

LIVING WITH ONE CHINA AS A MIGRANT WIFE IN TAIWAN

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Officially, since 1949 at the end of the Chinese Civil War, Taiwan and China do not talk to each other, partly due to the ongoing dispute over the sovereignty of Taiwan. When they talk to each other, they often use a messenger (publicly or privately) since there is no official political contact between the two, in spite of the intensive socio-economic and cultural interactions after the resumed contact in 1987.

Would it be a good idea to have Donald Trump as their go-between? Apparently not. The tensions across the Taiwan Strait after Trump talked to Taiwanese President Tsai Ying-wen and Chinese President Xi Jinping were not eased but intensified. Well, he was not a messenger at all, and **he definitely did not act as a messenger when he rang either president**. The 10 minutes telephone communication between Trump and Tsai **was said to destabilise the relationship between Taiwan, China and Taiwan since the US switched its recognition of the ROC to the PRC**. The core of the tensions is the One China Policy, or the damage caused to it, by Trump's talk to Tsai. He was alleged as showing no respect to the One China Policy. And his disrespect cost him dearly: he had to correct himself in a **'lengthy' and 'extremely cordial'** talk with President Xi and offered reaffirmation of the US's adherence to the One China Policy.

The One China Policy has become a cornerstone for the Sino-US relationship. It has also been upheld by Beijing to conduct its foreign policy. The One China Principle maintains that there is only One China and Taiwan is part of China, partly because the People's Republic of China (PRC) claims that it has succeeded the Republic of China (ROC) after winning the Chinese Civil War in 1949. The PRC's claim does not take into account the reality that Taiwan, under the official title of the Republic of China (ROC), has been exclusively and effectively self-ruled since 1949, but its sovereignty is not internationally recognised given the geopolitical setting built around the One China Policy. Understandably, the emotions of Taiwanese citizens **often run high** when incidents of their sovereignty being **dwarfed, restricted, confined** or **nullified** occur in the international arena. And emotive politics as such often make national headlines.

However, how this not-internationally-recognised sovereignty has also been lived with by a growing number of naturalised foreign wives does not make national headlines. Framed along a South-North dichotomy, the migration of these women as wives from China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Cambodia is rarely newsworthy unless it **feeds into the stereotypes** of their poverty, rural upbringing, superstition, desire to 'marry up', domestic abuse, sex work, motherhood, and ill adaptation. Occasionally, stories that conform to gender norms appear and migrant wives are praised for being dutiful wives, virtuous mothers, and diligent daughters-in-law.

But why does One China have anything to do with migrant wives, whose worthiness, from the host state's point of view, **is largely defined by patriarchal and nationalist interests**? After all, One China belongs to the realm of high politics, whereas the lived experiences of migrant wives are shunned as low politics. One China is the business conducted by men and women wearing dark-coloured business suits and speaking foreign languages about security, geopolitics, strategic ambiguity, global force posture, and balance of power. The lived experiences of migrant wives confined in the private home seem to be nobody's concerns except for their husbands and in-laws; their everyday lives are as drab as TV soap dramas that are sensational, repetitive and predictable. One China and foreign wives belong to two different social fields.

Yet, the two fields are linked by sovereignty, or the contention of it, in the case of Taiwan. Sovereignty as an institution links the fields of philosophy, jurisdiction, and an asymmetrical distribution of power and resources with the fields of hypergamy, remittances, motherhood, patriarchy, and patrilineal nationalism. One China has a real impact when these women **apply for naturalisation**, a prerequisite of which is to sever their native nationality prior to being granted nationality by Taiwan under the title of the ROC. From 1987 up to the end of 2016, there have been more than 234,000 migrant wives, including those from China, receiving ROC nationality and being granted citizenship.

This is perplexing. Don't the men and women in business suits tell the whole world Taiwan does not exist as a sovereign state? If this is true, why would anyone be willing to lose a 'real' nationality in order to receive ROC nationality that is not so real?! If the One China Policy, and the states that adhere to it, treat Taiwan as a breakaway province which is said to have neither the authority nor power of sovereignty, why would some states allow their citizens to renounce their birth nationality and receive ROC nationality that is said to be non-existent because it is not internationally recognised? Aren't we told that the state has a moral obligation to prevent their citizens from falling into statelessness? How does the PRC government explain the fact that a growing number of their citizens, after migrating to Taiwan, enjoy the global mobility that is rendered by an ROC passport? Can we provide convincing answers to these seemingly incomprehensible questions not for intellectual curiosity or 'strategic interest' but for having an insight into **how sovereignty and geopolitics can affect migrant wives' wellbeing**? Can we stop the pretence that politics about foreign policy is so high that it should not concern itself about a migrant wife's desire of stability, equality and respect that seems to be promised by the nationality of the country she adopts as home? After all, whether her desire can be realised is determined by sovereignty, the nominal recognition of which seems to be a rather vague game of geopolitics, security and '**strategic ambiguity**'.