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Street-naming and the Subjectivity of Taiwan: A Case Study of Taipei City

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Abstract

Taiwan has been ruled by a variety of political regimes and the different ruling elites have used Taiwan's place names to shape their symbolic landscape. The end of World War Two witnessed the most tremendous change of place names in Taiwan when the Chinese Nationalist government or Kuomintang (KMT) established itself on the island. The traditional approach to toponymy mainly treats place names as the objective projection of culture on the physical landscape. However, recent research has turned to borrow concepts from critical theories to explore the expression of power inherent in geographical naming. This article will consider place naming as the illustration of state power on its symbolic landscape by examining all the street names in Taipei City, the capital of Taiwan.

Keywords: street names, toponymy, symbolic landscape, subjectivity of Taiwan

Izvleček

Tajvan je bil pod različnimi političnimi režimi in vsaka vladajoča elita je za oblikovanje svoje simbolične pokrajine uporabljala tajvanska krajevna imena. Ob koncu druge svetovne vojne, ko so otoku zavladali kitajski nacionalisti ali Kuomintang (KMT), se je Tajvan soočil z ogromnimi spremembami krajevnih imen. Tradicionalni pristop k toponimiji obravnava krajevna imena predvsem kot objektivne projekcije kulture na fizično pokrajino. Najnovejše raziskave pa so si za raziskovanje izražanja moči v geografskem poimenovanju izposodile koncepte kritičnih teorij. Pričujoči članek bo obravnaval krajevna imena kot odsev državne moči na svojih simboličnih pokrajinah z raziskovo vseh imen ulic v mestu Taibei, glavnem mestu Tajvana.

Ključne besede: ulična imena, toponimija, simbolična pokrajina, subjektivnost Tajvana

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1 Introduction

The naming of places is a key component in the relationship between place and political identity in contemporary society. Place names contain both symbolic meanings and spatial orders that provide normality and legitimacy to those who dominate the politics of place presentation.

The study of place naming has recently undergone a critical reformulation as scholars have moved beyond the traditional focus on etymology and taxonomy by examining the politics of place-naming practices. (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010, 453)

A growing number of scholars have emphasized the importance of understanding place naming as a contested spatial practice rather than viewing place names as transparent signifiers that designate places as "objects" or "artifacts" within a predefined geographical space (Berg and Vuolteenaho 2009). The majority of studies on the politics of place naming have emphasized the questions of nationalism and ideology.

Concerning the subjectivity of Taiwan, it is an issue of Taiwanese political identity. As Woolf says: "National identity is an abstract concept that sums up the collective expression of a subjective, individual sense of belonging to a socio-political unit" (Woolf 1996, 25–26).

Taiwan's most fundamental problem has been "Who should govern the island?" That is a question of power. In the past time, Taiwan has been ruled by different political regimes, notably, the Dutch, the Spanish, Koxinga (Zheng Cheng-gong), the Qing dynasty, the Japanese, the KMT (Kuomintang) and the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party). The different ruling elites also took Taiwan's place names to shape their symbolic landscape. Especially during Japanese occupation and when the Chinese Nationalist government (KMT) established itself on the island, the most tremendous change of place names in Taiwan occurred. The major target were street names and the names of administrative areas.

In this article, we will borrow the concepts from critical theories to regard place naming as the illustration of state power on its symbolic landscape by examining all the renamed streets in Taipei City, the capital of Taiwan.

The first part of the article mainly expounds upon the significance of the changes in the street-naming during each period. Attention is given to the interrelated spatial implication of naming in each period. The second part focuses

on how different political regimes used toponymic inscription to promote their own ideas behind varied symbolic landscapes, and how each regime re-coded the legacies left by an earlier regime. The final part discusses the issue of Taiwan's subjectivity based on empirical studies of street-naming and toponomy. We try to focus on the naming consciousness between different periods (Qing, Japanese occupation, KMT and DPP) to discuss the subjectivity of Taiwan.

