

I Care Because I'm a Mother: Motherhood and Citizenship of Immigrant Women in Taiwan

Dr Isabelle Cheng

15:15, 15 April 2015, Slovene Ethnographic Museum

Since the late 1980s, Taiwan has become one of the major destinations for female marriage migration in East Asia. Marriage migration in the form of family reunion between female migrant spouses and their Taiwanese husbands became the chief channel of bringing foreign-born citizens to Taiwan. Mainly from Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Cambodia, up to December 2014, a total number of 145,441 female migrant spouses adopted Taiwan as their home. Subsequently, 75 per cent of them became citizens of Taiwan. On the other hand, nation-wide surveys show that in the past decade between 50 and 70 per cent of immigrant wives gave birth after migrating to Taiwan. Other studies using small samples inform that the majority of childbirth occurred within the first years of their residency. These general trends suggest that for the majority of immigrant wives, whilst they became a mother, they most likely would have also applied for, or have acquired, citizenship.

By using qualitative methods of interviewing 26 Vietnamese, 20 Indonesian Chinese and 13 Filipino immigrant women in rural and urban areas in Taiwan, this research argues that immigrant women go through a dual rite of passage along which they become a mother and a citizen at the same time. Motherhood features significantly in immigrant women's motivations for applying for citizenship and their actual exercising of citizenship. The roles of motherhood and citizen intersect in their relationship with their husband, children and the host-state in their daily encounters. Mundane these daily encounters may appear, yet their shared experiences underlined by motherhood suggest that the understanding of citizenship, as a membership of a nation-state, a group of rights and entitlements, or an institution for integration, cannot be confined to issues in the public sphere.

DR ISABELLE CHENG received her PhD in 2012 from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). She is the Lecturer in East Asian Studies at the School of Languages and Area Studies of the University of Portsmouth. She currently serves on the Board of the European Association of Taiwan Studies (EATS) and is a Research Associate of SOAS Centre of Taiwan. Her research concentrates on marriage migration, citizenship, multiculturalism, and national identity. Her new research interest is military confrontation across the Taiwan Strait during the Cold War.



**TAIWAN FOUNDATION
for DEMOCRACY**

財團法人臺灣民主基金會