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The Evolution of a Taiwanese National Identity

ABSTRACT: This Special Report explores the growth of a Taiwanese national identity from historical, cultural, demographic, economic and political perspectives, factoring in Taiwan's history, ethnic divide, and domestic politics. June Teufel Dreyer of the University of Miami argues that a sense of identity apart from that of mainland China has existed in Taiwan for more than a century, and its specific definition now incorporates those residents coming from the mainland in the late 1940s as well as their offspring. Thomas B. Gold of the University of California at Berkeley contends that the Taiwanese quest for identity has risen from below, reflecting the weakened capacity of the KMT state to impose its official identity over society. Shelley Rigger of Davidson College disaggregates the concept of national identity into four distinct issues—provincial origin, nationality, citizenship and policy preference—and points out that the complexity of the identity issue resists easy analysis. While the three essays agree on the roots of a Taiwanese national identity, they differ on the direction of its evolution, as well as its implications for cross-Taiwan Strait relations.

Introduction

Gang Lin

Taiwan's political democratization has released a growing consciousness of national identity on the island over the last decade. Culturally, an ethnic division between native Taiwanese and those who came from the mainland during the 1940s has arisen because of their different historical experiences and even their languages (Mandarin vs. Taiwanese). Politically, the two ethnic groups tend to have different ideas about the future relationship (unification vs. independence) between Taiwan and mainland China. In recent years, the growth of a new and inclusive Taiwanese identity, as well as education and intermarriages, has helped reduce cultural cleavage between ethnic groups. Many Taiwanese people now define themselves as both Taiwanese and Chinese. However, a growing number of people on the island call themselves Taiwanese but not Chinese.

What are the main reasons for the growth of a Taiwanese identity? What has been the impact of the "February 28 incident" in 1947 on ethnic conflict in Taiwan? Is the growth of a separate Taiwanese national identity inevitable in the years to come? What about ten years from now, when Taiwan's population is completely dominated by native Taiwanese? The following three essays examine these and related issues from various perspectives.

In the first essay, **June Teufel Dreyer** of the University of Miami argues that a sense of identity apart from that of mainland China has existed in Taiwan for more than a century. While 50 years of Japanese colonial rule (1895-1945) contributed to the development of distinct habits and attitudes of the Taiwanese people, the arrival of the Nationalist (KMT) government and its ill-disciplined soldiers from the mainland quickly disillusioned native Taiwanese. The traumatic February 28 incident, when thousands of Taiwanese were slaughtered by the KMT military, left searing memories in the consciousness of native resi-



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dents, and became the first marker in the development of a modern Taiwanese identity, Dreyer maintains. Despite KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek's efforts at culturally redefining Taiwan's inhabitants as Chinese, a spontaneous movement of literary nativization by a group of indigenous writers emerged in the 1960s. According to Dreyer, the 1979 Kaohsiung incident, resulting from a mass demonstration and KMT crackdown, was another marker in the evolution of a Taiwanese identity.

Taiwan's democratization in 1986 has accelerated the development of a new and more inclusive national identity on the island, Dreyer continues. Under the leadership of Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui, a memorial to the victims of the February 28 incident was built in Taipei, and a "new Taiwanese" identity began to incorporate those residents coming from the mainland in the late 1940s as well as their offspring. While a separate Taiwanese identity has continued to develop under the Chen Shui-bian administration, Dreyer argues that its specific definition might be changed in the future. More than half a million Taiwan citizens now work and live in the mainland. What effect this will have on their self-identification remains to be seen, Dreyer concludes.

The second essay, by **Thomas B. Gold** of the University of California at Berkeley, explores a Taiwanese national identity from the perspective of state-society relations. According to Gold, the Taiwanese quest for identity arose from below, reflecting the weakened capacity of the KMT state

to impose its official identity over society. In the early days, the KMT state arrogated substantial amounts of all forms of power to itself, rendering society disorganized and powerless. It implemented martial law, maintained power to distribute scarce capital and resources, denied autonomy to social organizations, defined Taiwan as a province of the Republic of China (ROC), and made Mandarin Chinese the national language in schools, governmental offices, and the media. Beginning in the late 1970s, however, the initiative in Taiwanese life shifted away from the authoritarian party-state to society in the form of social movements. As Gold observes, non-KMT politicians began to call for self-determination and push for the termination of martial law. At the same time, social activism addressing nearly every realm of life exploded variously. Within the KMT, President Lee Teng-hui turned out to be the most unexpected political entrepreneur in pursuing a Taiwan-first line.

Over this period, structural shifts have opened up spaces for action by dissenters against the previously official definition of a Taiwanese identity, Gold continues. The expansion of the private sector transferred substantial resources and social prestige to entrepreneurs, most of whom were Taiwanese. As a result of Taiwan's democratization, formerly forbidden topics became debatable. Eventually, the proponents of Taiwan as a province of China became increasingly isolated. Gold concludes that a separate identity is very real to many people in Taiwan, and that Beijing must find ways to understand its origins and implications in the island's cultural and political life.

In the third essay, **Shelley Rigger** of Davidson College argues that the discussion of a Taiwanese national identity often suffers from a lack of clarity about concepts and definitions. Disaggregating the concept of national identity, Rigger raises four distinct issues that are crucial to the discussion, including 1) provincial origin, 2) nationality, 3) citizenship and 4) policy preference.

As Rigger elaborates, provincial origin (ethnic identity) is the most politically significant demographic division in Taiwan's society. The island's residents were divided, legally and socially, between native Taiwanese whose families came to the island before 1895 and "mainlanders" whose families arrived between 1945 and 1950. While ethnicity was

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an ever-present component of political discourse in the early and mid-1990s, the intensity and frequency of ethnic politicking have diminished over the past several years, Rigger notes. Nationality (cultural identity) is the subject of heated debate, because “Chinese” and “Taiwanese” are not mutually exclusive identities. By contrast, citizenship (political identity) is already a settled issue, as residents of Taiwan believe that they are citizens of a unique state different from the People’s Republic of China.

Rigger argues that policy preference for Taiwan independence or Chinese unification is the most complicated issue related to a Taiwanese identity. A “Taiwanese” identity does not equate to support for independence, and assertions of Taiwan’s statehood are not necessarily indicative of a desire for formal separation from the mainland. According to Rigger, most research on the independence-unification debate rests on flawed assumptions that the two positions are mutually exclusive and that they represent the only meaningful options for the Taiwanese people. Rigger contends that a plurality of Taiwanese is willing to accept either independence or unification under the right conditions, and that the percentage of Taiwanese who can accept either option has increased over the 1990s. The complexi-

ty of the identity issue resists easy analysis, Rigger emphasizes.

In his commentary on these three essays when they were first presented at a July 17, 2003 seminar sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson Center’s Asia Program, John J. Tkacik Jr. of the Heritage Foundation argued that preference for independence or unification is inextricably intertwined with one’s ethnic identity. For example, when asked who had the right to determine the future of Taiwan, only 11 percent of respondents said that residents of mainland China should also be included. According to Tkacik, this figure perfectly reflects the percentage of “mainlanders” in Taiwan, suggesting a close relationship between ethnic and national identities. Tkacik concluded that how Taiwan resolves its identity issue in the years ahead will decide the island’s future.

In brief, this Special Report explores the growth of a Taiwanese national identity from historical, cultural, demographic, economic and political perspectives, factoring in Taiwan’s history, ethnic divide, and domestic politics. While the three essays agree on the origin of a Taiwanese national identity, they differ on the direction of its evolution, as well as its implications for cross-Taiwan Strait relations.

