

An active policy of “desinicisation”

Compiled and commented by Mathieu Duchâtel based on:

- “The new version of the history textbooks allows us to rediscover the true face of the history of Taiwan,” editorial, *Ziyou Shibao* (Liberty Times), 1 February 2007.
- Chang Ching-wei, “The revised versions of the high school history textbooks abandon a myth in a neutral manner,” *Xin Taiwan Xinwen Zhoukan*, n° 567, 1 February 2007.
- Wang Yi-feng, “National identity: the seeds have to be sown in academic textbooks,” *Xin Taiwan Xinwen Zhoukan*, n° 567, 1 February 2007.
- “Legalist independence hits a wall, psychological independence is inflamed,” editorial, *Lienhebao*, 2 February 2007.
- Philip Yang Yung-ming, “Changing names at any price means playing on the heartstrings,” *Lienhebao*, 11 February 2007, p. 15.
- Lin Huo-wang, “Chen Shui-bian is changing names to save his skin after 2006,” *Lienhebao*, 12 February 2007, p. 15.

Since the beginning of 2007, three issues have dominated domestic Taiwanese politics: the corruption cases, the selection by the political parties of their candidates for the 2008 presidential elections, and the desinicisation campaign (去中國化) orchestrated by the island’s authorities. This last issue is shaped by strategic and ideological dimensions. Since the foundation of the DPP, desinicisation has represented one of the principal demands of the more independence-minded wing of the party. For its defenders, it represents the result of a legitimate effort to refocus the regime of the People’s Republic of China on Taiwan. It aims to correct the forced sinicisation of the Taiwanese by the Kuomintang and to liberate a national identity suffocated by an authoritarian regime dedicated to the Greater China myth. For its detractors, on the other hand, this desinicisation effort is based on populist calculations and on an underlying independence ideology. It will end up impoverishing Taiwanese culture by cutting it off from its Chinese roots. Some critics even go so far as to affirm that complete desinicisation would result in a total cultural void. In this context of a profound division among the elite, the reform of history textbooks announced in January 2007 by the minister of education, Tu Cheng-sheng⁽⁶⁾, has provoked, as on every political initiative of the DPP government, a hue and cry from the opposition and a volley of applause from the “pro-Taiwanese” political forces. This stormy debate intensified even more when the government announced at the beginning of February the resumption of its campaign to “rectify names” (正名) for state-owned enterprises, which consists in replacing the reference to China in their names by a reference to Taiwan. In its English appellation, the Chinese Petroleum Corporation (CPC), has become CPC Taiwan. From now on, the China Shipbuilding Corporation will be called CSBC Taiwan. The Chunghwa Post Corporation (*Chunghwa* means “China”) has been renamed the Taiwan Post Corporation⁽⁷⁾. In the Chinese-language versions, the use of the word *China* has been completely abandoned in favour of *Taiwan*⁽⁸⁾. At the end of February, the authorities discussed

the practical forms for renaming the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, one of the major tourist attractions in Taipei, the Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall⁽⁹⁾.

This summary is based first of all on the commentaries by the island’s pro-independence press to take stock of the nation-building movement orchestrated by the DPP government and the logic that rules it. Nation-building is distinct from “state-building”. While seeking to maintain stability in the Taiwan Strait, Chen Shui-bian and his successive governments have been extremely prudent as far as state-building is concerned, while devoting considerable energy to “Taiwanise” Taiwanese society, considering that it was necessary to “desinify” it for that. This analysis then sets out to take stock of the criticisms scourging this desinicisation policy, based on an editorial and two opinion articles published by renowned academics in the opposition’s daily newspaper *Lienhebao*. Interestingly, if the three texts selected are not totally devoid of cynicism or blistering barbs against Chen Shui-bian, they seem to forearm themselves against any accusation of being anti-independence and are keen to provide reminders of their commitment to the independence of the Republic of China on Taiwan. Faced with “two Chinas” or “one China, one Taiwan”, the principle of one China preached by Beijing is attractive to no more than a silent majority in Taiwan.

The new history textbooks used in high schools from the beginning of the second term in the 2006 2007 school year have gone through the grinder of the name-change cam-

6. Born in 1948, the Minister of Education is a historian by training, specialising in the history of Ancient China. A research fellow at the Academia Sinica until 2000, he became an advisor to the Ministry of Education in 1994. He drafted several speeches for Lee Teng hui, in particular those relating to the events of 28 February 1947. In 2000, he was appointed by Chen Shui bian to head up the National Palace Museum, a position with a ministerial rank, when he stated that he was committed to the “depoliticisation” of the collections of the Chinese empire. He was appointed Minister of Education in 2004.

7. “State run firms begin name change,” *Taipei Times*, 10 February 2007.

8. “Half-Baked Name Change, Taiwan,” *Taipei Times*, 11 February 2007.

