

The Cross-Strait Marriage Migration and Taiwan's National Identity Conundrum

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the peculiar demographics of the cross-Strait marriage (CSM) migration and explores the sociopolitical factors which contribute to forging its peculiarity and relevant social perceptions. The main thesis advanced in this article is that the CSM migration is shaped and strengthened by Taiwan's institutionalized practices of recruiting, screening, and assimilating mainland female migrants, and by the historical context on which these practices are rooted. It also finds that Chinese marital migrants are under the gender-specific controls of various Taiwanese institutions and are projected as the imagined boundary between "us" and "others" in Taiwan's struggle for an independent national identity. Through the case study of the imbroglio of CSM migrants in Taiwan's ethnic politics, this article seeks to enrich the sociopolitical understandings of gendered transnational marriages and to shed more light on the complex intersection between marriage migration and national identity politics.

Table of Contents

I.	THE HYPERGAMOUS MARRIAGE MIGRATION AND SOCIAL STIGMATIZATION	3
II.	INSTITUTIONALIZED PRACTICES TO CONTROL THE CSM MIGRATION.....	7
A.	COMMERCIALY ARRANGED MARRIAGE MIGRATION	7
B.	SCREENING OF MARRIAGE MIGRANTS AT THE BORDERS	9
C.	ASSIMILATE AND “TAIWANIZE” THE CHINESE BRIDES	10
III.	HISTORICAL ROOTS OF TAIWAN’S STRUGGLE WITH NATIONAL IDENTITY	11
IV.	CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	14
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	16

Taiwan has long been a migrant-receiving society. Since the Dutch colonization in the 17th century, numerous waves of migrants have constantly been altering Taiwan's societal landscape and reshaping its national identity. In particular, the past three decades have witnessed an increasing number of Taiwanese men marrying brides from neighboring societies. Among them, Chinese women constitute the majority of non-Taiwanese brides. The sizable population of Chinese brides sparks heated debate in Taiwan surrounding the ambiguous line between "us" and "others." Chinese marriage migrants are inevitably embroiled in the mire of Taiwan's national identity conundrum. This intersection of marriage migration and identity politics has two significant sociopolitical facets:

On the one hand, various Taiwanese institutions, both private and public, take part in shaping and controlling the gendered CSM migration. First, these institutions commercialize the matchmaking between Taiwanese bridegrooms and Chinese brides, which diminishes migrant wives to tradable commodities and makes state intervention necessary to screen out "bogus marriages"; following this commercialization process, the authorities exert extensive influences to examine marriage migrants upon their entry into Taiwan and further assimilate them during their residence on the island. Through their control over the CSM migration, the Taiwanese institutions not only differentiate "others", namely, the Chinese migrant wives, from "us", namely, the Taiwanese, but also distinguish them from other migrant wives from Southeast Asian countries by taking more restrictive measures to organize and regulate the CSM migration. Marriage migrants from Mainland China are cast as fundamentally different from both locals and foreigners; in other words, they are categorized as a purposely peculiar group of "outsiders within". This categorization enables the Taiwanese society to use CSM migrants as a reference point to locate itself in the international community and claim their unique "Taiwanese" identity vis-à-vis the Chinese identity.

On the other hand, the ensnarement of the CSM in Taiwan's national identity politics is situated within a broader historical context of its longstanding struggle with an inclusive and independent national identity. Throughout its history, Taiwan's identity politics has consistently been configured along an exclusivist line. As Taiwanese politicians with local backgrounds embarked on an ambitious nation (re)building project since the 1980s, the society has been more assertive

than ever to claim a homogeneous, independent Taiwanese identity while rescinding other collective consciousness, especially the Chinese national identity. Against this backdrop, the motivations behind contemporary policies towards Chinese marriage migrants lie in a deep-seated anti-Chinese sentiment and an increasingly self-assured Taiwanese awareness.

