

Rethinking Taiwanese Citizenship and Sovereignty through Cross-Strait Migration

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This paper uses the case of marital immigration from China to Taiwan to rethink the dilemmas of Taiwanese citizenship and sovereignty. Drawing on over a decade of ethnographic research with immigrant Chinese spouses and their family members, Taiwanese bureaucrats and officials, and NGOs, the paper begins by documenting the mutually constitutive relationship between Chinese spouses and the Taiwanese nation-state, especially with regard to Taiwan's efforts to obtain sovereign recognition from the international community. Through tracing parallels between the predicaments of marital immigrants from China and the uncertain future of the Taiwan nation-state, the paper underscores how intimate attachments and emotional investments infuse the ostensibly rational and impersonal governmental practices that regulate immigration, citizenship, and sovereignty. Insecurity and anxiety are two of the most prominent registers that guide these parallel realms of experience; and they underscore the fragility of citizenship and sovereignty as both immigrants and Taiwanese bureaucrats struggle to create a sense of belonging that includes cross-Strait couples in the Taiwanese nation and that asserts a place for that nation in an international community of sovereign states. By focusing on a group of immigrants whose exceptional status has become part of the fragile integrity of the Taiwan nation-state, the paper illustrates the consequences of living this exceptional status, both for individual immigrants and the nation as a whole.