3

Changing Intergenerational Transmission amid Political and Economic Liberalization

The first wedding feast I attended on Kinmen was hosted by a family from the village where I stayed in 2013. I had been invited by the groom's aunt without knowing anything about the newlyweds. As at similar events, I was brought up to date while seated with nine elderly village women around a table at the wedding feast. These women told me that the groom was thirty-five years old, who worked in a high-tech company in Taiwan, and the bride was five years senior to him and was pursuing her doctoral degree. A woman next to me mentioned in a lowered voice that the bride was pregnant. Without further comments on the newlyweds, these women all said that the groom's widowed mother could now feel relieved as her only son had finally settled down. One village woman sitting at another table, who had volunteered to be my *meiren* (matchmaker) when we first met, came by and said, 'See, it's not too late to get married. You can marry a man younger than you' (I was in my early thirties at the time).

Despite local women's diversifying intimate experiences after 1949, as described in Chapter 2, this delayed first marriage, and the fact that the bride's education and age were above those of the groom, as well as the pre-marital pregnancy, would probably have been unthinkable decades before. However, my elderly female interlocutors appeared to downplay or dismiss these factors. Instead, they emphasized the value of marriage closely tied to parents' duty of seeing their children settle down and, in the case of a son, the continuity of the family line. I describe this local flexible but also conservative response to marital change as 'creative conservatism', a suggestive term coined by Magee (2021) in her discussion of marriage counselling in the US. In her research in Christian communities in Lynchburg, Virginia, Magee observed that conservative dis-

Endnotes for this chapter begin on page 85.

courses about stable family structures and anxieties about divorce go together with creative ways of thinking about what marriage is. For example, despite the widespread religious conceptualization of a married couple as 'a unit', people seeking counselling were advised to work on a happy and successful marriage by pursuing intimacy and togetherness with their spouses while maintaining their respective individualities. 'Creative conservatism' captures how these Christian communities appreciate marriage as something that must change with the times and respond to 'new dangers in the world' through creative approaches (Magee 2021: 73).

In this chapter, I use creative conservatism as a suggestive lens onto the changes taking place in intergenerational transmission and marriage in Kinmen, where the conservative goal of preserving the patriline remains remarkably strong today. I explore creative conservatism as a transformative aspect of kinship in producing new generations of persons in conjunction with shifting global and domestic political economies since the 1970s. As described in this book's Introduction, from 1949 to 1992, Kinmen islanders experienced severe political and economic constraints under the system of military rule. By contrast, the Taiwanese mainland had undergone several waves of industrial development, creating an economic miracle. Politically, changes in the relations between the ROC, the US and the PRC in the 1970s led to vibrant social movements for democratization and eventually the end of martial law on Taiwan in 1987. The groom in the above-described marriage, like many of his coevals, left to study in Taiwan and stayed there in a professional occupation, meeting his future spouse. Though these islanders, residing in Taiwan, were not part of my research, they become present in the stories depicted below which show how their move to and settlement in Taiwan were facilitated by their parents but also stimulated their parents' creative conservatism.

The ethnography presented in this chapter draws on my collection of life stories from Kinmen residents of different generations. The older generation of my informants, who were born between the early 1950s and late 1960s, experienced artillery attacks from the PRC and conditions of extreme material austerity. By contrast, the younger generation, who were born between the late 1970s and early 1990s, has witnessed significant improvement in living standards and has become familiar with urban lifestyles through their stays on Taiwan. The stories that I collected from young islanders who returned to or remained in Kinmen reveal the various ways in which their personalities, careers, life plans and marriages were influenced by their upbringing and their relationships with their parents. The discussion that follows focuses on the themes of education, housing and weddings, which figured prominently in my older and younger informants' accounts of their parent-child relations and (adult children's) marriages. These three aspects of life bring to light the new dynamics of intergenerational transmission and interaction

amid the gradual improvement in local living standards and Taiwan's political and economic liberalization.

Theoretically, I build on new kinship studies (Carsten 2000, 2004), especially Charles Stafford's (2000a, 2000b) theorization of the Chinese folk model of *yang* (to care for), to highlight the processual and performative aspects of making parent-child ties. In Stafford's thesis, the concept of *yang* is cyclical and reciprocal as children, particularly sons, are expected to return the *yang* of their parents by providing *fengyang* (respectful care) when they are elderly. The cycle of *yang* is therefore tied to Confucian traditions prescribing generational and gender hierarchies, and to some extent overlaps with the notion of filial piety (Ikels 2004). But *yang* directs attention to everyday intergenerational interaction, revealing conflict but also increasing emphasis on emotional intimacy between generations, which redefines filial piety in contemporary Chinese societies (e.g. Evans 2008; Lin and Yi 2013; Yan 2016, 2021; Yeh and Benford 2004). In other words, the processes of *yang* or parenting do not simply result in a reciprocal return of *yang* or caring for aging parents but may animate new perceptions and practices regarding intergenerational relations. Furthermore, the expansive quality of *yang* enables us to consider how education, housing and weddings serve as important sites in which parents participate in a significant way in the shaping of their children's personhood and futures, and the two generations co-produce intergenerational bonds.

