

Abstract: *Sin dalla democratizzazione negli anni '90, Taiwan ha subito una drastica trasformazione politica, sociale e culturale. Con l'inizio del nuovo millennio, l'isola è diventata un bastione della democrazia liberale e la sua popolazione si dichiara orgogliosamente 'taiwanese'. Questo articolo traccia l'evoluzione dell'identità taiwanese negli ultimi settant'anni e dimostra come la linea di demarcazione si sia spostata dalle differenze etniche a quelle spaziali e infine a quelle basate sui valori. Oltre a ciò, l'articolo esplora anche lo sviluppo identitario in relazione al divario generazionale. Una delle caratteristiche principali di questa nuova tendenza identitaria è una maggiore inclusività focalizzata su valori condivisi e interessi comuni, che consente una dualità flessibile tra 'essere' e 'diventare' taiwanese, soprattutto tra le generazioni più giovani.*

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Taiwan has surfaced to become another geopolitical concern and a potential military flashpoint. The comparison of the two small nations against their superpower counterparts (Russia and China respectively) has become a hot topic. Some commentators even claim that Taiwan will be the next Ukraine and that cross-strait conflicts will 'dwarf' the Ukraine war in scale as well as in devastating impact on world peace (for example, Tisdall 2023; Hass, Glaser, and Bush 2023). One major reason for the cross-strait dispute stems from the conflicting views on 'who Taiwanese are'. Over the last three decades, people on the island increasingly identify themselves as 'Taiwanese only' (and thus, *not* Chinese) (ESC 2023a). However, Beijing has continuously asserted that Taiwan belongs to China since ancient times and that the Taiwanese are Chinese. The identity trend of being 'Taiwanese only' has alarmed Beijing and dampened Xi Jinping's 'Chinese dream'.

This identity shift began alongside Taiwan's democratization since the late 1980s. The once-labelled "island China" (Clough 1978) has undergone a drastic political, social, and cultural change. Entering the 21st century, the island has become a bastion of liberal

democracy in East Asia. After almost four decades of post-war authoritarian rule and the regime's China-centric policy, how and why has the Taiwanese identity changed over time? Both the growing Taiwanese identity and the subsequent support for Taiwan independence are undoubtedly the main cause of Beijing's intensifying aggression in the attempt to stem the flow, and the identity issue is at the heart of the cross-strait dispute. The focus of this chapter is, therefore, placed on the significant transformation of post-war identity. It traces the metamorphosis of the identity trajectory and explores the shifting identification faultline, from ethnic-based (*zuqun* 族群) identity to place-specific identification, and finally, to the recent 'civic identity' emphasizing Taiwanese values, namely, democracy, freedom, and equality. The final section is based on my research on Taiwan's education reform since 2000, exploring what has been taught differently from the previous generation, especially the addition of human rights education by examining the new curriculum and textbooks of 'Social Studies' (aka. *Shehui* 社會 or Civics).¹

The beliefs in liberal ideas and ideals, which are embedded in Taiwan's education reform, have become the defining feature of both 'being' and 'becoming' Taiwanese, especially among the younger generation. The issue of identity has been one of the most studied topics in the field of Taiwan Studies. There has been a rich and excellent corpus of research, and most of them focus on one aspect (such as ethnic division, democratization, political partisanship, historical and cultural legacies, Sinicization vs. de-Sinicization, and so on) and of a particular period (such as martial-law period, post-martial law transition, or recent development). This chapter not only provides a clear overview mapping the defining factors that triggered the identity shift but also pinpoints the emerging phenomenon of the value-

based identity of the younger generation.

