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From 'social problems' to 'social assets': geopolitics, discursive shifts in children of Southeast Asian marriage migrants, and mother-child dyadic citizenship in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the discourse surrounding children of Southeast Asian (SEA) marriage migrants in Taiwan has seen a dramatic shift from the discourse of 'social problems' to that of 'social assets'. By integrating perspectives of critical geopolitics and critical discourse analysis, this paper shows that this discursive shift has resulted from the dual impacts of the 'mother-child dyadic citizenship' and the geopolitics of the triad of Taiwan, SEA, and China. It is argued that the state formulates laws and policies concerning marriage migration based on the mother-child dyad rather than the individual-state nexus, while SEA is used merely as leverage against China. Moreover, confronted with an increasingly competitive global economy, especially the impending threat of a rising PRC, Taiwan's immigration laws have become more classist, discriminating against Southeast Asian marriage migrants in contradiction with the current positive discourse, which reveals that the state-citizen relationship has evolved into a corporate-consumer relationship.

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My mother is from Indonesia. As I was growing up, I was scared whenever I saw TV news portraying immigrants and migrants in very negative ways . . . One of my classmates in junior high school was bullied after they learnt that his mother was from Vietnam. I felt that I would also be bullied if I revealed that my mom is an Indonesian, so I did not lend any help to this bullied classmate, which I have regret ever since. My mom never attended any activities in my schools. I didn't know why until I complained to her. She finally told me, 'I was afraid to make you ashamed.' . . . Now I can proudly say I am the 'Second Generation Immigrant' and I am the mixed child of Indonesian and Taiwanese.

Introduction

The above quote comes from one of my undergraduate students enrolled in a 2019 Migration, Human Rights and Multiculturalism class. Though I never asked, several students revealed their family backgrounds; all recalled negative experiences growing up labelled as children of so-called 'foreign brides'.

These students' stories are indeed testimonials of the shifting gaze on the children of marriage migrants from Southeast Asia (SEA). In recent years, media and governmental discourses in Taiwan have begun promoting the presumption that second-generation immigrants (SGI) are advantaged for inheriting Southeast Asian cultures and languages. Their mothers, marriage migrants from SEA, are celebrated as markers of Taiwan's multicultural society¹ and encouraged to pass their native languages and culture down to their children so that these children can ultimately boost Taiwanese economic expansion to SEA, becoming the 'vanguards of Taiwan's deployment in Southeast Asia.'² Success stories such as *Using Mother Tongue as Springboard, Cheng Yao-Tieng Earns a Million Annually Before Age 30*³ have been celebrated by the media, promoting children of SEA marriage migrants as the 'vanguards of the New Southbound Policy' for their multilingual capabilities, while SEA marriage migrants have been featured national anthem singers and ceremony hosts at National Day Celebrations, thereby representing Taiwan's 'tradition of inclusiveness'.⁴

Such positive discourse represents a drastic shift. As in Japan and South Korea, the other two receiving countries for marriage migrants in Asia, these migrants and their children have historically encountered derogatory public discourse (e.g. Nakamatsu 2005; Shin 2019).

More than a decade ago, these children were portrayed in both media and governmental discourses as having many problems, especially 'developmental delay', while their mothers were perceived as lacking child rearing capacity because of their so-called 'inferior population quality' (Hsia 2007), a term commonly used in governmental documents⁵ and media reports.

The population quality of SEA mothers was questioned because of their socio-economic backgrounds. Since the phenomenon of marriage migration caught the public's attention in Taiwan in early 1990s, female marriage migrants from SEA and People's Republic of China (PRC), especially the former, were perceived as a threat to Taiwan's population quality because they frequently came from disadvantaged families in SEA and the PRC, which were then considered less developed than Taiwan. According to official statistics, one in every four new marriages in 2002 occurred between a citizen and a foreigner, although the percentage decreased after 2003, hovering between 12 and 20% of all marriages registered annually. The vast majority of foreign spouses remain women from the PRC and SEA, including Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia.

While these children were born with Taiwanese nationality, and their mothers were spouses of Taiwanese citizens, both were considered in public discourse as 'undesirable', as reflected in discriminatory policies and laws (Hsia and Huang 2010). Marriage migrants from the PRC are governed differently and face far stricter laws and regulations due to the political tension between Taiwan and the PRC since 1949 when the KMT (Chinese Nationalist Party) government lost the civil war to the Communist Party and retreated to Taiwan. This antagonistic attitude toward PRC migrants has remained stable even through transitions of power between Taiwan's two dominant political parties, KMT and DPP (Democratic Progressive Party).

However, the discourse surrounding SEA marriage migrants and their children in Taiwan has turned positive in recent years as captured in media trends. In a study on media reports from 1994 to 2012, Fung and Wang (2014) showed that marriage migrants

had been discussed in overwhelmingly negative terms such as ‘foreign brides’ from 1994 until 2002, when increasingly positive portrayals began to emerge. From 2010 on, media reports of marriage migrants have delivered relatively equal percentages of neutral and positive images. These trends in media portrayals parallel changing attitudes of the general public toward marriage migrants, as revealed in the series of National Image Surveys conducted by the Academia Sinica. Accordingly, the percentage of the interviewees perceiving SEA marriage migrants as negatively impacting Taiwanese society dropped significantly from 74.6% in 2004 to 54.3% in 2012, while the percentage of interviewees agreeing that the government should not restrict SEA marriage migrants from obtaining Taiwanese citizenship increased from 19% in 2004 to 28% in 2016.

The discourse on the children of SEA marriage migrants has followed a similar trend. These children were first labelled as ‘New Taiwan’s Children’ (NTC hereafter) in 2003 with entirely negative images (ibid.) Lee and Chueh (2018) analyzed mainstream media reports between 2005 and 2016 and found that these children were portrayed with mostly negative terms, such as ‘problems’, ‘developmental delay’, and ‘counselling’, until media portrayals from 2014 to 2016 became positively associated with terms like ‘talents’ and ‘advantages’.

While studies have clearly documented a discursive shift, the explanation of why this shift is occurring needs to be deepened. Fung and Wang (2014) and Lee and Chueh (2018) both attributed this discursive shift to social movements advocating for human and cultural rights of marriage migrants and their children. However, as the pioneering long-term activist referenced by Lee and Chueh in their discussion of these social movements, this attribution overly romanticizes our impact. The 2016 Amendments to the Nationality Act, rendering Southeast Asian marriage migrants vulnerable to statelessness, was passed only months after the ‘New Southbound Policy’ (NSP hereafter) was launched to promote Taiwan’s connection with SEA, which resulted in a positive discourse surrounding children of SEA marriage migrants.

