

Commentary

Mainland Spouses Speak: Taiwanese Nationalism and the Political Movements of Marriage Migrants from the People's Republic of China by Moon Kyungyun

A Slice of Identity Politics

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“Political leaders have mobilized followers around the idea that their dignity has been affronted and must be restored,” critically comments Francis Fukuyama on the conundrum of contemporary world politics (2018: 92). Moon Kyungyun amply demonstrates identity politics through her study of marriage migrants in Taiwan who had a craving for dignity. From the People's Republic of China, these mainland spouses felt that they had no place in Taiwanese society at the height of the Sunflower Movement. Moon's article gives us a fresh understanding of transnational political movements fraught with antagonism between destination and origin countries.

“Taiwan seems too democratic,” one mainland spouse said (Moon 2022: 12). This statement epitomized an awkward position that the mainland spouses occupied. In Taiwan, the marriage migrants had gained the liberty to organize, yet the more they participated in political movements, the more they felt betrayed. They are unwelcome to speak for their motherland, China, which mainstream Taiwanese regard as the biggest threat to their island's democracy. Similar to Fukuyama's diagnosis of U.S. politics between the

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left and the right, the rise of Taiwanese nationalism through the Sunflower Movement stimulated the rise of identity politics among mainland spouses. “To mainland spouses,” Moon argues, “the movement both delegitimized their identity in Taiwan and denied their very place there” (2022: 11).

Moon’s article has great potential to manifest marriage migrants’ quotidian struggle to live in Taiwan. Indeed, subtle transformations in the antagonism between Taiwan and China are nowhere better illustrated than in the suffering of those caught between the two polities, such as mainland students in Taiwan, *Taishang* or Taiwanese businesspeople, and mainland spouses. However, Moon leaves several questions unanswered: What sort of unpleasant encounter laid the foundation for their hurt feelings? What kind of contingencies led to the emergence of new political parties and organizations for mainland spouses in Taiwan? How did the political movements of the marriage migrants shift from depoliticization to politicization?

Readers also need more historical information to grasp the full-blown identity politics in Taiwan. How did the strong Taiwanese consciousness evolve into the Sunflower Movement? How have China and her citizens become the seemingly implacable foes of Taiwanese society? Did China’s rise as a global power in the early twenty-first century contribute to Taiwanese nationalism? Foregrounding these key questions would shed light on the highly dynamic cross-strait relationship.

The various strategies that marriage migrants adopted, such as appealing to the motherland, demonstrate how “mainland spouses speak,” as the title of Moon’s article indicates. Still, do mainstream Taiwanese hear the mainland spouses? No, unfortunately. The rift between those who are speaking and those who are supposed to listen has been growing. A mutual misunderstanding between the two sides is implicated in identity politics. For mainland spouses, recognizing the intensifying Taiwanese consciousness contradicts their motherland’s wish to unify Taiwan with China. For mainstream Taiwanese, it is disturbing to acknowledge that their “collective self-defense” against China (Moon 2022: 10) has isolated mainland spouses. Hence, Moon’s study is valuable for scholars to explore the root of and the remedy for identity politics in Taiwan.

References

- Fukuyama, Francis. 2018. Against Identity Politics: The New Tribalism and the Crisis of Democracy. *Foreign Affairs* 97: 90–114.