Historical background

In prehistoric times, the original settlers of Taiwan were a diverse collection of peoples who spoke a hypothesized Proto-Austronesian language. Before the arrival of outsiders, it is fair to say that the island's history is a history of the indigenous peoples. Scholars generally agree that Taiwanese indigenous peoples have close linguistic and genetic ties with other Austronesian-speaking groups, such as peoples in the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Polynesia, Madagascar and so on (Blundell 2011). Before the Dutch and Spanish set up their colonial footholds on the island in the early 17th century, most outsiders came to Taiwan either by chance or as seasonal visitors from China and Japan and had no permanent settlements (Hsu 1980). The Europeans established the first colonial control and started detailed written records about the island. Ever since then, Taiwan had been under the political control of external rulers for 400 years, from the Dutch, the Spanish, the Ming loyalist Cheng regime, the Qing dynasty, the Japanese empire, and finally the Republic of China (ROC) after the Second World War.² Little wonder then the island's history is described as a history of "remarkable discontinuities" (Wills 2007: 85). However, it was not until the establishment of the Taiwan Cultural Association in 1921 that the idea of "Taiwanese identity" first took shape and ushered in the beginning of the island's anticolonial movement (Ho 2022: 212). The colonial legacy has cast a long shadow on the Taiwanese psyche. Taiwan's unique colonial experience explains the complexity of identity politics, and the importance of and the desire for self-governing among the islanders after centuries of external domination.


Post-war identity conflicts along the ethnic division

After the Japanese surrender in 1945,

the island was retroceded to China, under the Chinese Nationalist (Kuomintang, KMT) government. Presenting itself as the 'liberator', the KMT's rule in Taiwan had a bloody and chaotic beginning. The clumsy and corrupted governance by the first Governor-general Chen Yi Administration led to the tragic 228 Incident in 1947,³ which set the tone of ethnic tension⁴ for the next four decades. The long shadow of the 228 Incident has played a crucial role in Taiwanese identity formation as well as in the struggle for independence (Fleischauer 2007).

It was clear from the very start that the focus of post-war governance in Taiwan was to foster the 'Chinese national spirit' and make Taiwanese 'Chinese' again (Chen, Chen 1989: 93-8, 221-31, 354-58). Education was one of the fundamental vehicles to rid the Japanese identity and construct a new post-war generation of 'Chinese' in Taiwan (*ibid.*: 2, 83-98; Chang 2006). However, the differences created by Taiwan's 50-year colonial experience were simply dismissed as a result of local people's 'slave mentality' (Ching 2019: 15) and were not dealt with sensitively. In other words, the post-war handover experience of the Taiwanese was equally traumatic. Against the previous colonial experience, Taiwan was again handed over straight into the hand of another external ruler. As Leo Ching aptly observes, the post-war transfer of power from the Japanese to the KMT rule (backed by the American forces) was a process of failed decolonization (Ching 2019: 16). The lack of opportunities to go through the decolonization process had in reality recolonized the island and exacerbated identity conflicts between the newly arrived mainland Chinese and the local Taiwanese.

In 1949, the KMT government lost the civil war and fled to Taiwan. Since it lost the mainland, the government-in-exile imposed stringent measures to construct Taiwan as the "island China" (Clough 1978). To justify its dubious legitimacy and differentiate itself from the Chinese Communist Party



(CCP), the KMT upheld traditional Chinese culture and Confucianism to establish itself as the legitimate heir of Chinese orthodoxy. To make the Taiwanese ‘Chinese’ (based on the KMT’s vision) became a national policy, which was implemented in education and cultural policy (Chang 2006). These measures aimed to foster a China-centric identity and justified the privileged status of mainland Chinese and the political legitimacy of the KMT regime. This process of “inner expropriation of cultural identity” (Hall 1990: 226) consequently degraded and distorted the local identity. While the Mainlander-led regime dominated the governance of Taiwan and prioritized Chinese culture, the Taiwanese cultures were suppressed and treated as secondary.


A dichotomy between ‘Taiwanese’ and ‘Mainlanders’ emerged from the Chinese national narrative as promoted by the KMT, placing Taiwan on the periphery of the greater China framework. Due to post-war unequal power relations and structural bias privileging one group (i.e. the Mainlanders aka. *waishengren* 外省人) over others (i.e. the Taiwanese, aka. *benshengren* 本省人), there had always been an undercurrent of ethnic tension.⁵ Such divisions were often described as *shengji* 省籍, which means ‘the province of one’s origin’.⁶ This binary categorization dominated the post-war social hierarchy for decades. By the second half of the 1980s, a popular discourse, ‘Four Great Ethnic Groups,’ emerged, proposed by the then-opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), constructing a new ethnic landscape in Taiwan: the indigenous peoples (*yuanzhumin* 原住民), Minnan (aka. Hoklo or Holo), Hakka, and Mainlanders (Hsiao 2012: 210).

