

building, visions of empire, and representations of colonised 'others' have histories that pre-date the impact of Western colonialism. As Peter Perdue argues in *China Marches West* (2005, published by Harvard), Chinese imperial expansion during the Qing, far from being simply a recapitulation of ancient dynastic state-building practices, was in both its scale and degree of penetration of indigenous societies of Central Eurasia something entirely new. For Perdue, Qing imperialism needs to be seen within the wider context of early modern empire- and state-building throughout Eurasia, and he demonstrates the striking similarities between the discourses of imperial expansion developed by the Qing intelligentsia and the champions of Russian expansion in Central Asia, and of British rule in India. The concept of the 'civilising mission' was as central to imperialism with Chinese characteristics in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as it was to later Western and Japanese imperialisms. Moreover, as Emma Jinhua Teng demonstrates in *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895* (2004, published by Harvard), images of the savagery and barbarism of Taiwan played as significant a role in justifying Qing imperial rule as they were later to play in legitimising Japanese colonialism. The writings and pictures that Teng discusses were circulated both privately and commercially (in print form), titillating readers with images of the exotic (such as details of the sexual habits of aboriginal women), while also serving to familiarise Chinese intellectuals with the notion that Taiwan (like other new Qing possessions in the north-west) were parts of China's 'sovereign territory'. Thus while modern exhibitions, museums, department stores, and organised tourism constituted new strategies for the promotion and legitimation of imperial rule in the Taiwan of the Japanese colonial era, the content of these exhibitions, and the ways in which they sought to justify imperial rule, often had clear precedents in Qing imperial discourse.

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Mark Harrison (2006) *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity*. New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 254pp, ISBN: 1-4039-7587-6

I want to begin this review by saying that this is a very important and original book, and that it should become required reading for all those interested in the study of Taiwan because it seeks to engage critically with political science scholarship in the field of Taiwan studies via post-colonial and particularly post-structuralist theory. Indeed, Harrison's book offers significant intellectual nourishment for scholars interested in theory and method and in the study of Taiwan. However, the argument that structures this book is not really about Taiwan. Or, given that it is an epistemological argument about the status of facts – are there such things as given facts or, alternatively, are they produced discursively via theory building – it might perhaps be more accurate to say that the argument that structures this book is not so much about Taiwan as applied to Taiwan as a kind of case study or instance. The consequence of this fact is that it is an argument with comparative

potential – its application to Taiwan is not a necessary outcome of the argument: it could have been applied to any place. It is this comparative potential that I will focus on in the concluding section of this review essay. In what follows I am going to offer a critique that is intended to further the theoretical reflection that Harrison sets in motion: it is not motivated by any will to destruction but rather by the same desire to apply the insights of contemporary theory to the societies and cultures of East Asia.

The most frequently-referenced theoretical term in the book's index is 'positivism' which is used both descriptively to characterise the methods of political scientists in their analyses of Taiwan's history, political vicissitudes, and nationalisms and, disparagingly, because according to Harrison, positivists operate under the unhelpful illusion that facts exist outside or before scholarly discourse. As such, Harrison argues that Taiwanese-ness or Taiwanese identity has been construed as a fact or as an object that can be specified as the necessary outcome of a classically liberal *telos*: the journey from colonialism to authoritarianism and finally on to democracy or, more prosaically, a journey from violence to civilisation. Harrison's argument attempts to demonstrate that the narrative itself constructs the facts that are privileged for analysis, objectifies them, gives them their shape, their resonance and their meaning such that Taiwanese identity is a product of 'the global academic system' (70). For example, in chapter one, Harrison's exquisite analysis of the naming of what today is called Taiwan – Formosa, the Republic of China, Chinese Taipei, Taiwan – as grammars delineating the boundaries of knowledge of the territory(ies) in question – demonstrates how the allegedly neutral, value-free knowledge of a place is indeed constituted by prior assumptions and constellations of political and economic constraint that determine what can be said about such and such a state of affairs in the world (160).

Let me interject, at this juncture, with the caveat that I am in broad agreement with the point Harrison is articulating, namely that the so-called positivist effort to rigorously separate fact from value is extremely problematic and that the emphasis on observation as a pure realm outside or free from ideological constraint – or, for that matter, from unconscious, cognitive structuring – is illusory. As Nietzsche might have put it, dispassionate and objective modes of writing are actually special instances of polemic that consciously seek to mask their own partisan nature. But, arguments about method in the sciences are more complex than Harrison allows for: Harrison's primary use of the term 'positivism' is as a form of abuse and, as a result, we are left only with a caricature. For example, Karl Popper's 'hypothetico-deductive' model of science explicitly recognises the theory-laden-ness of observation and is precisely intended as a critique of inductivist arguments that characterise scientific activity as a movement that begins with the neutral observation of facts and ends in the construction of theories or hypotheses. For Popper, the objectivity of the sciences lies not only in observation but also in the falsifiability of hypotheses (meaning that truth is never attained) and in the (alleged) autonomy of the sciences from political manipulation.

