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The Cyber-reception for Three Hakka *Tulou* Construction Projects in Taiwan

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FIORELLA BOURGEOIS

ABSTRACT: In the early 2010s, under the second mandate of Ma Ying-jeou (KMT), plans to construct three Hakka *tulou* in western Taiwan aroused considerable discontent amongst a section of the Taiwanese population. Their disapproval manifested itself in the eruption of small-scale demonstrations and in the expression of differences of opinion and individual experiences in the cybersphere. As actors, internet users took on the role of citizen's watch and people's judge and revealed, through a critique of the three projects, the failings and tensions present in representative democracy both in terms of cultural identity and procedural mechanisms, highlighting opposed values of the various social agents.

KEYWORDS: Taiwan, representative democracy, local election, Miaoli, *tulou*, Liu Cheng-hung, new media, actor, value, process.

In Taiwan, in the early 2010s, the leaders of the Miaoli and Hsinchu districts and the mayor of Taichung – all three affiliated to the Kuomintang (KMT) – drew up a plan for the construction of Hakka *tulou* (*kejia tulou* 客家土樓) ⁽¹⁾ in each of these areas. Of the three projects, only the Miaoli plan came to fruition: the *tulou* known as the Hakka Roundhouse (*kejia yuanlou* 客家圓樓) was inaugurated on 25 October 2014 in the town of Houlong 後龍. Officially, the aim of these three initiatives was the development of tourism through the valuation of "Hakka culture." ⁽²⁾

From the time they were proposed until their realisation or abandonment, these three projects engendered lively criticism on the part of local residents, the media, and Taiwanese intellectuals. The fiercest polemic centred on the Miaoli *tulou*. ⁽³⁾ In 2010, the building of the Hakka Roundhouse led to the demolition of two clay structures built by the Hakkas of Taiwan in the early 1950s: the "eight-trigram kiln" (*bagua yao* 八卦窯) and the "tetragonal kiln" (*sifang yao* 四方窯). In an interview conducted by *Liberty Times* in July 2013, Ho Chuan-kun 何傳坤, a Taiwanese anthropologist from the National Tsing Hua University, expressed his disapproval of the destruction of a part of Taiwanese Hakka culture, seeing in it the renunciation of a culture whose foundations were Taiwanese in favour of an imposed Chinese culture that was stripped of meaning and memorial value for the local population and the Hakkas of Taiwan:

The value of historic monuments lies in the place where they have their roots. When the government of the district of Miaoli imitates a *tulou*, is it to attract Taiwanese tourists or Chinese tourists? Why would Chinese tourists come to Taiwan to visit these mountain fortresses, the *tulou*? [...] If we are not saving the cultural heritage

1. *Tulou*, literally "earth buildings," are a type of architecture unique to southwestern China and were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2008 (in the cultural assets category). Built on stone foundations, with a wooden frame and surrounded by a wall made of hard-packed earth, the *tulou* – often casually termed "mountain fortresses" on account of their fortified appearance – are often categorised according to their shape and ground plan: the three most common plans are the round *tulou* (*yuanlou*), the square *tulou* (*fanglou*), and the five-phoenix-style *tulou* (*wufenglou*). These buildings are inhabited by the Hakka (*kejia* in *putonghua*) and by the Minnan (also known as Fulao or Hoklo in Taiwan), two sub-groups of the majority Han nationality living mainly in the provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. However, the heritage rhetoric disseminated by the Chinese government contributed to the crystallisation of a *tulou*-Hakka correlation that assimilated the *tulou* into a Hakka cultural and territorial marker, thereby obliterating the involvement of the Minnan population in the building of these edifices. Although this omission was denounced in 2009 by the Chinese architect and researcher Huang Hanmin, an article in *People's Daily* in 2011 maintained that "the *tulou* is the emblem of Hakka culture" and likewise that "Hakka culture is the soul of the *tulou*." Cf. Huang Hanmin, *Fujian tulou: Zhongguo chuantong minju de guibao* (The Fujian *tulou*: Treasures of Chinese vernacular dwellings), Beijing, Shenghuo dushu xinzhishi sanlianshidian, 2009, p. 109; Yan Qunxing and Wu Xunying, "Yongding: 'rang wenhua wu dong tulou'" (Yongding: "Culture is alive in the *tulou*"), *Renmin ribao*, 2011, http://paper.people.com.cn/mrb-hwb/html/2011-12/02/content_970259.htm (accessed on 15 May 2016). For historiography relating to the *tulou* and the controversy surrounding the nature of this architecture (function, form, and official rhetoric) cf. Fiorella Bourgeois, *From the Construction of the Collective Imagination to the Reconfiguration of Identities: The dialectic Relationship between the Institutionalisation of the Tulou and Local Cultures*, Dissertation: EHESS, 2015, 176 pp.
2. In 2013, on the pretext of developing tourism, the government of Hsinchu, a neighbouring district to Miaoli, officially announced the building of a Tourist Service Centre constructed in the form of a Hakka *tulou*. Information on the Hsinchu *tulou* project is available on the official site of the Hsinchu municipal department of civil engineering. Cf. Xinzhu xian zhengfu gongwu chu (Civil engineering department of the Hsinchu district), "Xinzhu xian luyou fuwu zhongxin kejia tulou xingjian gongcheng weituo guihua jishu fuwu" (Planning department in charge of the construction work on the Hakka *tulou*, Tourist Service Centre for the district of Hsinchu), <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B7DQmv-1pOToy2VKVTNFSjZTNOE/edit> (accessed on 22 November 2016). In 2014, it was the turn of Hu Chih-chiang, the mayor (KMT) of the municipality of Taichung, to plan the building of a round *tulou* in the Hakka quarter of Tungshih, but the project did not come to fruition. Cf. Wu Xianjun, "Kejia yuan tulou tiyan guan de chuanyi fa xiang: Meixue jingji guandian" (Innovative ideas about Hakka circular earth building experience museum: perspective of aesthetic economy), website of the Government of Taichung, 2014, <http://www.taichung.gov.tw/public/Attachment/115030/4122415574630.pdf> (accessed on 15 April 2017).
3. Yuan Qing, "Taiwan Miaoli gai Fujian yuan lou bei pi wei bei benti kejia wenhua" (The construction of a round Fujian *tulou* in the Miaoli District in Taiwan criticised for being contrary to local Hakka culture), *Guangming wang*, 22 July 2013, http://politics.gmw.cn/2013-07/22/content_8351539.htm (accessed on 26 January 2016).

of the Hakka of Taiwan, could it be because we do not have confidence in our own heritage? ⁽⁴⁾

On 21 September 2013, the Taiwan Hakka Think Tank (*Taiwan Kejia zhiku* 台灣客家智庫) organised a press conference to call upon the Head of the Miaoli district, Liu Cheng-hung 劉政鴻, to “immediately stop the building of a Chinese Hakka *tulou* that has no connection with Taiwan,” to broaden his knowledge of Hakka culture, and to enhance the cultural heritage of Miaoli District. ⁽⁵⁾

