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Teaching Australia Against America to English Majors in Taiwan

Shu-chen Chiang, Associate Professor

National Chiao Tung University

Taiwan

shuc@cc.nctu.edu.tw

I would like to start my paper with a true story I got from my neighbor. Her ten-year old son in his English class once heard a threatening sentence from his American teacher when he was making the boys quiet: ‘Bu Guai, jiu ba nimen songhui dalu’, which means ‘if you don’t behave, I’ll send you back to mainland China’.

When the boy asked his mother why his teacher of English threatened them with those words, my neighbor found the question too complicated to answer. She simply asked back ‘Did it work? Did the class become quiet then?’ Her boy said, ‘Yes, but a classmate of mine said to the teacher ‘my father works in Shanghai and we have a house there’.

I thought this story an epitome of the border identity structure in Taiwan: Taiwan’s current situation as a non-state, or ‘unsettled area’ in the international community, has been caused by the United States since World War II. And the ‘cultural turn’ in the 1990s was an attempt of the contemporary government to pursue its political sovereignty by forging new Taiwanese (rather than Chinese) citizenship, creating a dilemma for the world’s two hegemonies—the United States and China—both considering the island their ‘frontier’, despite the fact that the Cold War has ended. This border situation is more complicated as the everyday life (such as the father in the story, who travels between Shanghai and Taipei) opens up new vistas on building up translocal field of relationships. The American teacher in the anecdote assumed the US hegemonic relationship with Taiwan¹, and hence made a judgment that Taiwan would not want to ‘belong to’ China. He was right in the sense that Taiwan since 1987, after the lift of the world’s longest martial law (for 40 years), has increasingly claimed Taiwanese identity, which is a mixture of long-term migration and layers of colonisation.² In this process, the key to the creation of the new identity, though, is to acknowledge Aborigine contributions to Taiwanese culture and ancestry, thus making Taiwan a settler society like Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States, which obtained their sovereignty in their own ways and have succeeded in achieving prosperity and well-being. The newly rewritten national history puts much emphasis on the early participation of Taiwan in the capitalist world system--from the 17th century when Taiwan was the economical border of Dutch East

¹ See Mark T. Berger’s *The Battle for Asia: From Decolonization to Globalization* for the entry ‘Taiwan’.

² See Malisa Brown’s *Is Taiwan Chinese?*

Indian Company,³ followed by the Cheng Cheng-kung regime (1661-1683), the Qing Dynasty (1683-1895), the Japanese occupation (1895-1945) and the Republic of China since 1949. This repositioning of Taiwan is from a government holding the legitimacy of Chinese history⁴ to the wishful thinking that Taiwan should have its own supremacy in its claim for national identity. Along with the end of the Cold War as well as the economic success,⁵ the movement for Taiwan's separation from China gained momentum, and the debate over Taiwan identity has caused a commotion over 15 years. There are mainly two strands in the debate—Chinese complex and Taiwan awakening. The former insists on the eventual unification of China and Taiwan, while the latter acknowledges and honors Taiwan's Chinese heritage but claims not to be Chinese. This paper is not going to examine the details except to say one thing: exactly because this border consciousness cannot be resolved in the political discourse at this time due to the pressures from China and the United States,⁶ it can only appear in the cultural sphere. So we see the assertion for Taiwan independence expressed in the following facts: the adoption of *tong-yong* pinyin as the Romanisation system, adding the word 'Taiwan' on the passport, calling 'China' instead of the former usage 'Mainland', promoting dialects to be official languages, change of the patterns on money bills,⁷ change of the national map,⁸ and particularly, the construction of the history of Taiwan literature as well as dictionaries of Taiwan history and people.

The boy unwittingly undermined both his teacher's and Taiwan government's ideology of belonging, as his reply indicates that the frontier mentality could create an indeterminate space between the subject and the horizon. In other words, quite a

³ The government held a Formosa Exhibit in 2002-2003 to feature the beginning of Taiwan's modernisation in the 17th century. The frequent contacts with contemporary sea powers (Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands, Britain, and Japan) made Taiwan the world's stage. In comparison, China lags much behind. According to Immanuel Wallerstein, China was the last large region to be incorporated into the world-system in the middle of the 19th century. See his *The End of the World as We Know It: Social Science for the Twenty-First Century*, p. 20.