Taiwan's Evolving Identity

JUNE TEUFEL DREYER

[The democratic] process can...further establish a nation that is supported by Taiwanese people, different from China in the legal aspect and known to other nations in the world...a sense of glory in the nation will be shaped among the people. All ethnic groups in Taiwan will not only become more harmonious amid the new sense of gemeinschaft created by the newly structured history but also develop genuine amicability toward China...Learn to be Taiwanese first. Only this is the road to redemption.¹

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A sense of identity apart from that of mainland China has existed on Taiwan for more than a century. Although little discussed until recently, many factors have shaped the views and perceptions of residents of Taiwan. The Polynesian cultures of the aboriginal tribes, occupations of varying lengths and degrees of intensity by the Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch, 50 years of colonization by an assimilationist Japan, and a period of strong American influence after World War II have all contributed to the development of distinct habits and mindsets of the Taiwanese people. Several decades of isolation from the mainland after 1949 also resulted in changes in the prevailing culture on Taiwan. Meanwhile, under the influence of Mao Zedong's communist government, the culture of the mainland was changing as well, further widening the identity difference between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

HISTORICAL LEGACIES

While the half-Japanese Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga, 1624-1662) is usually given credit for sinicizing Taiwan, he lived only a little over a year after fleeing to the island following the Manchu conquest of the mainland. Even Koxinga's forays back to the mainland from his Taiwan base do not resemble loyalist attempts to re-take the mainland from the alien Manchus, as has sometimes been alleged, but rather the practice of his family's trade—piracy. Although the prevailing culture of Taiwan derives from Fujian, where most of its immigrants originated, differences in climate and available



building materials led to modifications in building techniques and other practices. A short-lived Formosan Republic, founded in resistance to Japanese occupation in 1895, is the first political manifestation of a sense of separate identity (see stamps issued by the Formosan Republic in Figure 1). Its collapse was followed by a decade of passive resistance in towns, and sabotage and guerrilla actions in more remote rural areas. The majority of the population, however, came to accept Japanese rule from a mixture of motives: the futility of resistance, fear of punishment, benefits of collaboration, and genuine admiration for Japanese accomplishments.

Although the nature of Japanese society precluded the complete acceptance of Taiwanese into it, a number of Taiwanese were able to study in Japan under privileged circumstances. One of them, Peng Ming-min, elected a course in French literature and was intrigued by the writings of Ernest Renan:

[Renan's] essay entitled *Qu'est qu'une nation?* ("What is a Nation?") touched me as a Formosan, rather than as the loyal Japanese I was supposed to be. He raised the fundamental idea that neither race, language, nor culture form a nation, rather, a deeply felt sense of community

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and shared destiny. In the context of the savage war in China, what could this idea mean to a Formosan?²

Such ideas led Peng and many of his peers to embark on a life-long quest to establish just such a Formosan, or Taiwanese, nation. Japan's surrender in 1945 led it to relinquish control over Taiwan. Many of the island's inhabitants were pleased to see the end of Tokyo's draconian rule, though the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek's corrupt Kuomintang (KMT) government and his ill-disciplined soldiers quickly led to disillusionment and discontent. In late February 1947, a scuffle between soldiers and a crowd protesting the military's mistreatment of an elderly woman who was selling cigarettes without a license led to a massacre. Thousands of Taiwanese were slaughtered with little regard for their actual complicity in the incident. This traumatic event left searing memories in the consciousness of Taiwan residents, and what came to be known as the "February 28 incident" was perhaps the first marker in the development of a Taiwanese identity in the twentieth century.

TAIWANESE IDENTITY RESHAPED UNDER CHIANG KAI-SHEK

The collapse of the KMT government on the mainland added two million refugees to an already strained social milieu. Natives of Taiwan referred to mainlanders as "taros," apparently because the long, messy hair of many refugees reminded them of the black roots clinging to recently harvested taro. Natives were "yams," which, in addition to being a staple of Taiwan's diet, are shaped very much like the island itself. Yams, local people pointed out, are also sweeter in taste than taros. Although powerless to challenge Chiang's government, resentment simmered below the surface and occasionally emerged above it. Spies were ubiquitous and punishments harsh. Dissidents quietly confided to each other their desire to send the mainlanders back where they came from.

In order to shore up his government's legitimacy, Chiang set about turning Taiwan's inhabitants into Chinese. To use Renan's terminology, Chiang chose to re-define the concept of shared destiny to include the mainland. Streets were re-named; major thoroughfares in Taipei received names associated with

the traditional Confucian virtues. The avenue passing in front of the foreign ministry en route to the presidential palace was named *chieh-shou* (long life), in Chiang's honor. Students were required to learn Mandarin and speak it exclusively; those who disobeyed and spoke Taiwanese, Hakka, or aboriginal tongues could be fined, slapped, or subjected to other disciplinary actions.³ Films were produced in Mandarin, with subtitles in Chinese characters for those who could not understand the dialogue. Although there was no direct prohibition against the use of other dialects in film production, the government restricted it in other ways. The Central Film Production Company, affiliated with the KMT, provided funding for films in Mandarin, and it was understood that these films would receive preferential treatment in the government-sponsored annual Golden Horse prize competition.

As for radio programming, so-called dialect programming was limited to 45 percent on AM channels and a third on FM channels. When television was introduced, non-Mandarin shows were restricted to 30 percent on Taiwan's three channels, all of which were government-affiliated. Performers who spoke non-Mandarin parts tended to portray criminals or those with low-status jobs, to give the impression that the inability to speak Mandarin defined one as lower class and perhaps not very bright.⁴ Students were expected to master minute details about the mainland, including the names of stations on its provincial rail lines. History books were re-written to portray Taiwan's past as part of China. Koxinga's memorial hall, originally built in the local Fujian vernacular fashion, was dismantled and re-created in a northern Chinese style. By contrast, such examples of indigenous culture as Taiwanese opera and puppet theater were looked down on and did not receive government support.

In addition to solidifying his government's legitimacy to govern Taiwan through these tactics, Chiang aimed at using Taiwan as a base to re-take the mainland. Conversely, his arch-rival on the mainland, Mao Zedong, was determined to "liberate" Taiwan. One of the few things the rival dictators agreed on was that there was one China, although they differed completely on which government represented it. With many more resources at his command, it seemed likely that Mao would eventually succeed in conquering the island.

However, the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 interrupted his plan. Since the American military was fighting soldiers from the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the Korean peninsula, Washington did not want Beijing to take over Taiwan, and President Harry Truman ordered the U.S. Seventh Fleet to patrol the Taiwan Strait to preclude that possibility. In 1954, Truman's successor, President Dwight Eisenhower, concluded a mutual security treaty with Chiang's Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan, and continued to recognize it as the legitimate governing authority of China.

FORCES FOR CHANGE

The Korean War proved to be a watershed that allowed a separate Taiwanese identity to develop. Had Mao succeeded in making the island into a province of the PRC, Taiwan's distinct persona might have formed simply a regional variant of Chinese culture that was, *mutatis mutandis*, not unlike other variant cultures such as that of Guangdong and of Fujian itself. However, with Taiwan's separate political status protected by the Seventh Fleet, the ROC on Taiwan began its own path to development. Slowly and in the face of opposition from Chiang Kai-shek's government, culture and identity began to evolve in distinctive ways. At the same time, the possibility of the KMT returning to the mainland gradually diminished. The children of mainlanders born on Taiwan had no memories of their parents' native place and little incentive to fight to regain it. Inter-marriage between Taiwanese and mainlanders, at first bitterly opposed by many parents on both sides, became increasingly common. With pressures for democracy growing and other political parties still banned, the Kuomintang itself became Taiwanized.

