

These two books can best be contrasted in terms of opposing political ideology. Rudolph's book is informed by liberal assumptions that nationalism is dangerous and individual rights the best path toward liberation. His views on the common people wishing to mortgage their land rather than live on ghetto-like reserves are similar to those of Thomas Flanagan, who advocates giving individual land ownership to Canadian Natives so that they can freely sell their land or use it as collateral for loans. Kulchyski's book is a leftist Canadian pamphlet – financed by none other than the Canadian government. These books illustrate that research on indigenous issues always involves some kind of political positioning. One book is more in line with the Enlightenment ideals of neo-liberalism; the other with the collectivist demands of the UN Declaration and local nationalisms. In Taiwan as in Canada, these opposing ideologies are still struggling for ascendancy. Indigenous communities, and the communities of scholars who study them, are all battlegrounds in a struggle that is far from finished.

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Taiwan Journal of Democracy

Published by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy

ISSN: 1815-7238

This brief review focuses on a recent issue - Vol. 3 (2), 2007 – of the *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*. The journal's stated brief is to provide 'an open forum, free of cultural and partisan bias' for the publication and dissemination of 'articles comparing the experiences of new democracies'. The editorial and advisory boards of the journal indicate the international scope and ambition of the journal, as do the articles themselves. Indeed, in this particular issue there are essays on Mexico (Hsiao-Yun Yu), Latin America more generally (Michael Coppedge, and Peter H. Smith with Melissa R. Ziegler), the Post-Soviet region (Mark B. Beissinger) and Taiwan (Laurence Whitehead) as well as on issues including political leadership (John Kane), so-called 'Presidentialism' (Robert Elgie) and a review essay on theories of democratization (Guillermo O'Donnell).

As academics are increasingly encouraged to specialise and to develop regional expertise two dangers are apparent: the first is that scholars will come to accept regions, nations and cultural areas as 'natural' objects of enquiry – they will, in other words, become voluntarily blind to the historically formed and politically and economically conditioned logic of area categories that shape and condition the production of academic knowledge. Secondly, the possibility of theory – of universal theory – will slide into the background as scholarly endeavour fragments into a series of domains of expertise defined by specific skill-sets, with each domain increasingly myopic to the fact that 'we' live not in neatly defined nations, regions or cultural areas but rather in an increasingly interconnected, globalizing world.

Thankfully, journals like this one offer a welcome and indeed valuable platform for thinking differently and, indeed, for thinking comparatively. According to

Yengoyan, 'comparison creates new and unique insights' (Yengoyan 2006: 3) and can enable 'discoveries through different ways of seeing things – by drawing forth new, unique and possibly odd implications that bear on what is being compared – and to direct our attention to other contexts which on their surface might appear to have no connection' (Yengoyan 2006: 4). Comparison is, then, 'a form of thought experiment' (Yengoyan 2006: 6) that invokes Benedict Anderson's 'spectre of comparisons' through which phenomena are no longer experienced 'matter-of factly' but are rather seen 'simultaneously close up and from afar' (Anderson 2002: 2) as if looking through a telescope from both ends at the same time.² This journal, then, provides a platform for informed (and informing) scholarly debate about democracy and democratic politics and for an explicitly comparative or bi-focal optics and vision. Clearly, a cluster of pro-democratic values are implied here despite the editorial disclaimer about the journal offering 'an open forum, free of cultural and partisan bias'. Given the otherwise originality of the journal's vision, it is a pity that neo-Kantian thinking continues to rule the roost: why is it still so difficult to argue that there are no facts without the values that structure them and offer them up for interpretation?

I want to focus for the remainder of this review on Guillermo O'Donnell's essay, 'Democratic Theories after the Third Wave: A Historical Retrospection' and Laurence Whitehead's 'Taiwan's Democratization: A Critical Test for the International Dimensions Perspective'. Both of these papers offer useful points of departure for thinking through questions of method and theory (respectively) for the study of democracy and democratic politics in Taiwan and elsewhere.

O'Donnell begins with a pointed critique of political-science arguments that claimed that Confucian and Iberian cultures were 'naturally' indisposed to democracy. It surely goes without saying that cultures are not static objects that can be defined in terms of essential characteristics and traits. O'Donnell is correct to point out that this kind of argument has geo-political consequences and, moreover, that it presents 'culture' as something timeless and unchanging rather than as a plurality of dynamic and shifting morally inflected relations and articulations between individuals, groups, and the state (O'Donnell notes that the same kinds of arguments are being used today about Islamic countries and cultures). In other words, scholarship must move beyond these kinds of unnecessary and unhelpful ethno-centric essentialisms.

O'Donnell's next point is to critique the notion of democratic 'consolidation' which, he argues, encourages 'us' to think about democracy as a 'stabilized point of arrival' rather than as an 'ongoing process' (2). In other words, democracy does not stand, static, at the end of some evolutionary or teleological line of development towards which all societies must aim. Rather, democracy is always incomplete, always indeed fragile, and is not guaranteed by elections but rather rests on rights enshrined in law, autonomous institutions, open media, multiple forms of belonging and citizenship and so forth. Indeed, O'Donnell suggests that

² Yengoyan, A. (2006) *Modes of Comparison: Theory and Practice*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press and Anderson, B. R. O'G. (2002) *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*. London and New York: Verso.

while there have been many important studies of political parties, elections, and government offices, too little attention has been paid to the every-day and perhaps seemingly banal aspects of democratic belonging. As O'Donnell points out, 'democracy also entails crucial dimensions of civil, social, and cultural citizenship[s]' (4). Here, O'Donnell appears to be making a case for an ethnographic or micro-level approach to democracy and democratic politics, an approach that works not only from the top-down but also from the bottom-up and which explores not only 'meso- and micro-institutional arrangements' but also 'informal institutions and practices' (5).