Recent anthropological scholarship has increasingly examined education in relation to kinship and relatedness (Cruz 2019; Fong 2011; Kipnis 2009). Though education is often examined as an investment or strategy of the family for upward social mobility or class reproduction, Resto Cruz (2019) makes a theoretically productive move, suggesting that it be considered as an inheritance that is empirically evident across the world amid the global postwar expansion of schooling. In this analysis, Cruz unpacks how education propelled by kinship has generated ruptures and inequalities, and produced contradictory consequences for persons and their relations in the post-1945 central Philippines. Following this lead, and informed by my ethnography, this chapter examines how education has been increasingly conceived as an inheritance by Kinmen parents in the upbringing of their children along with state policies broadening access to higher education. I pay attention to how gender inequalities in local patriarchal environments were challenged or persisted amid growing investment in daughters' education. I also explore how this conception of education as an inheritance has in practice been considered by parents in relation to their arrangements for children's housing and marriages in their allocation of available resources. Housing is one of the most important items transferred from parents to sons in Chinese settings (Croll 1984) and, in contemporary times, this is often a one-off occurrence upon marriage (Yan 2003). In the past and today, weddings have usually involved great expense on the marital rituals and gifts paid by parents of the groom and the bride, including

the bride's parents' monetary gifts to her known as *jiazhuang* (dowry). I argue that parents' material input in children's education, housing and weddings can be conceived as three types of inheritance not only in their material aspects but also in terms of their future-making aspect as this inheritance is expected to be the foundation for children's upward mobility and future material security. The following ethnography illustrates how Kinmen parents allocated their available resources to different kinds of inheritance for sons and daughters, and how this might reinforce or unsettle gender inequalities and result in the thickening or thinning of parent-child ties (Carsten 2013, 2019; Cruz 2019).

This chapter follows the discussion in Chapter 2 showing how new dynamics between gender, family and economy in the Cold War era have given women power, transcending the women's domain of the 'uterine family' (Wolf 1972). The latter emphasizes mother-son emotional bonds in contrast to highly valued father-son filiation in patriarchal settings. Subsequent sections of the chapter demonstrate how mothers have played significant roles in arranging their children's education, housing and weddings, informed by their own visions of a good life, which often involved gender stereotypes and inequality. However, transgressions or innovations of both parents (including fathers who are less patriarchal) and adult children became palpable and have reshaped and enhanced intergenerational ties and intimacy. Weddings manifest this creative co-making of intergenerational bonds through drawing on a cultural repertoire and on contemporary commodity forms amid rapid expansion of the neoliberal economy since the 1990s. Changing forms of intergenerational transmission illuminate kinship's transformative capacities in making new generations of persons with new futures in relation to wider changes in politics and economy. This emerging creative conservatism signals a gradual shift of emphasis in parenting from the aim of preserving the patriline to the aim of ensuring the material and emotional well-being of children of both sexes.

Education, Gender, Livelihood

As described in Chapter 2, access to education in the early stage of military rule was uneven not only between the sexes but also between siblings, as (elder) daughters often sacrificed their education to earn money for the family. Education conceived as an inheritance was, therefore, not just unidirectional from parents to children but also horizontal as it involved contributions from siblings, some of whom, however, found it unfair and grumbled about their sacrifice (Chiu 2018b; see also Cruz 2019, Lee 2004b). On the other hand, several of my elderly female and male participants told me that they had not studied beyond primary or secondary school because they had no interest in studying, though their families' economic constraints were also an important factor. They engaged in farming,

a-ping-ko businesses, and low-waged and labour-intensive work in the sorghum distillery and other sectors. In light of their own experiences of hardship and their observation of the links between education and stable livelihoods, the generation growing up during the peak period of military tension became more concerned about their children's education.

Governmental policies have also enabled students who have performed well academically and who are from economically less well-off families to pursue higher education. Kinmen students can apply for a programme allowing a certain number of them to skip the national test for university admission. They can also apply for university funding schemes in certain disciplines linked to the future occupations of school teachers and doctors, though they are required to work in Kinmen for some years after graduating (Huang 2019; Li 2009). These schemes are designed to deal with the constant shortage of teachers and physicians in the offshore islands and remote areas in Taiwan. Several studies have shown how the government-funded training system for teachers has contributed to the upward mobility of those from low-income families (e.g. Fwu 1999; Guo 1997; Tsai and Lee 2016). Moreover, in recent years, wage stagnation has frequently been in the headlines with suggestions of a stagnant, alienating and precarious future for young people.[1] While I heard that some funding recipients viewed the obligation to work in a designated place for some years as not in accordance with their life plans, many of my local interlocutors praised these young people for their success in securing respected jobs with steady incomes amidst the gloomy prospects of Taiwan's economy.

Higher education has been closely linked to upward mobility and future material security for children of both sexes in Kinmen. Though most of my young informants whose stories are described in this book did not take up the government programmes, their pursuit of higher education was usually inseparable from their parents' support. Below, my discussion focuses on the relations between gender, household economy and intergenerational transmission through two examples showing how mothers reshaped the gendered outlook of their daughters by investing in their education.

'Women Must Be Economically Self-Reliant Whatever the Circumstances'

Li-Mei (who was born in the early 1950s) made the above remark when describing her reluctance to ask her mother-in-law for money to purchase daily necessities early in her marital life. She felt bad about being financially dependent and supervised by her mother-in-law, who controlled her son's salary, because she had been the main breadwinner in her natal family before marriage. As the eldest child of her parents, with three younger brothers and two sisters, Li-Mei left school

when she was in the fourth grade and started her *a-ping-ko* business of laundering soldiers' uniforms. She then worked in other *a-ping-ko* businesses till the age of twenty-three when by her own choice she married a man in her village, whom she had known since childhood. At that time, the salary that her husband earned as a school teacher was stable but relatively low. In her attempts to augment her family income and gain financial autonomy, after giving birth to her second child Li-Mei restarted her *a-ping-ko* activity by opening a snack bar among a variety of shops close to a larger military base. This business continued to operate till the late 1990s, when the policy of demilitarization made it no longer profitable.

