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Typeset by: Cenveo Publisher Services
Printed in the UK

First published 2020

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020930254

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-5297-1146-2
ISBN 978-1-5297-1145-5 (pbk)

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Taiwanese Sociology's Road to Professionalization and Engagement

Chih-Jou Jay Chen

Taiwanese Sociology from Past to Present

The development of Taiwanese sociology towards professionalization over the last 60 years has been closely related to Taiwan's almost 100-year path to becoming a modern, independent, and democratic state. In fact, the development processes of the two have been quite similar; both can be understood as efforts to 'break free from external powers and move towards self-determination, progress, and identity'. Over the past 100 years, the small island of Taiwan has been either ruled or colonized by its next-door hegemons, China and Japan. It wasn't until the 1990s that Taiwan's democratization and national identity began to make significant progress. However, on the road to becoming a 'typical prosperous modern country' – that is recognized by the international community, has a solid democratic system, mature civil society, and consistent national identity – Taiwan still has a long way to go. Likewise, during Taiwan's democratic transition over the past three decades, Taiwanese sociology has been moving towards professionalization and engagement with local communities. Looking back at the past 50 years, the development of Taiwanese sociology has been affected by two contextual factors. On the one hand, under the influence of Westernization and globalization, Taiwan's sociology has been making continuous progress with regard to professionalization and academicization; on the other hand, inspired by Taiwan's unique political and economic context in the post-Second World War era, its sociological community has been increasingly engaged with its grassroots society and local politics.

Before the end of the Second World War, during its 50 years of colonial rule (1895–1945), Japan missed the opportunity to establish sociology as an academic discipline in Taiwan's higher education landscape. However, at the time, Japanese anthropologists had in fact been conducting fieldwork

in Taiwan, collecting information on local customs, languages, geography, and religion for use by the state apparatus. In addition, government-organized surveys that were based on the social science knowledge at the time and that originally stemmed from the colonial authorities' need to rule at the time, were arguably the earliest instances of systematic implementation of sociological knowledge in Taiwan, using survey and statistical techniques to collect data on social phenomena such as population, land, agriculture, commerce, religion, diseases, etc., thereby increasing the state's understanding of its subjects and satisfying its need for social control. The purpose of this effort was not the accumulation and construction of sociological knowledge itself; it was rather meant to help the colonial authorities understand the lives of ordinary people in order to exert power and govern more effectively. Still, the survey data collected during this period had provided an in-depth and detailed description and overall image of Taiwanese society at the time, laying an important foundation for sociological research in later years (Tang, 2008).

In 1949, after the Chinese Nationalists, or Kuomintang (KMT), were defeated by the Communists, they retreated to Taiwan. A few sociologists followed the Nationalist government to Taiwan and, beginning in the 1950s, they established sociology departments in various universities across the island. Thus, the period from the 1950s to the 1970s is generally understood to have been the burgeoning era of Taiwan's sociology. The Kuomintang's authoritarian regime originally approved the discipline's establishment in higher education because it considered sociology to be useful for the social construction and effective governance of Taiwan.

In the 1970s and 80s, following Taiwan's economic take-off, authoritarian rule gradually loosened and higher education expanded. Sociology institutes and departments at various universities began to employ academics who had obtained their PhDs at universities in the United States, bringing new trends of thought back to Taiwan. They gradually turned out to be the pioneers of the professionalization of Taiwanese sociology. While the academic paradigm and professional development of Taiwan's sociology were significantly affected by foreign (i.e. US) influences, an even stronger influence stemmed from the political and economic development of Taiwan itself.

Taiwan's economic growth, industrial changes, and the democratization of its political institutions since the 1990s have directly affected the research subjects and propositions of Taiwanese sociology. In terms of economic development, high-tech industries replaced export-oriented

labor-intensive industries in the 1980s. In the 1980s and 1990s, Taiwan's small and medium enterprises (SME) began to move abroad to invest in China. While Taiwanese industry began its transformation, the research topics of sociologists also expanded from labor processes and labor regimes to industrial organizations and networks, as well as technology transfer and upgrading.

