Workshop proposal:

Conceptions of the Nation-state: China, Taiwan, Hong Kong

Organized by Sebastian Veg

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Argument

The question of the Chinese nation-state and its transformations throughout the 20th century is a much-discussed one, but it has once again come to the fore in recent years, both at the centre and at the borders of the PRC state.

Historically, the nation-state has been a problematic proposition throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, in a context in which the borders of the state and the nation did not coincide. It is generally considered that culture rather than politics was the binding force behind the successive empires that ruled what is now China. While Anti-Manchuism and Han nationalism were strong drivers of the revolutionary movement in the late years of the Qing empire, the Republic of China and the KMT rapidly embraced the “Five-nation Republic” (wuzu gonghe). Socialist internationalism and Chinese nationalism coexisted in the CCP discourse, both before and after 1949.

In recent years, a series of developments have once again brought the question of the nation to the fore. The democratization of the polity on Taiwan from the late 1980s coincided with the formulation of a new discourse of Taiwan-centered nationalism. In post-handover Hong Kong, the repeated thwarting of democratization by pro-Beijing forces has led to the formulation of a “nativist” (bentu) discourse, which seeks to synchronize the political community requesting democracy with the cultural community defined by a common identification. Finally, in the PRC, the discourse of the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,” first formulated by Jiang Zemin and strongly promoted by Xi Jinping has reaffirmed the link between the Chinese nation and the Communist Party as its most adequate embodiment.

In each of these situations, ethnic-cultural and political-civic representations of and identifications with one or several “nations” or communities coexist in tension. The CCP promotes nationalism in connection with the “Chinese nation,” while demonizing “nativism” in a Hong Kong or Taiwan context. Nationalism, in particular when it is formulated in ethnic-cultural terms, has been routinely criticized by academics (e.g. in Hong Kong), but may also have played a positive role in the advancement of democratic agendas in other contexts (Eastern Europe, Taiwan). This workshop seeks to examine these tensions against the larger background of a global resurgence of nationalism in the 21st century.
Program

10:00  Frank Muyard (National Central University)
Modern Nation vs. Empire-Nation in Taiwan and China

10:40  Wu Jieh-min (Academia Sinica)
Notes on the Tensions between Taiwanese Nationalism and Chinese Irredentism during Taiwan's Democratization Era

11:20  Françoise Mengin (Sciences Po)
Travelling with a Blurred Citizenship: Taiwanese People's Paper Identitie(s)

12:00-14:00  Lunch

14:30  Edmund Cheng (Hong Kong Baptist University)
Democratic Reunification and Offensive Localism: Ideational Power Struggle in Post-Handover Hong Kong

15:10  Samson Yuen (Oxford, Open University of Hong Kong)
Conception of Chineseness: Identity Politics in Hong Kong 2008-2015

15:50  Sebastian Veg (EHESS)
National and Local identification in June Fourth vigils in Hong Kong

16:30  Brian Leung (HKU/Sciences Po)
Polity, nation and legitimacy: a sketch of a theory of Hong Kong nationalism

17:10-18:00  Concluding remarks and discussion led by Jean-Philippe Béja (CNRS)

The speakers' presentations will last 25 minutes with 15 minutes for questions afterwards.