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# EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

REVIEW ESSAY

#### State Spatiality and Identity Formation in Postwar Taiwan

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Bi-yu Chang. *Place, Identity and National Imagination in Postwar Taiwan*. New York: Routledge, 2015. 260 pp. \$145 (cloth).

Over the last quarter of a century, more than a hundred books devoted to Taiwan's geography, topography, and cartography have been published in Taiwan, a large percentage of which are historical or regional in focus. Perhaps the first major product of this cottage industry was a collaborative endeavor between the Belgian publisher Mappamundi and its Taiwanese counterpart, Nan Tian, entitled *The Authentic Story of Taiwan* (Vertente, Xu, and Wu 1991). Han Sheng and Yuan Liu, both well-known private publishers, followed suit a few years later with reprintings of seventeenth-century Dutch maps of Formosa and the first Japanese survey maps of Taiwan, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, municipal and county governments each funded the collection, research, and publication of historical charts and maps particular to their own regions, a practice that continues even today.<sup>2</sup> Historical geographers soon completed detailed analyses of Dutch, Ming, and Qing imperial maps,<sup>3</sup> perhaps stimulating the reproduction and sale of facsimile copies of large imperial scroll maps.<sup>4</sup> At the turn of the twenty-first century, national museums began to hold major exhibitions of historical maps of Taiwan, and established publishers (such as Wei Dewen's Nan Tian) assisted these institutions in printing exhibition catalogs for a public eager to invest in such cartographic materials.<sup>5</sup>

Before that, in 1996, a geographic information system (GIS) lab was established in the Institute of History and Philology at Academia Sinica, which inaugurated yet another phase in this fascination with Taiwan's geography and topography. Two years later, Dadi Geography (aided by the Center for Space and Remote Sensing Research at National Central University) published the first popular compilation of satellite maps of Taiwan, which was specifically targeted at teachers and students using the new "Knowing Taiwan" middle-school geography textbooks (Wang 1998).<sup>6</sup> Today, several such GIS research labs provide cartographic services for a broad range of academics and government agencies. Online versions of their completed projects are used every day by a growing number of professionals and avid amateurs.<sup>7</sup> And while GPS devices and smartphones are ubiquitous around the globe in 2015, large-scale road maps can still be found in many a private vehicle in Taiwan and are frequently used to plan weekend family road trips.

In her new book, Place, Identity and National Imagination in Postwar Taiwan, Chang Biyu argues that, despite this avalanche of publications and websites devoted to Taiwan's (historical) geography and cartography, few publications have offered a comprehensive and detailed analysis of Taiwan's spatiality, in particular the representations and spatial discourse of nation and homeland that have been propagated and controlled by the Kuomintang (hereafter KMT) regime since its retreat to Taiwan in late 1949. To fill that gap in the literature (particularly in the English-language scholarship) on Taiwan's spatiality, Chang has examined the annual Taiwan Yearbook, Taiwan-based cartographic production, elementary-school textbooks, and the 1950s design and construction of Chunghsing New Village (site of the relocated provincial government). Her goal has been a better understanding of the symbolism, construction, visualization, and contested meanings of Taiwan's geography and political landscape (2). In this monograph, Chang also seeks to examine the ways in which state spaces are operated, contested, and changed, as well as how power relations are concretized, social alliances established, and cultural changes enacted through state spatiality (13). Although the central focus is state spatiality, this is also a book about Taiwan's identity politics and the highly contested postwar power relationships on the island (13).

Chang's new book consists of an introduction, four chapters devoted to different aspects of postwar spatiality, and a short postscript, which provides a brief personal statement of the author's own relationship to Taiwan as both physical place and imagined space.<sup>8</sup> In her introduction, Chang defines the major analytical terms employed in the book (e.g., identity, home, homeland, space, spatiality), as well as several Chinese equivalents or usages (*laojia*,