2 The Rule of Street-naming in Different Regimes

When someone looks at a map of Taipei, they may be confused about where they are. There are so many streets named after the city and province names of mainland China, such as Beiping E. Rd, Changchun Rd, Nanjing E. Rd and Liaoning St, that one would think they were in China. It is just like Lung Ying-tai wrote: "I lived in the city named as Taipei; it is similar to an unfolded Chinese history map" (Lung 2009, 34). Why are so many Chinese place names inscribed on the streets of Taipei?

To answer this question, we need to trace the street-naming process. Taipei's street names have transited from the Qing dynasty, through Japanese era to the present day. Based on Taipei's street names on the map of the late Qing dynasty (Figure 1), we can fit all the street names of Qing Taipei into the following five naming rules:

1. The streets were named according to the main local natural landscape, such as river, hill and so on.
2. The streets were named after an important institution, such as a temple, a government building, a military unit and so on.
3. The streets were named after the main economic activity in the area, such as agriculture, commerce or handicraft industry and so on.
4. The streets were named after an ethnic group, such as plain aboriginal people, *ha-ka* people and so on.
5. The streets were named with auspicious words for blessing.

There were 154 streets on the map of late Qing Taipei. According to the number of streets in each naming rule (Table 1), the most of them (about 48.7%) of streets were named with important institution, the second most number (about

18.8%) of streets were named with Chinese auspicious words and the third most (about 16.2%) of streets were named with local economic activities. Back to Taipei history, from 1875 until the beginning of Japanese rule in 1895, Taipei was part of Tamsui county (淡水縣) of Taipei prefecture (台北府) and the prefectural capital. Taipei remained a temporary provincial capital before it officially became the capital of Taiwan in 1894. It showed that the Qing Empire had not paid much attention to Taipei until the late 19th century; hence the most street names happened through the process which people perceived, comprehended and shaped their places. Apparently, the streets of Taipei were named mainly to reflect local conspicuous buildings and economic activities but not political symbols. At the same time, we can see that the main street names recorded the temples, trade companies and economic activities, thus showing the cultural nexus of power in Taiwan local society.

Naming rules	Natural landscape	Important institution	Economic activities	Ethnic group	Auspicious words	Total
Sum	19	75	25	6	29	154
Percentage	12.3%	48.7%	16.2%	4%	18.8%	100

Table 1: The types of naming rules in Qing Taipei. (Source: The Formosan Daily 1905, 5)

Taiwan became a Japanese colony in 1895. In the beginning of the Japanese colonial period, Japanese governors basically showed their respect for Taiwan's residents. They did not rename the streets of Taiwan until the mid-occupation period. Based on the policy of national assimilation, the Japanese regime conducted the "Renaming the *chō*" project in 1916 (Tainan state, law no.93, 1916). The street names of Taipei, Taichung, and Tainan were simultaneously revised with Japanese city planning. In 1919, Tainan city altered its street names first, and then Taipei and Taichung city followed the prefecture system of Japan. When city administration began in 1920, the government planned to rename the city streets of Taiwan.



Figure 1: The Taipei city map in 1897. (Source: Zeng 1958, 213)

Taipei began its city administration in September 1920, and two years later, the Taipei city government divided the city region into 64 administrative divisions after the Japanese municipality system *chō* (町). At first, it adopted the original street names of Qing dynasty, but then the Japanese renamed Taipei's administrative divisions in Japanese prefectural style *chō*. The street names of Taipei city were revised at the same time.

Among the three cities, Taipei retained the most traditional place-names for its new *chō* names, whereas Taichung and Tainan fully adopted Japanese style place names for their *chō* names. According to The Formosan reports, the Japanese regime originally intended to translate Taipei's street names into totally Japanese style place names. (The Formosan Daily 1916, 5) However, the Japanese governor Den Kenjiro (田健治郎, 1855–1930) surprisingly demanded that the Taipei urban planning committee should respect local history. Hence, the *chō* names of Taipei hold more traditional Taiwanese style.

