

4. REPRODUCING UNCERTAINTY  
DOCUMENTING CONTESTED SOVEREIGNTY AND  
CITIZENSHIP ACROSS THE TAIWAN STRAIT

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Documents, so the assumption goes, constitute the evidentiary signs of citizenship, statehood, and sovereignty. Whether passports, national ID cards, travel passes, visas, or entry permits, official documents ostensibly sanctify both the identity of their bearers and the standing of the body that issued them. But what kind of work is performed by identity and travel documents in contexts where citizenship and sovereignty are contested or fragile? Instead of assuming that documents necessarily enact the qualities of recognized statehood or bestow citizenship, this chapter examines how bureaucrats and immigrants infuse documentary practices with their own aspirations and emotional investments, with the result that documents do not affirm legal recognition or sovereign claims so much as they reproduce the uncertain status of contested borders and the individuals who journey across them.

If a government's sovereign standing is not self-evident, then what does this mean for its ability to bestow and recognize citizenship? How is citizenship produced or undermined when some of its ostensibly foundational conditions—recognized borders, distinct groups of nationals and foreigners, and sovereign recognition—are uncertain at best and hotly contested at worst? How does movement across borders heighten the destabilizing features of this context, rendering national identity and legal status matters of contention and calling into question the security of state-bestowed identities, citizenship included?

This chapter addresses one small piece of this larger puzzle by examining the work that identity and travel documents do in a context of contested sovereignty. Other scholars approach documents as elements in a larger state classificatory project—a project through which states aim to recognize and make legible their own populations while simultaneously excluding outsiders from the citizen body (Caplan and Torpey 2001; Scott 1998; Torpey 2000). This chapter begins from the assumption that classifications of individuals and groups are rarely seamless or uncontested.<sup>1</sup> Together with chapters by Sadiq, Rosenbloom, and McKenzie, it argues that these moments of friction and even failure offer valuable insights into how both citizenship and sovereignty are produced and struggled over in diverse settings in the world today (Wang 2004; Yngvesson and Coutin 2006).

My analytic point of departure is the state of largely *de facto* sovereignty experienced by Taiwan (also known as the Republic of China [ROC]) and Taiwan's contested relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC), which claims the island as a renegade province destined eventually to return to the PRC's sovereign orbit. By examining the travel documents Taiwanese and Chinese use to move between the two countries and the identity documents issued to Chinese immigrants in Taiwan, I show how these atypical documents both substantiate Taiwan's claims to sovereign standing and simultaneously undo those very claims through their ambiguous features: the documents mimic internationally recognized evidentiary standards for citizenship that legitimate cross-border mobility, but their "not quite" features also affirm Taiwan's "not quite" state of national sovereignty. In other words, the documents themselves and the actions performed on or with them reproduce, rather than resolve, the anomalous status of the border travelers cross and the uncertain standing of Taiwan as a document-issuing and document-recognizing sovereign authority. One consequence of these documentary effects is to bestow an exceptional (although legal) status on Chinese immigrants in Taiwan and to call into question their ability to realize the full promise of naturalized citizenship in their new home.

I focus here on two groups for whom the documentary bases of identity are particularly fraught: Taiwanese bureaucrats charged with regulating cross-border mobility and the largest population of permanent immigrants to Taiwan, the mainland Chinese spouses of Taiwanese citizens. Travel and identity documents animate both groups' quests for security and legitimation. Chinese spouses desire recognition as legitimate members of Taiwanese families and the Taiwanese nation, while Taiwanese bureaucrats seek international acknowledgment of their status as representatives of a sovereign state. Documents, I suggest, medi-

ate these groups' relationship to desired states of existence—citizen inclusion and sovereign recognition—but that mediation more often than not fails to resolve the anxieties each group faces as it seeks to attain modes of belonging promised by idealized models of both citizenship and sovereignty. These failures result from documents' inability to escape the historically contingent legal and geopolitical configurations that demand they function merely as “as if” material forms of recognition, skirting the thorny questions of sovereignty and national identity that continue to plague cross-Strait relations.

### *Documentary Border Crossings*

China's mid-twentieth-century civil war produced two regimes that claimed to represent the legitimate government of all of China: the Nationalists, who retreated in defeat to the island of Taiwan in 1949, and the Communists, who thereafter took control of the Chinese mainland. Military conflict and intense ideological battles persisted across the Taiwan Strait during the bitter Cold War decades that followed, but international responses to the two-state problem gradually shifted as Cold War tensions waned and more states recognized the PRC over the ROC.<sup>2</sup> This multidecade process of ROC derecognition has culminated in a situation today whereby Taiwan functions as a *de facto* independent state with its own democratically elected government, military, and currency, but it lacks *de jure* recognition from all but a mere twenty-two small countries in the world. In short, Taiwan's political status *vis-à-vis* China remains ambiguous.

