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- 1 This volume on Taiwanese culture, edited by three distinguished scholars based in London, offers a new and fresh perspective on Taiwan studies and beyond. Its critical re-writing and re-reading of culture avoids a narrow area-studies perspective by focusing on issues such as trauma, memory, history, tradition, modernity, and post-modernity, enabling the reader to compare similar constellations and their problematisations in other parts of the world.
- 2 Two key issues characterise the volume: first of all, a critical but sympathetic analysis of the identity issue in Taiwan, which is shaped by globalisation and localisation and in particular by the unresolved issues of cross-straits politics and national identity. Secondly, most of the contributors reflect carefully on their own stances and their own perspectives, including their roles as anthropologists and academic observers. The Afterword by Stephan Feuchtwang, with its strong criticism of the lack of class analysis in most chapters, helps the reader to re-think the previous chapters and thus renders this work an outstanding contribution to post-modern cultural analysis.
- 3 The individual chapters include innovative aspects, and most of them provide the essence of a critical re-valuation of culture in a postmodern society. The introduction by Paul-Francois Tremlett problematises the work of anthropologists in general and provides a useful overview of how during recent years the ethnographic description, once seen as neutral, has become a more multi-faceted issue where the “mono-logic of the all-too-often white, Western, male knowing subject” (p. 1) should be avoided. A new understanding has been gained, not only of anthropological works, but also of the humanities in general through the self-conscious critical re-thinking of anthropology and through reflection on questions of representation, translation, cross-cultural understanding, methodology, textuality, impartiality, interpretation, and contextualisation.

- 4 Chapter 1, “Re-writing religion: questions of translation, context, and location in the writing of religion in Taiwan” by Fang-Long Shih, examines the writing of religion in Taiwan and, often from a feminist perspective, deals with the re-inventing of that writing. One of her basic arguments is the question of translation – how terms for religion, such as *zongjiao*, have entered Taiwan and have undergone various interpretations. Shih perhaps underestimates the self-reflection of today’s Taiwanese, who are very much aware of the different interpretations of religion in the West. Nevertheless, Christianity and also many Buddhist groups in Taiwan have probably adopted a more Western understanding of religion than that described by Shih, and religion in contemporary Taiwan is no longer inscribed into the routine of daily life as it was in the past. Shih herself admits this in her conclusion when she mentions the fact that religion in Taiwan should not be understood as part of a specific Chineseness, but as a partial and autonomous sphere in a postmodern and global society.
- 5 Chapter 2, “Re-riting death: secularism and death-scapes in Taipei” by Paul-Francois Tremlett, provides a critical re-reading of death and the dispositions surrounding death. By citing examples from contemporary Taiwan and also from Singapore and Hong Kong, Tremlett shows how old beliefs have been superseded by modern developments and economic factors such as the scarcity of land. The state and private enterprises have created new forms of death rituals and memory that are unique, on the one hand, but on the other, have left behind traditional religious beliefs that were once so important in the daily lives of the Taiwan populace and other Chinese societies.
- 6 Chapter 3, “Writing indigeneity in Taiwan” by Scott Simon, is probably the most personal account of anthropology in this edited volume: Simon offers his reflections from the position of an academic who has been personally involved in the lives and political struggles of the indigenous people in Taiwan.
- 7 Chapter 4, “Re-writing museums in Taiwan” by Edward Vickers, offers a comparison with new museums in the People’s Republic in China to show how, during the last decade, new museums in Taiwan have shed pan-Chinese identity and history while creating a certain distance between Taiwan and the neighbouring mainland by focusing on both localisation and globalisation.
- 8 Chapter 5, “Re-writing language in Taiwan” by Henning Klöter, provides an account of language policy in Taiwan with a specific focus on Taiwanese (Tai-gi), and offers useful insights into the question of language vs. dialect and the ideological aspects of every language policy in Taiwan. Unlike other authors, Klöter refuses to comment on Taiwan’s socio-linguistics policies, and maintains the objectivity of an observer.
- 9 Chapter 6, “Writing Taiwan’s nationhood: language, politics, history” by Mark Harrison, discusses the issues of identity in great detail, making it clear that identity should be understood as a process of ongoing negations and (re-)constructions within social, cultural, and political life. He bases his analysis on various sources and historical elements, including reports of travellers to mainland China in the early 1990s after travel restrictions were lifted, the nativist literature (*xiangtu*, *bentu*) of the 1970s, which embraced discussions of identity during a period that was still shaped by martial law, and the representation of Taiwan in various photographs.
- 10 Chapter 7, “Re-writing cinema: markets, languages, cultures in Taiwan” by Chris Berry, provides a historical overview of cinema in Taiwan, from the early years when ROC cinema tried to emphasise the shared cultural roots of the Taiwanese and Chinese, to

phases when cinema acted as a tool for creating a “pure” Chinese identity, through to the Taiwan New Cinema of the 1980s when, on the international scene, Taiwan cinema was seen as a very specific source of hybrid identity. He concludes that today’s Taiwan cinema has become almost invisible due to the growing influence of Hollywood.

- 11 Chapter 8, “Re-writing art in Taiwan: secularism, universalism, globalisation, or modernity and the aesthetic object” by Felix Schoeber, examines Taiwanese modern art and its representation at international art exhibitions. He shows that it was not only political developments (such as democratisation and the lifting of martial law) but also internal striving for modernity and modernisation that has shaped Taiwanese contemporary art and led to contradictions between the ideas of the scientific gaze and the aestheticised object (p. 178).
- 12 The final chapter, “Re-writing education: ‘learning to be Taiwanese?’” by Stuart Thompson, presents an analysis of school books and short scenes taken from movies about schooling in Taiwan, along with a critical re-evaluation of Western writing on education in Taiwan.
- 13 To summarise, the profound reflections of its editors and contributors allow this volume to offer valuable insights into various aspects of culture in Taiwan, such as identity conflicts and the contradictions between tradition and modernity, and also to critically question Western writings on Taiwan during the last 50 years. The wide variety of perspectives for comparative research offered here will certainly serve as a valuable resource for students and researchers, not only in the area of Taiwan Studies, but also in the spheres of anthropology and social science in general.