



PROJECT MUSE®

## Introduction

James Lin, Graeme Read, Peter Thilly

Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review, Volume 9, Number 1, May 2020, pp. 1-6 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ach.2020.0009>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/758254>

## Introduction

JAMES LIN

*University of Washington*

GRAEME READ

*Australian National University*

PETER THILLY

*University of Mississippi*

From an island embedded in early modern trade networks through its interactions with colonial and imperial powers, and as a site for development and democracy, Taiwan has been shaped by its global connections and in turn has changed the world. Understanding Taiwan within a global context reveals not just how Taiwan's history, society, and culture have unfolded but also how Taiwan has played a crucial role in transnational processes as a site of global knowledge production.

Although Taiwan is an island, physically separated from other landmasses by seas on all sides, its societal and cultural formations have been undeniably shaped by interactions unhindered by those physical limitations. According to "Out of Taiwan" theory, which extends this history into the distant past, the Austronesian migration across Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and the South Pacific originated on the island more than four thousand years ago (Bellwood et al. 2011). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the emergence of a capitalist world economy drove the Dutch, Spanish, and Qing empires, as well as the Zheng Chenggong

(Koxinga) regime, to extract sika deer, camphor, sugar, and rice from Taiwan's land and its indigenous peoples, and enabled the migration of Han Chinese across the Taiwan Strait (Andrade 2008; Shepherd 1993; Hang 2016). Under Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945), Taiwanese consciousness and identity arose in response to nationalist ideologies imposed by the Chinese and Japanese (Ching 2001; Dawley 2019). More recently, the global Cold War sustained martial law and the authoritarian Guomintang grip over Taiwan, restructuring local society and memory (Szonyi 2008). Today, the entanglements of Taiwan's tech-driven firms with a global economy has continued to make Taiwan inextricable from the greater events that unfold outside its borders, including changing costs of labor markets and manufacturing and trade wars (Hamilton and Kao 2017). This special issue of *Cross-Currents* explores Taiwan's ostensible contradiction of being a “global island,” by highlighting the generative ways of thinking from centering Taiwan within a *worldview*.

In October 2018, the University of Washington Taiwan Studies Program hosted a workshop featuring a wide range of diverse humanities and social science research centered on the theme of “Global Island: Taiwan and the World.” The impetus for the workshop was to reimagine Taiwan outside the traditional confines of comparative and cross-Strait studies that have predominated in academic research on Taiwan. The articles that emerged from the workshop and have been assembled in this issue instead understand Taiwan as an actor embedded within global networks and spaces or, alternatively, as a unique site or producer of globally circulating knowledge. At a time when Taiwan studies is gaining increased visibility, exploring Taiwan's linkages to the greater world showcases underexplored facets of Taiwan and the potential contributions of this field to interdisciplinary studies of society and culture.

Amid the diversity of methodologies and source material, two key themes emerged from the workshop. The first, most strongly represented among the historians, is a reexamination of Taiwan not as a special case but as an important site for understanding the major political and economic transformations of the twentieth century. Weiting Guo's article explores the interwoven constructions of gender, patriotism, and criminality during the tense wartime decades of the 1930s to 1940s in his biography of female bandit and guerrilla leader Huang Bamei. Guo likens Huang Bamei to a chameleon

for her ability to adapt and transform in a rapidly changing environment, but we may also see her as a palimpsest. At various moments throughout the twentieth century, the regimes of both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan have inscribed upon Huang's memory their own politically motivated and contesting imagery, through which Guo has highlighted the traces of her original background as an enigmatic bandit. Most germane to the theme of our special issue, Guo uses Huang's life, along with the contested memory of her life, as a way to understand the local experience of global events—war, state-building, and transformations in ideas about gender—in China first, and later in Taiwan.

The other two articles by historians articulate Taiwan as a site of unique knowledge production in agricultural science and development. Together they signal the emergence of Taiwan as an important historical actor in the colonial and Cold War world. Wei Yi Leow demonstrates how Japanese colonial scientist Eikichi Iso developed Horai rice in Taiwan, a crossbreed of the sticky, short-grain *Japonica* variety consumed and valued in Japan with other varieties adapted for the extended sunlight exposure of tropical Taiwan. Consequently, even though Japanese breeders intended Horai rice to be solely exported back to Japan, it took root locally in Taiwan and altered cultural taste preferences in rice consumption. Leow offers a new perspective in understanding how scientific knowledge evolves in unique ways in Taiwan, at important historical intersections of Japanese colonialism, environmental agency, and local subjectivity. James Lin addresses Taiwan's own agricultural development missions to Vietnam during the 1960s, offering an outward-facing story of Taiwan's engagement with the global political economy. Lin argues that these missions were more than just modernization projects and became subsumed by the authoritarian Guomindang state's political project to construct a new social identity for Taiwan. This political project centered on technoscience expertise and sacrifice to help other developing societies and peoples around the world, and it extolled the characteristics of perseverance, generosity, and scientific modernism specific to the Taiwanese experience. All three of these articles situate Taiwan and Taiwanese actors as central to conversations about how knowledge of Taiwan shaped and was reshaped in local and global sociopolitical systems.

