

## Introduction

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In the last few decades, the issue of Taiwanese identity has been fervently debated and hotly contested. A rich corpus of research has been produced in the fields of political and social science and cultural studies, exploring and examining this enigmatic topic (recent publications include, *inter alia*, Ngo and Wang 2011, Huang 2011, Hong 2011). Constructed through a mixture of selected history, fantasy, narrative and myth, the passionate search for an “original identity” creates a new Taiwanese self. The discourse on Taiwanese identity in recent decades is constructed at a specific point in time and reflects the politics of the era. Thus, cultural identity is not something fixed or a pre-existing fact waiting to be “discovered.” Rather, the concept of identity is, as Stuart Hall aptly describes it, “[n]ot an essence but a positioning,” and should be viewed as “a production” that is “always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall 1990: 222, 226). The politics of identity is not only a politics of representation, but also a politics of position, and this positioning is a matter of contextualisation. Placed against the background of a wealth of academic research on Taiwanese identity, this collection of essays tries to do exactly that—to contextualise—and to explore the thorny issue in a multifaceted fashion. Instead of setting the impossible task of pursuing an imaginary rediscovery of Taiwanese identity, which suggests an ultimate origin and a “true self,” this volume seeks to avoid an essentialist approach and to open a dialogue on the subject of representation of identity, examining the ways in which images of Taiwan have been constructed, imagined, and articulated at different periods in time.

The volume focuses on the ways in which Taiwan is imaged and imagined and how this relates to identity politics. It investigates the representation of identity in Taiwan in films, fine art, advertising, sport and social spaces at different periods in history. Across a range of cultural forms, the discussion here is underpinned by various strands of intellectual investigation, considering specific issues from the standpoints of sameness and difference, examining the demarcation between the self and the other, and identifying the boundaries between “homeliness” and alienation. In other words, identity is not just indicated by sameness and taken as an unquestionable unity, but rather, it is marked by arbitrary delimitation and the inscription of differences (or more precisely, selected differences). As Homi Bhabha stated, cultural and political identity is constructed through “a process of othering” (1990: 219). The development of Taiwanese identity has been informed by historical factors. Although constantly changing and undergoing transformation, there is no singular, one-dimensional history that fits everyone’s narrative of the past. From being a colonial subject, Chinese

citizen, to new Taiwanese, the past is presented as we choose it to be, based on the position in which we place ourselves, at a particular historical moment. Although this book covers a broad range of themes, at its core, the collection of essays concentrates on capturing the fluidity, changeability and fragmentation of the seeming coherence of Taiwanese identity as an imaginary and encompassing whole. By representing or imaging Taiwan at various times, and for different groups of people, the volume endeavours to present a new way of examining such a highly contentious issue of Taiwanese identity.

The seven essays of this volume “image” Taiwan visually, socially, and symbolically. They are grouped into three sections to accentuate the focus of particular approaches: “Colonial Representation,” “Imaging Difference,” and “Identity and Place.” The first of these—“Colonial Representation”—consists of two essays, each dealing with colonial subjectivity and traumatic experience. The second section, entitled “Imaging Difference,” comprises three essays which, though covering different cultural practices (film, TV advertisements, fine art), all explore the boundaries between the inside and the outside, the difference marked by the process of othering, and the anxiety and alienation of the excluded. The last section—“Identity and Place”—comprises two essays examining the relationship between identity and the social construction of place, and also unpicking the role of place-making in the new Taiwanese nation-building process. Interrogating the complex issue of Taiwanese identity from various standpoints, the seven contributors come from different academic backgrounds (from Literature, History, Film Studies, Linguistics, Anthropology to Cultural Studies) and are located in different places geographically (from Taiwan, Europe and America). This combination of perspectives and approaches provides complementary insights into how Taiwan has been envisioned and imagined and also how the Taiwanese have positioned and identified themselves at different times.

On the whole, the essays demonstrate the complexity of identity, which is not given or rooted in a rediscoverable origin. Rather, they illustrate the multifacetedness of identity and its unyielding (or essential) messiness. What is made evident here is that identity is not constructed through different cultural practices, “not outside but within representation” (Hall 1990: 236). Thus, identity construction is either strengthened by the sameness of lived experience and commonalities of daily life, or shored up by some “forgotten history” and “ancient origin,” or, simply, reinforced by exclusion and the inscription of differences.

The different themes contributed to this publication bring both nuance and depth to the discussion of the representation of Taiwanese identity. Liao compares and contrasts two seemingly similar films both of which deal with the custom of *ruszhuì* (入贅)—the ‘uxorilocal marriage’—and associates it with the traumatic colonial experience construed as a form of castration. In addition, he re-assesses the changing identity and historiography of the 1990s, a period of political upheaval and major identity shift, examining both the narratives of the films and the political rhetoric of the time.