The cross-Strait political stalemate began to thaw in 1987 and renewed ties opened up the possibility of civilian flows across the Strait. One result of this new relationship was a growing number of marriages between Chinese and Taiwanese, the vast majority of which paired a Chinese woman with a Taiwanese man, with the couple often residing in Taiwan. On the basis of their family reunification claims, mainland Chinese spouses enjoy rights to legal residence and future citizenship status in Taiwan. To regulate this contested group of immigrants and contain their impact on Taiwanese society, the ROC government has created an increasingly complex immigration regime that enacts Taiwan's sovereign aspirations while striving to assuage widespread anxieties about the country's political future.

By the late twentieth century, Taiwan had begun to grant entry to temporary labor migrants from Southeast Asia and to permanent marital immigrants from China and Southeast Asia. Despite their shared status as the spouse of a Taiwanese citizen, these two groups of marital immigrants have been slotted

into different categories in Taiwan's emerging immigration regime. "Foreign spouses," primarily women from countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, and the Philippines, are regulated under Taiwan's Immigration Act, which grants them residency and work rights when they first arrive in Taiwan and creates a four-year time clock to naturalized citizenship. Their entry into Taiwan and status as legal immigrants are documented through recognizable evidentiary means: they cross borders using foreign passports stamped with an entry visa and receive a laminated plastic residence card shortly after arrival that resembles in form and content Taiwanese citizens' national identification card.

Chinese spouses, by contrast, are defined as neither foreigners nor natives under Taiwanese law: to identify them with either category would be viewed by China as either asserting Taiwanese independence or acquiescing to the stance that Taiwan is merely a province under China's sovereign control. Following the reestablishment of cross-Strait ties in the late 1980s, Taiwan's legislature crafted new legislation to manage this emerging relationship and the possible arrival of mainland Chinese on Taiwanese shores. Known as the Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area, this legislation slotted all mainland Chinese into an anomalous legal category, "people of the mainland area." The act and its subsidiary policies created a distinct immigration path for Chinese spouses, generally the only group of mainland Chinese who enjoyed rights to residence and citizenship in Taiwan. Unlike their foreign counterparts who received residency status and work rights upon first arrival in Taiwan, Chinese spouses faced a delay of several years in both respects and an initial timeline to citizenship that was twice as long (eight years in total). Some of these inequalities were redressed by reforms to the act in 2009, but to this day Chinese spouses must wait six years before being eligible for Taiwanese citizenship.

Chinese spouses, therefore, occupy an exceptional legal status in Taiwan, a sign of the anxieties produced by their origins in the mainland and the potential threats they may pose to Taiwanese sovereignty once they become naturalized citizens.<sup>3</sup> Despite enjoying legal immigration standing in Taiwan through marriage to a citizen, Chinese spouses are marked by this exceptional status both prior to and, in certain ways, even after becoming naturalized citizens.<sup>4</sup> The documents that create Chinese spouses' legal identity during their many years as immigrants in Taiwan and that they use to travel across the Taiwan Strait substantiate their exceptionalism and their contested claims to future inclusion in the national polity.

Travel between China and Taiwan is regulated by a multitude of documents, but for Chinese and Taiwanese border crossers, passports are not among them.

In fact, many Chinese spouses in Taiwan do not have a PRC passport at all. If we accept, as John Torpey (2000) and Yael Navaro-Yashin (2007) contend, that passports constitute and convey “state-ness,” then it should be obvious why Chinese and Taiwanese do not use passports to move across the Strait, for to do so would require that China recognize Taiwan as a sovereign nation-state.<sup>5</sup> Despite this absence of passports, travel between China and Taiwan does *resemble* international travel. Chinese, Taiwanese, and foreign travelers all pass through immigration and customs at airports and sea ports, and they are required to show documentary proof of identity to border officers at points of departure and arrival. Foreign nationals use passports and visas to journey between Taiwan and China, but Taiwanese and Chinese who cross these borders carry documents that are distinct from those used for travel to a third country.

To sidestep the sovereignty question, China requires Taiwanese who seek to enter the PRC to apply for a “Taiwan compatriot pass” (*taibaozheng*), which serves as their document of record while in China. In turn, the PRC government issues Chinese citizens departing for Taiwan a “travel pass” (*tongxingzheng*) designated specifically for Taiwan. These documents are small booklets that resemble a passport in form and content: they have a rigid, colored cover and a first page with a photograph and other identifying information. Inside pages contain “visas” that are valid for a fixed period of time and permit single or multiple entry and exit.<sup>6</sup>

The documents’ official names, printed in full on the cover, demonstrate some of the common rhetorical strategies employed by China to contain cross-Strait ties within a domestic, intranational framework. First, the two countries are identified not by their formal names but as regions or areas: Taiwan and the mainland.<sup>7</sup> Second, the documents are defined not as passports—using the documentary language of citizenship and sovereignty—but as travel passes, a term that suggests heightened state control over internal mobility (Torpey 2000, 165). Hence, by issuing Chinese citizens “travel passes” for travel to Taiwan, the PRC government implicitly enfolds Taiwan into its domestic space. Third, the presence of directional verbs in the full names affirms the geographic perspective of China as the dominant (i.e., issuing) authority: Taiwan residents “come to” (*laiwang*) the mainland, whereas mainland residents “go to” (*wanglai*) Taiwan. These verbs position China as the central actor managing cross-Strait flows, thereby denying Taiwan any claim to independent sovereign status.

