [17]. Moreover, some daughters were given up for adoption because fortune-tellers "foresaw" their grim fates to be improved in an adoptive family. However, these daughters suffered an even grimmer fate, and their birth families were afraid of coming forward for them due to the fear of criticism. "The importance of 'good reputation' seems to greatly outweigh the basic value and dignity of human life" [17]. Adopted daughters-in-law faced an uncertain fate in the adoptive family and disconnection from the birth family. The multilayered workings of a patriarchal society were merciless on adopted daughters-in-law, who faced tremendous difficulties in maintaining a mother-daughter bond. This scenario presented by Taiwanese literature differs greatly from the mother-daughter relationship and female connection explored in the Western literature.

5. CONCLUSION

According to the discussions in the previous sections, it can be inferred that the relationship between an adopted daughter-in-law and her adoptive mother was actually more similar to that between a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law than a mother-daughter relationship. Hence, adopted daughters-in-law tended to experience unfavorable treatment. Moreover, the mother-daughter relationship between an adopted daughter and her biological mother was disconnected in a social structure characterized by a preference for sons over daughters. Adopted daughters-in-law were regarded as daughters already married off and severed from their birth families. Consequently, the birth mother would rather raise a daughter-in-law for her son than raise her own daughter, let alone initiate a conflict with the adoptive family for her daughter. In short, except for the lucky few, adopted daughters-in-law faced extremely unfavorable circumstances.

According to Chiang [17], the conflicts between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law, a mother's disregard for her daughter, an adoptive mother's abuse of her adopted daughter, and the

antagonism between sisters-in-law and between brothers' wives do not indicate that women's ultimate adversaries are women themselves. Instead, these women enable us to realize how the family structure and social systems based on gender inequality in a patriarchal society have transformed the family into a field where women oppress one another because they have fewer resources and must rely on men. Through the analysis of adopted daughters-in-law, we should observe from these seemingly outdated and extreme social phenomena presented in these stories and novels to highlight the various facets of how women may have been exploited in a family. By doing so, we can reveal the fact that the real source of oppression for women is the intricately designed patriarchal society. Furthermore, I hope to present the possibility of maintaining a close mother-daughter bond in all adversities through the positive examples found in these texts. Finally, I firmly believe that as long as women can be aware of their positions and cooperate with one another, they stand a chance of fighting against patriarchal oppression in the modern society, be they mothers and daughters, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, or female companions.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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