Like many *a-ping-ko* businesses established by the islanders in this era, Li-Mei's enterprise involved the maximization of all available family labour and constantly expanded, for example, by building individual shower rooms, in order to attract more soldier-clients. Cherry (born in the mid-1980s), the youngest child of Li-Mei, recalled that her father would be asked by her mother to deliver hot food to the soldiers in his spare time. She also helped by sitting in the entrance to the shower rooms in order to receive the soldiers' payments, and in other ways during her childhood. Though she was very reluctant to help the business, Cherry admitted that these experiences had trained her to be outgoing and sociable, and influenced her decision to pursue a Master's degree in marketing in the UK. Cherry attributed her smooth path to education abroad, followed by a well-paid job in Taipei, to the financial foundation laid by her mother, who accumulated wealth through her successful enterprise and her sound investment in China's budding real estate market in the late 1990s. The wealth that Li-Mei earned also funded the reconstruction of a large house on her husband's inherited family land, the respective down-payments of her two sons' houses upon their marriages, and another daughter's postgraduate study abroad.

When recalling her endeavour to establish a business after marriage and childbirth, Li-Mei emphasized several times the importance for women to 'have their own careers and be economically independent' in order to be self-confident. She also asserted that 'marriage should be based on [a woman's] own choice and affection [for her partner]'. Her remarks revealed what she might think about her daughter's marriage. Cherry told me that after she resigned from her job in Taipei and returned to Kinmen in 2016, rather than pressuring her to get married, her mother gave her advice about managing her money in order to secure her financial security and independence. Li-Mei's reaction was arguably related to her recognition of Cherry's views about her parents' marital relationship. Toward the end of my interview with Li-Mei at their home, where Cherry was also present, Li-Mei's husband came back in a state of slight drunkenness. Cherry immediately expressed discontent at her father's behaviour. She complained to me that although her father was a nice man, she disliked the typical kind of Chinese masculinity embodied by her father who would leave all family affairs to her mother

while out enjoying himself with his friends, and who behaved disreputably when drinking. She then spoke in unequivocal terms, 'I would rather stay unmarried than marry a man like my father'. Li-Mei tried to intercede for her husband by saying with a sigh, 'he just likes spending time with his friends'.

Educational Investment in A Stable Livelihood for Children

Mei-Hua (born in the mid-1950s), whom we encountered in the preceding chapter, had similar experiences to Li-Mei as both their natal families' economic situations were significantly improved by their *a-ping-ko* businesses. Mei-Hua was more fortunate in the sense that, as a second daughter, she received nine years of mandatory education owing to her elder sister sacrificing her own education and establishing the business. From her late teens to her late twenties, Mei-Hua also worked hard to fund her younger siblings' higher education in Taiwan. Unlike Li-Mei, Mei-Hua's husband was arbitrarily chosen by her mother, and she had no knowledge of the debt her husband's family owed before marriage. While Mei-Hua was constrained by her duty to care for her ill mother-in-law and children at home, her economic acuity building on her previous work experience helped her to generate several strategies to increase the family income. She not only cleared her husband's debt within a few years, but also financed the construction of their current residence and her four children's education beyond high school.

Despite her marital family's constrained economic circumstances, Mei-Hua told me that she had invested a lot in her children's education. She did not let her children apply for student loans for their undergraduate studies as many students of working-class families did, nor did she ask them to pay money back after they started working. Mei-Hua claimed that her investment in her children's education was aimed at enabling her children to 'have their own bowls [*you yige ziji de wan*]' meaning to have the necessary capacity to earn an independent living. Here, education was conceived as an inheritance that could become the foundation for the children's livelihood (see also Kunreuther 2009) rather than academic achievements. When her youngest son decided to prepare for the highly competitive civil service examination instead of going to university, Mei-Hua gave him her full support. She also dissuaded her first and third daughters, who held Masters' degrees from the two leading universities in Taiwan, from pursuing doctoral degrees. In our conversations, Mei-Hua clearly related her advice to her children to her perceptions about the increasingly precarious job market and future for young people today.

Mei-Hua did not intervene in what subjects her daughters studied at university, but her first daughter's major in finance and third daughter's major in social work were related to observing their mother's financial shrewdness and her devotion to volunteering. Mei-Hua's profound influence on her daughters' career-paths was

also shown in her encouragement of these two talented daughters to participate in the examinations to secure stable public employment (and their success). When I first met Mei-Hua in 2013, these two daughters were not yet married and Mei-Hua avoided intervening too much in their private lives. Nevertheless, she upheld an idea that she and her husband would not have fulfilled their parental duty until all of their children had married and established their own families. Rather than spending time and money on doctoral studies, Mei-Hua wanted her daughters to accumulate their savings and prioritize their marriages. These two daughters got married in the following years.

Reshaping a Gendered Outlook and Its Limits

The two mothers described above instantiate an image of women that recurred among many of my older female interlocutors in Kinmen. On the one hand, they embodied the patriarchal ideals of womanhood in their skill in managing domestic chores and looking after children and parents-in-law. On the other, their ability to augment the family revenue reconfigured the power dynamics between themselves and their husbands (see also Brandtstädter 2009; Judd 2009), leading to their children's recognition of them as the actual matriarchs in their families (Stafford 2009). Their power in their marital families was reflected in their leading roles in allocating funds to their children's education, but the reshaping of a gendered outlook might have been restricted by the mothers' conservative visions of a good life and future. Despite these limits, the daughters who received higher education might have sought to break away from the normative life course, including marriage.

