

Memories of the Future

Review >
East Asia

Corcuff's *Memories of the Future* links a variety of perspectives characteristic of the new direction Taiwan Studies has taken in recent years. Based on papers presented in the mid-1990s annual conferences organized under the auspices of the North American Taiwan Studies Association (NATSA), this collection of essays is aimed at Taiwan researchers in particular, and scholars working on East Asia interested in the complexity of nationalism, identity, and ethnicity in general.

By Ann Heylen

Inspired by theories of collective and national identity, the editor and contributors demonstrate the pluralistic nature of identities in Taiwan. The work is divided in three parts: 'Historical Roots', 'The Transition of National Identity', and 'Perspectives on Ethnicity and Taiwanese Nationalism'. Particularly innovative is the manner in which the linear unfolding of the book allows the reader to discern various aspects of state-society relations in Taiwanese identity politics hitherto neglected or obscured.

Andrew Morris portrays the formation of the 1895 Taiwan Republic against the background of Western presence and economic role in northern Taiwan. Morris shows that late nineteenth-century Taiwanese gentry were predisposed to Western assistance, and draws attention to the complexity of anti-imperialist policies of the Qing dynasty in the international political arena. Robert Edmondson does not give us a new narrative of the 2.28 Incident, but concentrates on the politically charged process of its historical interpretation in the post-Japanese colonial socio-historical context.¹ Stéphane Corcuff further underscores the fact that identity is not static but a dynamic process that remains highly volatile in the never-ending process of nation building. In analyzing changes in four national-identity-related symbols under former president Lee Teng-hui, i.e. state doctrine, official commemorations, textbooks, and banknotes, Corcuff convincingly demonstrates that these were not the result of radical reform, but illustrate a negotiated process between the defunct state-party state ensemble and social movements, opposition politicians, the press, and scholars (p. 97).

Shu Wei-der, Lin Tsong-jiyi, and Robert Marsh deal with the identity issue seen from the perspective of social movements. Shu investigates the membership and activities of the clandestine political overseas Taiwan Independence Movement (TIM).² In his data analysis of 14 North American-based TIM members, Shu takes issue with two competing sociological theses

on political activism; the marginality and privilege theses (p. 50). Lin and Marsh complement our understanding on the interaction between elite manipulations and mass opinions in the 1990s. Whereas Lin concentrates on political party identification (Kuo Min-Tang (KMT), Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), New Party (NP), and non-partisan), Marsh's survey research focuses on ethnic self-identification, using the *bensheng* and *waisheng* jargon.³ Both articles reach the same conclusion, that is, that there is an increasing sense of Taiwanese identity and a decreasing Chinese identity. In so concluding, Marsh also confirms Lin's thesis that the mass-elite interaction was a reciprocal one, whereby the changing stances of political parties were mainly influenced by public opinion, which had responded to shifting environments (p.134). This latter issue is quite well explained in Marsh's section on the geopolitical constraints on Taiwan's independence (pp. 154-158).

It is clear that the major strength of this book is its attention to the Mainlanders, a rather ignored research topic in Taiwan Studies. Both Li Kuang-chün and Stéphane Corcuff find this social group an important player in the discourse on identity and politics. Corcuff does a fine job in explaining what Mainlanders (*waishengren*) are about and conceptualizes them as a new ethnic category (pp. 164-171). His contribution is definitely worth reading and solidifies Li's conclusion that the political and cultural ascendancy of the Taiwanese (*benshengren*) has not only perplexed the first generation Mainlanders' collective memory, but has also brought second-generation Mainlanders an identity dilemma which carries profound socio-economic consequences (p. 121).

In the closing chapters, two progressive Taiwanese intellectuals, Wu Rwei-Ren and Lin Chia-lung, defend a new perception of nationalism following Taiwan's political democratization (1988-2000). Wu's leading argument coalesces around the concept of a pragmatic nationalism. Inspired by Gramsci, Wu develops the thesis of a passive revolution and argues that the struggle for democracy in Taiwan took the stance of an anti-colonial national

movement (p. 200). Lin's pointed analysis of the term 'Taiwanese' draws our attention to the distinction between ethnic and national identity. He convincingly shows that identity politics in the last decade of political transition indicate a shift away from an ethnic term for 'native Taiwanese' to a civic term for 'citizens of Taiwan' (pp. 224-227). His thesis supports a sudden growth of civic national identity that

does not necessarily negate or object to its Chinese roots.

The relevance of this book is that it reflects anew on Lee Teng-hui's 1994 expression 'the misery of being a Taiwanese' (p. 233). By acknowledging Taiwan's sense of national belonging to combine a Taiwanese political identity with a Chinese cultural identity it perpetuates the challenge to China's irredentist stance on nationalism and highlights the thorny issues of nationhood and a dated belief in nationalism demanding one nation, one state. Perhaps a suitable follow-up would be a study that focuses on the perspective of the aboriginals and the several Taiwan diaspora communities worldwide. A small draw-

back may lie in the fact that many references in the texts are not included in the bibliography, yet this book is definitely a worthwhile purchase. <

- Corcuff, Stéphane (ed.), *Memories of the Future*, New York: M.E. Sharpe (2002), pp. ix + 285, ISBN 0-7656-0791-3

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- 1 On the evening of 27 February 1947, six agents of the Taiwan Tobacco and Wine Monopoly Bureau assaulted a female street peddler selling contraband cigarettes and killed a man running out of his house to flee the scene. The incident led to weeks of violence throughout the island and implacable repression by the KMT nationalist forces. In the decades to come, public discussion of the incident was outlawed and became an ethnically divisive memory on the part of the Han-Taiwanese islanders.
- 2 TIM includes several pro-independence organizations active in North America, Canada, Europe, and Japan. Its membership comprises of Han-Taiwanese islanders who have been blacklisted or exiled by KMT policies from the late 1940s onwards.
- 3 *Bensheng* refers to the Han-Taiwanese islanders while *waisheng* refers to the Mainlander population that came to Taiwan following the retrocession (between 1945 and 1949). The usage of the two terms shows the distinction between those born in Taiwan province (*bensheng*, lit. this province) and those born in other Chinese provinces (*waisheng*, lit. outer province) and is politically loaded.