

Beyond Cultural Group – A Critique of Ethnic Politics in Contemporary Taiwan

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Ethnicity, race, and nationhood are fundamentally ways of perceiving, interpreting, and representing the social world. They are not things in the world, but perspectives on the world. These include ethnicized ways of seeing (and ignoring), of construing (and misconstruing), of inferring (and misinferring), of remembering (and forgetting).

Rogers Brubaker (2004:17)

1.0 Cabinet Membership for People from Tainan-County?

Last April (2008), one piece of news caught my attention and gave birth to this paper.¹ According to this report, the KMT (Koumintang) Tainan-county district director (國民黨台南縣黨部主委) Li Chuan-chiao (李全教) and his local associates called for a press conference to express their anger and disappointment that not a single person from Tainan-county was appointed into the cabinet by the newly-appointed premier Liu Chao-shiuan (劉兆玄). The press conference was named “Support the Descendants of Tainan-county” (聲援台南縣子弟大會). Director Li stated that people in Tainan-county felt cheated and ignored because Wu Ching-chi (吳清基) and Chan Chi-hsien (詹啟賢), two highly-expected Tainan-born candidates, did not get recruited into the cabinet. Two months later, it was still the same that no people from Tainan-county was appointed into the cabinet or as the Examination-Yuan Minister (考試委員) or the Control-Yuan Minister (監察委員). Director Li and his local associates called for another press conference to declare that if President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and Premier Liu Chao-shiuan continued to ignore the voices and interests of people in Tainan-county, they would not exclude the possibility of mobilizing their county fellows to protest in Taipei and would consider to pull out their support for the upcoming county-magistrate election (縣長選舉) in 2009.

¹ See “Tainanese Attacked Premier-appointed Liu: Our Descendants Are Overlooked,” Lin Yu-lin, China Times, April 26, 2008.

In recent years, in order to reduce opposition and dispute, it is common for politicians to take into account the aspects of gender, ethnic group and geographic area before major policy decisions and personnel arrangements are made. But it is the first time for people to protest in the name of county dignity and interests. In fact, the newly-appointed Minister of the National Youth Commission Wang Yu-Ting(王昱婷) is a legislator elected from the city of Tainan. It will be clumsy and awkward to deny that Wang Yu-Ting is not from Tainan by sticking to the administrative difference between Tainan-county and Tainan-city. If we have to put the issues of area-balance and fairness in the first place, will it be appropriate to appoint all the new cabinet members evenly from the 25 counties and cities around the island? As an inference, should the county of Taipei(台北縣) be represented most in the cabinet because of its highest share of Taiwan population?

I wonder what are the historical background, political milieu and cultural underpinning that come together to prompt local politicians in the county of Tainan to self-righteously demand that Tainanese should receive cabinet membership. Otherwise a denial of cabinet membership will be interpreted as a sign of neglect and disgrace for people from Tainan-county. What puzzles me is if the appointment of a Tainanese into the cabinet can improve the life qualities in the county of Tainan? Furthermore, can the KMT Tainan-county district director and his associates speak for Tainanese? Why do they have to make known in advance their scheduled events and acts of protest? As for people who remain quiet on the cabinet composition, does it mean that their dignity and interests were intact and nothing needs to be complained of? Put in a different way, is it because people in Tainan-county voiced their complaint loud and hard that they can get attention from the media and the government? How can we make a good sense of those who remain silent on the issue of cabinet membership? Can a reflection on the above-mentioned questions help to analyze ethnic phenomena in general and ethnic politics in particular in contemporary Taiwan?

Paradoxically, as local people demand dignity and cabinet membership in the name of county dignity and interests, Taiwan's political mobilization in recent years is often launched across county division and ethnic boundary. Since the 1990s, although "Four Grand Ethnic Groups"(四大族群) has become one leading discourse for understanding Taiwan's socio-demographic composition, it is perplexing that the phenomenon of media-reported ethnic confrontation did not unfold along the boundaries among the Four Grand Ethnic Groups. Why do we fail to observe the

occurrence of four ethnic groups in conflict?

Take the example of the 2008 presidential election, not all of the four ethnic groups nominated their own group-specific candidate. Instead, what occurred was an escalation of a binary confrontation engulfing all the aspects of sheng-chi (省籍), ethnicity, partisanship, pan-blue vs. pan-green and cross-strait relations. Many media-administered opinion polls and academic studies were conducted to compare the four ethnic groups with respect to the issues of public policy, party support and candidate approval rates. But we fail to observe any single independent statement made by each of the four ethnic groups. Why did the members of each of the four ethnic groups choose to be quiet during these political elections? Is there something missing as well as misleading with the idea of analyzing ethnic politics and Taiwan's socio-demographic composition with a reference to the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Group? Should the analytical concept of Four Grand Ethnic Groups be analyzed in turn? Do the uses of "percentage, mean and mode" as research tools to compare "group differences" help to shed light on the nature and reality of ethnic politics? Or is it the time for us to take a new route for observing the contour of ethnic politics in contemporary Taiwan?

This paper believes that the key to answer the above-mentioned questions lies in the way we perceive and theorize the concepts of ethnic group and ethnic politics. The goal of this paper is to reflect on Taiwan's ethnic phenomenon and to compare two theoretical perspectives on their studies of ethnic politics with regard to the aspects of conception, theoretical assumption, empirical implication, epistemological commitment and political consequences. The first perspective sees ethnic group as cultural group, hereafter the cultural-group perspective, which is often described as "discrete, bounded, culturally distinctive and enduring". Accordingly, one major task for analyzing ethnic politics is to provide a comparative study of group differences. We would like to show that this cultural-group perspective is not only responsible for the occurrence of a press conference to demand a cabinet membership for Tainanese but also has influenced our understanding and analysis of ethnic relations and ethnic politics. Attention of this paper will be focused on the phenomena of Four Grand Ethnic Groups, state-managed multiculturalism and a fragmentary proliferation of cultural groups.

The second perspective sees ethnic group as a political community, hereafter the political-community perspective. We hope this perspective can help to revise the weakness of the cultural-group perspective on two aspects: "culture" and "group."

The political-community perspective argues that an ethnic group is more than a cultural group, but a cultural group with a political mission. It is not to downplay the significance of culture, but to emphasize an importance to analyze the production and representation of cultural differences in terms of political context. For example, we should be careful to answer who has the say in articulating and representing cultural differences, and what political consequences are brought about?

In addition, we would like to see ethnic group as a variable, in the conception of group as groupness, which is expected to extend our theoretical vision of ethnic politics. We hope to demonstrate the analytical advantages of focusing on the following issues such as the roles of organization, the dynamics and consequences of events, the competition for interpretative framing and rhetoric keywords, and the importance of cognitive change for collective action.

