

discussion on aboriginal studies. Nevertheless, the chapters focus more on institutional debates among scientists rather than discussions motivated by indigenous political activists. Second, the cases are overwhelmingly about genes and tests on human subjects rather than broader examination of research and local knowledge within the indigenous territories, which may reinforce viewpoints based on nationalism or science-centrism. Finally, scientists, state and indigenous people are portrayed as mutually exclusive entities in Munsterhjelm's five-phased movement. However, the political arena of indigenous affairs is not clear cut; rather, there are substantially overlapping claims by the indigenous people as well as scientists. The case of legislator Jiwas Ali in the beginning of this review is a reminder of such intertwined interests. She considers herself an indigenous activist against Han exploitation in Taiwan but also lobbies for the connection between Taiwanese aborigines and mainland Chinese identity. Studies of indigenous political claims and research controversies deeply reflect the rhetoric of racism, a legacy from colonial Japanese biological research, intertwined with Taiwanese ethnic politics, post-war US scientific agendas and Pacific indigenous sovereignty. This book contributes to the comparative understanding of contemporary political identity and scientific nationalism in Taiwan, which is pertinent to theoretical reflection on the PRC counterparts. Furthermore, it reveals extensive connections among social studies on science and technology, property laws, indigenous research ethics and activist politics of the Pacific in general. Against all odds, Munsterhjelm provides a compass to sail through the contested ocean of indigenous genetic research.

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The Last Isle: Contemporary Film, Culture, and Trauma in Global Taiwan

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Sheng-mei Ma explains the title of this collection of essays as a reference to both the sense that Taiwan has just been passed by, and that its survival is threatened. He locates the book as opening “from where Taiwan film scholarship has generally left off, interrogating relatively unknown contemporary filmmakers who are not likely to ever make it to the world stage...” (p. 3). Indeed, the island's recent film culture has been neglected, yet, as Ma observes, under globalization it exhibits new characteristics that merit analysis. More polemically, he observes that “In the rise of China in the twenty-first century, a crop of ‘New China Hands’ – naturalized Americans of Chinese descent and mainland affiliation – has exerted considerable control over Western discourse on China, Taiwan included. It is against this eliding of Taiwan, this continuous trauma of being undone, that Taiwan Studies should direct its energy” (p. 16). In its drive to fill a gap in Taiwan film studies and counter the “eliding of Taiwan” – whatever its origins – this collection is welcome.

However, as anyone familiar with Ma's previous writings might anticipate, this is not a systematic study of the film industry. Anyone hoping for statistical data or analyses of either market or genre trends will be disappointed. In fact, most essays towards the end of the book have little do with Taiwanese cinema or, in some

cases, even Taiwan. Although original and well observed, for example, chapter six focuses on Ang Lee and Asian American culture, and chapter ten on five Asian American artists and how their Taiwanese family backgrounds inform their work. Chapter nine is concerned with how English is taught in Taiwan, and chapter eight analyses brand names in Taiwan as well as graveyards in the town of Shalu, with a short discussion of Zero Chou's 2004 film, *Splendid Float*. The coda is mostly about anxieties in the US and Hong Kong concerning China's growth and expansion.

In these circumstances, the reader will get the most out of these essays if they are approached as a series of self-contained and unabashedly subjective readings in the cultural studies mode of particular films and phenomena, prompted by his return as a visiting professor from the US to the island where he grew up. The recurrent themes that bind his observations concern the on-going impact on Taiwanese culture of various historical traumas (colonization, the White Terror, martial law, being thrown out of the United Nations, and more), and the split consciousness that results.

For example, Ma's opening essay on the box office megahit *Cape No. 7* considers it as a return to the idea of Taiwan as "orphan island" associated with Wu Zhuoliu's colonial era novel, *Orphan of Asia*. Insofar as trauma traps the sufferer in a compulsion to repeat, the film is understood as reiterating the trauma of Japan's "abandonment" of Taiwan, but with a new happy ending that explains its appeal. Similarly, Ma contrasts *Island Etude* and the fashion for cycling round the island that it documents to the open highway associated with the American road movie. He sees this practice as a return to the trauma of ejection from the world community and a desire to transcend and escape confinement on the island.

Cape No.7 and *Island Etude* are among the better known of recent Taiwan films, but Ma also attends to more local phenomena and films. These include narratives and characters that echo the two gods adopted as symbols of the island – Mazu, the mother goddess who protects fishermen, and Nezha, the boy god who is both unrestrained desire and an orphan. Another essay on Wang Yu-lin's Taiwanese dialect films teases out the chaotic comedy of translation and mistranslation rendered through both Chinese and English efforts to subtitle the films, and the dialogue's own play as characters switch between Mandarin and Taiwanese. As Ma rightly observes, the penalty for these rich local orchestrations is that they are opaque to outsiders and the films cannot travel.

Overall, there are many fascinating revelations and provocative observations in *The Last Isle*. The book would benefit from a further round of development to clarify the key arguments, both of each essay and of the book as a whole, and to develop the theoretical framework underpinning those arguments more thoroughly. But perhaps that would have been against the spirit of "Taiwan's cultural messiness" (p. 107) that Ma wishes to convey. However, I cannot close this review without also noting the very messy presentation of the manuscript. From bad spelling on the first page ("Taiwnization"), to a skeletal index and inaccurate pinyin throughout, made even more obscure by the absence of a list of Chinese characters or a filmography, these low standards disappoint.

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