



Nation, Migration, Identity: Learning from the Cross-Strait Context (14 March 2019)

Report by Li Hsin-yi



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Nation, Migration, Identity:
Learning from the Cross-Strait Context

Lara Momesso
Lecturer at the School of Languages and Global Studies
(University of Central Lancashire)

Discussant: **Li Hsin-yi** (Doctor in Anthropology, Heidelberg University)



For the fifth session in our series of “Taiwanese Perspectives” we welcomed Dr Lara Momesso from the University of Central Lancashire to give a speech with the title: “Nation, Migration, Identity: Learning from the Cross-Strait Context”. Dr Momesso is a lecturer in Asia Pacific Studies at the School of Global Languages and Studies at the University of Central Lancashire (UK). Her speech was commented by Li Hsin-yi (Heidelberg University).

At the beginning of her speech, Momesso first introduced the institution of The Northern Institute of Taiwan Studies (NorITS) where she is currently working. The NorITS is located at the University of Central Lancashire, cooperating with Northern England Policy Centre for the Asia Pacific (NEPCAP) and the Institution of Korean Studies. By focusing on Taiwanese history, societies, pop-cultures and literature, the NorITS aims to put

Taiwanese studies within a broader Asia-Pacific perspective, to attract more students, as well as to make Taiwan questions more visible in and beyond academia.

In her talk, Dr Momesso presented a co-authored paper, which compares two qualitative research analyses of Chinese and Taiwanese immigrants in the cross-strait context: one is her own long-term research project about PRC-marriage-migrants in Taiwan, the Lupeis (陸配), and the other one is the research about Taiwanese investors in China, the Taishangs (台商), completed by the scholar Lee Chun-yi. In their paper, the authors raised a key question: what happens when transnational actors move between regions that hold conflicting views, with regard to national recognition and sovereignty and that are shaped by unequal power relations? Momesso and Lee use two theoretical frameworks from Ian and Wood (1999)¹ to analyze the narratives of Taishangs and Lupeis: one is the conception of self-perception, i.e. the ways of how these cross-strait immigrants express their national identities and belongings. For the second one, they looked into the dialogical recognition of the other, i.e. the social spaces where these immigrants are living in and interacting with the local inhabitants. Using these theoretical frameworks, the authors put emphasis on the structural opportunities and constraints for these immigrants to integrate into the society according to the cross-strait national politics in China and Taiwan, and on the social images of these immigrants in the receiving society. Taking these political, social, and cultural conditions and challenges into consideration, Momesso and Lee presented in the

¹ Isin, E.F. and Wood, P.K., 1999 *Citizenship and Identity*, London, Sage.

end a highly hybrid and complex picture of how these factors are intersected with each other, and how these in turn influence the possibilities of these cross-border immigrants to assume their national belonging: the Taishangs in China often use situational identities to avoid awkward discussions in public, and take strategic choices to remain in a privileged position for doing business in China. The mainland spouses (mostly female) manifest their identity differently in private and in public, to protect themselves from the negative images which are distributed in the Taiwanese social media and from local discrimination. The authors

came to the result: even if the new cross-strait policies bring increased numbers of people cross border today, to migrate between Taiwan and China, this does not mean that these cross-strait exchanges will form a so-called transnational identity – which is, according to the transnational theories developed by Appadurai, a new, hybrid, mixed, supranational identity.



Lara Momesso

Instead of this, the authors showed, when movements occur between regions that hold conflicting views with regard to national recognition and sovereignty, not only migrants find it hard to develop hybrid identities, but they may also be used by states as a means to pursue their nationalist own objectives.

In her comments to Momesso’s talk, Li Hsin-yi raised two theoretical questions: one is how to interpret the terms which the Lupeis and Taishangs used to describe “nation”, to assume their national identity. Taking this into consideration, she posed further the question: if we consider the issue of identity as aspect of boundary drawing, inclusion and exclusion, self and the other, and the formation of identity as a fluid process, situational and interactive, is identity not per se already hybrid and flexible?

The session was concluded by another two questions raised by the audience: one asked, whether besides the concept of nation, also the ideas of family has strongly influenced these immigrants to construct their national identities? The second question concerned the usage of 中華 (Zhonghua) and 中國 (Zhongguo) by these immigrants regarding their national identities.