Alongside small-scale demonstrations against the destruction of the kilns and the building of a *tulou*, ⁽⁶⁾ the protesters exploited the virtual sphere, a privileged forum for the “critical sovereignty of opinion,” ⁽⁷⁾ which was increasingly becoming a zone and a tool for citizen-based surveillance in Taiwan. ⁽⁸⁾ This exercise of citizen activity in a democratic context (evaluation, judgement, prevention, etc.) is part of the communication society, structured by social media (Facebook, Wechat, Line, etc.), microblogs (Twitter, Weibo), Bulletin Board Systems (PTT), and other virtual interfaces that transmit information and enable dialogue between internet users. ⁽⁹⁾ These new online communication platforms have led researchers to investigate the observations of internet users in order to have a better understanding of their engagement and of the politico-social dimension. ⁽¹⁰⁾

This article analyses certain online controversies ⁽¹¹⁾ concerning the reception of the three *tulou* building projects through a qualitative survey on new media and through the exchange of comments between internet users published between July 2013 and July 2015. The aim of studying these comments is to reproduce the social mood of a section of the Taiwanese population under the second mandate of President Ma Ying-jeou 馬英九 (KMT) from May 2012 to May 2016, and at the same time to enable researchers to understand more clearly the censorship role played by internet users, who are often only partially anonymous, and to consider the dynamics of the comments and virtual dialogue of internet users.

Although the question of identity is well and truly present in the online posts, internet users reveal a varied range of concerns that contribute to a common dynamic: the creation of an indictment against the government in power and the elaboration of a common horizon of expectation. Virtually or physically, the players (militants, internet users, and politicians) mobilise in the name of certain values to initiate, stop, or change the direction of a process of reform. This article studies the reception of three *tulou* construction projects in Taiwan from the perspective of the processual change that led to the realisation or abandonment of the project rather than from the perspective of the result. ⁽¹²⁾

Empirical materials, choice of corpus, and methodology

Most of the online articles on building *tulou* in the Miaoli and Hsinchu districts and in the Taichung municipality were published between 2013 and 2015 in the two biggest Taiwanese daily papers, the liberal democratic *Liberty Times* (*Ziyou shibao* 自由時報), in favour of Taiwanese independence, and *Apple Daily* (*Pingguo ribao* 蘋果日報), considered to be a moderate daily. ⁽¹³⁾ Five of the articles are followed by Facebook comments (four in *Apple Daily* and one in *Liberty Times*), ⁽¹⁴⁾ so a total of 129 Facebook comments were collected. This data base was expanded by 23 Facebook comments posted after an article in the online *EToday* 東森新聞雲, and 15 Facebook comments published on the page of the Taiwanese forum Mesotw

(*Taiwan xiaozhan* 台灣小站), entitled “Miaoli District Head Liu Cheng-hung demolishes Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese *tulou*” (*Miaoli xianzhang Liu Zhenghong chi Taiwan Kejia yao gai Zhongguo tulou* 苗栗縣長劉政鴻拆台灣客家窯蓋中國土樓). Moreover, the survey resulted in the collection of 172 other posts on three articles published on one of the main Taiwanese platforms, PTT Bulletin Board System (*Pititi shiye fang* 批踢踢實業坊), mainly used by students. In all, a sample of 367 comments from internet users, of variable quality and length, were analysed. It should be pointed out that the pages of the PTT forum and Mesotw are systematically linked to *Liberty Times* and *Apple Daily*.

Online, the context is provided by many elements: the subject of the page on which the comment is posted, its place in a virtual dialogue between internet users, the social network used to publish the comment, etc.

4. Su Fanghe and Fu Chaobiao, “Miaoli xianzhang Liu Zhenghong chi Taiwan kejia yao gai Zhongguo tulou” (Miaoli District Head Liu Cheng-hung demolishes Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese *tulou*), *Liberty Times*, 22 July 2013, <http://news.ltn.com.tw/news/focus/paper/698644> (accessed on 25 January 2016).
5. Taiwan Kejia zhiku (Taiwan Hakka Think Tank), “Jinji de Liu Zhenghong! Chi Taiwan ren de fang, gai Zhongguo ren de lou” (“Liu Cheng-hung’s Attack! Destroy Taiwanese dwellings, put up Chinese buildings”), 21 July 2013, http://taiwanhakkatank.blogspot.fr/2013/07/blog-post_20.html (accessed on 3 March 2016). Five other articles on the construction of the *tulou* in Miaoli were published on the site of the Taiwan Hakka Think Tank: <http://taiwanhakkatank.blogspot.fr/search/label/台灣客家拒絕山寨圍樓>.
6. Huang Yixin, “Zhudong ni jian kejia tulou: minzhong kangyi bai chongtu” (Zhudong plans to build a Hakka *tulou*: conflicts emerge following protests from the population), *Apple Daily*, 1 May 2015, <http://www.appledaily.com.tw/realtime/news/article/new/20150501/602732/> (accessed on 29 November 2016).
7. Pierre Rosanvallon, *La Contre-démocratie. La politique à l’âge de la défiance* (Counter-democracy. Politics in the Age of Defiance), Paris, Éditions du Seuil, p. 171.
8. The movement of democratisation of Taiwanese society in the 1990s led researchers to rethink democratic participation in the light of new information and communication technologies (NICTS); they have raised questions on the virtues and vices of “e-democracy” (*wanglu minzhu*), “electronic democracy” (*dianzi minzhu*) and “teledemocracy” (*dianshi minzhu*). The expanding role of ICT in Taiwan led, in October 2012, to the foundation of g0v (the ‘o’ of gov was turned into a ‘0’), *lingshi zhengfu* in Chinese. The main objectives of g0v – organised along the lines of a liquid democracy model and composed of hackers, engineers, information technology designers, journalists, lawyers, and militants as well as human science researchers such as anthropologists and sociologists – are transparency of information, decentralisation, and openness, that is to say, open data, open source, open government, and open cooperation. The community’s numerous projects are all part of *civic tech* (civic technologies). Certain g0v “participants” (*canyuzhe*) are government consultants, others are civil servants. One such is Audrey Tang, appointed minister without portfolio in charge of digital affairs in August 2016, and also the hacker Luo Peiqi, who now works for the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (*Weisheng fuli bu*).
9. On the leading role of new media in the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan in 2014, cf. Liu Shijun, *Zhengzhi kangyi shijian zhong de meiti chuanguan shiyong yu shijian: yi taiyanghua xueyun wei li* (New Practices and Uses of the Media in Political Protests: The Example of the Sunflower Movement), Thesis, National Chengchi University, 2014, 157 pp.
10. Many more Anglophone and Sinophone studies on the comments of internet users exist than have been published in French. Similarly, quantitative studies are more common than qualitative studies. Amongst the latter, two articles may be cited by way of example: Wu Hsiao-Mei, “Wangshang xingzou: Facebook shiyongzhe zhi daka zhanhu yu dibiao shijian” (Traversing the web: Check-in tactics and place practice of Facebook users), *Xinwen xue yanjiu* (Mass communication research), No. 126, 2016, pp. 93-132; Ching-Ting Liao, “BBS wangzhan de Kejia zuqun rentong jiangou: yi PTT ‘Hakka Dream’ ban weilii” (Constructing the Hakka ethnic identity in BBS: A case study of “Hakka dream” in the PTT), *Zixun shehui yanjiu* (Journal of cyber culture and information society), Vol. 13, 2007, pp. 257-293.
11. The term “controversy” is understood here to be an “effervescent moment” as defined by Durkheim, or in other words, as an occasion for the social players to question certain hitherto established balances of power and beliefs, to redistribute amongst themselves ‘greatness’ and positions of power, and to invent new organisational systems and techniques that will shape their future relationships differently.” Cyril Lemieux, “À quoi sert l’analyse des controverses?” (What is the use of analysing controversies?), *Mil neuf cent. Revue d’histoire intellectuelle* (1900, journal of intellectual history), No. 25, 2007, p. 192.
12. For the idea of “processual change,” I refer readers to Stéphane Corcuff’s presentation of the notion at the opening of the workshop entitled “The Ordinary and the Extraordinary in Taiwan. Political, Social and Economic Change” held at the Academia Sinica on 30 and 31 October 2014.
13. For a historical analysis of the political colours of *Liberty Times* and *Apple Daily*, see Hsu Chien-jung, “Taiwan Identity Media,” in Hsu Chien-jung, *The Construction of National Identity in Taiwan’s Media, 1896-2012*, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2014, pp. 156-224.
14. Articles published in *China Times* were not used, since the site blocks comments by internet users.

