Chapter 2

Global Civic Engagement as an Empowering Device for Cross-Ethnic and Cross-Cultural Understanding in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

This study observed the feasibility of a general education course in facilitating global civic engagement for twenty-six participants from a Taiwanese university. Such a commitment was considered crucial to the fostering of cross-ethnic and cross-cultural understanding of immigration and new immigrants as a global issue within the Taiwanese context. Oral presentations, film/video watching, and service learning sessions were arranged to promote critical appraisals of things, persons, and issues related to foreign ethnicities and cultures. Data of the study consisted of relevant writings produced by the participants. The results of analyses revealed that the participants developed an awareness of persons, things, and issues that were cross-ethnic or cross-cultural in nature. Consequently, they achieved attitudinal and perceptional change of foreign ethnicities or cultures or generated critical appraisals of specific things or issues. Additionally, a considerable number of them displayed motivational readiness for global civic engagement.

INTRODUCTION

In this article we present the educational outcome of a general education course which introduced the concept of global civic engagement to college students in Taiwan. Specifically, the course was intended to direct the students' attention beyond local issues and develop understanding of immigration and immigrants as a global concern. Taiwan, for geographic and historical reasons, has long been a hub of

cultural and ethnic heterogeneity. The overall cultural landscape became even more diverse since 1988, when the Taiwanese government decisively lifted the Martial Law, embracing an open-door policy toward Mainland China. Accompanying this easing of political tension was a surge of cross-border marriages across the Taiwan Strait. Additionally, in 1994 the government enacted the Moving toward the South Policy (*Nanxiang Zhengce*)[1], which intended to improve its economic and diplomatic ties with Southeast Asian countries. This policy change brought in an even bigger flood of new immigrants who entered the country on international marriages (Lin & Wang, 2006).

The aforementioned international or cross-border marriages typically involve Taiwanese men marrying women from Mainland China and Southeast Asia. Statistics shows that currently in Taiwan there are a total of 505,320 marriage immigrants, among them 319,295 are women from Mainland China and 147,190 women from the Southeast Asia. The two groups together make up 92.31% of the population of new immigrants on international or cross-border marriage (Ministry of the Interior, ROC, 2015).

RESEARCH SETTING

Negative Public Beliefs About New Immigrants in Taiwan

The substantial increase of marriage and labor immigrants in the few past decades has caused a significant change in Taiwan's demography and its ethnic and cultural landscape. Largely due to imbalanced media portrayals and hearsay from various sources, many citizens have developed stereotyped notions and/or negative perceptions toward new immigrants.

The observations made by Hsieh (2004) and Tseng (2004) deserve mention here. Hsieh (2004) explored the images of foreign laborers as illustrated in three important newspapers in Taiwan from the years 1987 to 2003. The methods of content analysis and semantic differential were employed to analyze the research data, with special attention on the trends and features of news coverage during this time period. The outcomes revealed both positive and negative stereotypes directed at foreign laborers. The positive ones include characteristics like "diligent," "friendly and harmonious," "with sophisticated survival skills," "well adaptable to changing circumstances," while the negative ones included characteristics like "highly vainglorious," "extremely harmful," "transgressing the law," "very dangerous," and "resistant." Hsieh summarized that there was no normalized tendency toward negative stereotyping of the target group of foreign labors as shown in news media. However, Tseng (2004) reported dissimilar findings. She indicated that immigrants from Southeast Asia were unanimously perceived as individuals from backward countries and they received discriminatory treatment as a result. In one sense, they were deemed as "others within others" (p. 46). She further pointed out that Taiwanese citizens failed to differentiate among the languages and cultures that are typical of immigrants from that region.

Liu (2008) also investigated how mainstream media in Taiwan depicted the relationship between Taiwanese employers and their immigrant domestic workers. She observed biased news coverage that overly emphasized the conflicts and tragic episodes. The media also highlighted the negative side of immigrant domestic workers by reconstructing an unbalanced power relationship similar to the condition of social reality between the two parties. Ku (2008) indicated that Taiwanese society as a whole had never shown a genuine intention to understand the culture of guest (foreign) workers or listen to their inner voice and needs. She further remarked that foreign laborers in Taiwan, who were occasionally captured by mass media, were always presented with the negative image of being either "pitiful" or "damned."

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