

sometimes devalued because of its mainstream positioning. Martin, in her essay 'Feminist Girls, Lesbian Comrades' (in Jennifer Helgren and Colleen Vasconcellos, *Girlhood: a Global History*, 2010, and based in part on earlier articles), discusses the Mandopop singer Sandee Chan in the context of 'Spice Girls fever across the East Asian region' (91). She notes that 'the rise of girl rock in Taiwan is inherently linked to transnational cultural flows and the globalization of musical girl cultures. One particularly interesting way in which this happens is in the local reworking of globalizing discourses of pop feminism and "girl power"' (90).

*In the Limelight* demonstrates the creative potential of critical gender studies in relation to celebrity studies. Read in conjunction with Martin's essay, we can glimpse how the fields of enquiry which the book opens up might be applied fruitfully to East Asia in general, and to Taiwan in particular.

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***Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change: Race, Sex and Nation*, by Gerardine Meaney, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, 252pp., £33.99 paperback, ISBN 978-0-4158-9647-4**

Gerardine Meaney over the last decade has worked on uncovering and challenging patriarchal discourses in Irish national identity and culture and, indeed, in Irish Studies. Her book *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change* is a theoretically-sophisticated collection of essays that explore changing constructions of Ireland, focusing on 'cultural processes and social movements that have impacted on the most intimate experiences and the most deeply held senses of identity' (xvii). The book's themes are developed through an analysis of canonical and lesser-known literature, as well as films, television dramas, and documentaries. Meaney uses Lacanian psychoanalysis, feminism and post-colonial theory as overlapping, though hardly frictionless, interpretative frameworks to examine how patriarchy and xenophobia helped to form, and remain embedded within, Ireland's post-colonial identity. She also draws attention to 'manifestations of the official gendering of Irish national identity and of resistance to those official identities' (xviii), and she is critical of how post-colonial studies has been applied to Ireland.

Meaney's work shows how the study of nationalism in Taiwan and in Taiwan Studies could benefit from the three strands of her approach. While there are some critiques of nationalism in Taiwan from a post-colonial perspective, psychoanalytic and feminist critiques of nationalism in Taiwan are largely undeveloped. One of the few studies analysing feeling is Horng-Luen Wang's essay '*Ressentiment* in Modern Communities: Some Preliminary Reflections on Taiwan's Experience' (2004), which draws on Nietzsche's term *ressentiment* to interpret in a general psychological way Taiwan's attitude towards China and international society.

One example of a post-colonial critique of Taiwan's nationalism is Mark Harrison's *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity* (2006). Harrison's intervention in debates about national identity in Taiwan begin with a critique of the European liberal assumptions which have underpinned

national movements in Taiwan (and Ireland); namely, the assumption that a nation is the natural expression of an ethnos, the basic unity of identity as expressed through a distinct language, culture, literature and so forth. Drawing on post-colonial and post-structuralist theory, Harrison argues that Taiwan is not a given (national) fact but has, rather, been brought constantly into existence by naming practices – Formosa, Republic of China, Chinese Taipei, Taiwan – that imply competing fields of values, facts and so forth through which the island has been made available for description and analysis. In short, for Harrison identity is always a fabrication in the making and what needs to be studied are the processes through which identity-making is authorized.

One passage in Meaney's book has particular resonance for Harrison's approach to Taiwan, where she observes that 'the danger to the postcolonial critique now in Ireland is that it will be co-opted to a discourse of the authentic and native, sometimes called shared history' (16). This is arguably what occurred when the KMT replaced Japan as the rulers of Taiwan, and then again when the KMT's imposition of a Chinese identity gave way to an essentialized 'Taiwanese' identity. As Meaney notes, 'the inevitability of the process whereby new nation-states operate in remarkably similar ways to their imperial predecessors from the point where they acquire armies, borders and institutions limits the liberatory potential of even the most utopian nationalisms' (143).