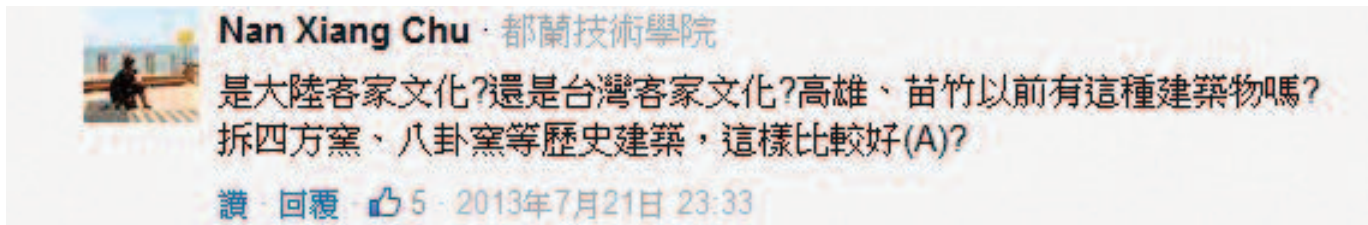


Figure 1 – Facebook comment published by internet user Nan Xiang Chu following an article in the *Apple Daily* entitled “The Miaoli District is building a mountain fortress ‘a Fujian *tulou*’.” Source: Nan Xiang Chu, <https://www.facebook.com/q19810115> (accessed on 15 May 2016).

In the case of the Facebook posts, for example, a survey was conducted on the profile of the internet user in question in order to understand the place of the comment in the news thread. Nonetheless, internet users enjoy partial anonymity, which acts as a definite curb to a comprehensive understanding of the identity of the internet user as a player in the social network. Digital identity also depends as much on the virtual platform (that establishes a normative framework of variable flexibility) as on the internet user.⁽¹⁵⁾

A chronological analysis of the posts revealed two broad time spans, each relating to a specific subject: the comments from 2013 relate mainly to the question of identity, whilst those from 2014 and 2015 reveal a critique of the local political system. These two issues should be placed against the background of a more general consideration of the uncertainties of representative democracy in the Taiwanese context.

(De)legitimising the representation of identities: Authority figure and political fiction

Miaoli District head Liu Cheng-hung announced in a press release in July 2013:

The construction of the *tulou* represents the local culture of 65% of the Miaoli Hakka and should enable us to attract tourists. We hope that everyone will be able to assimilate the *tulou* as an integral part of local culture and benefit from this ancestral wisdom.⁽¹⁶⁾

This declaration drew numerous comments from both sympathisers and detractors of Liu Cheng-hung’s position, all raising the same question: can the *tulou* embody the Hakkas of Taiwan? Two major fundamental questions emerged from the analysis of internet users’ comments: is the culture and identity of the Taiwanese Hakkas distinct from that of the Chinese Hakkas? Are local officials justified in representing a hypostatised Hakka community? Over and above previous analyses of the lack of consensus between Chinese culture and Taiwanese identity, these issues may be understood in the light of the tension between the construction of a political issue as an abstract political principle relating to a form of totality, or unity (“the People,” “the Hakka ethnic group”),⁽¹⁷⁾ and the liberal principle whereby each individualised subject has the right to self-determination.⁽¹⁸⁾ Although a comment is a form of individual expression, its rhetoric is characterised by reference to collective forms of designation, synecdoches that use *I* as an expression of the collective.⁽¹⁹⁾ By using these collective designations as a screen for the *I*, the internet user tends to set himself up as an authority figure, the legitimate spokesperson for a community.

Chinese Hakkas vs Taiwanese Hakkas: Aporia of the essentialisation of an identity dualism

Following an article in *Apple Daily* published on 21 July 2013, entitled “Miaoli district is building a small mountain fortress, a ‘Fujian *tulou*,’” an internet user with a higher education diploma, Nan Xiang Chu, distinguished between two Hakka communities (see figure 1):

Is this the culture of the Mainland Hakkas? Or is it the culture of Taiwanese Hakkas? Did [the town of] Kaohsiung, and [the districts of] Miaoli and Hsinchu have this kind of architecture before? Is it right to destroy the square kiln, the octagonal kiln, and other historic monuments?⁽²⁰⁾

Nan Xiang Chu’s questions on the nature of Hakka culture in Taiwan are similar to those of other internet users who raise the issue of the correspondence between the *tulou* as an element of representation of Taiwanese Hakka culture and the origin of the Hakkas, a diaspora community, whose official history has been structured by several migratory waves in China and the countries of Southeast Asia.⁽²¹⁾

Certain internet users therefore associate the geographic origin of the Hakkas with the legitimacy of the *tulou* in its function as a representation