If, by positivism, Harrison means inductivism, then there are no grounds for disagreement between us. However, Harrison does not mean inductivism, or at least not only inductivism, because he uses the term 'positivism' like a dragnet. Moreover, he is rather wedded to Foucauldian arguments about the role of

discourse (discourse being the second most referenced term in the index) in the constitution of the objects of scientific enquiry and the ethical problems this raises for scholarship. This has interesting consequences. It would be true to say that positivists in all their shades assume that statements can be verified in terms of their accord with actual states of affairs in the world, but this is, of course, a very narrow view of language, and is not accepted as a satisfactory account of meaning in any serious scholarship today. But, for the likes of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, words-as-signifiers have an unfortunate predilection for non-arrival: instead of sticking to a purely denotative function, signifiers slide endlessly into other signifiers leaving meaning-as-reference adrift on an unforgiving and tempestuous sea. But if words do not point to things, how can accounts of events such as the 2-28 Incident ever be verified or evaluated? In his rejection of positivism and embrace of post-structuralism, Harrison runs the risk of leaving his reader without any criteria for establishing the truth or absence thereof of any account of a putative place or event. I would suggest that Harrison presents his reader with a false choice between positivism and post-structuralism, when other, more interesting alternatives are available (163).

Let me turn to the text and to a passage in which the tensions Harrison is grappling with are nicely manifest:

One might ask, how would it be possible to avoid being complicit in the Taiwanese national idea. If [...] it is impossible to write about Taiwan without producing the discourse of Taiwanese nationhood, how can one remain objective in one's scholarship? The answer is that one cannot. The best that one can do, as is being attempted here, is to understand and make explicit one's complicity with imagined, albeit academically approved, narratives of nationhood, and through that understanding offer a greater depth and nuance in describing the processes, including one's own, through which the Taiwanese national idea has come into being (43).

Objectivity, then, is impossible because of the scholar's 'complicity' in the production of the very facts or phenomena he or she is seeking to describe and analyse. The only way out of this bind is to direct enquiry towards the historical formation of the categories and concepts used, in this instance, in the study of the territory that is today named Taiwan. Yet, despite this determination to situate scholarship and to attend to the role it plays in the production of facts, the word 'one' is used seven times in this short passage. From where does this 'one' write? Harrison performs a double-movement in which his own academic biography is woven into the production of Taiwanese identity but, at the same time, meta-theoretical reflection inscribes a distancing *vis-à-vis* theory whereupon it becomes impossible to specify, with any certainty, where Harrison is writing from. For example: Harrison cites Edward Said's notion of 'Orientalism' to argue that positivist scholarship on Taiwan has uncritically reproduced the global hegemony of the West because it cannot recognise or acknowledge its own complicity in that hegemony (202). For Harrison, this is due to the positivist tendency to assume that its methods are objective and insulated from political contamination. But Said's meta-theoretical reflection requires the adoption of the same distancing and objectifying gaze (directed at 'Orientalism' as a discrete discourse-object) that

Harrison critiques. So, in what sense does Said go beyond the positivism Harrison is writing against?

Harrison also suggests that 'the' positivist's tendency to objectify can lead to the scholar unwittingly reproducing 'the discourse on Taiwanese identity, with all its attendant ideology and politics' and, worse, 'becoming part of its reproduction rather than merely its analysis' (51). Harrison now appears to long for the proper separation of fact from value and for an astronomical distance by which to guarantee scholarship about Taiwan proper analytical rigour. In what sense is this an anti-positivist argument? I confess that I can't be sure. On the one hand, 'positivists' are rebuked for their inability to recognise that facts do not exist outside theory and that, therefore, their attempt to separate fact from value is deluded. Then, post-structuralist scholarship is introduced to give weight to the argument that the objects of scholarly discourse about Taiwan are indeed constituted by said discourse and do not exist independently of discourse. But, in a strange twist, the impossibility of objectivity then becomes the ground for the demand for an *über*-positivism or a super-objectivity in which analysis is properly scientific and, as such, free from entanglement and involvement in the processes it seeks to examine.

Harrison's use of the work of Pierre Bourdieu is, given the above, significant. Bourdieu performs a mediating role between Harrison's hostility for positivism and attraction to post-structuralism, particularly the work on language, class, and symbolic power. As such, Harrison states his task as one of attending to the processes through which acts of naming have been legitimated: 'political acts are not moments that express identity, but rather they are the moments that constitute identity formations' (71). I take this to mean that the search for a primordial Taiwanese-ness or a proto-Taiwanese nationalism in various opposition movements from the nineteenth century onwards is problematic because the liberal *telos* of nationalism that imagines distinct *a priori* ethno-linguistic groups becoming self-conscious through struggle for, and eventual participation in, a democratic nation-state apparatus, is a just-so story that fails to acknowledge that 'ethno-linguistic groups' are not natural entities but historical products of specific processes and identifications. According to Harrison, then, 'what Taiwan Studies has interpreted as the "rise" of a Taiwanese identity is more systematically understood as [the] accumulation of symbolic power around the name Taiwan when it is used to describe the people of the island' (80). But, what are the specific processes through which such power accumulates or coagulates around or through particular instances of naming? Harrison's elegant analysis of different discourses of naming aside, we never find out.

In the conclusion to the book, Harrison says that he has been arguing for 'a textual approach to the problem of Taiwanese identity' that stresses the 'open-endedness of discourses' (201) in which a real Taiwan can never be specified because meaning – following Derrida – always eludes final delimitation. Following Derrida's critique of the so-called 'metaphysics of presence' it might be possible to conclude that Taiwan is in a constant state of becoming as it is repeatedly brought into being through the speech-acts or 'enunciations' of different historical agents. Yet, some speech-acts are better than others, as is clear from the final lines of the book where Harrison reminds his reader of the ethical dimensions of research about Taiwan. My question is, to what extent does the kind of 'textual approach'

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.