*jiaxiang*, *guxiang*), and briefly introduces some of the key premises and theoretical sources she will employ in the monograph. In chapter 2, Chang attempts to make sense of the politics of state territorialities in postwar Taiwan via a detailed examination of the maps and spatial discourse in official yearbooks published between 1952 and the present. The postwar development of official and private cartographic practices and production is the focus of chapter 3. In this chapter, Chang establishes two major investigative goals: first, to explore the politics and power relations inscribed in maps and map-making practices; and second, to explain the poor quality of maps produced in Taiwan through an examination of state procedures for review and censorship. Readers will detect a major shift in topic when Chang turns to concrete physical space in chapter 4. Chunghsing New Village, which was rapidly designed and constructed on Chiang Kai-shek's orders in the mid-1950s, is Chang's source for understanding the policy- and place-making processes that determined power relationships between central and local governments in early postwar Taiwan. The author also uses this chapter to explore, however briefly, the lived experiences of officials (and their families) at this new site for the Taiwan Provincial Government. In the final chapter, Chang returns to the topic of state spatial discourse and examines the geographical knowledge presented in elementary-school textbooks in order to see how formal education sought to influence the formation of national identity and a sense of place. Chang employs numerous maps and illustrations, as well as a few photographs, to focus attention on specific changes in geographical knowledge, spatial discourse, and official mappings. Multiple references to recent theoretical literature help to contextualize the author's empirical research on Taiwan space, place, and identity in a broader, even universal, discussion.<sup>9</sup>

As the book's title denotes, Chang's major concern is the nature of the relationship among identity, power, and place in Taiwan after the KMT retreated to the island in 1949 and dominated spatial discourse for the next forty or more years. She asks why "place" is so important in the construction of identity, geographical imagination, and nation building (2). More specifically, Chang seeks to explain how the state's spatial practices continuously shaped and reshaped the everyday lives of Taiwan's citizens and, furthermore, how state territorial strategies naturalized and strengthened power relations through spatial discourses (13). In the individual chapters, these broader concerns become more concrete as Chang analyzes disparate empirical data. In chapter 2, she asks what kind of national imaginations and narratives were

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constructed in the annual *Taiwan Yearbook*. Definitions of "national territory" and changes in KMT territorial strategies are two of her specific analytical targets (25). When investigating the nature and quality of postwar cartographic practices and products in chapter 3, Chang probes military cartography, official and privately published maps, and regulations governing the map review process to explain how cartographic knowledge was used and controlled to represent the Republic of China in accordance with party-state ideology (68). Chapter 5 extends this type of questioning into the educational realm to ask how the ideas of "home," "homeland," and "country" were presented and taught in Taiwan's elementary schools after 1949 (162). Chunghsing New Village, a physical and symbolic space, is the site of Chang's investigation into how a new political landscape could affect the operation, redistribution, and realization of state power(s) in chapter 4 (113).

By adopting a spatial approach and exploring the issue of Taiwanese identity via an examination of spatial politics. Chang claims to be addressing an understudied topic in recent Taiwan studies research circles (12). It is important to note here that she is speaking primarily of studies published in English.<sup>10</sup> Despite the large number of publications on Taiwan's geography, topography, and historical cartography cited above, she believes that spatial identity-in particular, the effect of spatial politics on Taiwanese identity—is an area in which many new insights can be gained (13). Chang's basic premise concerns our daily engagement with space: "The significance of space has to do with the fact that it is where people perform their daily spatial practices, where social hierarchy is established, actualized and reinforced, and where power is exercised and cemented" (5). Furthermore, Chang believes that her conclusions regarding the power of state spatiality over individual and collective identity in the Taiwan case have universal implications. A separate but equally important motive is her belief that Taiwan's strategic position in East Asia is too important to ignore (19). According to Chang, interrogating KMT official spatiality and changes in spatial discourse after the mid-1980s will also enable us to better understand the historical origins of contemporary debates involving Taiwan's sovereignty and regional conflicts over territorial claims.

