

Formation of Taiwanese Consciousness and Mobilization of Ethnic Groups in Democratic Movement of 1970s: Focus on Taiwanese Language Concerns (1972-1978)

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the evolution of political attitudes and discourses of democratic movement in Taiwan on the Taiwanese language issue from 1972 to 1978 when the Kuomintang (KMT) government comprehensively suppressed Taiwanese-language TV programs. Moreover, it aims to investigate how the democratic movement in Taiwan evolved from a solely liberal political appeal to a political movement driven by a strong Taiwanese local consciousness and partly by ethnic mobilization throughout this period.

In 1972, the KMT government began to crack down on Taiwanese-language TV programs and strangled the living space of Taiwanese-language popular culture in an attempt to completely unify the vernacular language used in Taiwan. With Taiwanese being the mother tongue of the largest ethnic group in Taiwan, the Hoklo people, this policy immediately aroused dissatisfaction in Taiwanese society. In the provincial assembly and elections, pro-democracy activists were fighting for the language rights of the Taiwanese, with focus primarily on defending the right of the elderly or rural citizens to watch TV programs of their mother tongue.

The KMT government stipulated the “dialect” sunset provision in the Radio and Television Act in 1975 in an attempt to entirely eradicate native languages in the public space. This further expanded the issue of the Taiwanese language, leading pro-democracy activists to challenge language oppression and make it their main political appeal for election mobilization. At the same time, the oppression of the Taiwanese language had become the most significant cause in the deterioration of ethnic identification.

Owing to the victory of non-KMT candidates in the local elections in November 1977 and the impact of the Zhongli Incident on the ruling authority of the KMT, the pro-

democracy activists gave increasing attention to the Taiwanese language issue. They not only openly challenged the KMT government's language policy in the provincial assembly, but also expanded their appeal from fighting merely for Taiwanese-language TV shows to battling for the right to use the mother tongues of Taiwan's intrinsic ethnic groups. During that period, in the discourse on the language issue in Taiwan, an obvious Taiwanese local consciousness emerged, and the role of ethnic mobilization became more visible. By December 1978, demand against language and ethnic identity discrimination had become one of the 12 most frequently cited political viewpoints of the democratic movement in Taiwan. Thereafter, the Taiwanese language issue was more than merely a TV program concern; it became a common appeal of political mobilization in the democratic movement of Taiwan.

Keywords: Taiwanese, Ethnic Groups in Taiwan, TV Programs, Democratic Movement, Ethnic Politics