When Chinese spouses travel to Taiwan, they depart the mainland using their travel pass; they enter Taiwan, however, on a document issued to them by Taiwan’s National Immigration Agency (NIA) or, prior to the establishment of the NIA in January 2007, by the Entry/Exit Immigration Police. Unlike

the booklet-type documents issued by China, this “Exit and Entry Permit” is a single sheet of paper folded in thirds to make it roughly the size of a passport. The bottom third is laid out much like the first page of a passport, with a photograph in the upper left corner and identifying information to the right. Although the permit resembles a passport, it includes information that is often contained in a visa or a port-of-entry form (such as purpose of entry and address in Taiwan). To add to the confusion, the permit acts as a passport at the moment when it (and not the PRC-issued travel pass) is stamped by a Taiwan border officer as the Chinese traveler proceeds through immigration control to enter Taiwan.

These documents manage border crossings by keeping both the status of the border and the national standing of Chinese and Taiwanese who journey across it intentionally ambiguous. The documents resemble internationally recognized passports and visas but are not exactly the same. The NIA officials themselves acknowledge that the use of travel passes and entry permits reaffirms the “strange relationship” between Taiwan and mainland China and undermines Taiwan’s aspirations for a recognized “state-to-state” relationship with the PRC. Although this ambiguity keeps potential political tensions across the Strait in check, it also generates its own complexities for those who move across the border and for the officials who regulate those flows.

When ties between China and Taiwan were reinstated in 1987, travel from one country to the other was a cumbersome and time-consuming process. Despite the narrow body of water separating Taiwan from the mainland, travelers were required to transit through a third location, typically Hong Kong or Macau. At the time, Hong Kong was still a British colony, and Macau was ruled by Portugal. Even after the PRC assumed control of the territories in 1997 and 1999, respectively, it designated them as special administrative regions with quasi-independent governments and border control bureaucracies. Direct travel across the Taiwan Strait became possible only with Taiwan’s election of Nationalist president Ma Ying-jeou in 2008. Ma sought to expand trade and improve ties with China by introducing direct flights between Taiwan’s major airports and select cities on the mainland. Although these flights began in July 2008, the Taiwan government did not permit Chinese spouses to utilize direct travel until a year later. Hence, prior to mid-2009, all Chinese spouses traveling to Taiwan were required to transit through Hong Kong or Macau.<sup>8</sup>

Acquiring a Taiwan-issued entry permit was the first step in a Chinese spouse’s journey to Taiwan. Her Taiwanese spouse applied on her behalf for the entry permit after the couple had legally married in China and procured all required documentation. Once that application was approved, the NIA or

its predecessor unit generated two copies of the entry permit: an “original” that it mailed directly to the Hong Kong or Macau airport branch of Chung Hwa Travel Service (Taiwan’s unofficial consular office), and a “copy” that was stamped by the issuing body and then sent to the Chinese spouse’s guarantor in Taiwan. The guarantor (typically her Taiwanese husband) then mailed the copy of the permit to China so she could use it to apply for a travel pass from PRC authorities. With the PRC-issued travel pass and the Taiwan-issued entry permit “copy,” a Chinese spouse traveled by land or air to Hong Kong or Macau and, at the airport desk of Chung Hwa Travel Service, exchanged her entry permit “copy” for the “original.” Now with the “original” permit safely in hand, she could board a plane for Taiwan.

Why this elaborate system of “original” and “copy”? I initially assumed that it derived from the symbolic message of sovereign recognition conveyed by a Taiwan government agency directly mailing an official document to China. When I raised this question with Mr. Zhu, a senior Taiwanese official in the NIA section that issued entry permits, he instead emphasized the practical risks involved, dangers that revolved around Chinese propensities to “forge” documents.<sup>9</sup> During our interview in the summer of 2009, Mr. Zhu claimed that “in the past many people forged entry permit copies and used them to enter Hong Kong to work and earn money, not to come to Taiwan.” Now, however, with direct cross-Strait flights, Chinese spouses no longer had to transit through Hong Kong or Macau (although many still did because of cheaper airfares), and the NIA had no choice but to issue the “original” entry permit directly to the Taiwan guarantor, who then mailed it to his wife in China. “Because of this,” Mr. Zhu continued, “the risk we over here must take is even greater! There is no ‘interview,’ [we] haven’t seen the person. Because, after all, many of them over there forge documents.”

