

Call For Papers

The North American Taiwan Studies Association (NATSA) 20th Anniversary Conference

The Zeitgeists of Taiwan: Looking Back, Moving Forward

Suggested Sub-themes*

* These sub-themes are intended as inspiration rather than limitations. We encourage the submission of panels and individual papers related to the main conference theme from a wide variety of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Please visit our website or facebook page for a discussion board for those who would like to connect with others to organize panels.

Website: <http://www.na-tsa.org/new/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/North-America-Taiwan-Studies-Association-NATSA/128166173923634>

1. Banality and Crisis

One fairly constant descriptor of the spirit of both Taiwan and Taiwan studies over at least the past half century or so has been that of crisis. The island and its people seem to be consistently haunted by one sort of danger after another: from the “rise” of China to the perils posed by the island’s authoritarian and colonial past; from economic transformations to natural disasters, environmental pollution, labor disputes, political scandals, and recurring fears of nuclear holocaust. In recent years, NATSA itself has even hosted panels suggesting and refuting the notion that not only may Taiwan be in crisis, but that Taiwan studies could be dead (Long Live Taiwan studies!). Yet, if one of Taiwan’s zeitgeists is a feeling of crisis or danger, this is not enough to understand lives as lived on the island. We must also find a way to reference the banality of everyday life that accompanies crisis as well. What is the “normal” in times of (perhaps perpetual) crisis? In Taiwan, at least, crisis never seems to come alone. In the face of not only missiles pointed at the island, but actual missiles flying overhead, students still took their exams, breakfast shop owners made sandwiches, and elections went on. How do we understand this interplay between crisis and banality? Is banality a strategy to thrive through crisis or a co-creator of the next crisis? In what ways are people then both “of” as well as “outside” particular times? What ramifications might the banality of crisis have for political, economic, and social understandings, models, or action? How does mass media contribute to both crisis and banality? How might this approach to the quotidian nature of crisis give us insight into the lives, anxieties, and desires of the contemporary and historical peoples of Taiwan?

2. Taiwan Studies at a Crossroads: Zeitgeists of the Last 20 Years

NATSA was founded in 1994, an era of ongoing democratization in Taiwan. Many young Taiwanese scholars and graduate students who participated in or were inspired by the democratic movements came to North America for further education. Yet, they found little space for Taiwan-related topics to be presented and ideas to be exchanged. Hence, a group of student researchers established NATSA (then called NATSC) to hold an annual conference on Taiwan studies. The 20th anniversary of the Association provides a chance for reflection, recognition, and gratitude, but also a time for us to figure out where we should go from here. At present, Taiwan studies and Taiwan itself both face numerous critical challenges. Taiwan studies, as a branch of regional studies, is highly influenced by international politics and the global economic environment. How do we balance these external concerns against our intellectual goals? China has recently begun to sponsor its own version of Taiwan studies focused on its own national interest. How do we find ways to incorporate China and Chinese studies into Taiwan studies without one subsuming the other? How should the transnational movement and research of Taiwanese scholars and students engage academic and policy communities in Taiwan? After 20 years of NATSA, what kind of impacts have the works of past participants had? How much has the community of Taiwan studies scholars collaborated with those from or studying other countries in East Asia, Southeast Asia, or Europe and what are the effects of such collaborations and comparisons? How has Taiwan studies followed or bucked the zeitgeists of its time? How might the history of Taiwan studies inform our goals for the future? NATSA 2014 promises to be a great opportunity to reflect on these questions. Our debates and discussions will help us re-evaluate and re-invigorate the current study of Taiwan from beyond itself and to lay a foundation for the academic zeitgeists of the future.

3. Taiwan at a Crossroads: Social Movements

Building upon discussions of social movements from the 2013 conference, we suggest that not only Taiwan studies, but also Taiwan itself is in some ways at a significant crossroads. Social movement research in Taiwan began, in the 1980s, by focusing on an early wave of social activism—for environmental protection, labor rights, gender equality, ethnic social justice, and a host of other issues. These protests constituted an emerging civil society, which contributed to the island's epoch-changing political and social transformations. After recent decades of increasing economic integration with China (as well as ongoing dependence on the United States), a widening gap between the rich and the poor and a series of anxieties over food safety, land seizures, and judicial independence, it seems that protest movements may again be picking up in pace and size. Was the massive popular uproar over the death of army corporal Hung Chung-chiu in the summer of 2013 a part of something larger? Are particular historical times more suitable for social mobilizations than others? What are the characteristics of those times and how might they be met for some people and not others? What kinds of continuities and differences in issues, personnel, or mobilization efforts are there between the new and the old movements? Are these actually separate “waves”? How have the changes in power between the KMT and the DPP affected the politics of such movements? How have demographic and economic changes in recent decades influenced participation? How did the younger generation contribute to the success or failure of these mobilizations? What role do traditional media and social media (like Plurk or Facebook) play in mobilizing participants in these new social movements? How do aboriginal groups figure into the new social movements and their own

“new” movements? By scrutinizing different dimensions such as creativity, constraints, impacts, responses, or even unintended consequences of actions in terms of time and/or times, how might scholars better engage in and push forward discussions of social issues?

