

January 2009. Some 30 researchers participated in the conference, which drew together experts working in the area to compare and exchange findings. It proved to be an excellent platform for fruitful and rewarding interchange, which subsequently led to a substantial revision of some of the papers that make up the present volume.

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1 Cultural difference, social recognition and political representation in Taiwan

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In a society increasingly polarized by the ethnicization of national politics, Taiwan seems to be an appropriate case to take up the quest to critically examine cultural identity, social recognition and political representation. Elsewhere this quest has generated a heated debate about the conditions for a just social order, culminating in the idea of a politics of difference. A politics of difference in Taiwan has two major implications. On the one hand, the idea obliges us to reflect upon the oppressive aspect of Taiwan's society and it offers a challenge to the predominant social order. On the other hand, the nature of group difference and the politics of representation peculiar to the case of Taiwan urge us to reconsider the limitations of multicultural politics and to look for a politics of difference that fits the local circumstances.

The idea of a politics of difference is often attributed to the seminal contribution of Iris Marion Young (1990). She sees modern societies as composed of social groups rather than universal individuals. These groups are defined by particular identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, sex and age. These identities are constitutive, at least partly, of a person's sense of history, affinity and separateness. For Young, the claims about universality and egalitarian rights simply mask the hegemonic oppression of the dominant groups. Justice, therefore, does not require the eradication of group differences, but on the contrary the development of institutions that respect the differences. At the same time, the differences between groups may cut across group boundaries so that an individual may have multiple group-differentiated identities. Oppression arises when group differences are conceptualized in terms of exclusive, unalterable and essential natures that subsequently allow groups to be organized in hierarchical relations of domination. A just politics is thus an order that recognizes the anti-essentialist nature of differences.

Over the last two decades the politics of difference has attracted much attention. Different approaches have been developed to provide the theoretical as well as policy foundations for the concept. These are usually grouped under the broad banner of multiculturalism. The central and common denominator in these different approaches is that liberal egalitarianism fails to live up to its own egalitarian ideals. Under the façade of universal rights, groups under a liberal state are supposedly free to pursue their cultural objectives on the same terms. Yet multicultural theorists have rightly pointed out that these terms, universal as they might appear, have been determined without the consent of the cultural

minorities. Taylor (1992) is thus sceptical about the possibility of the existing forms of liberal democracy in accommodating the politics of difference. For him, the basic axioms of equal rights and non-discrimination in liberal democracy ignore the differences of minority groups and hence prevent these groups from achieving equal recognition.

The relevance of the politics of difference for Taiwan is obvious. Well before the lifting of martial law in 1987 and the subsequent democratization in the 1990s, the rise of social movements and group consciousness had sparked off heated debates concerning group differences and identity politics. During the last two decades, the problem of Mainlander versus islander identities has become the most contentious issue in Taiwan society. Nonetheless, it has been increasingly recognized that the reification of group boundaries in such categories as islanders and Mainlanders presents major problems, especially regarding the assumptions that groups are ontologically given; that groups are internally homogenous; and that the particularistic identities do not overlap.

In this regard, Young's insight in her 1993 essay, titled 'Together in difference: transforming the logic of group political conflict', is appealing for a Taiwan that has been haunted by identity-driven conflicts. Here Young argues that the practical realities of modern social life as a product of urbanization and the market economy defy the attempt to enforce group difference as exclusive opposition since economic interdependence and spatial intermingling have resulted in many partial identities. The challenge for Taiwan is to go beyond ethnic identity as the sole concern for group boundary, to acknowledge the interests of other marginalized groups, and to look behind reified group boundaries in order to discover group differences as mediated social relations based on overlapping boundaries rather than exclusive opposition.

This volume undertakes the endeavour to explore the politics of difference among groups in Taiwan and the problems arising from their struggle for political recognition. It sets out to investigate the multiple facets of social domination in Taiwan and the ongoing struggles by minority groups to overcome subordination. The following questions are addressed in our chapters: how group identity and boundary is formed and transformed; how such identities and boundaries reproduce internal orders of domination; how different groups pursue political recognition, acquire political empowerment or assert their citizenship; how the politics of difference produces or subverts existing orders of domination and subordination; how the state manipulates and engineers group differences in ordering societal power; how taxonomic space is contested and legitimized; and how nation-building projects contradict with multiculturalist policies. In brief, this book will focus on the subordination and resistance of different minority groups as well as on the limitations of multicultural politics in Taiwan.

