

Introduction

He who knows only one country only knows none.

(Sartori 1994:16)

The articles in this special issue collection were presented at the 'Small Islands, Big Issues' conference that was held at University College Dublin in September 2011. The conference is the first multi-disciplinary academic symposium devoted to comparative studies relating to Taiwan and Ireland, and to their respective area studies. The project resulted from a developing interest in recent years in finding ways to make theoretically useful comparisons between Taiwan and Ireland, and the discourses that have come to characterize the study of each place.

It may be thought that the comparison is suggested by situation: both Taiwan and Ireland are small islands adjacent to powerful neighbours with whom they have had complex histories. In both locations we can see histories, politics, and cultures marked by contested subjectivities and identities, as well as struggles over democracy and human rights. A focus on the human situation in both places invites the application of discursive categories such as colonialism and post-colonialism; globalization and localization; and nationalism and hybridity. It also allows explorations of the goals, problems, and limits of sovereignty and independence in the context of sub-ethnic and religious divisions, as well as of the complex relations with a nearby metropolitan 'Other' and of diaspora experiences in the era of post-national globalization. At the same time both contexts challenge the straightforward appropriation of such categories and demand their sophisticated reworking. However, Ireland and Taiwan are neither internally homogeneous, nor are they similar to each other. Indeed, they are strikingly distinctive in their political, institutional, and intellectual histories. The romance of comparison sits in tension with the difficulty of finding a secure and satisfactory place from which to make it.

The attempt is further complicated and enriched by important differences in the approaches and development of Irish Studies and of Taiwan Studies, both of which find themselves arriving at a point of self-examination where positivist assumptions dissolve and are replaced by questions concerning the epistemological and discursive bases of the academic enterprises that have come to be named 'Irish Studies' and 'Taiwan Studies'.

For both Irish Studies and Taiwan Studies there are specific and limited questions that are asked, argued over, and answered, on the basis of particular discursive categories. Reflecting its diaspora origins in North American academic circles, Irish Studies privileges history, politics, language and literature, both 'classical' and modern. In contrast, Taiwan Studies operates to interrogate and create the possibility of Taiwan itself in a manner that reflects its later development and the contested history of Taiwan. Irish Studies encompasses the political, as Taiwan Studies does to some degree. However, Taiwan Studies exists as a self-

consciously political programme as well as an academic one. This existential questioning has become mainstream in Irish scholarship only in comparatively recent times as the possibility of Ireland itself has become a question. History and literature find themselves having to share unaccustomed space with other perspectives in the stories that the Irish tell about themselves.

Taiwan Studies, on the contrary, was organized from the outset at the intersection of a range of modern social sciences such as political science, cultural studies and anthropology. Therefore, though Taiwan Studies may claim to be 'multidisciplinary,' its epistemological structure is based on those of its primary disciplines (Harrison 2006:18).

The current volume comprises articles that aspire to make explicit comparisons using frameworks and modes of discourse characteristic of Irish Studies, of Taiwan Studies, and of 'positivist' social science. In itself this makes the present collection of interest as an ethnographic experiment where Ireland is inscribed in terms of Taiwan Studies, and Taiwan in a manner more typical of scholarship concerning Ireland. Scholars whose focus of interest is Taiwan or Ireland (or even more purely theoretical in orientation) are thus enabled not just to 'see ourselves as others see us', but also to expose their own discourse to scrutiny as comparisons are explored and Ireland is discussed as if it were Taiwan, and *vice versa*. It may be argued that the associations thereby constructed are sometimes fragile. But what is revealed in the attempt, perhaps, is itself instructive.

Fang-Long Shih takes up the challenge of comparing the development of nationalist discourses on both islands. Her treatment contributes to the scholarship concerning the natures and historical developments of the nationalisms in each island, including the Republic of China nationalism of KMT orthodoxy and Irish/Ulster unionism, as well as to that of contemporary Irish and Taiwanese nationalisms. Shih's focus on the elements and processes involved in constructing and sustaining the ethnic, cultural and civic impulses in the various nationalisms of the two contexts makes what could otherwise be seen as a hopelessly distant and asynchronous comparison satisfying and fruitful. Although her attention is on Taiwan in the present article, her discussion of the role and dangers of 'strategic essentialism' provides a tool that may usefully reflect the Irish experience.

Stéphane Corcuff contextualizes Shih's discussion of discourses of nation as naturalized subject by adding a geopolitical perspective. He adapts an anthropological concept, liminality, to parse the relationships between China and Taiwan, arguing that Taiwan is both conservatory and laboratory *vis-à-vis* the Chinese imagination. Corcuff's elaboration of liminality helps to explain also how a place can be simultaneously marginal and symbolically essential, a conservatory and a laboratory. Corcuff rejects a number of theoretical models, including a centre-periphery paradigm, arguing instead for an appreciation that a new model is needed to understand Taiwan, and in the process to understand what Taiwan as a place and an unavoidable subject, as a threshold of China, causes China to reveal about herself, her perception of history, identity and relations with the world. One is left wondering in what manner Corcuff's liminality, although developed to explain Taiwan, could be applied to relationships between the two jurisdictions of Ireland and perhaps even to Irish-British relations.

