

Past, Present Future in Taiwan Studies: A Historiographical and Autobiographical Journey

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In this speech today, at the School of African and Oriental Studies, I am return to a topic I have been studying and writing about since the mid-1990. That topic is the evolution, present-day state Taiwan Studies and future. I first talked about this field that all here are involved in at a conference at the University of Texas/Austin. Based upon bibliographical research and interviews, I wrote a second essay for a conference at Yale in 2007 and a second conference--the EATS conference in Spain the year later that was titled, quite provocatively, "Is Taiwan Studies Dead." In Frances Fukiyama --like terms, I suggested that Taiwan Studies, like Taiwan itself, was entering an era of "End of Days." In 2011, I returned to the topic in a broader and more comprehensive essay for a conference at Jiaodong University in Xinzhu and presented a similar, updated, paper at a conference in Leiden and here at SOAS, a few weeks later in the fall of 2013.

I now present an expanded and recast essay in which I attempt to see the development of our field in what is hopefully a more substantive and nuanced way than I did in that earlier. I also try to show why my announcement at that time of the "death of Taiwan Studies as research field" was all too premature.

This new work may be seen as a grand and sweeping overview of Taiwan Studies as I now see it. I discuss the evolution of our field/subfield and show how it developed within -- and as witness to --the larger development of Taiwan as a political, diplomatic, economic, cultural and religious entity. I talk about its evolution --its long and detailed past, its present day nature--as a field and as a subfield within the larger umbrella of Chinese studies. I conclude with a discussion our field's possible future in a Taiwan and China and America and Europe that are all developing institutes or programs or courses related to Taiwan.