Taiwan in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction

Richard Louis Edmonds and Steven M. Goldstein

For much of the past half-century, Taiwan's development has been inextricably tied to the drama of the Chinese civil war and the Cold War in Asia. Both the government on Taiwan and many of its supporters abroad have sought to link the island's history with that of the mainland. The result has been partially to obscure the distinctive history of Taiwan and, with this, to ignore factors which have decisively shaped the development of the island. The bulk of the papers in this volume seek to contribute to the ongoing efforts of scholars in Taiwan and abroad to illuminate the early 20th-century portion of this history and to join it to discussions of the post-war evolution of the island.

With the end of the Second World War, Taiwan was returned to China after 50 years as a Japanese colony. The Kuomintang-controlled Republic of China on the mainland took over the administration of Taiwan almost immediately, subjecting its citizens to a brutal, authoritarian rule. In 1949, after defeat on the mainland, Chiang Kai-shek brought the remnants of that government to Taiwan, where, claiming to be the legitimate government of all of China, he established a temporary national capital in the one province completely under its control.

It seemed at the time that this hollow claim would be silenced by an imminent Communist invasion. The outbreak of the Korean War, however, and fears of Chinese Communist expansion brought renewed economic, military and diplomatic support from the United States of America. Thanks to Washington's backing, until the 1970s much of the world, often with reluctance, followed the American lead in recognizing the Republic of China government on Taiwan as that of all of China. The Cold War identification of the émigré government as "free China" and discussions of the option of recognizing "two Chinas" obscured the fact that this island and its population had, in fact, never participated in the mainland events which were now coming to define the essence of Taiwan. The island's history was being seamlessly merged with the drama of the five decades of mainland upheaval that followed the Sino-Nipponese War, a period of Chinese history of which it was barely a part.

At the end of that war in 1895, the island was ceded to Japan by the Qing Dynasty and for the next 50 years it was governed as an imperial colony. For five decades, the trajectory of the island's development was unaffected by the political and economic trends dominating mainland politics. This Chinese island frontier now was developing in accordance with the themes and priorities of Japanese imperialism. The island that was returned to China in 1945 was, thus, neither a *tabula rasa* nor simply another Chinese province. It was a unique society which, in some of the

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same ways as had been the cases with Hong Kong and Macau, had seen its social, economic and political systems fundamentally transformed by its colonial rulers.

It did not take long for the occupying Kuomintang to realize that while the population on Taiwan was ethnically Chinese, they had aspirations and priorities very different from the relocated mainland government. After eliminating large numbers of potential opposition leaders, the émigré government turned to the task of reconstructing the island's identity. The new government sought to sever the population's ties (linguistic, literary, political or economic) with their distinctive history as it reoriented the island's past as well as its future to the mainland. Much as the Japanese sought to weaken the Chinese identity of the people of Taiwan, the subsequent Kuomintang government sought to weaken any influence that the Japanese colonial experience (or, for that matter, pre-colonial history) might have had on the post-war population.

During the last two decades, the study of Taiwan both on the island and abroad has undergone a dramatic change. In the West, most notably in the United States but also to some extent in Europe, where studies of modern history or politics had been especially tendentious, increasing numbers of scholars in economics, sociology, anthropology and geography began to examine the island apart from the anti-Communist battles of the past. In Japan, after several decades of shyness, study of Taiwan became more popular and bold in its suggestions that the island was more than a Chinese territory that had been occupied by an earlier imperialist generation, although this is not meant to imply that the vast majority of Japanese scholars were attempting to reclaim any sort of sovereignty over the island. On Taiwan, the increasing absurdity of Kuomintang claims to represent all of China and the progress towards democratization fostered cautious beginnings towards a study of the island's indigenous and colonial past. It soon became apparent not only that history did not start for Taiwan in 1945, but that important aspects of the present ranging from ecology to economic development to national identity were to be found in its distinctive heritage.

A major purpose of the conference from which this volume developed was to present some of the results of this recent orientation. The papers concerned with domestic developments are attempts to demonstrate the kinds of insights in the evolution of Taiwan that can be provided by extending the frame of reference for study of the island to encompass the impact of two regimes imposed from abroad – Japanese colonialism and the émigré government of the Kuomintang. While the conference focused on the importance of illuminating these new perspectives on Taiwan's development, the organizers also realized that the impact of contemporary events – especially in the realm of foreign policy – also had to be addressed.