According to Wang Fu-chang, different ethnic divisions in Taiwan had been conceptualized and crystalized at different periods because of changing political and social atmospheres, i.e. Taiwanese vs. Mainlanders (since the 1970s); indigenous

peoples vs. the Han Chinese (since the early 1980s); Hakka vs. Minnan peoples (after the mid-1980s); and Minnan vs. Mainlanders (since the 1990s) (Wang 2003: 63). The various conceptualizations of the ‘other’ created tension and resentment, and have also reflected the political and social change in Taiwan over time. Since identity is often constructed, the constantly changing conceptualization of the ‘other’ reflects the characteristics of that period.

After the lifting of martial law and the subsequent democratization in the 1990s, Taiwan experienced a period of heightened ethnic tension. Initially, the privileged Mainlanders came under attack, followed by accusations against the majority Minnan-speaking people for “Hoklo chauvinism” (Hsiao 2000: 142). To alleviate *shengji* division, the ‘original domicile’ (*benji*) record was removed during the 1992 revision of the *Household Registration Act* (*huji fa* 戶籍法). The ‘*benji*’ label, once a key indicator of one’s identity as a ‘Mainlander’ or ‘Taiwanese,’ lost its significance with the removal. This change marked a shift in governance focus, as the ROC regime, by relinquishing close connections to China, redirected its attention to Taiwan and its residents. Consequently, the division between ‘benshengren’ and ‘waishengren’ became redundant over time (Peng 2006). Instead, a more inclusive notion of ‘new Taiwanese’ (*xin Taiwanren* 新台灣人) emerged, emphasizing shared fate and residency on the island irrespective of background, replacing the once-binary categorization.

The trend to identify Taiwan as ‘one community’ originated from the ‘Community Construction Movement’ campaign that was mobilized in 1994 by then-President Lee Teng-hui. The movement was designed to empower local people, establish community networks, and encourage public participation in local affairs. The endeavour to construct a ‘community of shared fate’ has brought fundamental changes to Taiwanese society



and has consequently strengthened Taiwanese consciousness and a rooted identity. The campaign has generated a kind of cultural awakening. Different from the China-centric identity promoted in the post-war era, a Taiwan-focused identity has emerged, consolidated by a more intimate relationship with one's environment and reinforced through education and media.

As a remedy to ease ethnic tension, these measures showed a collective effort to not only achieve reconciliation but also reimagine Taiwan as the 'home' and redefine the idea of 'Taiwanese'.

The changeability and constructive nature of Taiwanese identity echoes Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' (1983). The process of creating a sense of 'Taiwaneseness' is constructed through culture, languages, landscaping, and the 'rediscovery' of history and memory, such as the discourse advocated by President Lee calling for the formation of 'New Taiwanese':


Taiwan was originally deserted by the Chinese and has since then developed its uniqueness. The KMT party came to this island only after the Second World War, and the Taiwanese had never had their own political regime... Now, people in Taiwan have finally been able to create their future. Therefore, the *shengji* conflicts between Taiwanese and mainlanders should no longer be an issue. We should unite. That is what I call 'New Taiwanese-ism'. ("Xin Taiwan ren zhiyi" 1998)

By the end of the 1990s, the debates about who was more 'qualified' as 'Taiwanese' had gradually ceased. The idea of 'Taiwanese' shifted from which groups should be categorized as 'Taiwanese' to the consolidation of an imagined community where locally-based people share common interests and futures. This approach gave rise to a different kind of identity politics that emphasized shared fate over differences.

Love Taiwan as 'our' place

After a half-century of KMT one-party rule, the democratization process ushered in the first opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government when its candidate Chen Shui-bian won the 2000 Presidential election. During the Chen administration (2000-2008), the new government endeavoured to promote a 'spatial revolution' by liberalizing restricted spaces and rewriting the China-centric national imagination (Chang 2018). This revolution was achieved by enhancing general understanding of Taiwan and fostering affection for the island. The key phrase in this period was '*ai Tainan*' 愛臺灣 (i.e. love Taiwan), calling the public to care for the island and be the master of their own environment. A series of campaigns were launched, using Taiwanese sceneries, landscapes, and various constructions to conceptualize as well as visualize the idea of 'Taiwan as the 'home' and 'one community'. For example, climbing Yushan, Taiwan's highest mountain, became a symbolic declaration of one's deep affection for the island. The ascent also allows them to attain the identity as "Children of Yushan" and thus, "Son/Daughter of Taiwan" (Chang 2012). Moreover, a new 'oceanic perspective' has been added to the imagination of Taiwan. From the official emphasis on marine resources and connectivity, the establishment of the Ocean Affairs Council, to the introduction of 'Maritime Education' in the 2008 revised Curriculum Guidelines, this new oceanic focus repositions the island within the Asia-Pacific region and moves away from the 'Greater-China' framework (Chang 2018).

