

Diaspora, Hidden “In-between-ness”, Cross-borderer:
an Exploration of Taiwanese Immigrants’ Identity in Contemporary Japan

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Abstract

I am currently working on my PhD dissertation which examines cultural identity and the related discourse of one particular immigrant group, the “postwar comer” Taiwanese, in contemporary Japan. This group came to Japan after the end of WWII and experienced complex transitions in both legal statuses and self-identifications. Constituted from the legacies of Japanese colonialism and Chinese nationalism, the immigrant Taiwanese constantly negotiate and redefine their “neither here, nor there” identities and thus constitute a distinct case within the population of overseas ethnic Chinese.

This study investigates the Taiwanese migrants’ cultural adaptation and socialization in the Japanese social setting through literature review and field study. The author has collected data through questionnaire distributions and interviews. This paper argues that the postwar comers of Taiwanese have constructed a transnational identity either hybridized or hidden in-between two cultures of Japanese and Chinese. In other words, this paper attempts to offer a perspective on Taiwanese under Japanese colonialism and Chinese nationalism that transcends the “identity struggle” commonly experienced by immigrants around the world. This group of Taiwanese migrants in postwar Japan struggle with surveillance, assimilation, resistance and identity confusions. To balance between a survival strategy overseas and a primordial attachment to the motherland, their identity of group boundaries may shift in various directions in accordance with the dynamic situations.

Although compared to the US or some European countries, Japan is not considered to be a country of significant migration but a society of racial and cultural homogeneity. However, Japan had accepted a large number of immigrants from its previous colonies, such as Korea and Taiwan. Since the economic boom and labor shortage in the 1980s, Japan faces an increasing influx of immigrants, in particular those from East Asia. While previous literatures of the Chinese and Korean Diaspora are widely researched, there is a vacuum on Taiwanese Diaspora in the associated scholarship. Different from their Chinese and Korean counterparts residing in Japan, Taiwanese migrants appear to

be an invisible group of culture identity. Unlike Chinese and Korean communities that have kept strong cultural identities that stress their countries of origin, Taiwanese migrants keep transnational ties to their homeland Taiwan while practice in a way of in between Japanese and Chinese cultures.

To maintain one's Japanese-ness is not only a strategy for advantageous survival in Japanese society, but also serves as nostalgia for the colonial period. Meanwhile, Chinese traits are embedded in cultural identity, employment or in the daily life practices of the Taiwanese. The labels of Chinese, Taiwanese and overseas Chinese which are used for self identification by the Taiwanese have multiple meanings. Just as their interpersonal networks are indefinite and extensive in membership, those labels are vague in meanings, and can be used to include not only other Chinese in Japan, but also Taiwanese and Chinese outside of Japan. In this flux of meanings, there is no one definite label used by the Taiwanese migrants to bind themselves to one ethnic group.

Cross-border identity is often articulated along the lines of political orientations or of certain perceivable cultural features. However, at the level of daily life practice, the articulated self identification might not be unproblematic; boundaries of self ascribed identification might have fissures. Taiwanese migrants usually do not describe themselves in static terms such as Chinese or Japanese. However, such terms are subject to negotiation and renegotiation in practice on the one hand, and people's everyday behaviors might be contradictory to their articulated identities on the other. Their group boundaries may shift in various directions in accordance with situations.

To clearly comprehend the multifaceted transitions of Taiwanese immigrants' cultural identity, it is necessary to examine not only the background of international history as well as social setting, but also the migrants' behaviors unfolding in daily practice. This working paper, in the current stage, provides basic backgrounds and tentative finding of the migrants' identity. It is expected to increase quantity and quality of the interviews to derive further discussions and findings.

Brief Bio of Peichun Han:

Peichun Han is a PhD candidate in International Relations at the Waseda University. She received her B.A. in International Relations from the National Taiwan University in 2002, and M.A. in Public Policy from the Georgetown University at Washington DC in 2004. She is currently working as a TA at the Department of International Liberal

Studies, Waseda University. Her research interests focus on East Asian and migration studies, particularly those related to identity and cultural comparison. Her working dissertation researches on Taiwanese Diaspora. She examines the unique traits of Taiwanese migrants in Japan through comparative approaches. In addition to a number of editorial articles on newspaper, her paper “China Studies in Japan” was published on the *Quarterly of Mainland China Studies* (National Taiwan University Press, 2005).