

Analytic Philosophy in Taiwan: Impact within and beyond Academia

Ting-an Lin

Stanford University & University of Connecticut

tinanlin@stanford.edu

Abstract

This paper summarizes the evolution of analytic philosophy in Taiwan, examines its impact within and beyond academia, and discusses the future of the discipline. The roots of modern philosophy in Taiwan can be traced back to the Japanese colonial era, and analytic philosophy was introduced to the country in the late 1940s when many intellectuals in China moved to Taiwan. However, massive curbs were imposed on philosophy during Chiang Kai-shek's dictatorship, and the discipline began to thrive again only after Taiwan's democratization in the late 1980s. Nonetheless, since its introduction in the colonial era, modern philosophy has made significant contributions in Taiwan, encouraging interdisciplinary engagements, advancing civic education, and promoting the spirit of democracy and political liberation. Philosophy has played a key role in Taiwan's remarkable transformation from an island colonized for hundreds of years to a country that recognizes democracy, freedom, and human rights. The themes of anti-colonialism and anti-domination seen in the works of modern Taiwanese philosophers not only reflect the discipline's political and historical underpinnings but also signal how Taiwanese philosophy can acquire a distinct identity, despite being influenced by many other philosophical traditions. While still at a nascent stage, Taiwanese philosophy has the potential to join forces with other philosophical traditions in advancing the vision of decolonizing philosophy.

1. Introduction

Taiwan is recognized for achieving remarkable progress in the domains of democracy, freedom, and human rights in the past few decades. Taiwan's first presidential elections were held in 1995, and the country welcomed its first female president in 2016. In 2019, Taiwan became the first Asian country to legalize same-sex marriage between its citizens. According to the Democracy Index released by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2023,¹ Taiwan is one of the twenty-four countries categorized as "full democracies," and it is ranked ahead of all other Asian countries. While there is certainly room for more improvement, for a nation that endured almost four hundred years of colonial rule and dictatorship, Taiwan has been developing at an incredible pace.

Interestingly, very little is known about the vital role played by philosophy in Taiwan's decolonization, democratization, and continual pursuit of cultural identity. The goal of this paper is to bridge this knowledge gap. Section 2 presents a brief history of modern philosophy in Taiwan, which consists of three phases: the Japanese colonial era (1895–1945), Chiang's dictatorship (1945–1988), and the era of democratization (since the 1980s). In Section 3, I discuss the impact of analytic philosophy on academia, civic education, and the political environment. In Section 4, I link the

¹ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2022. Frontline Democracy and The Battle for Ukraine* (London: EIU, 2023).

historical reflections on philosophy in Taiwan with recent discussions on an embryonic domain named *Taiwanese philosophy*.

2. A Brief History of Philosophy in Taiwan

The main island of Taiwan is sometimes referred to as *Formosa*, which means “beautiful island” and is a name that can be traced back to Portuguese sailors who sailed past the island in the 16th century. Although those sailors believed the land was uninhabited, Taiwanese indigenous people (who are Austronesian-speaking peoples) had settled on the island for 6,000 years. Given the scarce written records of Taiwanese indigenous philosophical traditions, contemporary scholars have relied on colloquial myths and legends to study those philosophical ideas.²

Since the 16th century, a series of six rulers colonized Taiwan for about four hundred years: the Dutch (1624–1662), the Spanish (1626–1642), the Cheng family (1662–1683), the Manchu Qing (1683–1895), the Japanese (1895–1945), and the Chiang family (1945–1988).³ These foreign rulers introduced diverse philosophies to Taiwan; for example, the Dutch and the Spanish imported Calvinism and Catholicism, respectively; the Cheng Family ushered neo-Confucianism, and under Manchu Qing’s reign, Buddhism, Daoism, and Scottish Presbyterianism were introduced in Taiwan.⁴ Next, I focus on the development of philosophy under three political periods in Taiwan: the Japanese colonial era, Chiang’s dictatorship, and the era of democratization.