The close relationship with the land one inhabits is closely bound up with personal experiences of 'being' in Taiwan, 'being' a part of the place and its progress, and 'becoming' Taiwanese (Chang 2018: 55). Because of the growing connections with and affection for Taiwan, Taiwanese identity has taken a




'spatial turn' and become more grounded (Chang 2015: 10-12). The slogan of 'loving Taiwan' is no longer abstract or hollow but has become an attitude towards who the Taiwanese are and who they have become. Having said that, I do not mean to say that the growing sense of 'Taiwaneseness' is the result of top-down construction. Far from it. The flourishing of Taiwanese identity is not merely an outcome of a politically driven de-Sinicization (*qu Zhongguohua* 去中國化) project, as some suggest. It would be naïve to assume that the Taiwanese are simply passive inert receivers who have no agency of their own and have played no role in the island's democratization. The formation of identity is shaped not simply by the elite but more so by the public, especially in an open and increasingly mature democracy. The focus on local affairs and the importance of 'Taiwan' have been the top priority in any election campaign. Thus, public opinion, citizen participation, the media, and social movements have all contributed to the policymaking process, and the changing social norms and public attitude. In other words, social activism and public participation have played a prominent role in influencing Taiwanese policy direction and monitoring the politicians.

As a result, showing one's commitment to Taiwanese welfare and openly declaring affection for the island became the norm for politicians to win electoral support. For example, to refute the criticism of KMT post-war China-centric governance, KMT candidates Lien Chan and James Soong lied prostrate on the ground and kissed the land to declare their love for Taiwan in the 2004 Presidential election campaign ("Song Chuyu fufu" 2004). Although they lost by a small margin, it is clear that the self-identification of being Taiwanese and a strong declaration of 'love for Taiwan' were crucial in election campaigns to demonstrate their care for the people and substantiate their image as legitimate and worthy leaders.

By developing closely-knitted communities island-wide, the pride of being part of Taiwan's successful democratization has become the core of islanders' identity. The aspiration is described as a determination of "*dang jia zuo zhu*" 當家作主 (literally meaning, 'being one's own master') (Shih 2007: 8, 10). The ambition to become an autonomous and liberal democracy feeds into the emergence of a unique sense of Taiwanese self that is departing from the old KMT-led Chinese identity. Thus, the indigenization process since the 2000s is not a one-way top-down policy outcome, but the result of a feedback loop between government policy and bottom-up demands.

Democracy, values, and sense of self

The spatial reform brought with it a restructuring of social relations (and by extension, power relations) and rewrote the idea of 'the local'. Instead of accepting the division demarcated by the 'four ethnic groups' discourse, the idea of 'the local' (i.e. the Taiwanese) has been redefined and emphasizes the elements of commitment, contribution, affection, and shared interests. The centrality of 'Taiwan' (replacing China-centrism) has become the norm (Chang 2018). Building a better understanding of Taiwan and developing a rooted sense of place has the effect of fostering affection for the island. Moreover, it has provided people with similar lived experiences and a sense of ownership of the land they inhabit. Although partisanship continues to be the dividing line in the Taiwanese political landscape, most people embrace the 'Taiwanese' identity and have adopted a more inclusive approach (Lin 2016: 211). Anyone who lives on the island and who cares about and contributes to the place is now considered a 'Taiwanese'. Thus, Taiwanese identity in the 2000s has become more place-based, and the once ethnically divided faultline was replaced by people's connections with and contribution to their



locality. The previous ‘ethnic nationalism’ discourse has become obsolete and is now replaced by the civic nationalism approach.

