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From Reproductive Assimilation to Neoliberal Multiculturalism: Framing and Regulating Immigrant Mothers and Children in Taiwan

Pei-Chia Lan

Department of Sociology, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

Drawing on the case of Taiwan, one of the major destinations for marriage migrants in Asia, this article examines how the host state utilizes shifting discursive frames for Southeast Asian immigrants and their children to establish the regime of marital citizenship and achieve the project of nation building. I characterise the earlier regime as ‘reproductive assimilation’, which aimed to manage the potential risk that immigrant motherhood brings to ‘population quality’ through assimilation-oriented projects of monitoring childbirth and childrearing. The recent turn toward the ‘New Southbound Policy’ shifts the cultural frame toward ‘neoliberal multiculturalism’ by reframing the ethnic difference of the ‘new second generation’ as a market asset for globalised national development.

KEYWORDS

Marriage migration;
immigrant motherhood;
marital citizenship; maternal
citizenship; assimilation;
multiculturalism; Taiwan

Over the last two decades, more than half a million immigrants entered Taiwan through marriage, mostly women from Southeast Asia and Mainland China (Ministry of the Interior 2017a). The unions between Taiwanese men and Southeast Asian women, in particular, stir ambivalent feelings for Taiwanese society, which has long seen itself as a mono-ethnic nation. On the one hand, immigrant women help the country, which is currently facing the challenge of very low fertility, to reproduce the next generation of multicultural citizens. On the other hand, the state and the public consider immigrant women a threat to population quality because they are suspected to be incapable mothers and unworthy citizens.

The language used by the press and official documents to refer to marital immigrants and their children has changed over the years. ‘Foreign brides’ (外籍新娘), a common term in the 1990s, which carries connotations of ethnic otherness and commodified marriage, was gradually replaced by more inclusive terms like ‘new immigrants’ (新移民) or ‘new residents’ (新住民) in the early 2000s. The mixed-race children of immigrant mothers, who used to be called ‘new Taiwanese children’ (新台灣之子), are given the new label of ‘new second generation’ (新二代), which not only gives the second generation an identity as a group but also positively affirms their immigrant background and multicultural heritage. With the recent policy turn, the government has started to praise

children of immigrants for having the potential to facilitate the nation's development of trade and diplomatic ties with ASEAN countries.

By looking at the changing discursive frames and institutional regulations for Southeast Asian immigrant mothers and their children, this article examines how the Taiwanese state attempts to mitigate social anxieties about the nation's future by managing ethnic differences and governing biological and cultural reproduction. Immigrant mothers are viewed as the racialised, classed other that carries the risk of shattering the imagined ethnic homogeneity of the national population and the modern images of marriage and family. And yet, the political discourse of multiculturalism also symbolically appropriates immigrants and their children to achieve the imagination of a globalised national future.

Reproduction, Citizenship and Multiculturalism

Women's sexuality and reproduction are fundamental elements in the discourses and practices of nationalism and state sovereignty (Yuval-Davis 1997). Scholars have used the concept of 'maternal citizenship' to denote multiple meanings. Feminists who assert women's maternal virtue see mothering responsibility and practice as guiding principles for women's political and social rights (Kymlicka and Norman 1994). However, scholars who take an intersectional approach raise the critique that laws governing access to marriage and reproduction accomplish governments' cultural, moral, eugenic, racial and patriarchal regulation of the citizenry (Collins 1999; Mink 2002).

Lower-educated immigrant women are vulnerable to state monitoring regarding their bodies and conduct. A poignant example is offered by Aihwa Ong (2003), who illustrates that the US project of family planning requires Cambodian refugees to become self-governing subjects with regulated fecundity in order to seek substantial incorporation in the new country as modernised citizens.

The expanding literature on cross-border marriage has investigated how the host state governs marriage migrants by reconstituting legal and substantial citizenship in many different ways. According to Frensznoza-Flot and Ricordeau (2017: 10–11), 'marital citizenship' not only refers to a *legal status* but also involves a *practice* which entails 'certain obligations to fulfil toward the state in exchange for the rights, duties and protection that it offers.' As such, 'marital citizenship regimes allow the host state to regulate the family formation process of their citizens and their foreign partners.'

