

# The Formation of 'Transnational Communities': A New Challenge to 'Multicultural Taiwan'

**Li-jung Wang**

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Yuan-Ze University, Taiwan

*Li-jung Wang has recently completed his Ph.D at the Center for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, United Kingdom.*

## **Abstract**

This paper will explore the multicultural challenges resulting from increasing numbers of migrant workers and foreign (non-Chinese) brides in Taiwan, and discuss how such outside cultural influences create new forms of cultural expression, identity, and citizenship. The paper will further describe experiences and present theories specific to Taiwan's experience.

Research on 'transnational communities' is fairly advanced in Taiwan. 'Transnational communities' in Taiwan are expected to 'assimilate' quickly into mainstream Taiwan society and their personal cultural needs and influences largely ignored. These communities continue to remain largely isolated from mainstream Taiwan society, thus making them 'invisible' to society as a whole. Therefore, this research hopes to encourage research of 'transnational communities' within the field of cultural studies and to provide a basic picture into the cultural influence and development of these communities in Taiwan.

## **Keywords**

Transnational community, multiculturalism, identity, citizenship, cultural policy.

## **Introduction**

As a result of its unique history, Taiwanese society is struggling with two problems. The first is the lack of a common national identity. The clash between Chinese identity and Taiwanese identity has led to other conflicts within the society as a whole. The second problem is related to inequality among the various cultural communities, which has created a crisis in political legitimacy and social justice. In response to these challenges multiculturalism has become an important influence in Taiwan's cultural policy, and 'multicultural Taiwan' is constructed as a new national identity. In 1997, the Constitution of the Republic of China (ROC, the name of the government in Taiwan) claims that the ROC recognizes and supports multi-cultures with the amendment of the Tenth article. In 2001, President Chen, Shu-ban announced that 'ROC is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country. Multiculturalism is the basic national policy' (the President Palace, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2001). Multiculturalism is viewed as a new value in Taiwan.

In the 1990s, migrant workers from East Asian countries, including the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia, brought new cultural differences to Taiwan. Today there are about 320,000 migrant workers in Taiwan, which is approximately the same number as the total population of Taiwanese aborigines. Their presence is viewed as a new test of the government's multicultural policies.

In addition, in 1994 the government of Taiwan abolished the limitations on 'foreign brides' who enter Taiwan from Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines. This

new group -- whose fathers are Taiwanese and mothers are Indonesians, Thais, Vietnamese and Filipinos -- has attracted much attention in Taiwanese society. In September 2002, their children began to go to primary schools. The Taiwan government now faces the difficulty of how to educate them, since they were born into, and live with, two cultures. In other words, how can the government educate these children to live in Taiwanese society while still allowing them to retain their own indigenous cultures?

These new problems, which have to do with what Taiwanese identity is now and what it will become in the future, challenges the whole society. The boundaries between nation and nation, between Taiwan and other countries, will be shifted, blurred and unstable. Everyone will live with increasingly diverse and overlapping cultures. This paper will attempt to discuss the influences and challenges of 'new cultural diversity' posed by these 'transnational communities' to identity, cultural policy and citizenship in Taiwan.

### **The Formation of 'Multicultural Taiwan':**

Because of its special history, few people share a common national identity in Taiwan. The strong tensions between diversity (such as ethnic, gender and class differences, hybrid culture and multiple identities) and homogenisation (the construction of national identity) has continued through the various phases in Taiwanese history, and also have tainted the Taiwanese version of 'multiculturalism'. Since the 1940s, the conflict between Chinese Nationalism and Taiwanese consciousness has led to a continuing crisis in Taiwanese society (Chinese Nationalism was dominant before the 1970s). For a long time, cultural policy was used to promote Chinese nationalism. The rise of Taiwanese consciousness challenged the dominance of Chinese nationalism in the 1970s, and this inevitably had an impact on cultural development. Since the 1990s, multiculturalism has been viewed as a new way to solve this conflict, and to embrace the various cultural identities under the auspices of a new 'multicultural Taiwan'.

In other words, the common value of 'multicultural Taiwan' is based on the need for political integration and ethnic equality. At first, neither Chinese nationalism nor Taiwanese nationalism could be accepted by all Taiwanese. Ethnic differences are most important, since different groups have different experiences. In this situation, a discussion of multiculturalism is useful to create an integrated, common identity: Taiwan is presented here as a society comprising four ethnic groups. For example, in national festivals the various ethnic cultures will be displayed together to represent Taiwan.

In addition, another purpose of 'multicultural Taiwan' and the 'Four Ethnic Groups' is to reassert the distinction between Taiwan and mainland China. In particular, the aboriginal culture plays an important role in this respect. Since the cultures of mainlanders, the Hakkas and the Fulo, all came originally from mainland China, only the aboriginal culture can be said to be 'native' to the island of Taiwan. Thus the aboriginal culture is a vital reference point for distinguishing between Chinese culture and Taiwanese culture.

However, the discourse of 'multicultural Taiwan' faced a new challenge from the formation of 'transnational communities' in the late 1990s onwards. In the next section, I will discuss the development of 'transnational communities' and their challenges to 'multicultural Taiwan' in term of three perspectives: identity, cultural policy and citizenship.

## The Development of 'Transnational Communities' in Taiwan

The emergence of transnationalism as a key concept in the study of international migration proceeded rapidly in the latter part of the 1990s. Across a range of disciplines, academics sought to define and trace the development of transnational communities and practices, and examine the ramifications for identity and citizenship in an increasingly globalised world.