O'Donnell places particular emphasis on citizenship and he argues that 'democracy is the only political arrangement that construes all of us as agents' and also that 'democracy is hospitable to different conceptions of the human being' (7). He rightly argues that human beings are born into pre-existing webs of language, culture, and history; citizens are as such not isolated 'monads' (6) but rather the bearers and makers of diverse meanings and identifications that include familial, religious, institutional, and national affiliations that do not inevitably preclude the right to pursue individualistic and egoistic desires and wants:

I insist that the citizens of political democracy are socially preconstituted beings. They enter into the public arenas of a democratic regime carrying a dense network of social relations – many of them legally defined and backed – as well as identities, collective affiliations, and cultures that usually are strong and meaningful for them. This fact and the beneficial diversity it entails is not a hindrance but the reason that underlies the positive value that we should attach to the contemporary existence of various kinds of democracy and, with them, of various paths for further democratisation. (8)

O'Donnell's essay seems to me to suggest certain important methodological points for the study of democracy and democratic politics both specifically in Taiwan but which are equally salient to any elsewhere. Firstly, analysis must include a comparative perspective; secondly, analysis must be self-consciously reflexive in order to overcome the various species of orientalism that underpin much of Western social theory and political science discourse; thirdly, democracy is not a static state or a destination but is rather a process that is always vulnerable; fourthly, the study of democracy must not rest with the study of government offices, political parties, and elections but must include a cultural dimension that assumes that 'we' are not isolated, rational, individuals but are rather embedded, socially and historically pre-constituted beings; and fifthly, that the study of democracy and democratic politics can itself contribute to processes of democratization.

O'Donnell's essay offers some extremely useful methodological pointers towards the study of democracy and democratic politics in Taiwan (and, obviously, elsewhere as well). Whitehead's essay, by contrast, is concerned not so much with methodological questions but with testing theoretical assumptions, in particular those that belong to what he calls the 'international dimensions perspective'. Whitehead argues that 'the Taiwanese case constitutes a critical test for several key assumptions about the role of international factors' in

processes of democratization (11) and, as such, Whitehead ‘tests’ a number of these key theoretical presuppositions of the international dimensions perspective including ‘wave theory’, ‘snowballing’, ‘decolonization’, ‘external conditionality’, ‘contagion’, ‘modernization theory’, and ‘popular sovereignty and consent’, against the Taiwan case.

According to Whitehead, wave theory ‘privileges variations in great power ‘control’ as the major explanatory variable’ (15) and links democratization to the collapse of the bi-polar logic of international relations that characterized the so-called Cold War. But although this so-called ‘wave’ – like the ‘snowballing’ metaphor – picks up on the fact that democratization has, in recent decades, occurred in groups or clusters of countries, it does not explain why some countries do not democratize and, moreover, these metaphors render democracy not as ‘freely chosen or negotiated’ at the local level but rather as being ‘heavily determined by the prior choices of great powers or influential neighbours’ (17). In other words, one tendency of the international dimensions perspective is to locate the agency ‘behind’ democratic change in an anonymous elsewhere rather than in the (likely conflicting) hopes, anxieties, and struggles of local peoples.

As Whitehead ‘tests’ each assumption against the case of democratization in Taiwan, Taiwan emerges as ‘highly atypical’ (22) and as an ‘extremely deviant “limit case”’ (29). Whitehead’s ‘test’ or ‘experiment’ does not so much refute these theories and their predictions but rather sets up a case for Taiwanese uniqueness or exceptionalism. There are surely consequences that follow from this kind of argument; perhaps it means that grand theory needs to attend to the local in more detail in order to for that theory to attain a level of greater nuance and subtlety, ideally without any resulting loss of explanatory power. Or perhaps it simply means that more political scientists need to study Taiwan, because it is such a special case. Or, again, perhaps it means that the example of Taiwan requires an alternative theory of democratization to account for its unique and irreducible characteristics and features. However, constituting Taiwan as ‘atypical’, ‘deviant’, and as a ‘limit case’ may encourage the further isolation of Taiwan; perhaps after-all, a comparative perspective serves only to obscure the key elements of Taiwan’s recent political history.

In fact, Whitehead privileges what he calls ‘regional “clusters”’ because ‘the history and culture...of each large region matters, as it selects and refracts the way global tendencies feed into local practices’ (31). He is, of course, absolutely right, and the argument unfolds in such a way as to refute the causal models of political change detailed by the international dimensions perspective. Instead, Whitehead emphasizes democratization ‘as a complex, under-determined, long-run, relatively open-ended, and even reversible historical process’ (32). Yet, the context for interpretation that Whitehead himself privileges – namely, that of the China-Taiwan nexus – is hardly neutral or indeed naturally given, but is itself the product of global and regional political and economic relations of power.³

³ For a social science perspective on this question, see Hong, K. and Murray, S. O. (2005) *Looking Through Taiwan: American Anthropologists’ Collusion with Ethnic Domination*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.

The *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* offers a valuable forum for thinking carefully about questions of democracy and democratic politics in Taiwan and elsewhere. Methodologically and theoretically sophisticated, the journal offers an important space for critical reflection and it should be close to hand for all those interested in Taiwan, regardless of their disciplinary background or theoretical predilections.

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