For instance, host states may manage the entry and residency of foreign spouses through measures such as marital interviews and the requirements of naturalisation. Lawmakers and bureaucrats not only produce standards of marital authenticity that sustain marriage as a highly gendered and sexualised institution, but they also assert state sovereignty to monitor the intimate life of cross-border couples (Lan 2008; Friedman 2015). In Taiwan and Korea, reproductive sex within heterosexual, monogamous marriage sweeps aside the suspicion of 'fake marriage' in the eyes of the state and eases the path to legal citizenship and social entitlements (Chao 2004; Kim 2007; Wang and Belanger 2008). By contrast, participation in sexual activities deemed dangerous or destructive to the moral order of the society, such as infidelity and sex work, is penalised by cancelling residency and even revoking naturalised citizenship (Cheng 2013; Chen 2015).

Childbearing and childrearing are critical sites for the governance of marital citizenship. Minjeon Kim (2013) coins the term 'ethnicised maternal citizenship' to describe

the state project that emphasises marriage migrants' role as biological and cultural reproducers of 'Koreans,' which paradoxically promotes cultural assimilation while relegating marriage migrants to the status of gender dependents and ethnic others. Meanwhile, as Isabelle Cheng (2017) has demonstrated in her study in Taiwan, marriage migrants themselves also view acquiring and practicing citizenship, including voting, as a critical means to achieving their motherly duty in the private sphere.

Similar state projects are found in other receiving societies. In Hong Kong, 'family life education' carries out the rationality of national development, in which social workers instruct mainland Chinese spouses with the aim of 'modernising' their views of family life (Newendorp 2008). In Japan, Filipina wives attend 'mother's class' to acquire cultural knowledge and maternal skills necessary for them to achieve both the gendered duty of mothering and a sense of ethnicised belonging (Faier 2009).

The influx of marital immigrants, however, poses challenges to the political ideology of ethnonationalism and the regime of *jus sanguinis* citizenship, both widely held across East Asian countries. Since 2005, the Korean government has officially used the term 'multicultural family' to refer to cross-border marriages and their offspring. However, scholars have criticised this state-led project for falling into political sloganeering and straying from the essence of multiculturalism (Han 2007; Ahn 2012). Hyun-Mee Kim (2007) poignantly points out that the rhetoric of 'multicultural family' is constructed for the interpellation of marital immigrants, who are considered by the Korean government to be easily mobilised resources to solve the various family crises and care-work burdens facing Korean society.

Scholars have used the concept of 'neoliberal multiculturalism' to describe how neoliberal states and organisations embrace multiculturalism as a new strategy of governance that recognises limited cultural rights and promotes cultural diversity, while domesticating ethnic inequality and neutralising political opposition (Hale 2005; Melamed 2006). Projects with titles such as 'productive multiculturalism' or 'multiculturalism means business' call on indigenous people or immigrant groups to embrace ethnic identities and attachments as market assets (Kymlicka 2012). Ji-Hyun Ahn (2012) also applies the term to describe the Korean context of multiculturalism: the discourse of cultural diversity, mostly salient in the domains of management and media, celebrates the image of cultural hybridity that results from and facilitates the flexible flows of capital and people.

Focusing on the case of Taiwan, I advance the literature with two major inquiries. First, this article situates the regulation of immigrant motherhood in the broader political context of ambivalence and uncertainty about the national future. For Taiwan, a country struggling to enhance its sovereign status and global visibility in the face of growing pressure from China, nationalist discourses are shadowed by the cultural logic of what Lee Edelman (2004) calls 'reproductive futurism': the symbolic image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experience of historical children, dominates our imagination of the future and embodies the telos of the social order. The social concerns about Taiwan's fertility crisis and unsuitable parenting demonstrate the collective imagination of a national future that centres on the reproduction of the healthy, well-nurtured Child with a proper cultural inheritance and sufficient global exposure.

Second, this article examines how the narrative construction of marital immigrants and their children changes over time. In particular, I focus on 'framing' as a social mechanism of categorizing differences and defining self and other (Goffman 1974). The naming and

framing of marital immigrants and their children in Taiwan have changed across historical periods: from 'foreign bride' to 'new resident' and from 'new Taiwanese children' to 'new second generation.' The transformation of cultural understanding of their ethnic differences in relation to the national future reflects the changing regimes of marital citizenship, shifting from what I call 'reproductive assimilation'—monitoring immigrant motherhood as an essential pathway to social and cultural integration—to a state-centred 'neoliberal multiculturalism': cultivating the multicultural capital of immigrant children as transnational market assets for the benefit of national development.