Mr. Zhu’s concerns reflect official anxiety about the identification capacity of documents in the hands of mainland Chinese and the feared lack of correspondence between an identity document and the individual who uses it.<sup>10</sup> The distribution of “original” and “copy” is intended to protect the “original” from fraudulent use in a context where Taiwan is unable to confirm, independently, the identity of Chinese citizens, but where government officials *assume* that Chinese will forge documents if given the opportunity. In Mr. Zhu’s narrative, both the original and the copy are susceptible to forgery, but the threat of a forged original is more powerful because of the capacities for mobility that inhere in the original: the ability to leave the geopolitical orbit of the PRC and travel to Taiwan. A Derridean reading that would show all “originals” to be simply “copies” (or “copies” to be no different from “originals”) fails to get

at the heart of the matter here, because officials such as Mr. Zhu experience a forged original as a direct challenge to Taiwan's sovereign authority to bestow on specific individuals the right to cross its borders. The phenomenologically original document, whether authentic or faked, empowers the bearer to fly directly to Taiwan without requiring the copy's mediating bureaucratic encounter in Hong Kong or Macau.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Zhu's framing of this potential risk positions "we over here" against "they over there" in an attempt to maintain a distance otherwise collapsed by direct flights across the Taiwan Strait and the government's issuance of original entry permits, a distance that bureaucrats such as Mr. Zhu see as vital to Taiwan's fragile sovereignty claims.

The multiplicity of documents employed in cross-Strait travel underscores the ambiguous status of the border itself and, subsequently, of the individuals who cross it—groups who fail to fit into recognized categories of foreigners, citizens, or even nationals returning from far-flung homes in the diaspora. Much like the ostensibly suspect birth certificates that the U.S. State Department deems insufficient evidence for *jus soli* citizenship claims (Rosenbloom, this volume), the travel documents used by Chinese spouses are infused with suspicions that those documents may not bear a unique referential relation to their bearer. These suspicions persist even after Chinese spouses enter Taiwan and embark on the path to residency and citizenship, and they justify the exceptional documents that substantiate Chinese spouses' anomalous status in Taiwan. These documentary effects reverberate on multiple scales: on the one hand, exceptionalism undermines Chinese spouses' efforts to create a sense of belonging in Taiwan as members of Taiwanese families and as future citizens; on the other hand, exceptionalism calls into question the coherence of ostensibly recognizable categories such as citizens and foreigners with their internationally sanctioned identity and travel documents.

### *Documentary Acts*

The documentary exceptionalism that defines cross-Strait border crossings permeates the everyday experiences of Chinese spouses once they enter Taiwan and begin life in a society where most of them lack the two most widely recognized forms of identification: a national ID card that connotes Taiwanese citizenship or a foreign passport. Burdened with a multitude of documents issued by different authorities, Chinese spouses are often unsure which document to use where or when—their entry permit (now converted to a reunion permit after passing a border interview at their port of entry) or the travel pass issued by the Chinese government. Some resort to Taiwan's widely recognized



National Health Insurance card that they receive after their first four months of residence in Taiwan. Nor are Taiwanese bureaucrats or average citizens always certain which form of identification different contexts require, even in official encounters where a premium is placed on accurate identification. The practices that emerge around identity documents, what I term here “documentary acts,” affirm Veena Das and Deborah Poole’s (2004b, 24) insight that state-issued identity documents “acquire a different kind of life” as they are manipulated for diverse ends by state actors, ordinary citizens, and, as the following cases suggest, immigrants from various backgrounds. These documentary acts not only undermine state projects to make populations legible but also potentially call into question the very foundations of citizenship and sovereignty on which such projects rest.

#### ADJUDICATING IDENTITIES

Meng Hua’s experience in a Taipei district courtroom in the winter of 2008 underscored the challenges of confirming immigrants’ identities through an array of documents issued by different governing bodies. A fifty-three-year-old woman from Jiangxi Province in China’s interior, Meng Hua had married for the third time in 2005 to Mr. Li, an elderly veteran who had lived in Taiwan since 1949, when he fled there with the Nationalist army. From the beginning, however, Taiwanese authorities had refused to recognize the couple’s marriage because Meng had previously married another Taiwanese man but had never legally divorced him in Taiwan. It took Meng several years to obtain a formal divorce, and in the confusion of that process, Meng and Li ended up divorcing in China and then remarrying twice. Only in 2007 did Meng finally receive permission to enter Taiwan as Li’s legally recognized spouse.

The couple’s travails did not end with Meng’s arrival in Taiwan, however. Li’s bad temper had fostered a habit of litigiousness, and after Meng was ostensibly mistreated at a city hospital following a hand injury, Li decided to sue the hospital. Not only did his suit fail, but the case brought the couple’s marital complexities to the attention of the public prosecutor, who, so he claimed, was obligated by law to bring a case against Meng for bigamy (in reference to her 2005 marriage to Li when she had not yet divorced her previous Taiwanese husband). It was on the occasion of this court hearing that I accompanied Meng and Li to the Taipei District Criminal Court on the outskirts of the city’s bustling Ximending shopping area.

Meng and Li were sitting on the wooden benches outside the courtroom when I arrived. Short and plump, with her long hair twisted carefully into a bun, Meng perched nervously on the edge of her seat, while Li, in his seventies,

contained his impatience in a stiff posture honed through years of military service. The reporting clerk came bustling down the hallway and ushered us into the courtroom, asking immediately for Meng's documentation as the defendant. Meng first handed him her entry permit, but the clerk shook his head and said that he needed her "passport," stating the term in English (which neither Meng nor Li spoke) and then repeating it in Chinese (*buzhao*). "Oh, my passport [*buzhao*]," Meng replied, and handed over her travel pass issued by the PRC government. The clerk accepted the travel pass without comment and entered the necessary information into his roster.