⁴ Since then started a de-colonisation project: Between 1945 and 1911, Taiwan's government portrayed Taiwan as ethnically Han and nationally Chinese, claiming that it was the lawful government of mainland China, which then was unjustly occupied by the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese people on the mainland were encouraged to cross over the Taiwan Strait to pay their allegiance.

⁵ The coincidence of the timing with Taiwan's economic boom and the emphasis on avowedly pro-independence goals clarify the close ties between these specific nationalistic practices and the rapid development of small-scale entrepreneurial capitalism in Taiwan. This new proportioning of sovereignty and citizenship has both reflected and affected the questioning of identity that has accompanied Taiwan's drastic political and economic transformation of the last 15 years.

⁶ See Denny Roy's *Taiwan: a Political History* as he writes about the dilemma Taiwan has caused for the two countries: 'The United States and China face the prospect of a war over Taiwan that neither side wants. China is committed to attack Taiwan under certain circumstances, while the United States is committed to defend Taiwan under certain circumstances. For both, failing to fulfill these commitments would likely be more costly politically than honoring them'. (p. 243)

⁷ This change is from political figures to local plant and animal patterns.

⁸ From vertical to horizontal (see figure 1).

large number of people in Taiwan in promoting their political sovereignty still take China within their horizon, which is a sphere of belonging.

Looking at what Taiwan might tell us about the future of the nation state in Asia-Pacific area, most observers would say that there is no unidirectional tendency towards dissolution of the nation state. Both China and the United States have used Taiwan in playing out their respective Asian politics, and thus as a means of propping up their nation-state status in Asia. Taiwan, in this power game between the two big countries, could only make careful moves to get space for survival and development. The official strategies concerning national security include 'go south' and 'connect north'⁹ policies, with an implication that 'we are perhaps bad Chinese but can be good Asians—with more democracy'. It might not be surprising to find that the first sentence in Melissa Brown's book *Is Taiwan Chinese?* is 'At the turn of the twenty-first century, Taiwan is a global hot spot' in her discussion of Taiwan's identity change from an American perspective.

The irony, as demonstrated in the beginning story, is that despite the state's efforts to distance Taiwan from China, there is an increasing trade relationship between the people of both sides. Some scholars describe this as a 'reverse migration' (from Taiwan to China) which has never happened before in the history. But the reason for this migration is the same as that in previous migrations: the seeking for economic opportunities.

In this drastic change of the identity shifts, my teaching in a university to English majors also faces new challenges: how to understand the hegemony of the West and how to present Taiwan to a Western eye? These questions used to be set in the framework of 'the West and the Rest', with an assumption of the putative unity of the West, which most often was represented by the United Kingdom, Japan and the United States for their impacts on modern China and Taiwan. On the other hand, the self image used to be constructed on the premise that Taiwan in its pursuit of freedom and democracy was the only place in the world that preserved the core of Chinese civilisation. The dignity came from the contemporary state ideology that 'we are the legitimate heir of China (see we still use the standardized Chinese characters), though suffering discrimination in the international community, which "recognizes" the Chinese Communist Party, the illegitimate usurper'. With the change of the state identity, my teaching switches to focus on the critique of the modern world-system, particularly the American consumerist way of life and its global reach, as well as the pervasive assumption that the West exists as a bounded domain. The students are taught to reflect on their love relation to the United States and to problematise ideologically universal ideas such as democracy, individualism, human rights and sovereignty. This training of critical reason is not easy as the students usually have to love a culture (and its power) before they decide to master a foreign language. Their attachment to American culture starts so early and hence so tight that critiquing it is like throwing an egg against a rock—a hopeless battle to fight. After all, the United States sometimes praises Taiwan for making progresses in democracy, leading

⁹ These policies are aimed at breaking up the diplomatic blockage set by China. The 'south' refers to Southeast Asia while the 'north' refers to Japan and the United States. See Wen-Chih Lee's 'The Construction of Taiwan's 'Go-South' Worldview: The Vantage Point of Struggle Between Sea Power and Land Power in Asia-Pacific', in *Taiwan and Southeast Asia: Go-South Policy and Vietnamese Brides*, eds. Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao.

