DIASPORA REGIME INTO NATION: MEDIATING HYBRID NATIONHOOD IN TAIWAN

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Abstract

Based on an empirical inquiry, this article seeks to assess the role of television in the process of national identity-formation in Taiwan. It situates both the formation and transformation of national identity in the contingent particularities of post-WWII Taiwan, where a powerful regime in exile met an indigenous majority population that gave rise to what I refer to as "the double-homeland complex." This article sets out to explore not only whether but how the inhabitants of Taiwan have appropriated the quintessentially modern sense of nationhood and to identify the role that television has played in shaping and mediating that appropriation. This thesis first examines how multiple identities, especially Chinese and Taiwanese identities, have been articulated and represented by the media since 1971; and, secondly, how different ethnic groups in Taiwan have engaged in different ways to acco-mmodate the variety of identities against the backdrop of a changing media environment. It is Taiwan's uniqueness, in terms of the degrees of post-war media control and current media globalisation, that makes it a fascinating case study of the interplay between the local, the national and the global in the formation of national identity. In this article, the idea of "hybridity" receives close attention as a basis for evaluating the role of television in national identity-formation in Taiwan.

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Introduction

This article sets out to resolve an apparent paradox pertaining to the role of the media (and television in particular) in the formation of national identity in Taiwan. Despite two compelling and apparently unfavourable cultural forces (national television and transnational television), a sense of political identification with Taiwan has grown among the population, and the adjective "Taiwanese" has increasingly become synonymous with "national." Decades of top-down national media control aimed at fostering a supposedly "national" (i.e. unified "Chinese") identity have not prevented a "local" identity from growing; nor has the "global" culture accessible via Taiwan's high cable/satellite penetration weakened this identity.

The paradoxical relationship in question has two further dimensions. On the one hand, from 1971 to 1996 in Taiwan there were only three terrestrial television channels, all of which were owned and/or controlled by the Chinese Nationalist Party (also known as Kuomintang, KMT — the political party which formerly ruled China and fled to Taiwan when it was defeated in 1949 by the Chinese Communist Party, CCP). The KMT exploited the mass media deliberately to promote Chinese nationalism. On the other hand, in the run-up to, and following, the process of political democratisation in the late 1980s there was a remarkable multiplication of channels in Taiwan, to an extent unmatched by other Asian countries, and this made available a huge provision of foreign programmes to the Taiwanese audience.

This article addresses the aforementioned paradox by exploring *whether* and *how* the media, and television in particular, have contributed to the configuration of national identity in Taiwan. The question will be approached in a manner different from the conventional theories, which simplistically posit that national media necessarily bring into being and strengthen national identity while global media necessarily undermine that identity. Drawing insights from the relevant literature on media representation and audience reception, the empirical evidence is grounded from three case studies including a content analysis of television serial drama synopses, a textual analysis of national cinematic texts, and in-depth interviews with television families. But, before going to the details, the diasporic character of Taiwan's dominant political force should be taken into consideration to grasp the complexity of media-identity relations.

The KMT as a Diaspora Regime

Few political parties in the world are as powerful as the Chinese Nationalist Party (also known as Kuomintang, KMT) by measures of the latter's dominant power in the spheres of Taiwan's national politics, economy, and culture. In view of the fact that the KMT was originally a regime in exile in Taiwan, how can we explain this transformation? Clearly, many factors are important, but certainly the media have been especially significant in helping to build such a diasporic but powerful regime. The argument here, in a nutshell, is that the media not only contributed to the consolidation of the KMT regime in Taiwan, but also became a constitutive part of that regime.

Let us first consider the question of how the KMT, as a regime in exile following its defeat and withdrawal to Taiwan in 1949, was able to survive and subsequently prosper in Taiwan, where it had to govern a somewhat alienated majority popula-

tion (i.e. the "native Taiwanese"). How did the KMT overcome all these difficulties and legitimise its principal aim of consolidating itself in Taiwan with a view to mobilising the population to retake the mainland? In fact, in order to achieve this aim, the KMT needed to create a national identity in Taiwan which was congruent with the Chinese homeland to which it continued to lay claim.

But, however widespread it may be among nationalists themselves, the conception of a nation-state as a ready-made "package" incorporating a national identity based on shared descent, history, language, ethnicity or whatever is quite unrealistic. A major problem with this agenda was that conceptions of nationhood among the population the KMT now controlled were largely contradictory. The "Mainlander" incomers, on the one hand, for whom the idea of a nationalist cause was still barely a generation old, were actually "in exile" and were separated from the homeland in which they were expected to realise their aspirations. The "native Taiwanese," on the other hand, though living in their own homeland, had already had one alien Japanese identity imposed upon them and were unlikely to be enthusiastic about submitting to another.

Another obstacle was the lack of a common language. The majority of Taiwanese had no command of Mandarin, while the KMT and the "Mainlanders" spoke no local Taiwanese languages. Probably about two-thirds of the Taiwanese population at large were far more familiar with Japanese (Lai et al 1991, 93-96). For their mother tongue, most Taiwanese spoke one or more of a range of "dialects" such as Hokkien and Hakka which, although mostly stemming from the same Sino-Tibetan roots as Mandarin, were so far removed from it as to be, certainly in their spoken form, virtually separate languages.

A third threat to the KMT's consolidation of its own brand of national culture was the impact of foreign culture, particularly from Japan and the United States. On the one hand, Japanese culture was deemed to have left behind a negative influence, whereas, on the other hand, it was feared that military and economic dependence on the United States might lead too far in the direction of cultural dependence. Indeed, Chiang Kai-shek himself is said to have suggested that too great an emphasis on materialism could have a demoralising effect on the population and thus weaken their resistance to communism (Lee 1980).