Culturally, a movement of literary nativization (*bentuhua*) began in the 1960s. Its advocates favored replacing literature of mainland themes with Taiwan themes. Authors depicted characters who spoke local dialects, albeit imperfectly rendered, using Chinese characters. Plots concerned the difficulties of ordinary folk and their resistance to the "imperialist," i.e., the KMT, presence in Taiwan. Nativist writers had a definite political agenda, though they were understandably reluctant to draw governmental attention to it. The 1960s and 1970s also saw

increasing pressures toward democratization, which, given the ethnic mix of the population, inevitably meant Taiwanization as well. Several advocates of democracy were arrested and imprisoned on Green Island for long periods of time—ten years in the case of the elderly editor Lei Chen, whose *Free China Fortnightly* called for the formation of a loyal opposition party. Another writer, Bo Yang, was sent to jail for a Popeye cartoon that could (and undoubtedly was meant to) be interpreted as a criticism of Chiang Kai-shek. While representing a change from the 1950s, when memories of the February 28th incident were more vivid and manifestations of a Taiwan identity more subdued, the expressions of such identity during the 1960s and 1970s nonetheless rarely surfaced publicly, except for broad hints during election speeches. Privately, it was otherwise. A U.S. Department of State analysis of 1970 noted, however, that the Taiwanese identity was resurfacing. Its author predicted that the Taiwanese, who regarded Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People and Chiang Kai-shek's thought as alien doctrines to justify mainland domination, would take control. And the ROC would cease to exist.⁵

The growing isolation from the international community ... deepened the conviction of anti-government forces that it was necessary to create an international and cultural persona for Taiwan, which was separate and noticeably different from that of the mainland.

This situation changed markedly at the end of 1978, when the United States announced its intention to recognize the PRC, break relations with the ROC, and abrogate the mutual security treaty of 1954. The growing isolation from the international community following Washington's announcement deepened the conviction of anti-government forces that it was necessary to create an international and cultural persona for Taiwan, which was separate and noticeably different from that of the mainland. At the same time, de-recognition of the ROC by many



countries, including the United States, undermined the credibility of the one-China myth among the people the KMT claimed to rule. A Western journalist residing in Taiwan since 1969 opines that many people, who had previously bought into Chiang's notions of one China because they perceived some personal or national benefit in it, began to get disillusioned.⁶

THE KAOHSIUNG INCIDENT AND BEYOND

If the February 28 incident is the first marker in the creation of a Taiwanese identity in the twentieth century and the Korean War the second, the Kaohsiung incident of 1979 is the third landmark in this regard. A march to commemorate International Human Rights Day and to protest the KMT's postponement of a scheduled election turned violent.⁷ The government arrested numerous participants, who protested that not they but *agents provocateurs* had been responsible. Eight demonstration leaders, all of them Taiwanese, were put on trial, convicted, and sentenced to lengthy prison terms. They became heroes and heroines to those who shared their views, and inspired others to test the limits of the government's tolerance. Among other manifestations thereof, writers began to experiment with new literary forms, some of them incorporating Hokkienese, English, and Japanese into their works. In 1985, a group of several aboriginal tribes converged to destroy a statue of Wu Feng, a fictional deity invented by the Han Chinese to domesticate the "barbaric" tribals. Aboriginal activists began to complain that they were losing their languages and literatures to assimilationist pressures, and lobbied successfully for a change in the name by which they were referred from "mountain people" (*shanbao*) to "original inhabitants" (*yuanzhumin*). There was an increase in Hakka activism as well.

These movements took on greater salience when, in 1986, Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek's son and successor as president, announced that the emergency decrees, which had been in force for four decades, would be abolished in the following year. Opposition parties were legalized, and restrictions on the press were lifted. In early 1988, Chiang Ching-kuo died in office and was succeeded by his vice-president, Lee Teng-hui. Lee, whose Hakka ancestors had assimilated to Hokkien

culture, had been educated in Japan and the United States. Like his friend the afore-mentioned Peng Ming-min, Lee had a well-developed sense of Taiwan identity and set about reinforcing from the top manifestations of this identity that had long existed at the basic level of society. It became possible to speak openly of the February 28 incident. Heretofore classified archival materials were made available to scholars, and a group of historians was commissioned to do a study of the incident. Lee's administration built a memorial to the victims of the massacre and, in a moving ceremony on the 50th anniversary of the incident, the president personally dedicated it.

Some of the manifestations of this shift, such as the dedication of the memorial, were highly public. Most were more subtle. For example, the official *Republic of China Yearbook*, published by the Government Information Office for 1988, the year Lee Teng-hui became president, began a chapter entitled "people" with a long explanation of the origins of the Han Chinese and their expansion on the mainland. Taiwan was not mentioned at all. A concluding section entitled "minority groups" was, apart from a small paragraph, exclusively devoted to mainland minorities such as Tibetans and Mongols. The caption below a picture read "A Taiwan mountain aboriginal girl," without naming her ethnic group. In the 1993 edition of the yearbook, the opening paragraph of the comparable chapter discussed the total population of the mainland, noting that "the Chinese mainland is not under the political control of the ROC government, so it is not possible to verify census figures." The remainder of the section discussed the population of Taiwan. Mainland ethnic minorities were listed in chart form, followed by several lengthy paragraphs on each of the nine aboriginal tribes of Taiwan that were then officially recognized by the ROC government. The paragraph devoted to the population of China shrank in length year by year; the chart of mainland minorities disappeared in the 1998 yearbook. History books began to emphasize the past of Taiwan rather than that of the mainland. Mainland-born politicians began to study Hokkienese, and to campaign in it.

The changes begun by Lee were continued under his successor, Chen Shui-bian, a Hoklo (referring to people originally came from Fujian several

hundred years ago). Soon after he was elected mayor of Taipei in the mid-1990s, Chen changed the name of *Chieh-shou* (jieshou) Boulevard to Ketagalan, symbolically replacing Chiang Kai-shek's memory with that of an extinct aboriginal group. He also founded a bureau of Hakka affairs within the municipal government structure. In 2001 the aforementioned yearbook's paragraph on the population of China disappeared completely, and the name Taiwan had been added to the front cover and spine of the book. Other chapters of the yearbook, such as those on history and literature, underwent similar alterations. In 2002, the annual date book published by the Government Information Office and distributed worldwide, added "Taiwan" to "Republic of China" on its cover. The 2003 edition of the date book simply used "Taiwan." ROC passports will soon add the word Taiwan, in English, on their front covers.

Newspapers changed their names. The *China News*, bought by the prominent Hoklo Kao family, became the *Taiwan News*. The government-sponsored *Free China Journal* became the *Taipei Journal* in 1999 and the *Taiwan Journal* in 2002. Currency also changed, with pictures of KMT leaders replaced by those of Taiwan landmarks. Traditional cultural forms such as puppet theater and Ke-Tse opera began to receive government subsidies. Museums began to display the work of indigenous artists. In what has been termed the "culture wars,"⁸ there was some resistance to this, but the nativization trend continued unabated. Peng Ming-min and Bo Yang became advisers to the president, and the infamous Green Island was turned into a human rights park honoring political prisoners who had been incarcerated there. The Academia Sinica published Lei Chen's memoirs and other newly declassified documents relating to his case.