In this exchange Meng first assumed, not without reason, that the court required an identity document issued by Taiwanese authorities, but instead the clerk privileged the PRC travel pass as the document of record. Neither commented on the confusion of terms in their encounter or the use of the travel pass as a replacement for a foreign passport. This confusion continued after the court session began, when one of the court recorders asked Meng whether she had a Taiwan national ID, to which Meng replied matter-of-factly, "No, only a passport," meaning once again her travel pass and not an official PRC passport, which she did not possess.

As the presiding judge initiated the court proceedings, she looked over both Meng's and Li's identification documents, reading their numbers aloud for the court recorder. In the midst of examining Meng's travel pass, she paused and said to Meng, "This [travel pass] is from the mainland. Didn't Taiwan give you an entry permit?" Meng quickly handed over her entry permit, and the proceedings continued, with the judge fingering both documents throughout her questioning.

Even in a formal legal setting such as a courtroom, expectations for identification documents fluctuate among individuals and over the course of the hearing itself. The ease with which both Meng and the various officials moved seamlessly between different kinds of documents issued by different authorities attests to the mediating power of documents and their ability to integrate diverse legal regimes as if they were equivalent (e.g., travel passes that stand in for passports) (Hull 2012, 253). But that presumed equivalence also raises questions about the authority of the document's issuing body and the state's capacity to produce citizenship and sovereignty by authenticating and classifying individuals under its purview. The courtroom encounter did not resolve these questions but simply suspended them in the name of legal efficiency. By demanding that a Taiwan government document be added to the mix, the presiding judge intimated that the PRC-issued travel pass failed to stand as a document of record for the purposes of definitive identification in Taiwan, but she

did so without acknowledging the implicit claim to sovereign recognition that underlay the court's demand for an officially Taiwanese form of documentary identification.

#### CIRCULATION EFFECTS

The identification capacities of different kinds of documents require mutual recognition from multiple actors who make decisions about rights to mobility and resources based on the presumed power of such documents to validate an individual's identity. Atypical documents that do not fit easily within an international evidentiary regime may undermine bearers' efforts to realize their rights as citizens and documented immigrants, or they may simply make explicit potentialities that exist in recognized forms of documentation, as Sadiq, Rosenbloom, and McKenzie show in their chapters. Chinese spouses in Taiwan quickly discovered that their exceptional documents constrained their ability to move across borders, especially when their desired journeys involved travel to a third country. At stake were the various circulation effects produced by different forms of documentation: how well identity and travel documents constituted Chinese spouses as desirable travelers and how widely those documents enabled them to move. Whereas recognized documents typically (although not always) facilitate mobility within national spaces as well as across borders, atypical documents may fail to bestow the same circulation effects on their bearers, a consequence of the contested status of both the traveler and the issuing body.

In addition to creating practical obstacles for Chinese spouses who sought to travel beyond the cross-Strait orbit, identity documents also became sources of emotional investment for their bearers, in both positive and negative senses. Taiwan-issued papers "transmit an affect of tentativeness" (Navaro-Yashin 2007, 86), not only in the sense of being ephemeral (easily destroyed) or bestowing limited circulation effects but also because they affirm the uncertain sovereignty of Taiwan as the issuing body and Chinese spouses' own sense of never quite belonging in Taiwan. Chinese spouses' exceptionalism is reproduced through the ephemeral aura of the documents they carry and through the inability of those documents to constitute recognized identities and to enable desired forms of mobility—literally, across all borders, but also figuratively, in the sense of marital decisions and life circumstances in Taiwan that do not always live up to their imagined potential.

Chinese spouses' emotional investments in their documents were intertwined with the material form of the documents themselves; they were generated by and responded to documents' physical qualities and presumed effects (Hull 2012; Riles 2006; see also Sadiq, this volume). As merely "a piece of paper," the reunion

permit that many of the Chinese spouses I knew received upon first arrival was frequently singled out for its lack of substance.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to the booklet form of a residence permit, travel pass, or passport or the laminated national ID card that connoted citizenship in both Taiwan and China, this single sheet of paper was viewed by many as insubstantial and even humiliating, its flimsiness a symbol of Chinese spouses' tentative status in Taiwan. Even Taiwanese husbands took umbrage at paper documents and associated them with officials' demeaning attitudes toward mainland Chinese. In 2003, I interviewed a Taiwanese academic who had married a Chinese woman who held a masters' degree from Beijing University, China's premier academic institution. On his wife's second visit to Taiwan in 1997, border officers at the airport seized all her documents, including her PRC passport. In his retelling of his wife's border-crossing experience, the husband described how the officer had looked at her "as if she was the same as all those other mainlanders," despite the fact that she had told him she was a teacher at an elite Beijing university. Eyeing her with suspicion, the officer had tossed a pile of papers in her direction and brusquely instructed her to fill them out. Adding insult to injury was the flimsy document she received in exchange for her other papers, a temporary ID that, in her husband's words, was merely "a very thin, very thin piece of paper."