The stories of Li-Mei and Mei-Hua both show mothers' substantial roles in shaping their daughters' personhood and life paths. Their investment in their daughters' education to some extent guaranteed the latter's material security amidst the gloomy prospects of Taiwan's economy. While Mei-Hua's daughters appeared to take a normative path of life as expected by their mother, Li-Mei's daughter, Cherry, expressed discontent with this normative destiny. As Cherry told me, her observation of her mother's excessive sacrifice for the family and disapproval of her father's behaviour negatively affected her own interest in marriage.

Being aware of the association between Cherry's current single status and her views about her parents' marriage, Li-Mei left her daughter's marriage aside for the moment while serving as a financial mentor to her economic security. This is not to say that Li-Mei accepted the possibility of her daughter's lifelong singlehood, but her support kept her daughter close and frank in sharing her life with her. As we will see in the next chapter, the emotional ties between generations have led parents to accommodate their children's deferral of marriage, and has sustained children's filial sentiments for their parents. But parental accommo-

dation may be a strategy of patience and waiting for their children's eventual marriage – a sign of creative conservatism, as suggested in my elderly informant's remark at the beginning of this chapter: 'it's not too late to get married'.

Inheritance and Unsettling Gender Inequality

Because Kinmen's teenagers had to go to Taiwan for their undergraduate and further studies, education and housing were increasingly bound together in parents' allocation of financial resources. Several of my younger interlocutors lived in a house their families had purchased in Taiwan when they studied and worked there, rather than in college residences or rented property. A retired school teacher told me that, since the 1980s, more and more local parents, including himself, had bought properties in northern Taiwan, where there were universities with good reputations and more job opportunities. Parents who were civil servants or school teachers also often seized the chance to change their place of work, as allowed by the government system, in order to seek better educational resources for their children while keeping their jobs (Hsu 2009: 49, 70). They targeted districts in Taipei where there were plenty of good schools and where living expenses were affordable. This strategy is still very common among Taiwanese families today as parents seek to prepare their children for a world of competition by settling in educationally prestigious districts in the capital (Lan 2018).

The *yang* provided by parents that bound education and housing together is often read as a parental strategy to ensure children's upward mobility or class reproduction. But this strategy, which also creates physical distance between generations, is double-edged as it potentially enlarges their emotional distance, and prevents parents from knowing about and interfering in their children's lives. Several of my elderly interlocutors said that they knew almost nothing about the intimate lives of their children working in Taiwan and could not understand why they remained unmarried past the age of thirty. Moreover, purchase of property in Taiwan implies parents' preparation for the possibility of living apart from their adult children, especially sons, in the future. For example, Cui-Lian, in her early sixties, has two sons who work in Taiwan and who lived together in a flat purchased by their parents before the elder brother got married. Prior to her first son's wedding in 2016, Cui-Lian and her two sons made the decision that the second son would take ownership of the flat and be responsible for the remaining loan, and the first son would receive financial help from his parents to buy a new residence in Taiwan. Cui-Lian told me that though she – like many local parents – desired to have at least one son live with them in Kinmen, she had expected for a long time that her sons might establish permanent residence elsewhere for employment purposes.

The increased uptake of advanced studies among women suggests a significant shift in women's entitlement to family wealth from almost zero in the early twen-

tieth century to a growing expenditure on their education today. Nevertheless, the prevalent male-focused attitude in Kinmen has placed women in an inferior position, especially in families with more than three children (including sons and daughters). Ya-Fen, a single woman born in the late 1970s, shook her head when asked whether her parents had prepared a dowry for her marriage as several of my older informants did for their daughters. Ya-Fen said that her family was not wealthy enough to fully support six children's education (two daughters and four sons), and her mother, who oversees all the family's affairs, has strong ideas of son-preference. Her father once said that the dowries for his two daughters were nothing more than the money spent on their education. When Ya-Fen's younger sister expressed her desire to attend an intensive preparation course for the university entrance examination, their father persuaded their mother to pay the fees. In the way Ya-Fen described her parents to me, it was her mother who was the actual matriarch in their family and her father had less patriarchal attitudes.

Due to financial constraints, Ya-Fen's parents only paid the tuition fees for their daughters' undergraduate studies in Taiwan, so Ya-Fen and her sister had to work part-time to feed themselves. By contrast, their younger brothers received full funding up to the completion of their undergraduate studies. Ya-Fen said that her brothers might have no idea about the mortgage for a flat in Taipei bought by her mother years ago, when Ya-Fen had just started working. Except for the initial down payment paid by her mother, Ya-Fen paid off the remaining loan. Nevertheless, she did not expect to have a share of the property under her mother's name in the future.