CULTIVATING AN INCLUSIVE IDENTITY

In fostering from above this extant separate identity, the post-Chiang leadership understood that neither this identity nor the island's democratization could be based on the mainstream of the Taiwanese—properly called Hoklo—alone. The descendants of those who came to Taiwan after World War II must have a part to play, as must the Hakka—who have often felt that their interest lies more with the trans-

planted mainlanders than the Hoklo—and the aboriginal groups. Lee Teng-hui, who may fairly be called the father of modern Taiwan, envisions a pluralistic society in which ethnic characteristics blend. In the 1998 election for mayor of Taipei, the KMT's candidate was the popular mainlander Ma Ying-jeou. At a clearly orchestrated and highly symbolic juncture of the campaign, Lee, speaking Mandarin, asked Ma whether he was a mainlander or a Taiwanese. Replying in Taiwanese, Ma responded that he was a "new Taiwanese," drinking Taiwan water and eating Taiwan rice. Lee expanded on this theme in his autobiography, published in the following year:

...The "new Taiwanese" who will create a new Taiwan include the aboriginal people, those whose ancestors came here four hundred years ago, and those who arrived only recently. Anyone who lives in and loves Taiwan is a "new Taiwanese."⁹

A Taiwanese identity has clearly emerged. Attempts to re-imagine this identity to include the mainland are possible but, after 50-odd years to evolve and solidify, they are even less likely to succeed than Chiang Kai-shek's.

A Taiwanese identity that developed largely in reaction to the assimilative policies adopted by Chiang Kai-shek's mainlander government has hence incorporated mainland residents of Taiwan within its ethos, albeit imperfectly and incompletely. This more inclusive new Taiwanese identity is now juxtaposed to that of the PRC. Polling data on how many people consider themselves Taiwanese, how many identify themselves as Chinese, and how many feel that they are both Taiwanese and Chinese indicate a shift toward "Taiwaneseness." According to a 2002 poll conducted by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), more than 50 percent of the respondents considered themselves Taiwanese only, up from less than 20 percent a decade ago (See Figure 2A). On the other hand, other data indicate that, within the last two or three years, there may



have been a decline in the number considering themselves Taiwanese only, to about 40 percent, though all figures show a rise over a decade before (See Figure 2B).

Apparently, different polls imperfectly mirror what the respondent understands by her or his answer and therefore show somewhat different results. This does not mean that polls are useless. Evidence that a separate Taiwanese identity has emerged is undeniable. However, is this identification permanent? If a nation is, in Benedict Anderson's oft-repeated definition, an imagined community, it is possible that it can be unimagined, or that one's imagination could shift the specific meaning of Taiwan's identity to include people on the mainland. More than half a million of Taiwan's citizens now live and work on the mainland; what effect this will have on their self-identification and their influence on Taiwan as a whole remains to be seen. Some appear to develop a more benign view of the mainland and become more open to unification; others develop a heightened sense of how different they are and become more strongly convinced that unification is not a desirable outcome. There are also several thousand mainlander-spouses of Taiwanese residents. Whether these mainlanders will assimilate to the Taiwan identity or provide a cultural bridge to their homeland is also an open question.

The government of the mainland has threatened to absorb the island by force if its residents do not voluntarily agree to be absorbed; this would subject the population of Taiwan to yet another attempt at assimilation. However, since an already extant separate identity has further evolved and solidified over the past 55 years, such an attempt would seem still less likely to succeed than Chiang Kai-shek's.

ENDNOTES

I am indebted to Joseph Jaushieh Wu, Office of the President of the ROC, Echo Lin of the Formosa Foundation, and Coen Blaauw of the Formosan

Association for Public Affairs, for help in compiling poll data for Figure 2A. I am also indebted to Lee Ming-liang for supplying photographs of the two stamps in Figure 1, obtained through the good offices of Chuang C. Chiueh, U.S. National Institute of Health.

1. Lee Min-yung, "An Absurd Myth and Wicked Sophistry," *Taipei Times*, June 26 2003, 8.

2. Peng Ming-min, *A Taste of Freedom: Memoirs of a Formosan Independence Leader* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972), 26.

3. Taiwanese is based on southern Hokkienese (*minnan*), a dialect of southern Fujian. Hakka, or *kejia* in Mandarin, means "guest people." The Hakka migrated south during the barbarian invasions that beset northern China in the 12th century. Their speech is believed to approximate standard Mandarin at that time, but is quite different from current Mandarin. Hakka tended to dominate certain professions; traditionally, intermarriage between them and local population was rare. Most of Taiwan's Hakka emigrated from Mei County in Guangdong Province centuries ago.

4. Shih Cheng-feng, conversation with author, April 14, 2000.

5. U.S. Department of State Cable, no. A-256 (July 21, 1970), 11-12. The cable represents the personal viewpoints of the analyst in the U.S. embassy in Taipei, who left after five years on post. He closes with the sentence, "In the view of the reporting office, the future of Taiwan belongs to the Taiwanese; the mainlanders must learn to live with this fact, and so must the United States."

6. Don Shapiro, conversation with author, June 25, 2003.

7. The KMT's stated reason for postponing the election was Washington's abrupt decision to terminate diplomatic relations with the ROC.

8. Richard Kagan, *Chen Shui-bian: Building a Community and a Nation* (Taipei: Yeu Chen, Ltd., 2000), 209-219.

9. Lee Teng-hui, *The Road to Democracy: Taiwan's Pursuit of Identity* (Tokyo: PHP Institute, 1999), 200.



FIGURE 1: STAMPS ISSUED BY THE FORMOSAN REPUBLIC, 1895

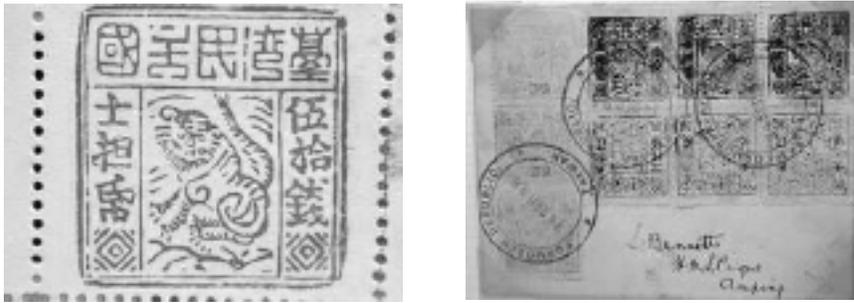
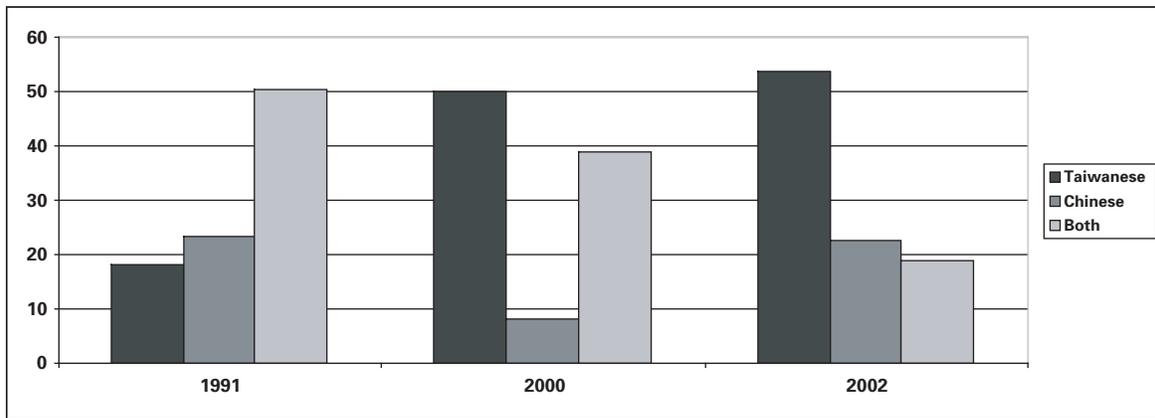
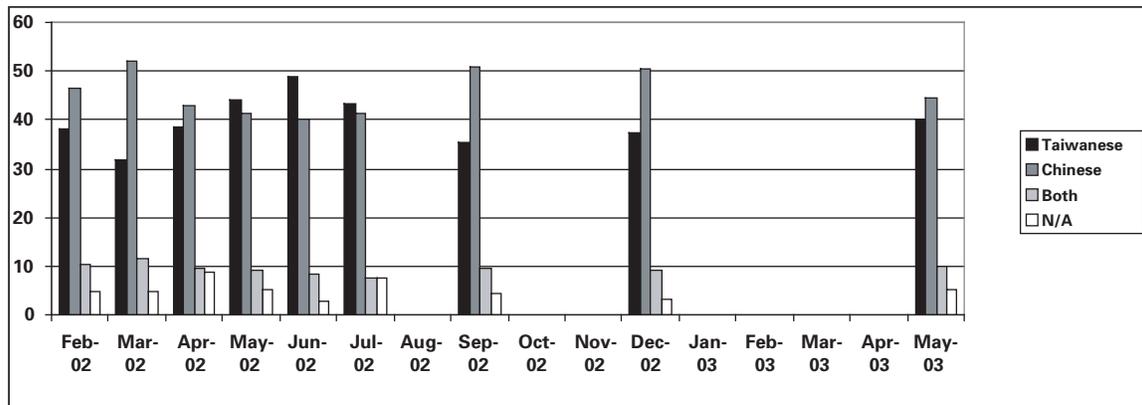


