

To Name is to Norm: Cultural Politics of Street Naming in Tainan City

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary society, the naming of a place is a key component in the relationship between a place and its political identification. In this sense, to name is to norm; and street names reflect the symbolic meanings and spatial orders bestowed upon a place by those in control or in power. Taiwan has been ruled by different regimes; and political changes were often accompanied with and manifested by alterations of street names.

This paper examines changes in street names in Tainan, the oldest city of Taiwan, in light of regime transition or change in government. Because nomination makes a fundamental gesture of possession, the naming of streets in the city affords one more opportunity to affirm or to contest, control of the city. With reference to concepts of cultural politics, the practice of naming and renaming of streets in Tainan was analyzed to reveal street naming as a means to institute/consolidate ruling power.

Keywords: Tainan, Street Names, Power Transition, Spatial Allocation, Culture Politics