

Research on the Mechanism of Establishing National Identity: Based on the Analysis of Taiwan's History from 1895 to 2000

Can Cheng

Graziadio Business School, Pepperdine University, Los Angeles, United States
chengcan6@xdf.cn

Abstract:

Taiwan's autonomy and status in the People's Republic of China (PRC) have always been contentious. The visits of numerous Western officials and Taiwan's steadfast assertion of its national identity have introduced uncertainties in the security of the Indo-Pacific region. Exploring the development of Taiwan's self-awareness regarding its national identity is crucial for understanding how Taiwan navigates its position in the PRC, paving the way for a practical approach for the mainland to improve cross-strait relations. With a deep analysis of factors contributing to deteriorating Taiwan's identity recognition, the article will continue to examine Taiwan's history from 1895 to 2000 and the evolution of its national identity. It concludes that historical factors significantly shape Taiwan's identity and considers how the mainland can enhance its relationship with Taiwan's utilizing mechanisms. To promote a Chinese identity in Taiwan, the article suggests strategies such as fostering economic cooperation under the One-China principle, facilitating youth education exchanges, and acknowledging cultural and national identity.

Keywords: Cross-Strait relations, sovereignty, national identity

1. Introduction

Taiwan's claim to be separated from its mainland is profoundly ingrained in its complicated history of colonization and governance under several regimes. Taiwan's existing special condition of autonomy, as well as its contentious relationship with the mainland, the People's Republic of China (PRC), continue to have an impact on Indo-Pacific security dynamics. Understanding the origin and growth of Taiwan's national identity is critical to understanding its current position and relations with the PRC as well as for possible reunification.

Taiwan's identity has been shaped by significant historical influences, particularly under Japanese colonial rule (1895-1945) and the subsequent Kuomintang (KMT) administration. During the Japanese colonial period, Taiwan experienced a concerted effort to integrate its society into the Japanese Empire. This included the "Kōminka" movement, which promoted Japanese customs, language, and Shintoism. Despite the harshness of these assimilation policies, they led to substantial advancements in infrastructure, education, and public health in Taiwan. Scholars like John F. Copper and Editors Liao Ping-Hui and David Der-Wer Wang have provided comprehensive overviews of this period, highlighting both the oppressive measures and the modernization that occurred.

In contrast, the KMT's rule following Japan's defeat in

World War II brought a different kind of repression. The February 28 Incident in 1947 and the ensuing White Terror period saw thousands of Taiwanese executed, tortured, or imprisoned. This period of strict control and repression deeply scarred the collective consciousness of the Taiwanese people and significantly influenced their political behavior and attitudes towards the KMT and unification with China.

Social Identity Theory (SIT), established by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, provides a framework for understanding Taiwan's multidimensional national identity. This theory can be operationalized in a variety of ways, including social, political, and cultural dimensions. For example, surveys and interviews can assess affinities with Taiwan's indigenous vs Chinese culture, but public opinion polls and voting behavior might reflect political identification. Understanding these characteristics allows the mainland to implement various cultural and economic cooperation to improve cross-strait ties and create better conditions for Taiwan's reunification with China.

2. Historical Background and Comparative Analysis: Colonial Influence and Cultural Impact

When examining Taiwan's national identity, scholars need to take these historical impacts into account using social identity theory. Each era signifies a distinct paradigm used

to establish identity, and a thorough examination requires an awareness of these changes.

Efforts to incorporate Taiwanese society into the Japanese Empire characterized the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan [1]. The book by John F. Copper, *Taiwan: Nation-State or Province?* provides a comprehensive overview of the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan, including the “Kōminka” movement and its impact on Taiwanese society. It details the efforts by the Japanese colonial government to incorporate Taiwanese society into the Japanese Empire through the “Kōminka” movement, including the promotion of Shintoism, the Japanese language, and customs. The text also discusses how these forceful assimilation policies contributed to advancements in infrastructure, education, and public health in Taiwan. Through encouraging the practice of Shintoism, the Japanese language and customs of this movement sought to assimilate Taiwanese citizens. At this time, Taiwan also accepted the advanced elements of Japanese society, such as democracy, technology, and ideas of free trade. From Copper’s book, it can be seen that despite their harshness, these measures helped Taiwan modernize, leading to improvements in infrastructure, education, and public health. However, while the “Kōminka” movement aimed to fully integrate Taiwanese society into the Japanese Empire, it also ignited complex reactions among the Taiwanese residents [2]. Liao Ping-Hui and David Der-Wer Wang provide a comprehensive overview of the Kōminka movement, including its inception, implementation, and effects on Taiwanese society. From Liao and Wang’s view, it can be seen that many individuals found themselves navigating the delicate line between adaptation and resistance as they encountered both the opportunities and challenges presented by the Japanese colonial regime. The imposed assimilation policies, particularly in education, often led to a sense of cultural dislocation among older generations who struggled to reconcile their traditional values with the new paradigm being enforced upon them.

