

National Identity in Taiwan: A Revisit

Ching-hsin Yu

Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, TAIWAN

Abstract

The study of citizen's national identity in Taiwan has continuously drawn researcher's close attention over the past decades. Reviewing the published literature, researchers mainly select three approaches in their studies in different period of times. The first is an essentially qualitative approach under which national identity is studied based on historical, philosophical and political discourses. Concepts such as state, nation, ethnicity, and community consensus are deeply explored and applied to Taiwan's recent political development. These discussions have introduced contemporary theories of nationalism, nation-building, ethnic integration, etc., and enriched the contents of national identity in Taiwan. Of course, consensus and controversies have coexisted in the discussions. The second approach stems from fertile empirical studies of national identity since the late 1980s. In particular, the increasing popularity of opinion survey has enabled researchers to collect citizen's attitudinal and behavioral attributes of national identity. The concerns of citizen's preference on the issue of "unification vs. independence," citizen's self-identity, and more recently, the impacts of cross-strait interactions on citizen's national identity are often seen. Understandably, these studies are relatively sensitive to echo current political changes or events in Taiwan. The third approach is a mixed method trying to incorporate the strengths of previous two approaches. Owing to the development of new research techniques, historical and political discourses are reformatted into the surveys of citizen's political orientation and thus enhance the power of explanation of empirical studies. The employment of focus group interview, for example, has considerably bridged the gap between qualitative and quantitative studies of national identity. Citizen's preference of self-identity is able to tone with citizen's whole imagination of nation (state). Similarly, quasi-experiments are also used in explaining citizen's changing (or unchanged) attitudes of cross-strait relations which might influence the preferences of national identity.

This paper firstly introduces the importance of national identity in Taiwan. Particularly, as Taiwan enters a new phrase of democratic consolidation, the issue of national identity is undeniably one of the few most important issues concerning Taiwan's future. Secondly, it will review the current literature of national identity in Taiwan. Strengths and weaknesses of the literature are discussed based on the three

Panel 3 Nationalism and National Identity

research approaches mentioned. Thirdly, this paper will present the findings of mixed research techniques and designs in the study of national identity. These findings can show significant improvements methodologically on the one hand and provide more precise explanation of citizen's preference on national identity on the other hand. Fourthly, this paper will discuss the relationships between the increasingly cross-strait interactions and the study of national identity. As more social, economic and political interactions between Taiwan and China occur, it is anticipated that citizen's attitudes toward China and choices of national identity would also fluctuate. In the concluding section, this paper will summarize the existing achievements of the study of national identity in Taiwan. Also, it will outline the future research issues and suggestions for the advancement of national identity study in Taiwan.

Keywords:

Taiwan, National Identity, Unification, Independence, Taiwanese Identity