- Kevin F. Steinmetz, “Message Received: Virtual Ethnography in Online Message Boards,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2012, pp. 26-39.
- Huang Yangming and Yang Yongsheng, “Miaoli xian gai shanzhai ‘Fujian tulou’” (Miaoli District is building a small fort, “a Fujian *tulou*”), *Apple Daily*, 21 July 2013, <http://www.appledaily.com.tw/apledaily/article/headline/20130722/35167340/>, (accessed on 15 May 2016).
- The ethnic Hakka group (*kejia zuqun*) is one of the “four big Taiwanese ethnic groups.” In 2001, Chen Shui-bian’s Taiwanese government (2000-2008) institutionalised Hakka identity by founding the *Kewehui*, the Hakka Affairs Council. In 2002, the *Kewehui* established an annual festival, the Hakka Tung Blossom Festival (*Kejia tong hua zhai*), and in 2011 inaugurated Hakka National Day (*Quanguo Kejia ri huodong*).
- For an analysis of liberal individualism, cf. Nathalie Maillard, *La vulnérabilité: une nouvelle catégorie morale? (Vulnerability: A new moral category?)*, Geneva, Labor and Fides, 2011, pp. 54-71.
- Quoting Jean-Louis Fabiani, Cyril Lemieux notes that in cases of controversy, “it is always a question of creating conditions that allow the protagonist to invoke as witness, or even constitute as a resource, the audience to a debate. This audience may be virtual, represent posterity or the universal: the presupposition of its existence opens up a space for the disclosure of truth. [...] In this type of conflict, the proviso by which the two adversaries must recognise that each has an equal right to expose their arguments before the public and to present proof tends to be invested by the participants in varying degrees.” Cyril Lemieux, “À quoi sert l’analyse des controverses” (What is the purpose of analysing controversies), *op. cit.*, p. 195.
- Huang Yangming and Yang Yongsheng, “Miaoli xian gai shanzhai ‘Fujian tulou’” (Miaoli District is building a small mountain fortress ‘a Fujian *tulou*’), *op. cit.*
- The annexing and management of Taiwan by the Qing Empire between 1684 and 1895 on the one hand, and the establishment of the KMT on the island in 1945 on the other, engendered several waves of migration from China to Taiwan. As a result, almost 98% of the Taiwanese population is of Chinese origin. The Minnan and Hakka sub-groups that inhabit the southwestern coastal provinces of China opposite Taiwan (Fujian and Guangdong) account for most of the Chinese migrants. Along with Mainlanders (*waishengren*) and Taiwanese Aborigines (*Yuanzhumin*), the Minnan and Hakkas make up the four major ethnic groups recognised by the Taiwanese government. The Minnan (70%) and Hakkas (15%) represent 85% of the total population.

→ chungrew: 當然不適當，這種做法會摧毀台灣的的傳統文化，毀損歷史 07/22 10:00
 → chungrew: 但如果認定台灣人的根在中國，那這樣做才是對了，很正確 07/22 10:00
 → chungrew: 一個民族沒有根，是非常可怕的一件事 07/22 10:00

Figure 2 – Comment by internet user Chungrew published on the PTT platform. Source: CrashonU (crazy), "Miaoli xianzhang Liu Zhenghong chi Taiwan kejia yao gai Zhongguo tulou" (Miaoli County Chief, Liu Cheng-hung, demolishes Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese *tulou*), PTT, 22 July 2013, <http://b.bbi.com.tw/Gossiping/1Hx8h-vj.html>, (accessed on 6 December 2016).

of a homogenous Hakka community whose culture is Chinese. In a comment on Facebook published following the article in *Apple Daily*, internet user Jimmy Chen declares that the Hakkas are migrants originating from the mainland and consequently, this historical fact is enough to legitimise the construction of a *tulou* in Miaoli. Similarly, Ma Shan 馮山, a Hakka from Miaoli who supports the Pan-Blue Coalition⁽²²⁾ and is combating what he considers Minnan chauvinism in Taiwan, frequently underlines the Taiwanese Hakkas' Chinese origin. In a comment dated 21 July 2013, he adds:

The construction of Hakka *tulou* in Fujian also bears historic witness to what the Hakkas have experienced. [...] Many Hakka friends automatically associate the *tulou* with a Hakka dwelling place. This does indeed mean that this type of architectural heritage can also represent Hakka culture.⁽²³⁾

In the same exchange of comments, Wu Mengru 吳孟儒 uses a sarcastic sophism in order to discredit the rhetoric on origins that justifies the idea that Chinese Hakka culture is representative of the Taiwanese Hakkas' history:

If we want to see the heritage of the Hakkas from over the Strait, we only need to go there; why come to see what the Taiwanese have done? Should we, since human origins lie in Africa, transform all the Taiwanese buildings into African buildings? Though all are related to each other, in the end, all societies, all over the world, develop a local culture [that is their own] [...].⁽²⁴⁾

Nevertheless, although the history of the migration of Hakkas to Taiwan remains an authoritative argument put forward by many internet users, the cultural rhetoric that emanates from it is skilfully treated by those who support Taiwanese self-determination regarding their identity, culture, collective memory, and history. Those who believe that there is a cultural difference between a Taiwanese Hakka community and a Mainland Hakka group concede that the Hakkas who immigrated to Taiwan produced a culture that is all their own since they assimilated part of the native culture.⁽²⁵⁾ The Taiwan Hakka Think Tank therefore affirmed that "the construction of a round *tulou* goes against the historical process of the Hakkas of Taiwan."⁽²⁶⁾ In a Facebook comment dated 22 July 2013, a student from the National University of Tainan, Wayne Chen, argues that the ancestors of the Hakkas who immigrated to Taiwan never built *tulou*, so the *tulou* cannot embody the Taiwanese Hakka community.

Detractors and zealots approach the historical narrative from two distinct, opposing angles. The first group base their arguments on a retrospective determinist historical path to legitimise the Chinese identity of the Hakkas invoked by the *tulou* monument. The second group, on the other hand, invoke a prospective determinist historical dynamic by which the historic force that moves Taiwan inevitably leads to the formation of a Hakka culture

that has Taiwanese foundations. Therefore, those who oppose the *tulou* construction project condemn the semiotic dimension of the architecture as part of a politically-imposed narrative that conflicts with a historic process of self-determination unique to Taiwan.

From one collective to another: An attack on Taiwanese sovereignty

In an attempt to discredit the erection of the Miaoli *tulou* and to reinforce a feeling of "misrepresentation," internet user Tsen Wei Lun quotes the introduction to an article in *Liberty Times*:

Chen Ban [陳板], ex-president of the Hakka television channel and a guest professor affiliated with the Department of Architecture Art Conservation of the National University of the Arts in Taiwan, strongly criticised Liu Cheng-hung by affirming that he had deceived the Taiwanese people by creating a meaningless style of architecture.⁽²⁷⁾

This extract sees the "people" as a form of collective interiority with its own character, whose expectations have not been fulfilled. The use of the topic "Taiwanese people" rather than "Hakka" is more evident in the PTT comments than in those of *Liberty Times* and *Apple Daily*. On 22 July 2013, an internet user introduced a topic on an article in *Liberty Times* entitled "Miaoli District Head Liu Cheng-hung demolishes Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese *tulou*."⁽²⁸⁾ In a series of three comments, internet user Chungrew makes no mention of the Hakkas and concentrates his arguments on the fragile construction of Taiwan as a nation (see figure 2):

Of course this [the destruction of the kilns and building of the *tulou*] is inappropriate; this type of procedure will destroy traditional Taiwanese culture and damage its history. But if, however, we are convinced that Taiwanese roots are in China, then this sort of thing is fair and right. A nation without roots is a terribly frightening thing.