Additionally, Lee and Chueh (2018) argued that children of SEA marriage migrants have been valued in recent positive discourse because their human capital is imagined as a buttress for the NSP, reflecting the ideology inherited from the ‘Go South Policy’ (GSP hereafter) of the 1990s. While Lee and Chueh were correct to point out the impact of the NSP on the discursive shift, they failed to identify economic and political differences between the GSP and the NSP.

While both the NSP and GSP are governmental policies towards SEA, each was built on contrasting images of Southeast Asian countries and their citizens. One question that must be addressed is why the social construction of Southeast Asian marriage migrants was overwhelmingly negative in the context of the GSP and it turned positive in the context of the NSP? The answers lie in examining the relationship between immigration discourse and geopolitical context.

Immigration discourse and geopolitical context

Children of migrants have been given labels associated with different meanings. For example, the label ‘multicultural children’ refers to the children of an underprivileged Korean man and a female marriage migrant from a less industrialized neighboring country. In a study of news articles from 2009 to 2013, Shin (2019) identified three

main discourses on so-called multicultural children: ‘marginalized group’, ‘threat to the future of Korea’, and ‘global human resources’. Shin contended that the ideologies of democracy, nationalism, and neoliberalism penetrated the notion of multiculturalism in Korea. While correctly recognizing the importance of nationalism and neoliberalism, the analysis lacks a temporal dimension which is crucial to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon of marriage migration present in East Asian countries for more than two decades.

In the historical study of the changing discourse on mixed-race children in modern Japan, Horiguchi and Imoto (2016) traced different categories representing children born to Japanese and non-Japanese parents. From Meiji (1868–1992) to the pre-war period, these children were referred to as *konketsu* (mixed blood) and mostly associated with social problems, except for mixed-race children of Western mothers, who were symbols of desirable Japanese modernity. During the 1930s and 1940s, portrayals of mixed-race children focused on their healthy development since intermarriage in colonized Korea and Taiwan were promoted in the imperialization policy. In the post-war period, there were almost no media reports on *konketsu* until 1952, when the General Headquarters ended its occupation in mainland Japan and the images of ‘impure’, ‘polluted’ mixed-raced children became widely reported, reflecting the prevailing anti-U.S. sentiment in Japan. As cross-border migration intensified, the number of children of Filipino mothers and Japanese fathers significantly increased beginning in the 1980s, and negative portrayals began to be challenged in the 1990s by civil society organizations advocating for the rights of the Japanese-Filipino children; thus, the term *kokusai-ji* (international children) was promoted.

While Horiguchi and Imoto (2016) contended that the labels of mixed-race children symbolize larger socio-political issues of the time, including race, Westernization, colonization, and globalization, their analysis did not further elaborate on the connection between discursive changes and broader socio-political contexts.

To articulate this connection, the lens of critical geography can shed some light. Dempsey and McDowell (2019) examined the connection between the EU’s discourse on ‘migration crisis’ and geopolitical dynamics by analyzing media portrayals of migrants in 2015 and 2016. Migrants were initially described as ‘humans’ migrating to Europe, then likened to a ‘natural disaster’, and finally labelled as a geopolitical ‘threat’ to security. The intensification of negative representations reveals European geopolitical conceptualizations of belonging and sovereignty that are often at odds with the principles and values to which the EU subscribes. The labelling of migrants is a geopolitical narrative revealing EU member states’ efforts to stabilize their system and protect the privileges that Europeans enjoy behind their once ‘borderless’ supra-national entity’s increasingly militarized borders.

Many scholars in critical geopolitics have pointed out the close connection between immigration discourse and geopolitics. As Hyndman (2012) contended, migration has long been a barometer of geopolitics. Therefore, immigration discourse can be seen as geopolitical discourse (Mamadouh 2012), as illustrated in the discursive construction of Arab immigrants in the U.S. as terrorists in the aftermath of September 11, which led to a flurry of new immigration proposals to tighten border security (Nagel 2002).

The close connection between discursive shifts in immigration and geopolitical circumstances is clearly revealed in the study of immigration narratives in France and the Netherlands from the 1970s to 1990s, in which Mamadouh (2012) distinguished three storylines regarding the ‘invasion’ of immigrants at different scales: invaded neighborhoods, nations at risk, and Western Europe under siege. ‘Invaded neighborhoods’ represented a storyline in the 1970s when immigration was framed as a local problem, affecting issues such as lack of housing in the communities. This narrative of invasion was scaled up to ‘nation at risk’ in the 1980s after the oil crisis when a rise in unemployment led to the perception that immigrants were ‘stealing jobs’, and ‘taking advantage of our welfare state’. The storyline of ‘Western Europe under siege’ emerged in the 1990s when asylum seekers became the predominant figures in anti-immigrant narratives, pointing to the notion of a common fate faced by a unified Western European society facing similar population flows. This immigration discourse is scaled up to the regional level emphasizing the need to construct a Fortress Europe to limit immigrant flows.

Similarly, to understand why the discourse on SEA marriage migrants’ children in Taiwan has changed from the negative label of NTC to the positive label of SGI, this article also considers such discourse as a form of geopolitical discourse and will examine the geopolitical dynamics underlying the discursive shift with a temporal dimension.

However, unlike in the EU and the U.S., where tightening of immigration policies corresponds to negative immigration discourses, securitization of migration for SEA marriage migrants co-exists with the positive discursive shift in Taiwan. While discriminatory immigration laws and policies corresponded with negative images of SEA marriage migrants and their children in the past, the shift toward positive images of them has not been correspondently reflected in relevant laws. This article will further analyze this incongruence.

Research questions and methods

Informed by the perspectives of critical geography, this article aims to analyze how the discourse on children of SEA marriage migrants has shifted as the dynamics of geopolitics has changed over the past decades. To understand the reasons behind these discursive shifts, this paper adopts the lens of critical discourse analysis (CDA), whose purpose is ‘*to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes*’ (Fairclough 1995, 132). The analysis will focus on the meso and macro levels of the three interrelated dimensions of the discourse developed by Fairclough (1995), since micro-level discursive practices surrounding children of SEA marriage migrants have already been established by previous studies (Fung and Wang 2014; Lee and Chueh 2018).