Background and Data

Demographers and bureaucrats in Taiwan have directed public attention to the 'population crisis' looming large in the nation's future. Taiwan's fertility rate has dropped to one of the lowest in the world; not to mention that a growing number of young citizens are simply not interested in getting married.¹ Then-President Ma Ying-Jeou even described Taiwan's declining birth rate as a 'national security issue' (United Daily 2011). To tackle the population crisis, both national and local governments have adopted multiple policy measures to encourage Taiwanese women, especially those with advanced degrees, to give birth to more children. These measures, however, seem futile in the face of the still depressed fertility rate.

Compared to declining marriage rates among Taiwanese citizens, cross-border marriages increased over the 1990s and peaked in the early 2000s. Marital immigrants offer an easy solution to the various family crises and care deficits facing Taiwanese society. Many of these immigrants' Taiwanese husbands are undesirable partners in the local marriage market – elderly veterans, divorcees, the disabled, farmers, or working-class men – but there are also middle-class men who met their wives through trade or tourism in China or Southeast Asia, or work or study in a third country (Hsia 2007; Friedman 2015).

In 2003, the birth rate for children of immigrant mothers reached its peak of thirteen for every hundred new born Taiwanese babies (Ministry of the Interior 2017e). Starting from 2014, over ten per cent (or about 200,000) of all students enrolled in primary and secondary school were born to an immigrant mother. In the 2017–2018 academic year, 40 per cent of these had mothers from Vietnam, 40 per cent from China, and 9 per cent from Indonesia. This proportion has become substantial because the number of children born to Taiwanese mothers continues to be depressed. With the declining fertility rate, the total number of children in primary and secondary schools dropped from 2,840,460 in 2004–1,799,952 in 2017. Among them, the children of new immigrants increased from 46,411–181,301, reaching the peak of 212,057 in 2012 (Ministry of Education 2017).

Two decades have passed since the earliest waves of marriage migrants entered Taiwan. NGOs and activist groups in Taiwan have successfully deployed 'strategic framing' to challenge public concerns about the negative impacts of marital immigrants (Hsia 2008). AHRLIM (the Alliance for Human Rights Legislation for Immigrants and Migrants), an alliance of activist organisations, used the rhetoric of democracy, human rights and multiculturalism as narrative strategies to challenge Taiwan's traditionally exclusionary model of citizenship (Hsia 2009).

As a result, the Taiwanese government gradually changed its policy toward marital immigrants (see below for details). The political discourses have also gradually shifted from a linear view of assimilation to the mutual exchange of multiculturalism, promoting the idea that Taiwanese society can and should ‘learn from immigrants.’ With the inauguration of Independence-leaning President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, the ‘New Southbound Policy’ (新南向政策) became an agenda of priority. As concern over Taiwan’s overdependence on cross-strait trade increases, the Tsai government is encouraging business to ‘go south’ by investing in Southeast Asia to diversify political and economic risk. The policy includes multicultural projects on many fronts with the second generation of cross-border marriages as primary targets (Executive Yuan 2016).

This article is based on a larger research project (Lan 2018) that recruited about 80 native and immigrant parents as informants. Among them, I conducted in-depth interviews with five immigrant mothers from Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia. In May 2016, I held a focus-group discussion with eight immigrant women, half of whom are originally from Southeast Asia, who participated in a free-of-charge parental education workshop. I also participated in another informal meeting with five second-generation children in September 2017; most of their mothers are Vietnamese except for two whose mothers are from PRC. The data from the interviews and focus-group discussion with Southeast Asian immigrant mothers and second-generation children is used for understanding their subjective experience in relation to the Taiwanese state’s nation-building project. I also rely on resources drawn from government documents, journalistic coverage, policy reports, and secondary literature to chronicle the development of public discourses and to identify the framing of migrant mothers and their mixed children. All of the quotes from official documents and interviews are originally in Chinese and translated by me.

