

## **“Objects, memory and cultural identity in (re)construction”**

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### **Identity and collectors of antiques in Taiwan**

Serge Dreyer

Associate Professor, Dpt of Foreign Language and Literature, Tunghai University

#### **Abstract**

In Taiwan, collecting objects tends to follow various lines of differentiation. First, as a nearly universal category, we find the nature of the objects collected (toys, ceramic, woodblock prints). Personal trajectories based upon an affective link between the collector and his objects emerge most of the time from this category. Sometimes, economic concern can be found in the attitude of this type of collectors (short-term speculation, long-term investment, search for ostentatious value). Another type of collection is defined by chronological criteria: one collects exclusively objects from a specific period (the imperial times, Japanese occupation, Taiwan after 1945). Motives for this kind of collection are numerous: genuine interest for the history of that period, specificity and rarity of these objects, connection with the life of the collector, valorization of a way of life. Another possible attitude seems to focus about a process of identification, either of an individual type or a group-oriented one: one collects only “Taiwanese,” Austronesian, Hakka, Japanese or Chinese objects. These “territories” are not always totally impervious to each other; some collectors enjoy collecting objects belonging to these various categories.

Through interviews with collectors from Taiwan, mostly but not exclusively focusing on Taiwanese objects, I will try first to understand their approach of collecting, which is not necessarily perceived by them as a process of identification. In a second phase, I will analyze how they relate to their collection. Is it a passive attitude that is trying to refer to a stable and permanent past from which they would clearly define a Taiwanese culture? Or is it an ideological attempt to elaborate a new Taiwanese identity?

In addition I will endeavor to bring to light how these collectors rate themselves with curators and field experts who are competing to be the guarantor of knowledge about Taiwanese culture. This research will leave room for discourse in a spirit of exchange between the collectors and the academics.