

Taiwan and Ireland Compared: Contested Subjectivities

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This paper uses a comparative perspective to re-examine the issue of contested subjectivities in the study of Taiwan and the study of Ireland. Taiwan and Ireland are both small islands adjacent to powerful neighbours, with which they have had a history of complex relationships. Further, in both locations we can see histories, politics, and cultures marked by contested subjectivities and identities, and also by struggles over democracy and human rights. Irish Studies and Taiwan Studies are approached in this paper as a series of narrations about how both locations have been written and/or re-written as a subject. Three narrative frameworks and paradigms are as such outlined, drawing on anthropology and literature of Ireland and Taiwan. Framework One concerns how Ireland and Taiwan were both written within an “imperial” paradigm, with Ireland written as subject to British imperialism and Taiwan written as subject to the KMT’s (Chinese Nationalist Party) Chinese nationalism. Imperial metaphors in both cases oppressed native histories, politics, and cultures, and undermined native subjectivities. In Framework Two, Ireland and Taiwan are re-written as subjects in their own right, primarily through the vehicle of nationalism as structured by an interpretation of the national in racial/ethnic terms. Irish and Taiwanese subjectivities are thus understood and narrated as specific kinds of naturalized subjects that ultimately deny their own inventedness and historicity. Framework Three goes beyond nationalism to demonstrate how attention to processes of globalization, immigration, and multi-culturalism can help us to understand the long-term development of new subjectivities derived from extended international networks formed by decades of immigration and diaspora. The paper concludes by considering Taiwan and Ireland as network societies, that can be studied in light of the relationships and connections through which they have been constituted as places.