Among the obvious means to KMT's initial end of establishing a uniform national culture were policing, compulsory military service and compulsory education. Just as pivotal to its design, however — particularly in view of its alarm at the effectiveness of Communist propaganda in the battle for the mainland — was the control of the media.

To grasp the complexity of KMT's nation building project and its consequences, I attempt in the following section to connect the Taiwanese case with a broader research agenda, namely, the intricate relationship between cultural globalisation and hybrid identities. Of particular relevance here are the concepts of "hybridisation" and the "global-local nexus." I shall offer a brief discussion of each of these in turn.

National Identity: Hybrid, Yes; De-centred, No

The notion of "hybridity," as opposed to the essentialist idea of a fixed (group-based or placed-based) identity, has gained currency in the literature on cultural globalisation and national identities (Bhabha 1990; Hall 1992; Hannerz 1996). It is

argued that the increased mobility of peoples, capital and goods has brought about the mixing of different cultures and the emergence of hybrid forms of culture/identity everywhere (Appadurai 1996). Bhabha offers a useful definition, seeing hybridity as a "third space," as "a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha 1990, 211).

Yet, the term "hybridity" is not entirely satisfactory. It has a derivative meaning that refers negatively to "something less than the 'species' from which they are derived" (Modood 2000, 185) with "a loss of purity, wholeness, authenticity" (Pieterse 1995, 54-55). The term also implies an ontological purity of formerly separate identities and indigenous cultures, which merge subsequently to become hybrid identities/cultures. The problem of the concept is that it "evokes the myth of pure indigenous cultural forms, which are then supposed to be 'hybridised' along with globalisation" (Alasuutari 2000, 263). In addition, the hybridisation thesis tends to celebrate hybrid forms of culture/identity uncritically and does not take the question of power seriously. The hybridisation thesis thus runs the risk of sanctifying the *fait accompli* caused by asymmetrical power relations exerted by colonialism or state violence (Pieterse 1995, 55).

Nevertheless, the hybridisation thesis still has its strengths. By employing the metaphors of "routes" in place of "roots" (Gilroy 1993; Hall 1995) the hybridisation thesis not only has an empowering potential but also rescues us from falling into an essentialist position. Furthermore, it enables us to transcend the homogenisation arguments offered by the crude version of the media imperialism thesis.

A point of departure in discussing cultural hybridisation is that the hybridisation thesis itself needs to be tested. Some commentators therefore call for empirical studies which give substance to the impact of global media/culture on local media/culture (Alasuutari 2000, 259; Wang et al. 2000). Similarly, as Pieterse argues:

> A theory [of hybridisation] which … focus[es] on fuzziness and melange, cut-and-mix, criss-cross and crossover, might well be a relief in itself. Yet, ironically, of course, it would have to prove itself by giving as neat as possible a version of messiness (Pieterse 1995, 55).

Cultural hybridity does not assume precisely the same form around the globe. In order to explore cultural hybridisation empirically, as a phenomenon that accompanies cultural globalisation, the notion of hybridity needs reformulation. First, "hybridity" cannot be conceptualised as a fused culture/identity in which all its constitutive cultures/identities are no longer distinguishable and cease to function socially. Contrary to usual supposition, the idea of national identity does not run against (and still far from being invalidated by) the rise of hybrid identities. Writing in the British context, both Hall and Modood emphasise an emerging new type of hybrid identity (Hall 1991; Modood 2000). As Hall explains:

> Third generation young Black men and women know they come from the Caribbean, know that they are Black, know that they are British. They want to speak from all three identities. They are not prepared to give up any one of them. … Because they need to know that difference, that difference that makes a difference in how they write their poetry, make their films, how they paint. It makes a difference. … They need it as a resource. They are all those identities together (Hall 1991, 59; emphasis added).

Clearly, as noted above, the hybrid forms of identity do not necessarily run against the quest for a national identity as one which is renegotiated rather than cancelled (i.e. re-territorialised but not yet borderless). In other words, there is room for overlapping allegiances.

Secondly, "hybridity" is better conceptualised as opening up spaces for accommodation as well as resistance between different senses of belonging to the nation, than merely as a harmonious state of cultural mixing that can always be celebrated. The process of hybridisation is replete with ambiguities, conflicts, contradictions, and the potentials for domination as well as empowerment (Pieterse 1995). This leads to a third reformulation of the concept, indicating that "hybridity" is not "'as the label of flattening sameness'… [with] undifferentiated Difference (with a capital D) [which] marked unproblematically against a EurAmcentric standard" (Morley 2000, 232).

Extending these reformulated conceptions of hybridity to the Taiwanese context, it is perhaps misleading to assume that there is a presumably Taiwanese identity with undifferentiated difference, and that there is a unified Sino-centric identity to which the former stands in opposition. As I will argue later in this article, in the Taiwanese case, the national identity has come to encompass of late a wide range of hybrid formations. It is the ways in which they have creolised and the contexts in which people appropriate (and are distributed) along this "continuum of hybridities" (Pieterse 1995, 56) that need to be the focal points for further exploration. Of course, this continuum of cultural hybridisation cannot properly be conceptualised without taking into account the interplay of the local and the global.

National Identity between the Local and the Global

Amongst the competing propositions which are concerned with the media-identity relationship at the intersection of the global and the local are two of particular importance: (1) the national media forge national culture and thus contribute to national identity-formation; (2) with the multiplication of television channels, the increased access to the foreign media weakens or endangers national identity. Both propositions are problematic as they assume either positive or negative media effects (national versus foreign media) on national identity. It is noteworthy that neither proposition places the audience at the centre of theorisation, but rather each implies the existence of a generally passive audience.