2.1 Modern Philosophy in Taiwan during the Japanese Colonial Era

After being defeated in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, the Qing dynasty ceded the sovereignty of Taiwan to Japan. As Japan’s first colony, Taiwan witnessed a period of tremendous modernization, including the introduction of the Western educational system and philosophy as an academic discipline. Japanese academics at the time were strongly influenced by Continental philosophy (such as German idealism and Marxism) and the Japanese Kyoto School; thus, many Taiwanese intellectuals who received higher education in mainland Japan or at the newly founded Taipei Imperial University were widely exposed to the theories of Continental scholars (e.g., Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx) and scholars of the Kyoto School (e.g., Nishida Kitarō (西田幾多郎), Tanabe Hajime (田邊元), Watsuji Tetsuro (和辻哲郎)). American pragmatism also played an important role in influencing Taiwanese scholars of the time, especially through the Taiwanese intellectuals who pursued graduate studies in the United States (US) and returned with new philosophical ideas.

Despite the pluralist philosophical influences, many Taiwanese philosophers engaged with a common theme in their work: the meaning of existence, specifically in terms of resisting Japanese

² Tunkan Tansikian (陳張培倫), “Reflections on the Epistemological Studies of Taiwanese Aborigines,” (關於原住民族知識研究的一些反思) *Taiwan Indigenous Studies Review*, no. 5 (2009): 25–53.

³ J. Bruce Jacobs, “Whither Taiwanization? The Colonization, Democratization and Taiwanization of Taiwan,” *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 14, no. 4 (2013): 567–586.

⁴ Tzu-wei Hung, “Anglo-American Philosophy in Taiwan: A Centennial Review,” *Asian Journal of Philosophy*, no.1 (2022): 19.

political domination and cultural assimilation as well as building Taiwan's cultural identity.⁵ In line with Tzu-wei Hung's (洪子偉)⁶ usage, I refer to these scholars as *Sit-chûn scholars*.⁷ The term "Sit-chûn (實存)" means "existence" in the Taiwanese Hokkien language, and it denotes not only the metaphysical investigation of existence but also the condition, value, and meaning of actual human existence. For example, Yao-hsün Hung (洪耀勳), who earned his degree from Tokyo Imperial University (now University of Tokyo) and studied German idealism and Hegel's theories, relied on Watsuji Tetsuro and Hegel's theories to argue the case of the distinctiveness of Taiwanese culture.⁸ Mosei Lin (林茂生), who attended college in mainland Japan and later pursued his graduate studies at Columbia University under John Dewey, argued that the Japanese school system in Taiwan had failed to fulfill the principles of education and resulted in cultural discrimination.⁹

In addition to contributing academically, many Sit-chûn scholars also participated in various social movements for cultural revolution. For example, Mosei Lin co-founded the Taiwanese Cultural Association (台灣文化協會) in the 1920s and offered summer classes on philosophy. Qiu-wu Lin (林秋梧) and Shao-hsing Chen (陳紹馨) delivered lectures at various public events organized by the Taiwanese Cultural Association. *Formosa Speaks* authored by Wen-kwei Liao/Joshua Liao (廖文奎)¹⁰ is regarded as a seminal work on Taiwanese independence. The dissemination of philosophical ideas through these social and cultural movements had long-lasting impacts on Taiwan (as will be discussed later in Section 3).

2.2 Analytic Philosophy in Taiwan under Chiang's Dictatorship

The abrupt shift in political regime at the end of World War II in 1945, from Japanese colonial power to the Kuomintang (KMT)-led government of the Republic of China (ROC), ushered tremendous changes in the political, social, and cultural spheres of Taiwan, which in turn had significant implications on the development of philosophy in Taiwan. Although Taiwanese citizens originally welcomed the end of fifty years of Japanese colonialism, they soon came to resent the corruption and indiscipline of the ROC administration. The February 28 massacre (or the 228 massacre) in 1947 marked the beginning of Chiang Kai-shek's military regime in Taiwan. Two years later, in 1949, Chiang's KMT government lost to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the Chinese

⁵ Tzu-wei Hung, *Existential Engagement: Philosophy in Taiwan, the Japanese Era* (存在交渉：日治時期的台灣哲學) (Taipei: Academia Sinica and Linking Publishing, 2016); Tzu-wei Hung, "On the Sit-chûn Scholars of Taiwanese Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 69, no.4 (2019): 973–993.

⁶ To follow the usual practices in different languages, when referring to Taiwanese philosophers and scholars in this article, I refer to their English name (or translated English name) in the given name–family name order, followed by their Chinese or Taiwanese name in the family name–given name order in the parentheses without space between the family name and given name. The Chinese or Taiwanese name is only included the first time a name appears.

