

advocated by Derrida and adopted by Harrison provide the tools with which to specify (and change?) the 'global geopolitics' (205) in which Taiwan and the study of Taiwan are embedded?

Let me now turn to the potential for this kind of theory to be applied beyond Taiwan. Harrison has argued, if I have understood him correctly, that scholars of Taiwan have tended to view their own knowledge practices as occupying a space outside politics and history. His critique of positivism pivots on this point: there is no neutral realm from which to observe, and facts are not given to observation but are actually constituted by the act of observation itself which is not pre-theoretical but rather theory-laden. This is surely an important point to be taken seriously by all of us who work in the human sciences. But, I wonder if a textual approach is really up to the task. It may indeed be the case that we apprehend the world through language and that, therefore, words in the final analysis point to other words and not to things. But, even if that is the case, institutions develop authorising practices to limit the meaning of words and it is surely to such authorising practices that we must attend. Only then can we develop an understanding of what 'home' means in a globalising and fragmented world.

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Response to Tremlett's Review of *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity*

The task of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences is rather more improvised and contingent than scholars sometimes like to admit. The principles of objectivity, or at least of disinterest, and a commitment to the boundedness of linguistic terms of analysis can encourage us to operate on the assumption that clear scholarly boundaries exist, and within those that knowledge is securely produced through certain styles, set routines and 'ways of doing'. Such a commitment, and its expression, is part of the establishment and maintenance of scholarly authority and legitimacy. Indeed, scholarly work can be devoted as much to defining its own boundaries as to producing new knowledge, to the elaborate process of including and excluding certain categories to demarcate one discipline from another, and rehearsing those 'ways of doing' which themselves produce the coherence of a discipline.

In this way, scholarship generally does not acknowledge its own improvisations and contingency. The generation of scholarly authority is very often produced by the active masking of its mechanisms, as an art that conceals its art, for to expose them is to potentially undermine the basis of its epistemological legitimacy. And yet, some of the most productive and innovative scholarship is created by applying the approach of one discipline to another, by introducing new categories into a field so as to reveal hitherto unread aspects of a subject or problematic. In the shadow of the necessarily authoritative scholarly voice is both a profound uncertainty about the limits and possibilities of the knowledge it expresses and also, in the very instability of its boundaries, the possibility for creative scholarly innovation.

In *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity*, a term I use to take in some of these issues is 'the theatre of scholarship' and the performance of scholarly authority in the book is something of a *commedia dell'arte*. It improvises a methodology based on a range of scholarly techniques to produce legitimised knowledge. Drawing on cultural studies, it is suspended from some very serious post-structuralist and post-colonial theory, delivering a special density of writing as it tries to apprehend the elusive and dialectical ways in which identity is addressed. Operating within an area studies, it also rests on thorough archival research drawing out new empirical knowledge from primary sources in sections such as those on naming, the notion of the East Asian Little Dragons, and on the history of the Diaoyutai Islands protest movement in the early 1970s. My solution to reconciling these approaches and to accommodating the instability I found around the categories of the study of Taiwan was to move self-consciously and self-reflexively between the methodologies, making explicit reference right through the text to the nature and mechanisms of scholarly enquiry, to the 'arch style of postcolonial theorizing' (163) as well as to academic 'labor in libraries and archives' (163).

Tremlett says that *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity* is not really about Taiwan, but rather about the study of identity itself. The deliberate revealing of the mechanisms of scholarly writing in the book indeed can lead to the question of how knowledge about identity is produced, as much as to any specific knowledge about Taiwanese identity. A reader as astute as Tremlett immediately then identifies the conceit of the book, which is its presumption to speak from position of a higher or greater truth. If scholarship itself becomes part of the research then I am presuming to write above scholarship. It is a risky and perhaps exhausting technique, with an appeal to a scholarly truth above scholarship which is potentially endlessly recursive. Even here, in this response to a review, is the risk of being drawn into an academic hall of mirrors as I speak from a position above even my own work. It is part of the reason why the book returns throughout to the ground of 'labor in libraries and archives', and as an author I note the pleasure and respite that such expository sections offered.

Tremlett is right about the book's conceit when the scholarship in question is something called 'Taiwan Studies'. *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity* describes throughout the instability of the boundaries of Taiwan Studies and the role of scholarship, self-reflexively including the book itself, in stabilising them. However, above its authorial subject position is still 'theory' – Derrida, Bourdieu, Bhabha, Chow, Said, and implicitly, Foucault. The authority of theory is why Tremlett wonders if the book is really about just identity, but at the same time it is this multilevel scholarly subject position which leads Tremlett to question the way the text appears to face off some of the heaviest contemporary theorists against the existing literature on Taiwanese identity. As Tremlett suggests, opposing Derrida or Bourdieu could be the rigorous defense of empiricism of Popper or Austin, rather than the wholly untheorised assumptions of an empirical basis for Taiwanese identity found in Wachman or Corcuff.

In the first instance, one could insist that the current inchoate nature of Taiwan Studies, described in chapter one, permits or even demands the introduction of solid theorising of its problematics and foundations. However possible it might be to deploy Popper or Austin to defend the empiricist basis of the existing literature

on Taiwanese identity, the fact is that its authors do not do that themselves. Therefore, at this level, the book's exposure of its own methodologies expresses the unevenness and quality of the literature. The study of Taiwan is full of gaps and elisions, and part of Tremlett's reservations result from my attempt to frame a text within the incomplete architecture of a field of unstable area studies. As the book elaborates, identity is a key problematic in Taiwan Studies and most of the existing literature is hopelessly undertheorised, so the book is, I believe, right to take it down.