Taiwan to see other Asian countries (especially China) from the civilizing positionality.¹⁰ I therefore started to teach Australia—an English-speaking country which is also a settler society like the United States (and Taiwan) as an example of an alternative idea of the West. Through Australia, students learn how the West is a mythic unity, which is mistaken as a geographic territory with an affiliated population, or a unified cultural and social formation. Also through Australia, they understand that Asia too is a mythic unity. They must compare the difference between Australia and Taiwan in their presumptions of Asia. There is quite a big leap for Taiwan to move from the state of being described as Asians by some outside agents like Australia to the self-representation as a subject. Today Asia is not necessarily subjugated to the domination of the West. Most Asian countries are, at least in theory, independent of their former colonisers.

But why Australia? Why not Canada, or New Zealand, as they are all favorite choices of Taiwanese migration.¹¹ The main reason is its location: it is geographically closest to Asia and a nation with a conventional fear of Asian invasion.¹² It's not too difficult to find similarities between Taiwan and Australia in some little facts: population roughly the same, Aboriginal history newly inserted in national historiography, ancestors as unwanted people from the mother country, an identity problem as the colonizer and the colonized, and a development away from Chinese/British visions of the land, its flora and fauna in painting and the arts.

A recent impact on Taiwan from Australia is the proclamation of cultural policy. In 1998, Taiwan had the first national cultural policy. What should be noted is that it came out four years after Australia's *Creative Nation*, and two years after the Chinese translation of *Creative Nation* (figure 2). The translation was commissioned by the Council for Cultural Affairs, whose policy makers had long watched multicultural states such as Australia and Canada. This book with the Chinese title *Chuangyi zhiguo* was published in 1996 and dispatched to all public libraries and universities. In the preface there was an expression of admiration to the Australian government for its support for lifestyle and cultural infrastructure to existing concerns with traditional arts forms. In 1997 multiculturalism was constitutionalised; since then, Taiwan took up the identity image as a multicultural state and a settler society. And the term

¹⁰ The most recent compliment occurred in the 1990s: During the 12-year leadership of Teng-hui Lee (1988-2000), who initiated a series of identity change from 'Chinese consciousness' to 'Taiwanese consciousness', there was a post-authoritarian socio-political transformation. President Lee implemented a series of programs concerning the new citizenship: more investment in education (especially mother-language teaching and English-language teaching starting from the primary education), health services, social welfares, housing provision, and environmental protection. He also extended full voting in presidential election to anyone over the age of 20 and civic-participation rights through the campaign of Integral Community Construction. In 1995 he was invited to Cornell University to give talks and increased Taiwan's visibility in international media. His influence inside and outside Taiwan earned him a title 'Mr. Democracy' and his political reformation was euphemistically called 'a silent revolution'. His administration in 1994 bought a full page on Time Magazine to publicize this idea with the metaphor of a butterfly, symbolising a metamorphosis of Taiwan.

¹¹ The five target countries for Taiwanese migrants, in order of immigrant population, are the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore.

¹² See Meaghan Morris's "White Panic" in *Trajectories*, edited by Chen.

'New Taiwanese' was used to define all ethnic groups that have lived in this island with Taiwanese consciousness. Taiwanese in this sense is not just a pure right or an unabashed gain but a social practice defined and redefined in political struggle.

Besides the official effort, a woman writer also contributed to the visibility of Australia in Taiwan. She is Julie Chang, already a well-known writer with her Chinese name Xia Zuli before she moved to Australia with her husband James Chang in 1986. Half of her 16 books are about Australia, mostly in journalistic style. Two of them, *The Bird of Paradise and the Bottlebrush* (2001) and *Innocence in a World of Many* (1995) were particularly written for young overseas students in Australia and for Taiwanese parents who plan to send their children abroad for education. The Australia she depicts is neither demonized nor idealized, but reveals something of the social and political complexity. For her reader, this country in her writing is definitely better than Taiwan. In 1995 a survey showed that Australia had surpassed the United States and Canada to become the first choice for Taiwanese migrants. This migrating heat was caused not only by Australian migrant policies¹³ but also by the better knowledge of Australia. And Chang's writing has contributed to this wave of migration. Her books have become essential items in the luggage of many Taiwanese migrant families to Australia. In them we see Australian landscape, rich cultural life, advanced public facilities, and the good nursing system for the aged, all of which have impressed the reader in Taiwan. Chang also writes the dark side, such as the discrimination against aboriginals, Philippine mailed brides, the Chinese gold diggers in the 19th century, and problems with the welfare system. They can be read like guidebooks, with beautiful literariness as the smooth pathway to an understanding of Australian politics and institutions.