John F. Copper’s analysis also highlights that the educational reforms instituted during this period promoted loyalty to the Japanese Empire and facilitated a broader exposure to modern scientific knowledge and civic education. Schools became the primary sites where the Japanese language was imparted, alongside the cultural practices intended to create a new Taiwanese identity steeped in allegiance to Japan. This educational system produced a generation of Taiwanese who were more literate and engaged with contemporary ideas, even if they operated within the constraints of an imperialistic framework.

Moreover, the infrastructural improvements, such as the expansion of roads, railways, and telecommunication systems, while primarily serving the colonial government’s interests, also contributed significantly to Taiwan’s

economic development [3]. Huang explores instances of Taiwanese resistance to preserving their cultural identity amidst pressures to assimilate. It reveals that responses to the Kōminka movement varied, including resistance, rebellion, compliance, and adaptation. Additionally, the article highlights how, despite initial rebellion, Taiwan’s residents transitioned towards adaptation with minimal resistance, benefiting from Japanese investments and developments while maintaining a distinct cultural boundary. These developments enhanced trade within the island and connected Taiwan more efficiently to mainland Japan, fostering a sense of modernity and progress. As also described by Copper, the duality of these advancements--the technological progress juxtaposed against the backdrop of colonial oppression--complicated the Taiwanese relationship with their identity during this transformative period.

In conclusion, the ‘Kōminka’ movement is a pivotal chapter in Taiwan’s history, encapsulating the intricate interplay of power and identity. Copper’s work elucidates this period as one marked by both the strife of forced assimilation and the undeniable benefits of modernization. It is essential to understand that while the movement aimed to reshape Taiwan’s society into an overseas part of the Empire, even though most Taiwan residents oppose this history, it is still an undeniable history in which Japan inadvertently laid the groundwork for a more educated and infrastructural enriched Taiwan, setting the stage for future political and cultural developments in the post-colonial era. This unintended positive outcome of the ‘Kōminka’ movement gives people a more complex understanding of Taiwan’s future.

3. The Historical Complexity of Taiwan’s Chinese Identity

3.1 KMT Adds Uncertainty in Taiwan’s Chinese Identity

Taiwan’s national identity is complicated by its colonial history, yet many residents still identify as Chinese politically and culturally. The KMT took power on the island, further complicating this dynamic. Literature has shown that the harsh rule of the Chiang Kai-shek government imposed severe laws and regulations on Taiwan residents starting in 1945. The KMT seized power in Taiwan following Japan’s defeat in World War II. The KMT’s initial tactics involved strict control and repression of opposition, leading to the February 28 Incident (1947) and the ensuing White Terror period, during which thousands of Taiwanese were executed, tortured, or imprisoned [4]. Fang-Yi Chiou and Ji Yeon Hong created a fresh dataset of evidence from Taiwan. Their empirical findings show numerous essential points: Individuals and groups who have directly or indirectly faced repression are much less

likely to support the KMT. These people tend to disagree with the KMT's policy of unification with mainland China and identify more as Taiwanese than Chinese. Residents from towns with more significant casualties during the 228 Incident are more inclined to oppose unification with China, demonstrating that the severity of repression had a long-term impact on political inclinations. It clarifies that the legacy of the 228 Incident and the subsequent White Terror continues to shape Taiwan's political landscape today. As younger generations learn about this history, there is a growing awareness and rejection of the KMT's past authoritarian practices. Educational initiatives and public discussions surrounding these historical events have fostered a collective memory that emphasizes the importance of democratic values and human rights.

When compared to the former colonizers, Japan, which also imposed harsh laws on Taiwan residents, it also contributed to Taiwan's health, social, and infrastructure developments, most importantly, it is the cultural influence that Japan imposed, and the new oppressors of the KMT's corruption and ineptitude further exacerbated social divisions and economic inequality.

The political narrative in Taiwan has shifted significantly, with increasing numbers of residents identifying more strongly as making a living with a vague identity rather than identifying as Chinese and being plagued by the KMT's white terror and cruel ruling at that time. This shift is evidenced by Huang Mei-Er argues that Taiwanese responses to the Kōminka movement included resistance, rebellion, compliance, and adaptation [5]. She delves into specific instances of resistance and how some Taiwanese sought to protect their cultural identity despite pressures to assimilate. Taiwanese reactions to the Kōminka movement were diverse and complex. Individuals have fought against assimilation efforts, attempting to assert their Taiwanese identity in the face of pressure. In addition, some people followed the authorities' orders, either out of fear or a desire for social approval. Finally, some Taiwanese choose to adapt, finding methods to traverse the shifting cultural terrain while keeping aspects of their heritage. It can gain insight into the many techniques used by Taiwan's residents to protect their cultural identity during this turbulent time.