⁷ Hung, *Existential Engagement*; Hung, "On the Sit-chûn Scholars."

⁸ Yao-hsün Hung, "Fudo Bunkakan: Taiwan Fudo No Renkan Ni Oite," (風土文化觀——台灣風土との関連に於いて) *Taiwan Times*, June 1936.

⁹ Mosei Lin, *Public Education in Formosa Under the Japanese Administration: A Historical and Analytical Study of the Development and the Cultural Problems* (Columbia University, 1929).

¹⁰ Joshua Liao, *Formosa Speaks* (The Formosan League for Re-emancipation, 1950).

Civil War and fled to Taiwan. From 1949 to 1987, Taiwan was under martial law—the second longest imposition of martial law in the world—and went through a period known as “White Terror.”

This political environment had both positive and negative effects on the evolution of philosophy in Taiwan. On the one hand, when the CCP took over China, many intellectuals, including philosophy scholars, moved from China to Taiwan, thereby transmitting philosophical traditions, including analytic philosophy. Hai-guang Yin (殷海光) was an eminent immigrant scholar, who promoted analytic philosophy, especially the ideas of liberalism and logical positivism. Yin was born in China, completed his graduate studies in philosophy at Tsinghua University, and taught philosophy at the University of Nanking. In 1949, he settled in Taiwan and began teaching philosophy at National Taiwan University (NTU), the country’s most reputed public research university. Inspired by the May Fourth Movement, Yin believed that science, freedom, and democracy are vital to society.¹¹ Accordingly, he introduced and popularized logical empiricism and liberalism in Taiwan, taught the philosophy of science and logic at NTU, wrote and translated textbooks on logic, translated Friedrich Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* into Chinese, and published numerous political commentaries critiquing Chiang’s military regime and dictatorship in two liberal magazines, *Free China Journal* (自由中國) and *Wensin* (文星). Yin inspired many Taiwanese students of the time, some of whom went on to become famous philosophy scholars.

Among the negative effects of Chiang’s military regime in Taiwan was the ban on Japanese language and publications written in Japanese, including philosophical works. Under the White Terror, numerous Taiwanese intellectuals were killed (Lin Mosei was among them), tortured, or forced into exile. Those who stayed in Taiwan endured various restrictions on their freedom. For example, speeches or publications that in any way could be interpreted as “communist” were considered “rebellious,” and people associated with rebellious ideas (e.g., owning a book that was categorized as “communist” by the government) attracted extreme punishment.

The arbitrary use of political power and tight restrictions on freedom greatly impeded the development of philosophy in Taiwan. Hai-guang Yin, a leading scholar of analytic philosophy mentioned earlier, was one of the victims of Chiang’s dictatorship. In 1960, the KMT government forced *Free China Journal* to shut down (referred to as *Free China Journal Incident*) after it had published several pieces criticizing the Chiang administration. Yin, as one of *Free China Journal*’s co-editors and authors, was also targeted: some of his publications were banned, his research subsidy and some sources of income were withdrawn, he was prevented from lecturing students, and was placed under house arrest until his death in 1969. Later, to further diminish Yin’s liberal influence, the government intervened in the operations of the Philosophy Department at NTU under the guise of an “anti-communism” drive, leading to a series of incidents during 1972-1975 that were together referred to as the *NTU Philosophy Department Incident* (台大哲學系事件). In the Philosophy Department Incident, thirteen philosophy faculty members (some of them are students of Yin, such as Guying Chen (陳鼓

¹¹ Ruey-lin Chen (陳瑞麟), “The Pioneering of Contemporary Taiwan’s Philosophy of Science: Yin Hai-kuang’s Philosophy of Science,” (臺灣科學哲學的首航：殷海光的科學哲學) *The National Chengchi University Philosophical Journal* 10 (2003): 1–33.

應) and Xiaobo Wang (王曉波) were expelled and silenced. These incidents adversely affected the development and the climate surrounding philosophy.