What is the transnational? Portes et al. point out that 'transnational' migration needs to involve a significant number of people engaging in 'sustained social contacts over time', with more than just occasional trips and activities across national borders (Portes et al, 1999). For Vertovec, there are six conceptual premises upon which any theory of transnationalism needs to be founded. Vertovec, who is an active promoter of transnational community, isolates six conceptual premises upon which any theory of transnationalism needs to be founded: (1) transnationalism as a social morphology focused on a new border spanning social formation; (2) as diasporic consciousness ; (3) as a mode of cultural reproduction variously identified as syncretism, creolization, bricolage, cultural translation, and hybridity; (4) as an avenue of capital for transnational corporations, and in a smaller but significant way in the form of remittances sent by immigrants to family and friends in their homelands; (5) as a site of political engagement, both in terms of homeland politics and the politics of homeland government vis-à-vis their émigré communities, and in terms of the expanded role of international non-governmental organizations; and (6) as a reconfiguration of the notion of place from an emphasis on the local to the translocal (Vertovec, 1999).

Using these categories, we can identify two kinds of 'transnational communities' in Taiwan: migrant workers and foreign brides.

### *Migrant Workers*

From 1991, the Taiwan government abolished the restrictions on migrant workers<sup>1</sup> in Taiwan. This meant that, on the one hand, the government could solve the problem of illegal migrant workers in Taiwan, and, on the other hand, it could intervene in the management of migrant workers (Jiang, 1997:17). Subsequently, the government also abolished the restrictions on migrant housemaids. In 2000, there were over 320,000 migrants in Taiwan from East Asian countries, including the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia, speaking over five different languages and varying in lifestyle, appearance and religion (Wu, J.R, 2001:147).

As a result of economic growth, the problem of labour shortage emerged in Taiwan in the 1980s. Research by the government indicated that in 1987 the rate of labour shortage in the construction business was 77%<sup>2</sup>, and in manufacturing industry the rate was 66% (Jiang, 1997:17). Businessmen therefore repeatedly asked the government to allow migrant workers into Taiwan. At the beginning of the 1990s, there was a rapid expansion of large-scale public works projects, which in 1989 forced the government to announce 'measures to solve the labour power problem in 14 important constructions and industries'. In 1991, the government announced 'the temporary measure to solve the problem of labour power' by removing restrictions on migrant workers in other industries. In 1992, 'the law of occupation and service' allowed the government for the first time to appoint migrant workers to government posts (Wu, T.F., 1997:5).

The attitudes underpinning these changes of policy may be summarised as follows. First, the government views migrant workers as temporary residents in Taiwan; when

there is enough labour power, the government can cancel the migrant workers system. Thus, there is no long-term plan for migrant workers. Secondly, since it is businessmen who have the greatest interest in migrant workers, the government is happy to hand over responsibility for managing migrant workers to them. It is not interested in the relations between businessmen and migrant workers. In effect this means that businessmen can exploit and oppress migrant workers, and that the rights of migrant workers are not protected by the government<sup>3</sup>. Thirdly, the government uses a form of contract according to which every migrant worker can stay in Taiwan for no longer than three-and-a-half years, and no migrant worker can bring his/her family or children to Taiwan<sup>4</sup>. This is to ensure that the government does not have to provide insurance, welfare or education to the families of migrant workers.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Foreign Brides***

In 1994, the government began to promote a policy of 'Turning South', promoting Taiwanese investment in Southeast Asia as a counterbalance to growing capital outflows to mainland China. This year also saw the beginning of a trend in which large numbers of women from Southeast Asia began marrying Taiwanese men. The facts speak for themselves. In 1999, the number of 'foreign brides' was 20,000. This grew to 41,000 in 2000, 60,000 in 2001, and 74,000 in 2002. According to statistics, the total number of 'foreign brides' in Taiwan stood at around 287,500 in 2003. During 2003, approximately nine percent of marriages in Taiwan involved 'foreign brides', about 62 percent of which were Vietnamese, 15 percent were Indonesian, and six percent were Thai. Filipinos, Malays, and Cambodians comprised smaller groups.

Further data indicates the rising importance of 'foreign brides' in Taiwan society. In 2002, around ten percent of new primary pupils were classified as 'Vietnamese-Taiwanese', 'Indonesian-Taiwanese' or 'Thai-Taiwanese'. This number will continue to increase, as 'foreign brides' tend to have more children than their Taiwanese counterparts. This new group poses two challenges to Taiwan society. Firstly, they will change the structure of population in Taiwan and, logically, will be a force to change the definition of 'Taiwanese' in the future. Secondly, they will challenge mainstream educational and cultural policies in Taiwan. Broadly speaking, they are infusing new cultures into Taiwan.

Although there are many transnational communities in Taiwan since the late 1990s, however, they are excluded from 'multicultural Taiwan' since they are viewed as 'others' from the point of view of the new national identity. Therefore, their cultural rights cannot be exercised. By excluding their cultural differences and rights, Taiwan also limits the possibility of making its culture more diverse.

