

Memories of the Future

Review >
East Asia

Corcuff's *Memories of the Future* links a variety of perspectives characteristic of the new direction Taiwan Studies has taken in recent years. Based on papers presented in the mid-1990s annual conferences organized under the auspices of the North American Taiwan Studies Association (NATSA), this collection of essays is aimed at Taiwan researchers in particular, and scholars working on East Asia interested in the complexity of nationalism, identity, and ethnicity in general.

By Ann Heylen

Inspired by theories of collective and national identity, the editor and contributors demonstrate the pluralistic nature of identities in Taiwan. The work is divided in three parts: 'Historical Roots', 'The Transition of National Identity', and 'Perspectives on Ethnicity and Taiwanese Nationalism'. Particularly innovative is the manner in which the linear unfolding of the book allows the reader to discern various aspects of state-society relations in Taiwanese identity politics hitherto neglected or obscured.

Andrew Morris portrays the formation of the 1895 Taiwan Republic against the background of Western presence and economic role in northern Taiwan. Morris shows that late nineteenth-century Taiwanese gentry were predisposed to Western assistance, and draws attention to the complexity of anti-imperialist policies of the Qing dynasty in the international political arena. Robert Edmondson does not give us a new narrative of the 2.28 Incident, but concentrates on the politically charged process of its historical interpretation in the post-Japanese colonial socio-historical context.¹ Stéphane Corcuff further underscores the fact that identity is not static but a dynamic process that remains highly volatile in the never-ending process of nation building. In analyzing changes in four national-identity-related symbols under former president Lee Teng-hui, i.e. state doctrine, official commemorations, textbooks, and banknotes, Corcuff convincingly demonstrates that these were not the result of radical reform, but illustrate a negotiated process between the defunct state-party state ensemble and social movements, opposition politicians, the press, and scholars (p. 97).

Shu Wei-der, Lin Tsong-jiyi, and Robert Marsh deal with the identity issue seen from the perspective of social movements. Shu investigates the membership and activities of the clandestine political overseas Taiwan Independence Movement (TIM).² In his data analysis of 14 North American-based TIM members, Shu takes issue with two competing sociological theses

on political activism; the marginality and privilege theses (p. 50). Lin and Marsh complement our understanding on the interaction between elite manipulations and mass opinions in the 1990s. Whereas Lin concentrates on political party identification (Kuo Min-Tang (KMT), Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), New Party (NP), and non-partisan), Marsh's survey research focuses on ethnic self-identification, using the *bensheng* and *waisheng* jargon.³ Both articles reach the same conclusion, that is, that there is an increasing sense of Taiwanese identity and a decreasing Chinese identity. In so concluding, Marsh also confirms Lin's thesis that the mass-elite interaction was a reciprocal one, whereby the changing stances of political parties were mainly influenced by public opinion, which had responded to shifting environments (p.134). This latter issue is quite well explained in Marsh's section on the geopolitical constraints on Taiwan's independence (pp. 154–158).

It is clear that the major strength of this book is its attention to the Mainlanders, a rather ignored research topic in Taiwan Studies. Both Li Kuang-chün and Stéphane Corcuff find this social group an important player in the discourse on identity and politics. Corcuff does a fine job in explaining what Mainlanders (*waishengren*) are about and conceptualizes them as a new ethnic category (pp. 164–171). His contribution is definitely worth reading and solidifies Li's conclusion that the political and cultural ascendancy of the Taiwanese (*benshengren*) has not only perplexed the first generation Mainlanders' collective memory, but has also brought second-generation Mainlanders an identity dilemma which carries profound socio-economic consequences (p. 121).