FIGURE 2A: TAIWAN'S EVOLVING IDENTITY



Sources: Poll data for 1991 and 2000 are from National Chengchi University's Election Research Center. Data for 2002 are from a survey taken by the DPP and reported in the *Taipei Times*, August 22, 2002.

FIGURE 2B: TAIWAN'S EVOLVING IDENTITY



Source: National Chengchi University's Election Research Center



Identity and Symbolic Power in Taiwan

THOMAS B. GOLD

The emergence, growth and acceleration of the conscious effort to define and articulate a distinct Taiwanese national identity has become a critical component of Taiwan's social, political, and cultural life. It is a signature aspect of the remaking of Taiwan in virtually all spheres of life since the end of martial law in July 1987. Although a "Taiwanese identity" and a "Taiwanese national identity" are analytically separate phenomena, as this process has evolved, they have become inextricably intertwined. What were initially on the one hand a primarily cultural movement and on the other a separate movement for political democratization and self-determination are now confluent in individual life, social movements, political parties, and state affairs.

This societally-generated quest for identity needs to be seen in the larger context of the weakened capacity of the Kuomintang (KMT, or the Nationalist Party) state to impose its official identity over society. The capacity of the KMT state also deteriorated greatly in other realms of life as a consequence of a seemingly endless onslaught of external and domestic challenges.

Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, the venerable and formerly unassailable KMT lost control first over society, and then, in a spectacular fashion, over the state.¹ The state itself has lost most of the capacity it enjoyed for leadership and mobilization. The initiative in Taiwanese life shifted away from the authoritarian party-state to society in the form of social movements, beginning in the late 1970s with the "Chung-li incident" and the "Kaohsiung incident." Almost immediately after the termination of martial law (1949-1987), there was a veritable explosion of social activism addressing nearly every realm of life in Taiwan. The island's vaunted social order and political predictability met severe challenges, with no clear guidelines, experience to draw on, or endpoint in sight.

THE KMT'S SYMBOLIC POWER

One pillar of KMT rule was the incontestable (violators would be subject to penalty of being charged



with sedition) power to define Taiwan's "identity" to the island's inhabitants and to the outside world. This power of representation (symbolic power) was one of many types of power, or what the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu labeled "capital."² The mainland regime-in-exile held such power quite closely and largely denied it to society. In this system, which was strongly influenced by the Leninist party of the Soviet Union in organization, possession of each form of capital reinforced possession of others and facilitated capital accumulation. Symbolic power wove through all other powers and undergirded them, because it legitimized and gave meaning to the entire setup.

In the KMT's official interpretation, Taiwan was a province of the Republic of China (ROC). Settled by Han immigrants from mainland China (primarily southern Fujian Province and Guangdong Province), Taiwan had been a prefecture of Fujian before being upgraded to provincial status in 1885 under the Qing dynasty. From 1895-1945 it was a Japanese colony, and the Japanese had, with increasing intensity in the latter part of the World War II period, attempted to



reorient the island population's identity to Japan culturally and politically.³ At the conclusion of the war, under an agreement by the Allied Powers that included the ROC (replacing the Qing dynasty in 1912), Taiwan was precipitously retroceded to China as a province. The first post-colonial governor was sent from the mainland. There had not been an anti-colonial "liberation movement" on the island (at most some intellectuals had petitioned for "home rule"), nor had the Japanese prepared the Taiwanese for independence or management of their own affairs.

When the ROC government's situation in the civil war with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) became dire in 1949, the central government based in Nanjing retreated to Taiwan to marshal its resources to prepare for a final stand or counterattack. Party members swore loyalty to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and to his vision of the significance and mission of the ROC. The corruption, brutality and incompetence of the early days of KMT rule culminated in a mass uprising in early 1947 which was ruthlessly suppressed (known as the "February 28 incident"), thereby cowering into submission the population which had looked forward with much anticipation and goodwill to becoming equal citizens in a modern republic. The KMT regime's systematic effort to physically liquidate or effectively emasculate Taiwan's Japanese-era elite, thereby removing any real or potential challenge to its hegemony, surpassed anything the Japanese imperialists had undertaken in their campaigns to install their control over the island.

A STRONG PARTY-STATE

The KMT administered the central government in temporary exile as the executive wing of the party. The lines between the two were blurred. The party-state arrogated substantial amounts of all forms of capital to itself, rendering society disorganized and powerless.

- Economically, it maintained power through running state enterprises, party enterprises, and state-owned banks, and rationing scarce capital and resources (much of it supplied by the U.S. Agency for International Development).
- Politically, it prevented the establishment of new parties, suspended elections to the key national

bodies (the National Assembly and the Legislative Yuan), implemented martial law, gave tremendous power to the Taiwan Garrison Command, and built grassroots power through alliances with local faction leaders.

- Culturally, it made Mandarin Chinese (which few Taiwanese spoke and most mainlander elite spoke with heavy accents) the national language (*guoyu*) in schools, governmental offices, and the media, and restricted the use of Taiwanese or Hakka dialects in these public spheres. Mastery of details of dynastic Chinese history, geography and culture, as well as ROC history and ideology (the Three Principles of the People of Sun Yat-sen) was essential for success in school and entry into government positions. Meanwhile, the study of Taiwan's history was excluded from the school curriculum. In addition, Chinese culture (such as Peking opera) was promoted, while Taiwanese cultural was denigrated.
- Socially, it made connections (*guanxi*) with personnel from the mainland, or Taiwanese collaborators Taiwanese essential for access to the most significant resources. In this corporatist system, social organizations were required to have KMT leadership, thereby denying to the people the autonomy essential for the development of civil society.
- Symbolically, it defined Taiwan as a province of the ROC in the past, present, and future, even factoring in Taiwan's unfortunate interlude under Japanese imperialist control. Taiwan, the site of the Free China regime, was regarded as a bastion of freedom and a beacon to the mainland compatriots. This representation was inculcated by the media and schools, and elaborated by specialists in ideology. Skepticism was not tolerated. For the international community, the ROC was the only legitimate Chinese state able to represent all of the Chinese people, including those on the mainland temporarily under communist control. There was no such thing as a two-China or one-China-one-Taiwan policy. Any country wishing for diplomatic relations with "China" had to pick either the ROC regime temporarily ensconced in Taipei, or the Communists in Beijing—a stance fully supported by the Communists as well.