### **The Representation of 'Transnational Communities' in 'Multicultural Taiwan'**

Migrant workers and foreign brides are viewed as 'others' under the new national identity--multicultural Taiwan. Firstly, the roles of migrant workers are represented in the several ways. First, migrant workers are often represented as violent, dangerous criminals. The famous case is the earthquake of 921 in 1999. At this time there were rumours that migrant workers were robbing people, since the victims of the earthquake had no homes to go back to. These rumours were also broadcast by the mass media. Thus the victims were very scared and tried to defend themselves by setting up organisations or equipping themselves with weapons. However, the truth of the matter

was that the migrant workers themselves were also hurt by the earthquake, but local governments offered them no support. Many migrant workers lost property, residences and jobs during the earthquake (Lee, 1999). Similarly, the mass media likes to portray migrant workers as a risk to public security, even though, in reality, the crime rate for migrant workers is lower than that for Taiwanese.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, the migrant workers are often portrayed as being uneducated and their culture is viewed as inferior. For example, Xu, Hong-Yi examined the influence of Filipino culture in Taipei, and found that most people regard Filipino culture as poor and dirty (Xu, 2000:77). Another example is that many migrant workers like to meet their friends at Taipei Rail Station, especially on Sundays. This causes Taipei residents to say that 'our station is 'occupied' by migrant workers'<sup>7</sup>.

The third representation of migrant workers is that they are responsible for unemployment in Taiwan, in particular the unemployment of Taiwanese aborigines. In 2001, a survey by the Committee of Aboriginal Affairs showed that the rate of unemployment among the aborigines was 12.26% compared with an average of 5.4 % for Taiwan as a whole<sup>8</sup>. It is argued by many that the main reason for high unemployment among aborigines is the presence of migrant workers. They affect job opportunities for the aborigines, since the average wage of migrant workers is only 70% that of the average wage of local labourers, including the aborigines. This has led to the increasing marginalisation of the aborigines in Taiwan's labour market (Pan, 1999).

Even though 'foreign brides' permanently reside in Taiwan, they are still viewed as outsiders by the general population. There are several ways in which 'foreign brides' are currently perceived.

Firstly, foreign brides are perceived as 'social problems'. Similar to the stereotyping of migrant workers, Taiwan's mass media has tended to emphasize concerns that foreign brides threaten the onset of numerous social problems. For example:

*The fact that an increasing number of Taiwanese men go to Southeast Asia to marry women who are poorly-educated, insipid, and lacking in beauty indicates the many problems in the social structure, marriage system and relationships between men and women in Taiwan (China Times, 21/11/1995).*

A quotation from another article follows:

*A police investigation into the problem of foreign brides found that sixty of those investigated had since been divorced from their husbands. This threatens the traditional family system, children's education, and the entire society. Some even turn to prostitution. (United Daily News, 10/03/1992)*

Secondly, foreign brides are represented as coming from 'inferior' cultures. Children of foreign brides are viewed as a threat to the quality of culture and education in Taiwan. It is an issue constantly raised and debated in the mass media. For example:

*Many foreign brides use marriage as a way to earn money in Taiwan. This will harm the overall quality of population and endanger social development and culture. In 'foreign bride' marriages, both the bride and groom tend to be of a far lower level of education than the Taiwan average. Over the longer term, this will certainly reduce the quality of population.(China Times, 11/12/1991)*

And,

*With the growing number of foreign bride children, many primary schools face new challenges. This new category of students face difficulties learning language (their mothers are not able to teach them Mandarin), which increases the burden for teachers.... Concerns regarding how primary schools can overcome this new problem with limited resources are making many teachers and principals worried.(China Times, 22/12/2003)*

Thirdly, foreign brides are described as 'commodities', advertised like products by an agency that arranges overseas marriages for Taiwanese. Many non-government organizations criticize the emphasis of these agencies on their portfolio of girls being 'beautiful', 'young', 'pure', 'virgin', and 'cheap'(China Times, 14/03/2004) . Some agencies even provide polygamy services and offer refunds if not satisfied in order to attract more customers.

Fourthly, foreign brides are viewed as challenging traditional family values. Some scholars believe that the advent of the foreign bride option is leading many to change their attitudes regarding marriage – preferring to think of prospective brides in terms of functionality or performance, such as 'easy controlled', 'hard working', or 'time saving' (i.e., some men feel that, while they have no time for romance, they need to get married). This phenomenon appears to present a significant challenge to traditional relationships between men and women. Furthermore, marriages involving foreign brides are statistically shown to run a higher risk of divorce. Scholars also worry that the continued trend in favor of foreign brides will reduce the overall quality of marriage in Taiwan. (Xue , 2003).

## **New Challenges to the Identity of 'Multicultural Taiwan'**

With the development of globalisation, more and more people travel across national boundaries to work. What can the experience of migrant workers and foreign brides teach Taiwan? Will there be more experience of cultural difference and globalisation, or more discrimination and cultural inequality? Chiou, Shwu-wen discusses the cultural experience of 'the foreign/migrant bride' in Taiwan through the concept of 'local internationalisation', and emphasises the importance of combining locality and international society. For her, immigrants are bearers of different cultures, and local people have the opportunity to combine with these new international cultural influences. Can these immigrant brides improve cultural exchange and strengthen the possibility of multiculturalism? Or are they forced to live in an 'assimilated' environment so that they silently lose their own culture (Chiou, 1999: 108). In addition, will migrant workers merely strengthen the unequal structure of international society and reinforce racial discrimination in order to enhance the national identity of Taiwan (Hsia, 2000:88) ?