On the meso level, this paper investigates how the labels of NTC and SGI have been produced in the media and governmental narratives. On the macro level, the analysis focuses on geopolitical context within which the discursive shift arises. Specific research questions include: how have the labels of the children of Southeast Asian marriage migrants been constructed by the government and media? Why have these labels and their associated meanings shifted? What is the geopolitical context of this discursive shift? Why have legal changes contradicted this seemingly positive discursive shift?

Drawing on my long-term action-oriented research since 1994 as an organizer and advocate for the rights and welfare of marriage migrants and their children (for details of the processes and my roles, see Hsia 2019), the methods employed include participant observation in campaigns for policy and law changes since late 2003 (especially regarding the amendments to the Nationality Act from 2012 to 2016), analysis of media reports, and governmental statements of related policies and laws beginning in the early 2010s when the discourse began to change (particularly regarding the NSP and the 2016 Amendments to the Nationality Act).

The following sections will examine the connection between the discourse on the children of SEA marriage migrants, relevant policies and laws, and the geopolitical context, as summarized in Table 1.

Discursive shift from NTC as ‘social problems’ to SGI as ‘social assets’ in Taiwan

NTC had been the most popular term referring to children of marriage migrants until 2014, while SGI first appeared in the media in 2010 but remained rare until 2014 when its appearance significantly increased and surpassed NTC. SGI has become the most popular term since 2016. Moreover, the NTC discourse had been overwhelmingly negative while the SGI discourse has been very positive (Lee and Chueh 2018).

My previous study (Hsia 2007) showed that NTC was first coined in 2003 in a well-known magazine and subsequently widely circulated at the peak of national anxiety concerning negative impacts of foreign brides’ children on Taiwan’s ‘population quality’. This anxiety led to a drastic shift in the government’s position from neglecting issues of marriage migration to quickly formulating immigration policies to control the inflow of marriage migrants and initiating programs to presumably improve the ‘quality’ of their children, though these had no basis in solid research. This increasing concern over the ‘quality’ of foreign brides’ children coexisted with proliferating media coverage concerning these children’s higher risks of ‘developmental delay’.

The NTC discourse centered around issues of ‘population quality’, which began to target foreign brides for the New Family Planning Programs in 1998, shortly after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis followed by heated media discussion concerning Taiwan’s global competitiveness. Rising anxiety that the PRC’s emergence as a ‘world’s factory’ would threaten Taiwan’s economy was juxtaposed with concerns about how foreign brides, particularly those from SEA, would deteriorate Taiwan’s population quality to compete globally (ibid). This fear of losing global competitiveness derives from Taiwan’s conception of national pride as being rooted in prosperity, which led to the National Security Council pinpointing the ‘incapable motherhood’ of foreign brides as a national threat to the sustainability of Taiwan’s economic development (Cheng 2013). This overwhelmingly negative NTC discourse was replaced by positive SGI discourse, which has become significantly popularized since the NSP was launched in 2016 (Lee and Chueh 2018).

The NSP’s Promotion Plan was announced in September 2017, shortly after the inauguration of President Tsai Ing-wen (DPP).⁶ The Office of the New Southbound Policy was established on 15 June 2016, directly under the Office of the President. One of the four main tasks of the promotion plan is to ‘conduct talent exchange’ and ‘new immigrants’, i.e. marriage migrants, compose one of the focus areas: ‘*Help first-*

Table 1. Geopolitics and the discourse on the children of Southeast Asian marriage migrants in Taiwan from 1990s to 2010s.

	Naming of Children of SEA Marriage Migrants	Dominant discourse	Immigration laws and policies	Economic policies	Regional and global political economy context
Early 1990s	None	'Foreign brides' as social problems (e.g. fake marriages)	None Ignored and hope it would disappear	1993 (to 2002) Go South Policy	rise of the PRC as a World's factory; capital flight from Taiwan to the PRC
Late 1990s	None	Deterioration of population quality	Targeted SEA marriage migrants for New Family Planning Programs (birth control)		1997 Asian Financial Crisis
2003	New Taiwan's Children (NTC)	Developmental delay	2003: National Immigration Agency established 2004: announced plan to establish the Foreign Spouse Care and Guidance Fund 2005: Fund established 2003–2007: increased barriers for marriage migrants to obtain citizenship	Go South Policy continued from 2002 to 2008	Rising power of the PRC
2010	Second-Generation Immigrants (SGI)	Respect multiculturalism	2012 Nationwide Torch Project for New Immigrants	Friendlier relationship with the PRC	Rising ASEAN
2014	SGI surpassed NTC; vanguards of Taiwan's deployment in Southeast Asia	SEA wave			
2016	SGI popularized; Seeds of New Southbound	Amendments to the Nationality Act (easier for professional foreigners to obtain citizenship but more barriers for marriage migrants)		Launching New Southbound Policy; more antagonistic toward the PRC	

generation immigrants use their linguistic and cultural advantages to obtain work certification and job opportunities (such as language teaching and tourism-related work). Help second-generation immigrants connect with their ancestral countries by encouraging universities to establish appropriate departments or curriculums, and give admission priority to students speaking Southeast Asian languages.⁷ The NSP promoted directly by the President has significantly contributed to the emerging ‘Southeast Asian Wave’ in Taiwan, and the children of SEA marriage migrants are expected to be the ‘seeds of the New Southbound Policy’. As President Tsai stated at the Taiwan-ASEAN Dialogue in November 2016⁸, ‘*We will also invest in second-generation immigrants in Taiwan, and encourage them to join our New Southbound Policy efforts*’, because SGI are believed by Tsai’s Administration to be Taiwan’s ‘*best connectors*’ with SEA nations and their people.

During the presidency of Ma Ying-Jeou (KMT) prior to President Tsai’s election, the National Immigration Agency (NIA) implemented the ‘Nationwide Torch Project for New Immigrants’ in 2012 with a budget for a Foreign Spouse Care and Guidance Fund (the Fund hereafter) under the Ministry of the Interior (MOI). The Fund was established in 2005 during President Chen Shui-bian’s administration (DPP) to support programs that provided services such as Chinese language course, vocational training, counseling, and medical subsidies for marriage migrants, particularly those from SEA. With the Torch Project in 2012, most budget from the Fund was shifted to education programs for marriage migrants’ children, especially those encouraging them to learn Southeast Asian cultures and languages. As the Torch project began to promote the multicultural advantages held by children of SEA marriage migrants, the term SGI became more popular while the previously dominant naming, NTC, began to fade away.