22. The Pan-Blue Coalition is an alliance between several Taiwanese parties – including the KMT, the People First Party, the New Party, and the Minkuotang – who support, amongst other things, the promotion of Chinese nationalism in Taiwan.
23. Huang Yangming and Yang Yongsheng, "Miaoli xian gai shanzhai 'Fujian tulou'" (Miaoli District is building a mountain fortress "a Fujian *tulou*"), *op. cit.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. Han Baode, "Wenhua jiaorong haishi wenhua xiaobing" (Cultural mix or cultural joke), *Taiwan Hakka Think Tank*, 27 July 2013, http://taiwanhakkatank.blogspot.fr/2013/07/blog-post_27.html (accessed on 14 December 2016).
26. *Ibid.*
27. Huang Yangming and Yang Yongsheng, "Miaoli xian gai shanzhai 'Fujian tulou'" (Miaoli District is building a mountain fortress "a Fujian *tulou*"), *op. cit.*
28. CrashonU (crazy), "Miaoli xianzhang Liu Zhenghong chi Taiwan kejia yao gai Zhongguo tulou" (Miaoli District Head Liu Cheng-hung demolishes Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese *tulou*), PTT, 22 July 2013, <http://b.bbi.com.tw/Gossiping/1Hx8h-vj.html>, (accessed on 6 December 2016).

How should we interpret the effort of internet user Chungrew to rationalise the situation? In his view, it is above all a question of a conflict over the interpretation of the “roots of the identity” of the Taiwanese population. Moreover, he does not hesitate to warn against the risks inherent in the indetermination of these roots for the “Taiwanese nation.”

Whether it is a question of the defenders of the *tulou* or of its opponents, the question of the balance between the instituted (the Hakkas and secondly the Taiwanese) and the instituting (the *tulou*) reveals the tension created by the inclusion of the autonomous individual (the internet user) in a personified affective community (“the Taiwanese” people and “the Hakkas”) whose substance has been called into question. This conflict seems unsurpassable in that internet users and the media have not reflected upon the category of “Hakka” as an institutionalised political entity. Moreover, the media have not encouraged the rationalisation of the pluralism underlying this standardising designation.

The “foreigner,” between exemplariness and defiance: A critique of inter-Strait cultural exchange policies

On 22 July 2013, *Liberty Times* published an article entitled “Miaoli District Head Liu Cheng-hung demolishes Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese *tulou*.” The article reproduces the dialogue between public intellectuals and members of the government:

The Miaoli government responded to the unsolicited criticism expressed by Wu Yi-chen [PDP and Legislative Yuan member] in the previous day’s paper, which accused the government of putting pressure on the culture of Taiwanese Hakkas. She [Wu Yi-chen] had not understood that cultures can be exchanged and combined [*ronghe jiaoliu* 融合交流] and do not take account of territorial boundaries. They cannot be neatly compartmentalised. Although public figures use this topic as a pretext for satisfying their own objectives, the government of the district will protest strongly and will not give in. (29)

Although these official statements would seem to maintain a distinction between the Hakkas of China and the Hakkas of Taiwan, the topic of the exchange and mixing of cultures annoyed many internet users. In a comment published on 22 July 2013 on the Mesotw platform, internet user Kcm quoted the above passage and denounced the cultural exchange policies between China and Taiwan promoted by the Miaoli government as part of the strengthening of inter-Strait Sino-Taiwanese relations in order to justify the construction of the *tulou*:

[In order to foster] cultural exchanges, must we begin by mutilating our own culture and destroying its heritage? Does the rest of the world behave like this in order to boost tourism? (30)

The analogy of the foreigner appears again in a comment from Youzi buyi 游子布衣, who says that the United States and Japan do not repress their history and culture in this way. (31) This comparison is particularly interesting on account of the history of diplomatic relations between the United States, Japan, Taiwan, and China. As a result, the two countries mentioned by the internet user have been elevated to the rank of yardstick, or even of an example to be followed in the management of collective memory and na-

tional heritage. Similarly, several internet users use the analogy with a foreign country to mock Taiwanese cultural exchange policies and the officials who apply them. In a PTT comment, Bce says mockingly, “If Egypt wanted to destroy the pyramids to build a great wall, saying that it would attract tourists, wouldn’t you find that ridiculous?” (32)

At the same time, certain internet users developed a rhetoric of the “enemy-foreigner,” using an image of China and the local official in which “foreign” is used to describe any entity that is not part of the affective community:

Is he a Chinese spy? He has come specially to destroy Taiwanese culture when it should be transmitted! The construction of the *tulou* will not turn me into a Mainland Hakka, will it? Could it be that in becoming an official, one becomes an idiot? (33)

In this comment, internet user Chen Hongling 陳虹翎, an interior architect living in Kaohsiung and who previously lived in Miaoli, does not hesitate to question Liu Cheng-hung’s relationship with China and call his competency into question. Similarly, internet user Zeng Huimei 曾惠美, an inhabitant of the district of Changhua 彰化縣 and supporter of the Pan-Green Coalition, disapproves of the Taichung *tulou* project in the Hakka district of Tungshih 東勢區, calling it a “circular Chinese dream of Hu Chih-chiang [胡志強],” mayor of Taichung and affiliated with the KMT. The expression “Chinese dream” (*Zhongguo meng* 中國夢) used by the internet user is a direct reference to the political slogan of Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China and President of the People’s Republic of China since 2013, for whom “the Chinese dream” is the dream of the Chinese nation, but also that of every Chinese person. (34)

So over and above the debate on the politicised representation of Hakka and Taiwanese identities, the indictment made up of the comments of internet users targets heritage management in Taiwan by local officials.

Revealing wrongs: Vices and virtues of the government

Whilst the comments from 2013 are mainly focused on questions of identity, those from 2014 and 2015 reveal new concerns linked to three major events. On the one hand, the precursor of the Miaoli *tulou* project is seen as a failure by the media and the majority of the inhabitants of Miaoli, Hsinchu, and Taichung. Indeed, the Miaoli *tulou*, inaugurated in October 2014, contributed to an increase in the budget deficit of Miaoli District, al-

29. Su Fanghe and Fu Chaobiao, “Miaoli xianzhang Liu Zhenghong chi Taiwan keija yao gai Zhongguo tulou” (Miaoli District Head Liu Cheng-hung demolishes Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese *tulou*), *op. cit.*
30. Comment by Kcm, *Taiwan xiaozhan*, 22 July 2013, <http://www.mesotw.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=31916> (accessed on 10 March 2016).
31. Comment by Youzi buyi, *Taiwan xiaozhan*, 22 July 2013, <http://www.mesotw.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=31916&extra=&page=2> (accessed on 10 March 2016).
32. CrashonU (crazy), “Miaoli xianzhang Liu Zhenghong chi taiwan keija yao gai Zhongguo tulou” (Miaoli District Head Liu Cheng-hung demolishes Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese *tulou*), *op. cit.*
33. Comment by Chen Hongling, published on 28 October 2014. Cf. Su Fanghe and Fu Chaobiao, “Miaoli xianzhang Liu Zhenghong chi Taiwan keija yao gai Zhongguo tulou (Miaoli District Head Liu Cheng-hung demolishes Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese *tulou*),” *op. cit.*
34. “Xi Jinping guanyu shixian zhonghua minzu weida fuxing de Zhongguo meng lunshu (Theorisation of Xi Jinping’s Chinese dream for the great renewal of the Chinese nation),” *Renmin wang* (people.cn), 12 May 2013, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/1205/c40555-23756883-5.html> (accessed on 13 December 2016).