The cultural-group perspective tends to see ethnic group as tangible and clear-cut and encourage the treatment of ethnic group as the independent variable for causal analysis. It is observed that the tools of percentage, mean and mode are favored to conduct a comparative study of ethnic groups on the topics of language use, income, education, voting behavior, political position etc. (黃宣範 1993; 林忠正、林鶴玲 1993; 財訊雜誌 1996; 王甫昌 1997; 駱明慶 2001; 吳乃德 2002; 施正鋒 2007). But, as this paper will argue, it will lead to a reification of ethnic group and perpetuate the perception of ethnic conflict as a form of collective conflict. However, this paper believes that it is inappropriate to equate ethnic conflict with ethnic groups in conflict, and ethnic conflict should not be reduced to cultural groups in conflict. If we fail to clarify the myths surrounding the concepts of culture and group, ethnic politics will be restricted to a comparative study of group differences as well as an analysis of collective conflict between cultural groups.

As a comparison, the political-community perspective sees ethnic group as a variable and observes the existence of ethnic group as an on-going event. It will then direct our attention to the role of organizations and ethno-political entrepreneurs, to the dynamics and consequences of events and activities, to the competition for interpretative framing and rhetoric keywords, and to the process of social construction and cognitive development. This paper will try to illustrate the utility of this political-community perspective in the analysis of ethnic politics with reference to some recent political development in Taiwan.

2.0 Ethnic Group as Cultural Group

What is an ethnic group? It has been a long time that many sociology textbooks define ethnic group as cultural group. There is no exception in Taiwan. We have been told that Taiwan's population is composed of Four Grand Ethnic Groups, which correspond to four groups of cultures and people. This understanding of Taiwan's socio-demographic composition can be found in presidential speech, tourist guide, academic report, political pamphlet, library catalogue, food-culture introduction etc. The tendency to treat ethnic group as culture group is characteristic of the cultural-group perspective, which sees ethnic group as discrete, bounded, culturally distinctive and enduring. Therefore, a multiethnic society is often compared to a multi-color mosaic composed of many single-color ethnic groups. However, this cultural-group perspective has some flaws and it is important for us to reflect on these flaws before we can achieve a fruitful understanding and analysis of ethnic phenomena in general, and ethnic politics in particular.

First, the cultural-group perspective tends to ignore the historical and political dimensions behind ethnic relations. When we perceive ethnic group as bounded and enduring, we are making assumption that there exist some fixed, clear-cut and stable cultural boundaries to be observed between ethnic groups. The goal of ethnic studies becomes one of searching and recording the cultural substance and content of each ethnic group. At the same time, one's ethnic identity is determined by some overt, diacritic, cultural traits such as language, dress, food, life style etc. It is also believed that these cultural traits are correlated in a linear way. That is, people speaking a certain language will develop their unique dress, food, religion, architecture, life style etc.²

But as we distinguish ethnic groups and ethnic identities according to some overt, diacritic, cultural traits, we will see ethnic groups as unfolding along their own historical trajectories without being encountered with each other. As a result, we have risked of reducing ethnic relations to a question of tolerance and respect for each other. It will in turn lead to an ignorance of the historical and political context in which ethnic conflict took place and leave the issues of historical reflection and institutional reform untouched. Later this paper will try to demonstrate that all the historical grievances and hatred resulting from ethnic conflict at the different stages of Taiwan's history did not disappear automatically after we started to talk about Four

² This pistemological approach is deeply influenced by natural science. The way anthropologists record ethnic groups in the field is the same as scientists endeavors to discover new chemical elements in the lab.

Grand Ethnic Group and Multiculturalism. In fact, they have smoldered quietly for a long time, repeatedly emerged to the surface in recent political confrontation, and fueled the competition for interpretative framing and rhetoric keywords. It constitutes the first reason for us to reflect on the cultural-group perspective.

Second, the perception of ethnic group as cultural group tends to ignore the situation of exclusion and silencing. We should give attention to the way cultural consensus is produced and reproduced. There has been some criticism that the production and representation of culture is not so much an anthropological finding, but a result of political domination and social exclusion. It is often argued that internal consensus on the cultural definition of an ethnic group is achieved with policing, silencing and a price of in-group diversity (Guillory 1993). Ironically, this criticism can be applied to the case of multiculturalism.

From a historical perspective, the rise of multiculturalism is often a response and a reaction to assimilation-oriented policies. Not surprisingly, advocates of multiculturalism will take a defensive stance toward traditional culture, and as a result, ignore the existence of oppression and domination within the culture, such as a patriarchal treatment of women. It is our concern that as we take for granted Taiwan's socio-demographic composition in terms of Four Grand Ethnic Groups, we might fail to account for the external circumstances of this discourse and marginalize in-group diversity. This will perpetuate the power relation and political process behind the making of cultural consensus on the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups. It is the second reason for us to reflect on the cultural-group perspective.

Third, the cultural-group perspective will obscure social analysis. As we would like to question, it is possible that ethnic differences are just the phenomenon not the reality. In addition to ethnic differences, there are some more fundamental social issues to be concerned with, such as class, gender and geographical area. That is, the cultural-group perspective's emphasis on cultural content leaves the issues of social inequality untouched. For example, in the era of globalization, as capitalist development become fully-entrenched, it is often criticized that multiculturalism is a consumption package to mask us from seeing the impending consequences of economic restructuring and the everlasting exploitation of minority groups (趙剛 2006). Therefore, we have doubt that the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups and Multiculturalism might have distorted the distribution of public resources, and fail to take into account the social significance of minority groups. It is the third reason for us to reflect on the cultural-group perspective.

In addition, in terms of empirical studies, it is worth noting that the cultural-group perspective has a tendency to rely on the use of some specific research tools. Once we perceive ethnic boundary as being real and tangible, we would be more attempted to employ the tools of percentage, mean and mode to compare group differences, such as their political attitudes and positions. However, this paper argues that the use of these specific methods and tools will limit our historical understanding of the nature of ethnic relations, and cripple our analytical vision and theoretical scope. For example, how does a comparative study of group differences on the approval rate of presidential candidates shed light on the nature and process of ethnic conflict? What kind of theoretical questions and methodological tools are appropriate to study the speeches of political elites, which have a potential to trigger a process of people-classifying and an escalation of ethnic confrontation? How can we employ the cultural-group perspective to explain the motivation and consequences of the KMT Tainan-county district director and his associates to call for a press conference to demand a cabinet appointment for Tainanese? This paper hopes to reflect on these questions and propose some thoughts. If we fail to clarify the limits and weakness of this cultural-group perspective, it will be difficult for us to reach a fruitful analysis of ethnic politics in Taiwan. I will first review some of the important phenomena relating to the perception of ethnic group as cultural group. They include the discourse of four grand ethnic groups, state-managed multiculturalism and a fragmentary proliferation of cultural groups.