Let me turn to Chang's major conclusions and attempt a brief summary of chapter claims prior to articulating a few critical assessments of her arguments. In general terms, Chang argues that the KMT's display of an in-depth knowledge of China in the Republic of China (hereafter ROC) yearbooks<sup>11</sup> was a desperate attempt by the party-state to stake territorial claims, operational ability, and political power over a China it no longer controlled. After diplomatic setbacks in the 1970s, this "innate" (guyou) and complete national territory was presented anew in the yearbooks as a symbolic cultural sphere. That revised claim was supported by a foundational *daotong* (or "orthodox tradition") discourse and repeated statements regarding long-term ethnic and cultural (even geological) connections between China and Taiwan, the current site of Nationalist rule. If the boundary between China and Taiwan was intentionally blurred in these yearbooks to enable KMT survival, the relationship between the two entities was hierarchical, and the island was secondary and local-at least until additional diplomatic crises moved marginal Taiwan closer to the center of "cultural China" in the late 1970s. And while maps in the yearbooks did not change quite as rapidly as textual representations, the transition from the pre-1970 iconic "begonia leaf" mapping of China to the color-shaded topographical and administrative map (used from 1970 to 1996) did follow changes in KMT discourse that were manifested in the yearbooks. Fundamental change, however, came in 2001, when the "ROC map" was removed entirely and "Taiwan ROC" was reimagined as a marine nation with its own corresponding map. In sum, Chang argues that these various (and changing) spatial strategies have been a "bargaining lever" employed by the KMT to win international support, engender national pride, and consolidate internal solidarity in order to safeguard the party-state's survival in a dangerous world.

The central argument of chapter 3 is stated up-front on page 67: that in order to secure the island's defense and prevent Communist infiltration, all cartographic data was jealously guarded. The KMT regime monopolized cartographic knowledge for almost four decades, and, consequently, cartographic development in postwar Taiwan was stifled and stagnant. However, Chang is quick to clarify that this barren cartographic environment was limited to private research and publishing. Prior to the 1980s, active and accurate mapping practices existed only among Nationalist military cartographers, who were aided by technological and financial assistance from the United States.<sup>12</sup> For all other producers of maps, the trifecta of complex and bureaucratic map review procedures, the state's monopoly of cartographic data, and party executives' "map phobia" served as "a straightjacket, preventing good mapping practices during

the early postwar decades" (71). High political risk<sup>13</sup> and meager returns from a limited market ensured that the few publishers in Taiwan who did print maps of China were forced to perpetuate the ROC state's territorial claims, thereby shoring up its legitimacy. Chang extends this bleak assessment of cartographic production of China's territory to postwar geographical knowledge and mappings of Taiwan, comparing them unfavorably with Japanese cartographic production prior to 1945. For example, the first postwar island-wide land survey in Taiwan was not completed until 1980, and base maps from those surveys were made public only after 1982. Even then, "sensitive" sites, such as the Songshan Airport, were disguised as rice fields on those public maps for security purposes (75). It was not until the 1990s that substantive cartographic data became easily accessible in the public domain in Taiwan (76), a trend that was aided by advances in digital mapping technology, the lifting of the ban on cross-Strait travel, and the gradual loosening of the state's grip on cartographic data. Overall, Chang argues that the "ROC's reluctance to develop cartography and equip its citizens with up-to-date maps" is explained by: (a) the authorities' distrust of the Taiwanese; (b) the party-state's China-centric policies; and (c) a centuries-long official phobia of maps (104). In contrast, the more eager pursuit of cartographic knowledge and expression in recent decades "mirrors the drastic social and political change" caused by the processes of democratization and localization after the 1980s (89).

In chapter 4, disparate explanations are given by Chang as motivation for the design and construction of Chunghsing New Village in the mid-1950s. National security in an era of military crisis and uncertainty (112)—the orthodox explanation—is juxtaposed to 1950s insiders' cynical view of the national government's greedy appropriation of provincial land and assets (114). Whatever the motivation, Chang argues that local landowners' interests and local culture were never considered by politicians or urban planners. Furthermore, the "evacuation" of provincial government staff from Taipei to the remote and underdeveloped site was unexpected, swift, and permanent, despite the "temporary" status originally given to the plan by party authorities (118). Simplicity, efficiency, and the functionality of twentieth-century modernity were central themes in the design of the New Village (126), while investments in modern facilities and green landscaping soon created an environment that was politically presentable and physically comfortable, yet also self-contained and exclusive (131–133). However, Chang argues that the construction process at the chosen site manifested the "totalitarian" nature of

architectural modernism," which in this instance sought to foster a new lifestyle for a modern Chinese community—a utopian model for the rest of "Free China" (128–129, 140–141). Yet if the New Village's housing and facilities were technically advanced for the 1950s, their design and construction did not anticipate future needs, and, thus, housing shortages and lack of space in residential units became chronic problems (135). Failure to repair and update facilities and architecture during Taiwan's era of rapid industrialization in the 1970s guaranteed the New Village's eventual demise once the provincial government was "streamlined" away in 1997. A severe earthquake in 1999 accelerated that politically motivated process by destroying half of the buildings, and the state's repossession process has gradually relocated nearly all the remaining aged residents (141, 144–145).

