

Camouflage as truth

Camouflage as truth: trans-Straits and tactical identities of younger-generation Taiwanese migrating to China

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This paper examines the everyday identity practices of younger-generation Taiwanese migrants living in mainland China, a group navigating a politically sensitive yet increasingly normalized form of cross-Straits mobility. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2021 and 2025—including in-depth interviews and participant observation—this study explores how individuals tactically negotiate belonging, ambiguity, and risk in mundane yet ideologically charged encounters. A central contribution of the paper is the conceptualization of “camouflage” as a situated mode of identity modulation: a contingent adjustment of self-presentation that minimizes friction without fully assimilating. Camouflage is not about passing as the other, but about blending just enough to sidestep

recognition or interrogation. Rather than starting from theory, this concept arose directly from fieldwork, in response to a recurring gap—where existing vocabularies failed to describe the nuanced and strategic behaviors observed in trans-Strait interactions. It is thus proposed as an open, empirically grounded analytic that remains subject to further testing and refinement. Through cases involving accent recognition, casual political questioning, and identity sidestepping, the paper highlights the affective labor and situational intelligence required to remain socially viable without becoming ideologically legible. In doing so, it contributes to the study of postnational subjectivity and the micro-politics of recognition, offering new insight into how identity is lived—not just declared—within one of the most symbolically charged migration contexts in the contemporary Sinosphere.

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