Cultural difference in Taiwan

While the core concern of a politics of difference is the creation of an ideal society of unity-in-diversity, the way that cultural differences are constructed in Taiwan

exhibits major limitations. Such limitations are reflected in a number of aspects. From the outset, attention has been focused on ethnicity. As Simon points out in Chapter 2, there is a conflation between 'culture' and 'ethnicity'. Multiculturalism is usually reduced to the celebration of ethnic specificities of the island's Hoklo, Hakka, Mainlander and aboriginal populations.

Despite criticisms from many sides, the idea of the 'Four Grand Ethnic Groups' has become the dominant discourse in present-day Taiwan. Representative organizations for the ethnic minorities have been set up and legislations enacted along these lines. These included the creation of the Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1996 and the Council of Hakka Affairs in 2001. Meanwhile, the Indigenous Peoples Education Law, the Indigenous Identity Law and the Indigenous Peoples Employment Protection Law were promulgated. In 2004, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) issued a Proclamation that denounced assimilation and integration policies, and it pledged to uphold the principle of multiculturalism, claiming that all ethnic groups are the masters of Taiwan, all languages of these ethnic groups are the languages of Taiwan.

There are historical reasons why cultural differences in Taiwan focused predominantly on ethnic identities. During the long period of martial law from 1949 to 1987, the ruling Kuomintang and its followers monopolized political offices. The majority of the population in Taiwan was excluded from participating in 'national' affairs. 'Local dialects' were banned in schools and the media. A segregation policy was maintained, both spatially and socially. The Kuomintang military personnel and their families were housed in special residential areas until the late 1990s. They were not counted in population statistics until 1968. Provincial origin was institutionalized in public job selection and resources distribution, including the recruitment of civil servants. Candidates who passed the civil service recruitment examination were selected in proportion to provincial quotas. Although more than 85 per cent of the population in the island were counted as belonging to the 'Taiwan province', they were regarded as representatives of only 5 per cent of the Chinese population since Taiwan was treated as one of the 36 provinces in the whole of China. In essence, this means that although the majority of candidates were born in Taiwan, their chance of being selected depended not only on their examination results but also on the quota allocated to 'provincial origins'. Candidates whose parents retreated from mainland China could make use of the quota allocated to their ancestral provinces in which the candidates themselves had never lived before. All these policies of constructed provincial boundaries – with the intended effect of highlighting Chineseness and undermining localness – were implemented in order to justify the mythical presence of a one China under the legitimate rule of the Kuomintang.

Because of that, democratization in Taiwan has meshed intimately with the rise of identity politics. Anti-authoritarian struggles in the 1980s and early 1990s took the form of anti-ethnic domination, resulting in further ethnic bifurcation. Subsequently, the Four Grand Ethnic Groups project was put forward as the basis of a politics of difference during the last two decades. It emphasizes cultural diversity and co-existence rather than cultural assimilation and integration. Although

aimed to move beyond singular cultural domination, it is narrowly confined to focus almost exclusively on ethnicity. Other loci of differences such as gender, religion, class and sexuality – which have long been the subjects of domination and oppression as well – are given much less attention. A good example is the discrimination towards homosexual groups discussed by Damm in Chapter 9. Despite the ostensible recognition given to gay and lesbian rights by the state, the government position remained vague and the homosexual groups achieved little legal recognition or improvement in their legal standing within Taiwan society and politics. The gay and lesbian discourse served nothing more than to present Taiwan to the world as a democratic and pluralistic 'nation'. Another case in point is the gender difference discussed by Tang, Bélanger and Wang in Chapter 8. In their case study of Vietnamese brides, differences in gender cultures are rarely recognized by Taiwan's patriarchal family structure. The clash in gender role expectations may result in domestic violence and abuses of the Vietnamese wives who often find themselves helpless, lonely and marginalized in the patriarchal society.