3.0 A Reflection on the Phenomenon of Cultural Groups in Contemporary Taiwan

3.1 Four Grand Ethnic Groups

Four Grand Ethnic Groups is a leading discourse of Taiwan's socio-demographic composition and an embodiment of the cultural-group perspective. In the first place, we would like to admit that historically, the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Group has emerged as a progressive move in challenging the long-time KMT-controlled cultural myth as well as the historiographical interpretation of Chinese Nationalism. But it is important to keep in mind that there existed some historical and political circumstances behind the production of the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups (張茂桂 1997). If we do not take this into consideration, we might fall into the theoretical trap of the cultural-group perspective and weaken our understanding and analysis of ethnic politics in Taiwan. Several criticisms deserve our attention.

First, on the surface, there is an emphasis on diversity in the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups. But a second look will reveal that the criterion for the classification of the four groups is arbitrary and lack of consistency. For example, it seems that the Holo(福佬) group and the Hakka(客家) group are distinguished from each other according to their emigration place but the Aboriginal group is singled out because of their early arrival to Taiwan. Furthermore, the Mainlander/outsideers(外省) group was originally a common administrative category for people coming from outside of this province, and then materialized into a concept of human grouping as a result of social interaction and mutual ascription in the early history since the arrival of the KMT regime to Taiwan in the late 1940s (Gates 1982). In total, the selection and classification of four ethnic groups involved the three aspects of emigration place, time and social ascription. It leads to a confusion of classification criterion and obscures the room for social analysis.

Even if we take language difference as the classifying criterion, the confusion remained the same. Not only these four groups are not mutually exclusive, but also they are not conclusive. For example, for those mainlanders who came to Taiwan around 1949, some of them were the Hakka people from the provinces of Fuchien(福建省) and Kanton(廣東省) but they would be considered as belonging to the Mainlander group (Chen 2003). In addition, according to the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Group, each person should have one and only one ethnic identity. But in fact, the way we use languages and identify ourselves are not as straightforward as prescribed by this discourse. Most of time, we might be multi-language users and our identity choice are impromptu, vague and even strategic. While the Hakka people and the Holo people have their own languages, the Mainlanders do not share one mother tongue in common. In fact, the barrier of language variation within the Mainlanders as well as the Aborigines might even be greater than the language difference between the Holo group and the Hakka group. But this reality of in-group language variation is not acknowledged in the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups.

On first sight, the four ethnic groups are distinguished from each other according to the sake of language difference. But Chiang(江士林 1997) has argued that while language difference was employed as the criterion of group classification, it provided a naturalizing effect and a legitimate foundation for political order. In fact, it was the impending escalation of political conflict in the 1990s that gave people an incentive to classify people by language difference with the hope of providing a naturalized foundation for ethnic relations. Therefore, the discourse of Four Grand

Ethnic Group should not be seen as a cultural/linguistic description or an anthropological finding, but one of political reconciliation.

As a matter of fact, the alignment of four ethnic groups mingled three different aspects of ethnic relations and failed to take into account the historical and political dimensions which are essential to understand the nature and reality of ethnic politics. Also it misleads us to take an equal treatment of four ethnic groups as a way to realize the goal of social justice. For studies of ethnic relations and ethnic politics, the major task is not only to calculate the number of ethnic groups or to take an equal treatment, but to analyze the causes and consequences of ethnic conflict in historical and political context.

According to the history of Taiwan, there are at least three important dimensions of ethnic relations as shown in a binary opposition between “we vs. they”. First, in the eyes of the Aborigines, “they” is the Han people (漢人). Second, in the eyes of the Hakka people, “they” is the Holo people. Third, in the eyes of “Taiwanese”, “they” is the Mainlanders. But the way to put the four groups together produces a de-historical effect and obscures the various experiences of political domination and social oppression encountered by each group in their own regard. As for the Aborigines, what is at stake is not to distinguish the Han people into three or four groups, but to struggle against the oppressive institutions inflicted by the Han people since their migration to Taiwan in the 16th century. However, the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups fails to recognize this historical complexity in ethnic relations and ethnic politics. We would like to mention later that all the specters of conflict and tension sneaking behind the three aspects of ethnic relations do not automatically fade away following the proposal of the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Group and Multiculturalism. Instead, these ever-existing conflict and tension often come alive and provide ammunition in the competition for an interpretative framing and the choice of rhetoric keywords in recent political struggles in contemporary Taiwan.

Furthermore, the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups fails to explain some common phenomena that are happening across ethnic boundaries. For example, how are we going to explain the distinction between Taiwanese pan-blue (本省泛藍) supporters and Taiwanese pan-green(本省泛綠) supporters? In terms of population composition, the share of pan-blue supporters is no less than 50%, much higher than that of the Mainlanders (15%). In other words, at least 35% of the population in Taiwan belongs to Taiwanese pan-blue supporters, how are we going to comprehend their social composition? It is evident that we can not appeal to the discourse of

Four Grand Ethnic Group alone to understand the social distinction between Taiwanese pan-blue supporters and Taiwanese pan-green supporters. Instead, an analysis anchoring on social mobility and generational change might be more fruitful.

Third, the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups tends to essentialize ethnic differences and overlook in-group variation. With emphasis on language difference, this discourse is characteristic of a tone of cultural determinism, which treats one's ethnic identity as fixed and unproblematic. However, it underestimates the significance of class inequality and inter-generational change. For example, the underclass of Old Veterans and their social marginality are often overlooked and less-reported by the media. In addition, the life experiences of Taiwan-born second-generation and third-generation Mainlanders are under-reported and poorly understood by the public. The cultural-group perspective prevents us from seeing the generational change within the Mainlanders. There are increasing numbers of second-generation and their-generation Mainlander students choosing not to answer on identity-related questionnaires.

It is our argument that the production and classification of the four ethnic groups is one of political judgment, not one of anthropological finding or linguistic description. Not surprisingly, the politically-determined group boundary is liable to some logical loopholes, which will seriously cripple our analytical vision in understanding ethnic relations and ethnic politics. To be worse, it encourages Taiwan society to understand human collectivity and political issues in terms of cultural groups. The press conference "Support the Descendants of Tainan-county" (聲援台南縣子弟大會) provides a ridiculous example of the consequences when people choose to treat county as a form of cultural group.

3.2 State-managed Multiculturalism

The discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups becomes not only the foundation on which the cultural imagination of a newly-emerged national identity and socio-demographic composition is based, but also a major principle according to which official cultural policies are managed. At the same time, multiculturalism is recommended as a normative criterion with which to ease ethnic tension, to harmonize ethnic relations and to manage cultural affairs. It is defined in this paper as state-managed multiculturalism (Bennett 1998).

Although we might feel a little astonished with the idea of cultural management

by state-owned agencies and state-sponsored programs, we have to admit a necessity to live with that. It is not difficult for us to recall what have happened to the “unmanageable” cultural differences by some racist or ethnocentric states with the use of violence, humiliation, punishment, segregation, exclusion etc. In Taiwan, as compared to the long-time arbitrary, nationalistic violence done by the KMT regime to cultural differences, it is fair to reserve a positive character for the practice of state-managed multiculturalism. However, state-managed multiculturalism is also liable to a tendency to perceive ethnic group as cultural group, both conceptually and practically. Some reflections are deemed necessary.