In March 24, 1922, Taipei city announced 64 new *chō*. About one third of them completely or partly followed traditional place names. The Dadowcheng (大稻埕) administration area, where most Taiwanese resided, had almost all localized *chō* names. But the walled Taipei administrative area where the most Japanese lived had Japanese domestic style *chō* names. There was only one exception, the Mongka administrative area of Taipei city, which contained only 4 local *chō* names in contrast to its large population of Taiwanese. Nevertheless, even when named in Japanese style, they have retained their local characteristic. This naming system showed the local features and characteristics (Table 2). The principles of renaming *chō* revealed a connection with the local population during the Japanese regime.

From the process of Japanese project "Renaming the *chō*", apparently, the Japanese regime tended to localize Taiwan cities with similar domestic street names in order to assimilate Taiwan residents. On the other hand, Japanese governors of Taiwan still paid respect to local people. One third of *chō* names followed the original place names. In addition, there were seven Japanese style place names named after the local features.

In August 1945, the Japanese regime surrendered to the Allied Nations and the Komintang took over Taiwan on October 25. Promptly, on November 17, the *Office of the Chief Executive of Taiwan Province* introduced *The Regulation of Street-Renaming for Taiwan Province* to eradicate the concepts of Japanese authority. According to the Regulation, every county of Taiwan had to revise its street names in two month time.

	Chinese style place names		Japanese style place names			
Japanese /total population	All follow the old place names	Partly follow the old place names	Naming according the local landscape	Naming for Japanese elite	Naming after an important institution	Others
over 75%	Hokumon chō Seimonchō Nanmonchō	Eirakuchō Shoinchō Ryūkōchō	Izumichō	Taishōchō Akashichō Kodamachō Sakumachō Nogichō		Honmachi Yamatochō Oimatsuchō Kyōmachi Suehirochō Sakaechō Shineichō Chitosechō Asahichō Omotechō
50–75%	Shinkichō Tōmonchō	Bunbuchō	Kawabata chō	Kabayama chō		Kotobukichō Wakatakechō
25–50%	Kenseichō Hakkōchō Koteichō Kamikeifu chō	Mihashi chō	Tsukijichō			Saiwaichō Shintomichō Nishikichō Fukuzumichō
10–25%	Maruyama chō		Irifunechō Hamachō		Ōmiyachō Suidōchō Motozono chō	Tomitachō
under10 %	Shimokeifu chō Taiheichō Dairyūdōchō Nisshinchō	Ryūzanji chō	Kawaichō Minatochō		Ōhashichō Nishizono chō Higashizon ochō Babachō Horiechō Onarichō Midorichō Miyamae chō Yanagichō	Ariakechō Hokumonchō
	14	6	7	6	12	19
64	20		44			

Table 2: The naming system of *chōs* in Taipei city (1922). (Source: Taiwan Zongdufu Guanfang 1922, 152–157; Taiwan Zongdufu 1922)

A summary of this Regulation of Street-Renaming is as follows:

1. The street names were adopted in order to memorialize Japanese figures, e.g. Meiji, Taishō, Kodama, Nogi.

2. The street names were adopted in order to spread the glory of Japanese, e.g. Daiwa, Asahi.
3. The streets were named after the Japanese famous people for memory, e.g.Wakamatsu, Asashi matsu.

The street-renaming also had to follow the new rules:

1. The street names were adopted to carry forward the Chinese spirit, e.g. Chunghua Rd, Hsinyi Rd, and Hoping Rd.
2. The street names were adopted to propagandize the Three People's Principles of Sun Yat-sen, e.g. Mintsu Rd, Minchuan Rd, and Minsheng Rd.
3. The street names were adopted to commemorate national figures, e.g. Chungshan Rd and Chungzheng Rd.
4. The street names were adopted to present the local geography or folks.

Based on the above principles, all the street names of Taipei were changed back to their original names, such as North gate Street, South gate Street, and so on. But shortly after 1947, the *Office of the Chief Executive of Taiwan Province* decided to rename all Taipei's streets with the place names of mainland China. They take Zhongshan Rd as the central meridian and Zhongxiao Rd as the central latitude**,** and divided Taipei city into four districts. From then on, the place names of mainland China were inscribed to the streets of Taipei city, depending on their location in China.