This article delves into the peculiar demographics of the CSM migration and explores the sociopolitical factors which contribute to forging its peculiarity and relevant social perceptions. The main thesis advanced in this article is that the CSM migration is shaped and strengthened by Taiwan's institutionalized practices of recruiting, screening, and assimilating mainland female migrants, and by the historical context on which these practices are rooted. With an aim of reinforcing Taiwan's independent national identity, Taiwanese institutions play a crucial role in controlling the CSM migration and breed the social discrimination that, in turn, necessitates continuous, restrictive institutionalized practices. In this sense, it is necessary to examine the CSM migration through the prism of the historical and sociopolitical contexts in which these normative and discursive practices find their justifications. Through the case study of the imbroglio of CSM migrants in Taiwan's ethnic politics, this article seeks to enrich the sociopolitical understandings of gendered transnational marriages and to shed more light on the complex intersection between marriage migration and national identity politics.

This article is structured as follows: it will first set the scene by introducing the demographics of the CSM migration and the resulting social stigmas attached to CSM migrants; it will then proceed to elaborate on the institutionalized practices which give rise to the entanglement of CSM migration in Taiwan's ethnic politics, namely, Taiwanese institutions' practices of recruiting, screening and assimilating Chinese marriage migrants; subsequently, it will provide a historical analysis of Taiwan's long-term national identity conundrum in which Taiwanese institutions' contemporary practices are rooted; lastly, it will provide some concluding remarks to encapsulate the impacts of contemporary measures and historical roots on the imagined national identity of Taiwaneseess.

I. The hypergamous marriage migration and social stigmatization

Compared with other Tiger countries which have all experienced large-scale cross-border marriage migration, the magnitude of transitional marriages with Chinese nationals is particularly outstanding in Taiwan (Kim, 2010; Cheng & Choo, 2015; Jones & Shen, 2008). According to the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) of Taiwan, or Republic of China (ROC), as of March 2016, there had been 291,339 CSMs, compared with 54,484 marriages between the Taiwanese and people from Hong Kong and Macau and 166,828 marriages between the Taiwanese and foreigners (mainly from Southeast Asian states such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand) (MAC, 2016). The CSMs, therefore, account for the majority of Taiwan's cross-border marriages. Furthermore, the data published by the National Immigration Agency (NIA) of Taiwan illustrate that approximately 94% of all Chinese marriage migrants are female (NIA, 2016). Therefore, the typical pattern of the CSM is a marriage between a Taiwanese man and a mainland woman.

During the past three decades, the CSM migration has undergone a fundamental transformation. The CSM as a social phenomenon first emerged in late 1987 when a forty-year ban of travel to Mainland China was lifted. The first wave of Taiwanese grooms was mainly composed of Kuomintang (KMT) veterans who retreated to Taiwan Island with the KMT regime. After retiring from the service, these mainland veterans found tremendous difficulties in getting married because of their unfamiliarity with the Taiwanese culture, language and society. A tiny portion of them opted to marry Southeast Asian women, while the majority visited hometowns in Mainland China after the travel ban was lifted in 1987 and discovered that their hometowns had the ideal pool of marital partners with whom they share cultural and linguistic affinity (Lu, 2012; Lan, 2008). The middle-aged peasant women constitute the first wave of Chinese brides and mainly play the role of a caretaker for their families. Over time, the CSM spread across different social sectors and gained significant momentum. The second wave of CSM migration is principally comprised of disadvantaged Taiwanese men and Chinese women from rural areas. Most of the Taiwanese grooms are agricultural or working-class men who are less desirable and disfavored in the local marriage market (Wang H. Z., 2001a). Nevertheless, due to the better socioeconomic conditions in Taiwan than Mainland China, their disadvantages virtually disappear and, in some cases, they are significantly better off than the bride's family (Kuo, 2011).