Ya-Fen has long felt the unfairness of demands from her parents to help more in family affairs because she is the eldest daughter. One of the reasons that she returned to Kinmen was her prediction that her parents would ask for her assistance with the preparations for her younger brothers' weddings as she had done for her sister's and one brother's weddings while working in Taiwan. Ya-Fen told me that she constantly reminds herself about being cautious about the balance between her own interests and her parents' requests. She remarked jokingly, 'If I keep doing so much for my family, I may suffer from *youyu zheng* (depression)'. Based on her recognition that she is unlikely to inherit any family property, Ya-Fen has devised some strategies to ensure her own financial security. One method of augmenting her savings was to let out the unused property in Taiwan, and she defended her own rights by dismissing her mother's enquiries about the rent. Anthropologists have noted that inheritance, which usually indexes the relationships between kin, matters to a person not merely in its material aspects but also emotionally, and in the substance of what a person is (Cruz 2019; Knight 2018; Lambek 2011). Inequalities involved in the transmission of wealth, care and attention from parents to children may create ruptures in family relations and may also stimulate innovation challenging hierarchical and unequal relations. Ya-Fen's

reaction to her mother favouring her sons illustrates how kinship is not always a site of amity and comfort but may cause harm and alienation to varying degrees (Carsten 2013, 2019; Das 2007; Lambek 2011).

The story of Ya-Fen instantiates the relatively slow overturning of gender inequality in the processes of *yang* that I found across Kinmen. A larger proportion of family wealth was usually spent on sons before their marriages, and houses remain reserved primarily for them. This male bias in transmission of family fortunes is also evident in the popular pattern of patrilocal co-residence in present-day Kinmen. As far as I observed between 2013 and 2020, many local married men live with their parents in the parental home. For aging couples with more than one son, it is common that one married or unmarried son decided or was asked by his parents to stay in the parental home. The conventional pattern of patrilocal co-residence has been maintained by this mingling of a son's economic interest and his filial sentiments of caring for his parents in light of the cycle of *yang*. But there are also cases in which souring relations between parents and adult sons (and their wives) or a young couple's desire for their private space led to the sons' moving out (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Nevertheless, Ya-Fen's case also illustrates rather close father-daughter relations in defiance of the valued father-son filiation in patriarchal settings. Ya-Fen said that though her father loves to spend time outside the home (like Cherry's father described earlier), he is different from most men in Kinmen in that, for example, he actively takes part in household chores. Ya-Fen's younger brothers are also familiar with the sharing of housework, which they had learned from their father since childhood. Ya-Fen and her siblings learned a less patriarchal image of men from their father during the long-term processes of *yang*, which shaped their personhood and emotional bonds with their father. Ya-Fen described her closeness to her father by mentioning that she often communicated her thoughts to her mother indirectly via her father. While I often heard about fathers' patriarchal demand of their children's thorough obedience to their orders or expectations, I also heard several stories from my young female informants which articulated their emotional bonds with their fathers. These intimate father-daughter ties became increasingly palpable and expressive in weddings.

Weddings and Changing Expressions of Parent-Child Ties

As many young people settled on Taiwan or elsewhere for education and work, their parents barely interfered in their choice of spouse. However, instead of being merely informed about and then invited to their children's weddings, parents played active roles in planning, including a series of traditional marital rites followed by a *xiyan* (wedding feast).[2] The *xiyan* mentioned at the beginning of this chapter instantiates this conservative expression of parental authority: the

hosts of the feast were not the newlyweds but the groom's parents (in that case, his widowed mother), and most guests were members of the groom's patrilineage and his parents' social networks whom the groom might not have known before. The same holds for the feast hosted by the bride's parents. As several of my young married informants described, while abiding by their parents' arrangements for the traditional marital rites, they devoted their time and money to 'novel rites' to create their own memorable moments of marrying, in particular through bridal photography (see Adrian 2003 for a detailed ethnography in urban Taiwan). This mixing of traditional and modern elements in today's weddings can be seen as a further expression of creative conservatism: on the one hand, a social order building on generational hierarchy and kinship-based networks is maintained through old rituals, and on the other, conjugality and emotional ties between generations are manifested through new modes of celebration.

Parents show flexibility about the weddings of their sons who reside in Taiwan in only asking them to come back for a *xiyan*, while other rites are largely omitted. The weddings for men who belong to larger patrilineages and live in Kinmen are more complicated. A wedding that I attended in 2017 involved the newlyweds' observance of the rites of *yingqu* – in which the groom formed a procession comprising his groomsmen, one *meiren* (marriage ritual facilitator), and a music ensemble to bring the bride from her home to his – touring the groom's village to worship gods and ancestors. This groom, who lived with his parents in his large patrilineal village, performed these rites to fulfil his grandfather's wish. The grandfather was over ninety years old at the time and wanted to see, before the end of his life, at least one of his several grandsons carry out the rite of touring the village for worship (see Figure 3.1). It took nearly two hours for the couple to complete their tour of several sites, including village temples and ancestral halls, to worship gods and ancestors, during which the grandfather appeared at various points and quietly witnessed their conduct. The couple's ritual act symbolized a liminal process in which they renewed their personhood as the groom reconfirmed his membership in his patrilineage and the bride transferred her loyalty from her natal family to her marital family.

As Stafford (2000a) has noted, besides the remaking of personhood as described above, Chinese marital rites also concern two other systems of relatedness, which he termed 'the cycle of *yang* (to care for)' and 'the cycle of *laiwang* (reciprocal movements between people)'. These two systems, I suggest, shed light on why modern governmental attempts at reforming traditional marital rites failed. As discussed in Chapter 1, following the establishment of the ROC in 1912, Chinese intellectuals targeted the patriarchal, costly marital rites as objects ripe for reform, with the aim of building a modern Chinese nation-state and making 'new' Chinese persons. These reform movements were adopted by both the KMT and the CCP, and implemented in the territories they controlled. However,

Figure 3.1. The bride and groom entering an ancestral hall to greet and worship the groom's remote ancestors in 2017. © Hsiao-Chiao Chiu.

in Kinmen and Taiwan as a whole, the traditional practices of bridewealth and hosting a *xiyan* remain popular today because they are concerned with making kin and social ties.