In terms of political development, the Kuomintang's authoritarian system has always been the main axis of Taiwan's social life and economic development, e.g. the relationship between the Kuomintang regime and local factions, the role of the state in economic development, and changing state–society relations. Furthermore, sociological research has adopted the 'state' as a critical factor to discuss the issues mentioned above, employing and contributing to concepts such as 'authoritarian state', 'developmental state', 'party-state clientelism', and 'welfare state'. In the early 1990s, the oppositional anti-KMT movement and other social movements paved the way for Taiwan's political democratization. Meanwhile, sociological research has expanded to Taiwan's national identity, ethnic relations, nationalism, and aboriginal and feminist movements.

During those years between the 1990s and 2000s, Taiwan's economy developed rapidly, higher education expanded, and the number of faculty positions in sociology increased significantly. The discipline's degree of professionalization further consolidated. For example, back in the 1970s, there had been only seven sociological teaching and research institutions with some 70 full-time faculty members and research fellows in Taiwan, less than ten of whom held a PhD in sociology. By 2002, the number of sociological teaching and research institutions had risen to 12, and there were more than 130 full-time faculty members and research fellows with about half of them employed in non-sociology departments and the majority holding a doctorate in sociology. In 2018, the number of teaching and research institutions increased to 13 with more than 320 full-time faculty members and research fellows, all of whom had doctoral degrees.

On the other hand, also during this period, civil society's space for autonomy from the state grew and some sociologists took on the role of public intellectuals. Having great appeal on campus and among the people, they emphasized liberalization, democratization, and localization, challenging the Kuomintang's authoritarian rule and its pro-China unification ideology while also promoting the development of civil society and public discourse (Hsiao, 2014).

Since 2000, Taiwan's politics, economy, and society have undergone tremendous changes, and the research topics and approaches in sociology have also been greatly affected. From 2000 to 2008 and again from 2016 to 2020, the anti-unification opposition party DPP (Democratic Progressive Party), which had been suppressed under martial law, defeated the Kuomintang (KMT) and rose to power. While Sino–Taiwanese economic relations have grown closer and closer, political relations have become increasingly hostile. In the past, Taiwanese society flaunted its equality. However, in recent years, like many other developed countries, Taiwan has been faced with an increase in economic inequality. While higher education has expanded, young people today have suffered from stagnant wages, higher living costs, and job insecurity. The social changes of this era have inspired research topics in the areas of national identity, social inequality, and China's influence on Taiwan.

Features and Challenges of Taiwanese Sociologists in the 2010s

In 2018, there were around 320 PhD holders in sociology in Taiwan's academic sector. Among them 160 work in 13 sociology departments that are spread over six public and six private universities, as well as Academia Sinica. Another 160 sociologists work as full-time faculty members in non-sociology departments, including departments of general education, medical sociology, public administration, social welfare, national development, social work, social psychology, ethnic relations, and labor studies. Between the 1980s and the 2010s, according to personal information provided by members of the Taiwanese Sociological Association, the research areas most frequently selected by members were economic sociology, social stratification, and gender studies, followed by cultural sociology, political sociology, and sociology of family. More importantly, emerging areas of research that have been on the rise since 2010 are medical sociology and STS (science, technology, and society).

Of these 320 sociologists in Taiwan, 60 per cent are male and 40 per cent female. Almost half (49 per cent) of those PhDs were obtained at universities in the United States, 22 per cent in Europe, 27 per cent in Taiwan, and 2 per cent in other countries in the Asia Pacific. Most of them secured their first tenure-track jobs in the 1990s (33 per cent) and 2000s (40 per cent), followed by the 2010s (21 per cent) and the 1980s (6 per cent). In the 1990s, the rapid expansion of Taiwan's higher education created more job openings for sociology PhDs. However, since the 2010s,

Taiwan's declining birth rate has been affecting university enrollment, leading some universities to stop or slow down the hiring of new faculty members.