2.3 Analytic Philosophy in Taiwan under the Era of Democratization

After the Formosa Incident (美麗島事件) in 1979 and a few assassinations of dissidents in the 1980s, the international society started to raise concerns about Taiwan's human rights situation and forced the KMT-led administration to start the process of democratization. In 1986, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was founded; 1987 marked the end of Taiwan's 38-year-long martial law regime; and in 1996, Taiwan held its first direct presidential election. However, the end of the martial law did not suddenly enable the Taiwanese to enjoy freedom. KMT's influence and control exerted via laws enacted over decades still impose strong restrictions on Taiwanese, and Taiwan's pursuit of democratization and transitional justice continued for a few decades and involved significant efforts from many Taiwanese.

In the 1980s, against the backdrop of gradual democratization and closer links with the US, many Taiwanese citizens went abroad to study philosophy and carried back the influences of analytic philosophy to Taiwan. Among the pioneers were Po-wen Kuo (郭博文) (who studied value theory and received his Ph.D. from Yale University) and Cheng-hung Lin (林正弘) (a student of Hai-guang Yin; who later received his Ph.D. from UC Berkeley and worked on logic, epistemology, and the philosophy of science), both of whom taught at NTU. Other key figures studying analytic philosophy in Taiwan at the time were Futzeng Liu (劉福增), Yih-mei Huang (黃懿梅), Shih-yu Kuo (郭實渝), and Daiwei Fu (傅大為). In the 1990s, more scholars received their Ph.D.s in the US and the United Kingdom (UK) and returned to Taiwan, including Hua Tai (戴華), Allen Y. Houn (洪裕宏), Jih-ching Ho (何志青), Chin-mu Yang (楊金穆), Ruey-yuan Wu (吳瑞媛), and Ser-min Shei (謝世民).¹² Together, these scholars formed a strong alliance of analytic philosophy traditions, shaping the philosophical landscape in a more pluralistic way. Today, most philosophers in Taiwan categorize philosophical studies into three major groups: Chinese philosophy, continental philosophy, and analytic philosophy.

During the era of democratization, some attempts were carried out at institutionalizing philosophical studies in Taiwan, which then became the foundation for the discipline to thrive. In 1996, the Taiwan Philosophical Association (TPA) was founded. Although analytic philosophers were the main advocates and founding members of the TPA, the body was inclusive and welcoming of all traditions of philosophical study. Additionally, the end of colonization and dictatorship allowed more space for philosophical education to flourish. Today, twelve universities offer philosophy programs in

¹² Hung, "Anglo-American Philosophy in Taiwan."

Taiwan.¹³ Conferences, publications,¹⁴ and other academic events have also contributed to the development of philosophy.

3. Impact of Analytic Philosophy in Taiwan

How has the development of analytic philosophy affected Taiwan? In addition to contributions along the axes of research, teaching, and service, analytic philosophers in Taiwan have had profound effects on the overall character of academia and society. In this section, I discuss the impact of analytic philosophy on Taiwan along three dimensions: academia, civic education, and political environment. I argue that analytic philosophy has contributed to interdisciplinary engagements, advanced civic education, and promoted the spirit of democracy and political liberalism.

3.1 Contributing to Interdisciplinary Engagements

Within academia, analytic philosophers have played a crucial role in engaging in interdisciplinary exchange, especially with scholars from other scientific disciplines. A driving force behind such engagement is the Taiwan Association for Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science and Technology (LMPST Taiwan), which is linked to the International Union of History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (IUHPST). Its predecessor organization was founded in the 1960s, and it has since undergone a few rounds of organizational changes; in February 2021, it was registered as a non-profit organization. One of the main purposes of LMPST Taiwan, as well as its predecessor, has been to promote interactions between philosophers and experts in other fields and provide exchange opportunities and platforms. Since the 2010s, LMPST Taiwan has been organizing two biennial conferences: the Taiwan Metaphysics Colloquium (TMC) and the Taiwan Philosophical Logic Colloquium (TPLC). These conferences were hosted by the Department of Philosophy at NTU and were attended by many renowned scholars and resulted in multiple published international anthologies.

Taiwanese philosophers have also made a critical contribution to the building of academic community among East Asian philosophers. Together with scholars in Japan and Korea, Kai-yuan Cheng (鄭凱元) and Szu-ting Chen (陳思廷) initiated the Conference on Contemporary Philosophy in East Asia (CCPEA) and the East Asian Workshop on the Philosophy of Science in the early 2010s. The latter has been renamed into the Asia-Pacific Philosophy of Science Association (APPSA) and been expanded to engage with philosophers in the broader Asia-Pacific area.