Even within the confines of ethnicity, Taiwan's multicultural project also excludes other ethnic minorities (such as foreign and mainland spouses) that have become a constitutive part of present-day Taiwan. A further limitation, as noted by Simon in his chapter, is the reduction of multiculturalism into narrow cultural practices and linguistic rights. Other forms of rights such as welfare protection do not enter the formula. The case of cross-Strait families and mainland spouses is illustrative. Despite the absence of any racial differences, cross-Strait marriages have been discouraged by the government in the name of national security and population quality. As Lu shows us in Chapter 7, mainland spouses were once denied access to work and social welfare, prompting their families to ally with political factions in order to challenge the restrictive policies and to gain social support for their rights to work and to welfare provisions.

Yet more problematic is the tendency of the multicultural project to reify group boundaries. It defines the four ethnic groups as being discrete, bounded, historically given, and culturally distinctive and enduring. In this regard, the idea that there is an ethnic group called Mainlanders, who essentially speak different dialects and came from different regions in China, and share only one common experience – coming to Taiwan after 1949 or being the offspring of these migrants – is indicative of the artificiality of such reification. Under such reification, the possibility of boundary crossing is denied. But, as Corcuff argues in Chapter 3, Mainlanders often navigate between a clear and an unclear consciousness of their identifications. It is a process through which Mainlanders acculturate themselves, consciously or unconsciously, by adopting manners, linguistic idioms and ideas shared by other so-called islander groups.

In short, the way in which cultural difference has been defined in Taiwan falls short of a politics of difference advocated by social theorists like Young and Taylor. Multicultural politics emerged as a reaction against the totalizing one-China hegemony during authoritarian rule. The Great China identity as constructed and perpetuated by the Kuomintang has been challenged as the basis of oppression and

domination. Yet such a challenge has quickly become a contentious process linked again to political rule, albeit under a different political logic.

Political representation and exclusion

The central problem about the constructed ethnic difference in Taiwan is that such a difference is translated into partisan politics. Electoral politics in post-authoritarian Taiwan has not been associated with competition in ideological orientations or policy preferences. Rather it is linked to ethnic representation, mediated by the contentious issue of state sovereignty.

Earlier we have noted that the anti-authoritarian struggle was mobilized in terms of anti-ethnic domination. During the late 1970s and 1980s, the opposition movement began to challenge the legitimacy of the Kuomintang and attack its mythical claim in representing the whole of China. Opposition leaders argued that people in Taiwan all paid taxes but could elect only 17 per cent of their representatives. They demanded political liberalization and equal value for each vote (Wang 2008a: 469).

The success of the opposition movement brought about general elections in the early 1990s. Since then parliamentary members have been elected directly from the local populace and no longer derived from provincial representation. Ethnicity emerged as a contentious issue when Mainlander elites felt threatened by the possibility of marginalization under the majority rule by the so-called Taiwanese. Such a sense of threat led to the split within the Kuomintang, when some Mainlander elites founded the New Party in protest against the Kuomintang under the leadership of Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui. As a result, the political spectrum was characterized by antagonism among three groups: the DPP who supported Taiwan independence, the Kuomintang who wanted to maintain the status quo, and the New Party who advocated for ultimate unification with China (Wang 2008b).

Power contention between antagonistic groups was taken up in the guise of the strife between Taiwan's independence from China and anti-independence. Survey studies over the years have shown that the overwhelming majority of Taiwan's populace consists of two groups: those who support Taiwan's independence and those who oppose it. There is hardly any market for unification with China (Wang 2001). Yet beneath the surface of sovereign contention, political interests are at stake because the claim regarding 'Taiwan' as a de facto sovereign state instead of the 'Republic of China' threatens the political survival of the old elite who present themselves as the guarding force of one-China. 'Taiwanization', on the other hand, benefits those who see themselves as representatives of the people living in Taiwan. Electoral mobilization subsequently linked partisan politics with ethnic representation.

In the last two decades, electoral politics and partisan competition have been driven mainly by the so-called Blue-Green antagonism, which is shorthand for the competition for political representation between two coalitional camps, and their desire to shape the national interests and state agenda. The Blue coalition is

composed of the existing and former Kuomintang elites, their Mainlander followers, and a substantial number of islanders. The Green coalition comprises mainly islanders, including the existing and former DPP members and their followers, anti-Kuomintang politicians and a small fraction of Mainlanders. The Blue-Green cleavage is essentially a dichotomy between two broad electoral coalitions, but in popular perception it is often conflated with the ethnic divide between the Mainlanders and Taiwanese, even though a large proportion of the Blue supporters are in fact islanders (Wang 2008b).