‘Foreign Bride’: Potential Threat to Population Quality

Although childbearing is increasingly becoming an individual lifestyle choice for Taiwanese women, for marital immigrants, it is still a gendered duty enforced by the patriarchal family and state. Through motherhood, foreign spouses display their commitments to marriage and permanent immigration, especially when they face sustained suspicion about their migration motives, which are popularly associated with gold digging or illicit work through sham marriage (Hsia 2007). On average, Vietnamese spouses become pregnant six months after arriving in Taiwan (Wang 2001). Many immigrant mothers, especially lower-educated, Southeast Asians, continue to give birth until the number or gender of the children meets the expectations from their husbands’ families (Chen 2008).

Childbirth also enables marriage migrants to assert marital authenticity in the eyes of the state and to gain preferential treatment that helps them to acquire residency or citizenship sooner (Chao 2004; Friedman 2015). The regime of marital citizenship during the 1990s and the early 2000s was driven by the logic of ‘reproductive assimilation.’ It viewed motherhood as an essential pathway for immigrants to achieve social and cultural integration. Childbirth served as a critical rite of passage for immigrant mothers to become loyal family members and worthy citizens—their status thereby shifted from stigmatised ‘foreign brides’ to ‘respectable’ mothers of ‘new Taiwanese children.’

However, during this period, Taiwan's government viewed the reproductive activities of migrant women less as a solution to the fertility crisis and more as a potential threat to population quality. A blunt example involved opinions aired by then-Vice Minister of Education, Chou Tsan-Te, at a national education conference in 2004. Speaking to a crowd of school principals, Chou expressed his worry about the 'low quality' (低素質) of immigrants and said that 'foreign brides should not have so many children' (Yiu 2004).

The offspring of cross-border marriages are under state monitoring not only due to the racial otherness of immigrant women but also because of the assumed biological or socio-economic disadvantage of their Taiwanese husbands. An official report (Ministry of the Interior 2004a: 5) explicitly states the logic of 'discrimination by association':

The marriages of foreign and Mainland spouses are often delegated with the mission to reproduce the next generation. Most of their Taiwanese spouses are older, have a low socio-economic status, or live with disabilities. If we do not attend to genetic health (優生保健), their children would be vulnerable to the influence of physical or mental illness and thus under high risk for biological defect or developmental delay.

The Taiwan Provincial Institute of Family Planning has incorporated immigrant spouses into the 'New Family Plan (Birth Control and Genetic Health)' as early as 1998. Public health nurses have offered seminars or household visits to instruct immigrant mothers on scientifically-based and hygienic practices of childcare (Chiu and Lin 2004). Since 2003, the Department of Health has kept official records to monitor the reproductive activities of immigrant spouses; the coverage has become comprehensive with ninety-nine per cent of spouses monitored in 2014 (Ministry of Health and Welfare 2015: 115). Similar measures are applied to local women of 'special groups' such as teenage mothers and the physically or mentally disabled (Fan 2006). Starting in 2005, the Department of Health also subsidises birth control for those marital immigrants who have lived in the country no more than four months (extended to six months after 2011) and are not yet eligible for National Health Insurance. Notably, the medical subsidy is limited to only reproductive care, including measures like prenatal exams, amniocentesis, intrauterine devices, and tubal ligation (United Daily 2005).

In contrast with the common stereotypes, immigrant women do not have much higher fertility rates than local Taiwanese women. According to the research of Yang et al. (2012), the fertility of immigrant mothers seems higher than that of married Taiwanese women, mostly because Southeast Asian immigrants get married and become pregnant at a younger age and the majority of them give birth to their first child within the first two years of marriage.² Despite popular misconceptions, the babies of immigrant mothers actually suffer less from stillbirth, premature birth, and low birth weight compared to those of Taiwanese mothers (Yang et al. 2012). This is likely because Taiwanese mothers are on average older.

'New Residents': Managing Risk in Childrearing

In 2003, the Awakening Foundation and other women's organisations advocated a campaign of renaming, urging the government and the public to replace the derogatory terms 'foreign bride' and 'Mainland bride' with 'new immigrant women' (新移民女性), a term preferred in polls conducted with marital immigrants (Awakening 2003). The government

soon incorporated this new title in official documents and expanded the resources and services for these ‘new immigrants’ or ‘new residents.’ Taiwan’s government also started several immigrant-friendly policies, including granting easier access to the job market prior to naturalisation since 2002 (Liberty Times 2002). It also devoted much funding to social services for immigrants and conducted a comprehensive survey on the living conditions of foreign and Chinese spouses in 2003 (Ministry of the Interior 2004b). In January of 2005, the Ministry of the Interior announced it would invest NT\$3 billion (US\$100 million) over the duration of ten years in a ‘Foreign Spouses Care and Service Fund’.³