To be specific, state-managed multiculturalism is basically an administrative strategy of controlling cultural differences. It represents a token showing of the many faces of the nation and its socio-demographic composition. In order to display those “representative” cultures and people, agencies and programs are established to manage ethnic issues and cultural affairs. But unfortunately, state-managed multiculturalism tends to bring about a reification of ethnic groups. It is because once a culture is recognized by the state, it earns itself an official status and an opportunity for state funding. But it will paradoxically bring about an oppressive effect of homogenizing the representation of culture and identity.

For example, to promote the visibility of those “representative” cultures and people, it is expected that there should be a group-specific cultural center in each county and city. As group-specific cultural center or museum is established in each county or city, it will lead to a repetition in exhibition and discourage people’s attendance. Besides, since most of the activities and programs are sponsored by state agencies, it raises doubt if the momentum can sustain itself in the long run. The Hakka Tung-Blossom Festival (客家桐花祭) represents an example of state-sponsored programs, the goal of which is to promote Hakka visibility.

In addition, state-managed multiculturalism will lead to an exclusion of people who are not qualified according to the ethnic identity in question. This protective and patronizing nature of state-managed cultural policy tends to stigmatize the culture and people of a specific group. It is no wonder that singer Lin Sheng-hsiang (林生祥) refused to accept the best-Hakka-singer prize from 2007 Golden Melody Award in order to protest against the mistaken priority of ethnic group over music genre (朱梅芳 2007). In recent years, in order to cope with a decreasing number of applicants for entering graduate schools on Hakka studies, many colleges decide to put on a footnote on the entrance-examination regulations to emphasize that all

applicants, regardless of ethnic backgrounds, are welcome.

Thanks to the cultural-group perspective, in order to promote Hakka culture, state agencies and programs usually represent Hakka language in a linear way with the association of Hakka food, Hakka dress, Hakka faith and Hakka architecture. Just as other ethnic groups “should” be able to exhibit their own distinctive food, dress, religion and architecture. But it will lead to a reification of cultural differences. The problem comes from the assumption of a linear relationship between language, food, dress, religion and architecture for Hakka people. Another example is the I-ming belief (義民信仰). The linear assumption of Hakka people with the I-ming belief will exclude the possibility of the Holo people with I-ming belief. The cultural-group perspective dogmatizes that each ethnic group is characterized with its unique culture. In sum, influenced by the linear assumption in the cultural-group perspective, state-sponsored programs tend to ignore internal variation and overlook the commonality among the four groups. It amounts to a bureaucratic, administration-centered management of ethnic issues and cultural affairs.

3.3 A Fragmentary Proliferation of Cultural Groups

Fueled by the institutionalization of state-managed multiculturalism, the cultural-group perspective is also responsible for a fragmentary proliferation of cultural groups. As long as a group of people can self-claim themselves as a cultural group according to some external, unambiguous criteria, no matter how artificially-made the group boundary appears, they will be guaranteed a chance to voice and a right for political action. As a result, it will be difficult for us to stop the ascending trend of newly-formed cultural groups, an example of which is the county of Tainan, if we did not challenge the logics of the cultural-group perspective.

It seems to be an inevitable result according to the logics of the cultural-group perspective. If someone disagrees with the cultural content of a specific group, they will initiate to organize a new group with the artificially-selected new materials. It in turn encourages a false dialectics between consensus and disagreement, and produces many small interests-oriented cultural groups. Unfortunately, it leads to a fragmentary proliferation of identity politics. The press conference “Support the Descendants of Tainan County”(聲援台南縣子弟大會) is certainly one of this kind.

In recent years, I notice an increase of conferences featuring local studies, such

as “Conference on Taoyun Studies”(桃園學研討會), “Conference on Chia-I Studies” (嘉義研究學術研討會), “Conference on Hua-lien Studies” (花蓮學研討會), “Conference on Kaohsiung City Literature Studies” (高雄市文學學術研討會) etc. These conferences are all sponsored by state agencies, such as the cultural bureaus of local governments. I call this a local version of state-managed multiculturalism. However, I wonder what is the point of organizing these conferences? Is this meant for social gathering, political mobilization or academic research? Thanks to the logics of the cultural-group perspective, just as we have seen a growth of conferences on the studies of Hakka and Aborigines, it would not be long before we can attend a conference on the studies of Kuan-yin (觀音) or Chung-li (中壢). However, my concern is how could these cultural-group-oriented conferences shed light on the nature of ethnic relations and ethnic politics in Taiwan?

There implies an additive mode of cultural representation behind this proliferation of cultural groups. According to this mode, the more diverse our cultural groups appear, the more representative and legitimate multiculturalism will be. For example, school curriculum should increase diversities in terms of language education and cultural content to look “multicultural”. We have to be cautious that this additive mode of cultural representation will create a mystifying effect to disguise our understanding of social reality. It is a dilemma of state-managed multiculturalism. Since the 1990s the total number of aboriginal groups has increased from 9 to 14, but can we translate this increase into an improvement of their employment, education attainment and social mobility? It is to be emphasized that we are not opposed to the increase of aboriginal groups, but to point out that this increased number of aboriginal groups might obscure the role of state-managed agencies and state-sponsored programs in the reproduction of social inequalities.

People might defend that given the tide of localization, we can receive support and funding from state agencies only with the treatment of a county as a cultural group. They can also defend themselves by accusing the critics of a lack of understanding and respect to local people and cultural differences. This can probably explain why people in Tainan-county felt self-righteously to call for a press conference to protest against a denial of cabinet membership for Tainanese. It will again encourage people to self-claim themselves as a cultural group in order to compete for political visibility and official funding. However, this proliferation of cultural groups will create a squeezing effect to cripple an efficient distribution and realization of public resources.

The perception of ethnic group as cultural group is responsible for the phenomenon of a fragmentary proliferation of cultural groups. To reflect on this, we need to clarify the roles of organization and ethno-political entrepreneurs who claim to speak for the groups. We need to question what is the motivation for them to speak for an ethnic group? We have doubt that the organization and ethno-political entrepreneurs might have their own concern and interests. For example, we can question that the reason the KMT Tainan-county district called for a press conference is to increase their political visibility in order to pave the way for the upcoming county-magistrate election in 2009. Therefore, we think it is time for us to propose a new perspective to study ethnic phenomenon and ethnic politics.