To argue, as Chang does in her final case study, that the 1962 geography textbook compiled for elementary schools in postwar Taiwan was "dull, impersonal and generic," with little relevance to students' environments or experiences (159), is to state the obvious, as my own cohort in Taiwan has so frequently told me. Yet chapter 5, based on an analysis of ninety-two elementary-school textbooks, contains many new insights. Chang explains pedagogical reform in 1968 as a direct response to the PRC's Cultural Revolution. Textbook design and compilation was standardized and centralized under the National Institute for Compilation and Translation, which facilitated the anti-Communist message that Chiang Kai-shek had mandated (160). Centralized production was abolished only in 1996, but curricular reforms in 1975 (which "ushered in Taiwan's liberalization in education," 161) slowly generated a second major revision of the textbooks, which were released later in 1989. Throughout these changes in content, however, Chang discovers consistent goals and themes. The primary goal in compiling postwar elementary-school textbooks has been to foster patriotism—prior to 1997, an anti-Communist, China-centered love of nation, and subsequently, students' loyalty to Taiwan as "the beautiful national land" (197). Early postwar textbooks represented China as an old civilization, a vast territory with rich resources, inhabited by a first-class race (167), while the 1968 revision was more overtly politicized, identifying Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yat-sen directly with "China" (169). Chang argues that concepts such as *laojia* (old home) and *guxiang* (homeland) in the earlier textbooks, as well as their emphasis on multiple Han migrations to Taiwan (as *jiaxiang*, or hometown), instilled a "melancholic longing" among the students (175-176) and established a

"common mindset that China was the spiritual homeland of all Taiwanese" (177). In contrast, Taiwan was presented as local, peripheral, and secondary to China (190). Chang deepens this set of arguments by showing how the physical setting of the public schools—with their icons, national flags, leader portraits, and political slogans—helped to create a "living environment that mirrored the KMT political ideology" (187). Beginning in the 1970s, however, diplomatic defeats, rapid industrialization, and a gradual political democratization engendered a new and positive connotation for Taiwan as *xiangtu* (homeland) (192–193), and Taiwan gradually shifted from the periphery to the center stage in elementary-school geography textbooks (196–197). Echoing arguments in her other chapters, Chang concludes that change in "Taiwan's educational reform of the last few decades reflects exactly the changing trend in political hegemony" (198).

Perhaps the first question one must ask of an "alternative approach to understanding the thorny issue of Taiwanese identity" (18), as Chang describes her work, is what the author's *new* insights are. As Chang notes in her introduction, there is certainly no shortage of books (even English-language monographs) devoted to Taiwanese identity politics.<sup>14</sup> Can a focus on space, no matter how sophisticated a theoretical grounding or how rich an empirical database, provide any substantive new understanding not already presented in these other monographs, articles, and papers? An objective answer to this question is: "Perhaps." Let me try to explain.

Midway through the introduction, Chang states that "the fundamental issue in this book is exactly how the 'self' is spatially expressed and socially constructed" (10). Choosing space as her analytical category—rather than, say, history or collective memory—is predicated on a basic assumption she articulated earlier: that "our identity is not just shaped by culture and ethnicity, but also by the space we occupy—both geographically and socially—and the unique experience inscribed in it" (7). The "space" evoked here is broadly defined to include such concrete places as home or school, but also such abstract, even imagined, places as homeland, country, or nation. While the former might be a "'place' which one can call one's own" (2), the latter might only emerge through *collaborative* social construction. Thus, adopting a spatial approach where the particular focus is on the "importance of and the relationship between state spatiality and identity formation" runs the risk of granting too much agency to the power of state spatiality, while failing to address individual, as well as collective, consumption of official discourse and representations.