As we have seen, many parents in Kinmen still view their children's marriages as their final duty of *yang*, which includes a great deal of money saved for the wedding. But, beyond this formal and moral duty as a Chinese parent to his/her children, I noticed the changing emphasis on more explicit expressions of their affection for their children in my elderly informants' narratives about their children's weddings. Normally, the groom's parents are responsible for most wedding expenses, including the monetary component of *pinjin* (bridewealth) and other gifts to the bride, the cost for *xibing* (wedding cakes or biscuits) on both the groom's and the bride's sides, and a *xiyan* on the groom's side.[3] I heard of some cases where the groom's parents accepted their affines' request of unreasonable amounts of *pinjin* and gifts, and they kept this secret from the groom to avoid endangering the newlyweds' relationship. In the past, most parents would not host a *xiyan* for their daughter's marriage due to economic constraints and, more crucially, the idea that a daughter would eventually become a member of another family. By contrast, nowadays many parents of a bride not only decline *pinjin* from the groom but also host a large *xiyan* to show their affines that their daughter is loved and they are not marrying her off as if they were selling a commodity.[4]

During the period of miliary rule, the military government tried to reduce the costly *xiyan* by introducing *jituan jiehun* (a group wedding ceremony). But it was still common for civilians to host a large *xiyan* and rely on voluntary labour from female relatives for catering. While the host family might reward the helpers with certain gifts or *hongbao* (red envelopes with money inside), it was the principles of reciprocity and mutual help that mobilized voluntary labour (see Chau 2004 for similar phenomena in post-reform China). Nowadays the *xiyan* is fully commoditized by resorting to the professional catering of restaurants, but some other life course events still rely on female relatives' voluntary labour (Chiu 2017). Thus, the family staging a wedding asks their female relatives to help to distribute *xibing* to all the households in their village.

The islanders' observance of traditional rituals does not exclude innovations which may strengthen the cycle of *laiwang*. With improved living standards, the practice of posting messages of congratulations for an engagement or marriage in the local government-owned *Kinmen Daily News* has become very popular since the 1980s. The appearance of these messages manifests the wider social ties and *mianzi* (face or reputation) of the groom's family which, however, bears an additional moral and financial burden as they usually prepare more expensive boxes of *xibing* in return. Similarly, in light of the principle of reciprocity, it is common today for the family staging a wedding to reject *hongbao*, usually used to cover the costs of the feast, from their related villagers. Reciprocity and mutual help are emphasized as socio-moral values related to the processes of producing social persons, in opposition to the marketable value of commodities (Graeber 2013; Turner 2008). The older generations who revitalize their webs of reciprocity through old and new practices are concerned not only about their own moral personhood but also about the re-embedding of their children in wider social networks, which may help them in times of need. Here we can see the generativity and persistent vitality of kinship under conditions of capitalist modernity where various kinds of labour and exchange can be monetized but fail to generate meaningful relations in the long run.

Most of my young married informants explained their submission to their parents' arrangements for their weddings by articulating their respect and affection for their parents, without directly using the term *xiaoshun* (filial piety). Some said that they were just '*sui tamen de yi*' (doing what their parents asked them to do) to avoid conflicts; some said that they did the rituals '*zhiyao tamen kaixin jiu hao*' (as long as their parents were happy). This submission may also be related to a stereotyped impression of what a Chinese wedding should be that was held by many young people. An experienced *meiren* (marital ritual facilitator) told me that, partly because of the rise of cultural nostalgia, today many young couples try to create a culturally authentic Chinese wedding by adding in several 'traditional' elements they learned about from the internet, but which had not really been prac-

tised in Kinmen. Indeed, young couples tend not to question the patriarchal order implied in the traditional marital rites but focus on how to create their special memories of marrying. Whether or not they viewed the traditional rites as necessary elements in making their unique weddings, young couples did not exclude new rites promoted by the bridal industry. This is illustrated in the case of Eve and her husband, both natives of Kinmen, who planned their wedding in 2016.

For Eve's husband and both sets of parents, a memorable wedding had to be ritually complete, including the rite of *yingqu* and large feasts hosted by the two families respectively. But Eve objected to the rite of *yingqu* and preferred a small-scale banquet with only the two families attending. Her mother wondered why she wanted to marry out so 'quietly'. Eve explained to me, as she replied to her mother, that she disliked the part of the rite of *yingqu* that involved bidding farewell to her parents, because 'I am still a daughter of my parents even though I was marrying out'. This claim suggests that women suffer from the rupture of leaving their natal family implied in the ritual and in their marital lives afterwards (Judd 1989, 2009; Wolf 1972), which Eve and many women today firmly refuse to accept.

Significantly, Eve also stated that, 'all of the traditional rites were not what I truly wanted because they were built on family, on the given customs of our society'. But she added immediately that it was just her individual preference, which differed from the original plan of her husband who was present throughout our interview. She further asserted, 'It's not easy to earn money after all', as those rites and feasts were costly. Whether or not Eve's remarks were intended as a critique of patriarchy, she eventually made compromises with her husband and parents on both sides regarding the wedding arrangements. They omitted several rites, including *yingqu*, and only held a betrothal rite at Eve's home, followed by two large feasts respectively hosted by the parents of the bride and the groom, because Eve knew that both parents viewed the feasts as their duty as well as an expression of their love for their children.