Of the various groups of transnational communities, the Filipino workers have a more noticeable collective culture in Taiwan by virtue of their association with Catholics. According to the research of Xu, the culture of the Philippines has had a major influence in the area surrounding St. Christopher's Catholic Church in Taipei. Many Filipino workers go to Mass in the church and afterwards have a picnic in the park or go shopping with friends. The collective action of Filipino workers has led to some new

changes around the church, such as the opening of many shops using the English or Filipino language on their signboards, the provision of a mail service to the Philippines, and the sale of cheap products. The area has become a small 'Philippines town' (Xu, 2000:77).

However, this new collective Filipino culture does not increase the opportunities for cultural exchange between Taipei residents and migrant workers. Indeed, it appears that residents think that their streets are 'polluted' by migrant workers, and believe that these workers pose a threat to public security around the area (Ibid:96-8). The communal residents want the church to move to another location so that the Filipino workers will not be able to gather here again. Many Taipei citizens want to 'separate' them in a special place so that they can no longer 'bother' people. The Taipei city council tried unsuccessfully to move them to a derelict football field. Now the council plans to set up a new cultural centre for migrant workers in order to solve this problem<sup>9</sup>.

The Filipino culture, which is the most visible migrant culture in Taiwanese society, is viewed as an 'inferior, negative' culture. It is interesting to compare this image to that of Thai culture, since the Thais are the biggest group of migrant workers in Taiwan<sup>10</sup>. In making such a comparison, it seems that the Filipino workers can maintain their own cultural experience through their English-speaking and Catholic networks. But the Thai workers cannot do the same, since, for example, they cannot communicate with the Taiwanese except by learning Chinese. Thus they tend to become an 'invisible' group (Wu, T.F., 1997: 85). They only meet their friends at railway stations or in parks, or they go to Thai restaurants<sup>11</sup> in their leisure time. Thus they have no opportunity to participate in their own culture, except when the local government or their employers hold activities for them<sup>12</sup>.

Turning to the Indonesian migrant workers, most are housemaids and are dispersed in different Taiwanese families. It is therefore more difficult for them to form a collective culture. The focus of their culture is religion. Since there are only 50,000 to 60,000 Muslims in Taiwan, most Taiwanese see them as 'strange', and many employers limit the religious freedom of Indonesian workers. In order to keep their jobs, the Indonesian workers are also encouraged by employment agencies to suppress their religious practices at work.

According to the above-cited researchers, although migrant workers bring new, different cultural experiences to Taiwan, there are not many cultural exchanges between migrant workers and local residents. *Individual* migrant workers are visible in Taiwan, but their *collective* cultures are excluded. These 'different' cultures are thus 'stigmatised' or rendered 'invisible' by Taiwanese society. While included in the effort to define this new multicultural identity, foreign brides pose new and difficult challenges to this discourse.

Foreign brides pose two specific challenges to the identity of 'Multicultural Taiwan'. Secondly, foreign brides further represent a new trend toward creating a more cosmopolitan identity for Taiwan. As Steven Vertovec points out, transnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition. This is because:

*On the one hand, many people's transnational networks are grounded upon a place of origin and the cultural and linguistic traits associated with it. Such networks are marked by patterns of communication of exchange of resources and information along with participation in socio-cultural and political activities. On the other hand, among certain sets of contemporary migrants, the identities of specific individuals and groups of people are negotiated with social worlds that span more than one place. (Vertovec, 2001:573)*

Taiwan's experience with foreign brides follows that predicted by Vertovec's writings. Chiu, in observing the diverse backgrounds and nationalities of foreign brides, points to three common characteristics. Firstly, foreign brides become physically and culturally separated from their native society, while not being able to integrate into Taiwan's society. Rather than having one identity, they chose two, that of their country of birth and of Taiwan. Secondly, elements of the foreign bride identity includes: gender, class, ethnic group and nationality. They do not identify themselves in only one way. Thirdly, they construct their identities around their family life, work environment and social network (Chiu, 2003:287-8).

Secondly, foreign brides and their new generation significantly change the definition of being 'Taiwanese'. According to Department of Health data, of the 247,000 babies born in 2003, 30,000 were mothered by foreign brides (Department of Health, 2003). This means that one-eighth of Taiwan's youngest generation is a 'hyphenated' Taiwanese (i.e., 'Thai-Taiwanese', 'Vietnamese-Taiwanese', etc.). The new composition of Taiwan is no longer the 'four Ethnic Groups' often touted in government policies, but now includes the Southeast Asian nationalities represented by Taiwan's foreign brides. Furthermore, hybridity works simultaneously in two ways: organically by hegemonising, creating new space, structure and scenes; and intentionally by diasporising, intervening as a form of subversion, translation and transformation. These processes, Hall suggests, do not make up a narrative; rather 'they are two phases of the same movement, which constantly overlap and interweave' (Hall, 1991, 24-5). They operate dialogically together, in a double-voiced, hybridised form of cultural politics.

### **New Challenge to Citizenship:**

Many other new terms and theories have been put forward to discuss the problems of transnational community. Christian Joppke shows that contemporary immigration, with its dual implications of post-national membership and multicultural identity politics, represents a profound challenge to every component of the classical model of citizenship (Joppke, 1998:23). She distinguishes between the challenge to citizenship as legal status, which is associated with the rise of '*post-national membership*', and the challenge to citizenship as an identity, which is associated with multicultural identity politics (Ibid: 24). To give another example, the idea of '*global citizenship*' used by Michael Muetzelfeldt and Gary Smith refers to the capacity for developing civil society beyond national boundaries, the taking on of transnational features in areas such as communication, the development of shared values and mutual respect and the co-ordination of economic, social and environmental policy (Muetzelfeldt and Smith, 2002). These commentators try to construct a set of global rights and obligations associated with global citizenship. These are the rights and obligations that may emerge in global relationships.

