

## **What's Marriage Got to Do with It? Examining Taiwan Studies from the Perspective of Marriage Migration**

Isabelle Cheng

Lecturer in East Asian Studies, School of Languages and Area Studies,  
University of Portsmouth, UK

In recent years, Taiwan began to acquire a self-identity as a migrant society. This self-claim is supported by two-fold. Historically, Taiwan was one of the major destinations for Chinese out-bound migration from the Mainland in the past centuries. Contemporarily, Taiwan received a significant number of migrant women whose migration from China and Southeast Asia to Taiwan was prompted by their marriage with Taiwanese citizens. The historical migration gave rise to a discourse of multiculturalism, which frames Taiwan as a multi-ethnic society and, as a result, advocates equality, respect, and recognition for all ethnic groups. In the wake of the arrival of female marriage migration, this normative discourse was appropriated by the government, and social organisations alike, to cultivate social appreciation for the ethnic diversity and cultural heritage brought in by marriage migration. However, the belief that Taiwan is multicultural in empirical and normative sense is a stark contrast to the fact that the presence of migrant workers is mostly written off from the construction of the multiculturalism discourse, and that migrant women are pressurised by the state and society to be assimilated. This convenient yet hypocritical appropriation is a case in point that marriage migration facilitates a critical lens from which to examine the social construction of Taiwan and the resultant academic research.

In this light, this present paper will survey literatures on marriage migration and intersect these literatures with salient issues in the field of Taiwan Studies. This paper will point out that there are significant deficits in the field of marriage migration in the following aspects:

- (1) a transnational and temporal approach to trace the impact of marriage migration on the sending society with regard to development, identity, political and socio-economic change;
- (2) a political examination of the impact of citizenship awarding and migrants' rights-claim movement on electoral and partisan politics;
- (3) a political and sociological analysis on the operation of self-help organisations (and political parties) founded by migrants and their interactions with local political actors
- (4) an institutionalist approach to the evolution of immigration policy and citizenship legislation with an emphasis on its intrinsic link to Taiwan's democratisation and the emergence of the Taiwanese consciousness;
- (5) a comparative exploration between the experiences of Taiwan and those of other receiving societies, such as South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore, with a

reference to their emerging multicultural make-up, citizenship legislation and identity politics (comparison can be also made between the case of Taiwan and those of North American and West European societies in the Global North);

- (6) an intersectional triangulation of the experiences of male and female migrant spouses for being dependents in the legal system and their everyday encounters with Taiwanese consciousness from the perspectives of ethnicity, gender and class;
- (7) a transnational and ethnographical perspective from which to understand how ‘Overseas Chinese’, or ethnic Chinese, from Southeast Asia are converged in marriage migration and how they assert their ethnic and national identity in the context of Taiwanese consciousness;
- (8) a sociological study on the experiences of migrant workers (particularly domestic workers and caregivers) and those of marriage immigrants with regard to intimacy with, acculturation of, and proximity to Taiwanese lifestyle and social values.

With the above-mentioned findings, this paper will highlight the experiences of Taiwan in the regional migration flow and South-North movement in the global map and connect the experiences of the island with interdisciplinary theoretical construction.

#### ABOUT AUTHOR:

Isabelle Cheng received her doctoral degree from the Department of Politics and International Studies of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). She is currently a Lecturer in East Asian Studies at the School of Languages and Area Studies of the University of Portsmouth, UK. She is also a Research Associate of the Centre of Taiwan Studies, SOAS. Her research concentrates on marriage migration from China and Southeast Asia to Taiwan with a reference to immigrant women's identity and political participation. Her research interests are citizenship, multiculturalism, household registration and Overseas Chinese Studies.