Katz considers both the positive and negative effects of television. In his judgement, "the rapid multiplication of channels" means that television has ceased to function as "the medium of national political integration" (Katz 1996, 22-23). This implies that previously audiences shared a limited number of television channels, which promoted integration into the nation, whereas now television is segmenting its audiences as the number of channels increases. Curran shares a similar premise that national television is a positive force for national integration, though he disagrees with Katz's view that this role is now being undermined by the multiplication of channels (Curran 1998).

However, the premises of both their arguments can be questioned, i.e. the ideas of a fragmented or unified audience and of the global/local divide. First, it is premature to substantiate the claim of either an already fragmented audience or a unified audience. In either case, it remains an open question whether national iden-

tity would become weaker. Secondly, the global/local distinction should not be held in absolute terms. For Massey, "there has never been a historical moment untouched by the world beyond; in that sense the global has always been part of the construction of the local" (Massey 1994, 116). Or, as Giddens states, "globalisation can … be defined as the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice versa. … Local transformation is as much a part of globalisation as the lateral expansion of social connections across time and space" (Giddens 1990, 64). The interplay of the global and the local does not simply result in a weaker or robust national identity.

But, to be fair to the arguments held by Katz and Curran, it is true that national identity is increasingly open to challenge, especially in the contemporary media-saturated context. It is equally true that the relationship between communications and national identity might be re-structured in the globally dimensioned environment of today, in which instantaneous electronic communications provide an unprecedented degree of "connectedness" between nations, cultures and localities. We all are becoming a bit more cosmopolitan than ever in the sense that we are exposed by the media to other cultures without leaving home (Robbins 1998).

This proliferation and prevalence of mediated experience, along with other factors, contributes to "the plurality of choices which confronts individuals" (Giddens 1991, 82-84). Indeed, the cultural landscape that is profoundly shaped by the globalisation of media has, as some scholars observe, confronted us with a choice between a cultural home and the "cultural supermarket" (Hall 1992, 303) where diverse cultures are on offer and identities become *detached* and/or *disembedded*.

To a certain extent we may agree that there are indeed a wide range of identities available to us. But at stake here is how freely people can actually choose between identities in their local and global forms, namely, a presumably local *cultural home* and the presumably global *cultural supermarket*. It can be argued that, first, the "choice" being constantly made between identities — ranging from the local to the global — is not out of freedom but because, in an age of late modernity, as Giddens points out, "we all … are forced to do so — we have no choice but to choose" (Giddens 1991, 80-81). Of particular importance in this respect is that we should not overstate the freedom of choosing between identities through the acts of consumption alone (Billig 1995, 139). Thus, the individual freedom to choosing identities is not actually free from the coextensive social constraints. As Dunn (1998, 63) argues, "identity is forged in the encounter between a conscious and reflexive self striving for its own *realisation* and the *limits* of biography, society, and history" (emphases added). Arguing for a social relational theory of identity formation, Dunn emphasises the importance of "providing a picture of the *dialectical interplay* between self-determination and social determinism" (Dunn 1998, 63).

Secondly, "detached (or disembedded) identities" should not be overstated. Rather, the very meanings of identities are about *attachments* to, and *embeddedness* in, *times* and *places*. Few really qualify as footloose cosmopolitans in the narrow sense of cosmopolitanism, meaning a "noncommitment and unfeeling detachment from particular affective and concrete ties [to specific times and places, etc.]" (Cheah 1998, 24). The (actually existing) cosmopolitan figure is not likely to be the one who freely travels between cultures, picking a little bit from here and a little bit from

there, with no need of home(land), no attachment to any particular culture and without a sense of national identity. As Robbins argues, "instead of an ideal of detachment, actually existing cosmopolitanism is a reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance" (Robbins 1998, 3). From this, we might argue that the choice between a cultural home and the cultural supermarket is not confined to be an either-or one. As noted above in the discussion of cultural hybridisation, there is a possibility that allegiances forged at different levels ranging from the local to the global can overlap.

From the above, we may conclude that cosmopolitanism should not be seen as the opposite of nationalism. Nor does the engagement with other cultures necessarily result in the loss of self (culture/identity). As Robbins observes, "like nations, worlds too are 'imagined.' … There is a growing consensus that cosmopolitanism sometimes works together with nationalism rather than in opposition to it" (Robbins 1998, 2). This being the case, some of the assertions made by the post-nationalist thesis are arguably premature (e.g. Appadurai 1996). I wish to argue here that it remains as relevant as ever to take nationalism seriously in an increasingly globalised/cosmopolitan world. As Cheah remarks, the postnationalist thesis mistakenly "takes the distending of the hyphen [between nation and state] in contemporary globalisation as a sign of the disintegration of both nation and state" (Cheah 1998, 33). Moreover, as Hannerz concludes, global cultures do not provide a robust alternative loyalty although for some people the nation has worked "less well as a source of cultural resonance" (Hannerz 1996, 88). Equally, I agree with Anthony Smith's remark that national identity "is likely to continue to command humanity's allegiances for a long time to come" (Smith 1991, 176) but for reasons different from his. The continued importance of national identity is not due to its robustness vis-ŕ-vis other forms of identity, but because the national and the cosmopolitan do not always develop independently of each other. Nor do they necessarily stand against each other as if there could only be either cosmopolitanism or national identity. The same goes for the dynamics of the global and the local.

Mediating National Identity in Taiwan

Based on the empirical study of the Taiwanese case conducted earlier, I now return to the key question of how — if at all — the media have contributed to the formation of national identity in Taiwan. To answer this question satisfactorily, it is necessary to address the paradox raised at the beginning of this article, which is this: that despite two factors which might least be expected to favour it — on the one hand, decades of top-down media control aimed at promoting a unified Chinese identity and, on the other, a high level of penetration of foreign programming by cable/satellite television — a Taiwan-centred identity has effected a significant (re-) emergence and development.