Progressing from the insecurities of temporary reunion status to the first residency stage available to Chinese spouses was an experience marked not only by greater rights (the ability of some to work legally, for instance) but also by more substantial documents. With changes to the immigration sequence in 2004, Chinese spouses became eligible for residency following two years of marriage or the birth of a child, and they looked forward to residency status as a sign of recognized standing in Taiwan. Many articulated the transition through reference to the physical form of their new identity document. Unlike the sheet of paper that certified reunion status, residency was documented by a passport-like booklet with a light-blue cover. The weight and substance of the document defined how Chinese spouses related to their new status: they referred to it as the "booklet" or the "blue booklet" and frequently mentioned that it had multiple pages. In contrast to the lack and humiliation experienced by holders of reunion permits, the residency booklet inspired a sense of pride among its bearers because of its material substantiality.

Chinese spouses' attachment to the residency permit also derived from assumptions about the greater circulation effects of that document as opposed to the reunion permit. Luo Jing, a stylish young Chinese woman married to a Taiwanese computer entrepreneur, was eager to pick up her new residency permit on the fall day in 2007 when I accompanied her to NIA headquarters

in downtown Taipei. She had checked the status of her application online that morning and had e-mailed me to arrange a time for us to meet at the bus stop near her apartment. Our bus ride took us from the upscale neighborhoods of northeastern Taipei to the mixed business and working-class streets of the older, western part of the city. We arrived at the NIA in the early afternoon and proceeded down the escalator to the cavernous hall dedicated to mainland Chinese. Fortunately, there was no line to pick up processed applications, and Luo confidently approached the woman seated at the desk. The clerk's attitude was brusque and businesslike, and upon discovering that Luo had forgotten to bring her receipt, the woman asked in an exasperated voice whether she had any identification. Luo retrieved her National Health Insurance card from her purse and handed it to the clerk, who, appeased by the familiar card, flipped through her file drawer and pulled out Luo's new document.

As we walked away from the desk, the blue booklet in hand, Luo Jing turned to me and asked whether now she could leave Taiwan without additional paperwork. In search of a definitive answer, we returned to the desk, where Luo asked whether the booklet enabled her "to come and go freely." Before departing the country, she needed an exit stamp, the woman replied, and she turned the pages to show Luo the stamp that came with her new document, but which expired in six months. We sat down on a bench in the large hall and Luo leafed carefully through the booklet. The first page of Luo's document looked very much like a passport and included her photograph and identifying information, such as date and place of birth, reason for entry, and her husband's name. There was a line stating that she was required to submit to fingerprinting on her first entry, along with a notation indicating that she had done so. The remaining interior pages were blank except for the one exit stamp and another stamp with the document's expiration date.

Luo had high hopes that this new identity document would facilitate greater mobility beyond Taiwan and China, but she would soon learn that her residency permit did not enable unfettered movement across borders. Not long after obtaining residency status, she sought to join a tour group to South Korea with her mother-in-law. But the tour was unable to accommodate Luo's anomalous documents, including the combination of her residency permit with a PRC passport newly acquired just prior to Luo's first trip to Taiwan in 2005. Because Luo had never traveled anywhere outside of China other than Taiwan, her passport contained no travel stamps to prove that she had legally departed China. In other words, although Luo was no longer physically in the mainland, her official travel document as a Chinese citizen did not provide evidence of a legal departure, entry elsewhere, or a return, all of which would constitute her

as a desirable traveler who conformed to designated travel routes and permitted lengths of stay. Instead, her cross-Strait journey was documented by her travel pass and entry permit alone. For Chinese spouses in Taiwan, therefore, their passports do not reflect their cross-border movement, precisely because the Taiwan-China border is constituted as not quite international by the anomalous documents used to manage travel across the Strait. Cross-Strait mobility renders Chinese spouses out of place, located elsewhere to the routes tracked (or not) in their passports, further undermining their efforts to use valued passports and residency permits to travel beyond Taiwan and China.

### *Sovereign Stamps*

Chinese spouses are not the only individuals in Taiwan who express affective investments in certain kinds of documents and the resources they may provide. Taiwanese immigration officials and bureaucrats, too, manage feelings of ambivalence about Taiwan's sovereignty struggles through their material engagement with identity documents. At stake here is what border officials do with these documents, especially the highly contested act of officially stamping a document issued by another government. After a series of interviews with senior NIA officials in the summer of 2009, I came to realize that as the number of Chinese travelers to Taiwan increased, the act of stamping took on heightened significance for those who staffed Taiwan's immigration posts and managed border flows.