The street-renaming of Taiwan has not only uprooted Japan and implanted China but also removed domestic spirit. The Kuomintang completely demonstrated its "Great China" ideology with the street map in Taipei, and every single city as well. Even if this renaming system matched the concept of spatial orientation, it totally erased local identity and the identification of the residents with their locality.

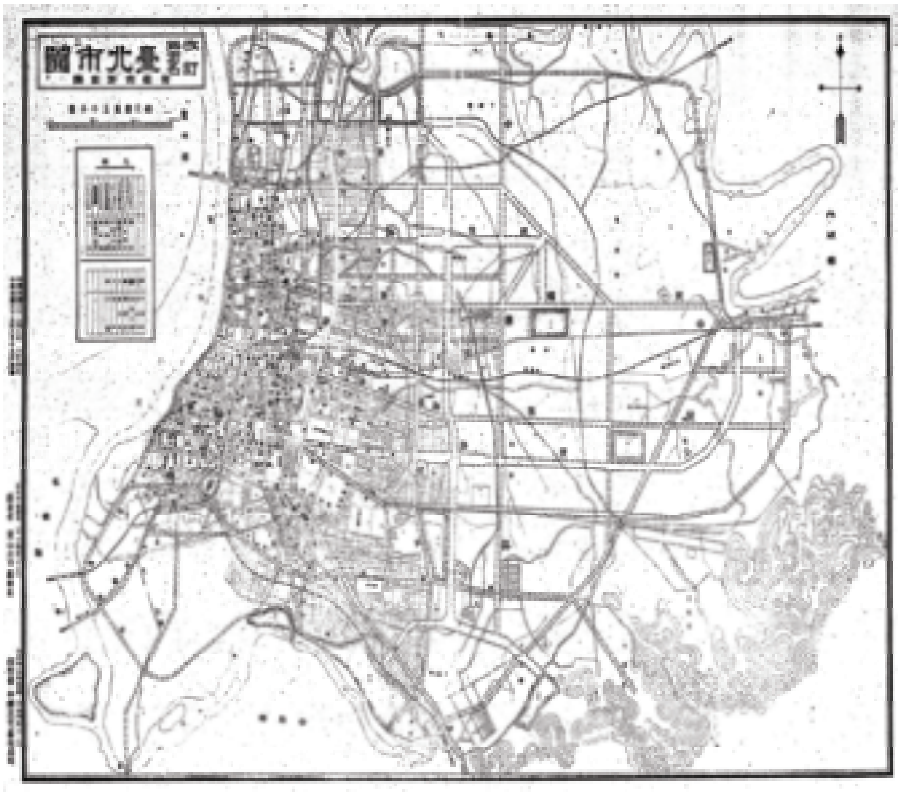


Figure 2: The Taipei city map in 1947. (Source: Zeng 1958, 216)

3 Toponymic Inscription and Taiwanese Subjectivity

Before entering the discussion of street-naming and its relationship with "Taiwan subjectivity", some clarification of the "Taiwan subjectivity" issue needs to be made. "Taiwan subjectivity" is a multi-dimensional issue. It covers issues such as the international status of Taiwan. It could also mean the "Taiwanese identity".

Discussion of Taiwan's political history almost invariably impact upon contemporary debates over the island's national identity and "Taiwan subjectivity". As Peter Berger (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 23–25) argues, social construction of national reality originates from everyday life experience taken for granted in socialization. The naming of places is one of the primary means of attempting to construct clearly demarcated spatial identities. Therefore, we still require a critical analysis of the social and political struggles over spatial inscription and related

toponymic practices. There have been three different governments in Taiwan since 1684 to the present. We can realize the characteristics of the three different regimes from place names' transitions. In the Qing dynasty, the naming of Taipei streets occurred naturally and characterized its domestic features. The Qing regime had not intervened in the naming of streets. This shows its negativity and inactivity as well. For those people who lived in Taiwan, they only regarded Taiwan as an impermanent place and still had no Taiwanese consciousness.