Meaney's essays are grouped into three parts: 'Race, Women, and Nation'; 'Writing, Bodies, Canons'; and 'Race, Masculinity, and Popular Culture'. The book's gender perspective in particular, could be used to re-examine the construction of Taiwan's nationalisms and to challenge patriarchal nationalist discourses. Feminist critiques in Taiwan did not emerge until the late 1980s, when they began to explore male domination and gender inequalities in the contexts of the family and workplace in terms of biological essentialism. These critiques have since the 2000s moved on to the notion of gender as a cultural construction, re-examining gender subjectivities and domination as a systematic property of socio-cultural production as a whole (Sangren 2009). However, very few feminist scholars on Taiwan have extended their work, like Meaney, to issues of national subjectivities; one exception is Fang-Mei Lin's 'Women's Organizations and the Changing State/Society Relationship: Resistance, Co-option by the State, or Partnership?' (2008), although Lin's paper is concerned primarily with whether it is possible for feminist advocacy organizations to forge a new governmentality linking the state and feminist subjectivities. Lin also edited a special issue of *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* entitled 'Transnational Taiwan' (2010), in which she argued that in order to

construct a Taiwan(ese) national identity or subjectivity, one must negotiate with and among a range of complex factors. These include not only history, colonialism and geopolitics but also inter-textuality, cross- or intra-cultural translation and the narrative arts of cinema and the novel. (3)

However, feminist critiques have left nationalisms and nationalist narrations in Taiwan largely un-gendered.

Meaney's first chapter can be seen as laying out a feminist analytical framework for the whole volume, and her approach could also be applied specifically to

Taiwan. She begins by quoting Anne McClintock: 'all nationalisms are gendered' (quoted on page 1), and later draws on McClintock's observation that: 'Excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit' (quoted on page 4). Meaney further develops this gendering approach into the context of 'Virgin Mother Ireland', arguing that:

the centrality of Mariology in Irish Catholicism and the extent to which issues of reproduction and sexuality dominated public debates and anxieties around modernization while sharing many of the general characteristics of the gendering of national identity... are in the Irish case also powerfully linked to residual anxieties around race and Ireland's postcolonial position as a white European nation. (6)

As such, the emerging field of 'feminisms and nationalisms' in Irish Studies could offer a new direction for Taiwan Studies, exploring the extent to which gender (and race/ethnicity) constitutes a fundamental structuring principle in the construction of a common (shared) national identity and subjectivity, and in making the distinction between the colonized self and the colonizer other; in Shelley Feldman's words, with 'women as symbol, men as agents of the nation, colonized space as feminine, colonial power as masculine' (quoted on page 1).

Among the topics of the first part of Meaney's book is an examination, and critique, of the 'imposition of a very definite feminine identity as guarantor of the precarious masculinity of the new state' (5), in which women's sexuality was inscribed in religious imagery and severely socially regulated; she is critical in particular of how gendering and racializing strategies are naturalized through the figure of the Virgin Mary in Ireland. Meaney regards the decoding of such strategies as vital, and she discusses how women's writing 'in the margins of the national project' (77) engages with alternative possibilities of nation and state. She urges readers to 'deconstruct the binary of colonizer and colonized, agency and victimization, pure and hybrid, and acknowledge the extent to which complex processes of accommodation, resistance and opportunism have shaped the concept of "Irishness"' (7). She further argues that by moving beyond representations of Ireland as a feminine land and landscape, 'the national body could no longer be a body to be possessed, but to be lived in' (77). Feminists in Irish Studies are now working to effect a different kind of nation-state, and Meaney indicates that:

Yet it remains important to understand the basis of the affiliations between women and nationalism, which historically has publicly operated in situations of national crisis...It is equally important to be aware of and challenge the sacrificial logic that structured that affiliation. (77)

By contrast, very few scholars of Taiwan's literature have brought gender perspectives into their analyses of national narratives; one exception is Chia-Ling Mei's 'Gender Discourse and the Development of Post-war Fiction in Taiwan' (2003), which focuses on the symbolic imaginaries among the nation, the family and gender. However, although literature scholars in Taiwan have begun to touch on gender and nationalisms, their analyses, unlike Meaney's, approach the

development of national imaginaries and nationalist narrations largely uncritically. Despite this significant gap, though, there are new approaches which, although they tend not to engage explicitly with critiques of Taiwan's nationalisms, go around the subject of nationalism by exploring Taiwanese women's subjectivities in relation to transnationalism; one example is Kuei-Fen Chiu's 'Documentary Power: Women Documentary Filmmakers and New Subjectivities in Contemporary Taiwan' (2012).