In order to resolve this paradox, we need to consider the relationship between media and national identity as one of necessarily *conjunctural mediation* between media representations and audience receptions of nationhood. I adopt the idea of conjunctural mediation because it builds on the strengths of — but also goes beyond — the diffusionist vs. constructivist (Sahlins 1989), transmission vs. ritual (Carey 1989), and powerful media vs. active audience approaches to the intersection of mass media and national identity. What is stressed here is that that these

polarising views in the nationalism and communication literature should be considered as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

In what follows, a summary of the main empirical findings will be followed by a discussion of the nature of the aforementioned paradox. With the empirical evidence in hand, we will then move forward to discuss how the idea of conjunctural mediation can overcome this explanatory barrier and help to clarify the role of the media, and television in particular, in shaping national identity in Taiwan. Finally, I will consider the implications of the research in terms of two broad concerns of media studies: (1) the superiority of the "mediation" model over the "transmission" model; and (2) the importance of a media perspective within theories of nationalism and the analysis of national identity.

The Prime-time Television Serial Dramas. The content analysis of television serial drama synopses between 1971 and 1996 suggests that Taiwan's television was characteristically *Chinese* (but not always *Chinese nationalist*) in terms of its spatial, temporal and linguistic attributes. There are two persistent patterns: (1) China as the centre and Taiwan as a periphery; (2) China with a long history and Taiwan with no pre-1949 (non-Chinese) history of its own. The quantitative analysis of the television serial drama synopses between 1971 and 1996 found that Taiwan's television serial dramas gave priority to Mainland China over Taiwan itself. The presence of Mainland China — as measured by spatial and temporal attributes — has persistently exceeded that of Taiwan in Taiwan's television serial dramas.

This China-oriented representation manifested in the prime-time television serial dramas was even more salient in relation to the political and educational institutions which under-represented the ethnic majority of Taiwan and marginalised local expressions. As I pointed out earlier, the KMT deliberately sought to promote Chinese nationalism, popularise a (unified) Chinese identity and suppress any separate Taiwanese identity, and therefore directly controlled all the terrestrial television channels. The vital importance of the media was tied to the *diasporic* character of the KMT regime, which fled to Taiwan after defeat by its communist rival in 1949 and sought to do everything it could to return to Mainland China. Everything about Mainland China was deliberately preserved in Taiwan by the KMT while Taiwan itself was relegated to a peripheral position in the KMT's conception of the nation. Sensitive traces of Taiwan's past, including Taiwan's colonial past under Japan (1895-1945) and the February 28 Incident of 1947, were rendered invisible in the public domain. The comprehensive dominance of the KMT in Taiwan's national life therefore constituted a specific cultural geography by symbolically creating in Taiwan the *absent presence of China* as well as the *present absence of Taiwan*. For the purpose of promoting Chinese nationalism, very little of Taiwan's historical past (especially that before Taiwan became a refuge for the KMT in flight) has been represented on Taiwan's television.

Cinematic Representation of the Nation. Until 1989, in the rare cases where some traces of Taiwan's pasts were represented, they were made to fit neatly into the narrative of Chinese nationalism. As indicated in the textual analysis of two Taiwanese films, the 1976 film *Victory* represented the KMT as the saviour ("hero" in the film narrative) who put an end to the Japanese rule under which the "native Taiwanese" had suffered for half a century up to 1945. And throughout the narrative of the film *Victory*, the Taiwanese under Japanese colonial rule were repre-

sented as very patriotic towards the Chinese nation. People on both sides of the Taiwan Strait were represented as fighting hand-to-hand against their common enemy — the Japanese (the "villain" in the film narrative). The sameness between the "Mainlanders" and the Taiwanese were emphasised, and Taiwanese identity was represented as naturally subordinate to Chinese identity. Not until 1989, after the lifting of martial law, did another film — *City of Sadness* — tell a different story. In that film, the incoming KMT was represented not as a *saviour* but as a *villain* who victimised the Taiwanese amid the February 28 Incident of 1947, whereas the departing Japanese were represented as much more like *friends* than *enemies* to the Taiwanese. Interestingly, though, while *City of Sadness* marked a notable shift in representations of the nation, we did not detect any such shift in the prime-time television serial dramas by 1996.

In many respects, the two films stand in stark contrast in terms of their construction of the nation: *Victory* is Chinese nationalist in character, whereas *City of Sadness* offers a counterpoint to the long sanctioned Chinese nationalist account of Taiwan's past. However, there are some similarities between the films: (1) both films create a boundary between "us" and "them," and exploit martyrdom to mobilise a nationalist sentiment; (2) they both seek to reconcile the existence of various cultures and diverse ethnic groups within Taiwan. Both films sought to bond the nation in response to national crises that threatened Taiwan (in the 1970s and the late 1980s respectively). *Victory* attempted to incorporate the "native Taiwanese" into the grand narrative of Chinese nationalism, and called for solidarity at the moment of national crisis during the 1970s when Taiwan was at risk of losing its international status and identity. Similarly, *City of Sadness* incorporated "Mainlanders" into Taiwanese identity and tried to make peace with the tortured past. By showing that "Mainlanders" also suffered during the tragic Incident, *City of Sadness* functioned as a kind of mass therapy, calling for mutual understanding and tolerance of different ethnic groups at a time when Taiwan was embarking upon democratisation in the shadow of the Tiananmen Square Massacre in Mainland China. In their different ways both films helped to shape a shared sense of national identity in Taiwan.