My students are asked to read these books and then compare Julie Chang with another writer also based in Melbourne, Ouyang Yu, who was from China and writes both in Chinese and in English. The comparison shows that their writings represent two opposite perceptions of Australia: to Ouyang Australia causes his spiritual death while Chang views Australia as a place of Taiwanese migrant's rebirth, full of hope. I explain their difference by reading them against the two distinct Chinese cultures that have shaped their perceptions of Australia. I argue that Ouyang, and most Chinese writers who came to this country in late 1980s, are obsessed with the death of Chinese subjectivity and the impossibility of melting into it alterity (i.e., Australia) hence fixating their particular experiences as a closure, which lead to resentment against themselves as well as against Australia. The sense of losing the center(s) is based on his disillusionment with both China and Australia, as he claims that both countries have failed to fulfill the ideals of the modern nation-state. In contrast to Ouyang's angry and bitter accusation, Julie Chang introduces to her readers in Taiwan an Australia like a paradise on earth, a country that can be admired for its democracy, social welfare system, and multiculturalism. She has written some painful experiences of migrants of various ethnic groups in her early book of Australia *Strangers in a Foreign Land* (1992) but even in that very book she has made the reader believe that she has sublimated the dilemma of conflicting cultures and moved toward increasingly more tolerant and more correct forms of harmony and integration.

¹³ The rapid growth in the numbers of people from Taiwan was a result of the Business Migration Program. See Cunningham's *Floating Lives*, p. 37-38.

The reading and its critique is absolutely not easy. As most university students are pro-independence and therefore the fans of the current president, Chen Shui-bian, who won the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, they often concur that this identity change is absolutely necessary and feel proud of the idea that Taiwan now finally has her own distinct voice (which often refers to the mostly used dialect). My job is to make them think about the difference between the two nationalisms—civic nationalism on Taiwan's side and the nationalism against foreign enemies on China's side. One thing they must learn from my course is a hard study of modern Chinese history in order to stop criminalising China, which has as much intention as Taiwan to assert its sovereignty. The Chinese writer Ouyang simply represents a tragic experience that is shared by all intellectuals who truly understand the history. In reflecting Taiwan's relationship with China, I quote a passage from *Creative Nation*:

This is the first national cultural policy in our country's history, but if that suggests a lack of will in the past, there was never a lack of interest. The debate goes back to the foundations of European settlement. Colonial Australians generally equated cultural goals with the successful transplantation of British civilisation to Australia; with the creation of 'a new Britannia in another world', in the famous words of William Charles Wentworth. This refrain continued well into this century, of course, but it has had to share the stage with the distinctly Australian voice that emerged with the birth of the nation 100 years ago.

The next teaching goal is to study the social systems and cultural formation Julie Chang describes in her books. I recommend John Hirst's *Australia's Democracy: A Short History* and Graeme Turner's *Making It National: Nationalism and Australian Popular Culture*. The students are often fascinated by the national values and Australian legends as well as Turner's critiques of them. Just when they start to wonder why the Australians look so different from the 'Westerners' they thought they knew, I teach how the West as an analytic concept is bankrupt and generally useless in guiding our observation about certain social formations and cultural phenomena encountered in many places. Andrew Jakubowicz's 'Hard Shell and Soft Center: Australia as a Truly Modern Nation' is hence a recommended article for understanding the changing Australian modernity.

The students also have to learn how not to glorify America lopsidedly—by studying the relationship between Australia and the United States. I recommend *Ambivalent Allies* by Dennis Phillips and *Americanization and Australia*, edited by Philip Bell and Roger Bell. I also use Jon Stratton and Ien Ang's article 'Multicultural Imagined Communities: Cultural Difference and National Identity in the USA and Australia' as the base to discuss multiculturalism as a policy.

I offer the course 'National Identity and Cultural Diversity: American and Australia' every two years: the first time was Fall 2002, with the student enrollment 25; the second time is Fall 2004, with the pre-registration number 44. I remember in the 2002 evaluation survey a student wrote: 'One thing that impressed me most in this course is reading the article "The Selling of the Australian Mind" (by Stephen Knight) in which I found out that many Australian people got an education with critical spirit and took it back into the community as something to use. I never thought my

university education could serve my neighborhood. Shouldn't English majors expect to develop their career by jumping into the flow of globalisation? Maybe it's time for me to think more about "roots" than "routes". This comment has motivated me to put Australian material into my other courses.

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