

## Former students (some mothers) respond to baby birth on CAL flight

October 25, 2015, By Daniel J. Bauer

Today's column is more than a little special for me. First, it is mostly reportorial in nature. I write not so much to share my own views, but those of others. These "others" are citizens of the Republic of China on Taiwan. They are also former students of mine.

The topic of discussion is the mother who recently gave birth to a baby girl while on board a China Air Lines (CAL) flight bound for Los Angeles. The incident, with which I assume readers are already acquainted, occurred on October 8. Various consequences of the event, and its importance, continue to hover in the clouds above.

Initial reports on the birth carried an oddly cheerful ring. CAL sent airline personnel to a hospital in Alaska to express congratulations to the Taiwanese mother, for example, and delivered a red envelop ("hung bau") to symbolize their sentiments, and so on.

Public reaction on social media, however, has been swift, clear, and sharply negative. An innocent has been born amid a controversy, it seems, that is neither new nor even close to being resolved.

Last Wednesday evening I posted on my Facebook (FB) wall a few copies of news stories about the mother and the unexpected - expected birth of her child in the United States. I invited reactions. Within 12 hours an outburst of words from a number of FB friends poured in.

For the sake of information, I only accept "friend" status on FB with students after they graduate. All but one who commented on the baby-aboard story said "dzai chien" to their alma mater several years ago. (But I still miss them!) The one exception? A dear American friend in Pennsylvania who bravely waded into the waters of debate, too. All told, 9 former students shared opinions, 2 in private messages. One was a flight attendant well acquainted with the woes pregnant women from Taiwan (and China) face upon arrival at immigration desks in Honolulu and continental United States (see below).

"Just the idea of people 'cheating' (their way through) regulations, manipulating the system by seeking loopholes in the immigration system sickens my husband and me," wrote a friend in California. "We are proud of being Taiwanese citizens, and

law-abiding, who are seeking permanent residency in the U.S., a country we fell deeply in love with."

A student-mom in Taiwan saw "nothing wrong with the mother's intent. She wants what is best for her baby. It's the manipulation of the system that (draws) the biggest criticism."

Several strove to water down the charge that the mother is deficient in her love of Taiwan. "This claim the mom is less proud of being Taiwanese . . . well, she gave her baby another option she might find useful growing up," said one respondent. An alumna in a major Asian city was likewise hesitant to attack the mother "because of her intention to get her child a U.S. passport . . . the (problem) is her selfishness. She hid her pregnancy and made flight attendants and passengers give extra assistance."

A perspicacious young mother among my alumnae, living here in Taiwan, counseled vigilance toward the media. "I didn't buy the first news about CAL visiting the woman in the hospital and giving her a red envelop to express its good wishes."

An alumna in Kaohsiung granted that "people are free to do what they want, but they should not interfere with the rights of others." This mother of two reminded me of "a bunch of websites for 'how to have U.S. babies although the parents are not U.S. citizens'. Frankly speaking, money talks. Agents help you arrange everything, yes EVERYTHING." This includes, she said, airport pick-up, hospital care, and the ordering of preferred food while under medical supervision.

A flight attendant in my flock also chimed in. U.S. immigration does not bar entry to a woman simply because she is pregnant, she informed me, but "officers will grill a pregnant woman just to make her uncomfortable (my comment: ouch!) . . . (Entry may be denied) for lying to an immigration officer."

A photo at the airport in Taoyuan showed the mother's return last week, her face covered in apparent shame. Officials barred her entry to the U.S.A. She reportedly left her new born infant on American soil in the care of a friend.

So ends, at least for today, a very disturbing story. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

## Talking points

- 1) Some people criticize the mother of the baby here for wanting so badly to get an American passport for her child. In your eyes, does she seem to "love Taiwan" less because of "love" for the USA?
- 2) Many people seek American passports or "green cards" (for legal residency) via the birth of a baby in the USA. Does this practice seem right to you? Why or why not?
- 3) Former students of Fu da use very strong words here in reaction to this news event. What words seem most interesting or important to you?

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