During regular elections at various levels of government, the Blue-Green cleavage is repeatedly reinforced. The resulting ethnic contention is not a manifestation of cultural differences. Rather it is a difference that is being selectively represented and politically appropriated to serve the interests of political entrepreneurs and organizations. Such selective representation and popular mobilization have been so successful that the whole society is now sufficiently polarized to the extent that calls to move away from the ethnic discourse are perceived as a conspiracy to undermine the opponents. For instance, although the Four Grand Ethnic Groups project is set to surpass the narrowly construed Mainlander-Taiwanese dichotomy, some Kuomintang supporters see it as a divisive ploy employed by the DPP to secure votes from the Hoklo majority. Even the debate about multiculturalism is seen by some as an ideological project aiming at the construction of a nation-state based on the subjectivity of the 'Taiwanese' (Chao 2006).

Most people in Taiwan have been aware of the polarizing effect of coupling partisan politics with ethnic representation. Yet Taiwan politics seems to be locked in a vicious circle of increasing politicization of ethnic differences, when a large part of ethnic tension in Taiwan is perpetuated by party politics. This vicious circle has been aggravated by recent developments in cross-Straits relations. China's emerging political and economic influence has intendedly and unintendedly shaped partisan politics in Taiwan. In the past two decades, the once number-one enemy has become the most important trade partner for Taiwan and the most desired destination for Taiwanese investment. Nearly one million Taiwan citizens are residing and working in China at the moment. For Taiwan businessmen, economic integration with China serves their interests best. They applauded the signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement in June 2010. The free trade agreement requires both sides to lift their tariffs for a wide variety of products. Yet such an arrangement may affect employment opportunities for the middle and lower classes in Taiwan. This in turn shapes their political attitude towards cross-Straits relations. At the same time, since the agreement was actively promoted and signed by the ruling Kuomintang, it has added to the opposition's scepticism towards the Kuomintang's motive for ultimate unification. Consequently, these developments have reinforced the ethnicity-sovereignty complex in Taiwan politics.

Notwithstanding the tension, ethnic conflict in Taiwan has not become volatile or violent. Compared to many other countries that have been plagued by ethnic violence or insurgencies, Taiwan has experienced a high degree of social stability. In fact, the gradual shift to local identification has been obvious. Beginning in 1990, the category of 'provincial origin' was replaced by 'place of birth' in household

registration and population census. The imagined community has shifted from a China that embraced a vast population and hinterland, to the island of Taiwan. Although there are serious disputes with regard to what this newly imagined community should be named – Republic of China or Taiwan – and where the future of this community should be heading, there is a high degree of consensus that all major political, economic and social developments should be undertaken in the interests of this island and its populace (Wang 2005). It is the strong sense of common fate under the same roof that accounts for the absence of any violent conflicts.

Yet this is still far short of the multiculturalist ideal of unity-in-diversity. On the one hand, ethnic relationships have been polarized by partisan politics, as already mentioned. On the other hand, ethnic bifurcation has overshadowed other differences. The selective representation of difference is all the more obvious when we observe that the cultural contents of what should be represented have received little attention. In fact, the problems of essentializing an ethnic identity will become evident once the cultural differences are examined under the microscope. Take the Hakka group as an example. The diasporic characteristics of the Hakkas make the identification of group differences extremely difficult. Diasporic Hakkas are characterized by hybridity and heterogeneity, contingently shaped by their interactions with different local communities with which Hakka groups adapt and negotiate their dialogic space and identity. In such circumstances, which differences should be recognized and which differences are to be represented? To circumvent the problem of heterogeneity, some Hakka groups strategically reformulated their identity as 'Taiwanese Hakkas' in order to secure political representation in the body politic (Wang 2007). The other Grand Ethnic Groups are no less heterogeneous than the Hakkas. The ethnic category of Mainlanders, as Corcuff argues in his chapter in this volume, is pluralistic and evolving, with as much difference within the group as that between the group and other groups. All in all, the manipulation of strategic differences between these ethnic groups serves less to establish identity than to exclude membership.