¹³ The twelve universities offering philosophy programs are National Taiwan University, National Chengchi University, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, National Tsing Hua University, National Central University, National Chung Cheng University, National Sun Yat-sen University, Soochow University, Fu Jen Catholic University, Chinese Culture University, Tunghai University, and Chang Jung Christian University. In addition to these programs, the Institute of European and American Studies at Academia Sinica is an important institute for philosophical research in Taiwan.

¹⁴ For example, *Eur.America*, *National Taiwan University Philosophical Review*, *Soochow Journal of Philosophical Studies*, and *National Chengchi University Philosophical Journal*.

Another site of close interdisciplinary engagement is the studies on the philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and cognitive neuroscience. Allen Y. Hwang, who received his Ph.D. in Philosophy and Cognitive Science from Indiana University, is a leading philosopher in Taiwan working in these disciplines. He founded two academic institutes of philosophy in Taiwan and taught many scholars in related disciplines. In 2008, the 12th annual meeting of the Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness (ASSC), a highly reputed international conference on consciousness studies, was hosted in Taipei, Taiwan. Then in 2017, the efforts of philosophers in Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, and other Asian countries led to the establishment of the Consciousness Research Network (CoRN). CoRN aims to build a pan-Asia interdisciplinary research network on the studies of consciousness and has since organized biennial meetings in Taiwan and Japan. With the recent advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), discussions on the philosophical and ethical issues surrounding AI, cognition, and consciousness are at the forefront. Engaging in the tradition of interdisciplinary collaborations, analytic philosophers in Taiwan continue playing a crucial role in advancing related research and education.

3.2 Advancing Civic Education

Centuries of colonialism and dictatorship have hampered the development of philosophical education in Taiwan. Given this fact and the rather poor quality of institutionalized education, the promotion of civic education assumes a critical role.

As mentioned earlier, the influence of philosophy on civic education can be traced back to the Japanese colonial era. Under the Japanese rule, Taiwanese philosopher, Mosei Lin co-founded the Taiwanese Cultural Association together with other intellectuals and conducted summer schools on philosophical teachings. Qiu-wu Lin, known as “Taiwan’s revolutionary monk,” was a Buddhist monk attracted to the egalitarian vision of Marx. He used Marxism to criticize certain Buddhist practices in Taiwan at the time, including the superstitious practices and beliefs of excluding women, and proposed a new form of Buddhism—Taiwanese Liberation Buddhism—that was more aligned with the ideals of equity and social justice.¹⁵ He regularly published editorials in newspapers such as *South Seas Buddhist Magazine* (南瀛佛教會會報) and *Taiwan MinPao* (台灣民報).¹⁶ Lin’s Taiwanese Liberation Buddhism deeply impacted the growth of humanistic Buddhism, sex and gender equity, and the animal liberation movement in Taiwan.¹⁷

In the recent decades, the role of philosophy in civic education has been gaining more academic attention. An increasing number of books on public philosophy, both translated and in the local language, are being published. Since 2014, Watchout Philosophy (沃草格哲學) has served as an open forum for publishing public-facing essays on philosophy. Most authors on the forum are philosophy graduates who introduce philosophical ideas relevant to the social and political issues in

¹⁵ Tzu-wei Hung, “Equity and Marxist Buddhism,” *Australasian Philosophical Review* (forthcoming).

¹⁶ Hsiao-feng Li (李筱峰), *Taiwan’s Revolutionary Monk, Lin Qimn* (台灣革命僧：林秋梧) (Zili Wanbao She, 1991).

¹⁷ Hung, “Equity and Marxist Buddhism.” In this article, Hung also noted two other contemporary philosophers, Hui-nan Yang (楊惠南) and Chao-hwei Shih (釋昭慧), who made crucial contribution to gender equity and diversity in Taiwan.

Taiwan. Among professional publications, the Mandarin Encyclopedia of Philosophy (MEP) (華文哲學百科), established in 2017, is Taiwan's version of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, where all the submissions are written by experts from related streams and are subjected to peer reviews and professional editing before being shared online. With free and open resources on philosophy, MEP enables Mandarin readers to have better access to philosophical resources.