3.4 Why A New Perspective?

Since the 1990s, the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups has popularized the perception of ethnic group as cultural group and encourages us to observe human grouping and ethnic politics in terms of the logics of the cultural-group perspective. According to this perspective, people can self-claim themselves as a cultural group and therefore acquire a base of legitimacy for official recognition and a share of public resources. That is why the KMT Tainan-county district decided to call for a press conference to “Support the Descendents of Tainan-county” (聲援台南縣子弟). The denial of a cabinet membership for Tainanese is considered as a disgrace and a neglect of their dignity and interest.

To put it together, Tainan-county has a fixed, clear-cut and stable county boundary, the descendents of Tainan-county represent a semi-blood-related, enduring cultural group, and the rhetoric of “supporting the descendents of Tainan-county” can invite communal response from people in the county of Tainan. As for the question if we should define Tainanese by household registration, birthplace or workplace, it becomes trivial and untouched. As a coincidence, the recent increase of conferences on local studies serves to record the “representative” historical and cultural content of each county or city. The working of the logics of cultural groups is in high gear.

However, it is our concern that the cultural-group perspective simplifies and reifies cultural differences, leads to a narcissistic self-perception, and restricts our analytical vision in the study of ethnic politics in contemporary Taiwan. If we stay satisfied with this cultural-group perspective, we would not be able to criticize the drama of “Support the Descendents of Tainan-county” (聲援台南縣子弟), nor to reflect on the lingering of historical grievance and ethnic tension. We will be

trapped into an analysis of ethnic politics with a comparative study of group differences, and reduce ethnic relations to a question of dialogue, tolerance and respect.

The cultural-group perspective has become well-accepted by the public and taken shape in the form of common sense in Taiwan. We tend to perceive ethnic conflict as cultural groups in conflict, rely on the uses of percentage, mean and mode to compare ethnic/group differences, and promote multiculturalism as a cure for ethnic tension and conflict. However, we would like to emphasize that it is this common sense of the cultural-group-perspective that needs to be criticized. Studies have shown that socio-cultural common senses tend to bring an effect of naturalization (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 2001), especially in the folk knowledge of gender and ethnicity (李廣均 2006) . Instead of employing this common sense as our analytical tools, we should take a critical view to reflect on it. In short, the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Group and Multiculturalism is something to be analyzed, not something to analyze with.

We do not mean to downplay an effort to encourage a dialogue and respect for each other but to emphasize that ethnic conflict and confrontation did not occur as a result of a shortage of dialogue or respect. This paper likes to demonstrate that behind the formation of ethnic conflict and confrontation there exist a complicated social process and political dynamics, which should be the focus of our studies of ethnic politics. If this is not clarified, we would continue to consider ethnic conflict as cultural groups in conflict.

The cultural-group perspective is not only responsible for the popularity of the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups, state-managed multiculturalism and a fragmentary proliferation of cultural groups, but also helps to mask some fundamental issues in the analysis of ethnic politics, such as the role of organization and ethno-political entrepreneurs, elite competition, event dynamics, historical reconstruction, cognitive change etc. In view of this, to accomplish a more critical analysis of the operation of ethnic politics, we think it is necessary to go beyond the cultural-group perspective and propose a new perspective for analyzing ethnic politics.

4.0 Ethnic Group As Political Community

In contrast to the cultural-group perspective, this paper proposes a

political-community perspective for the study of ethnic relations and ethnic politics. I wish to stand on the shoulders of Weber (1978), Barth (1969), Jenkins (1997) and Brubaker (2004) to advance our understanding and analysis of ethnic politics. As I mentioned earlier, the cultural-group perspective perceives ethnic group as a discrete, bounded, culturally-distinctive and enduring group, discriminates ethnic identity according to some overt cultural traits, reduces ethnic relations to a question of dialogue, tolerance and respect, and relies on state-owned agencies and state-sponsored programs to promote multiculturalism. However, many important issues remained untouched under the cultural-group perspective. For example, how can we explain the unfolding of political mobilization across the “boundaries” of Four Grand Ethnic Groups? As people of the four ethnic groups have gone to school together, worked indiscriminately, intermarried for several decades, why do “ethnic relations” always become confronted and intense in the wake of political elections (聯合報 2007)? As well, why did the KMT Tainan-county district choose to call for a press conference “Support the Descendants of Tainan-county” to protest a denial of their dignity and interests? Do they have the legitimacy to speak for Tainanese? This paper will try to answer the above-mentioned questions by taking a new perspective. To begin with, let us take a look at the thoughts of Max Weber.

We shall call ‘ethnic groups’ those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity.

Weber (1978 : 389)

According to Weber, there is no such thing as simple-and-pure cultural group. It is the political community that gives birth to an ethnic group, not vice versa. But how does a political community take shape in the first place? Is it because people share the same blood or have some cultural characteristics in common? Weber gave his emphasis to the circumstances under which people choose to entertain a subjective belief in their common descent. Therefore, we can understand political community as a group of people fighting for their political autonomy. They might find themselves caught in identical social position for experiencing similar grievances or having to struggle against an unequal treatment. In order to develop collective solidarity, they have to manage issues such as leadership, organization, mobilization, communication etc. Above all, how do they define themselves as “ethnic” members

and constitute an “ethnic” group? These all belong to the critical questions to be answered in the study of ethnic politics.

The early views of anthropological studies put emphasis on the substance and content of an ethnic group (Tylor 1871), but Barth (1969) argued that the focus of ethnic studies should be on the boundary maintenance mechanism. Barth did not mean to underestimate the importance of cultural content, but to highlight a necessity to analyze the selective representation of cultural characteristics in the context of boundary-maintaining process, during which both social inclusion and exclusion can happen at the same time.

That is, the formation of ethnic boundary is not a function of some fixed and clear-cut cultural characteristics such as language or dress, but a product of social interaction, usually taking a form of binary opposition between us and them. In other words, without ruling out the importance of cultural characteristics, we should give attention to the way how cultural traits are selectively employed by the actors to classify people and groups. Otherwise, we will mistake ethnic group as cultural group by treating a tree as a forest. In short, it is important to take into consideration the external and social context to analyze the well-purposed representation of cultural differences in the study of ethnic relations.

Richard Jenkins (1994; 2008) reminds us the importance to distinguish group from category. As group is often conceptualized as being “culturally homogeneous, mutually-communicating, full of consensus and well-coordinated action”, Jenkins argued that human grouping is also possibly a result of categorization, not a manifestation of cultural difference. Because of power inequality, many persons are forced to accept or to be labeled an imposed identity. Therefore, one task for the analysis of ethnic relations and ethnic politics is to study how identity labels are proposed, discoursed, circulated, imposed, institutionalized and embedded in various forms of government rules. That is, the operation of ethnic politics hinges on power relations, not cultural characteristics. What needs to be explained is how the categorizers see themselves and their objectives – not the categorized or the intrinsic qualities of the categorized (Jenkins 1994:207).