Between 2000 and 2020, during the process of institutionalization and professionalization, several institutional characteristics have emerged in Taiwanese sociology, namely, a small-scale academic community with a large variety of research interests, a resource management system distributing funds in a centralized approach, and an evaluation regime favoring publication in English-language journals and sometimes emphasizing quantity over quality in the assessment of researchers. In 2017, out of 324 Taiwanese sociologists, 217 (or 67 per cent) had previously published in English, i.e. they had used English to participate in international conferences and/or published English works in international journals or books. Many of the assessment and reward programs for university lecturers reward publication in journals listed in the SSCI (Social Science Citation Index), especially those with high impact factors. University faculty promotion reviews are often decided upon based on a specific number of journal articles, contributing to the growth of a modus operandi that puts quantity before quality.

Although university lecturer assessments give out higher rewards for the publication of English journal articles, in fact, Chinese publications have been shown to have a much greater impact on Taiwan's academic community and a social influence on civil society than English-language journals. A 2003 analysis of Taiwan's sociological community found that the discursive structure formed within the community through the citation of Chinese language journals is based on a simple 'core–periphery' structure with the researchers at Academia Sinica's Institute of Sociology at the core. This structure is unlike what similar studies abroad have found, where research stream divisions form a multi-threaded professional academic structure. Interestingly, most scholars who only publish in SSCI-listed English journals are scattered at the periphery of the reciprocal-citation network of Chinese language academia; they are not interconnected and form a lost group. An analysis of citations has shown that, with other conditions being equal, even those scholars who publish in SSCI journals a lot, are still not quoted as much, even if they have Chinese publications (Su, 2004).

Although Taiwan's academic community has already established a professional peer-review system, as a small community of colleagues it must rely on external objective standards so as to establish an evaluation system

that fosters trust while also being practical. This is why journal articles indexed in the Social Science Citation Index have become the main basis for the evaluation of academic achievement, and consequently for the allocation of resources or rewards from the state or other entities. If things continue on this trajectory, Taiwan's sociological community will be faced with many challenges. While the reward system's overemphasis on English-language publications is blandished as internationalization or globalization, it may also divorce academic studies from their local contexts and disconnect them from local empirical phenomena.

In addition to the challenges posed by the professionalization of the community itself, another challenge facing the sociological community in Taiwan comes from everyday people. 'What use is sociology? What contribution is sociology making to society?' are only two of the questions sociologists get regularly asked or ask of themselves. In fact, the pressure of this question on the humanities and social sciences in today's university landscape is even greater than it was in the last century. In addition to conducting academic research, sociology must also convince students that what they learn will advance their understanding of their communities, enhance their human capital, and help them pursue a career in management, design, data analysis, project planning, etc.

The China Factor in Taiwanese Sociology in the 2010s

Taiwan's political, economic, and social development has always been affected by the China factor. Two academic fields in Taiwanese sociology are directly related to the complex relationship between Taiwan and China: one is the study of Taiwan's ethnic relations, the other is cross-strait relations and China studies. The China factor in Taiwan has exerted different influences and produced different consequences at different times. Also, the China factor itself continues to evolve. As such, it has affected the outputs of research.

Since the early 2000s, the economic relations and trade between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait has been very close. In 2018, for example, China-bound exports made up 29 per cent of Taiwan's total export value, while imports from China accounted for 19 per cent of Taiwan's total import value. According to official estimates by the Taiwanese government, around 400,000 Taiwanese citizens were working in China in 2017, making up 55 per cent of all citizens seeking employment abroad (The Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, 2018).