Despite shifting the discursive frame toward an inclusive marital citizenship, the regime of ‘reproductive assimilation’ remains, with the emphasis shifted from biological reproduction (childbearing) to cultural reproduction (childrearing). In 2003, Taiwan’s government promulgated the Family Education Act with the aim of ‘promoting family values, increasing knowledge and skills of family life, improving mental and physical health, building happy families and creating a peaceful society.’⁴ Family education started in Taiwan around the late 1980s as a middle-class grassroots campaign with the aim to modernise family life, but it has become a top-down policy that monitors socioeconomically disadvantaged families (Lan 2018). Immigrant mothers, with their shortage of local language skills and cultural knowledge, are targeted as a group of parents who are in serious need of ‘parenting knowledge and skills.’ The Ministry of the Interior prints and gives away free copies of the guidance for children’s growth and the handbook for parenting education in Indonesian, Vietnamese and Thai. Interestingly, there is no English version of the handbook on parenting. This suggests that English-speaking foreigners, who mostly have middle-class background, are not the target of the government plan of parental education.⁵

Schools also operate as sites of parental education and an extension of state governance. Starting from 2006, the Ministry of the Interior started a program of ‘special care and counselling for high-risk families.’ Children from such families, including cross-border marriages, are under special care and monitoring at school. Since 2006, the Ministry of Education has also initiated a program called ‘K-12 Administration: Foreign and Mainland Chinese Spouse and Children Welfare and Counselling Program.’⁶ Upon application, each school can receive funds of between NT\$25,000 and \$60,000 to provide expert-run parenting seminars to ‘systematically educate foreign and mainland Chinese spouses about self- and child development, equipping them with the information to become better parents and improve their relationship with their children.’

Another state project further demonstrates the logic of risk management in the governance of children’s health. Starting in the 1990s, Taiwan’s government developed a system of medical surveillance involving kindergarten and nursery school teachers, paediatricians, nurses, social workers and parents to monitor children’s early development. The Ministry of the Interior started using the category of ‘developmentally delayed’ to identify young children who need additional health and education services as measures of ‘early intervention.’⁷

Although all Taiwanese children under age six are incorporated into the network of surveillance, medical staff are inclined to associate certain family conditions with children’s stunted development, including parents’ low socio-economic status, single parenthood and cross-border marriages (Tseng 2008). In other words, nonnormative mothers, including poor and immigrant women, are given the label of ‘risky mothers’ by the discourses of

scientific motherhood, which prizes the management of risk and the prevention of disability (Frederick 2017). A few clinical studies published in Taiwan around the early 2000s indicated that immigrant mothers had more premature deliveries and their new-born babies weighed less than the national average. Despite their small samples, these studies attracted grave attention among public health experts and the general public (see Yang et al. 2012).

These well-intended measures of state paternalism can lead to social labelling and discrimination in everyday life. Immigrant mothers are especially vulnerable to social blame for endangering not only the health of their children but also national development. One Indonesian immigrant mother, whose son received treatment for a minor developmental delay, told me about her experience:

We were waiting in the school kitchen while my son talked to the doctor (for evaluation). There was a woman in the kitchen and she asked us what we were doing, and we told her that our son was doing an evaluation. I guess she could tell I was not Taiwanese from hearing me talking to my husband. She turned to my husband and said, 'Let me tell you, you married the wrong woman. You should have married a Taiwanese. These foreigners don't know how to teach children, no wonder your child is developing too slowly' ... After that, I took my son to therapy and I found out that ninety per cent of the children in therapy were actually Taiwanese ... So that woman was wrong, not all foreign spouses' children have a problem.

Wang and Belanger (2008) have criticised the state-sponsored programs for marriage migrants for a latent tendency toward assimilation or 'Taiwanisation.' For instance, a significant proportion of government funding has gone to 'life adjustment' courses offered by local schools and NGOs for marital immigrants. These courses generally cover Chinese language lessons, Chinese cooking, parental education, and some vocational training, such as hairdressing and basic computer skills. These limited options, which exclude broader topics such as political rights, community engagement, and entrepreneurship skills, demonstrate the state's assumption that immigrants' practice of citizenship is contingent upon their fulfilment of family duties as wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law, rather than professional development or civic participation (Wang and Belanger 2008; Wu 2014).