In addition, the development of universal rights also brings about a new challenge to the nation state, since it points to the replacement of 'national citizenship' by human rights across national boundaries (Soysal, 1995). For example, the 'International Convention of the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families' (1990) demands almost the same rights as those associated with 'national citizenship' based on human rights. According to this Convention, many human rights of migrant workers should be protected by national governments. The Convention includes a number of articles dealing with cultural rights, e.g. Article 7 (on the protection of people without discrimination), Article 12 (which states that migrant workers should have freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to choose, accept,



access and practice their religions), Article 13 (on freedom of expression), and Article 43 (which states that migrant workers should enjoy the same treatment as a national citizens in certain key areas, e.g. education and cultural participation (Su, 2000).

How have the cultural rights of migrant workers and foreign brides developed in Taiwan? Our evaluation of migrant workers' cultural rights in Taiwan is as follows.

### ***The Cultural Rights of Migrant Workers:***

We can discuss these rights in terms of the right to participate in cultural life and the right to develop a culture. The right to participate in cultural life is still limited for migrant workers in Taiwan. The main reasons are related to the limitations imposed by employers and the lack of a cultural environment for migrant workers. For example, employers have the power to manage migrant workers according to the law; this means that most employers tend to limit the rights of migrant workers because this is convenient for them. Some employers only provide two free days per month, since they believe that migrant workers will become 'worse' if they are given more time off and would ask for more holidays or money. The extension of working hours leads to a decline of their cultural life and the limitation of cultural identity. If Filipinos have a holiday on Sunday, they can go to church to maintain their cultural experience and their religion. Thus, the main factor for them is whether they can have a holiday on every Sunday. For Thais and Indonesians, however, there are not many Buddhist temples or Mosques in Taiwan. In addition, both NGOs and the local governments hold celebrations or festivals to provide more opportunities for migrant workers to access their culture.

Because Filipinos can read English, they have wider access to the mass media in Taiwan, i.e. newspapers, radio and television. In addition, Taipei Radio also broadcasts in the Filipino language. The Thais are the biggest migrant group in Taiwan. The CLA (Committee of Labour Affairs, the highest institution of labour affairs in the central government) sponsors Thai programmes in the counties with large Thai populations, such as Tao-yuan County. Taipei Radio also provides programmes in Indonesian and Vietnamese. Radio is viewed as the most useful way to provide information and entertainment to migrant workers. Up till now, there have been no programmes for migrant workers on TV or satellite.

Research evidence shows that employers prefer to pay more money, rather than providing more days off to migrant workers in order to control them easily (Lin, 2000:120). Their holidays have been reduced from four or five days to two days per month. Thus they cannot easily participate in cultural life. In addition, language is another barrier to cultural participation. In general, migrant workers' rights to participate in cultural life are very limited.

In addition, migrant workers are viewed as 'short stay' workers, and hence their right to develop a culture has not been really considered by the government. However, a distinctive way of life and cultural experience has developed for migrant workers in Taiwan. For example, one cultural organisation, The Samahang Makata-Taiwan International Filipino Group of Writers in Taiwan (SMT) has been set up to promote creative writing. The members are Filipino migrant workers, such as workers in factories, constructors on sites, or domestic assistants working with families. They write about their experience of loneliness and isolation in Taiwan. At the same time, they also hope to communicate with Taiwan's society through their literary creations (Qiu, 2002). The Taipei City government responded to this new development by holding the first migrant workers' poetry writing contest in 2001. It also hopes to encourage the development of a new migrant workers' culture through this activity.

## ***The Cultural Rights of Foreign Brides***

The cultural rights of foreign brides are very limited in Taiwan for two reasons. Firstly, foreign brides face cultural values in Taiwan that are 'standardized' around existing island values and mores. Foreign brides are forced to be 'assimilated' into Taiwan's culture and their cultures of origin are portrayed negatively. Women from Southeast Asia are viewed as 'uneducated' in large part because they are not yet able to speak Mandarin fluently. Finally, foreign brides run the risk of losing their cultural confidence and respect. Secondly, foreign brides are isolated from the whole of society if they cannot communicate passably in Mandarin. Those without the language skills are largely restricted to staying home. They lose their cultural rights, such as the right to participate in cultural life, and language rights.

We can evaluate their cultural rights from the same two perspectives we used for migrant workers. The right of foreign brides to participate in appropriate cultural activities has been ignored by the government and society; even while the government and social groups have begun to expand the scope of cultural activities available to foreign workers in Taiwan. Foreign brides are expected to integrate into society. Most Taiwanese believe it necessary for them to abandon their native culture. For most foreign brides, the only access they have to their native cultures are in the few small Southeast Asian shops, which sell food, books, magazines, and videos from their native countries.

