

Abstract

Question: This thesis examines the question of why national consciousness in Taiwan is weak. After an examination of the principal theories of national consciousness formation, it posits the idea that recently settled nations have particular problems in constructing a sufficiently resonant historical narrative on which to build a national identity.

Methodology: Taiwan's weak national identity is established by the use of polling data. Australia is taken as an example of another country with weak national consciousness, as demonstrated in the failure of the 1999 referendum on a republic. Traditional narratives of Australian contrariness toward its subordinate relationship with Britain are compared with modern historical analysis challenging such assumptions and the idea that conflict and movement toward separatism is inevitable. The weakness of Australian national consciousness is shown to be rooted in the lack of a narrative of development sufficiently rejectionist of Australia's alternative identity as a British imperial possession. Taiwan's historical and political development is then examined for evidence of the development of a narrative suitably rejectionist of Taiwan's alternative identities as part of the Japanese empire and part of China.

Conclusion: Taiwanese have failed to develop a narrative of nationhood. This has been due to assimilation pressure from non-Taiwanese governments, as well as cultural limitations inhibiting the spread of a nationalist ideology.

KEY WORDS: Taiwan, Australia, history, nationalism, identity.