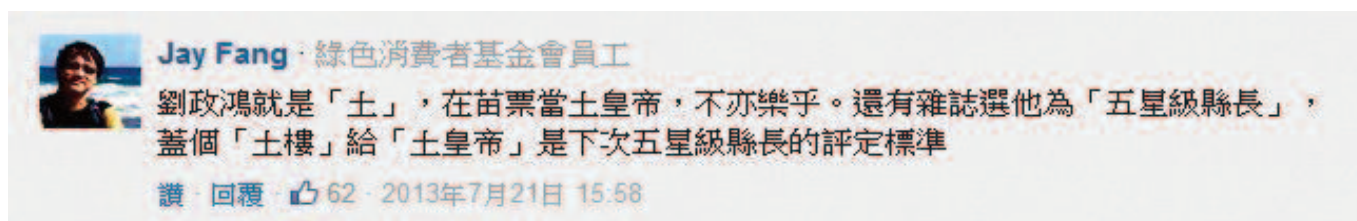


Figure 3 – Facebook comment by internet user Jay Fang posted following an article in the *Apple Daily* entitled “The Miaoli District is building a mountain fortress ‘a Fujian tulou’.” Source: Jay Fang, <https://www.facebook.com/fangjay2011/posts/10201393521621035> (accessed on 15 May 2016).

ready deep in debt. The low level of attendance for the site did not succeed in boosting tourism in the region. The media added it *ipso facto* to the long list of “Mosquito halls” (white elephant buildings) (*wenzi guan* 蚊子館) in Miaoli, just like the Ma village (*Mafen guan* 媽奮館 or *Majia zhuang* 馬家庄)⁽³⁵⁾ and Yingsai Academy (*Yingcai shuyuan* 英才書院).⁽³⁶⁾ On the other hand, the comments published between June 2014 and July 2015 must be analysed in the light of a socio-political context punctuated by numerous demonstrations that resulted in, amongst others, the Sunflower Movement (18 March - 10 April 2014),⁽³⁷⁾ a time of civil disobedience and delegitimisation of the then central government that marked a weakening of the presidential function as well as a loss of authority for the KMT. Lastly, the local general election on 29 November 2014 led to the victory of the DPP in most municipalities, districts, and towns. Six localities, however, remained under the domination of the KMT, including the districts of Miaoli and Hsinchu.⁽³⁸⁾

Against this background of upheaval in which internet users denounced the wrongs of the system of representation, certain comments opened up a horizon of expectation and formulated the prerequisites for the establishment of a fair and moral government attentive to the demands of the population and which would be unable to govern without its consent.

An act of accusation against local officials: Personifying corruption

The internet users took on a censorship role towards the officials they were assessing. As judges, they condemned the acts of these politicians if they did not measure up to an implicit moral and politico-judicial ethic. Liu Cheng-hung, for example, was accused of land speculation. On the Mesotw forum, the internet user NorthStar protested:

Liu Cheng-hung is the biggest bandit in Miaoli. He has taken the people's land by force and destroyed their heritage. He connives with the entrepreneurs who speculate on building land [...].⁽³⁹⁾

For Chen Dongfu 陳東甫, Liu's aim was to increase land prices in order to gentrify the district in which he lived:

First, Liu Cheng-hung built, next to his home, a high-speed train station. Then he had a bilingual school built. The land next to his home was originally agricultural land. Suddenly, land prices increased and now he is building a *tulou* there. He is continually developing the place [...].⁽⁴⁰⁾

Land speculation incited certain internet users to play on the Chinese character *tu* 土 meaning here “the earth, the ground, the dust,” coupling it

with other Chinese characters to create insults. Liu Cheng-hung is called a *tufei* 土匪, meaning “bandit,” from *tu bawang* 土霸王, a term meaning a “land despot,” and *tu huangdi* 土皇帝, an expression that might be translated as “land emperor” (see figure 3):

Liu Cheng-hung is “dust,” he has become land emperor in Miaoli, isn't it wonderful? The magazines have elected him “chief of the five-star district.” Building an “edifice of earth” for “the land emperor” is the next criteria for becoming chief of a five-star district.⁽⁴¹⁾

Jay Fang, a young man of 35 living in Taipei, called into question the relative credibility of the system for rating districts. Indeed, in 2012, Liu Cheng-hung was designated chief of a five-star district following a “poll measuring the level of satisfaction [of the population] with the officials at the head of the districts and municipalities” (*xianshizhang shizheng manyi du da diaocha* 縣市長施政滿意度大調查), published annually by the magazine *Yuanjian* (遠見雜誌). The nomination of Liu was interpreted as an act of complicity between the Miaoli district chief and the media. In his exchange with Jay Fang, Lin Zuguang 林祖光, a young Taiwanese from Kaohsiung and supporter of the Black Island Nation Youth Front (*Heise daoguo qingnian zhenxian* 黑色島國青年陣線), added, “925,000 NT\$ to buy the magazines and get yourself elected chief of a five-star district.”⁽⁴²⁾ Comments, as a form of protest, and more generally, those in the virtual sphere, have come to compensate for a lack of surveillance institutions and consequently, a failing of the democratic government to

35. Miaoli xian zhengfu wenhua canguang ju (Miaoli District Bureau of Culture and Tourism), “Majia zhuang” (The Ma Village), 20 December 2012, <http://www.miaolitravel.net/MainWeb/article.aspx?Lang=1&Sno=04004484> (accessed on 9 March 2016); Mo Yan-chih, “Ma visits Ma Village, stresses Hakka roots,” *Taipei Times*, 25 January 2012, <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2012/01/25/2003523976> (accessed on 10 March 2016).
36. Aaron Wytze Wilson, “Miaoli: The district that debt built,” *Taipei Times*, 12 October 2015, <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/feat/archives/2015/10/12/2003629837> (accessed on 12 December 2016).
37. At the start of the Sunflower Movement, the students demanded the cessation of all trade negotiations with China and transparency of information relating to the Trade Agreement on services between the two shores.
38. The local elections on 29 November 2014 consisted of nine ballots and a consultation. At stake in these elections was “the renewal of 11,130 mandates: that of the mayors of the special municipalities and towns [...], country magistrates [...], municipal and county councillors [...], mayors [...], village and district chiefs [...], and the mandates of native district chiefs and their councillors [...]” Cf. Frank Muyard, “Voting Shift in the November 2014 Local Elections in Taiwan: Strong rebuke to Ma Ying-jeou's government and policies and landslide victory for the DPP,” *China Perspectives*, 2015/1, p. 55.
39. Comment by NorthStar, *Taiwan xiaozhan*, 22 July 2013, <http://www.mesotw.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=31916> (accessed on 10 March 2016).
40. Su Fanghe and Fu Chaobiao, “Miaoli xianzhang Liu Zhenghong chi Taiwan keja yao gai Zhongguo tulou (Miaoli District Chief Cheng-hung is destroying Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese tulou), *op. cit.*”
41. Huang Yangming and Yang Yongsheng, “Miaoli xian gai shanzhai ‘Fujian tulou’” (Miaoli District is building a mountain fortress “a Fujian tulou”), *op. cit.*
42. *Ibid.*