When Chinese citizens enter Taiwan—whether they come as a spouse, to visit other relatives, as a tourist, or for business—they do not receive an immigration stamp in their PRC-issued travel pass. Instead, Taiwanese border officers stamp the entry permit provided to them by the Taiwan government. At one point in my conversation with NIA section head Zhu, I asked him to describe his own documentary journey when traveling to China. When passing through immigration into China, Zhu explained, border officers stamp his PRC-issued Taiwan compatriot pass. They might look at his Taiwan passport to confirm his identity (and he always brings it with him), but they would never stamp it. Similarly, he continued, although some Chinese citizens visiting Taiwan will carry a PRC passport, they must have an entry permit issued by the Taiwanese government to enter the country. “Taiwan authorities will not stamp the PRC passport,” Mr. Zhu noted. “They will only stamp the entry permit.” Mr. Zhu chuckled and paused before speaking again, this time his voice quivering with excitement: “We want very much to stamp [the PRC passport]! But at present, we still don't know what subtle effect this stamp might have on cross-Strait relations.”

Mr. Zhu tempered his strong desire to imprint a Taiwan stamp on a PRC-issued document by conceding that such a simple act came weighted with significant import for relations across the Strait. His portrayal of his own border crossings shows how the very act of stamping an identity or travel document affirms the sovereign status of the stamping authority while it also recognizes the legitimacy of the government that issued the document in the first place (Wang 2004).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in his expressed desire to stamp a PRC passport, Mr. Zhu acknowledged that bureaucrats' everyday documentary acts were, in fact, anything but mundane: they performed powerful political claims and bids for recognition as a sovereign authority.

Mr. Zhu was by no means the only NIA official attuned to the power of stamps. Other NIA officials brought this up on numerous occasions, both during conversations at the border and in interviews I conducted at NIA offices scattered across Taiwan. In June 2009, I traveled to Taiwan's main international airport to interview Mr. Lu, then second in command of the NIA Border Affairs Corps, about recent changes to the process for interviewing the Chinese spouses of Taiwanese citizens. In the midst of this discussion Mr. Lu, too, raised the topic of stamping a PRC travel document: "Of course, I've always thought that the immigration stamp [*zhangchuo*] is a symbol of sovereignty. Each country is the same. How do we make a breakthrough here, how do we issue that stamp in their [Chinese citizens'] passports? That is very difficult right now. . . . I need to stamp a 'Taiwan' here in your passport, a 'Republic of China' right here. The symbolic and practical meaning of that [act] must be stronger than the interview. This is what I firmly believe, I don't know if it is right or wrong." Like Mr. Zhu, Mr. Lu described the stamping of a PRC passport as a powerful assertion of Taiwanese sovereignty. For him, the physical presence of the stamped words "Taiwan" or "Republic of China," inked permanently onto a PRC-issued document, would produce both symbolic and practical effects. Official stamps indexically "trace a network of relations on the page" (Hetherington 2011, 194), but they also enact those relations in a specific form, in this case through the desired framework of sovereign recognition. Although Mr. Lu's "need" to imprint those characters in a Chinese passport reaffirmed his commitment to Taiwanese sovereignty, he was too savvy an official to rashly proclaim his desire to act on this impulse. Instead, he softened his "firm belief" with a final disclaimer, "I don't know if it is right or wrong."

Both men's emotional investment in the act of official stamping supports a recent shift in bureaucratic studies away from a Weberian emphasis on bureaucratic rationality and the "iron cage" of ossified rules and procedures. Bureaucracies also produce and regulate sentiments, including, as several anthropological

studies have shown, the affective investments of civil servants themselves (Das and Poole 2004a; Feldman 2008; Graham 2002; Navaro-Yashin 2006, 2012; Stoler 2004). In the examples I discuss here, those affective investments are expressed through bureaucratic acts performed on documents that offer the potential to generate sovereignty effects (Friedman 2010). Although both men ultimately temper their desire with an acknowledgment of impossibility, that tempering should not be viewed simply as an example of rationality dominating emotion. Instead, their comments show how affective registers permeate the ostensibly rational lives of official documents, embedding document bearers, issuers, and handlers in shared webs of desire that weave together personal aspirations, state legibility projects, and sovereign claims.<sup>14</sup>

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has shown how official documents often fail to perform as intended, despite the heartfelt investments of those who generate them, evaluate their authenticity, and use them to assert identities, claim recognition, and facilitate mobility. For Chinese spouses and Taiwanese bureaucrats, identity and travel documents are fraught sources of both anxiety and aspiration, condensing individual and national desires for recognized status and the security of belonging. Because the documents that facilitate cross-Strait travel are approximations of internationally sanctioned identity and travel documents—mere “as if” passports, visas, or identity cards—they also reproduce Taiwan’s contested sovereignty and its not quite state-to-state relationship with China. For Chinese spouses, this documentary approximation has the added consequence of affirming their exceptional status as neither foreigners nor natives in Taiwan. The anomalous qualities of Chinese spouses’ papers further widen the gap between them and all other foreign spouses of Taiwanese citizens. As Chinese spouses move between China and Taiwan and through Taiwanese society, their documents set them apart from other travelers and immigrants while they simultaneously reenact cross-Strait contestations over Taiwanese sovereignty.