Morris's account of star baseball group—Kanō—under Japanese rule provides a perfect case study for understanding colonial subjectivity and identity crisis. It also unearths the once buried and erased colonial experience by contrasting the baseball stars' glorious victory over their colonial master with their miserable fortune after the end of WWII. The paper then extends to an in-depth consideration of the complicated love-hate relationship between the coloniser and the colonised.

The examination of Pai Ching-ji's films by Birtwistle illustrates a very different modernist vision to that presented by the Japanese modernity of the colonial period—a version of western modernity transplanted by the KMT government after the war. In the 1960s, a pick-and-mix approach to western modernism is visualised in the films of Pai Ching-ji, which Birtwistle examines through the conflicts of western modernity and Chinese tradition, unpicking the western presence of a localised but somehow problematic modernity. Being keenly aware of his “outsider” position, Birtwistle adopts a strategy of the peripheral and presents a rare reversed picture of the Taiwanese/insider from without. In contrast, internal difference and differentiation are the subject of Klöter's article, which examines the strategic usage of languages in television commercials. Klöter argues that by attaching a series of characteristics to certain groups, television advertising becomes a breeding ground for language stereotyping. Contrasting not only the characters, but also their implied socio-economic status, Klöter compares the choice of languages attached to them, indicating a hierarchy of languages within the island. His extensive research confirms that the stereotypes associated with and constructed by language usage is buttressed in television advertisements, which feature middle-class, cultured and well-educated Mandarin speakers (using occasional English) located in urban areas, and working-class, rough-edged but honest Taiyu-speakers from the countryside. In contrast to the recent coming to terms with multicultural and multiracial differences within the island, Liu's chapter deals with the painful journey taken by Wu Tien-chang in pursuit of his sense of identity—or loss of identity—in art. Taking the lifting of martial law in 1987 as the watershed, Liu examines Wu's artworks throughout the 1980s and 1990s, contrasting the artist's position as an outsider feeling alienated (*unheimlich*) to a gradual reckoning of ‘home-ness’ and finally making peace at home.

Fundamentally, identity is *placed*: it is placed culturally, physically and symbolically. The final two essays deal with the spatial aspect of identity, exploring the relationship between identity and space, and also touching upon the issue of the nation-building project of the new Taiwan state. Lee looks at the development of the Kaohsiung Mass Rapid Transit (KMRT) System and analyses the political aspirations of a city wishing to become a cosmopolitan world city, and an even-better-than-Taipei capital for the south. Although the construction of KMRT is plagued by financial and construction problems, Lee argues that it is politically beneficial and culturally symbolic in terms of nation-building, presenting a strong “southern” perspective, counterbalancing Taipei's northern perspective, and thereby shifting away from a China-centric position. In

contrast to the built space explored in Lee's article, Chang examines the construction of a national landscape and the invention of a mythical origin for the island. As part of Taiwan's nation-building project, a campaign was launched in 2001 to popularise Yushan as a "sacred mountain" and to construct the Taiwanese as "children of Yushan." The repositioning of Yushan (and, by extension, Taiwan) serves to remove the island from a China-centric framework and locates it instead within an Asia-pacific context. Metaphorically, the mountain has become a "site of resistance." Yushan has been transformed from a simple geographical feature into a representation of Taiwanese origins, an ancestral home, and the wellspring of a long-forgotten identity. In doing so, this construction of a "sacred mountain" functions not only to nationalise landscape, but also to naturalise Taiwan independence.

The issue of "identity" has become one of the most prominent topics in Taiwan Studies in the last few decades. Its growing importance derives, in part, from the impact of globalisation, the loss of a sense of rootedness, and for the Taiwanese in particular, from the complex history of migration and colonial experience and increasing hostility from without (i.e. the Chinese threat across the Taiwan Strait). Japanese colonisation, Chinese rule, western imperialism, and PRC bullying could all be presented as the "other" threatening to undermine the authentic self. Difference matters to the construction of identity, either by invention of authenticity and origin or by exclusion of the foreign other. To be Taiwanese, in other words, is in part to ensure that one is "not the other." This collection of essays tackles a broad range of issues but deals with various identity claims in a historically specific fashion.

The aim of this volume is not to seek a definitive answer to the question of "who the Taiwanese are"; rather, it is to explore an open, fluid and ever-changing approach to understand the complexity and changeability of the issue of identity. In doing so, it not only avoids the problem of assuming an already authenticated and pre-existing cultural tradition and origin, but it also brings a new level of tolerance and flexibility to what T. Minh-ha Trinh calls "the anarchy of difference" (1991: 119–120).

## References

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