Figure 4 – Mock demolition of Liu Cheng-hung’s home by internet user Kuso. Source: Lin Xihan and Fu Chaobiao, “Wangyou Kuso jiewei chichu Liu Zhenghong laojia (Internet user Kuso creates a *trompe l’œil* and demolishes Cheng-hung’s home)”, *Liberty Times*, 22 July 2013, <http://news.ltn.com.tw/news/focus/paper/698668> (accessed on 10 January 2017).

regulate itself. Therefore, for internet user Chen Hongmou 陳弘謀, if the government is not competent in the exercise of the power bestowed on it, it is up to the sovereign people to make themselves known and defend their rights.⁽⁴³⁾

The role of the internet user-censors was to reveal abuses in the system. They associated the demolition of the Hakka kilns in Miaoli in 2013 and the mobilisation solicited by the forced buying by the state of land belonging to the peasant farmers of Zhudong in 2015 for the construction of a *tulou*, with the destruction set in motion by Liu Cheng-hung. Many internet users reminded their readers that since 2010, Liu had been behind a wave of expulsions and the demolition of homes that had led to several suicides in the village of Dabu 大埔, in the district of Miaoli. Subsequently, the population of the district organised several demonstrations in order to denounce the expropriation of land by the local government. For example, the demands of the big protest movement of 18 August 2013, whose slogan was “Today Dabu has been demolished, tomorrow the government will be destroyed” (*Jintian chai Dabu, mingtian chai zhengfu* 今天拆大埔, 明天拆政府), included the revision of the Law on the Expropriation of Land (*Tudi zhi shou tiaoli* 土地徵收條例). In response to these injustices, several internet users took part in a virtual collective movement that transmitted a form of vengeance that expressed itself in the – virtual – destruction of Liu Cheng-hung’s house. In reaction of the demolition of four homes in Dabu in 2013, internet user Kuso posted on Facebook a photograph in which he staged the destruction of Liu Cheng-hung’s house with the help of an animated miniature mechanical digger (see figure 4).⁽⁴⁴⁾ At the same time, several internet users suggested destroying Liu Cheng-hung’s home and replacing it with a famous monument. In a comment dated 22 July 2013, internet user Lin Damao 林大毛 suggested:

[...] Why not simply destroy the Chief of Miaoli’s house and build a Statue of Liberty? I think that’s not a bad idea.⁽⁴⁵⁾

A majority of internet users would have liked to see Liu Cheng-hung resign, citing the lack of possible remedies in the face of his prevarications. On the one hand, some accused Liu Cheng-hung of being protected by the govern-

ment of Ma Ying-jeou⁽⁴⁶⁾ and in particular by the Legislative Yuan.⁽⁴⁷⁾ On the other hand, the comments remind us that this corrupt politician was elected by the ballot box. As a result, Taiwanese internet users who are not from Miaoli District incriminated the local inhabitants who gave him procedural legitimacy through the local elections just as much as they blamed Liu Cheng-hung himself.

From local elections to the democracy of authorisation

The internet users displayed real disenchantment with an electoral system that no longer legitimises elected officials. Although the election attributes a function to an individual, the authority this confers is only partial in that the governees test the officials during the exercise of their mandate. Although local officials such as Liu Cheng-hung in Miaoli and Chiu Ching-chun in Hsinchu obtained procedural legitimacy through the elections (also called “legitimacy of establishment”),⁽⁴⁸⁾ they did not acquire the social legitimacy granted by those they governed. Indeed, the relationship of trust between the governing and the governed is established in the course of the mandate and not through the electoral procedure:

How dare you! The Hakkas of Taiwan have never lived in a *tulou*... [...] Can someone tell me where the value and meaning of all that is?? If that isn’t liquidating the budget, what is? Don’t lie to me, there are no talented men [*rencai* 人才] in Hsinchu. Just how competent [*gaodu* 高度] are our leaders? In which direction is the region developing? I implore these incompetent leaders [*mei gaodu de ren* 沒高度的人] not to stand for election again [...].⁽⁴⁹⁾

In this comment, Alan Hsieh underlines the lack of perspective in the budgetary policies applied in Hsinchu, which he associates with the incompetence of the local officials in administrative matters. As a result, the electoral procedure does not allow “men of talent” and experts to be chosen. Concern over the management of expenses by the local executive branch is frequent in the comments of internet users. The deficit in Miaoli District, an example not to be repeated, is used as an authoritative argument by internet users to rationalise their corresponding rejection of the Hsinchu and Taichung projects.

The internet users expressed their anxiety over the local general elections in November 2014; some of them evoked the possibility of a KMT victory in their locality and thought that the *tulou* construction projects in Hsinchu

43. Huang Yixin, “Zhudong ni jian keja tulou: minzhong kangyi bai chongtu” (Zhudong plans the construction of a Hakka *tulou*: Conflicts are emerging following popular protests), *op. cit.*
44. Lin Xihan and Fu Chaobiao, “Wangyou Kuso jiewei chichu Liu Zhenghong laojia” (Internet user Kuso creates a *trompe l’œil* and demolishes Liu Cheng-hung’s home), *Liberty Times*, 22 July 2013, <http://news.ltn.com.tw/news/focus/paper/698668> (consulted on 10 March 2016).
45. Huang Yangming and Yang Yongsheng, “Miaoli xian gai shanzhai ‘Fujian tulou’” (The district of Miaoli is building a mountain fortress ‘a Fujian *tulou*’), *op. cit.*
46. In a comment dated 30 October 2014, Wang Liren called Liu Cheng-hung “one of Ma’s [Ying-jeou] dogs” (*Ma gou*). Cf. Su Fanghe and Fu Chaobiao, “Miaoli xianzhang Liu Zhenghong chi Taiwan keja yao gai zhongguo tulou” (Miaoli District Chief Cheng-hung is destroying Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese *tulou*), *op. cit.*
47. Comment by Heng Aitai, *Taiwan xiaozhan*, 22 July 2013, <http://www.mesotw.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=31916> (consulted on 10 March 2016).
48. Pierre Rosanvallon, *La légitimité démocratique. Impartialité, réflexivité, proximité* (Democratic Legitimacy. Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity), Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2008.
49. Comment by Alan Hsieh, published on 3 May 2015. Cf. Huang Yixin, “Zhudong ni jian keja tulou: minzhong kangyi bai chongtu” (Zhudong is planning the construction of a Hakka *tulou*: conflicts are emerging following popular protests), *op. cit.*