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Chang appears to avoid this risk through reconfiguring her problematics to elevate the role played by the state in identity formation and supplying particular assumptions to reinforce that choice. In her words, Place, Identity and National Imagination in Postwar Taiwan "addresses issues of how state spatial practices continuously shape and reshape our everyday life, the ways that geographical knowledge and imagination are constructed, and also how state territorial strategies naturalize and strengthen power relations through spatial discourses" (13). Viewed in Chang's analytical framework, state spatial practices, as well as spatial discourse and representations, serve as basic structures that "lay the foundation for sense of place to develop, influence the formation of identity and provide both a physical and mental structure for us to position ourselves in the world" (11). Referencing Michel de Certeau, Chang adopts strong operative verbs to emphasize the overarching influence that this "spatial order" has on an individual's sense of place and of self: it organizes possibilities and interdictions while also organizing and regulating people's livelihoods (11). However, even at this early moment in the discussion, Chang also includes passages that seem to undercut these foundational assumptions. If the "crucial factor influencing postwar identity in Taiwan has been *shengji*" (4)—that is, the province of one's birthplace or origin-which the KMT institutionalized early in its administration of Taiwan, then why not interrogate the "simplistic and somewhat arbitrary categorizations" based on *shengji* that helped to create *benshengren* ("people with a local provincial background") and waishengren ("mainlanders"), the two categories that any text on Taiwanese identity politics is sure to address? Or if the meanings of place are "always negotiating, shifting and 'becoming,'" and if identity is always "multifaceted, constantly changing and forever slippery and contradictory" (7), is it wise to focus one's analysis of place, identity, and national imagination solely on state spatiality and spatial practices?

In short, it is my contention that Chang has overestimated the power of the party-state's spatial representations and discourse, while granting too little agency to consumers of state spatiality in each of the four case studies presented in this book. While her analysis of KMT territorial claims (both physical and symbolic) and associated meanings printed in the annual ROC yearbooks is insightful and convincing, Chang tells us very little about the readership of those yearbooks or whether (and under what circumstances) the yearbooks' maps were employed to influence others. Like Chang, I am a fan of critical geographer Denis Wood's 1992 claims

regarding the power of maps, which serves as a key theoretical source for chapter 3 (Wood and Fels 1992). However, one can accept Chang's claims regarding KMT state power embodied in the maps, cartographical knowledge, and officially approved visualizations of ROC territory that comprise postwar cartography in Taiwan while at the same time demanding to know how those maps were read and used. Wood's more recent book, missing from Chang's bibliography, reminds us that part of the authority of maps arises from the social assent given to the map's propositions, and such assent may very well depend on the utility of those claims for individual users (Wood, Fels, and Krygier 2010, 52). Nearly a decade ago, geographers Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge also reminded us that "maps are of the moment, brought into being through practices (embodied, social, technical), [and] *always* remade every time they are engaged with; mapping is a process of constant reterritorialization" (Kitchin and Dodge 2007, 335). Applying these arguments to Chang's subject requires that we attend to users and consumers of maps. These arguments also apply to the textual and cartographic representations in elementary-school geography textbooks, where the substantive, even powerful meanings taken away by the individual student are the product of collaborative work by textbook compilers, teachers, and the students themselves.<sup>15</sup> Maps that represent space well can "draw us in imaginatively and emotionally" (Dodge, Kitchin, and Perkins 2009, 152) and engender the passionate fervor that Chang associates with the textbooks taught in the particular educational environment of the Taiwanese elementary school. However, Chang also acknowledges that the textbooks were often boring and filled with content that was unrelated to students' experiences and environments (159).

It is in chapter 4 that Chang pays substantive attention to the mutual and collaborative production of spatial meanings, as well as the disbelief and criticism that arose when provincial government staff were forced to "evacuate" to the model village designed by planners and architects in 1956. Only in this chapter does Chang employ a significant number of memoirs and interviews to analyze residents' views of and accommodations to the New Village and the utopian (political) landscape and lifestyle that it embodied. However, these observations seem to fall outside Chang's specific concern with Taiwanese identity formation as addressed in the other chapters of her book. While improvements in facilities, activities, and transportation links seem to have engendered a sense of community—even an insider, exclusive community—among the

residents of the Chunghsing New Village, Chang does not examine residents' political affiliations or self-performed/-expressed identities. Most important to Chang's concerns would be knowing whether (and how) the socially produced residential and work space at the New Village contributed to the identity formation of village residents.