The shift can be identified from the identity surveys conducted by the Election Study Centre (ESC) at the National Chengchi University. For over thirty years, the ESC has carried out island-wide surveys continuously and systematically monitoring the trend of Taiwanese identity (ESC 2023a) and recording changing political attitudes among the Taiwanese (aged 20 and above) (ESC 2023b). The ESC identity survey asks the respondents how they identify themselves, as ‘Taiwanese only’, ‘Chinese only’, or ‘both Taiwanese and Chinese’. The first survey in 1992 showed nearly half of the respondents identified themselves as ‘both’ (46.4%), while 25.5% of them identified themselves as ‘Chinese only’, and the smallest group ‘Taiwanese only’ took up only 17.6%. In other words, at the beginning of the 1990s, the tendency to identify oneself as ‘Chinese only’ in Taiwan was slightly stronger than that as ‘Taiwanese only’. However, a dramatic reversal of self-identification took place between 1994 and 1996. During this period, the cross-strait relations soured after Beijing’s military exercises and missile tests (1995-96) and Taiwan’s first presidential election (1996). The hostility was magnified by Taiwan’s democratization. More and more people no longer felt inhibited from expressing how they truly felt. In 1996, although the category of being ‘both Taiwanese and Chinese’ was still the majority (49.3%), the importance of the other two groups reversed – 24.1% chose ‘Taiwanese only’ while 17.6% as ‘Chinese only’. As time went on, this trend has continued. By 2008, the ‘Taiwanese only’ identity (48.4%) became the biggest group overtaking that of ‘both Taiwanese and Chinese’ (43.1%) and remains so until today (62.8%) (ESC 2023a).

If Beijing wishes to coerce the Taiwanese to accept unification by aggressive military

intimidation and diplomatic blockade, it backfires. By June 2023, 62.8% of people in Taiwan identify themselves as ‘Taiwanese only’, 30.5% as ‘both Taiwanese and Chinese’, and 2.5% as ‘Chinese only’ (ESC 2023a). Instead of luring the Taiwanese to have the same ‘Chinese dream’ as Xi proposed, the bullying only makes Taiwanese identity much stronger and arouses greater anti-China sentiment. However, in fear of military conflicts across the Taiwan Strait, people in Taiwan are also pragmatic and do not want to provoke Beijing into an invasion. According to the most recent ESC survey, the majority of people in Taiwan prefer the ‘status quo’ because this option avoids both military confrontations (if declaring independence) and the change of their democratic lifestyle (if accepting being brought under Chinese rule).⁸

The shift from ethnic identity to civic identity has consolidated in the 2000s. Ethnic differences are no longer the focus of identity conflicts; the ‘unification’ with China became a distant memory associated with the authoritarian past; and politicians constantly declare their ‘Taiwanese’ identity and uphold the principle of ‘Taiwan First’ no matter which party they belong to.⁹

In Taiwan, the belief in democracy and liberal values is like a religion. People actively take part in elections and social movements and believe that past wrongs should be righted. The vigorous participation and deep involvement in social and political life have changed society and have established a strong sense of belonging which they are an intrinsic part of. The identity issue is no longer about an abstract idea of past glory or ethnic ties promoted by the post-war KMT regime. Rather, as Ho Ming-sho (2019, 217) points out, the ethnic label has been replaced by a more inclusive concept. Today, Taiwanese identity is more about *here and now*, which requires participants to perform, contribute, and materialize that idea of ‘belonging’. The active making and becoming process is the

key to Taiwanese identity formation today.

The tianran du generation


In the changing identity landscape, we witness a trajectory from an ethnic-based to a place-conscious identity, and from a narrowly defined ‘me’ and ‘you’ to an inclusive civic ‘we’. Moreover, a new phenomenon has emerged in the last decade, i.e. a clear generational gap (Brading 2017; Chang, Wang 2005; Le Pesant 2011; Lin 2010; Rigger 2006; Weng 2017; Wu, Lin 2019). Many scholars have found an unmistakable generational difference, showing disproportionately higher support for Taiwan independence among young people, usually those born after 1985 (Chen 2019; Wang 2017).