As part of the Torch Project, the NIA initiated an annual program called ‘Talent Cultivation Camp for Second Generation Immigrant Youth’ in 2014, whose aim was to ‘*make Southeast Asian language-speaking children of the new immigrants from SEA valuable assets for Taiwan; enhance their global competitiveness; and become trade vanguards in emerging markets*’. The official rationale behind such camp was that ‘*the global competitiveness of ASEAN has been rising, so that the SEA markets have unlimited potentials in the future and Taiwanese businesses have increased investment in SEA and doubled their need of talents*’. With the promotion of this camp, featuring Mr. Cheng Yao-Tieng, son of an Indonesian marriage migrant whose annual income reached a million NT in his late 20s, the term SGI became increasingly popular and, according to Lee and Chueh (2018), its number of appearances in the media exceeded that of NTC for the first time in 2014.

Mother–child dyadic citizenship in the wave of marriage migration

Discourses surrounding the children of SEA marriage migrants in Taiwan, both negative and positive, have been closely linked to that of their mothers. While NTC discourse was prevalent, the national anxiety began as apprehension about the impending threat of the PRC to Taiwan’s global competitiveness, yet SEA marriage migrants quickly became the target because it was presumed that their ‘inferior population quality’ would lead to inferior quality children. The positive turn of SGI discourse also reveals this close

connection as it assumes SGI's natural inheritance of Southeast Asian languages and cultures from their mothers. This connection is rooted in the position of marriage migrants in Taiwan's citizenship regime.

Taiwan's citizenship laws have been based on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, which reflects a traditional Chinese emphasis on lineage and ancestry that privileges patrilineal descent in the tracing of one's nationality, while nationality through maternal descent is conferred as an exception (Chen 2009). Prior to changes in the Nationality Act in 2000, no foreigners could be naturalized as citizens except for women married to Taiwanese men. Female marriage migrants are considered 'naturalizable' as they are included as members of the nation via motherhood (Cheng 2013; Lan 2008).

However, in NTC discourse, their 'incapable motherhood' (Cheng 2013) became a source of national anxiety rooted in fears of their deteriorative impacts on the Taiwan's population quality. (Hsia 2007). As the wives of Taiwanese citizens, the Taiwan government could not reject their access to Taiwanese citizenship and consequently adopted a 'dual exclusion-assimilation scheme' (Cheng 2013) that aimed at increasing barriers⁹ for marriage migrants to acquire citizenship and initiated programs to assimilate them into Taiwanese culture and 'improve' their 'population qualities' (Hsia 2009).

These discriminatory immigration policies assume that since marriage migrants hail from developing countries, they must lack the qualities necessary to perform motherhood (Hsia 2013; Cheng 2013). In other words, their citizenship is intertwined with their children. Hence, the granting of citizenship to marriage migrants is premised upon motherhood on one hand, while on the other hand, they are discriminated against because of their children's presumably 'inferior quality'.

Conversely, their children's citizenship is premised upon that of their mothers. As Chen (2009) argued, Taiwan's regime of citizenship draws national borders along gender lines: women who marry across national borders, female immigrants, and interethnic or mixed-race children are constantly excluded from the national community. Though the children of marriage migrants were granted Taiwanese nationality by birth through their fathers' citizenship, they were still considered inadequate and assumed to be 'developmentally delayed' because of their mothers' origins. Therefore, despite formal citizenship, children of marriage migrants lacked substantive citizenship.

To improve their 'qualities', government-initiated programs discouraged marriage migrants from bearing more children and compelled them to put their children in after-school classes regardless of their academic performance (Hsia 2007). Consequently, most children of SEA marriage migrants were not acculturated in their mothers' native languages and cultures because the assimilation scheme constrained mother-child intimacy and impeded SEA marriage migrants from passing down their cultural inheritance (Cheng 2013). Ironically, this same group of children that was portrayed as being of inferior population quality when they entered primary school has suddenly been rebranded as 'talents' and 'seeds of the New Southbound' in their early twenties. Again, this recent discursive change regarding children of SEA marriage migrants assumes maternal cultural inheritance, which is also premised upon marriage migrants' motherhood, since women are perceived as 'cultural reproducers' (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989).

As illustrated, neither marriage migrants nor their children in Taiwan are situated in relation to the state as individuals. While many feminist scholars (ibid.) have criticized women's motherhood as the basis for their incorporation in the nation, this paper

further contends that the ways in which their children are incorporated into the nation cannot be separated from those of their mothers; that is, the citizenship of marriage migrants and that of their children are mutually premised upon each other. In other words, the state formulates policies and laws regarding marriage migrants and their children based on the consideration of ‘mother-child dyad’ rather than the individual-state nexus. This concept of ‘mother-child dyadic citizenship’ is in contrast with conceptualizations of migrants’ children’s citizenship in North America and the EU, which perceive these children, even those of refugees and undocumented migrants, as vulnerable victims and give a superior moral status to children, whose individuality should be ensured by the state (Doná and Veale 2011; Kronick and Rousseau 2015; Hollekim, Anderssen, and Daniel 2016).

This ‘mother-child dyadic citizenship’ reveals the responses of Taiwan’s state, whose citizenship regime has been based on *jus sanguinis*, to the influx of marriage migrants. Therefore, to further understand the formation of citizenship in the wave of marriage migration in Taiwan and other emerging immigrants-receiving countries whose traditions of citizenship are based on blood, such as South Korea and Japan, it is crucial to investigate the ‘*mother-child dyadic citizenship*’ instead of viewing the citizenship of marriage migrants and that of their children separately.

Geopolitics of the triad of Taiwan, SEA and the PRC

As previously indicated, the current SGI discourse has in part become prevalent because Taiwan’s government wishes to deepen economic ties with SEA. However, SEA’s primary value to the Taiwan government is as a leverage against the PRC, which will be illustrated in the following triadic relationship between Taiwan, SEA, and the PRC.