By the same token, those children of marital migrants who are not covered by the project of 'Taiwanisation' stir societal anxieties. In June 2005, Taiwan's *Business Weekly* published a cover story entitled 'Taiwanese Kids in the Mekong Delta,' reporting that an estimated 3000 children of 'broken' Taiwan-Vietnam marriages were left in Vietnam without access to education. These marital migrants who divorced their Taiwanese husbands or 'ran away' from unhappy marriages returned to Vietnam with their mixed-race children. Some of these children, born with Taiwanese citizenship, encounter difficulty attending school or becoming Vietnamese citizens. The article cites a female Vietnamese returnee saying, 'I want my kids to stay in Taiwan so that they can have a better future. I don't want them to forget their language roots. I wish them to learn Mandarin well' (Wang and Belanger 2008: 100). The Eden Social Foundation, the NGO collaborating with *Business Weekly*, raised more than NT\$10 million (US\$300,000) to 'pave a road' for these children to learn Mandarin so they would not forget their roots in Taiwan (Wang and Belanger 2008: 100).

Transnational transfer of childcare is also common among immigrant mothers who stay married in Taiwan. Despite the unavailability of statistics, I found anecdotal evidence in my interviews that some immigrant mothers send their small children back home to live with grandparents for a period of time, mostly before kindergarten or elementary school, so the mothers can work long hours to support the family (Lan 2018).

In fact, many native-born Taiwanese parents similarly leave their children in the countryside under the care of grandparents so they can focus on work and business in the city. This practice was even more common in the 1980s and 1990s, but still happens now. Such childcare arrangements are increasingly viewed as parental negligence according to the current norms of childrearing that privilege the nuclear family and intensive motherhood (Lan 2018). However, transnational transfer of childcare concerns the public much more because it implies the failure of the paternal state to properly cultivate ‘new Taiwanese children’ into subjects of ethnonationalism.⁸

‘New Second Generation’: Neoliberal Multiculturalism

In the past, Southeast Asian immigrant mothers were generally discouraged from talking to their children in their native languages. The husband’s family was concerned that the children might develop an accent in speaking Chinese, or simply devalued Southeast Asian languages. As a Taiwanese husband of an Indonesian wife said: ‘There is no use for it because we live in Taiwan and not in Indonesia.’ However, the husband recently changed his mind. The Indonesian wife told me:

Now my husband keeps telling me to teach my son Indonesian so my son can go make money in Southeast Asia ... Some people told him about a kid whose mother is from Indonesia and he went to Indonesia to work after growing up. Because he can speak both Indonesian and Chinese, he makes a lot of money and then my husband told me I should teach our son Indonesian.

The changing perceptions of cultural diversity in Taiwan exemplify a neoliberal version of multiculturalism, in which immigrant women are incorporated as performers and tutors of exotic culture through the display of food, language and clothing (Lin 2017). Immigrant mothers’ cultural differences have shifted from being framed as a threat to the ethnic homogeneity of the population, toward being framed as an asset that should be passed to the next generation of cosmopolitan citizens.

In May 2016, President Tsai Ing-wen announced the launch of the ‘New Southbound Policy’ as ‘a crucial part of Taiwan’s economic and trade strategy, which aims to redefine Taiwan’s important role in Asia’s development, identify a new direction and a new driving force for a new stage of economic development, and create future value.’⁹ The high priority of this policy is marked by the fact that the New Southbound Policy Office was established in the Presidential Office rather than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As a part of the ‘new southbound policy,’ the Ministry of Education has earmarked NT \$1 billion (US\$33.2 million) for the New Southbound Talent Development Program to facilitate the two-way flows of transnational cultural exchange. The government has set up financial aid and subsidy programs to attract students from ASEAN and South Asian nations to pursue academic studies, technical training or research work in Taiwan. Meanwhile, the program offers opportunities for young Taiwanese to study, undertake internships and job training, or do volunteer work in ASEAN and South

Asia. Southeast Asian languages will receive further institutional recognition after they are included as parts of the ‘mother-tongue’ language curriculum in all elementary schools from the academic year of 2018 (Ministry of Education 2016a).