Audience Reception of Mediated Nationhood. Through two waves of in-depth interviews with 19 nuclear families, I examined the ways in which the audience appropriated the quintessentially modern sense of nationhood. The examination concentrated on (1) viewers' past and present experiences with television; (2) viewers' interpretations of the two films in question. I provided evidence to underline the importance of television in bonding the nation together. The emergence of television as a nation-wide medium from the early 1970s was vitally important in forming a shared cultural experience for viewers dispersed in all corners of the island by connecting them with the public realm and the outside world. Central to the findings is that the shared viewing experience, particularly at times of national crisis, celebration and mourning, has deeply penetrated the viewers' collective memories, thereby giving rise to a knowable and communicable community for the Taiwanese people, who were previously divided, not least by the lack of a common language. In addition, terrestrial television has continued to play a key role in maintaining national identity in contemporary Taiwan. Despite a radical change in Taiwan's television landscape, television remains a "domestic" (in both senses of

the word) medium. The national and engaged audience has not yet been replaced by a fragmented audience.

The analysis shows that viewers are socially structured by the texts and the culture they share. They are able to share the texts on the level of denotative meanings. It is the media (texts) which make available particular "reading positions" among the possible infinite identifications and which disseminate particular forms of knowledge/sentiments for the audience. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that audience members are knowledgeable and resourceful agents who interpret media texts in various ways. To grasp the full meanings of the text-reader relationship, I have argued that a balanced position should be taken to avoid both textual determinism and sociological reductionism. Intersections among viewers' social positional factors (especially ethnic and generational background) were found to be important in structuring the audience's reception of the two films in question. However, when interpreting a text, viewers' relations with particular interpretative frames derived from social positional factors such as ethnic and generational background are not fixed. In the course of interpreting a text, viewers not only make use of various interpretative frames, but also occasionally distance themselves from this or that interpretative frame.

The Limitations of Two Dominant Perspectives. The research evidence, as summarised above, points to the paradoxical presence of two seemingly contradictory forces: one is the supposedly *centripetal* force realised by the national media (and television in particular), and the other is the *centrifugal* force afforded by the transnational media (and television in particular). These two forces influencing the relationship between the media and national identity in Taiwan are captured in the two dominant theoretical perspectives in the literature: the diffusionist view of national identity-formation and the transmission view of communication. However, as we have seen, neither of these two approaches can resolve the paradox.

In responding to the inadequacies of the diffusionist and transmission views, one might argue that Taiwan represents a unique case where no congruence between national identity and media representation is required. However, I wish to argue that there is a certain link between media representation and the audience's reception of nationhood, but the two dominant perspectives lose sight of it. That is why I adopt the alternative viewing that national identity-formation is a process of conjunctural mediation between media representation and audience reception.

Conjunctural Mediation: the Complexity of Hybrid Nationhood

Why Conjunctural? In seeking to make sense of the Taiwanese case, we first need to locate the case within its shifting historical conjunctures. The Taiwanese nation is in itself a contingent formation; there was no indication of its existence until a century ago. In its recent and equally contingent formation, it was forged out of specific historical conjunctures conditioned by both external and internal forces.

Externally, the (re-)emergence of Taiwanese nationalism was tied to the increasingly unbearable diplomatic isolation of the Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan's official name), starting from 1971 with its loss of UN membership and culminating in

U.S. de-recognition of ROC in 1979. Internally, at the same time, Taiwan became a major economic and trading power. The growth of income and the extension of nine-year compulsory education gave rise to a Taiwan-born middle class whose support was increasingly needed by the ruling KMT in order to compensate for its loss of external support. The rise of the previously illegal organised political opposition from the second half of the 1970s kept pushing the limits of the KMT's endurance. In response to, and as a result of, these external and internal changes, the KMT had to make concessions that gradually distanced itself from the hitherto stringent Chinese nationalism and softened its nationalistic policies in the political democratisation process. Against this backdrop, the KMT reluctantly engaged in a symbolic re-interpretation of its long-held "One China" policy. What is historically *new* in post-Second World War Taiwan is the co-existence of Taiwan *as a part of* and *as apart from* "China," which is interpreted variously as a cultural "China," a political "China," a "China-ROC" and a "China-PRC."

Taiwan has been an independent state in all but name; however, its statehood has remained ambiguous. Political democratisation since 1987 has put an end to the half-century of authoritarian rule under the KMT. The pro-Independence candidate, Chen Shui-Bian, was elected in 2000 as Taiwan's President by direct vote. Yet the nation's official name is still the ROC, a designation which was originally formed in Mainland China after the collapse of the Qing Empire (when Taiwan had already become part of Japan in legal terms). The ROC is not a member of the United Nations and is currently recognised by less than 30 small nations. From across the Taiwan Strait, the People's Republic of China (PRC) regards Taiwan as an inseparable part of China and threatens to unify with it by force if necessary. Despite (or because of) the ambiguity of Taiwan's statehood, the sense of national identity among the population with Taiwan itself has been growing. This trend has been expressed in the "Taiwan First" slogan that has been used in election campaigns in recent years by all the major political parties including the KMT, and was previously expressed in the 1970s student *Geshin Baotai* (literally, "Reform for defending Taiwan") Movement (see Li 1987), which arose in reaction to Taiwan's diplomatic setbacks.

It is thus clear that national identity in Taiwan has been formed under certain specific conjectural conditions. Moreover, national identity-formation should be seen as a mediating process between media texts and audience members.

What Mediations? The term "mediation" is defined by Raymond Williams as an "active" process of relations between "different kinds of being and consciousness" which are "inevitably mediated" (Williams 1977, 98). He rejects the notion of "reflection" and favours the term "mediation" to account for the complexity of social reality. But he also cautions that "mediation" denotes "constitutive" and/or "constituting" rather than "intermediary" (Williams 1977, 99-100). By the same logic, we should consider the media as the constituting part of the mediation process, rather than as an intermediary between two parties (e.g. the state and the nation, or the people and national identity).