Furthermore, Rogers Brubaker (2004) tries to go beyond the idea of group by replacing it with one of “ethnicity without group”. It gives emphasis on the aspects of political context, social construction and cognitive change in order to understand and analyze the formation of an ethnic group. He argues that the protagonists in

ethnic conflicts are often organizations instead of ethnic groups. We should take ethnic group not as a thing-in-the-world to be found, but as a variable susceptible to the changes in political context. Thus our attention will be put on the significance of organization, ethno-political entrepreneurs, event, process, project, collective memory, interpretative framing, rhetoric keywords etc. It is in this way a critical analysis of the causes and consequences of ethnic politics can be achieved.

To dispute against the cultural-group perspective and clarify some of the myths surrounding the phenomena of cultural groups in contemporary Taiwan, it is necessary to propose a new perspective to study ethnic relations and ethnic politics. According to this new perspective, ethnic conflict should not be analogous to cultural groups in conflict. It is important not to equate an analysis of ethnic politics with a comparative study of group differences. We are going to show that the protagonist in ethnic conflict is in fact organization, not ethnic group. Ethnic group is better understood in the conception of groupness that is susceptible to the changes and fluctuations in the political context. The meaning of being “ethnic” is to be found in the choice of an interpretative framing and rhetoric keywords, not in the intrinsic qualities or cultural identities of people. To sum it up, it is more fruitful to take a constructionist and cognitive perspective for the study of ethnic relations and ethnic politics.

4.1 The Protagonist Is Organization

History has shown that the protagonists in ethnic conflict are not groups, but all the various organizations and those in charge of these organizations (the so-called ethno-political entrepreneurs) . They include state, government unit, law-enforcing agency, political party, election headquarter, supporters’ association, a variety of offices, foundation, social movement, church, press, radio station, TV station, militants, bandit, gang etc. (Brubaker 2004:15) . This observation helps to clarify why it was the KMT Tainan-county district, not Tainanese, to call for a press conference to “support the descendents of Tainan-county”. Besides, it is noted that what ignited controversy and riot is often the press or radio station, not the readers or the audience.

The reason organizations can speak on behalf of ethnic groups is not because they are conceptually and substantially the same, but because organizations can collect, integrate, distribute, employ all the different sources and forms of resources with which to plan and mobilize collective action. That is why organizations are the

real protagonists in ethnic conflict. Ironically, what we have said of ethnic groups such as “discrete, fixed-and-clear-cut boundary, enduring” is more accurate to the description of organizations.

Can organizations speak for and represent the interests of ethnic groups? It is a difficult move to make a distinction between these two. But the situation will get worse if we fail to draw the line between these two. At least we can assume that organization and ethnic group do not necessarily pursue the same goal. For example, it seems the KMT Tainan-county district protested to defend the interests of people in Tainan, but in fact they might be motivated by their own visibility and political interests. In addition, the fact of a competition between many organizations, such as the offices of legislators, to speak for an aboriginal group helps to clarify that organization and ethnic group are not equal to each other. If we fail to distinguish organizations and ethnic groups, we will tend to consider the conflict between organizations as ethnic conflict and then equate ethnic conflict as cultural groups in conflict. In fact, many incidences of “ethnic” conflict took place between organizations, such as various election headquarters or political parties. To identify the role of organization and ethno-political entrepreneurs in the development of ethnic conflict is the first thing we need to pay attention to in the analysis of ethnic politics according to the political-community perspective.

4.2 Event Analysis

The significance of conceptualizing ethnic group in the form of groupness is that we can understand ethnic group as an on-going event, rather than a human collectivity with fixed and stable boundary. It helps to clarify the myth and confusion caused by the cultural-group perspective. This view directs our attention to the way how organizations and their advocates can strategically arrange events, coordinate activities, and set up an interpretative framing and rhetoric keywords in order to sustain the strength of ethnic cognition and a high-level status of groupness. It is not difficult for us to recall that in the time of elections in Taiwan, organizations and the so-called ethno-political entrepreneurs are busy with arranging a variety of events and activities to draw media attention on the one hand, and to build up internal solidarity among the potential supporters on the other hand.

Many events and activities serve to draw media attention and gear up the level of ethnic cognition and groupness. They include sit-in, demonstration, around-the-island walk, overnight watch, hunger strike, petition, rendezvous,

fund-raising party, announcement of running-mate, party defection, personal attack, negative campaign, physical violence, lawsuit, daily quiz, public debate, referendum, reopening unsolved criminal cases, commemoration of historical events and figures, festival, imprisonment farewell press-conference, nomination convention, political rally, flag-raising ceremony etc. It is no wonder we can observe words and phrases such as fermentation, agitation, heating up, acceleration, keeping warm, cool down, mobilizing, flowering everywhere, incandescence, galvanization, crisis management, toothpaste-squeezing, sausage-cutting etc. They all meant to describe the on-going status of events and activities, reinforce ethnic cognition and raise the level of groupness. As a result, intensive media coverage will produce the effect of a reification of ethnic group, which testifies to what P. Bourdieu means to make something into existence with the use of symbolic power (Bourdieu 1989).

As for the analysis of ethnic politics, we need to concentrate on the circumstances under which group crystallization and collective solidarity can occur. One purpose for event-making is to draw media attention and public discussion. In a sequence, schedule will be made public in advance and critical information will be disclosed intermittently in order to draw intensive media coverage and gear up the level of ethnic groupness. In retrospect, many examples of event-making and activity-coordination are available in Taiwan's political elections in recent years. For example, President Li's visit to Cornell University (李登輝康乃爾之行/1995), the highly-expected announcement of running-mates, human defensive-line around the island of Taiwan on February 28 (二二八牽手護台灣/2004), around-the-island walk (徒步環島苦行/2008), school-curriculum reform (教科書修改), defensive referendum (防禦性公投/2004), UN for Taiwan (台灣入聯/2007-2008), long-stay project (下鄉長住計畫/2007-2008), green-card controversy(綠卡風波/2007-2008), name-rectification plan(正名計畫/2006-2008) etc. A study of the origins, dynamics and consequences of these well-planned events and well-coordinated activities can certainly shed light on the nature and operation of ethnic politics.

Name-rectification plan stood out as a recent example to illustrate the nature and operation of ethnic politics. We would like to support the act of name-rectifying for concerns of democratic consolidation and transitional justice in Taiwan. But it does not mean to deny that many acts of name-rectification, either for organization or building, are in fact well-calculated, politically-planned and strategically-executed. In addition to the selectivity of objects for name-rectifying, the real purpose of name-rectifying has to be investigated in depth. On first sight, the act of name-rectifying has been criticized for a lack of public discussion and consensus

making, but we can argue that the project of name-rectification is in fact a well-calculated political move to instigate tension and build up an escalation of political confrontation for the upcoming presidential election in March 2008.