New Southbound Policy as strategy competing with the PRC in rising ASEAN

President Tsai’s declaration of the NSP revealed the DPP government’s urgency to gain an advantageous position in the ASEAN region within 5 years. As pointed out by Mr. James Chih-Fang Huang, the founding Director of the Office of the NSP: ‘*Taiwan may only have five years of advantage . . . If we don’t grasp this opportunity now, we will not have any advantage in ASEAN.*’¹⁰

The economic motivation behind the NSP is clearly stated in President Tsai’s speech at the Taiwan-ASEAN Dialogue in November 2016: ‘*Taiwan’s economic development cannot be separated from that of neighboring countries. Our economies are highly complementary . . . Today, ASEAN is Taiwan’s second biggest trade partner, and also our second biggest export market.*’ However, the public rhetoric of the NSP emphasizes the so-called ‘*people-centered concept*’ as Director Huang differentiated the NSP from the GSP: ‘*The New Southbound Policy is not a policy with the goal of certain numbers in trade. Rather, it is a new foreign economic strategy based on a people-centered concept . . . actively promoting mutual exchange and collaboration between Taiwan and ASEAN as well as South Asian countries in the fields of talents, industries, educational investment, cultures, tourism, agriculture, etc. We hope to build new partnerships with ASEAN and South Asian countries in the 21st century . . . Not only do we go to ASEAN and South Asia, but we also hope that their people come to Taiwan as tourists and investors.*’

One of the reasons why the NSP is ‘people-centered’ is that many Taiwanese enterprises in SEA rely on employees from the PRC rather than from Taiwan. According to Director Huang, ‘*There are 6,400 Taiwanese enterprises in Vietnam, which create millions of job opportunities in Vietnam annually. However, these 6,400 Taiwanese enterprises employ 80,000 mainland Chinese staff . . . Taiwanese businessmen also face problems identifying successors and lacking managerial staff*’. Moreover, since Taiwan’s domestic market is limited, the NSP targets SEA as an extension of Taiwan’s domestic market; solidifying this link would require significantly more personnel. As Director Huang pointed out, ‘*the cultivation of talents*’ is the key to ‘*link to ASEAN and South Asian countries*’, which will solve ‘*all the problems about the industries*’. This so-called people-centered concept highlights the need for ‘personnel’ and ‘staff’ for Taiwanese businesses in SEA, implying a utilitarian rather than humanist perception of people. Within the NSP framework, SGI are perceived as instrumental tools for Taiwanese business expansion rather than as citizens entitled to the state’s good-faith efforts to reach their fullest potential, including nurturing cultural inheritance from their Southeast Asian mothers.

The NSP is also political. At her welcome remarks at the 2016 Taiwan-ASEAN Dialogue, whose guests of honor included former ASEAN Secretary General Ambassador Surin Pitsuwan and members of parliament from ASEAN nations, President Tsai elaborated on the two levels of the objective of expanding two-way exchanges:

On the governmental level, we will push for closer interactions between government departments and mutual visits by senior officials On the societal level, we are already making progress. . . . Right after we simplified visa applications for ASEAN citizens, more than 120,000 ASEAN visitors came to Taiwan this September So, we are making strides on our second objective and foresee that two-way exchanges will continue to expand at a brisk and steady pace.

While President Tsai mentioned twice that exchanges at the societal level have been significantly increasing, her emphasis was indeed on the governmental level, especially concerning mutual visits by *senior* officials. As a result of the tension between Taiwan and the PRC, Taiwan is not a member of the U.N., and it is almost impossible to arrange for visits of high-ranking officials from most countries. From the welcome speech at this 2016 Dialogue and the list of invited guests of honor, the political motivation behind the NSP to compete with the PRC was revealed.

Go South Policy as strategy against a rising PRC

The NSP was not the first policy adopted by the Taiwanese government to compete with the PRC. At the beginning of capital flight in the 1980s, most Taiwanese businesses turned to the PRC to take advantage of lower labor costs and linguistic and cultural affinity. To confront the PRC’s rising power as a ‘world’s factory’ that was siphoning off Taiwanese investors, President Lee Teng-hui (KMT), the first President born in Taiwan and nicknamed as ‘Godfather of Taiwan’s independence,’ launched the GSP in 1993, providing incentives for Taiwanese businessmen to invest in SEA instead of the PRC (Huang and Chou 2014).

The original GSP was designed for only one three-year term, but due to the expansion of ASEAN, the policy was extended for two more terms to 2002. President Chen Shui-bian, the first non-KMT (DPP) President, was elected in 2000 and renewed the GSP in July 2002 to continue efforts to divert Taiwanese investment from the PRC during his presidency (2000–2008). During the presidency of KMT's Ma Ying-jeou (2008–2016), the policy content remained similar but was not named 'Go South' focusing instead on trade and investment to downplay political tones and maintain a friendlier relationship with the PRC (ibid.).

In addition to the GSP, President Lee's Administration initiated a 'labor-import policy' of recruiting blue-collar migrant workers from SEA to discourage Taiwan-to-PRC capital flight (Tseng 2004). As economic relations between Taiwan and SEA developed, the number of marriage migrants from SEA increased significantly in the 1990s (Hsia 2004).

In response to the increasing number of working-class people from SEA, including marriage migrants and migrant workers, the MOI drafted the Immigration Policy Guidelines in 2003 under the presidency of Chen Shui-bian, which clearly stated that to enhance Taiwan's competitiveness, the government should create incentives for a 'high quality population', meaning professional, managerial and skilled foreigners, and provide counseling and guidance to the presumably low-quality foreign brides already living in Taiwan. The Guidelines also stipulated that blue-collar migrant workers from SEA were not allowed to apply for permanent residency and naturalization. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the government established more barriers for marriage migrants to obtain citizenship and adopted programs aiming to improve the quality of their children.

Interestingly, these measures were adopted after President Chen's renewal of the GSP in July 2002, indicating that during this phase of the GSP, SEA was still perceived as the 'inferior other', and the GSP existed only to take advantage of cheaper labor and resources in SEA. The people of the Southeast Asian countries were not considered to have the 'quality' to become one of 'superior us' and thus must be excluded from full integration (like the blue-collared migrant workers), while the quality of those who could not be excluded (i.e. marriage migrants and NTC) had to be brought closer to our 'superior quality'.