Among the stories that Irish nationalists have told about themselves is that Ireland was 'the first colony to be free' and 'an inspiration for other nations in the British Empire'. Taiwanese people, if they have a clear concept of Ireland, often share this view of Irish history in which a small island wrested itself from the grip of its neighbour, at that time the world's foremost imperial power. The paper on Lin Hsien-Tang by Fu-San Huang, Sam Huang and Conor Mulvagh is an interesting exercise in comparative historiography, and argues for the similarities and probable influence of John Redmond's example and that of the Home Rule movement in Ireland on the political methods and aspirations of the leading native agitator for political change in the Japanese colony of Taiwan. As the authors note, the intrusion of global war caused the efforts of both men to be superseded. Although both figures ended their careers in frustration and disappointment, this careful and closely argued comparison casts light on the methods, contexts and philosophies of both figures.

Ming-Yeh Rawnsley expands the range of our comparisons to the visual and cinematic, with an examination of two films of different mood under the common category of resistance. Like other papers in this issue Rawnsley again shows how comparison can be enhanced and refined by great variations in representation and style, where differing contexts lead to varying notions of resistance, including overt challenge and more veiled defiance. The intricacy and variety of resistance as a concept and as an act is well-illuminated.

Resistance and its representation through the theatres of Taiwan and Ireland is the theme of Wei-Hung Kao's contribution. Kao references Bhabha to argue that theatres can tell us much about a national self-understanding, although not always or even usually on purpose but rather through a kind of self-reflexivity different from the explicit and deliberate pedagogy of dominant narratives. From this 'contradictory and ambivalent space' those marginalized in each society speak. We are offered examples from the canons and movements of both nations to illustrate and develop this theme.

Both Ireland and Taiwan have been societies of emigration and immigration. Two papers examine these phenomena. Pei-Te Lien and Jeanette Yih Harvie deal comparatively with the situation of Irish and Taiwanese who have migrated to the United States through the prism of political incorporation into the receiving country. As well as expounding a number of parallels and differences in the migrant groups, and in the chronology of their movement to the United States, Lien and Harvie review the commonly employed theories used to explain patterns of political incorporation, leading to the conclusion that the discursive construction of racial difference is the unavoidable determinant of political incorporation even to the present day.

Questions of immigrant reception, incorporation and the projects of both cultural and economic nation-building are treated by Bryan Fanning. In his many-layered discussion, association is made not just between the relative openness to immigration of the different populations but also how this has influenced, and been influenced by, developmental goals. Fanning concludes with a positive evaluation of the potential for further comparative work, as well as the lessons that Ireland might learn from Taiwan.

Khinn-Huann Li, with Liam Mac Mathúna, presents a Taiwanese view of the Irish language movement in a study that those with an interest in Ireland will find

stimulating and informative, as it confirms that the situation of Irish is not as unique as is sometimes suggested and because it provides an evaluation from the viewpoint of quite a different context. Scholars of Taiwan, especially those with a concern or connection to the Taiwanese language movement, will appreciate the assessment of the Taiwanese movement in the light of the Irish experience.

The two commentary articles in this issue of the journal, those of Kerry Brown and Qiao Mu, give a view from London and Beijing respectively. Brown draws our attention to the 'other Ireland' and examines the external aspects to the Northern Ireland peace process in an attempt to set out the conditions that might underpin progress towards a more permanent peace across the Taiwan Strait.

It has been said that a 'Chinese shadow' lies over Taiwan, in that internationally Taiwan's space is constrained by Chinese government pressure. The same shadow lies over Ireland's knowledge of and engagement with Taiwan, Ireland having a so-called 'One China Policy' that is one of the most deferential of all her EU partners. Political decisions inside Taiwan are also constrained by the threat from China. In public media in the Western world little explanation is offered of Taiwan's position or of the varying aspirations of its population beyond the 'renegade province' trope. Qiao Mu's paper demonstrates that the Chinese view of Taiwan is evolving and that views on the 'Taiwan question' are increasingly varied, despite the near unanimity of official pronouncements. His paper describes the evolution of Chinese thinking and the responses to Taiwanese aspirations available to Beijing.

In these papers, we have an eclectic approach to the study of Taiwan structured around the notion of its change, and of some of the disciplines through which Ireland is usually studied in Irish Studies programmes overseas. The unmistakably Taiwanese-flavoured theoretical discussion is combined with comparative work involving Irish themes.

This collection of articles, together with the accompanying book reviews, which continue the Hiberno-Taiwanese comparative theme, represent a beginning. Each of the contributors has stepped out of their academic comfort zone to engage in this new venture. What is written is not the last word on any of the topics under consideration. Nor does it exhaust the possibilities. It is a contribution to Taiwan Studies, in particular, and also we hope to Irish Studies. In a broader sense, it serves to develop thinking about comparative area studies.

There is a kind of aesthetic to this collection of papers. It is clear that it is not only as Small Islands with Big Issues, but as locations characterized by Stéphane Corcuff's 'liminality' and as nodes in the global flows of culture where East has come to West and West to East, both Ireland and Taiwan have much to contribute to scholarship of wider application. We have begun unashamedly in a somewhat ideographic vein. As we build familiarity, and the romance of scholarly engagement deepens, we aspire to develop our common enterprise further. Asking Irish questions of Taiwan (or questions informed by Irish assumptions) and *vice versa* holds the potential for greater understanding of both small islands.

Bibliography

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