and Taichung were a means for the KMT candidates already in office to rally the Hakka electorate, which is well represented in these regions.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Moreover, many internet users questioned the reasons that incited the inhabitants of Miaoli to give free rein to Liu Cheng-hung, this "local tyrant" (*tuhao* 土豪),⁽⁵¹⁾ this thug (*liumang* 流氓)⁽⁵²⁾ who "tramples on the people."⁽⁵³⁾ Indeed, although the civil servant Liu has a supporting social role, the choice of a representative is the responsibility of the citizens of Miaoli. Huang Zhengyu 黃正羽 expressed the shame Liu Cheng-hung caused him and other inhabitants of Miaoli:

When I see the King of Miaoli [Liu Cheng-hung], I don't dare say that's where I come from. As they say, it's the choice of the Miaoli electorate. We have to accept all their choices. In any case, on the day of the elections, everyone will swallow their tears and vote for the shadow state party [KMT]. This is Taiwan EJ4.⁽⁵⁴⁾

What does this prophetic fatalism mean, and on what implicit argument is it based? Does it amount to recognition of the importance of the role of the local factions in Miaoli, the majority of whose electoral candidates are affiliated with the KMT?⁽⁵⁵⁾

The construction of a horizon of expectation at the heart of a crisis of representative democracy

In this context, qualified by Frank Muyard as "political autism,"⁽⁵⁶⁾ internet users, who are not simply critical spectators of a negative policy, are participating in a reflexive dynamic of wrongs that they heap upon the local leaders. The comments open up a horizon of expectation resulting in a process, initiated by internet users, of giving meaning to the polemical events linked to three *tulou* construction projects. To create this prospective horizon, the internet users offer alternative solutions to the bad management of budgetary expenditure. For internet user Jeffrey Bai, the sum invested in the building of the Hsinchu *tulou* could have been used to finance the army for several years.⁽⁵⁷⁾ In another commentary dated 17 July 2015, Frank Tien exclaims:

It's not enough that the neighbouring district already has one great "earthen" white elephant, but they have to go and build another "earth" building! Is it part of Zhudong's history? If there really is land available for building and a budget, why not build some social facilities for the people of the district?⁽⁵⁸⁾

Many internet users were demanding more effective management of local expenditure. Moreover, they sought the application of fairer policies founded on a consensus between elected officials and the populace that contributed to the common good. Internet user Lai Mengling 賴孟玲, young and with a higher education diploma, advised the government to "give the inhabitants of Taichung the future they deserve and to which they aspire" and suggested reinforcing Taiwanese soft power.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Internet user Gi Chang suggested using the money allotted to the Miaoli project for the protection of the historic and cultural Hakka heritage already present in Taiwan.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Conclusion

Over and above the particular nature of the events analysed, the comments seem firstly to shed light on the uncertainties inherent in representa-

tive democracy both from the point of view of identity (conflicts in the collective memory and recognition of pluralism in the formation of a national identity) and in its procedural mechanisms (representativeness of the policies and whether the elected officials are competent to govern). Most of the comments question the quality of this representativeness and at the same time, its legitimacy. These fundamental problems are discussed through a certain number of issues such as the dual identity of the Hakkas of China and the Hakkas of Taiwan, the right to self-determination of national identity, the corruption of local elected officials, and the disfunctions of the electoral system at local level. Against this background of democratic uncertainty, the virtual sphere, a public arena where individual opinions are debated and where "social worlds"⁽⁶¹⁾ confront each other, affords communities the opportunity to participate in the formation and strengthening of a common framework through which to understand the event under scrutiny.

Through this reflexive, collective undertaking, the event is not only seen as a unique occurrence or as the epiphanic symptom of the social machine; the controversies brought to life by the comments of internet users also reveal the existence of value conflicts between several players attempting to influence the direction of the current process of reform.

■ Translated by Elizabeth Guill.

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50. Several internet users affirm that the Taiwanese Hakkas "traditionally" vote in favour of the KMT. To combat this widespread idea that emphasises the Chinese identity of the Taiwanese Hakkas, representatives of Hakka organisations and associations issued a press release several months before the 2008 presidential elections to "clarify the position of the Hakkas of Taiwan." Cf. Peng Xi-anjun, "Taiwan Kejia ren shengming: women bu shi Zhongguo ren" (Declaration by the Hakkas of Taiwan: We are not Chinese), *Liberty Times*, 11 October 2007, <http://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/paper/160147> (consulted on 19 December 2016).
51. Comment by Adan Hsu, published on 30 October 2014. Cf. Su Fanghe and Fu Chaobiao, "Miaoli xianzhang Liu Zhenghong chi Taiwan kejia yao gai zhongguo tulou" (Miaoli District Chief Cheng-hung is destroying Taiwanese Hakka kilns to build a Chinese *tulou*), *op. cit.*
52. Comment by James Wu, published on 27 October 2014. Cf. *Ibid.*
53. Comment by Huang Huishun, published on 30 October 2014. Cf. *Ibid.*
54. Comment by Huang Zhengyu, published on 30 October 2014. Cf. *Ibid.*
55. Kao Yuang-kuang, "Ershiyi shiji Taiwan difang paixi de fazhan" (The development of local factions in Taiwan in the twenty first century), *Zhongguo difang zizhi* (Local autonomy in China), vol. 55, No. 6, 2002, pp. 4-17.
56. Frank Muyard, "Voting Shift in the November 2014 Local Elections in Taiwan: Strong rebuke to Ma Ying-jeou's government and policies and landslide victory for the DPP," *China Perspectives*, 2015/1, p. 61.
57. Huang Yixin, "Zhudong ni jian kejia tulou: minzhong kangyi bai chongtu" (Zhudong plans to build a Hakka *tulou*: Conflicts emerge following popular protests), *op. cit.*
58. *Ibid.*
59. Luo Wen-jia, "Luo Wenjia: Hu Zhiqiang de tuyuanlou meng" (Luo Wen-jia: Hu Chih-chiang's dream of a round earthen *tulou*), *Apple Daily*, 7 June 2014. <http://www.appledaily.com.tw/realtimenews/article/new/20140607/411887/> (accessed on 20 January 2016).
60. *Ibid.*
61. "Public discourse creates [...] social worlds. It does this because the concepts used are not purely cognitive and descriptive but also carry a moral and evaluative weight that affects those to whom they are applied and leads to people seeing themselves and behaving differently [...]." Cf. Louis Quéré, "Construction of Public Problems and Collective Action," *Colóquios. Uma tensao entre o global e o local*, 2001, p. 112.