To explain the hypergamy involved in the CSM migration, Tu and Li (1999) tend to downplay the notion of modern marriage, which is premised upon romantic love, but rather perceive the CSM as an institutional arrangement of extended families from different social strata for economic exchange and social mobility. They contend that the CSM can be characterized as an exchange between the extrinsic attributes of the Taiwanese men, such as wealth and the Taiwanese nationality, and the intrinsic attributes of the mainland women, such as appearance, age and health. As mentioned above, the CSMs predominately involve younger Chinese females and older Taiwanese men. The mean age difference is 8.5 years, meaning an average Taiwanese husband is 8.5 years older than his Chinese wife, while the mean age difference among the intra-Taiwan marriages is 4.3 years (Tu & Li, 1999). An 11-year age gap between the couple exists in more than half of the CSMs (Tsai M. C., 2011). The wives of Taiwanese veterans who constitute the first wave of CSM migrants are mostly ex-divorcees or widows from the same province or even the same county as their Taiwanese spouses (Cheng I. , 2008). In comparison, the underprivileged Taiwanese peasants and blue-collar workers, who make up of the second wave of CSM migration, attach more importance to their Chinese wives' marital history and prefer to tie the knot with never married female mainlanders (Tu & Li, 1999). The levels of educational attainment between the couples also mark a notable disparity. Mainland wives tend to have completed more schooling years than their Taiwanese husbands and the Taiwanese wives who also marry to rural or working-class Taiwanese men. These demographic findings of the CSM migration are congruent with the argument that the Chinese brides exchange their socially desirable intrinsic attributes such as young age, better education and never-marriedness for financial and social well-being.

A hypergamous cross-border marriage enables the Chinese wife to move up the social ladder while allowing the Taiwanese husband to enact his masculinities as the breadwinner and head of the household and designate the gendered care responsibilities to the migrant wife (Yeoh, Chee, & Vu, 2014). On the one hand, the rigid household registration ("*hukou*" in Chinese) system in Mainland China hinders a rural resident from settling down in cities and thus imposes obstacles to rural-urban migration and social mobility. For this reason, "marrying up" to a Taiwanese man becomes an attractive option for the Chinese brides in search for better welfare. On the other hand, the Taiwanese society has long been experiencing a "care deficit," due to an increasingly

aging population and diminishing fertility rates. Lacking the financial means to hire a caregiver, bringing in a Chinese bride as unpaid caretaker appears a lucrative choice to impoverished Taiwanese men.

Moreover, influenced by the deep-rooted Confucian tradition, the CSM is also intertwined with gendered desires and sexual responsibilities. Migrant wives are frequently seen as a free source of reproductive labor, which leads to the exceptionally high birth rate among CSM couples. Survey data suggest that most of the migrant wives give birth to their first child within two years of migration (Wang H. Z., 2011b; Tsai M. C., 2011) and that they contributed to 13.3% of Taiwanese newborns in 2004 (National Statistics of Taiwan, 2016). Viewed as imported labor for biological reproduction, the Chinese wives often face the pressures from their husbands or parents-in-law to produce offspring. Their early entry into motherhood after the migration is also incentivized by Taiwan's immigration regulations which stipulate that once a Chinese migrant has a Taiwanese child, she or he can bypass the two-year waiting period requirement and becomes immediately eligible to apply for residency and if certain conditions are satisfied, a work permit. This stipulation is bolstered not only by the humanitarian concerns over child rearing, but also by the suspicion of sham marriage and espionage, as it motivates the mainland brides to prove their loyalty to the family and society by fulfilling reproductive responsibilities (Lan, 2008). In cultural terms, the disadvantaged Taiwanese men also view the CSM as a cost-effective way to escape the stigma of singlehood and help them become "respectable family men" (Friedman, 2010). In turn, the Chinese brides fulfill their roles of "dutiful daughters" and "sacrificial sisters" by sending remittances back to families in Mainland China (Yeoh, Chee, & Vu, 2014; Cheng & Choo, 2015).

On the basis of the demographics of CSM migration, the Taiwanese society has developed a disparaging attitude towards mainland migrant wives. The locals always stigmatize Chinese migrant wives as "low-quality" people from a backward country and perceive them as opportunists who marry people from a "superior race" for material purposes. Chinese brides also constantly suffer from gender stereotypes in the largely patriarchal Taiwanese society. Their situations are further complicated by social antagonism and racial suspicion based on political reasons. In the context of cross-Strait political tensions, they are seen as the embodiment of the

rival socialist government on the mainland. Their situations hinge upon the cross-Strait relations and the political views of Taiwanese individuals. As a result, various derogatory labels are attached to mainland migrant wives, such as “bogus wives”, “baby-making machines”, “mainland infiltrators”, and “second-and-half-class citizens” (referring to their worse treatments than the “second-class citizens”, namely, Southeast Asian migrant wives) (Hsia, 2007). The peculiar demographics of the CSM migration and the enormously negative social attitudes towards migrant wives resulted from Taiwan’s institutionalized practices of controlling the CSM migration as well as its historical roots of the national identity conundrum.