9. “Chang Kai-shek Memorial Hall Must Go: Chen,” *China Post*, 27 February 2007. The Ministry of Defence has been engaged in removing the statues of Chang Kai-shek from military buildings. In September 2006, Taiwan’s international airport, the Chang Kai-shek airport, was renamed “Taoyuan Airport”.

paign, one of the hobby-horses of the more independence-minded wing of the DPP. Thus Sun Yat-sen will no longer be called the “Father of the Nation” (國父), but Sun Yat-sen, which, the political opposition says, boils down to delegitimising the Republic of China. Moreover, all the qualifiers traditionally used in the Republic of China to designate mainland China, such as “the Chinese communists” (中共), “our country” (本國), or even “the mainland” (大陸), will be replaced by “China”. The founding events that led to the overthrow of the Qing dynasty and to the establishment of the Republic of China are similarly targeted, such as those at Wuchang, which will no longer be termed the “Wuchang rebellion” (起義), but the “Wuchang insurrection” (起事), a term voluntarily more neutral that no longer seeks, in contrast to the previous expression, to confer a moral justification on the revolution against the Qing dynasty. On the other hand, the episode in which the emperor Qin Shihuang united the Warring States in 221 BC will no longer be taught. The period of the Japanese occupation (1895-1945) will also see a change in description, with the abandonment of the term “occupation” (日据), judged too negative, and its replacement by the wording “Japanese administration” (日治). Finally, the number of lessons dedicated to Chinese history will once again be reduced. In reality, this “rectification of names” in the history textbooks is an amplification of a reform of greater scope that, starting in 2004, has definitively integrated a dividing line between the history of Taiwan and the history of China.

The editorialist of the *Liberty Times* accepts the criticism of an opposition legislator, according to whom this reform can be compared to a “cultural revolution”. In his view, however, this is a cultural revolution based on democratic values and on a “Taiwaness”, and is intended to return to the Taiwanese their right to see the world from Taiwan, rather than through the prism of a Chinese nationalism imposed by force on the Taiwanese by the Kuomintang. For this editorialist, who picks up on a key argument of the Taiwanese independentists, Taiwanese society has experienced several invasions: the Dutch, the Spanish, the Ming loyalists of Zeng Chenggong (Koxinga), the Chinese empire during the Qing dynasty, the Japanese and, finally, the nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek. According to this argument, each invader brought with them a set of practices that contributed to the formation of a specific Taiwanese culture. From this point of view, Chinese culture is only one component among several others making up Taiwanese culture. But under the authoritarian regime of the Kuomintang, all the resources of

the one-party state were employed to “brainwash” the Taiwanese by imposing a Chinese identity on them, by crushing any specific characteristics of Taiwanese culture and by suffocating its diversity. Thus the teaching of history under the Kuomintang not only reflected the cultural imperialism of the Chinese, that “power derived from the outside” (外來政權), it personalised the dictatorial nature of the occupying regime. In contrast, the reform of the history programmes adopted by the DPP government is part and parcel of the democratisation of the island. Now, according to the *Liberty Times* editorialist, Chen Shui-bian has a mandate to implement this reform. His victory in the presidential elections of 2000 and his re-election in 2004 have committed him to consolidate the “Taiwanisation” undertaking and to reinforce the “Taiwanese subjectivity”. Chen is president of the Taiwanese. Given that, it is normal that he should enshrine their right to perceive history from their own point of view.

The *Xin Taiwan Xinwen Zhoukan* sets out to respond to the criticisms which state that the history textbooks merely reflect an ideological project and the intrusion of politics in education. It bases its argument on a quotation from Tu Cheng-sheng, who accurately grasps the dominant mood in Taiwanese society: “Those who think that my reform is borne by ideology are judging it from the viewpoint of their own subjective ideology”. The thesis of the pro-independence weekly newspaper is based on the argument which reasons that the change of names should not be read through the prism of the independence/unification debate, as it only represents a justifiable effort to demolish the legacy of the Kuomintang. For the weekly, this reform is moderate, and it is even questionable that the history of China takes up more space in Taiwan’s school textbooks than the history of Japan, Korea, Vietnam or the other nations that occupy Taiwan’s regional space...

For the editorialist of *Lienhebao*, Chen Shui-bian, while promising—during his two inaugural addresses in 2000 and 2004—not to declare independence, has already renounced the construction of an independent Republic of Taiwan and admitted that that was an unrealisable goal. Since then, he has abandoned the state-building project and renounced (*de jure* 法理台獨) independence. But on the cultural, social

10. “US Criticizes Changes in Names of Taiwan’s state companies”, *AFP*, 10 February 2007.
11. “Les relations entre les deux rives, bilan en 2006 et perspectives,” *China Analysis*, n° 11/12, January 2007.
12. Philip Yang, “Doubly Dualistic Dilemma: US Strategy Towards China and Taiwan,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, vol. 6, n° 2, August 2006.

and education fronts, Chen is raising high the green flag of what the *Lienhebao* calls “psychological independence” (心理台獨). His goal, says the editorialist, is to play on the heartstrings while leading people to believe, and pretending himself to believe, that a declaration of independence is still possible. Chen’s strategy consists in triggering a shockwave through Taiwanese society and taking advantage of the uproar that it unleashes in order to conceal the absence of concrete results and to garner the citizens’ votes while they are in a state of shock.

