

**TAIWAN STUDIES IN EUROPE:  
GLOBAL PROCESSES, LOCAL CONTEXTS**

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**LSE TAIWAN RESEARCH PROGRAMME**

**(PPT 2) Context as ‘natural’ or as ‘given’**

**(PPT 2.1)** Studies of Taiwan need to be understood contextually, although this raises the issue of if and when ‘context’ is to be treated as ‘natural’ or as ‘given’. **(PPT 2.2)** As mentioned by Murray Rubinstein (CUNY), between the 1950s and 1980s, Area Studies approach presented the Chinese context for Taiwan in advance as natural. For example, Emily Ahern and Hill Gates in *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society* (1981), claimed:

Taiwan is the only province of China that has not undergone the sweeping changes of a socialist revolution: Chinese life has greater continuity with the past there... Anthropologists have therefore gone to Taiwan to study what they could no longer study in other provinces. It was Taiwan’s representativeness, not its special qualities, that first attracted their interest. (Ahern and Gates 1981: 8)

**(PPT 2.3)** Taiwan was therefore studied as an exemplary instance of Chinese culture, and thus as a window through which a pan-Chineseness could be brought into view.

For example, Emily Ahern’s book *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* in 1973. This Chinese Village is actually in Taiwan, my mother’s home town, 三峡, where three rivers met, but renamed by the KMT,

**(PPT 3) Context as a ‘construction’**

**(PPT 3.1)** As Paul Tremlett points out in ‘Introduction to *Re-Writing Culture in Taiwan*’, the problem was not that those anthropologists had not acknowledged the importance of contextualising their fieldwork data socially, but rather that they did not develop a theory of context. China, as a whole society, was uncritically assumed to be a ‘natural’ or ‘given’ context (Tremlett 2009: 7).

**(PPT 3.2)** Without a developed theory of context, contextualization appears to depend not so much on facts and evidence, but rather on the politically charged choices of the scholar and her or his historical location, and the tradition of scholarship to which she or he belongs.

**(PPT 3.3)** However, the context for Taiwan Studies is never natural, but is rather a 'construction', and this facilitates points of departure for critical thought and the opening of new perspectives and understandings.

#### **(PPT 4) The LSE tradition of scholarship**

I work at the LSE and belong to the LSE tradition of scholarship. The LSE is a social science school and does not encourage area studies. How a Taiwan Studies can be fitted in or adjusted to have always been challenge.

**(PPT 4.1)** Since its founding in 1895, LSE's core approach has been to understand globalization in the settings of social science questions from the perspectives of various localities.

**(PPT 4.2)** Area Studies at the LSE champions an interest on a particular area for its intrinsic value, for the changes resulting in that area's greater incorporation into global affairs, and the impact and influence that area is having onto the world.

**(PPT 4.3)** LSE Area Studies is thus not constrained by geographic or political borders, but is defined more by frontiers of global economy, global governance and regulations, and global civil society. It seeks to provide new and innovative ways in area studies and flows of people, issues, ideas and data which connect that area with the rest of the global world.

#### **(PPT 5) The Construction of Taiwan Studies at the LSE**

**(PPT 5.1)** LSE Taiwan Studies aims to place on a broader global agenda those policy and research questions specific to Taiwan.

**(PPT 5.2)** It seeks the best insights from different disciplines, to study questions of enduring interest in the social sciences, in a setting specific to Taiwan.

**(PPT 5.3)** It thus attempts to bring together individuals and expertise on Taiwan and its connected fields across the world to undertake cutting-edge research on social science

questions relevant to Taiwan and further to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and discussion between researchers working on associated social science questions.

### **(PPT 6) Themes of Comparative Perspective**

In 2005, Stephan Feuchtwang and I developed themes of Taiwan in comparative perspective:

**(PPT 6.1)** Old comparative research that was based on typologies of particular 'units' has been shown to be unfruitful; as such, we try to release a plurality of perspectives, unbounded by any kind of 'legitimizing' claim (e.g. that China and Taiwan share a common culture) and also going beyond any standard and out-dated Area Studies paradigm which is straight jacketed within set geographical boundaries.

**(PPT 6.2)** We have since 2006 launched and run a Taiwan in Comparative Perspective project. It contextualises processes of modernisation and globalisation through interdisciplinary and/or intersocietal studies of significant social science questions that use Taiwan as a point of comparison.

### **(PPT 7) LSE Taiwan in Comparative Perspective**

**(PPT 7.1)** This engages with the LSE core approach on globalization: Globalising processes of modernisation provide a framework for exploring a double contextualisation both in terms of local context to a specific place and global context, and thus for studying comparatively and building dialogues.

**(PPT 7.2)** Taiwan in Comparative Perspective performs a movement from part to whole: analysis of or through Taiwan can serve as a suggestive catalyst for the consideration of issues of (more) global significance, often issues of particular concern and enduring interest in an increasingly inter-connected world.

**(PPT 7.3)** Taiwan in Comparative Perspective seeks to use the study of Taiwan as a fulcrum for discussing theoretical and methodological questions, pertinent not only to study in/of Taiwan, but also to lead to generate more general understanding or theory with potentially universal scope and applicability.

### **(PPT 8) Taiwan and Ireland in Comparative Perspective: Small Islands, Big Issues**

In 2011, the LSE Taiwan Programme and the University College Dublin co-organised the first ever conference on Taiwan and Ireland in Comparative Perspective, entitled: “Small Islands, Big Issues”.

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 historical, political, economic and cultural contexts. A focus on human situation in both islands invites the application of discursive categories such as colonialism and decolonization; national identity and nationalism. For example,

**(PPT 8.1)** In the case of Ireland, quoted from Declan Kiberd, “If Ireland had never existed, the English would have invented it.” (1995: 9) Indeed, British colonial rule created self-consciousness in the population of being ‘Other’ and of being subordinate. British rule prompted resentment and resistance, leading to Irish Independence in 1922. However, the situation has continued to be complicated; Ireland experienced partition, with the north of the island remaining a part of Britain.

### **(PPT 9) Seeing Taiwan differently**

**(PPT 9.1)** This comparative perspective enables us: through different contexts of seeing Taiwan – by drawing forth new, unique and possibly odd implications that bear on what is being compared – to direct our attention to other contexts which on their surface might appear to have no connection.

**(PPT 9.2)** This bi-focal comparative 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 societal area, but as an important site for the study of global processes of transformation, change, and re-connection.