

Translation of Streetscape in the cities of Taiwan: Renaming the past in Postcolonial Taiwan

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Abstract:

The streets named after political figures and events are important parts of modern culture policy; it not only provides spatial and semiotic orientation to the city, but also serves to naturalize and legitimize a selective vision of the past. Street naming thus can become a contest about who has the power to determine how the landscape is represented and whose history will be told.

Taiwan was ceded to Japan as a colony from 1895 to 1945. Following the end of WWII in 1945, the Republic of China (ROC), led by the Kuomintang (KMT), obtained control of Taiwan. After losing control of mainland China in 1949, the KMT ruled Taiwan as a single-party state for forty years, until the lifting of Martial Law was promulgated in 1987. The reforms were continued by Lee Teng-hui, which culminated in the first-ever direct presidential election in 1996. Then in 2000, Chen Shui-bian (the chair of DDP Party) was elected president, becoming the first non-KMT president on Taiwan.

The different ruling elites sometimes took Taiwan's place names to shape their symbolic landscape. During Japanese colonial era, the Japanese government had reformed the street districts in Taiwan's cities and named the street blocks after place names of Japan to assimilate Taiwanese. After WWII, the Kuomintang erased all the Japanesque street names and transferred to inscribe Chinese nationalism and ideology. After martial law lifting, the campaign of rectification of Taiwan's name stimulated residents rethinking about reforming the street names. Even only few street names renamed successfully, but The Taiwanization of residents in the island is strengthened finally.

This paper will explore the semiotic and political operation of commemorative street names to focus on a political analysis of naming practices and the cultural production of place by examining the procedures of the naming and the renaming of streets in the cities of Taiwan. Further, we emphasize on how street names, in addition to their spatial orientation and semiotic construction of the city, are also participants in the cultural production of shared past.

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