While expressing no enthusiasm for traditional rites, Eve declared that 'I wanted to wear a most beautiful wedding gown at that moment'. Her desire was realized through purchasing a package of bridal photography, which usually includes rented gowns (for photography and the wedding), professional photography, and photo albums and cards from a bridal salon. They initially bought a package from a bridal salon in Taipei, but had a bad experience as they were pressured by the photographer and stylist to finish the shoot on time, with the salon thereby failing in its promise to respect customers' preferences (Adrian 2003). Due to this negative experience, Eve asked a professional wedding photographer who had just established his business in Kinmen for a second shoot in several places which were memorable to the couple and at both of their parental homes. When they were at the groom's home, Eve encouraged her husband and his mother to

reconstruct a scene from her husband's childhood in which he asked his mother for pocket money but she was too busy to answer him. As Eve recalled, the entire process of photography constituted a shared unique memory of this marriage for them and for their parents on both sides, suffused with emotions and mutual care between generations. The wedding photography was no longer a mere commodity but a medium through which affection and care between generations could be objectified.

While in Eve's case her parents and parents-in-law appeared to enjoy the moments of intergenerational intimacy created by the consumption of photography, several of my elderly informants grumbled about their children spending too much money on wedding commodities that had no benefits beyond temporary personal pleasure. However, kinship practices involving creativity and innovation can surpass the market value of commodities. A young local wedding photographer told me about a client's (the bride's) father, a carpenter who made a *hunli beiban* (a large upright board installed at a wedding feast as the background for photographs of the newlyweds with their guests) as a gift for his daughter. Anthropologists have noted how people lay claim to each other as kin through the objectification of labour as tokens of value (Graeber 2013; Turner 2008). This father appropriated the form of *hunli beiban*, a popular commodity in the wedding industry, and made the item himself, thus objectifying his affection for his daughter and confirming his ties to her. This is very different from the old ritual requiring the daughter to sever her ties with her parents. There were also cases in which the newlyweds sought to hold a do-it-yourself wedding involving the voluntary labour of kin and friends. This kind of wedding might draw on elements from the wedding industry but all the participants recalled the event physically and emotionally as a time of reaffirming their ties and flows of affection for each other.

Echoing Bruckermann's (2019) discussion of a novel ritual celebrating children's birthdays in post-reform China, the co-existence of traditional rites and globalized commodity forms in Kinmen's weddings today could be read as making relatedness between parents and adult children, and among wider social networks. The combination of old and new practices is itself a manifestation of mutual care and affection between generations. As the old rituals are less about the expression of personal emotions, both the old and the young increasingly adopt new forms to express conjugal intimacy as well as intergenerational ties. The desire to express affection between generations can overcome a market logic by appropriating commodity forms to make new objects with no market value. These emerging phenomena illustrate the capacity of kinship practices to animate innovation and change, as well as the continued significance of kinship amidst an expansive neoliberalism that promotes the shift of an individual's attention from a universe of wider kin ties to the self.

Conclusion

Emerging intimate practices, such as late first marriage and pre-marital pregnancy, in the case described at the beginning of this chapter, have often been viewed in mainstream modernization theories as signs of rising individualism amidst a society's transition to capitalist modernity. Little attention has been paid to what role kinship has played in these changing processes. In this chapter, I have used the lens of 'creative conservatism' to explore how kinship practices may animate generational differences in life paths and the pursuit of intimacy in Kinmen. Changing kinship relations, together with a shifting politico-economy since the 1970s, have created new generations of persons with new imaginaries of the future. In line with anthropological challenges to assumptions that kinship becomes restricted to nuclear constructs of family and to possessive individualism (Bruckermann 2019; Cruz 2019; Lambek 2011; McKinnon and Cannell 2013), I have also shown how intergenerational ties and wider social bonds are still valued and maintained.

In this chapter, we have seen that education, housing and weddings have been three key sites of intergenerational transmission and future-making in Kinmen, in which parents participated in a significant way in shaping their children's personhood and futures. These three sites have required parents to carefully allocate their available resources to their children, relying on mixing sources of income from *a-ping-ko* business, farming and other sectors. While an increasing proportion of family wealth has been allocated to daughters, the idea of privileging sons remains dominant in the local patriarchal context. For a family with several children and limited resources, such as that of Ya-Fen, a daughter might not receive a dowry in the form of monetary gifts from her parents upon marriage because the money had already been spent on her education. Persistent male-focused attitudes have also led many parents to allocate much of their accumulated wealth and inherited property to sons, including money spent on their education, housing and weddings.

On the other hand, I have also shown how mothers and fathers deeply influenced their children's trajectories, and nurtured strong mother-daughter or father-daughter ties in defiance of the emphasis on father-son filiation in local patriarchal settings. This contributes to anthropological accounts of how kinship is suffused with ambivalence, and transgressions or changes may arise from everyday unremarkable acts of kinship (Carsten 2013, 2019; Das 2007; Lambek 2011; Peletz 2001). While transmission of care, attention and material property to the next generation is still often unequal by gender in Kinmen, increasing investment in daughters' education has created more diverse life options for them. Young women with higher education gain economic independence and the confidence to defer their marriage or reject parents' excessive demands for their contribution to

the family. Parents who transgressed gender stereotypes also showed their children different images of women and men beyond the patriarchal prescriptions, thus strengthening intergenerational bonds and contributing to the possibility of wider, meaningful progress towards gender equality.