In the closing chapters, two progressive Taiwanese intellectuals, Wu Rwei-Ren and Lin Chia-lung, defend a new perception of nationalism following Taiwan's political democratization (1988–2000). Wu's leading argument coalesces around the concept of a pragmatic nationalism. Inspired by Gramsci, Wu develops the thesis of a passive revolution and argues that the struggle for democracy in Taiwan took the stance of an anti-colonial national

movement (p. 200). Lin's pointed analysis of the term 'Taiwanese' draws our attention to the distinction between ethnic and national identity. He convincingly shows that identity politics in the last decade of political transition indicate a shift away from an ethnic term for 'native Taiwanese' to a civic term for 'citizens of Taiwan' (pp. 224–227). His thesis supports a sudden growth of civic national identity that

does not necessarily negate or object to its Chinese roots.

The relevance of this book is that it reflects anew on Lee Teng-hui's 1994 expression 'the misery of being a Taiwanese' (p. 233). By acknowledging Taiwan's sense of national belonging to combine a Taiwanese political identity with a Chinese cultural identity it perpetuates the challenge to China's irredentist stance on nationalism and highlights the thorny issues of nationhood and a dated belief in nationalism demanding one nation, one state. Perhaps a suitable follow-up would be a study that focuses on the perspective of the originals and the several Taiwan diaspora communities worldwide. A small draw-

back may lie in the fact that many references in the texts are not included in the bibliography, yet this book is definitely a worthwhile purchase. <

- Corcuff, Stéphane (ed.), *Memories of the Future*, New York: M.E. Sharpe (2002), pp. ix + 285, ISBN 0-7656-0791-3

Dr Ann Heylen is a researcher affiliated to the Department of Sinology, KU Leuven, and an associate member of the Taipei Ricci Institute. She specializes in Taiwanese history and has published on Japanese colonial rule and seventeenth-century Dutch rule of Taiwan.

ann.heylen@arts.kuleuven.ac.be

The Haunting Fetus: Abortion, Sexuality, and the Spirit World in Taiwan

Review >
East Asia

It is common belief in contemporary Taiwan that an aborted fetus may come back to haunt its family, and the ritual practices to appease it. According to this belief, the aborted fetus appears in the world of the living as a fetus-ghost (*yingling*) or as a fetus-demon (*xiaogui*). Fetus-ghosts provoke disorder affecting the family concerned, such as disease, injury, or death, while fetus-demons seek vengeance through evil acts: to appease the fetus-ghost, the family performs a ritual. While fetus-ghosts are associated with guilt and redemption, fetus-demons are concerned with evil: fetus-demons' sorcery means sorcery performed by a sorcerer master with the help of a fetus-demon. Haunting fetus-ghosts generate disorders in the same way as most Chinese and Taiwanese spirits.

By Evelyne Micollier

In *The Haunting Fetus*, Moskowitz endeavours to explore the ghosts' (*yingling*) distinctiveness, particularly their nature as children. A cultural continuum links the abortion cult, child spirits, and Daoism, providing a framework of local ideas and practices in which this newly imported cult can thrive. In traditional Chinese culture, age is calculated from the date of conception, while representations of early or 'unborn' childhood involve ambiguity, incompleteness, and a liminal state that gives access to secrets of the cosmic world. All of this is significant in Daoism. Moreover, the ultimate goal of the Daoist practice 'Guarding the One' was to return to such a liminal state through concentrative meditation, in which the technique of 'embryo breathing' was used to regress to the '*enfançon*' state (Schipper 1982:206).

The treatment of the subject is fascinating, as the moral, psychological, and symbolic aspects of abortion are addressed in the context of a modernizing Taiwan. Against this background Moskowitz discusses gender-related power struggles and the emotional manipulation of women. Moreover, the topic is original in the way it addresses religion in the context of Chinese and Taiwanese culture: the author conceptualizes the subject as being at the crossroads of religion and gender studies in a context of societies in social, political, and economic transition.

His analysis is based on ethnographic material such as case studies, urban mythology, people's own accounts given through interviews, newspaper articles, morality tracts, and visual media and literature about the ghosts. Moskowitz collected written documents and conducted interviews in Mandarin Chinese, primarily amongst urban Taipei residents, during the mid-1990s.

