

Roundtable 1 Taiwan Studies in Comparative Perspective

**Taiwan and Ireland in Comparative Perspective:
Global Processes, Local Contexts**

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This presentation seeks to make a case for studying Taiwan in comparative perspective. In itself, this may not seem particularly new: Taiwan has often been compared with China or even regarded as a surrogate for China. Comparison with China has been seen as ‘legitimate’ on the grounds that China and Taiwan share a common culture. What I am advocating is somewhat different. I am interested in comparing socio-economic, political and cultural processes. For example, one might want to compare processes of democratic change in Taiwan and an elsewhere. Or, as is the case here, one might want to compare processes whereby a national identity is formed in a context of colonialism and political violence and where, in the aftermath, the task of consolidating a peace through political settlement and shared social memory comes to the fore. In this instance Ireland provides a useful counter-point to Taiwan. Comparing Taiwan and Ireland may seem counter-intuitive but the case for comparison rests not on any similarity between Ireland and Taiwan but rather on the different ways in which comparable processes have unfolded in these different socio-economic, political and cultural contexts. This comparative perspective enables us both to know Taiwan differently and to see how global processes are localized in different ways in different places. This bi-focal approach has its challenges but at the same time it demands methodological and theoretical innovation as we seek to develop our knowledge not of Taiwan by itself or as part of some essentialized cultural area, but as an important site for the study of global processes of transformation and change.