The second theme that emerged from the workshop concerns how Taiwan's history—in particular, its history of embeddedness in larger global

processes—resonates and underpins present-day discussions of its peoples' complex identities. The articles addressing this theme engage more with the social sciences and offer significant contributions in theory, method, and context. One group of articles (Brown, Jhang, Xu) showcases potential for new theoretical and comparative developments across anthropology, gender, communication, and critical studies. Another group (Read, Chen) delves into Taiwan as context, drawing from sociology, cultural studies, and film studies to reflect the depth and dynamism of Taiwan's engagement with transnational forces in music and cinema.

As Taiwan is renegotiating marginalized histories and rediscovering global connections, the first group of articles on this theme reexamines scholarship on Taiwan by giving voice to those absent and illuminating data overlooked. Melissa J. Brown argues that Taiwan's contemporary acceptance of women in the public sphere has roots in historical cosmopolitanism. In analyzing three examples of Taiwan's intersectional cosmopolitanism, she demonstrates how the intersectionality of gender and indigeneity reveals women's social engagements as fundamental to Taiwan's economic development and exposes the shift from locally rooted nationalism to communitarian cosmopolitanism. These historical intersectional processes are significant beyond Taiwan and comparative studies in China, as Brown's work holds potential for a global model of not only women's quotidian public engagements but also people working across diversity in developing cosmopolitanism. JhuCin Jhang presents discourse analyses of Taiwanese lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals reconciling conflicts with their families of origin in the wake of the same-sex marriage law. Jhang's research highlights the unique nature of Taiwan's civil society situated at the intersection of global gender discourse and local anxieties. It locates Taiwan as a site for developing a new, globally applicable theory of LGBTQ studies, offering a vision for how Taiwan can contribute to and change global conversations. Jing Xu's work involves an ongoing revitalization and reassessment of unpublished dissertations of renowned Taiwan anthropologists Arthur P. Wolf and Margery Wolf. Xu's article illuminates their 1960s research into Taiwanese children's perception and compliance with social norms enacted in everyday village lives. She situates the uniqueness of the Wolf data in a global comparative framework, positioning Taiwan at an inter-

section of Sinological anthropology, the anthropology of children, and historical studies of childhood.

The final two articles explore identity and indigeneity in Taiwan's increasingly diversified and global music and cinema. Graeme Read's research into music festivals demonstrates how youth activists have resignified socio-cultural symbols to contest establishment politics. The article examines two festivals as sites of music as politics, wherein activists reflexively produced readings of Taiwanese history and society transcoded through globalized music. Read's analysis reveals conflicts of Taiwanese sovereignty and identity manifest in music, and shows how being Taiwanese was embedded in localized productions of global genres of popular music. Tzu-Chin Insky Chen examines the films *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai* as examples of immigrant cinema, demonstrating how they present two different articulations of invisibility in local identity. Taiwan's regional and global connectivity is revealed in Chen's analysis of these cinematic representations of Southeast Asian migrant workers and heterogeneous Taiwanese identities. These challenges to an imagined Taiwan as a local, homogeneous society reflect broader flows of global capitalism and labor migration. Altogether, this contemporary research exemplifies the diversity of processes remaking Taiwan's complex identities, demonstrating the wealth of knowledge to be gained from a globally situated picture of Taiwan studies.

As a whole, this special issue seeks to reorient Taiwanese subjectivity. Although Taiwan is undeniably linked with the greater world, it is too often marginalized as a silent, passive recipient of global change, whether Western or Japanese colonialism, capitalist exploitation, or Chinese political pressure. This collection of articles addresses both the influence of Taiwanese society and culture globally, and the influence of global forces locally, thus giving voice to Taiwan's role as a site of dynamic global production. Just as in other area-studies fields that have looked beyond borders to examine how local places have far-reaching effects, a global and transnational approach showcases the diversity and vitality of Taiwanese-centered research. Showcasing the full disciplinary range of the social sciences and humanities, the authors of the articles in this special issue deploy contextually grounded approaches and methodologies (Chen, Guo, Leow, Lin, Read), as well as new disciplinary-derived theories (Brown, Jhang, Xu). These novel lenses provide fruitful grounds for further advancing the field of Taiwan studies.

JAMES LIN is Assistant Professor of International Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle.

GRAEME READ is a PhD candidate at the Centre on China in the World, Australian National University.

PETER THILLY is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Mississippi.

## REFERENCES

- Andrade, Tonio. 2008. *How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bellwood, Peter, Geoffrey Chambers, Malcolm Ross, and Hsiao-chun Hung. 2011. "Are 'Cultures' Inherited? Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Origins and Migrations of Austronesian-Speaking Peoples Prior to 1000 BC." In *Investigating Archaeological Cultures*, edited by Benjamin W. Roberts and Marc Vander Linden, 321–354. New York: Springer.
- Ching, Leo T. S. 2001. *Becoming Japanese: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dawley, Evan N. 2019. *Becoming Taiwanese: Ethnogenesis in a Colonial City, 1880s to 1950s*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Hamilton, Gary G., and Cheng-shu Kao. 2017. *Making Money: How Taiwanese Industrialists Embraced the Global Economy*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hang, Xing. 2016. *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c. 1620–1720*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shepherd, John Robert. 1993. *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600–1800*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Szonyi, Michael. 2008. *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.