

(Un)doing nationalism through familial metaphors: a case of Taiwan

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Summary

Combining corpus-assisted method and discourse analysis, this paper aims to study familial metaphors such as mother, wife, and parents and analyze how ideals of gender roles are intersected with socio-political transitions in testing times.

Content

Ideals of femininities and masculinities (to a lesser extent) are often used to mobilize citizens in testing socio-political times. Familial roles such as mothers and wives are prime targets for politicians crafting ideals of nationalism. In this presentation, I use political speeches delivered by female politicians in Chinese/Taiwanese modern history, namely, Mme. Chiang Kai Shek, and Annette Lu, to argue that ideal familial roles always intersected with cultural and political transitions. Moreover, these ideals parallel changes in a society through feudalistic, modern, and authoritarian to democracy. Combining both corpus assisted method and discourse analysis and studying the argumentative strategies and familial metaphors such as mothers, wives and parents, I offer a comprehensive view on how gender, nation, and family values have been articulated in times of transitions on the island in the 20th century.

Taiwan situated in the strategic center in the Pacific Ocean can offer an interesting case study as it has experienced brief colonization by the Dutch and the Spanish in the 16th century and was included as one of the prefecture to Fujian, one of the provinces in China during the Qing dynasty (the last Chinese dynasty). At the beginning of the 20th century, Taiwan became the first colony of Japan (1894–1945) as a result of the first Sino-Japanese War, experienced a 50 year authoritarian rule as the then ruling party KMT (Kuomintang) to the island as it lost the civil war to the Chinese communists in the late

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1940s. In the late 1980s, the island started to democratize rapidly with much opposition demanding changes and direct elections. In 1996, the island held the first presidential election in Chinese history, in 2000 the then opposition party, DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) won the election and ended the 50 year monopoly of KMT. Since the turn of the 21st century, the island has experienced three party successions.

Following Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002), Chang (2002) and Li (2011), I see gender and politics as mutually intertwined and I am interested in the following questions: 1) Do political transitions from feudal society to modern state and from authoritarianism to democracy change the way we view gender roles and expectations? 2) If gender and politics are mutually embedded, do shifts in political ideology change the way candidates and voters view issues? 3) Does Confucian stress on women's subordination and subservience still pervade 21st-century Taiwan? Our results show that Mme. Chiang Kai Shek in the period of modern China saw women's subordinate status and illiteracy as one of the major culprits for China's malaise. Ways to advance women's status and the emphasis on women's education were incorporated into Chinese nationalism and patriotism where women were shown to lead in all spheres in society and their potentials were boundless. Women were discursively constructed as strong and rebellious and their defiance to Chinese patriarchy was allowed so long as it was an act of patriotism. Gender socialization was emphasized, and their well-bounded familial roles paralleled China's transition from a feudal society to a modern state and emphasized the importance of Chinese nationalism which had reigned in Taiwan from the 1940s to the 1980s.

Annette Lu was one of the most forceful feminists and human rights advocates in Taiwan. Her belief that gender equality is a fundamental human right served as one of the driving forces for her political convictions. By embedding her gender ideals with democratic appeals, her rhetoric constantly tested the limitations of tolerance when Taiwan was under martial law. Her stress on being human and then learning how to become men or women echoed much of the mistreatment of women in Taiwan in the 1950s, a society where Chinese patriarchal beliefs saw the dependence and obedience of women to men as the holy grail dictating gender relations. Lu's stress on the agency and independence of gender roles resonated well in the Taiwanese society when being submissive to Chinese patriarchy and Chinese nationalism was rampant.

By studying the rhetoric of these prominent politicians in time, we should get a better understanding of how changing ideas and ideals for gender, nation, and family can serve as resources for testing theories on gender, politics and language.