Kinship practices not only produce new generations who have more opportunities than those available to their parents but also enhance the ways in which wider kin and other social ties are rendered valuable and desirable – particularly in current times of growing uncertainty. In Kinmen, changes in the nature of parent-child ties are reflected in the mixing of traditional rites and contemporary commodity forms in weddings in an era of expansive marketization. Newlyweds' relational personhood is reaffirmed through old and new practices that revitalize wider kinship and other social bonds. This relational personhood does not exclude personal autonomy as the newlyweds embrace both conjugal intimacy and intergenerational bonds through wedding consumption. Nonetheless, although the desire to materialize the expression of affection between generations may be prompted by the market, kin ties and practices may surpass a market logic through appropriating commodities to strengthen affective ties.

The case of Kinmen offers a comparison with China regarding the consequences of the intersections of kinship, the state and policies of reproduction in culturally similar but politically opposite regimes of governance. As Yunxiang Yan (2003, 2009) has compellingly shown, state-driven transition from collectivization to marketization in China since the 1980s has led to the rise of individualization characterized by egoism. Young people have increasingly emphasized personal desires and conjugal interest by demanding wealth from their parents, especially men's parents, to satisfy their material needs. The older generation in rural areas – who, unlike their urban counterparts, were not protected by the state's welfare system following reform – have faced not only the loss of parental authority but also a crisis of elderly support. In the cities where the One-Child policy (from 1980, and replaced by the Two-Child policy in 2016) was more effective, parental devotion to raising their only child contributed to strong parent-child bonds. Daughters, in particular, emphasized their affective ties with their parents and their filial duty to provide elderly support (Fong 2004; Liu 2008; Xie 2021). They echoed discourses circulated in the state media in which traditional family values, especially filial piety, were emphasized to resolve the problem of elderly care (Zhang 2016; Zhang 2017). By contrast, the Taiwanese government had long treated childcare and elderly care as family duties, and relevant policies of public support have only been proposed in recent years (Chyn 2019).

As fertility rates in China continue to decline because of the earlier One-Child policy, and with increasing competition following marketization, a third generation has now become the locus of family life. There is a rising emphasis on intergenerational solidarity and mutual dependence as young couples have relied

on their parents' and/or parents-in-law's support to provide the best care for their children (Bruckermann 2017, 2019; Santos 2021; Yan 2016, 2021). Emotional intimacy between generations has been emphasized and is desired more than ever before. In a recent publication, Yan proposed the term 'neo-familism' to describe these new trends in China where new discourses of the state and ordinary citizens 'invoke familism as the primary strategy to pursue both individual happiness and family prosperity through the collective efforts of a multi-generational domestic group' (2021: 15).

The emergence of creative conservatism in Kinmen and the rise of neo-familism in China, I suggest, demonstrate the constitutive power of kinship in relation to the impact on ordinary lives of different political ideologies and policies. Rather than losing significance, people have drawn on old and new kinship knowledge and resources, in relation to changing politico-economic circumstances, to better prepare the next generations for increasingly uncertain futures. Kinship practices that include various rituals to secure kin relations and other social ties problematize assumptions about the secularization of kinship under capitalist modernity (McKinnon and Cannell 2013; Sangren 2000; Thomas et al. 2017). Kinship labour that can be objectified as tokens of value and care promotes the recognition of kin ties as separate from the capitalist calculation of labour and value (Bruckermann 2019; Graeber 2013; Turner 2008). In the face of similar demographic crises in Taiwan, China and across the world, including declining fertility rates, aging population and rising divorce rates, kinship and familial values have been appropriated and emphasized by neoliberal governments as measures to alleviate crises and ease or shrink governmental responsibilities (see Ochiai and Hosoya 2014). Ordinary families adopt creative approaches to nurture their kin ties within and beyond nuclear or joint families as they seek affection, support and material resources for survival, and attempt to secure the well-being of future generations.

Notes

1. Scholars have noted the trends of economic recession and stagnation of real wages in Taiwan since the late 1990s (Hsu et al. 2015; Huang 2015; Lee and Lin 2017).
2. The traditional marital rites in Kinmen are in principle similar to those in southern Fujian, China and on Taiwan because of the shared regional cultural heritage. But there are many variations and differences in the details; in Kinmen, these variations can be categorized into three geographic areas (Yang and Lin 1997).
3. Take Cui-Lian's case as an example. For her son's wedding in 2016, Cui-Lian had to prepare more than 300 boxes of *xibing* for all the households in their relatively large patrilineal village, and another 200 boxes for social networks outside the village. The *xiyan* consisted of forty-five tables (modest by local standards), and about thirty tables were for co-villagers (a table had ten persons and on average cost 5,000 to 6,000 New Taiwan Dollars, 160–200 USD, in a local restaurant in 2016). Though the prices for

wedding banquets in Kinmen are much lower than the prices in Taipei, where a table for a feast costs three to four times the average price in Kinmen, the total expenses still constitute a great burden.

4. This refusal of *pinjin* implies the bride's parents' definite dissociation from the negative cases sometimes reported in the Taiwanese media in which some parents were criticized for treating their daughters as if they were commodities by requesting an unreasonable amount of *pinjin*. But very often in Kinmen and Taiwan, the groom's parents still prepare a large sum of money in cash or a cheque as *pinjin* to display in front of their affines who have previously stated their refusal to accept *pinjin*. As several senior informants told me, even though their affines reject the *pinjin*, they have to *xingshishang* (lit. nominally; just for performance) prepare the *pinjin* out of courtesy, their own *mianzi* (face or reputation), and the intention to prove their family's financial status.