Affective investments on the part of both Chinese spouses and Taiwanese bureaucrats affirm the powerful role of documents in creating identities and statuses necessary for both personal and national recognition. But these shared investments also expose the contested underbelly of documentary acts, the always present possibility that documents may fail to produce desired identities, facilitate cross-border mobility, or enable sovereign recognition. By turning our attention to the materiality of identity documents, we can better understand how documents engage in a form of signifying work that extends beyond



specific documentary encounters: in other words, documents serve as “vehicles of imagination” (Hull 2012, 260) that generate new social and political possibilities even as they foreclose others (Riles 2006). The examples discussed in this chapter show how documents reproduce a powerful sense of uncertainty that reverberates across multiple scales of individuals, immigrant communities, state actors, and the nation-state itself.

As the lives of documents develop along unpredictable paths that extend into the future, their mediating power brings together often incommensurable domains, such that immigrants’ aspirations for national inclusion and belonging become wedded to state desires for sovereign recognition. These linked projects may advance efforts to produce sovereign legitimacy in the face of categorical ambiguity, but they may be just as likely to undermine the very armature of citizenship and sovereign recognition used to contain and manage cross-border mobility.

#### NOTES

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1. For instance, the identities produced by documents may be taken up by subjects in ways that undermine the very goals of state recognition that motivated the turn to documentary practices in the first place (Coutin 2007; Gordillo 2006; Navaro-Yashin 2007; Yngvesson and Coutin 2006).

2. In 1971, China’s United Nations seat was transferred from the Nationalist regime on Taiwan to the PRC, and the United States switched its diplomatic recognition to the PRC in 1979. The “one China principle” upheld by the PRC prevents states from officially recognizing both governments.

3. Taiwanese bureaucrats, for instance, frequently mention that the total number of Chinese spouses in Taiwan is rapidly approaching the size of Taiwan’s fourth-largest city. This statement is intended to suggest that former mainland Chinese could become a powerful voting bloc in Taiwan that could alter the country’s political future.

4. Chinese who acquire Taiwanese citizenship are treated differently from other citizens (both birthright and naturalized) in that they are denied certain rights to civil service participation or to sponsoring kin for family reunification.

5. In his history of the passport in Western Europe, John Torpey argues that “the emergence of passport and related controls on movement is an essential aspect of the ‘state-ness’ of states” (2000, 3). Torpey builds on Max Weber’s theory of state legitimacy

to suggest that monopolizing “the legitimate means of movement” was a critical dimension of state building in the modern period. Anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin extends Torpey’s insight to illegal states such as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which, she contends, must engage in documentary practices as part of asserting their own claims to “state-ness” (2007, 84).

6. In 2015 China began to issue ID-card-style Taiwan compatriot passes in place of the booklet form and removed visa requirements for pass holders.

7. The full name of the Taiwan compatriot pass is “Travel Pass for Taiwan Residents Coming to the Mainland.” For mainland Chinese departing for Taiwan, their document is called a “Travel Pass for Mainland Residents Going to Taiwan.” By juxtaposing Taiwan with the mainland, the PRC government implicitly denies legitimacy to Taiwanese independence supporters who argue that the name Taiwan may be used to represent a sovereign state.

8. Beginning in 2001, select categories of travelers from both countries were permitted to journey by boat between China’s Fujian Province and Taiwan’s offshore islands of Jinmen and Matsu. When direct flights across the Strait were introduced in 2008, the Taiwan government designated two “international” and two “domestic” airports as destinations, with one of the domestic airports (Taipei Songshan) later upgraded to international status. The existence of direct flights from both kinds of airports reaffirms the ambiguous status of cross-Strait travel as neither clearly international nor clearly domestic.

9. In a longer version of this chapter, I discuss how the presumed propensity of Chinese to forge documents undermines the value of the Taiwan passport as well because of the ease with which it may be falsified by Chinese smugglers. All personal names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

10. Caplan and Torpey describe this core tension in the presumption that an identity document captures a unique individuality as a conflict between the “uniqueness” of an identity document and its need to serve as “an element in a classifying series that reduces individuality to a unit in a series, and that is thus simultaneously deindividualizing” (2001, 8). This tension between a unique individuality and a shared classification scheme creates the possibility that others might manipulate modes of classification to serve different ends.

11. I am indebted here to Navaro-Yashin’s argument that for individuals who are the subjects of these documents (or, I might add, who handle them in their professional capacities), the difference between originals and copies is “experientially very real” (Navaro-Yashin 2003, 88). As an anthropologist invested in the study of personal experience, I pay close attention to how individuals experience documents and how such experiences might produce very different forms of subjective investment.

12. For those who first arrived between March 2004 and August 2009, the reunion permit was typically their first identity document issued in Taiwan. Policy reforms implemented in August 2009 eliminated the reunion stage and granted Chinese spouses residency rights upon first arrival.

13. The sovereignty effect of official stamping is seen in the multitude of examples worldwide where stamps are not made in the documents issued by certain countries or

where documents stamped by certain countries are not recognized by others. In the realm of cross-Strait relations, many third countries refuse to stamp the Taiwan passport out of concern that such an act would connote sovereign recognition and therefore anger Chinese authorities.

14. I borrow the phrase “life of documents” from Veena Das (2004, 240), who coins it to describe how the business of producing official documents moves between registers of legality and illegality without ultimately undermining state legitimacy.