On the other hand, since 2016, the hostilities in the political relations between the two sides have been growing deeper. China's rulers have long regarded Taiwan as a rogue province. For Beijing, Taiwan's existence serves as a reminder that its task of nation state construction remains unfinished. For Taiwan, China remains a challenge to the island's complicated question of national identity and a hindrance to Taiwan's pursuit of state autonomy. This section first introduces the study of Taiwan's ethnic relations, and then reports on the studies on the cross-strait relations and contemporary Chinese society.

The main issues in ethnic relations in Taiwan can be categorized along the following three dimensions: Aborigine and Han; new residents and old residents; and the relationship between the native Taiwanese (*Benshengren*; Hoklo and Hakka) and the Mainlanders (*Waishengren*). The distinction between native Taiwanese (*Benshengren)* and Mainlanders (*Waishengren*) mainly separates those ethnic Chinese who came to Taiwan before 1945–49 and those who came after. In 1947, social tensions precipitated by the KMT's heavy-handed rule ultimately led to the '228 incident' and the 'White Terror' period that ensued over the following decades during which many Taiwanese elites were killed or persecuted. These developments in particular increased the estrangement and distrust between the native Taiwanese and the Mainlanders. However, even under the Kuomintang's authoritarian rule, long-term contacts between the Taiwanese and Mainlanders, their intermarriage, and the role of education, all brought about an easing in their relationship.

Taiwan's current ethnic issues are mainly reflected in the differences in attitudes towards political party support, national identity, and cross-strait relations. After the Kuomintang lost control over the central government in the 2000 presidential elections, Taiwan's ethnic politics continued the post-martial law controversy over unification vs. independence (Wang, 2018). However, in today's Taiwanese society there is no entirely advantaged group anymore. On the one hand, because of the aforementioned diversification of ethnic identity created by interactions and intermarriage between the groups, it has become difficult to determine which one of them is the more advantaged. No ethnic group can enjoy an advantaged position in all areas of the different socio-economic, political, and cultural fields. Although longstanding historical factors have created political distrust between the Taiwanese and the Mainlanders, this does not affect the natural rapport between the two in daily social interactions (Wu, 2002). This might also be one of the main reasons why, while the issue of ethnic

relations in Taiwan persists to this day, it has not caused serious social conflicts.

Since the 1990s, Taiwan has been gradually introducing large numbers of two types of new residents: short-term migrant workers and foreign spouses. In 2018, the number of naturalized citizens for the first time exceeded 650,000, accounting for more than 3 per cent of Taiwan's population, thereby surpassing Taiwan's aboriginal population of just 560,000 (2.4 per cent). Relevant research has focused on the widespread stereotypes and stigmata, as well as the discrimination and unfair treatment by immigration and labor policies which new residents are facing. However, public attitudes toward migrants have been gradually changing. A study finds that Taiwanese citizens have become more accepting of marriage immigrants between 2004 and 2014, and that the acceptance of Southeast Asian female spouses was higher than that of Mainland Chinese female spouses. In terms of factors affecting public attitudes toward immigration policies, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and political party support have all maintained a significant influence during those ten years. The mechanisms affecting people's attitudes towards Chinese and Southeast Asian immigrants are mainly based on political party support, values, economic rationale, and social contacts (Chen and Ng, 2017).

The China factor has had a significant impact on Taiwan's ethnic relations, national identity, and cross-strait relations. To better understand China, Taiwanese sociologists, in the 2000s, began to accumulate more and more research on contemporary Chinese society. While Western scholars had been gradually allowed to enter China to conduct research in the 1980s, Taiwanese scholars started to enter China to do fieldwork in the early 1990s. Different from political scientists whose main interest is elite politics, sociologists are more interested in China's institutional reform and the development of Chinese society itself. Especially in light of the political, economic, and social relations between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, specific research paradigms and issues are still emerging.