II. Institutionalized practices to control the CSM migration

Taiwanese institutions have designed and implemented various measures to regulate marriage migration from other states. In particular, compared with Southeast Asian migrants, migrant wives from Mainland China are subject to more stringent and cumbersome measures. Indeed, the Chinese migrant wives are perceived as neither foreigners nor citizens. There are a set of laws and regulations uniquely applicable to the Chinese marriage migrants, placing them under extraordinarily selective requirements with regard to entry, residency, social welfare, political rights and so forth. Their peculiar position in the Taiwanese legal framework indicates that they straddle the boundaries between insiders and outsiders and are thus placed in a highly ambiguous space of “in-between” (Cheng I. , 2013). In a sense, the Chinese brides become “exceptional citizens” (Agamben, 2005), whose lives are subjugated to the extended power wielded by Taiwan.

This section pays special attention to Taiwan’s institutionalized practices in three particular stages, namely, recruiting in sending communities, screening at the entry points, and assimilation in receiving communities. It strives to probe into both public and private sectors’ practices which are more of active contributing factors leading to the peculiarity of CSM migration than passive social and administrative responses to this phenomenon.

a. Commercially arranged marriage migration

Thanks to the increasing economic interdependence and more regular political dialogue, the telecommunications and transportation conditions across the Taiwan Strait improved greatly over the past decades, which facilitates the CSMs and creates an enabling environment for the cross-Strait matchmaking and mate-selection. Hundreds of matchmaking agencies emerged in Taiwan to intermediate and facilitate the CSMs. As of April 2016, the NIA permitted 35 entities to carry out the cross-border matchmaking services (NIA, 2016). There are also a large number of unregistered, illegal marriage brokers on the Internet. They all provide a panoply of standardized services including arranging the traveling and meeting, organizing the weddings and the registration of marriage in both countries, preparing for the interview at the port of entry, as well as the negotiation of bride price and dowry (Lu, 2005). Given the fact that most of the Taiwanese male customers are poorly educated and disfavored, the agencies also offer instructions of dating skills. On the agencies' websites, they highlight the characteristics of a potential dating partner such as young, pretty, virtuous and diligent, which is designed to fit the Taiwanese customer's underlying demand of reproductive labor and desire for the Chinese females' intrinsic attributes. The prices of cross-border matchmaking are often fixed, ranging from NT\$200,000 (€5408) to NT\$300,000 (€8112). On some advertisements, agencies use the language such as "after-sales service", "one-stop service" and "guaranteed high success rates" which clearly points to a commercial process.

Therefore, the cross-Strait matchmaking activities have been highly institutionalized by the private sector as a profit-oriented industry with official approval and the Chinese brides are significantly commodified in the long-distance marriage market. These migrant wives are perceived as priceable commodities in a transaction process that is largely dominated by the intermediary institutions and the demand side. It further deteriorates migrant wives' vulnerability through underlying mechanisms of asymmetric power relations, racial differences and political rivalry. In consequence, their rights are often overlooked and may even become victims of women trafficking, sexual exploitation and domestic violence (Wang & Chang, 2002). This cross-border matchmaking industry enables Taiwan to extend its control over marriage migrants beyond its shrunken territory by virtue of private brokers and gives rise to the overwhelming perceptions among the Taiwanese that Chinese migrants are nothing more than "imported" reproductive laborers and caretakers who marry old, rural, uneducated Taiwanese

men for materialist purposes. A dichotomy is thus created between a “superior” race of the consumer class and an “inferior” race of tradable commodities, which, in turn, may strengthen the opposing relationship between Taiwanese-ness and Chinese-ness. Another major consequence of the commercialization of cross-border matchmaking is that in light of the potential sham marriages brokered through this industry, the Taiwanese authorities are given the responsibility of inspecting CSM migrants at the ports of entry and screen out “bogus wives”.

b. Screening of marriage migrants at the borders

Agamben (1998; 2005) points out that the fundamental power of a sovereign state lies in the ability to decide whether the law applies to a situation or suspends to apply in an emergency or crisis. Viewing international mobility as a menace, the sovereign state routinely intervenes in the practices of regulating international migration through the decisions of admitting or expelling an outsider from its jurisdiction (Salter, 2008).