Jesus Martin-Barbero also uses the term "mediations" to denote "the articulations between communication practices and social movements and the articulation of different tempos of development with the plurality of cultural matrices" (Martin-Barbero 1993, 188). He discusses the idea with reference to the complex

process involving racial mixture, modernity and tradition, and the blending of "social structures and sentiments" (Martin-Barbero 1993, 2) in Latin America. He argues that this complex process should be considered "more as a process of mediations than of media, a question of culture, and therefore, not just a matter of cognition but of re-cognition" (Martin-Barbero 1993, 2). He goes on to stress the importance of studying "reception," meaning "the resistance and the varied ways people appropriate media content according to manner of use" (Martin-Barbero 1993, 2).

To expand this line of argument offered by these authors, I employ the idea of conjunctural mediation in my analysis of the Taiwanese case, seeking to go beyond the limits of the "transmission" and "diffusionist" perspectives and offer an alternative account of the relationship between the media and national identity. The key propositions are as follows:

1. *Television has contributed to the historical creation of a national community out of signs, sounds and images in the territory of Taiwan. In this way, television has played a timely role in binding together "the nation at risk."*

Together with the introduction of nine-year compulsory education (in Mandarin only) in 1968 and the civil service's widespread use of Mandarin, the emergence of television as a nation-wide medium from the early 1970s onwards gave further impetus to the rise of a single national community of communication (sociability) in Taiwan, whereas the population was previously divided, not least by differences in spoken language. The crucial difference in the age of television was that it became possible to create in Taiwan a community not merely out of signs (i.e. the written Chinese script) but also out of sounds (i.e. Mandarin) and images. A Taiwanese nation bearing the name of the Republic of China was already in place and became a reality for the Taiwanese people who lived there.

Furthermore, the everyday presence of television broadcasting since the early 1970s, offering viewers of different ethnic origins a shared time and space (symbolic commonalties), has enabled them to imagine a community of common destiny. The backdrops against which this community of common destiny became imaginable were, among others: China's threatening presence (though there has been no war between Taiwan and China since 1958), Taiwan's diplomatic setback, and America's abandonment of formal ties to Taiwan and decreasing military support. Television has also bound members of this community together, particularly in moments of national celebration, mourning and crisis. As revealed in the recollections of the informants, the national events of the 1970s (for instance, the annually held Little League World Series baseball contests, Chiang Kai-shek's funeral ceremony, and America's abandonment of Taiwan) were broadcast live and watched by virtually every television household in Taiwan. What matters here is not only that viewers watched the same programmes, but also they felt the same sense of pride, sadness, anger or uncertainty. This confirms that the search for the sense of ontological security, as elaborated by Giddens (1990), was at play in making a nation out of the Taiwanese people.

2. *Television has contributed to flattening difference and diluting antagonism among ethnic groups. Watching television has long been a national activity that transcends the family boundaries in a context in which the traditional rigid differentiation between "native Taiwanese" and "Mainlanders" has become increasingly indistinct.*

In contrast to such romanticised definitions of solidarity as "forms of sharing and co-operation which are genuine and not enforced, that is it implies supportive tolerance and solidarity rather than control" (Barker 1999, 154), the sense of solidarity that initially took root in post-war Taiwan was based more on necessity than will. Notwithstanding the estrangement between the "Mainlanders" and the islanders in the early years of KMT rule, the Taiwanese people of disparate ethnic origins found that they were all "in the same boat" in the face of a military threat from the mainland, a sentiment which was also exploited by the KMT to consolidate itself on Taiwan.

On the basis of these observations, I conclude that Taiwan as an "actually" existing and imaginable national community of common destiny — in Anderson's sense of an "imagined community" (1991) — has been developing since the early 1970s. This robust sense of national identity has in part arisen from, and been reinforced by, the "everyday presence" of television and "togetherness" of television watching. The role of television in mediating the sense of national identity since the early 1970s has been profoundly important. The political community practically imagined as the nation was already *there* in Taiwan: national television (and cinema) not only helped to shape it but also became a constitutive embodiment of it.

3. *From the start, the KMT tightly controlled the media for the purpose of regime consolidation and the promotion of Chinese nationalism, yet the media have not represented a seamless web of meanings. A popular text, regardless of its hegemonic or commercial purpose, is not encoded in the manner of complete ideological closure, for this contradicts its aim of reaching as large an audience as possible.*

Ideological closure in the sense that a popular text conveys a single, dominant ideology is not borne out in the analysis. Thus, to state that media representation under KMT control was an expression of Chinese nationalism is not entirely accurate. National television is almost entirely funded by advertising, and by virtue of that, ratings are important. Yet the audience market was principally constituted by the "native Taiwanese," and with the passage of time the term "Mainlander" is losing its historical significance as a meaningful social marker in Taiwan. Therefore, no text intended to promote a unified Chinese identity could ignore how it might be received by the audience. As we have found in the textual analysis of *Victory*, despite the film's emphasis on Chinese nationalism, it could only gain popularity among the "native Taiwanese" who were the majority of the population by offering some positive roles for the "Taiwanese" characters. Similarly, *City of Sadness*, though endorsing a sense of Taiwanese nationalism, conveyed a pedagogic message transcending the ethnic antagonism between "Mainlanders" and the "native Taiwanese." At the very least, in both films, no one of disparate ethnic origins could be offended as long as a positive message of solidarity was on offer. In both films the boundaries between "us" and "them" relied on a broad definition of "us" that encompassed inhabitants of disparate ethnic origins in Taiwan.