Foreign brides in Taiwan face greater difficulties than foreign workers in developing a collective culture because the former are widely dispersed and have little contact with one another. However, scholars are increasingly working to promote the development of foreign bride communities in order to foster greater cultural diversity in Taiwan. As Wang and Tang point out, the government should consider the cultures of the island's foreign brides from multiple perspectives (Wang and Tang, 2003). For example, key Southeast Asian languages can be accepted as 'mother tongues' for primary school education purposes. This will raise the respect and understanding of foreign brides in Taiwan. Secondly, the cultural differences of foreign brides should be respected in the Mandarin language training they receive in Taiwan. The government should emphasize the advantages that the cultural differences of foreign brides bring to Taiwan and underscore the contribution these differences have and can make to Taiwanese society. This will help the family of foreign brides become more comfortable and appreciative of Southeast Asian cultures and encourage the Taiwanese children of foreign brides to learn about their maternal culture.

According to these various cultural rights, it is clear that a truly multicultural policy is not applied to migrant workers in Taiwan. In other words, 'multicultural Taiwan' only applies to citizens, and there is limited concern with universal human rights across national boundaries. However, it is noteworthy that NGOs specialising in human rights and also labour groups have begun to make increasing demands for the protection of the universal human rights of migrant workers. For example, restrictions on pregnancy were abolished following complaints by NGOs in 2001. If migrant workers procreate their next generation in Taiwan, the question of whether their children are entitled to the same treatment as the children of other citizens will become a major problem in the future. It shows that the new trend of universal human rights should bring about new pressure on the government to change its policy on migrant workers and their status in Taiwan. At the same time, the NGOs mentioned above are working to improve the daily life of foreign brides in Taiwan. Many NGOs (like the Association of Nan-Yang Sisters and the Foreign Brides Association) are focused specifically on lobbying for foreign bride rights. Some long-time NGOs (like the Alliance of Taiwanese Human Rights and the Awakening Foundation [a women's rights organization]) are also expanding their focus to include foreign bride issues.

To sum up, the government still keeps tight controls on the definitions of citizens and citizenship, so at present a 'post-national' citizenship is unthinkable in Taiwan. Views of universal human rights first influenced NGOs in Taiwan, and then the NGOs forced the government to change its policies in order to protect the rights of migrant workers. Some new policies have now been implemented through the dialogue between the government and the NGOs, especially on cultural issues.

### **New Challenges to Cultural Policy:**

The Taiwan government faces many demands from NGOs to improve the rights and equality of migrant workers and foreign brides. Some new cultural policies have been implemented in response to their demands.

In 1995, the CLA began to provide sponsorship to broadcast radio programmes for the Thai, Indonesia and Filipino workers (Chiou, 1998:180--2). In addition, the CLA began to set up consulting centres for migrant workers in local governments. These centres became the main institutions providing legal advice and cultural activities for migrant workers (Xu, 2000: 105). For example, the Taipei consulting centre held the first cultural exchange party for migrant workers, 'We are the World', in 1996. This suggests that there is now a new attitude towards migrant workers on the part of local governments<sup>13</sup>.

The cultural activities for migrant workers supported by Taipei city council serve several purposes. Firstly, they provide the opportunity for migrant workers to maintain their cultural experience and traditions in Taiwan, for example, in the Christmas party at St. Christopher's Catholic church (2000), the celebration of St. Cross Day (1998-2001), and the carnival of migrant workers, which had music provided by bands from the Philippines and Thailand (2000). In this way, migrant workers can access and continue their important cultural festivities in Taiwan.

Furthermore, the programme of cultural activities tries to improve the collective culture of migrant workers in Taiwan and increase its visibility in Taiwanese society. The exhibition of photographs of the life of migrant workers in Taiwan (2000) and the migrant worker's poetry writing contest (2001) were held to improve the development of migrant workers' culture, and to provide more opportunities for Taiwanese people to understand migrant workers and their lives.

In addition, Taipei city council has taken positive steps to help migrant workers participate in their own important festivals. For example, the Chief of the Labour Bureau went to join the Muslim Festival in 2001, and asked the employers to respect and accept the religious freedom of migrant workers. He also pointed out that the understanding of Islam was the first step to understanding Indonesian workers, and that in general mutual understanding between employers and migrant workers is essential (Qong, 2001). However, the case of foreign brides tells another story in cultural policy. Foreign brides pose a direct challenge to current policies promoting a 'multicultural Taiwan'. In reality, foreign brides are expected to become 'assimilated' into Taiwan's culture and to turn their backs on their own culture.

The language training provided by the Ministry of Education to foreign brides is a good case in point of this island-centric cultural policy. The Ministry has promoted the 'Plan for lifelong education for foreign brides' since 2003. The plan is slated to be implemented in three stages. The first stage runs from 2003 to 2008 and targets resources to help foreign brides adapt to living in Taiwan through language and life skill training. The

second stage is planned to run from 2009 to 2013, with goals including the upgrading of foreign bride life skills (ability to live in and contribute to Taiwan society), the promotion of foreign bride social adaptation, and the establishment of educational and cultural standards for foreign brides. The third stage will integrate foreign brides into the continuing education system (adult education) in order to raise overall educational standards on the island and help foreign brides integrate into Taiwan's social and community systems.

