

Studies on Taiwan's Ethnic Relations: The State of the Field

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Abstract

This paper will review the studies on Taiwan's ethnic relations, both in English and in Chinese during the past three decades to reflect on the past achievements and future prospects of the field. The review of the field will be divided into three stages: 1) Before mid-1980s; 2) Late 1980s to 2000; and 3) after 2000. Given the sensitive nature of the ethnic relations issue before mid-1980s, there are little studies on ethnic relations written in Chinese. Most the pioneering works in the field were written by scholars from outside Taiwan in English. Taiwan based scholars only begin to contribute to the field after mid-1980s. The first wave of studies on Taiwan's ethnic relations began to boom in the late 1980s, focusing mainly on the relations between *benshengren* (本省人 or Taiwanese) and *waishengren* (外省人 or Mainlanders), which became the driving forces of the studies on Taiwan's ethnic relations. The studies on the ethnic relations between Han Chinese and the aboriginals, and between Taiwanese Hakka and Holo were triggered by the political competition between Taiwanese and Mainlanders. The unique characteristics of Taiwan's ethnic relations, especially their complex mingling with national identity issues, as identified by the scholars in the field will be discussed to demonstrate the (potential) contributions of Taiwan case to the academic community in the world. Furthermore, the discrepancy between the predictions of the waning significance of ethnicity by scholars, and the actual continuing salience of ethnicity in politics, though in a very obscure manner most of the time, which became the new puzzle in the field, will be discussed and reviewed to reveal another unique facet of Taiwan's ethnic relations and related studies up to the year 2000. A new wave of ethnic relations studies emerged after 2000, when Taiwan witnessed the inflow of new marriage immigrants and guest workers from China and Southeast Asian countries. Also, the blooming of Hakka studies following the establishment of Council of Hakka Affairs in the Executive Yuan, and three Hakka Colleges in three northern universities and some Hakka Studies Centers in other universities have important impacts of the field of ethnic relations studies. The implications of these newly emerged research topics on the "new ethnic relations issues" and their impacts on the "old ethnic relations issues," especially between Taiwanese and Mainlanders, as demonstrated in their respective studies will be discussed to reveal the potential topics for further studies.