“What’s in a Name?”: Implications of Linguistic Strategies in ROC Official as well as English-Language Media Discourse on Taiwan Politics

The result of the December 2004 parliamentary elections in Taiwan was generally portrayed as a defeat of the ruling party after its slight victory in the presidential elections early 2004. It is arguable whether President Chen Shui-bian’s 11th hour appeal on the campaign trail for the ‘rectification’ of names has been a major contributing factor for this defeat. Fact is that this last-minute campaign tactic has seriously harmed the US-Taiwan relations, since it was perceived by the US Administration as a unilateral move to change the status-quo across the Taiwan Strait.

Judging from the Taiwanese English-language written press coverage of the latest Legislative Yuan elections, it seems that the ‘nativist’ drive, which gained ever greater momentum after the presidential elections of March 2004, suddenly became a setback to the DPP’s popularity, especially vis-à-vis the US-Taiwan relations. Indeed, the ‘rectification of names’ issue has become a most sensitive issue with different interpretations in a polarized Taiwan. The divided Taiwanese society, along with its partisan media, have in the last decade witnessed a double phenomenon of ‘Sinicization’ as well as ‘Taiwanization’, both vying for greater legitimacy.

The way a particular version of reality is promoted passes through the mediation of language. As such, this paper aims to explore the ideological implication of linguistic phenomena, in particular labelling practices in discourse on Taiwan domestic politics, the cross-Strait issue as well as US-Taiwan ties as they are reflected/(re)constructed in the local English-language media in Taiwan.

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