Language training plays an important role in the assimilation of foreign brides. The research of Chiou is critical of this tool because language training tends to favor 'assimilation' and reject 'multiculturalism'. Her assessment is based on three important observations: firstly, none of the teachers currently in the language training program are from Southeast Asian countries (even though most foreign brides in Taiwan are from that region); secondly, no information related to Southeast Asian cultures or perspectives are incorporated into the language training textbooks prepared for foreign brides; thirdly, as the purpose of such courses is to integrate foreign brides into Taiwan's society as soon as possible, these courses do not consider how to help them adapt and continue their own ethnic characteristics in Taiwan (Chiou, 2003). This policy leads to some challenges to multicultural policy. Foreign brides' ignorance of cultural differences ultimately makes them lose their cultural confidence and feeling of self-respect. The culture of the foreign bride is looked down upon by her children, her family in Taiwan, and by society as a whole (Zhang, 2003). Multicultural values are missing in the case of foreign brides. In addition, it is a pity that Taiwan continues to overlook the opportunity to learn about other cultures and become more culturally diverse through the foreign bride community in Taiwan. Wang and Tang, for example, advocate that Taiwan's language policy should protect the languages of foreign brides in order to advance the cause of 'multiculturalism' (Wang and Tang, 2003).

This new construction of cultural policy highlights changing attitudes to the multicultural policy as a whole. We have seen that migrant workers, although they do not have 'citizen' status, should have their rights protected, based on 'universal human rights'. With the experience of migrant workers in Taiwan, it seems that multicultural policy and citizenship have expanded 'from national boundaries to beyond national boundaries'. Foreign brides, on the other hand, are forced to become 'assimilated' in Taiwan, and give up their own cultures.

## **Towards 'Cultural Diversity'?**

The case of transnational communities raises one question: should multiculturalism be based on national boundaries? They are excluded from 'multicultural Taiwan' since its main aim is to construct a new national identity. This exclusion has provoked many critiques from the perspective of universal human rights, and reveals the tension between multicultural citizenship and national identity.

Therefore, we need to consider the specificity of multiculturalism in the global age. With the increase of transnational populations, all societies are 'multicultural'. Firstly, multiculturalism seems to be developing in the direction of a 'post-national' citizenship and universal human rights, especially cultural rights. Multiculturalism is concerned with not only the cultural rights of citizens, but also the rights of people without citizenship, such as new immigrants or migrant workers. In Taiwan the phenomenon of transnational communities is still fairly new, and hence the experience of multicultural policy is also limited. Thus transnational communities are not really viewed as a part of 'multicultural Taiwan'. They are constructed as 'other', and their cultural rights are generally ignored

by the government. However, the new views of 'post-national' citizenship and universal human rights are increasingly valued by NGOs in Taiwan. Under the influence of NGOs, the government has also begun to express concern about the problems of transnational communities' rights and cultures. The new cultural policy with respect to transnational communities can be viewed as an expansion of citizenship, towards 'transnational citizenship'.

In addition, transnational communities challenge the common identity in Taiwan - 'multicultural Taiwan' - by introducing hybrid cultures and multiple identities. Multiculturalism seems to be changing into 'cultural diversity'. Cultural diversity has replaced multiculturalism and become a key concept in cultural policy because 'it does not necessarily link culture to sexual origin, race or ethnicity, and thereby avoids the danger of ghettoisation lurking in some versions of multiculturalism and ethnic arts' (East Midlands Arts, 1996). According to this definition, the first point of difference between cultural diversity and multiculturalism is that cultural diversity refers to different forms of ethnically-based expression (the Arts Council of England 1997:33). Hybrid culture is an important creation of cultural diversity because it highlights the direction of cultural development in a global age: culture is always formed by interaction across a boundary, not only a national boundary but also an ethnic or subcultural boundary.

## Notes

---

- <sup>1</sup> According to Wu, T.F., there are two kinds of workers from other countries. One group consists of migrant workers, who stay in Taiwan for a short time. The other group consists of immigrant workers, who can gain citizenship and stay indefinitely. In the case of Taiwan, it is the first group who are numerically the most important. Wu, T.F, (1997), p.14.
- <sup>2</sup> It means that if the construction business needs one hundred workers, the shortage of workers is 77. Thus migrant workers are needed to supply it.
- <sup>3</sup> This thinking can be seen in many practical policies. For example, if migrant workers run away, the employers have to take responsibility. Thus the employers have a good excuse to place limits on the action of migrant workers or retain their passports or money.
- <sup>4</sup> According to the regulation of the Committee of Labour Affairs (CLA), every migrant worker can stay in Taiwan for two years initially. After that time, the employer can apply to extend the period of stay. The first extension is for one year and the second extension is for half a year. Thus the longest time that a migrant worker can stay in Taiwan is three-and-a half years. However, this policy was changed in 2002. Migrant workers can now stay in Taiwan for up to six years, and they can extend their stay without limitations.
- <sup>5</sup> Since the period of stay for migrant workers is limited, the CLA forbids migrant workers from entering Taiwan with their families or from becoming pregnant.
- <sup>6</sup> According to research by the Alliance of Labour Alignment, the crime rate for migrant workers is 28.5 per 100,000 persons, while the crime rate for Taiwanese is 51.09 per 100,000 persons. Clearly, the migrant workers are being stigmatised as violent people. See: <http://www.labor.ngo.org.tw/labor-right-report/20report/6-foreign-labor.htm>. (Chinese)
- <sup>7</sup> Many migrant workers meet their friends at rail stations, including those of Taipei and Taichung. Such gatherings cause resentment among local residents, because they believe that the rail station is 'occupied' by migrant workers and becomes dirty and noisy.
- <sup>8</sup> The data from CAA.
- <sup>9</sup> The Administrative Plan for Taipei city council, 2001. The Report of the Mayor to the Taipei Assembly.
- <sup>10</sup> According to the report of the CLA in 2001, the biggest group of migrant workers is that of the Thai workers (about 140,000 in number), the second largest group is that of the Indonesian workers (about 89,000), and the Filipino group is ranked third (about 83,000). The Filipino group used to be the biggest (about 110,000), but because of growing political problems between the Taiwan and Philippines governments, the CLA reduced the Philippines quota and increased the quota for the Vietnamese.
- <sup>11</sup> There are some restaurants specifically for migrant workers in Taiwan, e.g. there is a Thai restaurant in the Taipei rail station. This is an ideal place for Thais to meet their friends.

