

Rewriting Taiwan History: Professing 17th Century Specialization via Disciplinary Orientation

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The act of rewriting Taiwan History is an example of how academic disciplines are given to intellectual mutation and deformation, and do not possess immutable morphological properties (Herubel: 61). The very process of nation building that allowed for the contesting interpretations of the past in the first place has enabled to open up to more sensitive issues and moral judgment of particular historical situations and events. Commodification of Taiwan culture, history and language in the public sphere generated a desire for a return to a rigorous and critical re-engagement with the historical sources from which the claims for interpretation are made.

Precisely changes in the political landscape make it interesting to inquire what nuances these have entailed for the direction in which Taiwan history is being (re)written. In step with the conference theme, I will focus on how my recent research projects since my return to Taiwan in 2008 (a) bear relevance to the directions visible in rewriting Taiwan history and (b) reflect on how my own work has progressed against the background sketched above. I shall demonstrate that with a focus on educating the 17th century in Taiwan society.

Teaching an academic subject is never done so in isolation. Curricula respond to needs and demands from society, whether this is in an authoritarian or democratic, hegemonic or pluralistic fashion. This paper examines how the instruction of 17th century Dutch Formosa (1624-1662, 1664-1668) and Spanish Hermosa (1626-1642) evolved over the decades. Compared to other countries in the region, the epoch of European colonization in Taiwan was extremely short. Although the Portuguese are accredited with having been the first European nation to set foot on Taiwan in the late 16th century, it was the Dutch who made their presence visible and memorable in stone, ink and writing, followed by the Spanish in the same manner. This short time span, however, does not nullify the significance it has drawn under the different rules that characterize the chronology of Taiwan History. An assessment of its rapid changes stemmed first from the societal development of Taiwan society. The transition from an authoritarian state to a democracy entailed serious educational reform and institutionalized Taiwan history in the curriculum. The paper thus sketches the socio-political background as setting for curricula changes. Second, the interaction

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between teaching and research evaluates and reflects on new trends, one of which is the emergence of a process of internationalization. Of interest is the way in which demands for internationalization correspond to local demands. This will be addressed through the dialogue wherein textbook meets society. Attention will be paid to the social groups involved that enabled the support of 17th century research on the academic and the popular level, i.e. the Presbyterian Church, indigenous society, political activism, in addition to the efforts of governmental and academic visibility. In conclusion, this paper situates educating the 17th century as a specialization and as a vector for change in the contemporary historiographic landscape.