The most well-known examples of generational differences in Taiwanese identity are the mass participation of the Sunflower Movement in 2014 (a 23-day occupation of the Legislative Yuan) and the campaigns to legalize same-sex marriage (2017-2019). These movements have been mobilized and supported widely, but especially by young people. A new term *tianran du* 天然獨¹⁰ emerged after the Sunflower Movement to refer to the young activists (and later young Taiwanese in general) highlighting their growing support for Taiwan independence and anti-China sentiment. Although the younger generation has never had personal experience of political repression of martial law and was still young during the consolidation of Taiwan’s democratization, their support for independence demonstrates the aspiration to be free, fair, and autonomous, taking democracy as their way of life and a matter of course. For them, the core of being Taiwanese is to be free and live in an equal, just, and democratic society. Thus, the Taiwanese identity issue should be defined not simply by ethnicity, language(s), culture(s), or birthplaces, but by liberal values that the Taiwanese hold dear.

The strong tendency of young

Taiwanese to support independence has often puzzled Beijing and China-leaning scholars and commentators. They often criticize this phenomenon to be the result of a ‘de-Sinicization’ conspiracy that was instigated by the DPP. One major accusation pinpoints Taiwan’s education reform in the 21st century as the culprit for young people’s support for independence. Beijing calls the reform ‘*taidu jiaogai*’ 臺獨教改 (i.e. an education reform advocating Taiwan independence) and accuses the DPP government of attempting to ‘de-Sinicize’ and ‘brainwash’ the youth and manufacturing pro-independence support. However, is there evidence to support the claim that Taiwan’s education reform promotes independence? In reality, the reform officially started in the 1990s under the KMT. The goals for the reform were manifold, including the liberalization of curriculum design, the examination system reform, access widening, and academic freedom and teachers’ autonomy (Wu 2005). Reflecting the ‘one community’ spirit, Taiwan’s education reform consciously focused on the local environment. By enhancing children’s understanding of their surroundings and fostering a close relationship with and affection for their hometown, Taiwan’s education became more rooted, trying to rectify the post-war China-centric perspective and address the problem of neglecting Taiwan (Chang 2011).

However, the criticism of a rooted education as ‘de-Sinicization’ does not hold water. In the investigation I am currently conducting on the new Social Studies education,¹¹ I have found no evidence suggesting the promotion of Taiwan independence or anti-Chinese sentiment. The real impact of the reform manifests itself in a more liberal and less Confucian value system. The issue of same-sex marriage can serve as example: the younger generation is overwhelmingly more supportive than the older generations across party boundaries (Lin 2020). For the younger generation who



grew up in and are used to a free and liberal society, their identity is shaped both by a democratic environment and liberal values embedded in education. Different from their parents or grandparents, the young people identify themselves not based on the old ‘ethnicity’ line (however it is defined), but on their lived experience, close relationship with their environment, and shared values, such as human rights, ethnic equality, democracy, and freedom.

Conclusion

The emergence of a sense of identity is usually constructed through differences, especially “through the narrow eye of the negative... [and] through the eye of the needle of the other” (Hall 1991: 21). In the case of Taiwan, it is evident in the growing prominence of the ‘Taiwanese only’ identity as a response to Beijing’s increasing assertiveness. The impact of the increasingly aggressive and authoritarian ‘other’ (i.e. China) has contributed to the shaping and consolidation of Taiwanese identity today. As Stuart Hall articulates so brilliantly, there are two models of identity formation (Hall 1990). The first approach emphasizes an ‘authentic’ and ‘original’ identity that needs to be ‘discovered’. Beijing’s insistence to bring Taiwan into Chinese orbit is one of such ‘one nation’ discourse; while the second position sees identity as an ever-changing and never-complete process, that is always in flux. The former is an essentialist model, seeking to ‘discover’ and ‘recover’ an ‘original’ identity as if there is one ‘true self’ to be found; The latter is more open and inclusive, acknowledging the multiplicity and changeability of identity and also the impossibility of one singular ‘pure’ origin. From this perspective, identity is not fixed and has been continuously transforming. The trajectory of identity change in Taiwan has manifested the second model – from the colonial subjects (under Japanese

rule), enslaved people who needed to be taught to be Chinese (post-war period), narrowly-defined ‘Taiwanese’ (excluding the ‘mainlanders’ during a brief period of political transformation), and eventually to a broadly-defined ‘Taiwanese’ identity today (inclusive of all people who live and share the community of ‘Taiwan’). Because of the flexibility of constant changing and reshaping, Taiwanese identity is no longer rigid nor fastened to one narrow and fixed definition of oneself.

