

**The Meta-history of History:
Some Reflections on Tsao Yung-ho's Thesis of "History of the Taiwan Island"**

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Professor Tsao Yung-ho's thesis of "History of the Taiwan Island" of 1994 provides significant clues to the first possible strategy of doing Taiwanese national history in a non-essentialistic way. Tsao's thesis is the first Meta-History of Taiwan born in academia. It is a view, an embryonic theory, of Taiwanese history that grew out organically of a lifetime of solid empirical historical works of a humble and soft-speaking man. There are three main characteristics of HTI that point to its non-essentialistic nature. First of all, by de-centering the state, i.e., by shifting the focus of narrative from state to society, it was able to avoid the pitfall of statism. Secondly, by de-centering the Han people as main actors and shifting the focus of narrative from anthropo-centrism to topo-centrism, i.e., by treating Taiwan as above all a space, it avoids the conceptual quagmire of defining a Taiwanese *ethnie*, thereby accommodating plural ethnic groups. The author argues that Tsao took his hint from the French historian Fernand Braudel. Thirdly, by decentering the Mainland, i.e., by shifting the focus of narrative from the history of land to the history of ocean, it manages to escape from the continental orthodoxy of modern Chinese historiography.