In this regard, the pursuit of identity politics seems to perpetuate rather than to challenge the process that gives rise to ethnic polarization in the first place. Other subordinate groups find little space for social recognition and representation in such circumstances. It is a form of cultural politics that sanctioned particular differences, and in doing so intentionally or unintentionally help establish a hierarchized order.

Strategies of recognition and the limitations of multicultural politics

The politics of exclusion, undertaken in the name of a politics of difference, invites the struggle for social recognition from groups that are excluded. Such struggle for social recognition by excluded groups is effectuated through a number of related strategies, involving devices of imagination, techniques of representation and political acts of empowerment. However, regardless of the effectiveness

of such strategies, the struggle for social recognition has important unintended consequences in the pursuit of multicultural politics.

The Kaohsiung dockworkers discussed in Chapter 4 by Chen and Ngo represent a typical example of the dilemma faced by excluded groups in their struggle for recognition. These workers were once rural farmers under severe state exaction, uprooted migrants in an alien city, urban squatters ineligible for social welfare, and piece-rate workers without an employment contract. Yet shared communal characteristics and experiences do not automatically provide a basis for demarcating group differences and defining political subjectivity. None of these group characteristics, including class, ethnicity, dialect and workplace, was taken up by the migrant dockworkers in their struggle for recognition. As Young (1993) rightly emphasized, individuals assume many partial identities as a result of economic interdependence and spatial intermingling under the market economy. Under such circumstances, group borders can become indecisive and overlapping; identities will be intermingling and innumerable.

However, if group boundaries are indecisive and innumerable, as Young argues, then there is no singular logic from which individuals define their cultural subjectivity. Put more bluntly, the traits being used to define group identities are often nothing more than strategic choices. Individuals thus draw upon a wide variety of historical experiences, common sufferings, spatial intimacies, and so on, to construct their identities.

Such shared experiences and memories constitute an important device of imagination for the construction of group identities. It is thus no surprise that the tragic events of the 28 February Massacre of 1945 (during which anti-Kuomintang riots met with bloody suppression) and the subsequent White Terror have been exploited by groups to foster a sense of Taiwanese consciousness. And, for the excluded groups, their shared sense of suffering provides a handy source of collective imagination. The culture of masculinity in Taiwan's labour movement is an exemplary case. As Ho points out in Chapter 5, Taiwan's workers adopted a masculine culture as a Freudian reaction to their being castrated and feminized during the authoritarian rule. They relied on the commonality of their gender role as a device of imagination to build their solidarity and to express their movement as rejuvenated manhood.

Equally important to the devices of imagination are the techniques of representation. The latter involves the projection of a constructed group identity on to the public discourse. This is the process where intensive struggle between competing group interests can be found, when each group intentionally or unintentionally undermines the cultural subjectivity of the others while trying to reclaim its own. A rich repertoire of techniques can be found. The writing and rewriting of the history of Taiwan by different groups is an example. The oral histories and documentations of subaltern groups is another. A further illuminating case is given by Lee and Shyong in Chapter 10 of this volume. In their discussion of the public art project of the Rapid Transit System in Kaohsiung, they show how the project aimed to present the past and future of Kaohsiung City and its people. Through the project, the Kaohsiung City government and

the Kaohsiung Rapid Transit Corporation and the artists displace their relatively well-defined agendas, even though Kaohsiung residents as the audience of the public art are undetermined. The public art project is thus a field of contentions where different constituencies in Kaohsiung respond to the political-economic ordering of the city.

Regardless of the effectiveness of these devices of imagination and techniques of representation, the subordinate groups' struggle to regain their subjectivity and to achieve social recognition may have a number of unintended consequences. In some cases, the struggle for social recognition may be successful and effective, but only at the expense of marginalizing one's own difference. The case of the mainland spouses typifies this outcome. As Lu argues in her chapter, mainland spouses succeeded in overturning their status as a discriminatory social and demographic category in state policies. Yet in trying to assert social recognition, they opted to submerge their difference and to emphasize their sameness with others. In doing so, they endorsed the dominant ideology of gendered and class-differentiated residential and social rights. In other instances, the struggle for political subjectivity creates new forms of oppression and subordination. Take the case of the dockworkers as example: Chen and Ngo note that these migrants, while working under an extremely exploitative labour regime, did not articulate their otherness into a common base of struggle against the source of oppression. Instead, these differences were mobilized as a medium for internal strife and mutual exploitation. In doing so the workers in fact produced and reproduced a relation of domination among themselves.