The cross-strait dispute over identity demonstrates the deep fissure between the two contrasting positions. On the one hand, Beijing consistently appeals to the Taiwanese with the ‘Chinese nation’ myth, proposes the idea of ‘one family’, and stresses the importance of ‘national unification’ (Xi 2019). The calls for a ‘Chinese nation’ and the longing to return to ‘lost origin’ and ‘one nation’, such as the ‘Chinese Dream’ laid down by Xi Jinping, aim to achieve the “rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (Mohanty 2013). Such an approach reflects the Chinese position to construct the Chinese identity, i.e. an identity discourse about a “collective ‘one true self’ [...] which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common [...] as ‘one people’” (Hall 1990: 223). In contrast to Beijing’s demand for the Taiwanese to be part of the Chinese nation, the Taiwanese simply want to be themselves and emphasize shared experience, common interests, and a joint future.

However, the emphasis on the seemingly liberal, multiethnic, and multicultural identity carries a potential pitfall. Defining Taiwanese identity primarily from a Han-centric perspective risks homogenizing and appropriating indigenous peoples and cultures. While the majority of Taiwanese reject being incorporated into the Chinese ‘imagined community’, so are the Taiwanese indigenous peoples into the Han-dominated imagination. Thus, continuous reflection on and awareness of the importance of diversity

“Guomintang liangan lunshu zixun huiyi jianyi: Taiwan youxian renmin diyi” 國民黨兩岸論述 諮詢會議建議：台灣優先、人民第一 [KMT Cross-strait discourse, suggesting to prioritize Taiwan and put the Taiwanese first] (2020), *Liberty Times* 自由時報, February 14, <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/3068602> (accessed 5 April 2023).

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“Song Chuyu fufu xiagui qintudi jidong luolei” 宋楚瑜夫婦下跪親土地 激動落淚 [Teary James Soong and his wife kneel down and kiss the ground] (2004), *TVBS*



State Monopoly Bureau agents and a street vendor, and soon developed into a major resistance islandwide against the corrupt Chinese authorities.

⁴ The term ‘ethnic’ (zuqun 族群) has been extensively used to discuss the division and conflicts between the ‘Taiwanese’ and the ‘Mainlanders’ during the post-war era (e.g. Wang 2003; Shih 2007). Although the term is problematic, given that both groups are mostly Han Chinese, I use the term in a Taiwanese context. In so doing, I also emphasize the arbitrary categorization and constructive nature of identity politics.

⁵ Although over 97% of the population in Taiwan in the early post-war period were Han Chinese, the dividing line was based on the time of their arrival, i.e. either those who lived on the island before the end of the Second World War or those who came after 1945. These two categories were often simplified as ‘Taiwanese’ and ‘mainlanders’, or as ‘benshengren’ (literally means ‘people of this province’) and ‘waishengren’ (literally means ‘people from outside of this province’), implying their relative status as insiders or outsiders.

⁶ *Shengji* division has lost importance since the 2000s (Peng 2006). In addition, the arrival of a new group – the ‘*xin yimin* 新移民’ (i.e.

new immigrants) also changed the ethnic composition in Taiwan. Since the 2000s, the number of foreign spouses and migrant workers has grown exponentially.

⁷ The criticism of Taiwan’s ‘de-Sinicization’ effort mainly focuses on the DPP regime. For example, Yang 2018.

⁸ The support for ‘status quo’ (either ‘status quo forever’ or ‘status quo and decide later’) is now 60.7%. Although there was an anomaly of dropping support for independence in 2018, the support soon bounced back to over 1/5 level (ESC 2023b).

⁹ Although the DPP has always prioritized Taiwan-centric policy, the KMT has started to also establish its ‘Taiwan priority, put people first’ approach (“Guomindang liangan lunshu” 2020).

¹⁰ The term *tianran* means ‘natural’ or ‘innate,’ describing the inherent nature of something. Meanwhile, the character *du* is short for *duli* (independence) or *Taidu* (Taiwan independence). Together, the term ‘*tianran du*’ is a general description used to signify the natural inclination of young people towards supporting Taiwan independence.

¹¹ This includes an examination of the new curriculum guidelines and 18 volumes of *Shehui* textbooks at the junior high school level by the three major publishers in Taiwan.