In addition to the more traditional route of public engagement through writing essays and books, the publicizing of philosophy has also been pursued in diverse ways. For instance, Café Philo (哲學星期五, literally meaning "Philosophy Friday"), a series of public salons founded by a group of philosophy professors in Taiwan, has been instrumental in popularizing philosophy and public debates. Since 2010, Café Philo has expanded overseas to places such as New York, Boston, the Bay Area, and Munich. In 2013, philosophy professors and high school teachers founded the Philosophical Education Development Organization (Phedo) (台灣高中哲學教育推廣學會) to promote philosophical education in high school. Phedo collaborates with high school teachers to conduct guest lectures on philosophy in high schools, organizes summer camps and essay competitions for high school students, and hosts reading groups and speeches for the general public. In 2014, a group of graduate and doctoral degree holders in philosophy founded Philosophy Medium (哲學新媒體) to explore non-academic career opportunities and popularize philosophy via public essays, podcasts, and online courses. In 2017, the first Taiwanese TV series on philosophy, *Talking about Philosophy in an Easy Way* (哲學談淺淺的), was launched, and many philosophy professors from different sub-disciplines have been invited to talk about philosophy in an engaging format.

Owing to these efforts, philosophy has become a "fashionable" topic in Taiwan and analytic philosophy have benefited from this wave of interest. Furthermore, although analytic philosophy is not the sole focus of attention, it is undeniable that analytic philosophers in Taiwan have played a crucial role in publicizing philosophy.

3.3 Promoting Democracy and Political Liberalism

Last but definitely not least, analytic philosophy has had a profound impact on Taiwan's democratic progress and pursuit of freedom. As mentioned in Section 2.2, since the period of Chiang's dictatorship, analytic philosophy (especially the ideas surrounding political liberalism) has played a vital role in advocating the importance of freedom and democracy in Taiwan.

Nan-jung Cheng (鄭南榕), who was born in the year of the February 28 Massacre and died in the year that martial law ended in Taiwan, was a noteworthy pro-democracy activist. Cheng first studied philosophy at Fu Jen Catholic University and then moved to NTU during his sophomore year. When studying at NTU, Cheng was drawn to the ideals of liberalism and regularly visited Hai-guang Yin (who was under house arrest then) to discuss freedom and democracy. As a result of the Free China Journal Incident and Yin's arrest, Cheng abandoned his original dream of becoming a philosophy professor and immersed himself in political activism for democracy and freedom. After the Formosa Incident in 1979, Cheng started to write political critiques in a few magazines. In 1984,

he founded *Freedom Era Weekly* (自由時代週刊), which became a leading magazine of the democratic movement. Under the slogan “Fighting for 100 percent freedom of speech,” *Freedom Era Weekly* called for democracy and freedom at a time when martial law still forbade open publications that were not run by the KMT. On April 7, 1989, to protest against the charges of “rebellion” and to fight for freedom of speech, Cheng immolated himself.

The contributions of Hai-guang Yin and Nan-jung Cheng received recognized under the era of democratization. In 1993, the Yin Hai-guan Memorial Foundation was established to honor Yin’s contribution to academia and society. Yin’s former residence (where he was under house arrest) is now a museum, and the foundation also operates the Hai-kuang School of Humanities, which organizes public lectures and classes on democracy, human rights, and social and political philosophy. In 1999, the Nylon Cheng Liberty Foundation and Memorial Museum was established at the original site of The Freedom Era weekly magazine in memory of Nan-jung Cheng. In 2016, Taiwan’s Executive Yuan officially marked April 7, the day of Cheng’s self-immolation, as the Day of Freedom of Speech in Taiwan.

Furthermore, during the era of democratization, many philosophers (especially analytic philosophers) are active in promoting democracy and engaging in political critiques. In 1989, the Taipei Society (澄社), an association of political critics formed by groups of liberal scholars, was founded, and Cheng-hung Lin was one of the founding members. Allen Y. Hwang served as the president of the Taipei Society from 2003 to 2005 and is a leading force in Taiwan’s constitutional reform movement. Additionally, many new media outlets and organizations publicizing philosophy (such as Café Philo, Watchout Philosophy, and Phedo) have offered new resources to deepen civic education related to democracy, human rights, and freedom. Today, as the most democratic country in Asia and the first Asian country to legalize same-sex marriage, Taiwan is proud of its strides in democracy, freedom, and human rights, and it is important to recognize the contribution of analytic philosophy to this progress.¹⁸