In contrast to the marginalization of difference and the creation of internal domination, under some circumstances the struggle for social recognition can lead to essentialization of group identities and reification of group boundaries. In fact, during the search for political empowerment, groups must by necessity be essentialized so that they can become the bearer of the rights (even if it is only discursive rights) to be parcelled out, at least temporarily. Spivak (1990) thus speaks of 'strategic essentialism', when marginalized groups find it necessary and advantageous to temporarily essentialize themselves and bring forward their group identity in a simplified way to achieve social recognition. Such strategic essentialism relies inevitably on a constructed simplification of group characteristics and homogeneity among group members. But then we are back to the problem of oppression and domination, this time created by homogenization of membership difference. This can be clearly seen in the Taiwan indigenous rights movement launched by aborigines, which demanded the rights of indigenous people to determine their own collective, community and individual names. Eventually 14 tribes obtained official recognition as indigenous groups with reified boundaries, leaving some groups to continue their struggle to break away from the state-sanctioned tribal label.

From the experiences of mainland spouses, aborigines and Kaohsiung dockworkers, we observe that it is not uncommon for a marginalized group to construct its identity and to seek representation by subordinating other weaker groups or its own membership groups, creating a ladder of subordination. A vivid example is Ho's description of the militant labour activism in Taiwan, where female workers

are deprived of any voice under a masculine culture. This presents a serious challenge to multicultural politics, the aim of which is to eliminate social oppression in a hierarchized social order. The problem is similar to that of nationalism, when a uniform national identity is forged in the struggle against colonial or imperial rule. Yet, if self-determination is taken seriously, a newly independent nation will face internal challenges from smaller imagined communities. And there is no logical limit to the subdivision.

In a politics of difference, the presence of such subdivision is unequivocal. Let us look at the aboriginal groups again. As Simon noted in his chapter, after the Atayal in Hualien and Nantou were recognized as a tribe, the Taroko group sought its independence from the Atayal as a separate tribe. As soon as the Taroko tribe succeeded in gaining recognition in 2004, the Seediq immediately claimed the right to declare independence from the Taroko. In multicultural politics, as Tebble (2002) rightly points out, once the fluidity of group membership is underlined, there is no ground to deny the importance of subgroups. Eventually, it becomes difficult to avoid regressing to individuals who are uniquely different and who are the ultimate target of oppression.

The modern state and the politics of rectification

The problem of social recognition brings out a further set of questions: who recognizes and legitimates a group? Who controls the power to name a group? And who determines the taxonomic space? If certain principles of exclusion are inevitable in modern society (Harvey 1993: 63), how should such principles be defined, and by whom?

Contentions inherent in shaping the taxonomic space and in controlling the power of naming may turn a politics of difference into a politics of rectification. In most instances, state policies offer the most authoritative source of legitimation in terms of naming. As such, the capture of state power remains the most important target of contention. This creates a number of concerns. First, in the case of Taiwan, the coupling of ethnic difference to partisan politics is precisely driven by the contest to control the power of rectification. In societies where strong legacies of social cleavages can be found, this can become a catalyst of polarization. The result may be social fragmentation and confrontation, rather than the romanticized ideal of unity-in-diversity.

Second, when state power is employed to legitimize and protect the cultural rights of subordinate groups, what is there to deter the state from exploiting the fluidity of group boundaries to manipulate group differences? The Four Grand Ethnic Groups is a prime example of the state manipulating through its power of rectification. Simon in his chapter reminds us that the name rectification campaigns by the Taroko and Seediq tribes were associated with electoral strategies during local elections, as a means of mobilizing the corresponding aboriginal voters. In general, a very important characteristic of the modern state is its ability to filter, hierarchize and order social relations. Through its power of naming, licensing and selective manipulation, the state induces cultural and social

categories to take on a governing role in the reproduction of specific social orderings. Ironically, this is the source of social oppression that multicultural politics seeks to address.