4. Colonial Zeitgeists

Colonialism is an enduring zeitgeist of Taiwan. Taiwan’s various colonial regimes have had a wide ranging impact—not just each on their own, but also in relation to and building in layers upon one another. Archival sources for colonialism in Taiwan are rich not only in Chinese, but also in Spanish, Dutch and Japanese. In recent decades, aboriginal stories of their own experiences have begun to find wider, attentive audiences in Taiwan. Narratives of the island’s colonial past continue to play important roles in ongoing struggles over identity and in voicing a “post”-colonial Taiwan. What would be required for Taiwan to enter a post-colonial period, and for which peoples? How might studies of Taiwan's settler-colonial history (along with the overlaid Japanese and KMT colonial or semi-colonial periods) inform larger understandings of the articulation of power, economy, law, and social forms? How did this layered colonial history contribute to Taiwan's participation in globalization and migration both past and present? In what ways have particular interpretations of the colonial past influenced and been influenced by Taiwan's zeitgeists? What was the nature of colonial times under Hakka and Hoklo settlers, the Japanese, the Americans (post-WWII), or the KMT? How do previously colonized people make use of their cultural, communal, or political resources to negotiate, challenge, or reinterpret representations and discourses put forward by their colonial masters? How have former colonial powers in Taiwan, like Japan, reconstructed their own histories of/in Taiwan? In what ways have popular culture and literature in Taiwan played a role in responding to (post-)coloniality? How do colonial experiences continue to haunt particular groups in Taiwan?

5. Industrial and Labor Times

This sub-theme focuses on time and times through the lens of labor, economy, and industry. Over the long (and sometimes the very short) durée, Taiwan's governments and its industrial, agricultural, and commercial entrepreneurs have not only changed rural and urban landscapes through industrialization and modernization projects, but have also (re-)regulated social lives through new types of time management and economies. Past literature has documented richly the major transitions in Taiwan’s industrial and labor times—for instance, towards the forced “settlement” of aboriginal peoples, from an agrarian regime to an industrial one in the 60s and 70s, and the subsequent shifts from labor to capital, and then to knowledge intensive industries. How have these kinds of economic changes shaped the feeling of particular times (as, for instance, “golden ages”) or of particular generations (as, for instance, “not willing to work hard”)? How have they affected the length or character of the time worked? How are different types of work affected differently? Labor does not just reflect the times. It is also one of the primary determinants of our sense of time and of Taiwan’s times. For example, industrial labor working on assembly lines and family labor in small and medium sized enterprises represent two different sorts of industrial and labor time. We might even look back to early settlements on Taiwan and how very different kinds of labor (hunting, fishing, agriculture, forest clearing) helped to create different senses of time. How might time or times help us better understand labor and economy and vice versa?

6. Feeling Backward: Loss, Trauma, Melancholia, and Obsessions

At first glance, this year's subtitle "looking backward, moving forward" seems to provide us with an optimistic imagination of being able to turn our historical heritage into a visionary blueprint for the future. However, once we look at the bodily manifestations of "looking backward" and of "moving forward," the same expression leads to a rather distorted and twisted bodily figure. The mental image of distortion translates into feelings of awkwardness, inadequacy, disorientation, and pain. It also connotes a profound sense of loss, trauma, melancholy and obsession. These have been underlying themes for the zeitgeists of Taiwan due to the island's colonial past, migratory history, and perceived vulnerability through the ages. Under this sub-theme, we would like to encourage paper/panel contributors to think through these hidden emotions, affects, and structures of feelings. For instance, through the perspective of gender and queer studies, we might find out that bodily behavior, such as looking forward, is sometimes contradictory to real feelings—we might feel ashamed, backward, and traumatic when the future is paved in front of us. How are these feelings, affect, and symptoms portrayed in art performances, literature, and cinema or manifested in material edifices, such as monuments, parks, temples, government buildings and urban landscapes? How can we read the bodily sensations and the feelings of time and space differently than rational recognitions?

7. Methodological Time

This sub-theme discusses issues surrounding the idea of "methodological time." How can we reincorporate time in new ways into political science, sociology, anthropology, literary studies, geography, demography, and so on? How do we get at time's connections to people through different disciplinary perspectives? Put another way, how can we make zeitgeists less a vague "feeling" and more a robust technique for understanding time in relation to economic, political, and social transformations, as well as changing intellectual and artistic discourses? To take an example, the lifting of martial law and official censorship in the late 1980s opened the floodgates to recalling and commemorating traumatic and taboo events, such as the 228 Incident and the White Terror. Since then, assessing the past through "local" living memories has become a zeitgeist of contemporary Taiwanese history. Besides oral history, popular narratives in the form of poetry, novels, films, folklore, songs, online blogs and documentaries have provided new spaces for people in Taiwan to construct and reconstruct their life histories. How do individual subjects and communities living in different temporalities and spatialities negotiate and document the past? How might we address not only the phenomenological and ontological aspects of human experiences, but also the epistemological construction of these experiences in relation to time? Methodologically, how might we connect these personal narratives to Taiwan's other zeitgeists? What remains taboo or overlooked when we work to document different versions of Taiwan, and why? What are the relationships between the storytellers, the social activists, the publishers, and their target audiences? Could "zeitgeists" help us move beyond the standard periodization of Taiwan's history and see things in a different light? How might renewed consideration of time and times challenge models, theories, and/or policy recommendations of other disciplines as well?

In what other ways does time's ghost haunt us?