Thus, papers addressing Taiwan's relations with key international players such as Japan, the United States of America and South-East Asia were included. The important relation with the Chinese mainland is touched on throughout the collection. As a small island, Taiwan clearly

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has been buffeted by its relations with these surrounding big powers as well as Europe in certain economic areas and diplomatic battles with the People's Republic of China in Latin America and Africa since the 1950s. Unfortunately, it was felt there was not room to include contributions which dealt with these latter two aspects of Taiwan's development although they are likely to be quite important in some future volume on Taiwan in the 21st century. In any event, the contributions give us a wide-ranging view of key issues from the past century.

Richard Louis Edmonds starts off by giving a sequential picture of the development of Taiwan's landscape during the 20th century through four aspects: changes in the administrative geography, agriculture, population, and the impact of earthquakes. Edmonds finds the small scale of the island allowed succeeding governments to manipulate land use easily. These aspects demonstrate ways 20th-century Taiwan was transformed from a Japanese colonial agricultural base to the densely populated urban industrial society of today. Edmonds notes that there has been a general diversification of activity in Taiwan with the north urbanizing and industrializing faster than the south. He also points out that the efforts by the Japanese to remove Taiwan's Chinese identity and by the Nationalists to downplay the islands' Japanese legacy were not completely successful and the mixture of these two influences, along with American involvement, have reinforced the growth of a nascent Taiwanese identity.

Cheng Tun-jen offers an overview of the evolution of the economy through "three successive regimes in Taiwan, the colonial, the nationalist authoritarian, and the democratic." His central theme is the importance of the state in all periods as the co-ordinator of economic transformation. The body of the article demonstrates how these very different development states have managed the transitions from an agricultural economy to a progressively more complex industrial economy over the past century. Joining those who have recently reaffirmed the continuing importance of the state during a time of increasing globalization, democratization and liberalization, Cheng argues that although the state is reconfiguring its role, it remains an important force in Taiwan as well as a key factor in that island's weathering of the Asian financial crisis.

Chris Howe takes us through economic developments in Taiwan during the 20th century focusing on the relative roles of external and internal factors in an attempt to assess Taiwan's current and future economic impact. He constructs a time frame which divides the century into three major periods: the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), the period of American hegemony (1950–1987 with a subdivision of strong to weak hegemony from the early 1960s) and the period of re-integration into Asia (1988–). The crucial factors for Howe are: small size of the island's economy, its fluctuating political/strategic weakness, and its location at the focal point of East and South-East Asian economic interaction. Howe sees Taiwan at times constrained as to what it can do as an economy by its small size, whereas at other times small size has not been a disadvantage. In times of weakness from surrounding

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powers the island has been able to assert its economic and political independence to greater degrees. Its geographic location has been a distinct advantage in the age of APEC and regional integration, but Howe sees a danger for Taiwan's economy in the future if it shifts from the USA as a hegemon to the People's Republic of China.

Chen Dung-sheng's article reiterates the themes of the distinctive evolutionary path of Chinese society on Taiwan, the continuity between the colonial and post-colonial periods and an emerging society. Chen argues that, in contrast to the pattern on the mainland, society on the island evolved from solidarity based on the co-origin of in-migrants to blood relationships and territory based relations. These traditional relationships, he argues, persisted during the colonial rule of the Japanese and the authoritarian period of Kuomintang governance. The emphasis on political control that was characteristic of both regimes conditioned an economic structure in which small, family-financed firms played a large role and the traditional social structure was strengthened to the detriment of civil society by continued state dominance. Turning to the contemporary period, he finds that civil society has, indeed, begun to develop, but not as a result of political change which has drawn on and maintained much of the traditional bases of solidarity. Rather, focusing on changing patterns of solidarity in the integrated circuit industry, he argues that economic transformation, and not political change, has contributed more significantly to the growth of civil society.

Angelina Yee looks at Taiwan's literature of the 20th century by looking at a selection of texts which place consciousness as the main subject matter. For her, it is a surprise just how much good literature was able to survive the period of Japanese colonization and the period of retrocession to Chinese rule. A Taiwanese identity seems to have been established as a foil to the Japanese, the Nationalists and the Chinese Communists, as well as against internal factors such as repression of aboriginal people and traditional patriarchy. The result is a multi-faceted notion of Taiwan as literary place. She concludes on the note that a "hegemonic" Taiwanese identity could be forced upon the residents of the island repressing other voices and views of what Taiwan should be.

