

# Chapter 33. Interpositionality of Emotionality: How My Monolingual Taiwanese Nationality Intersects with Dual Citizenship of Taiwanese Americanness

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As the spring semester of 2023 drew to a close, one of my participants generously allocated two hours to share her multi-legged migratory journey from China to Taiwan to the United States. My dissertation work explores the experiences of Taiwanese Americans who navigate complex transmigration trajectories, examining how they are ethnonationalized along the way. During our virtual interview, tears streamed down her cheeks as she recounted her initial years in the U.S. She tearfully described the racialized bullying and social ostracization she endured. I found myself shedding tears with her, deeply moved. In that moment, I realized “research” cannot contain the vulnerability and humanism within and about us. As a Taiwanese researcher, I have personally encountered moments in the U.S., where I have felt pressured to identify with Chinese heritage and experienced alienation as a racialized foreigner. This shared sense of displacement fostered an emotional bond between us as transnational subjects.

As a mono-national Taiwanese, however, I do not enjoy the privilege of dual nationality compared to my Taiwanese American participants—especially the freedom of unrestricted travel across borders. I returned to Taiwan for ethnographic work following my research interview. Just before boarding my flight, I received the devastating news of my maternal grandfather’s passing. My participants have dual nationality that affords them flexibility in crossing borders; however, my F-1 student visa restricts me to the confines of my school campus during terms and mandates return to Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, to maintain my visa status. The emotional toll of transnational mobility I must navigate was highlighted by my inability to physically grieve with my family in Taiwan. Instead, I mourned my grandfather’s loss through digital messages exchanged over seven thousand miles, constrained by temporal limitations on my ability to be physically present.

Reflecting on my emotional positionality in relation to my participants, I pondered our shared experiences as Taiwanese transmigrants labeled as “exotic foreigners.” Yet our mobilities differ significantly; while my participants can freely

cross the U.S. border, I am constrained by visa regulations that shape my daily emotions and connections to my family. Differentiated mobilities within transnational communities underscore disparities in mobility rights and privileges. While dual nationals may enjoy relatively seamless border crossings, individuals like myself face bureaucratic hurdles that influence emotional experiences and familial connections. These disparities underscore the need for researchers to critically engage with how mobility—and its constraints—affects emotional lives and research dynamics.

This divergence prompts critical questions: When the inter-emotional-relationality between the researcher and the researched forms differentiated mobilities (e.g., border-crossing capability by citizenship status), how does the researcher negotiate with the writing, analysis, and “experiencing” of the data? How does our writing intersect with the emotion generated through confronting our different citizenship positionalities and alignments with institutions (e.g., border customs)? How can the researcher better understand such inter-emotional-relationality through the movement across and into different spatial and temporal environments?

In examining these themes, I am reminded of the interconnectedness of personal narratives and scholarly inquiry. The emotional bonds forged between researcher and participant underscore the human dimensions of research, challenging traditional boundaries between observer and observed. Yet the sharedness can never be replicated, as emotional and relational dynamics between researcher and participant arise from their varied citizenship statuses and institutional alignment, such as border customs. These reflections offer insights into the complexities of transmigration experiences and the emotional landscapes they entail.