

Gender and Women Studies in Taiwan: From “New Feminism” to Intersectionality

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Taiwan’s women’s and gender studies have been blossoming during the last decade, especially in terms of institutionalization – most universities now offer gender- related course programs and gender- related research projects have been widely supported by various research foundations, such as the Taiwanese NSC, domestically, and the CKS Foundation, internationally. Domestically, most gender- related research has been published in Chinese but, more and more frequently, Taiwanese authors are also having their work published in English, which has helped to promote the local academic discourse at a global level. At the same time, the Taiwanese academic discourse has been heavily influenced by international developments: the three main waves of women’s and gender studies/research in Taiwan, that is, the 1920s under Japanese rule, the 1970s and 1980s, during the democratization of Taiwan, and the more recent postmodern developments, have all shown strong international elements. Another characteristic of Taiwan’s women and gender studies is the interweaving of various social movements and academia. This paper will therefore first provide a very brief historical overview of Taiwan’s women’s and gender research. The first decades after World War II were shaped by a more conservative, China-oriented approach both domestically and abroad, when Taiwan was regarded as merely a surrogate of the “real” China which – being under Communist rule – was not accessible for Western and especially US- based academics. This changed when, in the 1970s and 1980s, Lü Xiulian started to write on “New Feminism” and linked Taiwan’s feminism with the democratization and pluralization of the island. Later *Awakening*, being a publishing house and a meeting point for activists, shaped Taiwanese gender research and opened it up for new topics, such as the indigenous population and same-sex issues. Foreign researchers, for example, Linda Arrigo, then brought US- inspired feminism and Marxist critique to Taiwan in the late 1970s.

The main of my paper part deals with more recent developments, that is, the growing interest in gender studies, including LGBTQ issues, which most recently have been accompanied by intersectional approaches. At the same time, however, a conservative and patriarchal attitude in some writings, especially in migration and educational studies, has been prevalent (or has continued from earlier writings). This can be traced back to the (partially successful) efforts being made by American Christian and conservative groups to counteract developments abroad which are seen as threatening “conservative family values”. These conservative writings are mainly directed against LGBTQ issues, and build on a combination of “Christian values” with more “traditional” Han Chinese (Hoklo/Hakka) values.

Panel 5 Gender Issues

Finally, the growing cross-Strait integration has started to have an impact on more recent developments in women and gender studies, with increased exchanges between both sides taking place. Here the role played by globalization that is being encountered on both sides of the Strait by various marginalized groups has been a main topic, as well as the more general exchanges taking place between Taiwanese and Chinese gender-oriented academics and activists, which have been criticized by Taiwanese activists who are concerned about the increasing Sinification of the island.