

Frontiers, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Reflections on Working at the Margins

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ABSTRACT

This essay traces my personal research experiences and trajectory, reflecting in particular on my engagement with frontier or border studies. I divide this research experience into four main periods: research on the Taiwanese feminist movement; research on Taiwan's imagined geography; research on Eurasian biracial identity; and Inter-Asian Studies. As a result of the research topics I have pursued over the years, I have spent my intellectual career at the margins, studying frontiers, borderlands, contact zones, mixed-race, and diasporas. I have come to realize that existing on the margins of academia or scholarly institutions is not a condition I seek to avoid, for it is at the margins and borders, I argue, that one can gain essential insights about the center, insights that come in both positive and negative form. Over the years, I have gained great intellectual stimulation and energy from studying one marginalized place in particular – Taiwan. This essay also critiques the North American-centric tendencies of North American academia, and the ethnocentric presumptions that often characterize Western scholarship. Finally, I emphasize that although we are used to considering Taiwan as a peripheral place, viewed from various critical standpoints, it is worth asking: which is periphery and which is center?

Keywords: Taiwan History, History of Feminism, Race Studies, Frontier Studies, Diaspora Studies