4. Conclusion: From Philosophy in Taiwan to “Taiwanese Philosophy”

Recently, Taiwanese scholars have been questioning the characteristics of Taiwanese philosophy. The term “Taiwanese philosophy” was first proposed in the late 1980s,¹⁹ but it is only during the last decade that the topic has started capturing more scholarly interest. One might wonder: Does anything qualify as Taiwanese philosophy? If so, what is it? While these are fair questions to be asked, noting that concepts like “Taiwanese” and “philosophy” are socially constructed, Shen-yi Liao (廖顯禕) argues that instead of asking *what x philosophy is*, it is more theoretically and politically advantageous to adopt an *ameliorative approach* to the metaphilosophical questions and ask *what we want*

¹⁸ It is important to acknowledge that there is considerable room for improvement. For example, women faculty are significantly underrepresented in academic philosophy in Taiwan, which raises concerns about gender justice.

¹⁹ Ren-yi Liao (廖仁義), “The Historical Structure of Taiwanese Philosophy: The Emergence and Evolution of Taiwanese Philosophical Eros Under Japanese Colonial Era,” (台灣哲學的歷史結構——日據時期台灣哲學思潮的發生與演變) *Contemporary Monthly* (當代) (August 1988): 25–34.

*x philosophy to be.*²⁰ In the case of Taiwanese philosophy, Liao's analysis implies that Taiwanese philosophers need not take Taiwanese philosophy as it currently is but can and should recognize their power to negotiate this concept collectively.²¹

Indeed, Taiwanese philosophers have been taking on the project to reshape the concept and boundary of Taiwanese philosophy over the past decade. For example, research projects led by Tzu-wei Hung and colleagues have resulted in the rediscovery and compilation of several philosophical works by Taiwanese philosophers from the Japanese colonial era and Chiang's dictatorship.²² It is through these projects that many Taiwanese scholars and the general public have heard about these philosophers and their philosophical ideas. The shared theme of anti-colonialism and anti-domination in the works of contemporary Taiwanese philosophers not only reflects political and historical underpinnings but also signals how Taiwanese philosophy can acquire its own distinctiveness despite being influenced by many other philosophical traditions. Further, it highlights how Taiwanese philosophy, though still at a nascent stage, has the potential to join forces with other philosophical traditions in advancing the vision of decolonizing philosophy.²³

After centuries of colonialism, during which the Taiwanese were often treated as secondary citizens and constantly deprived of tools to develop their own agency, the Taiwanese are now gradually rebuilding their cultural and political subjectivity. In hindsight, philosophy enabled the Taiwanese to overthrow the social hierarchies imposed by various political regimes and fight for their democracy. In the future, Taiwanese philosophy has the potential to empower Taiwanese to build their identity and contribute to the pursuit of liberation in the global world.

Acknowledgments

An earlier version of this paper has been presented at the Pacific APA 2023, as part of a panel titled "The Historic Emergence of Analytic Philosophy in East Asia." I greatly appreciate the efforts of Dien Ho for convening this panel and thank all the insightful feedback from the other speakers and attendees of the panel. Special thanks to Tzu-wei Hung, Shen-yi Liao, Katherine Chieh-ling Cheng, and Yuan-chieh Yang for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

²⁰ Shen-yi Liao, "Diverse Philosophies: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" *The Philosophers' Magazine* 93 (2021): 64–70.

²¹ For related discussions, see Ruey-lin Chen, "Can There Be a Taiwan Theory?" (可以有台灣理論嗎？如何可能？) in *Knowledge Taiwan: On the Possibility of Theory in Taiwan* (知識台灣：台灣理論的可能性), 15–54. Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Co, 2016; Ting-an Lin (林庭安), "Taiwanese Marxist Buddhism and Its Lessons for Modern Times," *Australasian Philosophical Review* (forthcoming).

²² Hung, *Existential Engagement*; Tzu-wei Hung and Duen-min Deng (鄧敦民), *Enlightenment and Rebellion: 100 Years of Taiwanese Philosophy* (啟蒙與反叛：台灣哲學的百年浪潮) (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2018).

²³ For different ways that philosophy could be decolonized, see Gordon, Lewis R, "Decolonizing philosophy," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 57 (2019): 16–36.