

Tolerance and Intolerance of Multiculturalism in Taiwan

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Efforts being made towards the construction of a multicultural society in Taiwan which began in the 1990s with the restoration of the cultural rights of Taiwan's indigenous peoples, have developed today in a direction, no longer limited to indigenous peoples alone, and which both enhances and permits the plurality of culture through the enactment of new laws and policies with regard to a wide variety of social groups. Postwar Taiwan's unique political system has contributed to these developments and, even despite the fact that Taiwan was a late-comer in consolidating a social environment as a host society for accepting foreigners, in recent years new immigrants have increased and policies have been rapidly introduced with them in mind.

However, if we examine laws and policy regarding the employment situations and things such as the attainment of citizenship by foreign spouses, then it becomes apparent that, while Taiwan gives people the impression that it is a tolerant society towards foreign nationals, there are clear differences in the societal positionality and treatment of migrants according to nationality and resident status. From this it can be gathered that Taiwan is not necessarily a state which actively encourages migration.

In other words, we can say that immigration policies are based upon a deep sense of patriarchy in which "good" spouses with foreign nationalities are seen as the objects of nationalization under a slogan of "plural culture". This "plural culture", on the one hand, praises a multiculturalism based in the spirit of a cosmopolitanism which appeals to plurality and is Taiwan's strategy as a late-comer in international society. On the other hand, it also contains apprehensions concerning the maintenance of traditional Taiwanese culture and the constitution of the Taiwanese population in an aging society facing a declining birth rate and decreasing population.

In this presentation I will examine the boundaries between tolerance and intolerance through focusing on new immigrants to Taiwan and the dual character of Taiwan's multiculturalism. I will do this from multiple perspectives, including that of the unique context of Taiwan and the background to the contemporary situation, as well as its place in a more transnational context.