3.2 Applying SIT To Explain Taiwan's National Identity in the History of Japanese and KMT Rule

The article applies to the Social Identity theory, which was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1970, posits that individuals derive a sense of identity from their membership in social groups, which influences their behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of themselves and others. Individuals who faced state repression (indicative of KMT's

authoritarian rule) are less likely to support the KMT's policies and identify more strongly as non-Chinese. This emphasizes how experiences of oppression create a strong in-group identity that contrasts sharply with the oppressive outgroup (the KMT). The historical narrative illustrates that, as awareness of past injustices grows, so does the identification with being vague Chinese identity, particularly among younger generations. The educational initiatives and public discussions about the KMT's authoritarian practices have fostered a collective identity that prioritizes democratic values and human rights. As residents of Taiwan have undergone this process, their political identity has evolved. Many are distancing themselves from a Chinese identity in favor of a unique Taiwanese identity, which aligns with their lived experiences and historical grievances. The comparison between different historical oppressors (Japan versus the KMT) serves to refine Taiwan's social identity. While Japan's colonial rule included infrastructure development and specific cultural integrations, the KMT's legacy predominantly represented repression and corruption.

The unfavorable comparison to the KMT allows Taiwanese residents to solidify their in-group identity further as they differentiate themselves socially and politically from the outgroup represented by the KMT and its policies. While above literacy discusses the role of collective memory in shaping identity, particularly concerning historical events like the 228 Incident. This collective memory influences how individuals perceive their social group and their societal role. The emphasis on remembering and discussing past atrocities aligns with the idea that collective memories help reinforce a shared identity, enhancing solidarity among group members. Therefore, the growing rejection of the KMT authoritarian legacy among Taiwanese, especially younger generations, is a powerful driver of social identity transformation.

The various responses to the Kōminka movement (resistance, compliance, adaptation) highlight the complexities in how individuals navigate their identities in the face of cultural assimilation pressures. As noted in the text, some individuals resisted, while others complied or adapted, reflecting different strategies to maintain a sense of belonging and identity. This phenomenon illustrates the intersection of personal identity with group identity; those who engage in resistance demonstrate a strong attachment to their cultural identity, while those adopting may experience internal conflict but still seek to maintain their Taiwanese heritage amidst changing social pressures.

From the analysis of the Social identity theory, it can be seen that KMT is damaging Taiwan's Chinese identity with its harsh regulations and laws; the mainland wishes to continue to evoke Taiwan's resident's Chinese identity; it has been through economic and cultural methods.

4. Mainland China's Approach and Positive Impact

4.1 The General Approaches

With the previous discussion, Mainland China has consistently sought to cultivate a Chinese identity among the Taiwanese population. This effort can be traced back to the early days of the Kuomintang (KMT) regime, which imposed a strict Chinese cultural and political framework on Taiwan. The KMT promoted Mandarin Chinese as the official language and integrated Chinese historical narratives into the education system. These measures aimed to align Taiwan's identity with mainland China's, asserting the notion of a single, unified Chinese nation.

Despite Taiwan's vague identity, persistent efforts have been made by Mainland China to promote a Chinese national identity among the Taiwanese population, reflecting positive trends in some areas. Mainland China has employed various strategies to strengthen this identity, including economic integration, media influence, cultural exchanges, and political pressure. Economic integration is one of the primary methods Beijing uses to foster a Chinese national identity in Taiwan [6]. The Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) signed in 2010 is a prime example as it was illustrated in Simon Tay's journal "Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA): Domestic Opportunities and Challenges." between pages 4-6, it can be seen that The ECFA aims to reduce tariffs and commercial barriers between Taiwan and mainland China, thereby promoting smoother and more substantial economic exchanges. The agreement facilitates increased cross-strait investments, tourism, and trade by lowering trade barriers, making economic activities between the two regions more integrated and interdependent. This will build an environment of mutual benefit and encourage innovation and the sharing of resources. As businesses from both sides engage more freely, they stand to capitalize on each other's strengths, creating a more dynamic marketplace.

Additionally, the media plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and fostering a sense of shared identity between Taiwan and Mainland China. Through various channels, including television programs, movies, and social media, there has been a concerted effort to promote narratives that emphasize Chinese cultural heritage and historical connections. This media influence is evident in the increasing availability of Chinese-produced content in Taiwan, which often portrays stories and values that resonate with the Chinese experience.

By presenting a portrayal of a culture that emphasizes unity and shared history, Mainland China seeks to cultivate a deeper emotional connection with Taiwan's residents, making them feel part of a larger national narrative, nav-

igating their similarities and shared experiences. These interactions not only facilitate dialogue but also offer a platform for Mainland narratives to enter the discourse in Taiwan, potentially softening resistance to the notion of a unified Chinese identity.