Through most of the 1960s and beyond, few Taiwanese possessed enough of any forms of capital to be qualified to enter the elite. The few who did were not in a position to challenge this structure, should they have wanted to. It could be claimed that the Taiwanese were not discriminated against; rather, they lacked the requisite qualifications for advancement. This form of misrecognition was actually a tool used by the regime as another means of domination. This is not to argue that Taiwanese would necessarily have challenged the KMT representation of their identity, but just to demonstrate that there was no space for this to happen should anyone have tried.

The obsessions growing out of the decades-long experience of the KMT on the mainland with imperialism, warlordism, civil war, brutal Japanese occupation and debilitating poverty were completely alien to the Taiwanese.

Over the same period, the ongoing and serious threat from the Chinese Communists conveniently provided the KMT with credible justification for maintaining a system of both physical and symbolic violence. It is important to recognize that this system did not grow organically out of issues and concerns within Taiwanese local society. Rather, it was imposed over and inserted through by an external quasi-colonial occupying regime. The obsessions growing out of the decades-long experience of the KMT on the mainland with imperialism, warlordism, civil war, brutal Japanese occupation and debilitating poverty were completely alien to the Taiwanese. By fiat the outsider party-state made its agenda of recovering the mainland and reuniting all of China the common mission of everyone on the island. All children learned the new rules as part of growing up; older Taiwanese, who had had a completely different historical experience than that of mainlanders of the same age and even considered themselves Japanese, had to be remolded.

THE WEAKENED CAPACITY OF THE STATE

All institutions, in the sense of relatively stable clusters of norms, values, behaviors and expectations that address particular aspects of social life, need to be reproduced over time. Quite obviously, in Taiwan's case, it became increasingly difficult for the KMT to reproduce the institutions vital to support the official identity of the ROC and of its citizens as "Chinese" for several reasons:

Externally, beginning in the early 1970s, the ROC lost formal diplomatic ties with most key countries needed to guarantee its international standing, and also lost its membership in the United Nations. International connections were essential props for the regime's ability to present itself to the world as the sole legitimate government of all China and to its own people as a government in exile which had international support for its peculiar ruling style. In the 1980s, the PRC emerged on the world stage as a responsible nation engaged mainly in economic modernization. It changed its approach to Taiwan from the aggressive "liberation" to the more benign-sounding "reunification," and welcomed Taiwanese to the mainland to do business and travel. Also, Overseas Taiwanese, individually and collectively—through numerous organizations, such as Formosan Association for Public Affairs (FAPA) and World United Formosans for Independence (WUFI)—challenged the KMT's definition of Taiwan as a province of the ROC and the justification for KMT's continued monopoly over political life while calling the regime "Free China."

Internally, there was a generational change. Second generation mainlanders, even those groomed to assume top positions in the party and state, did not have the same intense commitment or agenda as their forebears. Their life experiences were too different. Demographically, there were not enough mainlanders staying or being born on the island to fill all the positions. Taiwanese of the same age had by then undergone the same education and indoctrination, thereby amassing the requisite capitals and being competitive for posts. They in fact began to assume jobs in the central government and even moved up the party hierarchy, especially in the later years of Chiang Ching-kuo's tenure as he perceived the insurmountable difficulties in reproducing the system and the growing costs of freezing Taiwanese

out. Supplementary elections to the National Assembly and the Legislative Yuan brought more Taiwanese, and, occasionally, non-KMT members, into the two bodies. Some Taiwanese artists began to create works dealing with daily life of common folk on Taiwan (*xiangtu wenxue*) that had nothing to do with China *per se*.⁴ These works struck a nerve, especially among young and educated Taiwanese in the middle class who had not seen their lives thus portrayed, or their language and folkways treated seriously, up to that time. When this work was attacked in 1977 by KMT hacks as “worker, peasant, soldier literature,” thereby tarring it with a communistic slogan that was first advanced by Mao in mainland China, it attracted even more attention on the island. Although a sense of Taiwan as “different” from other Chinese provinces (whose inhabitants commonly pride themselves on their supposed uniqueness) most likely lay just beneath the surface of most people’s consciousness, the *xiangtu* writers and intellectuals who elaborated on their ideas boldly articulated many of these feelings after a long period of denigration, thereby producing an electric effect. Finally, Taiwanese political entrepreneurs, many of whom had been groomed in the KMT for leadership roles but bolted from the party, drew support from disaffected citizens, especially the educated youth. Non-KMT (*dangwai*) politicians began to call for “self-determination” in the 1980s, and their political movement attracted many of the artistic figures as well.

LEE TENG-HUI AS AN UNEXPECTED POLITICAL ENTREPRENEUR

The central and perhaps the most unexpected political entrepreneur over the past decade turned out to be Lee Teng-hui, Chiang Ching-kuo’s handpicked successor as ROC president and KMT chairman. Whether or not he had a long-term, carefully suppressed ambition to remake Taiwan politically and redefine its identity, or whether he improvisationally drew on exceptional political skills to read public sentiment on and reaction to ROC’s deteriorating external situation (which he shared), he ended up by thoroughly remaking the political field.

One of Lee’s most brilliant strokes was sponsoring an investigation into the causes of the February 28 incident and compiling a chronology of the tragedy. He apologized to the victims on behalf of the KMT,

which must have horrified perpetrators still around as well as party stalwarts who saw the crackdown by the regime as justified in the context of the times. He also supported the establishment of Taiwan’s holocaust museum, the February 28 Museum in Peace Park in the heart of the national government district, as well as February 28 memorials around the island.

The coup-de-grâce was probably Lee’s August 1999 statement that there were two Chinese states. His genius lay in blurting out that the emperor had no clothes, often stealing the thunder of the opposition Democratic Progressive Party and its “Taiwan independence” line.

Within the KMT, Lee pushed, with growing confidence, a Taiwan-first line, thereby alienating a sizable proportion of mainlanders, who became stigmatized as the “non-mainstream faction” and quit in 1993 to set up an eponymous Chinese New Party. In 1998, he virtually eliminated Taiwan Province administratively, thereby effectively stripping away the myth of the “central government” covering more territories than Taiwan (Of course, it was also a way of checkmating his erstwhile henchman-turned-challenger James Soong). The *coup-de-grâce* was probably Lee’s August 1999 statement that there were two Chinese states. His genius lay in blurting out that the emperor had no clothes, often stealing the thunder of the opposition Democratic Progressive Party and its “Taiwan independence” line. His domestic support was tremendous. Creating an “identity” requires an “other” to set oneself up against, and Beijing masterfully performed this role time and again for Lee—who Beijing did not initially suspect would turn out this way—and his successor President Chen Shui-bian—who they did. After being thrown out of the KMT as many members suspected his sabotage of the party’s presidential candidate in 2000, Lee became even more energized and outspoken on behalf of Taiwan first, and gave his blessing to the Taiwan Solidarity Union, another new party born of KMT malcontents, but formed to continue his agenda this time.