4. *The audience should not be seen as a "tabula rasa" but consists of knowing agents who draw on textual and extra-textual resources to decode what is represented. They interpret the texts in various ways, not only employing but also accommodating various interpretative codes/frames which are sometimes at variance with one another.*

As found in the depth-interviews, viewers are positioned in relation to sociodemographic factors such as ethnicity, gender and age. They are able to draw in-

terpretative resources from textual and extra-textual sources for themselves and utilise several (at times contradictory) interpretative frames to read the text. They can be conformist to some extent but are mostly reflexive and purposeful in relation to the media texts.

More importantly, the readings of the text, like the production of the text, socially structured. Through interactions with their family members, viewers come up with similar if not always consensual conceptions of *the state they (or "we") are in*. Despite gaps between *meanings as inscribed and intended* and *meanings as received and constructed*, a temporal attachment to "the nation" (i.e. in territorial terms, Taiwan) is strengthened from moment to moment via the mediation process between media representation and audience reception. In this sense, it does not really matter whether a text is inherently Taiwanese or Chinese in nationalistic terms; the social behaviour of "collective" viewing is more crucial to the formation of national identity.

5. *The global media, although accessible, have not replaced the position of national media, and national television in particular, in terms of regular viewing patterns. Rather, the global media have localised themselves to become popular in Taiwan, and the audience use the global media from a local perspective.*

National television (both terrestrial and non-terrestrial) remains the prime source of audio-visual infotainment for the Taiwanese viewers. The cable channels watched most frequently by a large audience are those with generalist appeals. Besides, in order to gain popularity, television channels beamed from outside Taiwan have adopted a variety of localisation strategies by reducing their "foreignness" to local viewers. There is also a localised use of global media such as CNN among the informants: they watch CNN mostly at times when there are local events with regional or global implications (e.g., Taiwan's 1995-1996 missile crisis, the 1996 presidential election, and Taiwan's earthquake in September 1999). Thus, the national audience in Taiwan has not yet become "balkanised."

6. *A structure of feeling, or "time-place sensibilities" in the Taiwanese case, sustains a hybrid sense of national identity incorporating "a Taiwan in the present with Chinese pasts." In turn, this underpins a Taiwan-centred identity.*

Billig's theory of "banal nationalism" (Billig 1995) is of use in theorising the persistent mode of Taiwan's television representation: the banality of the nationalism that pervades Taiwan's television representation provides the symbolic resources for national imagination. Although the KMT deliberately sought to make invisible the Taiwanese past (especially the pre-1949 past), television unavoidably represented much of "Taiwan in the present tense." On the other hand, "Mainland China in the present tense" was rendered insignificant on television, although the Chinese past in both the ancient and pre-1949 eras were always on television. This was accompanied by other conjunctural factors that helped to forge a nation in Taiwan that was separate from the Chinese people on the mainland under conditions of *ignorant isolation from the other* (Mainland China in the "present" tense). Or, to use Meyrowitz's phrase, they can be said to have been "isolated together" (Meyrowitz 1985, 143) in the same place of Taiwan. Ironically, this was to KMT's credit.

Thus, ironically, the KMT has made its Communist rival virtually invisible to the Taiwanese people (who were expected to re-unite with Mainland China). Yet

this invisibility has posed a psychological threat to the Taiwanese people, thereby alienating them from political identification with China.

The prime-time television serial dramas, as found in the content analysis, have provided a unique *cultural geography* for Taiwanese viewers: "A Taiwan in the present tense with Chinese pasts." The Chinese mainland has been constantly evoked, though in an imaginary way, in these dramas, whereas Taiwan has been deprived of its past (i.e. the pre-1949 past). As the interviews with the informants revealed, this has formed a peculiar "structure of feeling" (to use Raymond Williams's term), or "time-place sensibilities" in the Taiwanese case, which in turn have underpinned the hybrid sense of national identity. The majority of the informants located themselves somewhere *in-between*, seeing themselves as politically Taiwanese but culturally Chinese — an overlapping allegiance, which is summed up in the term "Taiwan-centred identity."

On the one hand, as indicated in the interviews with the informants, the trajectory of national identity-formation in Taiwan constitutes neither reversion nor replacement. Thus, what is assumed to be the current national identity is not merely the return of the previously repressed; rather, Taiwanese consciousness has itself been transformed in the process of accommodating the state known as the Republic of China. On the other hand, the sense of China as the homeland is further detached from the political (Taiwan *as apart from* China), whilst at the same time the sense of China as a cultural homeland is more or less retained (Taiwan *as a part of* China).

Furthermore, the informants' sense of national identity exhibits both certainty and ambiguity. On the one hand, the informants are in favour of maintaining *the status quo*; for them neither unification with nor formal independence from China is currently an option. On the other hand, they regard Taiwan as a *de facto* independent state and see cross-Strait relations as a *special state-to-state* case, while keeping open both options (of formal independence and unification with China). In other words, national *identity as being* for them is located in somewhere *in-between* what is politically Taiwanese but culturally Chinese. As for national *identity as becoming*, the viewers tend to adopt a pragmatic attitude that may be seen as a kind of deferral. Even those respondents who believe that Taiwan should be reunited with the mainland hold an attitude of "unification but *not now*" and "unification under some kind of political arrangement on *our* own terms." In other words, this is still a "Taiwan-centred identity."

Conclusion

It has been the purpose of this research to explore the relationship between the media (and television in particular) and national identity by reference to concepts derived from the fields of nationalism, media studies and cultural studies as well as the debates over questions of cultural globalisation and hybridity. To conclude this article, I shall first consider the implications of the research for an understanding of Taiwan's national identity. Then I shall turn to the broader implications for situating the role of the media in theories of nationalism and the analysis of national identity.