The most studied issue is the role of Taiwanese capital, enterprises, and managers in the process of China's market and social transformation. Looking at it from a different angle, Taiwanese sociologists observe that the development path of China's state socialism has also affected the operations of Taiwanese businessmen (*Taishang*) on the mainland. Under the influence of China's institutional environment, Taiwanese businessmen have shaped their labor regime and labor relations. Based on their profits and high-level political relations in China, they are further contributing to

the operation of Taiwanese politics and media, thereby affecting Taiwan's local political and social relations.

Secondly, following their long-term residence and the deepening of their embeddedness in local society, the national identity of Taiwanese living in China has been subject to changes. The position of Taiwanese in the political structure of China has also changed. In addition to its previous efforts to attract Taiwanese investment, in 2018, the Chinese government introduced '31 Measures Favorable to Taiwan', strengthening the provision of various preferential policies and convenience measures for Taiwanese who pursue employment or studies in China. The influence of these so-called United Front measures on Taiwanese attitudes toward China has also been a focus of academic research in Taiwan.

The third issue is the increase in cross-strait marriages and migration. For instance: What long-term impact will the large number of female marriage immigrants from the Chinese mainland have on Taiwanese society? Similarly, as the number of Taiwanese working or studying in China increases, new cross-strait family networks are taking shape. These 'floating homes' that are 'crossing the ocean' are now experiencing a social process of settling down on the mainland. Lastly, China's totalitarian regime is using capital and internet technology to actively influence Taiwan's media content and election mobilization, thoroughly penetrating political developments in Taiwan. Since 2016, Taiwan's civil society and system of democratic governance have been greatly pressured and challenged by Beijing.

Social Survey and Cross-national Collaboration

Social surveys, especially national surveys imitating the United States' General Social Survey, were important elements in the process of specialization and globalization of Taiwanese sociology. Under the recent trend of big data and artificial intelligence, quantitative research surveys can be a powerful approach to enhance the viability and market value of sociology majors. Since 1985, the government of Taiwan has supported the sociological community in conducting the Taiwan Social Change Survey (TSCS), which aims at collecting baseline information on Taiwanese society by surveying the general adult population island-wide through questionnaire interviews. This long-term and cross-sectional survey project has followed 5-year cycles that rotate selective modules in order to capture the time-series of social changes. As of 2018, the TSCS has accumulated

62 surveys. Many of these surveys carry repetitive modules that have run through up to five cycles of survey operations, enabling researchers to further understand social change from longitudinal perspectives. With approximately 128,000 face-to-face interviews completed over the past 30 years, the TSCS has become one of the largest survey series among all of the general social surveys in the world (Taiwan Social Change Survey, 2019).

The TSCS team also cooperates with the international community in designing international comparative surveys. Since 1996, the TSCS participated in a three-society, comparative survey project with China and South Korea. Since 2001, the TSCS has been an active member of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), having served in questionnaire drafting groups, various method groups, the Methodology Committee, and the Standing Committee. In 2003, TSCS launched the East Asian Social Survey (EASS), along with the Japanese General Social Survey (JGSS) and the Korean General Social Survey (KGSS). The EASS later included the Chinese General Social Survey and the Hong Kong Social Indicator Survey and became a major regional survey project (Fu and Chu, 2008; Taiwan Social Change Survey, 2019).

In addition to TSCS, the Taiwan Youth Project (TYP) is a longitudinal study on Taiwan's youths. This project, first launched in 1999, is led by the Family and Life Course Research Group of the Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica. It aims at comprehending the growth trajectory of Taiwan's youths by examining the interplay among three significant social institutions: family, school, and community. The survey explores different experiences among Taiwan's youths while growing up, and also tries to identify possible factors causing the differences. It also examines social mechanisms including the socialization process at home, school experience with peers and teachers, and differences by geography, gender, and class (Yi, 2013). Other topics surveyed are tracking of school, work, and military, leaving home, autonomy, friendship and dating, and early occupational and marriage experiences.