Third, when state power is exercised in ordering social hierarchy, the principle of inclusion and exclusion is not necessarily cultural. More often than not, one can find a capitalist logic in action when determining the taxonomic space. The categorization of immigrants is a good case in point. As Tseng and Komiya argue in Chapter 6, the underlying principle of labelling the outsider Southeast Asian immigrants in Taiwan is actually one of class bias. Through its immigration policies, the state not only screens outsiders but also creates new categories for outsiders from different class backgrounds. The lower-class immigrants are stigmatized as morally inferior and genetically deficient. By racializing this group of foreigners, exploitation and discriminatory policies are legitimated by highlighting the incompatibility of these immigrants with Taiwan's society.

This reminds us that otherness and differences should not be discussed in abstraction from material conditions. In many instances cultural differences merely serve as a disguise for class difference. Conversely, cultural identity can be used as a means of empowerment for the underclass. In the case of Taiwan's labour movement, the cultural notion of masculinity was a disguise for the workers' subordination as well as their tactical choice in the movement.

Is there a way to avoid the degeneration of the politics of difference into a politics of rectification? Here Harvey (1993: 64) rightly points out the peculiar tension between the politics which seeks to give full play to differentiated identities and the politics that seeks to eliminate the processes giving rise to such differentiated identities. The situation of the Kaohsiung dockworkers fully reflects such a tension. For a long period of time the identity of Budai and Yancheng was vital to the sense of selfhood of the majority of Kaohsiung's dockworkers. This sense of the self and collective identity depended on the perpetuation of a highly exploitative labour regime in the Kaohsiung harbour. Ironically, a change in the labour regime as a result of privatization led to a loss of identity for the workers who had been the targets of oppression. But the end of one oppressive labour regime was not automatically followed by an alternative order that was just and liberal. Subsequently the old dockworkers, devoid of a collective identity after the change, ended up facing a new regime in an atomistic way with little individual bargaining power. Put differently, the resources derived from group difference under peculiar historical circumstances could no longer be mobilized after the difference was eliminated. This occurred because the specific material condition (in this case the oppressive labour regime operating in the Kaohsiung dock) has changed, but the broader capitalist logic governing state-labour and business-labour relations remains unchanged.

Conclusion

Since the introduction of the idea, the politics of difference has invited criticism from many circles. For some liberals, multicultural defences of group rights and

group-orientated politics run against the democratic ideal of universal rights and participation for all, regardless of individual background (Barry 2000). For others, the politics of difference, in the words of Ransom (1997: 121), is liberal pluralism 'spiced up with a heavy salting of deconstructive rhetoric'. For the nationalists, the politics of difference undermines the creation of a national identity and instead sacrifices national unity for fragmentation and confrontation. For the socialists, identity politics blurs class relations and puts different groups in opposition to one another rather than unite them against capitalist relations of domination. Should we then leave the whole idea of multicultural politics behind and return to conventional liberal democracy?

Liberal presentations of tolerance and diversity, as Connolly (1995: 177–8) reminds us, fail to recognize adequately the contingent and relational character of social relations in which collective identities are constructed through the definition of difference. The politics of difference sensitizes us to such inadequacies, and draws our attention to the loci of social subordination and marginalization. We have benefited from this sensitivity. Looking at Taiwan society through the lens of multicultural politics, we have located many sources of domination and oppression, as the chapters in our volume have shown. Yet the idea is not free of contradictions and limitations when it is taken seriously as a blueprint for political action. Perhaps it is not unlike the concept of 'democracy', which is full of promises but also plagued with controversies and theoretical inadequacies. And, just like democracy, the politics of difference may be better seen as a form of civilization to be achieved through continuous dialogue with the past and present about the desirable mode of organizing social and public life.

The task of social analysts – or multiculturalist social analysts to be specific – is to facilitate this search. To borrow the position of Arendt, whose point is aptly summarized by Redhead (2002: 814):

A storyteller does not – à la Taylor – seek to articulate the features of an omnipresent moral ontology. Instead, a storyteller brings up to the present fragments of a cultural past in such a manner that they help their pluralistic audience to thematize a discontinuous (and thus nontotalizing), contestatory – and hence malleable – moral horizon through a self-consciously limited, nonexhaustive interpretation of a past that is predicated upon the contingent features of who they and their audience are.

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