In the case of the CSM migration, this is best exemplified by the interviews conducted by the authorities at the ports of entry. In order to filter out sham marriages, since 2004, the Taiwanese authorities required all Chinese marital migrants to be interviewed upon their first entry into the Taiwanese territory. In the interview, immigration officers often ask questions relating to the highly personal details of dating and marriage with considerable skepticism that Chinese migrants’ economic motivations outweigh their commitment to the marriage itself. The authorities also school migrant wives about the code of conduct as spouses, parents and future citizens during the interviews, by evaluating what constitutes an intimate relationship, true love and marriage. Through these evaluation and education processes, the entry interviews of CSM migrants serve to present Taiwan as a modernized nation where the element of romantic intimacy forms the groundwork of relationships and marriages (Lan, 2008; Friedman, 2010). By singling out Chinese marriage migrants upon their arrival and imposing restrictive interviews of the quality of the marriage by immigration officers, this procedure is predicated on the underlying anti-Chinese sentiment and the assumption that all CSM are economically motivated.

In these border interactions, the marital migrants and their intimate lives are placed under close monitoring by officials who act as the embodiment of the state power that dictates these bureaucratic encounters (Friedman, 2010). The ports of entry also act as the socially constructed space of power where the Taiwanese state exerts extensive power to undergird its sovereignty through the containment of “deviant migrants” and the management of the envisaged risks of cross-border mobility to national security, “population quality” and social homogeneity (Salter, 2007; Miles, 1999).

c. Assimilate and “Taiwanize” the Chinese brides

Despite the Chinese marital migrants’ full command of the Chinese language, their mainland accent makes them easily recognizable by the native-born Taiwanese. In their lived experience, they are constantly subject to the stereotypes of coming from a “backward country”, marrying “old men” for materialistic gains, and potentially lowering the “population quality” of Taiwan (Kuo, 2011). They are also seen as the embodiment of the authoritarian rule on the mainland or even the spies of a rival regime. Therefore, they are the “outsiders within,” who are believed to be more dangerous aliens and should be subjected to additional Taiwanization (Cheng S. J., 2006).

There are several specific regulations that only apply to the CSM migrants with respect to residency rights, social welfare, and political rights. In fact, Chinese migrant wives are subject to a more restrictive and cumbersome set of immigration and naturalization policies than any other category of marital migrants (Friedman, 2010). For instance, according to the Taiwanese law, CSM migrants need to pass the four-year “probationary period” before obtaining long-term residency and have to meet stringent requirements to be granted work permits. In contrast comparison, the marital migrants from other regions immediately obtain work permits and residency upon their arrival. This tremendously unequal treatment indicates the intentions of the Taiwanese authorities to confine the Chinese migrants to the family domain, keep them disadvantaged in the host society and create a racially incompetent people (Wang & Bélanger, 2008).

For another example, Taiwanese citizens of the Chinese origin, most of whom are marriage migrants, are barred from taking even the lowest rank of official positions, until they have registered household residence for more than ten years. In comparison, migrants from countries other than China are only prohibited from being elected to certain high-ranking positions and are allowed to assume all low- and middle-level appointed positions after they pass the civil servant examination. This differential treatment is grounded upon the social suspicion against Chinese migrants who are believed to be politically untrustworthy and underqualified. As a consequence, this regulatory regime requires Chinese marriage migrants to be more thoroughly Taiwanese until their taint of the mainland origin fades sufficiently to permit full national integration (Friedman, 2010). A hierarchy of social citizenship is thus constructed to differentiate the Taiwanese, non-Chinese foreigners and the Chinese, with deep ethnic boundaries which can only be overcome after a decade of Taiwaneseization.