THE GROWTH OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Internally, over this period there had been major structural shifts which opened up spaces for action by dissenters apart from the official definition of Taiwan's identity. The emergence and consolidation of civil society provided a space for self-organization and self-expression. The expansion of the private sector transferred substantial resources and social prestige to entrepreneurs, mostly Taiwanese, some of whom, usually surreptitiously, supported the opposition or Lee Teng-hui, inside or outside of the KMT. Politically, as Taiwan introduced a multi-party system, formerly forbidden topics were widely debated. Among them was Taiwan's identity in a cultural sense (using the neologism *rentong*, or recognition of commonality) and in a political sense (whether or not the existence of a distinct identity should evolve into demands for an independent political entity).⁵ The proponents of Taiwan as a province of China became increasingly isolated as the political mainstream, even within the KMT, supported the idea of a new identity. Lee himself, as KMT chairman in the 1998 Taipei mayoral campaign, pushed for the idea of a "new Taiwanese," an inclusive formulation, where even mainlanders or their offspring who identified with Taiwan could call themselves "new Taiwanese." Meanwhile, other people argued for a more exclusive definition of "Taiwanese," not including "mainlanders" on the island.⁶ The terms "*bensheng*" (of this province, i.e., Taiwan) and "*waisheng*" (of another province), which imply that Taiwan is a province, have been replaced in the discourse by "Taiwan" and "*dalu*" (mainland, which can refer either to "mainlanders" on Taiwan or to mainlanders in China). The cultural capital necessary for getting ahead politically and intellectually shifted radically. It has become necessary for politicians on the island, except for in its dwindling "mainlander" enclaves, to demonstrate their facility with Taiwanese dialect, and Taiwanese language tutors have had a field day. Textbooks have been rewritten to emphasize Taiwan's history, culture and civics, replacing the China-centric ones. The hallowed site of Academia Sinica will soon hold an Institute for Taiwan History, and Chengchi University, once a repository of mainlander intelligence research, now offers a master's degree in Taiwan studies. Historical research on Taiwan, which bolsters the argument for

a distinct identity, is flourishing. Mastery of Sun Yat-sen's ideology became deemphasized. Symbols of the KMT regime, such as pictures and statues of Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo were removed in some instances. Passports had the name "Taiwan" added to "Republic of China." Press freedom has opened up numerous venues and avenues for exploring and advocating the identity issue. For many Taiwanese, payback time has come at last.

For the harder core advocates of Taiwan identity, either culturally or politically, unification (not reunification) with mainland China is not in the cards. Whether or not China democratizes and its standard of living reaches that of Taiwan is immaterial to them, as few people on Taiwan have any memory whatsoever of being part of "China" other than symbolically, and their cultures, histories and identities are too different. As they see it, Beijing's approach to Taiwan, leaving aside the military threat, remains patronizing, condescending and completely unsympathetic to the identity conundrum. "One country, two systems" is a non-starter, and Hong Kong's recent travails over Article 23 prove to them the point that Beijing will not tolerate true autonomy and does not give a fig for what people really believe. Beijing is reluctant to give true autonomy even to a society like Hong Kong, where people are much less politically mobilized and the identity issue has nowhere near the salience it does in Taiwan. China's new leadership does not, at this stage, appear any more flexible or understanding than its predecessors. Beijing hopes to use the hundreds of thousands of Taiwanese who live and work on the mainland now as a united front or wedge, much as it has with the taipans of Hong Kong, but none of the admittedly non-representative sample of members of this group with whom I have spoken wish to raise their personal residence on the mainland to the level of advocating societal unification.

CONCLUSION

Taiwan is now a highly mobilized and politicized polity. The strong central authority has withered away. In spite of its "forward to yesterday" mentality, a KMT victory in the 2004 presidential election, should it happen, could not resuscitate this power. The main challenge will be to find channels allowing



the continuing discourse about and operationalization of the distinct Taiwan identity without provoking precipitous action on either side of the Strait, and to keep trying to educate mainland China as to origins of such identity and its importance to the people of the island. Whether or not Beijing believes that there is such a thing as a “Taiwan identity” which is different from other local identities in China, it must understand that many people in Taiwan think it is very real. Beijing must not arrogantly dismiss a Taiwanese identity, but must find ways to understand its origins and why it continues to evolve and gain strength in the island’s cultural and political life.

ENDNOTES

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Disaggregating the Concept of National Identity

SHELLEY RIGGER

National identity in Taiwan has attracted much attention in recent years from scholars and policy makers in Taiwan, the United States and mainland China. While many of the scholarly writings on this topic are enlightening and insightful, the discussion too often suffers from a lack of clarity about concepts and definitions. In particular, there is a tendency among Taiwan watchers to conflate and confuse four distinct issues that fall within the scope of the national identity discussion:

- provincial origin (ethnic/sub-ethnic identity)
- nationality (ethno-cultural identity)
- citizenship (political identity)
- policy preference (for Taiwan independence or Chinese unification)

Ordinary language and common-sense definitions encourage us to blend these issues. Also, it is easy to assume that these four items are manifestations of a single phenomenon, and therefore map neatly onto one another. In fact, if we disaggregate the notion of “national identity” into its component parts, we find that the issue is far more complex than any one of these elements would suggest. Not only is there diversity and complexity within each of the four strands; also, the relationships among them are extremely complicated. We oversimplify the question when we treat any of the four as a proxy for the others. The goal of this paper is to clarify the history and significance of each of these four phenomena and to illuminate the relationships among them.

PROVINCIAL ORIGIN (*SHENGJI*)

The most politically-significant demographic division in Taiwan’s post-World War II society is provincial origin, or ethnicity.¹ The island’s residents were divided, legally and socially, between those whose families came to Taiwan before it became a Japanese colony in 1895—the *benshengren* (people of this province), normally translated as “Taiwanese”—and those whose families arrived between 1945 and 1950, as part of the movement of Nationalist



(Kuomintang, or KMT) personnel from mainland China to the island during the Civil War—the *waishengren* (people of outside provinces) or “mainlanders.”

The resentment Taiwanese felt toward the mainlander-led government (and, by extension, mainlander individuals) for imposing an authoritarian government upon the island found reinforcement in policies that privileged mainlanders as well as their ways in the island’s political, educational and cultural life. As a result, opposition to the mainlander-led ruling party, the KMT, took on a strong ethnic flavor. Opponents of the regime emphasized two demands: democratization and just treatment for Taiwanese. Although the KMT greatly expanded the number and influence of Taiwanese in the party during the 1970s and 1980s, it could not shake the label “*wailai zhengquan*” (outsider regime).

In the early and mid-1990s, ethnicity was an ever-present component of political discourse, especially in elections. Political candidates openly campaigned on the basis of their provincial origin. (Provincial origin was included alongside sex, age and hometown as demographic information on official election gazettes). Some Taiwanese candi-

dates argued that “Taiwanese should vote for Taiwanese” and cast doubt on the patriotism of their mainlander opponents, while some mainlander politicians stimulated mainlander voters’ anxiety about how the minority would fare under a Taiwanese-led government. Ugly incidents in which politicians exploit ethnic tension for their own gain still occur today; however, the intensity and frequency of ethnic politicking has diminished over the past several years.

