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Migration, Mobilities, and Changing Political Landscapes

Anticipating Belonging or Anticipating Refusal: Information Environments and Taiwanese Prospective International Students' Perceptions of Destination Immigration Regimes

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Given Taiwan's combined geopolitical precarity and friendly if unofficial relations with the US and its allies, international relations and higher education analysts might be optimistic that pursuing advanced studies abroad is a fundamentally appealing option to Taiwanese students. Shortcomings in Taiwan's domestic higher education and job markets may also motivate these students to go abroad (Bodenhorn et al. 2020; Hou et al. 2021; Lo 2009; Lin & Yang 2022). However, sources of insecurity for these prospective migrants range from onerous visa regimes (Chen et al. 2020) to rising rates of anti-Asian hate crimes in the US and other Anglophone study destinations (Allen & Ye 2021; Kim et al. 2022; Tan et al. 2024).

This study aims to analyze prospective international students' academic career decisions through the lens of their subjectivities, namely their "bounded rationality" and limited access to information (Spaan & Naerssen 2018, 682-683; see also Carling & Collins 2018, Hu et al. 2022). Interviews with prospective students based in Taipei who await graduate program application decisions, plus site visits to university-based study-abroad centres and private international education agencies, will demonstrate how prospective students' information environments shape their perceptions of their possible academic futures and potential future selves as migrants. Students who aim to study in the US versus Canada especially merit comparison given recent shifts in both countries' immigration posturing. Additionally, acknowledging that the formation of a migrant identity begins during preparations to migrate (Rodriguez & Schwenken. 2013), this study will examine how prospective students' senses of belonging to potential host countries develop and how knowledge of restrictive visa regimes or anti-immigrant attitudes might curtail this identity development. Analyzing the experiences of Taiwanese international students can also contribute to the literatures on the forced-voluntary migration dichotomy and academic career decisions amid the slowing growth of the Asian Tiger economies.