Taiwan's institutionalized practices of recruiting, screening and assimilating Chinese marriage migrants tremendously impact on the entire process of the CSM migration. They not only determine who are allowed in, but also control the manner in which these migrant wives are "imported" and further "Taiwanized". Nevertheless, these institutional factors are insufficient to decipher the complicated picture of the CSM migration and its entrapment in the convoluted national identity politics in Taiwan. It is Taiwan's long-standing struggle with its own national identity that historically dominates its ethnic politics, especially in relation to migrants from Mainland China. Situated in Taiwan's deep-rooted national identity conundrum, the CSM migration easily becomes another victim of the dichotomous ethnic politics.

III. Historical roots of Taiwan's struggle with national identity

A migration experience is consistently shaped and reshaped in socially and historically specific circumstances (Wang & Bélanger, 2008). More specifically, in the case of Taiwan, the CSM migration is deeply embedded in its historical quagmire with national identity politics. Taiwan has never been recognized as an independent nation. Its history of nation building is persistently fraught with internal divergence and external influences. Taiwanese politics have always been dominated by ethnic tensions and thus adopted an explicitly exclusionist approach.

Taiwan's aborigines are of Austronesian origins and its ethnic identity differs substantially with that of the Asian mainland. The Dutch colonizers established the first settlements in Southern Taiwan in 1624 and the immigration to Taiwan accelerated. In the subsequent centuries, Hokkiens, migrants from Fukien (Fujian) Province in South China, and Hakka people, an ethnic group from China's Guangdong Province, continued to settle on the fertile plains along the western coast of Taiwan Island and drove the aboriginal people to the rugged mountainous areas in Central Taiwan, creating a deep-seated ethnic boundary between the Chinese migrants and the indigenous people.

After the defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Taiwan was ceded by the Qing Dynasty to Japan. Upon the arrival of the Japanese troops, the Hokkien and Hakka people for the first time united to fight against the colonizers and founded the Taiwan Republic. Although their attempts were quickly suppressed, this marked the genesis of the Taiwanese consciousness. However, Storm (2008) keenly points out that the nascent Taiwanese consciousness was only shared by the Hokkien and Hakka people, not the aboriginal people. From the very beginning, the "Taiwanese identity" was constructed along the exclusivist lines.

The half-century Japanese rule revolved around the assimilation of Taiwan into the Japanese society through a dual policy of suppression and education. Japan's colonial rule ignited the earliest national awareness on Taiwan and distanced the local culture from that of Mainland China (Shozo, 2006). Japan returned Taiwan to the KMT regime in 1945 and after their defeat in the Chinese Civil War, the KMT regime, along with industrialists, right-wing intellectuals and soldiers, retreated to Taiwan. These two million mainlanders were called *waishengren* (literally "people from other provinces" in Chinese or "Mainlanders") by the Taiwanese residents (*benshengren*, or "Taiwanese people") and significantly altered the demographic landscape of the Taiwanese society. They constituted the third ethnic group in Taiwan accounting for 14% of the population. Hokkien and Hakka people combined made up the largest ethnic group as "Taiwanese," in contrast to "Mainlanders," and comprised 84% of the total population (Tsai M. C., 2011). The aboriginals consisted of the remaining 2%.

To meet the dual purposes of preserving Chinese identity and sinicizing Taiwan, the KMT regime imposed Mandarin Chinese, which few Taiwanese residents spoke, as the “national language” and deprived local Taiwanese of public sector jobs. Thus, the post-war period of KMT rule over Taiwan was marked by ferocious conflicts between the local residents and the new nationalist elites. The advent of Mandarin-speaking nationalist mainlanders defined the boundary of the group of “Taiwanese people.” For the first time in history, a distinct Taiwanese identity was solidified against the imposition of Chinese identity by the KMT regime.