Fetus-ghost appeasement practice seems to be rooted in Japanese culture from where it spread out across Taiwan during the 1970s. The influence of Japanese belief and practice is noticeable in Taiwan in the development of new religions in general and in fetus belief and practice as a new religious component in particular (chapter 3). The legalization of abortion in 1985 may partly explain the development of such a controversial ritual practice in Taiwanese society. For the first time, abortion was discussed in the public sphere along with a range of highly emotionally charged related issues such as teenage pregnancy, sexuality, and family planning. These issues provoke tensions between the person as a whole and her inner self, the individual and society, and within society as a whole. Fetus-ghost appeasement helps to reduce those tensions, while fetus-demon sorcery reinforces them.

Though the study focuses on specific religious belief and practice, the scope of the research is so broad that it also contributes to understanding new concerns in the context of an

Asian society in the process of modernization, including moral values, control of sexuality, and the family as a traditional social structure in transition. In his analysis, Moskowitz takes into account the historical and political background. His research is innovative as no systematic ethnographic study of fetus-ghosts (*yingling*) and little ghosts (*xiaogui*) (called 'fetus-demons' in the book) had previously been conducted. Indeed, a better knowledge of Chinese and Taiwanese perceptions and conceptions of the spirit world contributes to our anthropological knowledge of daily acts and ideas, actions pragmatically connected to people's world views and systems of representations.

Moskowitz concludes: '...fetus-ghost appeasement is part of a larger body of religious practice and belief that might be called a commodification of sin, in which one can atone for one's wrongs through financial sacrifice in one form or another' (p. 168). But he also notes that 'religious masters could not market this belief if there were not a demand' (p. 169).

The book offers an insight into the process of reshaping the religious sphere through a pragmatic adaptation to the social issues raised in a society in transition, such as abortion and its meaning, women's changing roles, and other gender issues: all these issues are analysed in connection with economic transition. It opens up a number of avenues for further research related to gender, religion, and globalization related issues. Although the author does not sufficiently clarify his theoretical stands or his epistemological choices, the book is definitely a valuable work for any specialist and inquisitive reader as well as those interested in an contemporary anthropology. Moskowitz empathically covers a whole range of issues from the most intimate aspects of the human condition to the most external aspects of life in society. He also shows that a 'globalized' process of commodification is subtly pervading each of these aspects, even through the manipulation of emotions generated by distressing events. The book is a welcome addition to a body of anthropological works about women and contemporary religious culture in Taiwan. <

- Moskowitz, Marc. L., *The Haunting Fetus. Abortion, Sexuality, and the Spirit World in Taiwan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, (2001), pp.206, ISBN 0-8248-2428-8

Reference

- Schipper, K., *Le corps taoïste*, Paris: Fayard (1982).

Dr Evelyne Micollier is an associate lecturer at the University of Provence and an associate research fellow at IRSEA, the 'Institute for Research on Southeast Asia', Marseilles, France.
Evelyne.Micollier@newsup.univ-mrs.fr

Notes >

- 1 On the evening of 27 February 1947, six agents of the Taiwan Tobacco and Wine Monopoly Bureau assaulted a female street peddler selling contraband cigarettes and killed a man running out of his house to flee the scene. The incident led to weeks of violence throughout the island and implacable repression by the KMT nationalist forces. In the decades to come, public discussion of the incident was outlawed and became an ethnically divisive memory on the part of the Han-Taiwanese islanders.
- 2 TIM includes several pro-independence organizations active in North America, Canada, Europe, and Japan. Its membership comprises of Han-Taiwanese islanders who have been blacklisted or exiled by KMT policies from the late 1940s onwards.
- 3 *Bensheng* refers to the Han-Taiwanese islanders while *waisheng* refers to the Mainlander population that came to Taiwan following the retrocession (between 1945 and 1949). The usage of the two terms shows the distinction between those born in Taiwan province (*bensheng*, lit. this province) and those born in other Chinese provinces (*waisheng*, lit. outer province) and is politically loaded.