Meaney's first essay of the second part further develops the theme of gendering writing, through seeking 'the traces of cultural, political and social agitation excluded from existing histories of Ireland between 1922 and 1960' in 'the "minor" fiction of the time' (120). Of course, the censorship and cultural pressure experienced by Irish writers was less extreme than the contemporaneous military rule in Taiwan, but that does not necessarily mean that dissent or cultural critique was impossible (and Meaney's book also reminds us not to ignore the output of exiles and those looking in). Although the second part in particular presents an alternative assessment of Ireland's literary landscape that reaches beyond the 'canonical', James Joyce nevertheless looms large, and a long essay at the heart of this part discusses Joyce in relation to modern critical (re)assessments, literary responses, and Joyce's place in Dublin's heritage industry.

A discussion of John Huston's adaptation of *The Dead* is fruitfully compared with Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*, and this juxtaposition between Ireland and post-colonial Senegal raises the possibility of further comparison with Taiwan: in both cases discussed by Meaney (quoting Laura Mulvey on *Xala*) 'the question of language is at the political centre of the drama' (148), with characters in both stories reproached for a fondness for French (the colonial language in the case of Senegal, and of international high culture in turn of the last century Ireland) over their own language. Also, in both cases, the main character is not in control of the narrative. Meaney points out that national histories and national identities are both 'subject to haunting by the excluded, the subjects of expedient amnesia, the spectres of change' (152). She then argues that if Irish nationalists would move beyond 'the fetishized authenticity of the traumatic past', they need to take on the challenge of 'rearticulation of the boundaries of the sayable' (152) demanded by the haunting ghosts.

The final part of the book reminds us that a country's particular discourses about itself are not the only way in which culture is constructed, by looking at 'Irishness' and Irish masculinity as it appears in American films and in American and British television series. The Irish experience and character have become a rich resource for exploring American history and culture (Meaney discusses Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*); in contrast, it is difficult to think of anything comparable in relation to Taiwan, which is largely absent as a distinct location in western popular entertainment, but perhaps Taiwanese characteristics in the Chinese imaginary – beyond official pronouncements about the island's status – is a subject worth comparable exploration.

Also, Meaney notes that the way that Irish ethnicity is used as a theme in American dramas such as *Rescue Me* and *The Wire*. In these shows, Irish heroic figures tend to be represented as having self-destructive characteristics, 'with their Irishness functioning as a protective distance (they are not quite American heroes)'. Flawed Irish Americans in these television series 'expressed the desire for unity

and the terror of disintegration in a divided nation' (190). While Meaney questions this stereotype from her feminist perspective, Taiwan has yet to reflect on 'ethnicity' in any way in its television dramas. Ethnicity, as Meaney observes, 'is a matter of family history' and that 'makes the history of immigration personal' (190) and intimate.

Overall, Ireland and Irish Studies as described in Meaney's book bear many striking similarities with Taiwan and Taiwan Studies. Ireland and Taiwan are both made complex 'by [their] ability to celebrate [their] multiculturalism and simultaneously restrict national citizenship on the basis of ethnicity' (153). Also, Irish Studies and Taiwan Studies have both invested heavily in their own particularities; ironically, 'a particularity that seeks exception from the global system that produces it' (20). The search for genuine and authentic native voices in Ireland and Taiwan needs to bear in mind Vincent Cheng's warning, as quoted by Meaney, that such a search may 'serve only to provide us with a feel-good liberal and multicultural glow – while in actuality merely recycling tokenism and nostalgia' (15). The issues discussed in Meaney's book require careful and critical re-examination in relation to Taiwan, especially in the contexts of economic turmoil and global migratory flows. Meaney commends Vincent Cheng's use of James Joyce as a resource for the construction of 'all sorts of cosmopolitan, migrant, hyphenated and intercultural identities' (15), in contrast to elements of Irish cultural criticism that privilege Joyce's Irishness. It is an approach that parallels thoughts elaborated in this special issue of *Taiwan in Comparative Perspective* on 'Taiwan and Ireland in Comparative Perspective'.

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