

**Paoi Hwang, ed. *Global Encounters: Cross-Cultural Representations of Taiwan*. Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2012. 234 pp. ISBN 9789860354133.**

One of the shibboleths of Postcolonial Studies is its insistence on the ethico-political inefficacy of the nation-state. Tagged as a “western” invention in some sections of the field (and therefore held to be tainted at source), the category is thought to inculcate a necessary homology between race, nation and culture, and thus implicated in the stigmatisation of minorities in advanced and developing formations, responsible for the misrecognition that sustains and reproduces a range of social harms and injustices.

The case of Taiwan however gives pause to such assumptions and is worth consideration. Almost by definition, Taiwan’s quest for international recognition entails movement beyond Sinocentrism. It needs to project local cultural articulations separate from China’s continental “Han” ethnicity and Mandarin-derived linguistic commonality. Although a relatively small part of the population, Taiwan’s aboriginal peoples and their heritage gain great significance in such a configuration. And as demonstrated by several essays in this collection, this then opens a space for the provocative explorations of and affiliation with other “First Nation” or autochthonous situations in the circum-Pacific, Austronesian arena, meaning that the national longing for form in Taiwan comes with a ready-made cosmopolitan and even subaltern supplement. According to the “official” script on “nationalism,” obviously, this isn’t supposed to happen.

It is in this light that we can appreciate several of the essays in this collection edited by Paoi Hwang, which was published by the National Taiwan University Press in 2012. In the first essay by Terence Russell, the multiple meanings trailed by the 2005 round Asia trip of the outrigger canoe *Sandeq Explorer* are examined. Backed by a Taiwan-based NGO and other interests, the trip sought to publicise several concerns including the need to “Save the Pacific.” As Russell explains it, its Taiwanese backers wanted to highlight “the place of Taiwan in the Austronesian legacy” (21). However, the multiple claimants to the vessel’s meaning and symbolism also suspended that aim between contending temporalities, localisms and regionalisms.

The second contribution by Timothy Fox compares several fictional texts by Taiwan aboriginal writers Yubas Naogih, Husluma Vava and Lekal, and Maori authors Bruce Stewart, Patricia Grace and Keri Hulme. Fox argues convincingly that, for these writers, contact with the preternatural evokes not fear but an alternative cosmology with ecological and communal inflections. Unlike our conventional understanding of how the gothic operates, such “tribal gothic” acts as “a source of cultural healing and even resistance to hegemonic

monoculturalism.” On his part, Bennett Fu examines in his essay the links between the work of Taiwan aboriginal writer Liglav A-Wu, and Canadian aboriginal author Lee Maracle. Adapting a French word “*métis*” (meaning half-breed), Fu highlights their use of “*métissage*,” a textual strategy that supports syncretic procedures and questions dogmatic formulations of culture. Like the previous two contributors, Fu articulates through salutary transnational and translingual comparison the tribal, non-Sinitic features of Taiwanese culture.

To the extent that a Taiwan “nativist” agenda acquires effectivity through such subaltern affinities, one has to ask whether the rejection tout court of any appeal to nationalitarian formulas in Postcolonial Studies potentially returns through the back-door the Eurocentrism that it disavows. The point is that the trenchant claims of “Fourth World” and First Nation formations are summarily dismissed in such an adamantine construal of the issue. Furthermore, as should be patently clear, large-state particularism is *itself* held at bay by the small-state particularism examined in these essays; the two are different things. This consideration is amply demonstrated by Chih-ming Wang’s contribution, which analyses a 1965 novel written by an US state department official and published under the pseudonym D.J. Spenser. Titled *The Jing Affair*, the novel stages geopolitical scenarios tied to the question of Taiwanese autonomy, showing its entanglement in a number of imperial projects. Leaning on the work of the distinguished area studies scholar Pheng Cheah, Wang attends to the “mutual haunting or constitutive interpenetration of nation and state” (107), illuminating in the process the operations of “Cold War paranoia” and epistemology. In its totalising, rather abstract negation of the “nation-state” category, Postcolonial Studies has little capacity for such fine-brush investigations. Yet as Hwang shows in her own contribution, the field would probably benefit from a closer engagement with Taiwanese and/or East Asian cultural production. Hwang compares Wu Zhuoliu’s *Orphan of Asia* (1946) and Achebe’s *Arrow of God* (1964), showing striking parallels between Wu’s experience with Japanese imperialism and Achebe’s encounter with the British imperium. In effect, her essay returns us to the achievements of decolonisation, suggesting that the proto-radical, border-crossing sensibilities we associate with diasporic and minoritarian populations nowadays was also the provenance of the native intellectual engaged in intimate struggle with hegemony and aggrandisement.

Apart from the above, the collection also contains provocative discussions of the following cross-cutting issues and concerns: the parallels between Taiwan and Hong Kong staged through the works of Shi Shuqing (Isaac Yue); the translocal reach and significance of Taiwanese popular culture (Lim Lee Ching); existentialist and philosophical matters raised by late-capitalist consumerist culture (John Wu, Jr.), and the implications of the speech act that frames and summons “Taiwan” or “Formosa” (Jeremy Fernando). It marks a welcome foray into English-language publication by the National Taiwan

University Press and is warmly recommended to Asianists as well as literary and cultural studies scholars.

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