Due to Taiwan's special history, there exist many socio-cultural differences among people, especially in the aspects of language experience and collective memory. These historical and cultural differences carried with themselves highly-explosive implications to conjure up emotional disturbance and collective confrontation. To overcome this deadlock, on the one hand, what we should encourage is a dialogue, not a humiliation. On the other hand, we need to decipher the operation of ethnic politics and spell out the real intention of ethno-political entrepreneurs for the making of events and activities. Otherwise, we will fall into a trap of conceptualizing ethnic conflict as a form of collective conflict and ignore the role of organizations and those in charge.

It has been a long time that we analyze ethnic politics according to the logics of the cultural-group perspective. The four ethnic groups are employed as independent variables to compare group differences, with dependent variables as income, education attainment, voting behavior, political attitudes etc. However, we argue that the cultural-group perspective fails to shed light on the nature, process and consequences of ethnic politics in Taiwan. In stead, we should consider the possibility of conceptualizing ethnic group as an on-going event as well as in the conception of groupness so that we can analyze the roles of organizations and ethno-political entrepreneurs, study the causes and consequences of well-planned events, and piece up a fine picture of ethnic politics.

4.3 Interpretative Framing and Rhetoric Keywords

If we should not perceive ethnic conflict as cultural groups in conflict, we should not analyze ethnic politics according to the cultural identities of people involved, how can we define an incidence of conflict as being "ethnic"? This paper argues that the key to identify an incidence of ethnic conflict is not to be found in the intrinsic qualities of people involved, but in the way the conflict is framed interpretatively.

It is important to note that as the KMT Tainan-county district tried to protest against the denial of cabinet membership for Tainanese, they chose to name the press conference as "Support the Descendents of Tainan-county" (聲援台南縣子弟大會) instead of "Support Public Employees in Tainan-county. Furthermore, the definition

of Tainanese is nobody's concern. It does not matter if we define a Tainanese according to birthplace, workplace or household registration. What does matter is to choose an interpretative frame and some rhetoric keywords with which to maximize popular support from Tainan-county fellows. In other words, the making of an ethnic conflict is not determined by the intrinsic qualities or cultural identities of people involved, but by the choice of an interpretative frame and rhetoric keywords. The materialization of an interpretative frame and rhetoric keywords is often realized with descriptions and comments from participants, victims, family member, passerby, polices, public officials, media reporters, researchers, scholars, talk-show host, audience, commentator, textbook, and many others who are involved in the occurrence of ethnic conflict (Brubaker 2004:16-17).

As ethnic conflict often takes the form of a binary opposition between us and them, the construction of an interpretative frame and the choice of rhetoric keywords rely mainly from the precipitation of historical grievances and previous conflict. The meaning of being "ethnic" here is closely linked with collective memories and can easily conjure up the feeling and thoughts of the past. Therefore, the meaning of interpretative framing and rhetoric keywords should not be understood in terms of the structure of the Four Grand Ethnic Groups, but in terms of the various aspects of ethnic relations and ethnic conflicts in Taiwan's history.

For example, why would a self-claimed goodwill expression of "I treat you like a human being" (我把你當人看) by presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) stir up a feeling of condescension and anger on the part of Aborigines? Why would opposition leaders choose to use the phrase of "Taiwanese is treated even worse than Chinese Pig" (台灣人不如中國豬) to protest the import of poisoned milk from China? Why did a political figure caught up in a lawsuit appeal to the rhetoric of "Rice for Mainlanders and Shit for Taiwanese" (外省人吃米、台灣人吃屎) to gather his popular support? Is the half-year-long green-card controversy better understood as a case of legal dispute, an example of poor crisis-management or a chance to illuminate the historical interweaving of human nature, social inequality and provincial-based complex (省籍情結)(李廣均 2008)? It is also important to note the magic effect of some rhetoric keywords used in the operation of ethnic politics, which can easily recall our memories of the past. Some of the rhetoric keywords include eight-year war-fighting against the Japanese(八年抗戰), restoration(光復), dragon descendents (龍的傳人), the sick in East Asia, old veterans, national flag, state, 228, forbidden songs, martial law, Formosa, localization, mother tongue, colonial days, Taiwanese, Chiang Kai-shek, tribe, traditional territory, hard-neck spirit, I-ming belief etc.

The competition for interpretative framing and rhetoric keywords is essential to the operation of ethnic politics. They are of significance with regard to the way ethnic conflict is perceived, explained and represented. We need to be aware that the competition for an interpretative frame and rhetoric keywords is highly-contested and should be considered as part of the conflict itself. For example, is the act of name-rectification a fulfillment of transitional justice or a strategic, well-calculated project for political mobilization? It is obvious that there are always competing attempts to define or redefine the interpretative frame and rhetoric keywords, a struggle of which will produce a far-reaching influence on the way we analyze ethnic relations and resolve ethnic conflict in the future. These all constitute the issues which we can not afford to ignore in analyzing the nature and operation of ethnic politics.

4.4 Cognitive Change

The goal of competing for an interpretative frame and rhetoric keywords aims to sustain the strength of ethnic cognition and the high-level status of groupness for collective action. Once people choose to perceive the world with an ethnic frame, it can bring about down-to-earth political consequences, such as a decision to join nomination convention, petition, demonstration, protest, sit-in, fund-raising, political rally etc. Most of all, it will transform ethnic group into an existence of a thing-in-the-world. Therefore, Brubaker (2004:17) reminds us that

Ethnicity, race, and nationhood are fundamentally ways of perceiving, interpreting, and representing the social world. They are not things in the world, but perspectives on the world. These include ethnicized ways of seeing (and ignoring), of construing (and misconstruing), of inferring (and misinferring), of remembering (and forgetting).

Rogers Brubaker, 2004:17

What is an ethnic group? According to this cognitive perspective, ethnic group exists as the ways of perceiving, interpreting and representing the world. They include a variety of classification systems, categories, formal and informal identification etc. They are basically the many taken-for-granted common senses, with which we identify people, place, action, situation, history etc. That is to say, all the different forces of social construction will eventually accumulate to bring about a change of our cognition, with which we understand ourselves, themselves and the

world itself. Wang (王甫昌 2003:14-17) did explain the formation of ethnic consciousness as composed of three different phases: cognition of difference, cognition of inequality and cognition of a need for collective action, which testifies to a process from cognitive development to behavior change.

Therefore, the studies of ethnic politics should be focused on the categories in practice (the option of four ethnic groups in a questionnaire), situated action (singing forbidden songs in the political rally for presidential candidate), cultural idioms (Hakka hard-neck spirit in literary work), inferred interpretative framing (the impending consequences of a new version of the 228 incident), bureaucratic procedures (application form for a name-change to aboriginal tradition), institutional form (overseas-Chinese ministry and foreign students), well-calculated project (name-rectification for organization and building) etc. In short, the production and sustaining of an ethnic cognition has something to do with the way we perceive the various changes in the aspects of political competition, social momentum, bureaucratic categories and cultural representation, not with the intrinsic quality or cultural traits of people involved.