- 
- <sup>12</sup> The local government and the employers hold collective activities for Thai workers at special holidays or festivals, e.g. the birthday of the Thai King. See *China Times*, 4 April 1995.
- <sup>13</sup> I use Taipei as an index since Taipei city council has promoted the culture of migrant workers for two years. Other cities or counties also hold activities for migrant workers, but they are not as well organised in their approach.

## References

- The Arts Council of England, 1998. *Cultural Diversity Action Plan*, London: The Arts Council of England.
- Al-Ali, N., R. Black and K. Koser. 2001. "The limits to 'transnationalism': Bosnian and Eritrean refugees in Europe as emerging transnational communities", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.24, No. 4, July 2001: 578--600.
- Appadurai, A. 1990. "Disjuncture and Difference in Global Cultural Economy" Theory, *Culture & Society*, No. 7:295--310.
- Bennett, T. 2001. *Differing Diversities: Cultural Policy and Cultural Diversity Strasbourg*: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Chiou, S.W. 1999. "Local Internationalisation: The Philippines Brides in Japanese Villages", *Contemporary*, Vol. 141, pp. 108--117.
- 2003. *Gender and Migration*. Taipei: Taiwan Elite.
- Faist, T. 2000. "Transnationalization in international migration: implications for the study of citizenship and culture", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 23 No. 2, March 2000: 189--222.
- Hall, S.1999 "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity" in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System*, Anthony D. King, eds, New York: State of University of New York, pp.19--40.
- Hsia, H.C. 2000 "Transnational Marriage and the Internationalisation of Capital - The Case of the Foreign Bride Phenomenon in Taiwan", *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*, Vol. 39, pp. 45--92.
- Jiang, K.F. 1997. *Searching for Gold? Bad Dream? The Taiwanese Experience of Migrant Workers in the Construction Business*, Ga-yi: National Zhong-Zheng University.
- Joppke, C. 1998. "Immigration Challenges the Nation-State", *Challenge to the Nation-State: Immigration in Western Europe and the United States*, Christian Joppke, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.5--39.
- Kivisto, P. 2001. "Theorizing transnational immigration: a critical review of current efforts", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 24 No. 4, July 2001: 549--577.
- Muetzelfeldt, M. and G. Smith, 2002. "Civil Society and Global Governance: The Possibilities for Global Citizenship", *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 55--75.
- Portes, A., G. Luiz and P. Landholt. 1999. "Introduction: pitfalls and promises of an emergent research field", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 22 No. 2: 217--237.
- Qong, Z.J. 2001. 'Muslim Holiday: The Benefits for Indonesian Workers', in *China Times*, 3 June 2001. (Chinese)
- Riccio, B. 2001. "From 'Ethnic Groups' to 'Transnational community'? Senegalese Migrants' Ambivalent Experiences and Multiple Trajectories", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4: 583--599.
- Soysal, Y.N. 1995. *Limit of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Su, L.J. 2000. *Research on Foreigners and Their Rights in Taiwan*. Taipei: University of Central Police.
- Vertovec, S. 1999. "Conceiving and researching transnationalism", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 22 No. 2:447--462.
- 2001. "Transnationalism and identity", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 27. No. 4: 573--582.
- Wang, H.R and W.H Tang, 2002, "Mother's or Father's Tongue?". *United Times*, 25/06/2002.
- Wu, J.R. 2001, 'The Human Rights of Migrant Workers', in *The Human Rights of Taiwan* Chen, J.H., eds., 2000 ,Taipei: Xu-sheng Publisher.
- Wu, T.F. 1997. *The Cultural Struggle of Migrant Workers for Leisure Time*, Taichung: Dong-Hai University.

- 
- Xue, C.T. and Lin H.F. 2003. "The Change of Family in Taiwan: Foreign Brides", *Journal of National Policy*, October, 2003.
- Xu, H.Y. 2000. The Use of Space and Its Effect on a Filipino Labour Gathering Area -- Christopher Church Area in Chung-Shan North Road, Taipei: Dan-Jiang University.
- Zhang, Z. 2003. "Liberty or Assimilation: the Issue of Language Training for Foreign Brides in Taiwan", *Month of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 30, August, 2003.

**Data from Internet**

- Lee, Yi-Dao, 7 October 1999, on the 'Bitter Workers Forum' web site, [http://192.192.148.27/current/921\\_earthquake/labor.html](http://192.192.148.27/current/921_earthquake/labor.html). (Chinese)
- Pan, Mei-ling, 'Globalisation and Minority Labour: Taiwanese Aborigines and Migrant Workers'. <http://www.home.kimo.com.tw/liutaho/A75.htm>. (Chinese)
- Qiu, De-Zhen, 'The Poetry of Migrant Workers, Cultural Strike' on ePots (2002). EPots is an internet magazine. Web site is: <http://iwebs.url.com.tw/main/html/epots/68.shtml>. (Chinese)