Marketing Identity in Taiwan and Hong Kong:
Electioneering in Two Twenty-first Century Chinese Democracies

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the marketing of identity by parties in election campaigning in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The strength of this thesis lies in its comparative approach which allows a detailed analysis of the impact the political market makes on identity construction and differences and similarities in this construction as they vary from election to election. The central part of the research is a detailed ethno-graphic analysis of campaign instruments of the election campaigns of the two major political parties with particular emphasis on examining election advertisements such as campaign literature, television, newspaper and Internet advertisements. Quantitative findings support the qualitative study which focuses on the collected indicative samples. A number of in-depth interviews access the significance of the examples and their interpretation. The thesis establishes an analytical framework that makes it possible to track the movements of parties’ identity options on two levels: on a spectrum between ethno-cultural and civic identity and on a spectrum between Chinese identity and an indigenous identity (Taiwan or Hong Kong identity). Parties as vote maximizing entities are likely to be influenced by the political market including positions of competitors and most importantly, public opinion and the view of the electorate. The research has found that over the time period of three consecutive elections, parties with originally strong Chinese identity elements have moved towards an indigenous identity. The indigenous identity is largely civic in nature in Hong Kong, but increasingly framed in ethno-cultural terms in Taiwan. With strong and even rising indigenous identities in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the political market is likely to continue to force parties to adapt to indigenous identities.
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