TYP's study subjects and sampled students include middle-school students from 40 schools (162 classes) from Taipei City and County and Yi-Lan County. It involves more than 5000 sampled respondents, and a series of follow-up surveys on students, their parents, and their teachers. Phase I followed them from 2000–2009 and Phase II continued in 2011, 2014, and 2017 with spouse surveys as well (Taiwan Youth Project, 2019).

'University Social Responsibility' (USR) Project

In addition to the research and teaching of sociology, Taiwanese sociologists who work at universities have also been making significant contributions in the fields of social service and so-called social innovation. Striving to strengthen university–community engagement, beginning in 2017, Taiwan's Ministry of Education launched the 'University Social Responsibility' (USR) project, with sociologists playing a central role in the process.

The background of this project is that universities that have received financial subsidies from the government are tasked with bringing together elites from various fields. However, in recent years, there have been voices in society challenging this approach. They believe that in addition to continuing research and innovation in their respective fields, university teachers and students should take the initiative to actively keep in touch with local socio-economic and industrial development, transfer knowledge to the greater public and thereby promote their region's prosperity and development, and implement University Social Responsibility (USR). To this end, Taiwan follows the practices of other countries. For example, the European Union has also proposed a 'University Social Responsibility Reference Framework'. Taiwan's USR project has supported university teachers and students to form interdisciplinary teams to promote the innovative development of local enterprises and community culture, while also encouraging students and teachers to fulfill their research and learning objectives in the process of practice. In 2017, the USR grant program in Taiwan attracted applications from 116 universities and 220 individual projects.

The scope it promotes covers areas such as 'local commitment', 'industrial upgrading', 'environmental sustainability', and 'health promotion', which are in line with the 17 sustainable development indicators proposed by the United Nations. Specifically, a USR team conducts an inventory of a specific local community's development and industrial needs and develops realistic methods of application that can contribute to regional industrial development. In another example, a USR team might be committed to closing the urban–rural gap and use university professors and students to assist local primary and secondary schools in improving their quality of teaching. On the whole, the USR program combines university teaching innovation with social practice to improve the gap between learning and practical application; it is also a program in which universities provide assistance to solve Taiwan's socio-economic development problems, thus promoting students' local identity and local entrepreneurship.

Taiwan's sociologists and sociology departments play a key coordinating role in this project.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter reviews Taiwanese sociology's road to professionalization and engagement, along with the impacts from the development of Taiwan's democratization and national identity since the 1950s. Since the 1990s, we have witnessed two seemingly competing currents in sociology in Taiwan. On the one hand, there has been a request for internationalization of the discipline, which prescribes that sociologists should seek more interactions with the international community and make their research known to the outside world. On the other hand, there has been a call for indigenization, which encourages sociologists to reflect critically on theories and methods they employ to conceptualize their research. While these two currents do not necessarily contradict each other in nature, there emerges considerable tensions and contradictions in practice. Among them, the most salient one that leads to profound consequences is the publication strategy. In order to 'internationalize' their research, sociologists have to publish in English, which is alien to local people and unused in Taiwanese society. Moreover, these publications tend to frame their questions in such ways as to meet research agendas of the foreign (international) audience instead of the local one. As a result, the local (namely, Taiwanese) epistemic community rarely read these publications, making them even less relevant to local society. In contrast, advocates of indigenization, who insist on establishing 'academic subjectivity' by developing theories and methodologies more attuned to local society, tend to publish their research in Chinese. Consequently, these scholarly efforts to 'indigenize sociology' have been left largely unknown to the outside world and hence are sometimes criticized as merely 'parochial'.

The debates surrounding indigenization vis-à-vis internationalization have evolved over time, and institutions and individuals have developed strategies to cope with them. Although the debates are ongoing and unsettled, I argue that the relations between internationalization and indigenization are more of dialectic than a dilemma. Looking at the future development of Taiwan's sociology, we expect that professionalization and indigenization will coexist. Taiwanese academia will continue to pursue the accumulation of sociological knowledge, the expansion of the sociological community, and the integration of sociology with people's lives, work, and innovative development with great effort.

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