From the process of Japanese "Renaming the *chō*", we notice that characteristics of a colonial regime. As Taiwan was Japan's first overseas colony, Japanese intentions were to turn the island into a showpiece "model colony". (Pastreich 2003) As a result, much effort was made to improve the island's economy, industry, and public works and to change its culture. In 1919, Den Kenjirō (田健治郎) was appointed to be the first civilian Governor-General of Taiwan. Prior to his departure for Taiwan, he conferred with Prime Minister Hara Takashi, where both men agreed to pursue a policy of *dōka* (literally assimilation). Taiwan would be viewed as an extension of the home Islands, and the Taiwanese would be educated to understand their role and responsibilities as Japanese subjects. The new policy was formally announced in October 1919. This policy was continued by the Colonial Government for the next 20 years. The final period of Japanese rule in Taiwan began with the eruption of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and ended along with the Second World War in 1945. With the rise of militarism in Japan in the mid to late 1930s, the office of Governor-General was again held by military officers, and Japan sought to utilize resources and material from Taiwan for use in the war effort. To this end, the cooperation of the Taiwanese would be essential, and the Taiwanese would have to be fully assimilated as members of Japanese society. As a result, earlier social movements were banned and the Colonial Government devoted its full efforts to the "*kōminka* movement" (皇民化 *kōminka undō*: to become people of the Japanese *Mikado*), aimed at fully Japanizing Taiwanese society. Between 1936 and 1940, the *kōminka* movement sought to build "Japanese spirit" (*Yamato damashi*) and Japanese identity among the populace, while the later years from 1941 to 1945 focused on encouraging Taiwanese to participate in the war effort. Following the Second World War, Taiwan was placed under the control of the Chinese Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*). However, the government's program of "De-Japanization" created cultural estrangement, along with tensions between the growing population of migrants from the mainland and the pre-war residents of the island, which

culminated into the 228 incident in 1947. At the same time, the *Office of the Chief Executive of Taiwan Province* decided to rename all Taipei's streets with the place names of mainland China. It showed the goal of *Kuomintang* eventual reunification with mainland China. Of course, it is understandable that after a long exposure to China-centered education, people living in Taiwan, consciously or subconsciously, have great difficulty in separating themselves from "Chinese culture." However, we also realize that cultural identity differs from national identity. The consciousness of Taiwanese subjectivity is based on the respect for the right of self-determination to which Taiwan's inhabitants are entitled. According to the Taiwanese subjectivity issue, most scholars focus on education about Taiwanese political identity. Renaming places will be another strategy to emphasize questions of nationalism and ideology. If all street names in main cities of Taiwan can be renamed according to local history or landscape, it will help Taiwanese local identity and promote Taiwanese nation consciousness, and establish Taiwanese subjectivity.

4 Conclusion

The transition of street names in Taipei city illustrates the varied models of different regimes. Street-naming occurred naturally and was characterized by domestic features but not the consciousness of political power in Qing Taipei, because the Qing Empire had no positive government strategy and no subjectivity pronouncing of the Taiwan frontier.

During the Japanese colonial era, Japanese governors did not change the street names of Taipei until the mid-colonial period. At that time, the Japanese regime executed the "Japanization of Taiwan" policy, and adopted a strategy of renaming the streets in the main cities of Taiwan. Seemingly, the Taiwan governors did not completely agree with this renaming strategy, and there were still about one third of Taipei's streets named directly or partly after traditional place names.

After World War Two, the Kuomintang dominated Taiwan and rapidly and resolutely renamed all Taipei streets. The Kuomintang changed all the Japanese street names in a very short time. By this time, the street names had lost their original meanings and become an enlightenment tool to all citizens.

From the Qing dynasty, Japanese colonial period to the post-war, we perceived that as the relationship between habitants and place-names changed, there was less

connection between people and the land. While the Taiwanese alienated from their land, the local identity and the national consciousness became weaker. This is the main reason that the subjectivity of Taiwan has not been properly constructed.

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