With *Place, Identity and National Imagination in Postwar Taiwan*, Chang Bi-yu has written the first major work in any language on postwar ROC state spatiality. Despite the shortcomings described above, the rich empirical data she has provided in each of her four case studies is thoughtfully analyzed, resulting in a broad-ranging picture of the KMT's attempts to employ cartographic representations, yearbook spatial discourse, elementary-school geography textbooks, and urban planning to solidify domestic support for its rule in Taiwan and to legitimate its claims over the "innate national territory" of Free China. One can only hope that this fine research will stimulate even greater interest in the history of cartography, spatial discourse, and urban planning in postwar Taiwan.

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## Notes

- 2 Examples of this type of materials include: Huang (2000), Lai and Wei (2003, 2010), and Gao and Wei (2004).
- 3 See Hong (1999a, 1999b), Xia (1996), and Weng (1998).
- 4 See Taiwan min fan jiezhi tu (2003), Qing Yongzheng chao Taiwan tu fu Penghu qundao tu (2006), and Qing Qianlong chao Taiwan yutu (2007).
- 5 I cite only a few examples: Ge (2003); Shi, Song, and Oranjie (2003); Lü and Wei (2006); and Guoli Taiwan Bowuguan (2007).
- 6 See also the middle school geography text *Guomin zhongxue renshi Taiwan*. *Dili pian* 國民中學認識台灣. 地理篇 [Knowing Taiwan for middle schools: Geography section] (Guoli Bianyiguan1997).
- 7 See, for example, *Diming zixun fuwu wang* 地名資訊服務網 [Placename information network, http://gn.moi.gov.tw/geonames/index.aspx], and the online version of the Japanese survey maps of 1904, available at http://gissrv5.sinica.edu.tw/GoogleApp/JM20K1904 1.php.
- 8 Chang self-identifies as a "second-generation mainlander" and a "true Taiwanese" living in the United Kingdom for the last sixteen years. Furthermore, she states that researching

<sup>1</sup> See Shiqi shiji Helanren huizhi de Taiwan lao ditu (1997) and Taiwan baotu (1996).

and writing this book has been both an academic exercise as well as a personal journey for her (213).

- 9 Major theorists cited by Chang include: Henri Lefebvre (for distinctions between perceived, conceived, and lived space); Michel de Certeau, Derek Gregory, and Ken Hillis (on definitions and meanings of "space"); Tuan Yi-fu (regarding various psychological apprehensions of space and place); Anne Buttimer, Gaston Bachelard, and Edward Relph (on the meanings of home and homeland); J. B. Harley and Denis Wood (concerning critical geography and the power of maps); Cordell Yee (for the characteristics of "traditional" Chinese cartographic practices); Michel Foucault (on knowledge and power); Edward Said (for imperialism and culture); Louis Althusser (on "ideological state apparatuses"); and Benedict Anderson (for nationalism).
- 10 Given the globally connected world in which we live, incorporating Taiwan studies scholarship published in East Asia, in addition to that produced in North America and Europe, seems essential if we are to overcome the area studies limitations created by the Cold War.
- 11 This included the yearbook compilers' regular enumeration of specific regions within the national territory and detailed mapping of administrative divisions.
- 12 Chang cites one example of military cartography that appears to have been disseminated to libraries, though perhaps not to individuals, in the first decade after KMT rule in Taiwan: Zhang (1959–1962).
- 13 Chang cites several examples of the arrests of individuals seeking, procuring, or attempting to publish "sensitive" maps during this early postwar period (82–87).
- Several of the fifteen books published recently by Routledge in the same series ("Routledge Research on Taiwan") come immediately to mind, including: Ngo and Wang (2011); Schubert and Damm (2011); Ash, Garver, and Prime (2011); Wang (2014); and Chang and Holt (2014). Other recent books discussing identity in Taiwan include: Zhang and Shang (2010); Hong (2011); Lin and Sang (2012); Chang and Klöter (2012); Lee and Williams (2014); and Hsu (2014).
- 15 This collaborative work has been discussed by several scholars of Taiwan's colonial education system. See, for example, Zhou (2001), Xu (2005), and Chang (2012).

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