Taiwan’s national identity quandary is further compounded by its increasingly marginalized position in the international arena and loss of *de jure* sovereignty. Today, only the Holy See and 20 UN member states, most of which are small states relying on Taiwanese financial support, recognize the sovereignty of Taiwan. Nevertheless, Taiwan, or ROC, has the complete structure of a state: a democratic political system, military forces, economic independence and so on. In this sense, Taiwan possesses the structure and agents of national sovereignty while the official international recognition is absent. This situation brings about the major challenge facing Taiwan because, without a nation state, it is difficult to define a national identity (Storm, 2008). In the words of Storm & Harrison (2007), it constitutes a paradoxical scenario of “state available, identity wanted”.

Presently, Taiwan is confronted with a plethora of challenges in building a national identity. Endemic threats are coming from all perimeters, both outside and inside of the Taiwanese society. On the one hand, Taiwan is engulfed in the sweeping process of globalization, which gives rise to the increasing mobility of people. The rise of China, with its gargantuan political clout and economic stature, is further marginalizing Taiwan in the international arena and weakening its *de facto* sovereignty. On the other hand, since the end of martial law in the late 1980s, the wrestling between the Chinese consciousness and the Taiwanese consciousness consistently dominates Taiwan’s domestic political discourse (Copper, 2003). To counteract China’s continuous sinicization efforts, Taiwan’s independent national identity formation project is in full swing.

Although the Constitution of the ROC still claims “One China” and refutes any amendments in relation to Taiwan independence, despite its ambiguity and immaturity, Taiwanese identity has replaced Chinese identity as the national ideology. This is particularly true considering that today’s Mainlanders are already the third generation of those who migrated to Taiwan in 1949. The term *waishengren*, or “people from other provinces,” which defines the identity of mainlanders through the linkage with a place of familial origin, no longer meaningfully applies to them (Storm, 2008). With the significance of “Mainlanders” gradually faded away in Taiwan’s ethnic politics, the locals need a new target reference to locate the Taiwanese as an independent national identity in the international community. Thus, to the Taiwanese, the arrival of tens of thousands of mainland marriage migrants provides an opportunity to draw a new clear-cut dividing line between the Taiwanese and the Chinese. This is why contemporary Chinese migrants are commonly categorized as *xin waishengren* or “New Mainlanders,” ostensibly reminiscent of the ethnic politics prior to the 1980s. In doing so, the Taiwanese society reinforces the dichotomy between Taiwanese-ness and Chinese-ness which has been in place for decades. While the concept of Taiwanese-ness seems more fluid as demonstrated by the recognition of second or third-generation Mainlanders as Taiwanese, the concept of Chinese-ness is more static because irrespective of the length of their residence in Taiwan, New Mainlanders are unlikely to be accepted as Taiwanese in the long run.

Against this backdrop, the practices of recruiting, screening and assimilating Chinese brides deployed by a wide range of Taiwanese institutions serve the purposes of defining “others” as well as identifying “us”. By doing so, these institutions attempt to consolidate Taiwan’s claim of an independent national identity and reinforce its national building project. The historical roots of Taiwan’s national identity quandary shape the contours of the contemporary CSM migration and the ensuing ethnic politics.

IV. Concluding Remarks

This article revolves around the challenges posed by the cross-Strait marriage migration to Taiwan’s nation building project. It finds that Chinese marital migrants are under the gender-specific controls of various Taiwanese institutions and are projected as the imagined boundary

between “us” and “others” in Taiwan’s struggle for an independent national identity. Based on a critical analysis of Taiwan’s national identity conundrum throughout the history, it claims that the current policies and practices deployed by various Taiwanese institutions in organizing and regulating the CSM have profound historical roots. These institutionalized practices are not only passive responses to the peculiar demographics of the CSM, but also play an active role in shaping and deepening such peculiarity. They also create new ethnic frontiers in a country that is confronted with uncertain sovereignty and divided national identity in an attempt to demarcate the social boundaries between the Chinese and Taiwanese identities. Embedded in a complicated sociopolitical context of Taiwan’s national identity politics, Chinese marriage migrants are exposed to extensive gender and racial discrimination, inferiorization, domestic violence, suspicion of sham marriage and materialistic motivation and so forth. With both contemporary measures and historical influences at play, the enmeshment of the CSM in Taiwan’s national identity conundrum is unlikely to be untangled.

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