

Towards the End of a Long Journey: Assessing the Debate on Taiwanese Nationalism and National Identity in the Democratic Era

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Summary

The era of democratization which began in the mid-1980s has caused a new process of identity formation in Taiwan. Although the academic literature on this issue is abundant today, current research still struggles with a precise definition and concept of Taiwanese identity, in particular in terms of *national* identity. This paper assesses the debate on contemporary Taiwanese nationalism and national identity. In general, it confirms the observation made by many scholars that the island's history and political development have led to contending or competing identities. This 'identity split' has not impeded Taiwan in becoming a nation in its own right, however. The ongoing process of nation-building on the island is essentially based on an overarching quest for sovereignty and the desire on the part of the people to soundly identify with their liberal democratic state. More recent trends, though, suggest that Taiwan's national identity may gradually be closing the gates to the prospect of 'one China,' transforming it from 'civic' into 'civic-cum-ethnic.' The PRC faces a dilemma in this respect: if it maintains its pressure on Taiwan, it will fuel Taiwanese nationalism even further. Should China choose to modify its position on the 'one China' principle and become more flexible, however, then it will encourage Taiwanese nationalism to consolidate the existing 'identity divide' between the island and the mainland, thus strengthening the Taiwanese nation.

I Is Taiwan a Nation? National Identity in the Taiwan Studies Field

In one of her more recent writings in the field of Taiwan studies, Shelley Rigger pointed out three critical issues that have been investigated by academic research on Taiwanese national identity: (1) the Taiwan people's understanding of their identity as Taiwanese or Chinese; (2) their relationship to the Taiwanese state; and (3) ac-

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