In their contribution, Chu Yun-han and Lin Jih-wen look at the political development of Taiwan through the prism of two "regime cycles" and an evolving Taiwan regime at the *fin de siècle*. In doing so they present a unique comparison between the Japanese colonial government (1895–1945) and the "Nationalist émigré regime" (1945–1996); two regimes "that principally defined the political experiences of the Taiwanese people in the 20th century." Noting the differences between the two, the authors also find striking similarities, particularly in the manner in which the state during both periods set about to transform society only to find itself "subsequently transformed by the very society it governed." The cumulative effect of these regimes is seen in Taiwan as it enters the 21st century with an increasingly assertive society challenging state dominance and a "growing aspiration for a separate Taiwanese identity."

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The final three contributions are concerned with contemporary Taiwan's external relations. The contribution by Soeya Yoshihide looks at the very important relationship of Japan with Taiwan – arguably the overall most important relationship of the 20th century. Soeya focuses on Taiwan as a security issue for Japan which throughout the century had important implications for Japan's policies with mainland China. Colonialism in Taiwan, aggression against East and South-East Asia, and Japan's subsequent occupation by the United States set the stage for Japan's *de facto* "two Chinas" policy. It seems that as a political entity Japan moved from radical reactionary aggression towards Asia originally in self-defence against Western colonialism in the first half of the century to a "balancing act" policy which tried to maximize economic and strategic benefits without upsetting the USA or, secondarily, the People's Republic of China. This led Japan to recognize the Republic of China on Taiwan up to 1972 and then to switch to the PRC after the expulsion of the ROC from the United Nations and the Sino-U.S. rapprochement in 1971–72. Japan's post-war policy toward the island became dominated by its concerns, first to placate the USA and secondly to minimize offence to its larger and culturally influential continental neighbour. This was facilitated in the minds of the Japanese since their differing relationships with China and Taiwan prior to 1945 made it easy for the public to accept them as two separate entities. Japan's policy of recognizing the PRC and yet maintaining substantial contact with Taiwan (in reality a non-policy) went on to become a model for the relations that emerged between other countries and Taiwan – most notably the USA itself.

Steven Goldstein and Randall Schriver examine another aspect of Taiwan's diplomacy – its relations with the United States – and similarly stress its limitations. This relationship, based on the Taiwan Relations Act passed by the United States Congress in 1979, is often seen as the cornerstone of Taiwan's security in the face of mainland determination to achieve reunification. It not only provides for the sale of American arms to the island, but, in the eyes of many, represents a virtual treaty, committing the United States to the defence of Taiwan. In their study, Goldstein and Schriver examine the origins of the legislation and the manner in which it has evolved in response to the American domestic politics and international developments of more than two decades. Their finding, that the nature of the American commitment is decisively shaped by these two factors, suggests that this security cornerstone remains an "uncertain" relationship.

Michael Leifer assesses the results of the island's "pragmatic diplomacy" with the ten states of South-East Asia, all of which recognize Beijing as the legitimate government of China. He finds that while such informal diplomatic ties to compensate for Taiwan's uncertain international status have achieved significant successes in maintaining economic ties with the area, they have been of only limited use as a tool to enhance Taiwan's international standing. South-East Asian states have resisted any attempt by Taipei to use these ties as a stepping stone to

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more formal recognition as a sovereign state. A major factor influencing this behaviour has been a reluctance to anger Beijing, whose views set the limits for Taiwan's acceptance in the area. It seems that despite its successes in promoting the island's economic interests, "pragmatic diplomacy" holds little promise of being able to take Taiwan out of its current state of "diplomatic limbo" and towards the status of a sovereign international actor. Taiwan's pragmatic diplomacy rests on a structure of ambiguity that if ever clarified would make that diplomacy much less than pragmatic.

In sum, what emerges from these papers is the somewhat obvious but often understated conclusion that 1945 and 1949 do not present definitive divisions in the environmental, economic or socio-poltical evolution for Taiwan. Rather, to understand the course and content of this evolutionary process more fully, it is necessary to view the development of the island from at least a century-long perspective. This permits not simply a greater appreciation of the historical roots of these trends, but also of the chronologically diverse turning-points in their evolution. By taking such a view, these articles hopefully provide a more nuanced and complex view of the present nature, and future trajectory, of Taiwan.

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