In particular, the ‘new second generation,’ or children of Southeast Asian immigrants, are targeted as beneficiaries of the New Southbound Policy. Both central and local governments have poured in institutional resources to help them to cultivate linguistic skills and cultural knowledge related to their mothers’ home countries. The Ministry of Education offers grants for the children of immigrants to visit their maternal grandparents during summer vacations as well as fellowships to study in Southeast Asia. Local governments hold summer camps for the new second generation to spend time in Southeast Asia, including visits and internships at Taiwanese-owned factories to ‘experience international workplaces’ (New Taipei City Government 2017).

Several highly ranked government officials, including the director of the Bureau of Vocational Training, commented to the press that the children of immigrant mothers are ‘the best human capital for Taiwan to deploy in the Southeast Asian Market’ (Li 2013). Politicians use the familial metaphor of ‘in-laws’ to describe Southeast Asia and encourage the children of immigrants to familiarise themselves with their mothers’ native languages to smooth Taiwanese diplomatic relations with Southeast Asia. Even the official document concerning this initiative from the Ministry of Education uses the subtitle ‘in-law diplomacy’ to elaborate the goals of empowering the children of new immigrants:

These programs encourage the children of new immigrants to return to the homeland and trace their roots ... and cultivate them as new southbound soldiers ... We encourage them to study programs that focus on Southeast Asian languages and industries. Colleges can offer special classes with priority admission given to the new second generation. New-second-generation students are entitled to tuition subsidies if their majors are related to Taiwanese-owned industries and they acquire ASEAN language specialties. They will also receive assistance to find jobs in overseas [Taiwanese-owned] workplaces. (Ministry of Education 2016b)

The current political discourse views immigrant mothers’ linguistic and cultural heritage as a form of multicultural capital that can be converted into a market asset for their children. It not only can help a mixed child to broaden his or her job prospects in the future but may also benefit the Taiwanese nation in its quest for new investment destinations in the global economy. In short, Taiwan’s neoliberal multiculturalism is a state-led project driven by the force of national development. Mixed-race children are expected not only to become ‘cosmopolitan market actor[s] who can compete effectively across state boundaries’ (Kymlicka 2012: 111), but they also serve as culturally adaptable warriors who helps the nation to diversify its markets at the frontier of global capitalism.

The combination of multiculturalism with neoliberal economic policies can benefit mixed-race children and their families, but it may also create unintended negative effects, such as social labelling or ghettoisation in the career paths of the second generation. One daughter of an immigrant mother offered a poignant commentary on this policy turn:

I feel tired of hearing people describing us as the promising second generation. It seems that we are only supposed to go to Thailand or Vietnam. What if I want to go to Spain? We don’t want to be segregated from the others.¹⁰

In another informal meeting of New Second Generation children, college students shared their feelings: 'I feel that we have become a new species.' More and more people show interest in their lived experience with an exotic lens, saying 'you are very special.' Or, they display care through presumptions. Second generation children feel bothered by questions like 'Were you bullied while growing up?' 'What is your identity? Vietnamese or Taiwanese?' Even when members of the second generation are recognised for their academic achievement, it can carry an implicit tone of micro-aggression when teachers or the others add, 'It is not easy for you (to achieve this) with a mother like yours.'

The government and political agents promoting the New Southbound Policy wrongly assume that the new second generation will have a 'natural' affinity with the culture and language associated with their mothers' homeland. For example, when the Democratic Progress Party, the current ruling party, offered a summer fellowship to support children of marital immigrants to visit Southeast Asia, the grant recipients were called 'root seekers,' a term that implies an essentialised view of their cultural heritage. A student of the new generation put it quite well:

Vietnam is not where my roots are. It's where my mother's roots are. I think Vietnam is like a 'side branch' for me and only because a mudslide (referring to the New Southbound Policy) forced me to go over there.

In fact, the majority of the second generation cannot even speak their mothers' native languages due to the previous social stigma attached to Southeast Asian immigrants. The children commented on the contradiction between the government's past and present policies: 'You expect a lot of things you repressed before.' 'Those things you wanted to cast aside, you now put right in front of us'.