First, in line with the expectations of modernist theories of nationalism, both the Chinese and Taiwanese nationalism*s* in Taiwan are of relatively recent origin.

It is a principal contention of this article that at the root of Taiwan's transition to democracy was a significant transfer of power from Chinese nationalism to Taiwan-centred nationalism. At the same time, this shift should not be seen simply as the return of what was previously repressed. In other words, Taiwanese identity of late and the "authentic," "essentialist" form of Taiwanese identity dating back to the colonial era are *not one and the same*. Rather, national identity in Taiwan is a social product, interwoven with changes in relations of gender, ethnicity and generation that have created a space in which the hitherto antagonistic nationalist discourses could converge. Nationalism in contemporary Taiwan is becoming more *civic* than *ethnic* in character: ethnicity as a social marker is less significant than ever, and politicians playing the ethnicity card are publicly condemned.

Secondly, national identity in Taiwan has assumed a hybrid form; it has absorbed and adapted to external cultural influences. Historically, as the periphery of the Qing Empire and as a colony of imperial Japan, Taiwan was subsequently overwhelmed by Chinese nationalism and the anti-communist ideology sanctioned by the KMT state. The hybridised national identity (for which the term "Taiwan-centred identity" may be used as a shorthand expression) was itself shaped by complex power relations between the media and the audience, between the state and the citizenry, and between forces of the local and the global. As opposed to the conventional conceptions of cultural hybridisation, I argue that the hybrid identity in Taiwan has two key characteristics: (1) the make-up of that hybrid identity is in part determined by the mass-mediated "time-place sensibilities;" (2) the hybrid identity is not an undifferentiated entity in the sense that its components are of equal weight; rather people give one or another component priority and invest each with different meanings according to the particular context. Furthermore, I have found that a clear sense of belonging to Taiwan and an emphasis on Taiwanese citizenship have become increasingly important features of this hybrid identity.

Thirdly, the formerly rigid boundaries between Chinese and Taiwanese identities have been destabilised. There is of course no way of going back to the essentialised and romanticised identities asserted by radicals among the Chinese and Taiwanese nationalists. Both identities were, in extreme fashion, regressive forms of identification: (1) Chinese nationalism was a violent though "inclusionary" force which allowed no room for a distinct Taiwanese identity; (2) Taiwanese nationalism asserted a victimised yet "exclusionary" identity which regarded Chinese culture as something that had to be resisted altogether. Because of the relational nature of national identity, it can be said that remnants of "Chinese" identity such as the politically institutionalised and socially performed loyalties to the *de facto* independent Republic of China have become part of contemporary Taiwanese identity. Different modes of identification with the nation do not compete in zero-sum terms but may result in an inter-penetration of competing senses of national identity. In the case of Taiwan, however plausible it may have been to see national identity as a singularity imposed from above in the early years of authoritarian rule, the singular, unified Chinese identity (if it was ever established and sustained) lost momentum in the course of societal transformation. However, this process was not simply a matter of one particular strand of nationalism being superseded by another.

Fourthly, globalisation in terms of trans-border cultural flows has broadened the cultural horizon, but Taiwan's national identity remains robust. This challenges the conventional thinking that the consumption of the global media will necessarily result in a weakened local/national identity. In fact, the pace and scope of cultural globalisation has not prevented the growth of a sense of belonging to Taiwan. Indeed, cultural globalisation in association with the continuing importance of national media might inculcate in the people of Taiwan "a progressive sense of place" (Massey 1993), meaning that it is possible to have allegiances to both "the place" and "places beyond." Two forces specific to Taiwan seem to have contributed to this trend. The first is Taiwan's democratisation, which resulted from the rising tide of Taiwanese consciousness. The second force is the cross-Strait linkage driven by the force of globalisation. Through Taiwan's heavy investment in the mainland, the economic ties between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait have become stronger than ever and have put an end to decades of mutual isolation between the two sides. As this interdependence grows, the Taiwanese people's sense of national identity assumes an increasingly pragmatic form, emphasising the need to avoid any radical move to declare formal independence and to maintain Taiwan's *de facto* independence. At the same time, this pragmatic consciousness is changing the perception of the "national self" in relation to the broadly defined "other." Democratisation allows more balanced and up-to-date information about Mainland China to circulate in Taiwan, and globalisation increases the degree of economic interdependence across the Strait. This is increasingly nurturing among the Taiwanese people a growing willingness to engage with "others," especially those in the Chinese mainland, and also a growing awareness of having to come to terms with the "others" who are located across the Strait. They will have to find a way to negotiate over their remaining conflicts of interest on the basis of mutual respect and recognition. This suggests that for the Taiwanese there is a real prospect of "having the best of both worlds by being both Taiwanese and Chinese" (to use a phrase akin to that used by the informants).

On a broader level, the research has implications for our understanding of the place of media in the theories of nationalism and the analysis of national identity-formation. Although this formulation — national identity-formation as a process of conjunctural mediation between media representation and audience reception — will undoubtedly require further amendment according to the contingent particularities of any given case, I believe that it offers a useful tool of analysis in media studies beyond the Taiwanese case. It is likely to be especially useful in studying the relationship between the media and national identity in cases where issues of territorial "unification" versus "independence" are of importance. Grounded in empirical evidence, this article argues that both the transmission view of communication and the diffusionist view of national identity-formation should be replaced by the more sophisticated formulation of a conjunctural mediation process between media representation and audience reception (and between the powerful media and the active audience). From this perspective, this article has identified the main ways in which the mass media, and especially national television, have contributed to the formation of national identity in Taiwan.

Acknowledgements

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