For the editorialist, there are two senses to the idea of Taiwan’s independence. The first consists in opposing the People’s Republic of China. The second describes the effort to overthrow the People’s Republic of China. If the issue is to refuse annexation by the communist regime, the policy of desinication is meaningless. In its resolution on the future of Taiwan, passed by the executive committee of the DPP in 1999 before the presidential elections, the party revised its historical project of building a Republic of Taiwan, by declaring that “Taiwan is already an independent and sovereign state, its name is the Republic of China”. By recognising the legitimacy of the Republic of China, the DPP became an independence party in the primary sense of the term. And according to the *Lienhebao*, it has espoused the majority opinion of the Taiwanese population, the opinion that admits the existence of a sovereign state on either side of the Taiwan Strait. But if the DPP returns to its state-building project and to its ideal of destroying the People’s Republic of China, the most probable scenario is that, without the shell of the Republic of China, Taiwan will be at the mercy of the People’s Republic of China. According to the *Lienhebao*, the desinication movement is first and foremost orchestrated against the Republic of China; it leads the Taiwanese to look down on their own state and divides society by treating those who still identify with the Republic of China as “Chinese swine” (中國豬). Thus, by deploying such energy against the Republic of China, the only effect obtained by the DPP is to weaken still further Taiwan’s position in relation to China, by confronting it with a divided society, and, in the final analysis, relaying Beijing’s efforts to accelerate the elimination of the People’s Republic of China.

Philip Yang notes that the wave of name changes of state-owned enterprises has provoked an unusual reaction from the State Department in the USA, which has declared that it does not support “the administrative measures taken by the Taiwanese authorities that could give the impression of unilaterally changing the status of Taiwan or of setting course for independence⁽¹⁰⁾”. For this academic, this new

initiative of the DPP is far less ideological than strategic. It aims to create the conditions necessary for a good showing in the legislative elections in December, then in the presidential elections in 2008, by a tactic of divide and conquer and by erasing any memory of the total absence of results from public action since the re-election of Chen Shui-bian in 2004. But in this perspective, the DPP is forgetting that desinication could trigger a new crisis in the Taiwan Strait. It is from this viewpoint that Philip Yang puts forward an analysis of how the security triangle will work based on the case of the desinication measures. For him, the trend towards the stabilisation of relations across the Strait over the last two years can be explained as much by the new strategy of Hu Jintao⁽¹¹⁾ as by the role played by Washington of double dissuasion and maintenance of the political and military status quo⁽¹²⁾. The American statements, motivated by the desire to maintain stability in cross-Strait relations, have sought to forestall a direction reaction from China against the desinication on Taiwan. For recent history has shown that any explosion of verbal violence on the part of China against Taiwan has been counter-productive. On the other hand, faced with the American reprimands, Cho Jung tai, secretary general of the presidential office, could only attempt to close this chapter by declaring that Taiwan objected to any interference in its domestic affairs⁽¹³⁾.

A third critical viewpoint is that of Lin Huo-wang, who begins his analysis by denouncing the absence of social dialogue and the expeditious methods of the government. The changes of name will cause the state-owned enterprises in question to lose tens of millions of Taiwanese dollars⁽¹⁴⁾. Could this public money not have been better spent on improving the economic environment or on social services? The DPP’s approach is clear and nothing new: from the beginning of 2007, the party has wanted to take the initiative and define the theme on which the next elections will be played out. In the past, the DPP has used this strategy repeatedly, with effectiveness far superior to that of its political opponents, who have always failed to place the question of economic growth at the heart of the election debate. The new wave of desinication suggests that the DPP will again seek to place the question of national identity at the heart of the next electoral jousts. However, with the change of

13. “Government Brushes off US Criticism,” *Taipei Times*, 11 February 2007.

14. For example, the estimated cost of changing the name of the Post is in excess of 1.5 million euros, but Chen Shui-bian has justified his action by reckoning that the enterprises would gain in competitiveness in the medium term thanks to a better visibility, and that it was normal to “spend a modest sum for future generations.”

names of the state-owned enterprises, the DPP has chosen an issue where, according to all the surveys, a majority of the island's population disapprove of the government's action. For Lin Huo-wang, this can be explained by the fact that the real motivation of Chen Shui-bian is to consolidate the dependence of the candidate who will represent the DPP in the presidential elections in 2008 on him and his political line. In these circumstances, the principal preoccupation would be to avoid his name being sullied by the corruption case that, for the moment, only affects his wife, as the

Constitution of the Republic of China provides for criminal immunity of the president during his mandate. Wu Shu-chen has refused six times, for health reasons, to appear before the court. According to Lin Huo-wang, the presidential couple is seeking to gain time. Given that, Chen Shui-bian wants to impose himself as the person who will “make” the next president of Taiwan in order to benefit from the protection of the next head of state... A line of reasoning that has the merit of revealing the distrust of some members of the island's elite in judicial independence... •