

# The Birth of the "Taiwanese" : A Discursive Constitution of the "Taiwanese" as a National Identity

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## Abstract

This presentation provides a genealogical account of 'Taiwanese' as a national identity. Genealogy is a way of writing a history of the present that de-familiarises us from what we now take for granted by revealing in detail how things were otherwise. As argued in this presentation, Taiwanese identity, in ontological terms, exists only in discourse. It is a way of talking and doing things relative to what sort of people the Taiwanese are; every word and action contributes to the idea that there is such a thing as 'Taiwanese-ness' and helps to substantialise the qualities/features attached to it. This presentation conceptualises Taiwanese identity as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity; rather, it is formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways people talk and act. This presentation investigates various social practices/events in post-authoritarian Taiwan that incited people to talk about Taiwanese-ness. Certain things, with different positions, forms and organisations, were said and done, while other alternatives disappeared or were omitted and repressed. With various power relations, different discourses mutually intersected, interacted and competed. The social practices/events selected in this presentation include the production of knowledge, the publication of a comic book, an election campaign, and a political demonstration. It is crucially noted that the social practices/events analysed in this presentation are just a few of the numerous events that occur periodically or repeatedly. This presentation, in sum, is an attempt to understand how various social practices/events enable or disable certain ways through which people make sense of their past and their political lives, thereby coming to terms with their belongings, their allegiances, and their situated-ness. Taiwanese-ness is spoken of, not only literally but also symbolically, and it is this process of being 'spoken of' that constitutes the Taiwanese-ness - the birth of the 'Taiwanese'.

Dr. Yih-jye Hwang is currently in Leiden as recipient of MEARC's Writing up Grant "Taiwan in Comparative East Asian Perspective". This grant is made possible with the support of the Taiwanese Ministry of Education. Dr Hwang holds a PhD degree (Category A) in International Politics from the Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, Wales. During his one year stay in Leiden, Dr. Hwang will transform his PhD thesis The Birth of the 'Taiwanese': A Discursive Constitution of the 'Taiwanese' as a National Identity into a book.

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