Ann Anagnost (2000: 391) has argued that multiculturalism operates as an 'institutionalised representational regime' that permits 'the smooth suturing of cultural difference into the national culture in a domestication of difference emptied of history.' In Taiwan, multiculturalism falls into political sloganeering and paternalism when immigrants and their children are not incorporated as active agents asserting their identity and cultural rights, along with political rights and participation. When the policy agenda is driven by a market-driven instrumental goal and targets the second generation as 'culturally packaged products,' multiculturalism loses its essential aim of achieving human-centred intercultural understanding on a societal scale.

Conclusion

This article has examined the changing frames and regulations of immigrant motherhood in Taiwan. The earlier regime of marital citizenship, which I have called 'reproductive assimilation,' viewed immigrant motherhood as a potential threat to population quality, especially during the 1990s and early 2000s. The regime of reproductive assimilation continued in the 2000s but the focus shifted to childrearing by offering family education as a pathway to modern family life and intensive mothering. To earn the right to be incorporated into the social body and national community, the 'foreign bride' must now prove that she has become a 'new resident' as a self-governing subject capable of managing her fertility and motherhood. The recent 'New Southbound Policy' shifts the regime of marital citizenship in the direction of 'neoliberal

multiculturalism,' redefining the ethnic difference of the new second generation as a market asset for national development.

By managing the reproductive activities of female marriage immigrants, the state attempts to soothe social anxieties about Taiwan's uncertain political security and economic prosperity in the future. The rationality for such governance has nevertheless transformed over time: the patriotic duty of immigrant mothers has changed from that of erasing undesirable cultural difference to that of cultivating multicultural children as new patriotic capitalist subjects. The political discourse of multiculturalism symbolically appropriates Southeast Asian immigrants and their children for the imagination of a globalised national future, in which Taiwan could build stronger alliances with ASEAN countries as a bulwark against the political and economic threats posed by China.

The changing discursive frames for marital immigrants and their children indicate not only the transformation of cultural understandings about ethnic others but also the reconstitution of self-imagination for the Taiwanese state and nation. As we have seen, the changing regimes of marital citizenship are shaped and reshaped by political discourses concerning the imagination of Taiwan's national future in the global economy and geopolitical sphere. While the cultural rights of marital immigrants and their children gain increasing recognition in a political milieu sensitive to international cultural diversity, it is urgent for us to critically assess the policies of multiculturalism with the essential goals of respecting intercultural equality and challenging injustice in the distribution of cultural rights.

Notes

1. The total fertility rate dropped to 0.895 in 2010, the lowest in the world; the rate in 2016 was 1.17 (Ministry of the Interior 2017b). The crude divorce rate rose to 2.87 in 2003 and was 2.29 in 2016 (Ministry of the Interior 2017c). The crude marriage rate dropped to 5.07 in 2010 and was 6.31 in 2016 (Ministry of the Interior 2017d).
2. Yang et al. (2012) compiled multiple official census data and found that, although the general fertility rate of Southeast Asian immigrant mothers is higher than that of native women, the former's marriage-duration specific fertility rate is actually lower than the latter's. The fertility rate of Chinese spouses is the lowest, because almost forty percent of Chinese spouses were widowed or divorced prior to their marriages to Taiwanese veterans, so these unions are likely to stay childless (Chen 2008).
3. The fund was renamed as 'New Resident Development Fund' after 2015 (National Immigration Agency 2016).
4. The Family Education Act, section 1 (Legislative Yuan 2003).
5. The electronic version of the handbooks on prenatal care, children's health, and parental education can be download from the website of Ministry of Education (2018).
6. The program was called the 'Low-income foreign spouse family and children education plan' when it was first introduced in 2006 and amended in 2009.
7. According to Article 31 in the Protection of Children and Youth Welfare and Rights Act: 'The government will establish an assessment mechanism for the development of children aged below six, offering special care for early prevention, medical, schooling and family support for developmental delays in children as needed.' (Legislative Yuan 2011)
8. See Tran (2005) for a criticism of the ethnocentric bias of the Business Weekly report.
9. Office of President 2016.
10. A participant spoke at the forum 'Human-based New South-turn Policy: Cultivating Southeast Talents for Taiwan' held on May 17, 2016.

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Notes on Contributor

Pei-Chia Lan is Distinguished Professor of Sociology at National Taiwan University. Her fields of specialty include gender, work and migration. She is the author of *Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domesticity and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan* (Duke 2006), which won the American Sociological Association's Distinguished Book Award, and *Raising Global Families: Parenting, Immigration and Class in Taiwan and the US* (Stanford 2018).

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