

# Reimagining the Republic's Frontiers: The Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission and Identity Discourse on Taiwan, 1949-2017

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<https://hdl.handle.net/2324/6787385>

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出版情報 : Kyushu University, 2022, 博士 (教育学), 課程博士  
バージョン :  
権利関係 :

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論文名 : **Reimagining the Republic's Frontiers: The Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission and Identity Discourse on Taiwan, 1949-2017**

(中華民国フロンティアの再考:台湾、蒙藏委員会(1949-2017)における国家アイデンティティ・ディスコースの変遷)

区 分 : 甲

論 文 内 容 の 要 旨

In 2017, the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission (MTAC) was disbanded after 68 years of operation on Taiwan, raising the question of how an anachronistic institution evolved as the Republic of China's (ROC) underwent democratization. Certainly, for many who look at the rhetoric of "Multicultural Taiwan" beginning in the 2000s, the existence of the MTAC may have been bewildering outside its historical context. However, the history of the MTAC on Taiwan can illuminate the transition of national identity in the ROC. The issue of national identity in the ROC on Taiwan is not one facing academic neglect or scholarly disinterest. Rather, particularly since the process of democratization began in the 1980s, extensive scholarship has investigated questions related to Taiwanese-ness, Chineseness, the development and impact of Taiwanese nationalism, the political movement for Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples, and much more. However, limited scholarship has investigated the trajectory of official portrayals of the ROC's "frontiers," a term which referred to Mongolian, Tibetan and other non-Han minorities for decades after retreat in 1949. Research into the MTAC offers an opportunity to center ROC narratives of the so-called "the frontier," thereby allowing investigation into the shifting official approach to the (internal) "other" in national identity building. This perspective has the potential to shed a transformative light on the transition of national identity on Taiwan, as it showcases often neglected narratives on the ideological and geographical periphery.

Thus, investigation into to the evolving discourse of the MTAC from 1949 to 2017 can be understood as a case study to explore the formation of official ideology before, during and after democratization. More pointedly, the project specifically focuses on the shifting role of official portrayals of its former "frontier" peoples in the state's consolidation of ideology. This dissertation aims to improve our understanding of how the MTAC, as part of the ROC's larger state apparatus, imagined its national territory and understood the state's relationship to its so-called "frontier." Furthermore, the project focuses on debates on imperialist legacies in Chinese nationalism, and aims to uncover the legacies of imperialism and their possible lingering impact on Taiwan today.

Following a discourse-historical approach, my analysis finds that until the end of martial law (1987), the MTAC retained a mission to civilize its "frontier" through development policy and reform. Taiwan was seen as a peripheral island on the edge of a much greater Chinese nation. MTAC discourse on national identity in the first period

was heavily influenced by a Han-centric notion of the Five Nation Republic, with an overt civilizing mission embedded into the Commission's images of a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural nation. Visions of the frontier's victimization at the hands of foreign and communist forces demonstrated the need for ROC protectionism. These images were further strengthened by romanticized portrayals of Tibetan and especially Tibetan Buddhist martyrdom at the hands of the CCP and other menaces. All these discursive themes contributed to the overarching message that the ROC was the rightful ruler of Greater China, an indivisible entity whose whole depended on all of its parts.

The overt civilizing mission in MTAC portrayals of the nation's "frontier" served to justify ROC legitimacy over Mainland China through demonstrations of the frontier peoples' inferiority. Under the correct ROC, or Han, leadership, the logic of the Five Nation Republic's approach to pluralism argued that these peoples could be further developed. The ROC officially recognized five race-nations or *minzu* (民族) within China: Manchu, Hui, Mongolia, Tibet, and Han. Although this recognition was also accompanied with a localized or *yinsu'erzhi* (因俗而治) approach to governance, and strict assimilation was seldom a described objective of the state, MTAC discourse during this era suggested a rigid cultural or civilizational hierarchy at play, with the Han implicitly supreme.

By the 21<sup>st</sup> century, rhetoric emphasizing bilateral and international exchange had emerged within MTAC publications. However, within this discourse, the Commission continued to highlight the relative status of Taiwanese development to that of Mongolia and Tibet, even as espousal of political "Chineseness" faded. Furthermore, MTAC portrayed twenty-first century Taiwan as developed, democratic, and vaguely multicultural, and made efforts to tie the national narrative to the existence of Taiwan Indigenous Peoples, tracing back over centuries. Despite this, Indigenous Peoples' voices within the MTAC were scarce, and only began to appear during Ma Ying-jeou's KMT presidency. At the same time, other elements of Taiwan's multiculturalism, championed elsewhere within the young democracy were entirely neglected in MTAC literature. Consequently, as the Commission largely omitted Indigenous, Hakka, and other recognized local communities' contributions to Taiwan's history and national development, Taiwan's regional superiority depicted in MTAC publications was implicitly portrayed as a Han-Taiwanese achievement. This image of Han-Taiwanese advancement enabled differentiation of Taiwan from the PRC, but avoided making divisions within the greater Han civilizational/cultural identity. Thus, despite official re-centering on Taiwan and focus on a different core set of ethnic or national identities, the basic logic for ROC legitimacy remained in essence rooted in a Han-centric claim to benevolent and well-managed pluralism. In sum, the doctoral project finds that instead of employing Chinese imperialist strategies as means to demonstrate sovereignty over Greater China, 21<sup>st</sup> century MTAC rhetoric relied on certain imperialist attitudes to showcase Taiwan's relative cultural superiority, diversity, modernity, and democracy as key to survival in the PRC's growing shadow.