

of glocalization, assimilation, decolonization, and transnationalism. This book is a major contribution not only to Taiwan history and sport history but also to global history.

After the event: the transmission of grievous loss in Germany, Taiwan, and China

By *Stephan Feuchtwang*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2011. Pp. vi+240p. Hardback £55.00/US\$95.00, ISBN 978-0-85745-086-9.

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This book compares and contrasts three incidences of what the author calls ‘bad deaths’ in the twentieth century: the massive famine in the aftermath of Mao’s ‘Great Leap Forward’ in 1958–61, which easily constituted the most lethal event of the twentieth century, with an estimated death toll of well over 30 million; Nazi Germany’s genocide of close to six million European Jews during the Second World War; and an incident of ‘white terror’ in the Luku region in post-war Taiwan, in which 165 men and 19 children were forcibly removed, interned, and sometimes killed as suspected ‘communists’ in 1952.

These events were, of course, vastly different in both scale and nature, and it is to the author’s credit that he addresses the question of (in)comparability directly in the introduction. As an anthropologist, he is less interested in a precise historical comparison between the Third Reich and Mao’s China than in developing an ‘anthropological theory of subhumanity’ (p. 40) that explains the process of mass victimization. Resorting to Giorgio Agamben’s notion of the ‘state of emergency’, he highlights how both Nazi Germany and Mao’s China deployed ‘aggravated indifference and targeted violence’; how they both deployed fantasies of internal purification and stereotyping of others; and how they mobilized their followers to ‘sacrifice and excess’. Along similar lines, the ensuing chapter contrasts communism in mainland China and in Taiwan. Whereas the Great Famine has not yet officially been labelled as a disaster in China, the end of military rule in Taiwan in 1987 made it possible to discuss the Luku incident in public. Yet, in contrast to the situation in post-war Germany, neither the Great Famine in China nor the white terror in Taiwan was discussed in the language

of victims and perpetrators. Unlike the Holocaust, these experiences of bad death remained ‘marginalized by the dominant standards of signification’ (p. 65).

The central aim of the book is a discussion of the ‘transmission of loss’ in the aftermath of each of these events. Eschewing the more common terms of public and private memory, the author prefers ‘transmission’ as drawing ‘attention to the activity’ and stressing the ‘social nature of both individual recall and public narrative and commemoration’ (p. 13). The three main parts offer an insightful analysis of the public representations of these episodes of violence in China, Taiwan, and Germany and compare and contrast them with ‘family archives’ in all three countries: that is, personal and intergenerational memories of these events that the author and his collaborators collected in interviews with thirty-four people in each of China and Germany and fifty-four individuals in Taiwan. This analysis yields some interesting and noteworthy findings. For example, individuals in China submerging the famine to a general memory of ‘hardship’ to which the ensuing generation – accustomed to economic growth after the onset of the reform period in the 1980s – could hardly relate. Party functionaries, on the other hand, remembered their divided loyalty to the Party and to the often starving local populations. Political and familial shame thus constituted powerful impediments of the intergenerational transmission of the Great Famine, which therefore remained largely ‘implicit’ in China. The event could only be addressed indirectly in novels, often by discussing the significance of food. In Taiwan, by contrast, ‘family repair’ centred on burial practices, family tombs, and, eventually, a local monument to the victims of the ‘white terror’. Yet here, too, intergenerational memory remained much stronger than intra-generational memory, in part because of the ongoing fear of former victims of being labelled ‘communist’. In Germany, intergenerational transmission of loss appears to have been much stronger. In his interviews with Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, the author finds evidence of a move away from a ‘defensive Judaism’ toward a more universal memory of the Holocaust among the former, as well as a rejection of the politics of victimhood among the latter. His findings challenge – albeit on the basis of limited evidence – some of the results of other oral history study, which had emphasized much more apologetic memories of the Nazi past among non-Jewish Germans.

Thus, the comparison between the three cases powerfully supports the author’s conclusion that the

'contrast of transmission is huge' (p. 218). One regrets, however, that the author did not draw the cases together in a more explicit fashion and offer a more systematic analysis of the reasons for these differences. For example, while economic growth and a new form of materialism appear to have blocked intergenerational communication in China and Taiwan, this was not necessarily the case in Germany. Some sections of the analysis also digress into somewhat less fruitful areas. For example, I could not quite see the significance of the elaborate discussion of tourism in the Luku region nor was it entirely clear to me why the author felt compelled to extend his already broad focus to a discussion of the Israeli politics of memory. In addition, the analysis of the German case exhibits a series of factual mistakes. Hitler and the Nazis did not 'continue the process that had already begun of ending inflation' (p. 30) (this happened ten years before the Nazi assumption of power!); the Auschwitz and Eichmann trials did not coincide (the former took place from 1963 to 1965, the latter in 1961); the Balfour declaration promising an independent Jewish state dated from 1917 rather than from 1948 (p. 161), and

the name of the German filmmaker Edgar Reitz is consistently misspelled.

On a more general level, there is an inherent tension in the text between broad comparisons, on the one hand, and the anthropological approach focusing on interviews and personal recollection, on the other. Yet the book also points to possible ways of relating macro- and micro-levels of analysis. It underlines, for example, the formative force of public memories for the shaping of intergenerational loss – a prolific commemorative culture in Germany promoted this transmission, whereas a belated or non-existent public commemoration rendered it more difficult or even impossible in China and Taiwan. Conversely, more private family modes of transmission also effected political change in Germany and Taiwan. It therefore remains to be seen whether private forms of mourning in China might eventually lead to a more public recognition of the immense suffering associated with the Great Famine. It is one of the real benefits of this study that it reminds us of the deeply personal and intimate meanings of the millions of 'bad deaths' that defined the last century across the globe.