However, though the government has attempted to attract foreign investors and professionals to become Taiwanese citizens through schemes such as allowing high-level professionals to apply for permanent residency in the 2002 Amendments to the Immigration Act, the number of these so-called 'high quality' foreigners obtaining Taiwanese citizenship has been extremely limited. According to the Assessment Report on Our Government's Immigration Policy and Institutions conducted by the Control Yuan¹¹ in the 2003–2004 period, one of the weaknesses needing correction was the '*lack of incentives to attract excellent professional talent*'.¹²

The main reason why high-level professionals or investors had little interest in obtaining Taiwanese citizenship is the requirement to renounce their original nationality as stipulated in the Nationality Act. As Tseng (1997) argued, in the global immigration market where nation-states are competing to attract potential business immigrants, the price of the rights of residency/citizenship depends on the position of the host country in the world system. Because Taiwan's position in the world system is not particularly high for its citizenship to be considered a privilege to highly skilled, educated, and wealthy people, the requirement to renounce their original nationality has made Taiwan much

less competitive in the global immigration market; only marriage migrants from less developed countries would renounce their original nationalities to become naturalized Taiwanese citizens. This barrier for so-called ‘high quality’ foreigners to become Taiwanese citizens was removed in amendments to the Nationality Act at the end of 2016, soon after President Tsai launched the NSP.

Southeast Asia as Taiwan’s leverage against the PRC

While both NSP and GSP appear as policies towards SEA, their ultimate objective is to respond to the impending threat of the PRC. Unlike studies on geopolitics and immigration discourses that reveal bilateral relations between the host country and specific sending country or area (e.g. between the U.S. and the Middle East), this paper shows that the PRC is the true driver behind Taiwan’s immigration discourse on SEA. SEA has been utilized by Taiwan’s government as leverage against the PRC. Therefore, to understand immigration discourses on SEA marriage migrants and their children, it is crucial that they be contextualized within the triad of Taiwan, SEA and the PRC.

SEA is perceived as an economic option for Taiwan to reduce its reliance on the PRC market. Significantly, the fact that ASEAN Plus Three (the PRC, South Korea and Japan) enhanced the relationship between ASEAN and the PRC also meant that if Taiwan failed to put a foot in the door, it would both end up reliant on the PRC market and also lose ASEAN markets. In addition to these economic incentives, there is a political reason behind the NSP and the GSP: to improve diplomatic relations with ASEAN countries to counter PRC’s ‘One China Policy’.

Consequently, in the context of implementing the NSP, a drastic discursive shift occurred: the ‘social problems’ (low quality ‘foreign brides’ and NTC) suddenly became ‘social assets’ (new immigrants and SGI with the advantage of Southeast Asian cultures and languages). The PRC and ASEAN countries have moved upward in the World System while Taiwan’s economy has been stagnant and even regressed, so SEA citizens can no longer be considered the ‘inferior other’ that would cause deterioration of Taiwan’s population quality. On the contrary, as President Tsai stated in her speech at the Taiwan-ASEAN Dialogue, ‘*ASEAN is Taiwan’s second biggest trade partner and second biggest export market;*’ Southeast Asian citizens are now perceived as ‘new partners’ whom Taiwan should win over in order to help fight the ‘evil other’, the PRC. President Tsai emphasized this attempt in her speech: ‘*Taiwan is an important member of the Asia-Pacific region. We have a responsibility to contribute to regional peace, stability and prosperity. We fully embrace our role, and as ASEAN embarks on further integration, Taiwan will be a most reliable partner for ASEAN on this journey.*’

Previously, under Chiang Kai-shek’s regime in the Cold War structure, the PRC had been constructed as evil communists whose people suffered from poverty and oppression. With the rise of the PRC as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, Taiwan’s prosperity-based national identity has been so shattered that the discourse has been thoroughly revised: although the PRC is becoming wealthy, it is portrayed as a vicious giant bullying its neighbors, while Taiwan is still ‘*morally*’ superior because of its proclaimed principles of freedom, democracy, and human rights. The aim of constructing Taiwan as a friendly partner and good neighbor in the region, in contrast to the

PRC, the unsaid yet most crucial subject, was revealed in President Tsai's speech where she proclaimed Taiwan as the '*most reliable partner for ASEAN*' and assumed responsibility to contribute to '*regional peace*'.

The emerging consumer citizenship underlying the incongruence between immigration discourse and laws

In light of the zeal evident in promoting the NSP, it is especially ironic that laws regulating SEA marriage migrants have tightened. This incongruence between immigration discourse and immigration law is particularly clear in the 2016 Amendments to the Nationality Act, signed soon after President Tsai launched the NSP.

One major amendment is that high-level professional foreigners can now obtain Taiwanese citizenship without renouncing their original nationality. Nevertheless, SEA marriage migrants remain required to renounce their original nationality for naturalization. More ironically, Article 19 of the 2016 Amendments even holds marriage migrants under the life-long threat of statelessness because after renouncing their original nationality, their hard-earned Taiwanese citizenship can be revoked anytime in their life if their marriage to a Taiwanese citizen is deemed fraudulent in court. Defective documents and malicious testimony from Taiwanese spouses and in-laws could be considered evidence of 'fraudulent marriage'.

As Tseng (2006) argued, Taiwan's immigration policy is in essence 'classist' but appears as 'racialized classism' in which blue-collar Southeast Asians are classified as a cultural race that are 'incompatible' with Taiwan. However, as neoliberal globalization intensifies, the Taiwanese government has revealed straightforward classism, as vividly illustrated in the 2016 Amendments that assign more rights to the upper-class, especially the right to retain original nationality while being naturalized as Taiwanese citizens. In the promotion of the 2016 Amendments,¹³ the MOI explains that the rationale of exempting 'high-level professional' foreigners from renouncing original nationality is '*to enhance competitiveness of our nation in recruiting excellent foreign talents . . . who are beneficial to our nation*'.

Furthermore, in this current dominant discourse, upper-class foreigners are perceived as not only 'superior' in terms of their economic capital, but also in terms of their 'moral capital'. As part of the immigrants' rights movement campaigning for amendments to the Nationality Act since 2012, I personally witnessed government officials and legislators from various political parties rejecting our proposed amendment to accept dual citizenship to prevent marriage migrants from becoming stateless in the process of applying naturalization. Their primary reasoning was to ensure 'loyalty' of foreigners in times of war, and hence the principle of single citizenship was non-negotiable. The 2016 Amendments allowing dual citizenship only to 'high quality' foreigners indicates the assumption that the loyalty of 'high quality' foreigners is beyond doubt, thus making them 'morally superior' to the 'low quality' foreigners, mostly marriage migrants from SEA.