Yet at the same time, the fight is so oddly unequal that Tremlett's unease must be taken seriously. The apparent contradictions make me wonder then if the specific nature of the topic is rather more central than Tremlett allows, both for my book and for all work on Taiwan.

*Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity* argues in a number of ways that the nature of studying Taiwan is an expression of the nature of Taiwan itself. That is, far from being a scholarly field which can maintain principles of objectivity, or at least of disinterest, Taiwan Studies (and any area studies) cannot be disentangled from the discursive production of the boundaries of the area itself. The scholarly elaboration of Taiwanese identity as a research problematic is itself a part of Taiwan's own ideology of its identification, even as scholarship so often claims to speak from a distanced authorial position. In the book this argument is made by theorising identity as a form of knowing, and a key part of knowledge, especially of a nation, is found in scholarship. Scholarly writing on identity addresses it as an object at the same time as it functions to legitimise a subjectivity.

The book concludes on this basis with the point that scholars of 'Taiwan Studies' are completely implicated in Taiwan's legitimacy as a polity. The inverse of this is that it is the nascent, inchoate and contested nature of Taiwan's identity formations in terms of its politics and culture, and also Taiwan's real geo-political marginality in the international community with the ever-present threat (and attraction) of mainland China, that make a coherent and received Taiwan Studies so difficult. If an area studies elaborates and legitimises the coherence of an area, then it struggles to generate its own coherence when faced with an area which can be named but still suffers from a geo-political indeterminacy. As a result, the book struggles, I believe inevitably but ultimately fruitfully, with the entanglements of its own arguments. Even as it argues that it itself is producing Taiwan's identity, it must, to still be legitimate as scholarship, repeatedly try to extract itself from its implication in a nationalist ideology. This is where the improvised and self-reflexive methodology comes from, as well as the reaching up to hang off the authority of theory to avoid such epistemological quicksand.

What Tremlett does not acknowledge then is that *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity* is, at its heart a radical critique of area studies. It breaks down the pretense of area studies to be an objective approach to a geo-political region and says that area studies is, in fact, part of the legitimisation and elaboration of a geo-polity's ideological, as well as geographical, boundaries. In particular, the book is a critique of the way the congruence of area studies with certain national boundaries implicates it nationalist ideologies all too easily. This is especially so in Chinese Studies.

This presents the Taiwan Studies scholar with an unusual choice in his or her approach to Taiwan, one which the contestations of *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity* identified by Tremlett play out. Pursuing a 'critical' form of scholarly writing to the conclusion that I did represents a particular response to the epistemological problems of area studies. It is indeed an attempt at a 'greater truth' because however inevitably entangled it is with ideology and geo-political boundaries at least the book knows that it is. Uniquely it says openly and honestly.

Such a claim, including its presumption, leads Tremlett to wonder if it also expresses a profound resignation and impotence before Taiwan's uncertain political and cultural future. He asks: is it enough to merely note that Taiwan's future is in our own scholarship? As academics we can recognise our implication in that future but we can do nothing but write books and present conference papers. Against one thousand Chinese missiles or \$107 billion of cross-straits trade, an academic's words are just that.

In response and conclusion, I wonder again if the choice is rather more stark and perhaps then meaningful than Tremlett allows. *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity* faces off post-structuralism against positivist political science, and it looks like a one-sided contest. However, implicit in the book's conclusion that scholarship on Taiwan is part of Taiwan's legitimacy is that it is so regardless of the approach one adopts. As such the book faces off two profoundly different responses to Taiwan's future.

Academically, the political science on Taiwanese identity fails abjectly. Shelley Rigger's lament that 'operationalizing this concept [Taiwanese identity] as a measurable variable has proven difficult' (Rigger 1999) is simply an absurd statement. Nevertheless, understood in terms of its implication in Taiwan's future, it neatly expresses the objectification of the Taiwanese, explicitly excluding the political and moral dimensions of its own scholarship, which *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity* then highlights. From this move academically it is a short step to being part of the discourse which really does objectify Taiwan, that of international policy-making and economic, governmental, and military planning in China, the US, and Europe, and sometimes in Taiwan itself. On a geopolitical faultline, Taiwan is a concentration of the power of politics, government, military and global capital, and the academic approach to its study is a part of a choice as to how an individual might navigate that power. Deploying Derrida or Bourdieu might effortlessly obliterate the existing scholarship, but right behind it the target is bigger than Tremlett concedes.

Do we choose to become participants in the empirical geo-political equation of Taiwan's future between China, the US, Japan, and Europe, pronouncing as academics on the values of 'variables' for those with their hands on the levers of the machinery of geo-politics, or do we stand within academic knowledge and offer via our own self-reflexive approach to our own work, a critique of the politics in which it operates? Against the real machinery of geo-politics, the strategy of deploying difficult post-structuralist theory looks far more feeble than Tremlett might think. The decision of how we stand before power is necessarily personal and delimited, even hopeless, but my book, despite its flaws and limitations, shows ultimately the choice I made.

### **Bibliography**

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