Place in the World:
Elementary Geography Education and Identity Construction in Taiwan (1945-2000)

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We are all 'spatial beings,' living in and participating in physical, social, and mental spaces. People's sense of identity is heavily influenced by their perception of their 'place in the world', either geographical, social, economical or cultural. Surrounded by concentric layers of lived space, this 'lifeworld' shapes our sense of place and navigates our place in the world. Put simply, we make places and places make us.

A 'spatial turn' in recent decades has injected a new theoretical energy and has revolutionized intellectual thinking across disciplinary boundaries. Yet, it is not until recently that spatiality has finally caught up in Taiwan studies in the areas of human geography, history, film studies, and literary studies. The existing research on Taiwan's education and its influence on ideology have mainly focused on the problems of China-centricity and the politicization of the ideology-related subjects. Yet, the spatial dimension of identity construction in education is rarely touched upon. This paper thus looks at the long neglected spatial aspect of identity formation in education.

By examining post-war elementary school textbooks (1945-2000) of geography-related subjects, the paper looks at official knowledge that transmitted in textbooks, explores the interplay between the KMT-versioned 'regime of truth' and power relationship, and maps the positions and the constant repositionings of the 'self' (i.e. the Taiwanese) and the local (i.e. Taiwan) in textbooks. This investigation provides an insight into the design of state ideology and also the opportunity to identify what kind of 'lifeworld' was constructed to position Taiwanese children in the world. The post-war China-centric tendency has indeed been noticed and rectified since the 1990s, while the stubborn Han-centric prejudice embedded in the elementary textbooks remains to be problematic and dominant in shaping children's lifeworld and informing their worldview.