4.2 Economic and Cultural Approaches to Increase Taiwan's Relocation of Chinese Identity

The ECFA includes several key components designed to deepen economic ties. These components encompass tariff reductions on a wide array of goods, which makes it cheaper and more efficient for Taiwanese companies to export to China and vice versa. Additionally, the agreement covers service industries, allowing for greater participation of Taiwanese firms in China's markets, and encourages investments in sectors such as manufacturing, finance, and technology. The comprehensive nature of the ECFA ensures that various facets of both economies become intertwined, creating mutual dependencies.

In practical terms, this economic interconnectedness is intended to align the economic interests of Taiwan and China. For Taiwanese businesses, the benefits of a vast and accessible Chinese market are significant, providing opportunities for growth and expansion that might be limited within Taiwan's smaller economy. Taiwanese companies can leverage cheaper labor and resources in China, enhancing their competitiveness. Additionally, Chinese investments in Taiwan bring in capital and technological advancements, further integrating the economies. From Beijing's perspective, increasing Taiwan's economic dependence on the mainland serves a strategic purpose [7]. Jin says that mainland Taiwan sees increasing difficulty in moving away from mainland China's influence both economically and politically. It means that Economics is integrated into a new form to increase Taiwan's recognition of its identity politically. By embedding Taiwan's economy within the larger framework of China's economic landscape, Beijing hopes to foster a sense of economic necessity and pragmatism among Taiwan's businesses and citizens. The rationale is that a closely intertwined economic relationship would naturally make the idea of not only political but a cultural unification or, at the very least, closer ties more appealing and less disruptive. Economic benefits, such as job creation, increased trade, and investment inflows, could be seen as tangible advantages of maintaining a positive and cooperative relationship with mainland China.

Chinese media and cultural activities, promotions outlets, and social media platforms play a significant role in shaping public opinion and strengthening Chinese identity in Taiwan. Platforms like WeChat and Weibo, which are widely used in Taiwan, often promote pro-China narra-

tives and emphasize cultural similarities. For example, Chinese television dramas, movies, and music that are popular in Taiwan often highlight themes of shared heritage and historical unity. This media presence aims to subtly influence Taiwanese perspectives and align them more closely with mainland China's viewpoints [8]. Nearly 40% of respondents utilize it to access content created in mainland China, iQiyi is clearly in the lead in Taiwan, after YouTube [8]. In Taiwan, Tencent Video and Youku are the next big things. This means that China is increasing its cultural and identity recognition through social media in Taiwan and more Taiwanese have begun to be interested in revisiting the Chinese identity. This trend reflects a broader shift in the cultural landscape, where the influx of Chinese content is fostering a complex dialogue about identity among Taiwanese audiences. As these platforms gain traction, they not only facilitate access to entertainment but also create a space for cultural exchange that reinforces connections with mainland China.

Mainland China's multifaceted efforts to promote a Chinese national identity in Taiwan have yielded several positive impacts [6]. Economic integration, exemplified by the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), in the same article, has led to increased trade and investment between Taiwan and mainland China, providing significant economic benefits to Taiwanese businesses and contributing to Taiwan's economic growth and stability. This economic interdependence fosters a more favorable view of closer ties with China among Taiwanese businesses and their employees. Also, media influence plays a crucial role, with Chinese media's portrayal of shared cultural heritage and historical unity creating a sense of common identity.

5. Conclusion

Taiwan's national identity is deeply shaped by a complex interplay of historical, social, and political influences, particularly the legacies of Japanese colonial rule (1895-1945) and the Kuomintang (KMT) administration that followed. The Japanese Kōminka movement sought to assimilate Taiwanese society into the Japanese Empire, significantly modernizing infrastructure, education, and public health, yet also fostering resentment due to its oppressive nature. In contrast, the KMT's rule introduced severe repression, highlighted by the February 28 Incident (1947) and the White Terror, leaving deep scars on Taiwanese society and fostering a distinct Taiwanese identity that diverged from the Chinese identity promoted by the mainland. Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, offers a framework to analyze this multifaceted identity through social, political, and cultural dimensions. Surveys and interviews reveal the cultural and political

shifts in Taiwanese identity, notably the rise in Taiwanese self-identification post-2000.

Mainland China's efforts to promote a Chinese identity in Taiwan through economic integration, media influence, and cultural exchanges, such as the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) of 2010, have created economic interdependence and fostered a sense of shared identity. However, these efforts have not diminished the resilient Taiwanese identity shaped by historical trauma and distinct cultural and political experiences. Understanding these deep-seated identities is crucial for addressing cross-strait relations, highlighting the need for nuanced approaches that consider Taiwan's unique historical and social context to foster meaningful dialogue and cooperation between Taiwan and mainland China.

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