Moreover, this incongruence between positive discourse on SGI and stricter immigration laws for SEA marriage migrants indicates an evolving state-citizen relationship in Taiwan. The Taiwanese government has been in increasingly urgent need of 'high population quality' to enhance its global competitiveness because it has been confronted

with greater economic pressure, especially from the PRC. Previously, based on the discourse surrounding the inferior quality of Southeast Asian marriage migrants and their children, the state legitimated its exclusion of marriage migrants and blue-collar migrant workers from SEA in the name of ‘protecting the public interest’ of Taiwanese citizens. In other words, the goal was to prevent deteriorative impacts of inferior foreigners on our superior population quality for the sake of Taiwan’s competitive advantage in the global market. In this quasi-war discourse, what was at stake was the ‘quality’ of the population, perceived as the weapon needed to win the war in the competitive globalized market. However, ASEAN’s subsequent rise since the 2010 has made negative framing of SEA marriage migrants and their children untenable. At the same time, the PRC began expanding its influence in SEA, so the Taiwanese government shifted to utilizing SGI in an attempt to link with SEA. Ironically, while the recent ‘social assets’ discourse apparently contradicts the previous ‘social problems’ discourse, the Taiwanese government has never publicly acknowledged its mistakes in previous policies regarding NTC.

Without reflecting on this contradiction, the state apparatus appears to be a *corporate-like* entity whose ultimate objective is to advance its competitiveness in the global economy rather than ensuring equality and justice for all citizens, including marriage migrants and their children. In turn, citizens have assumed a *consumer-like* status by merely demanding that the state (the corporation) ensure the ‘quality’ of the ‘commodities’ they purchase (Hsia 2015) (e.g. migrant women as reproducers of citizens and SGI as personnel working for Taiwanese companies in the ASEAN) rather than exercising their rights and responsibilities to hold the state accountable for providing welfare and advancing equality and justice.

For instance, in late 2020, a small group of SGI held a public protest when they learned of the NIA’s plan to reduce the number of marriage migrants and SGI in the Committee governing the Fund. The Quarterly issued by an NGO active in marriage migrant and SGI issues published an article by an SGI leader in that protest. Since this Quarterly has been sponsored by the Fund, this NGO was required to make a mid-term report to the Committee. At the Committee meeting, the SGI editor of the Quarterly was scolded by an NIA senior staff, the key person administrating the Fund: ‘*The Fund has fed you large herd of new immigrants and SGI. We fund you, yet you published such an article agreeing with its criticism against us*’.¹⁴ The SGI editor was threatened that ‘*the final payment of this Quarterly will be retained if your mistakes are not corrected*’.

The government’s perception of citizens as consumers is justified by intensifying globalization. As a result of increasingly volatile economic development, the skills and human resources in highest demand today can soon become obsolete, leading individuals and countries to lose competitiveness in the global market. To attract global financial capital, the state must be able to quickly deploy the most competitive expertise and skills. In turn, the governors of the state apparatus have essentially become ‘CEO’ of the corporation (Hsia 2015). To maintain corporate advantage in the global market, the CEO must dispatch any personnel in need, such as SGI needed to help Taiwan’s business expansion in the ASEAN. The government, as the CEO, can thus legitimate its endeavors to employ all means to recruit ‘high quality’ foreigners, including amending immigration laws, without apprehension of criticism by citizens. When the 2016 Amendments confronted a series of protests by NGOs regarding Article 19, the government did not respond. It was only until the passing of the amendments that the MOI issued

a PowerPoint presentation promoting the 2016 Amendments on its Facebook Page that emphasized in one slide: *'Procedural Justice exists: difficult to revoke certification of naturalization'*. Instead of responding to NGOs' criticism of injustice, the MOI merely perfunctorily mentioned the difficulty in revoking nationality.

This emerging state–citizen relationship as one of corporation–consumer echoes the 'consumer citizenship' concept formulated by Turner (2017), who argued that the state has withdrawn from its commitment to full employment and the provision of social security, while civil society has been eroded under neoliberal globalization. With the emphasis on individualism and privatization, citizens have increasingly become consumers exercising individual choices in a society dominated by the market and commercial values.

Consumer citizenship has emerged strongly in Taiwan, as the state has not been held accountable for previous discriminatory policies and laws. Moreover, in Taiwan's case, the state's retreat from accountability and push toward prioritizing class-based immigration policies have been further justified by the long-term rivalry with the PRC. As the PRC continues to grow as the world's top economic power, Taiwan's prosperity-based sense of superiority relative to the PRC can no longer be sustained; consequently, Taiwan's government has attempted to construct Taiwan as the 'morally superior' alternative to the PRC in the region. In this new framing of Taiwan as the PRC's moral superior, SGI are utilized not only as cultural ambassadors to build bridges with SEA but also as showcases of Taiwan's adherence to multiculturalism and human rights as opposed to the PRC's ethno-nationalism and authoritarianism. Consequently, the state cannot afford to admit and apologize for previous discriminatory policies. In order to quickly mobilize an army of such 'cultural ambassadors', Taiwan's government employed and reinforced the frame of mother–child dyadic citizenship by constructing SGI as citizens already equipped with SEA cultures and languages. With such a utilitarian image of SGI in Taiwan's urgent competition against the PRC, the resources recently allotted to promote cultural inheritance from SEA marriage migrants to their children are perceived as a favor bestowed by the government rather than an entitlement the government is obligated to ensure.