4.5 An Expansion of Our Analytical Vision of Ethnic Politics

A study of ethnic politics should go beyond the idea of a comparison of cultural groups. The basic unit for analysis is not a thing-in-the-world, but the level of groupness which is susceptible to the changes and fluctuation in the political environment. We need to take a dynamic perspective to reflect on some of the critical issues such as the role of organization and ethno-political entrepreneurs, the causes and consequences of event-making and activity-arrangement, the competition for an interpretative frame and rhetoric keywords, and a change of cognition. Then we can find an appropriate angle to answer the following questions such as: why do ethnic relations always become intense and confronted in the time of political elections; the use of a native language by political candidates become politically sensitive; many historical events and figures come alive; many unsolved criminal cases will be reopened, policies of transitional justice are ready to go, and across-strait business will soon flourish or not.

Therefore, the issues at stake are not to verify if there happens an incidence of ethnic conflict, neither to confirm the “ethnic” identities of those people involved according to their intrinsic qualities. Those are the questions we will ask if we choose to treat ethnic group as a thing in the world. However, as for the study of

ethnic politics, a more critical question needs to be focused on “why and how” an ethnic-oriented interpretative framing is introduced and circulated to influence our cognition and behavior. Following this line of reasoning, it can help to explain that the operation of ethnic politics can be observed at any time, regardless of the coming of political elections or not. As long as some organizations or ethno-political entrepreneurs intend to set off an ethnic-oriented interpretative frame by introducing in some rhetoric keywords, there comes the operation of ethnic politics. For example, opposition leaders would highlight the phrase of “Taiwanese is treated even worse than Chinese Pig” (台灣人不如中國豬) to protest the import of poisoned milk from China in order to maximize popular support. Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) also appealed to the rhetoric of “Rice for Mainlanders and Shit for Taiwanese” (外省人吃米、台灣人吃屎) to secure his political base in the face of a lawsuit.

Paradoxically, when someone tries to emphasize an ethnic-oriented interpretative frame to sustain ethnic cognition and political mobilization, it might be condemned by their political opponents on the surface but welcome as well. It is because this ethnic-oriented interpretative frame can be employed by political opponents to activate a counter-mobilization. We should bring this to our attention that ethnic mobilization is a double-edged sword and will always take a form of binary opposition between us and them. As a result, it will bring about a vicious escalation of tension and confrontation. In this sense, it is not difficult for us to understand why regardless of pan-blue or pan-green, all the ethno-political entrepreneurs on both sides will welcome the phrase of Chinese Pig (中國豬) though no one will admit the use of it in the first place.

To be short, we should move beyond the effort to verify or confirm an incidence of “ethnic” conflict because we should not treat ethnic group as a thing in the world. In stead, we need to explain with what interpretative frame and rhetoric keywords, under what circumstances, by which organization and ethno-political entrepreneurs, our ethnic cognition will develop and exert an influence on collective action. These are the questions we will pay attention to according to this constructionist and cognitive perspective.

5.0 Beyond Cultural Group – A New Perspective for the Study of Ethnic Politics

May 2008, Ma Ying-jeou became Taiwan’s President and Liu Chao-shiuan was appointed to be the premier. Two month later, the KMT Tainan-county district called for another press conference to protest the denial of a cabinet membership for people

in the Tainan-county. From the cultural-group perspective, Tainan-county is de facto a cultural group because she has a fixed and stable county boundary; she has an enduring group of descendants in Tainan. In order to fight for the dignity and interests of people in the county of Tainan, local politicians challenged President Mao and Premier Liu for their ignoring Tainanese. This protest drama serves to illustrate the limits of the cultural-group perspective in analyzing the operation of ethnic politics.

According to the cultural-group perspective, ethnic group is characterized with its own cultural content and there exists clear boundary between groups. Also, it perceives ethnic conflict as equal to cultural groups in conflict. The key to a resolution of ethnic conflict lies in the effort to encourage a dialogue, tolerance and respect. Multiculturalism is thus proposed both theoretically and practically to ease ethnic tension. Ethnic studies become literally a de-politicized version of cultural studies. We argue that the cultural-group perspective brings about a mystifying effect to mask us from some fundamental issues in the analysis of ethnic politics. It directs us to ignore issues such as historical grievances and structural inequalities and leave untouched questions such as the role of organization and ethno-political entrepreneurs, event-making dynamics, social processes, interpretative framing and rhetoric keyword, cognitive change etc.

Instead, the political-community perspective will ask the following questions. Can the KMT Tainan-county district speak for people in Tainan-county? What motivate local politicians to announce their protest activities in advance? Do they protest for the dignity and interests of Tainanese or for their own visibility and political interests? Why do they name the press conference as “Support the Descendants of Tainan-county”? Does it matter if we define Tainanese by their intrinsic qualities such as birthplace, workplace or household registration? What implication can we draw if we treat their protest activities as an on-going event and a well-calculated project to promote their visibility for the upcoming county-magistrate election in 2009?

This paper argues that ethnic conflict is more than cultural groups in conflict. While the cultural-group perspective features a comparative study of group differences and proposes the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups and multiculturalism as a cure for ethnic conflict in Taiwan, the political-community perspective will emphasize to analyze the significance of cultural differences and the operation of ethnic politics in the context of political circumstances. Accordingly,

ethnic differences are more than cultural differences, but selectively-represented and politically-charged cultural differences. It is better to conceptualize ethnic group as cultural group with a political mission and understand ethnic difference as politically-charged cultural difference. As well, we would like to emphasize that the protagonists in ethnic conflict are often organizations, not a collection of groups. It is important to understand the roles of organizations and the speeches by ethno-political entrepreneurs through a perspective of event dynamics and social processes. Ethnic conflict occurs in the competition for interpretative framing and rhetoric keywords and it is necessary to take a historical perspective to understand the significance of interpretative framing and rhetoric keywords.

As a retrospect, it will be unfair if we blame the KMT Tainan-county district director(國民黨台南縣黨部主委) Li Chuan-chiao(李全教)and his local associates alone for their treatment of Tainan-county as a cultural group. Director Li and his associates are not the only people who should be held responsible for the popularity of the cultural-group perspective. As we have mentioned earlier in this paper, since the 1990s, the discourse of Four Grand Ethnic Groups has endorsed the logics of cultural groups. Not surprisingly, while the perception of ethnic group as cultural-group is institutionalized in state-managed multiculturalism, it reinforces the momentum of the cultural-group perspective for us to understand Taiwan's socio-demographic composition in terms of four grand ethnic groups of people and cultures. Besides, it encourages a fragmentary proliferation of cultural groups and obscures us from taking a critical analysis of social reality. It is our concern that if we fail to cope with the tendency to reify cultural group according to the cultural-group perspective, it would not be long before another example of "Support the Descendants of Tainan-county" occurs. Therefore, it is the time for us to promote a new perspective to study the nature and operation of ethnic politics in contemporary Taiwan.

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