Conclusion

Marriage migration has been significant in East Asia for more than two decades, and changing discourses on marriage migrants and their children need to be examined from a temporal perspective. By investigating discursive shifts regarding SEA marriage migrants and their children in Taiwan, this paper proposes a concept of *'mother-child dyadic citizenship'* and argues that the citizenship of marriage migrants and that of their children are mutually premised. As a state whose traditional citizenship laws have been based on blood, when confronted with a strong wave of marriage immigration, Taiwan's governments employ the 'mother-child dyad', not the individual-state nexus, to frame policies regulating SEA marriage migrants and their children. [Figure 1](#)

As shown in the framework, the discursive shift in the children of SEA marriage migrants has resulted from the *dual* impacts of mother-child dyadic citizenship and the geopolitics of the Taiwan, SEA, and PRC triad. By expanding Taiwanese business presence and improving diplomatic relations with ASEAN countries to rival the PRC,

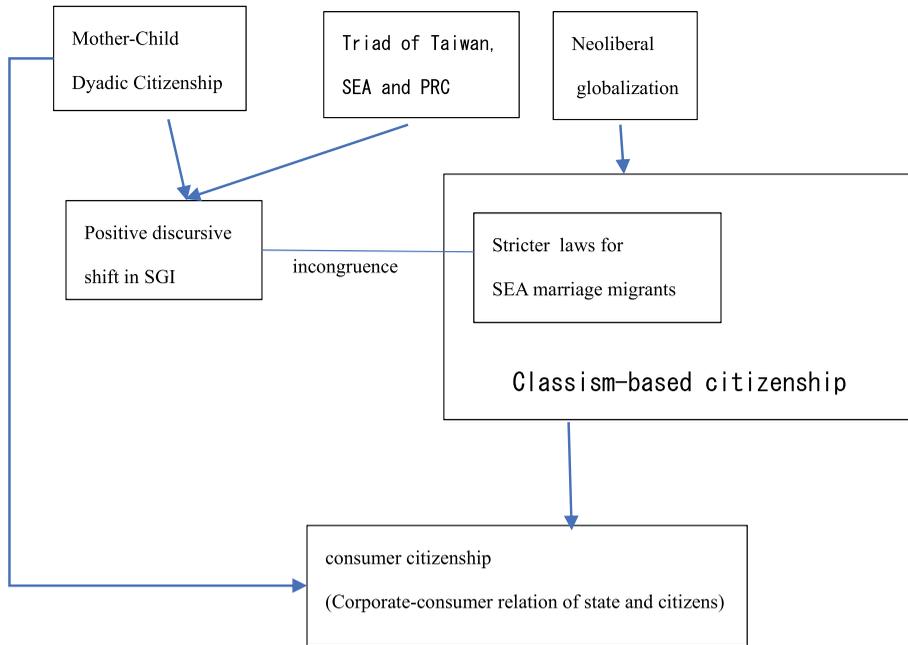


Figure 1. The main arguments can be illustrated in the following framework:

the NSP attempts to mobilize children of SEA marriage migrants by leveraging their presumed cultural inheritance from their mothers; consequently, a positive discourse on SGI and their Southeast Asian mothers has emerged in contrast with the previous negative discourse on NTC, who had not been acculturated to their mothers' original language and culture because of severe discrimination. The current positive discourse is merely a tactic under the NSP that uses SEA as a leverage against the PRC in response to regional geopolitical dynamics.

This recent shift to positive discourse regarding SGI ironically coexists with the tightening of immigration laws regulating SEA marriage migrants. The ideology embedded in the 2016 Amendments to the Nationality Act is classism, which assigns more rights to upper-class foreigners than to SEA marriage migrants, who are mostly from the lower-class. While Taiwanese immigration policy has been loaded with 'racialized classism', recent changes in immigration laws reveal that the underlying ideology has become straightforward classism.

The contradiction between positive immigration discourse and discriminatory laws has not received much criticism from civil society. Without reflection on this contradiction, the state-citizen relationship has evolved into a corporate-consumer relationship within which the state is not held accountable for equality and justice, while resources provided to citizens, including SGI and their mothers, are perceived as favors bestowed by the state rather than entitlements. With this emerging framework of 'consumer citizenship', the positive discursive shift is taken for granted while the government evades the responsibility to publicly acknowledge mistakes when formulating discriminatory policies and laws regulating NTC and their Southeast Asian mothers. This evasion of governmental responsibilities has been justified by the long-term rivalry with the PRC.

Furthermore, the mother-child dyadic citizenship reinforces consumer citizenship under neoliberal globalization because the children of SEA marriage migrants are assumed to inherit mothers' languages and cultures, which are considered instrumental to Taiwan's economic expansion into SEA.

Notes

1. Taiwan News, 8 October 2018, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3547755>
2. United Daily News, 18 August 2014, <http://vision.udn.com/vision/story/7689/735688>
3. United Daily News, 1 September 2014, <https://vision.udn.com/vision/story/7697/735624>
4. Taiwan News, 7 October 2019, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/ch/news/3791900>
5. In MOI's 2013 report titled 'Special Report on the Counselling and Education of Foreign and Mainland Spouses,' 'deteriorating the population quality' was listed as one of the major problems caused by marriage migrants. <https://www.immigration.gov.tw/media/5194/%E5%A4%96%E7%B1%8D%E8%88%87%E5%A4%A7%E9%99%B8%E9%85%8D%E5%81%B6%E8%BC%94%E5%B0%8E%E8%88%87%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2%E5%B0%88%E6%A1%88%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A-92%E5%B9%B412%E6%9C%8823%E6%97%A5%E8%A1%8C%E6%94%BF%E9%99%A2%E9%99%A2%E6%9C%83.odt>
6. https://www.moea.gov.tw/mns/otn_e/content/Content.aspx?menu_id=19288 (accessed on 13 November 2017)
7. <https://www.ey.gov.tw/otnen/64C34DCA8893B06/9c560855-1ecd-4f58-9c3f-c065d9e58f89> (accessed on 18 January 2019)
8. <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/5022> (accessed on 10 January 2020)
9. Including language requirements, nationality test, financial requirements, etc.
10. Central News Agency, 17 May 2016. <http://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20160517003417-260407>
11. An independent investigatory and auditory agency of the government.
12. [http://www.cy.gov.tw/AP_HOME/op_Upload/eDoc/%E5%85%AC%E5%A0%B1/96/0960000192588_%E5%85%A7%E6%96%87\(%E7%80%8F%E8%A6%BD%E7%94%A8\).pdf](http://www.cy.gov.tw/AP_HOME/op_Upload/eDoc/%E5%85%AC%E5%A0%B1/96/0960000192588_%E5%85%A7%E6%96%87(%E7%80%8F%E8%A6%BD%E7%94%A8).pdf) (accessed on 6 October 2017)
13. <https://www.facebook.com/moi.gov.tw/posts/1477223388972726> (accessed on 10 January 2021)
14. Notes of the SGI editor shared to the author.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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