One important sign that ethnic politics is not a decisive factor for most of Taiwan’s voters is the continued success of mainlander politicians at the highest levels of the political system. James Soong (Soong Chu-yu) was elected governor of Taiwan Province in 1994, despite the fact that mainlanders represented barely a tenth of the electorate. Ma Ying-jeou defeated a very popular incumbent, Chen Shui-bian, for the mayorship of Taipei City in 1998. Taipei’s mainlander population is relatively high, but Ma would not have been elected without thousands of Taiwanese votes. Nor can Taiwan’s political parties be tied to particular ethnic groups. While the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has little support among mainlanders, the conservative parties—the KMT and its spin-off, the People First Party (PFP)—get most of their votes from Taiwanese.

Meanwhile, adding to the complexity of ethnicity in Taiwan are processes that both mute ethnic identities and pluralize the ethnic arena. In the 1990s, the Taiwan government stopped imposing ethnic labels on its people. By removing provincial origin from the official identification issued to each Taiwanese, the state signaled that individuals would no longer be categorized according to the province of origin of their ancestors. Young people born to mainlander parents on Taiwan could choose a Taiwanese identity, while children born into “mixed” marriages were not continually outed by their ID cards. In 1994, President Lee Teng-hui used the phrase “New Taiwanese” (*xin Taiwanren*) to invite mainlanders who identified with the island into the club. At about the same time, the Hakkas, another ethnic minority similar in population size to the mainlanders, emerged from the political shadow of the *minnanese*-speaking Taiwanese. With the rise of James Soong as an independent force in 1999 and 2000, Hakkas seized an opportunity to turn ethnic

politics into a three-way game by differentiating themselves from both of the historically-dominant social groups.

NATIONALITY (ETHNO-CULTURAL IDENTITY)

In an excellent paper on national identity in Taiwan, Chu Yun-han and Lin Jia-lung define the concept of nationhood, or nationality, as “a sense of shared identity among people who believe in their belonging to the same nation but do not necessarily demand that the nation constitutes one sovereign state.”² In the Taiwan context, the discussion of nationality centers on citizens’ identification as Chinese, Taiwanese or both. The existence of the third option—an option many Taiwanese choose—demonstrates that as historical and cultural categories, “Chinese” and “Taiwanese” are not mutually exclusive identities—at least for some. Discerning what content respondents give to these categories is another difficult, and important, task for researchers in this field.

It is hard to argue with the proposition that, with the exception of about 300,000 aboriginal Taiwanese, the residents of Taiwan are descended from Chinese. Whether their ancestors came to the island in 1650 or 1950, their ancestral and cultural origins are in mainland China. However, for some Taiwanese, these centuries-old ties are very tenuous, and the shades of meaning individuals give to these concepts range widely. As Chu and Lin put it, “The two words actually mean different things to different people. Some view them as mutually exclusive categories; others find them compatible or even complementary, and still some have no trouble using the two interchangeably depending on situations. In fact, the popular connotation[s] of the two concepts involve a variety of elements, such as ethnic origin, language, culture, residency, citizenship and identification.”³

One aspect of the nationality issue that has attracted considerable attention is a self-conscious campaign to promote the idea that Taiwan is a distinct nation, with a culture and history different from those of mainland China. For example, there are those in Taiwan who claim that today’s Taiwanese should not accept that they are direct, lineal descendants of mainland Chinese, because aboriginal people, Japanese and Europeans have all



spent substantial amounts of time in Taiwan, and have “mixed their blood” with that of the Chinese-surnamed Taiwanese. Similar arguments are made about Taiwanese cultural practices, which, some claim, are so distinctive that they should be considered as manifestations of a unique, self-generating tradition.

One motivation for these arguments is political: their strongest proponents are supporters of Taiwan independence who hope to bolster their case by undermining the notion that a relationship between Taiwan and China is appropriate or inevitable. At the same time, however, the interpretation of Taiwan’s culture as non-Chinese, is rooted in the policies aimed at marginalizing and devaluing Taiwanese culture. Both the KMT and its mainland counterpart, the Chinese Communist Party, are implicated here.

As historical and cultural categories, “Chinese” and “Taiwanese” are not mutually exclusive identities. Simply asking the question “Do you consider yourself Taiwanese, Chinese, or both?” offers no clue as to what the answer actually means to the respondent.

Until recently, the Taiwan government’s cultural policies supported the claim that Taiwanese culture is not authentically Chinese. The KMT consciously promoted elite Chinese cultural norms and practices that were never typical of grassroots communities anywhere in China. However, by reifying these as the standard for Chinese culture, the KMT implied that Taiwanese practices—many of which are very similar to grassroots behavior in mainland China—were not Chinese. Further reinforcement for the idea that Taiwanese culture is not Chinese comes, ironically, from the unification-hungry Communist Party. Threats and scoldings from leaders of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) have convinced many Taiwanese that the PRC views them not as compatriots, but enemies.⁴ Meanwhile, after more than 100 years of separation, norms and practices on the two sides are in fact very different, which facili-

tates the argument that their cultures diverge.

Nationality enters the political debate about Taiwan’s future because many observers suspect that the growing tendency for Taiwan residents to call themselves Taiwanese, as opposed to Chinese or both, reveals a widening rift between the people of Taiwan and the idea of a unified China. Another widespread suspicion is that the promotion of Taiwan nationality is part of a strategy aimed at achieving formal independence for the island. Thus, foreign observers, in particular, often worry about the “rise of Taiwan nationalism,” which they fear will foreclose those options for cross-strait relations that could be achieved without a violent confrontation.

This may be so, but at least some of the data on nationality suggests that equating “Taiwanese” identity with support for independence is a mistake. To begin with, statistics purporting to show how Taiwanese identify themselves cannot capture the full spectrum of meanings respondents associate with these categories. Are respondents answering a question about their cultural identity, or their political identity? Simply asking the question “Do you consider yourself Taiwanese, Chinese, or both?” offers no clue as to what the answer actually means to the respondent. Indeed, when Chu and Lin conducted detailed research on this question, they found that “people tend to define ‘Taiwanese’ using territorial/political and subjective/psychological criteria and define ‘Chinese’ using primordial/cultural criteria.”⁵ In short, trends in national self-identification offer few clues about Taiwanese citizens’ preferences on the unification-independence debate.

CITIZENSHIP (POLITICAL IDENTITY)

If provincial origin is a declining factor in Taiwan politics, and nationality is the subject of heated debate and volatility, citizenship is already a settled issue. Residents of Taiwan believe they are citizens of a state, the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan. While there is still some support for the claim that the ROC’s sovereignty extends to mainland China (a 1996 survey found about 33% of respondents supporting this view)⁶, the notion that Taiwan is part of the *political* entity in mainland China has absolutely no support. For example, when asked which people

had the right to determine the future of Taiwan, 75% said only Taiwan residents had that right, while just 11% said residents of the mainland should be included.⁷ Even among supporters of unification, substantial majorities agree that only Taiwan residents should have a say in the island's future.⁸

The near unanimity with which Taiwanese view their political identity leads to two conclusions. First, assertions of Taiwan's statehood are not necessarily indicative of a desire for formal independence. Certainly, independence supporters can and do use "salami slicing" tactics to push forward their agenda. But those tactics enjoy broad support in Taiwan because they are viewed as the appropriate actions of a sovereign government. Presidential statements referring to Taiwan as a state in 1999 (by Lee Teng-hui) and 2002 (by Chen Shui-bian) caused consternation in Beijing and Washington, but provoked little reaction in Taipei, at least until the uproar in the other capitals began. Why? Because to Taiwanese, the idea that Taiwan is a sovereign state is self-evident. Many Taiwanese support moves such as adding "Taiwan" to the passport cover or pursuing membership in the World Health Organization not because they are seeking an independent Taiwan, but because they believe these are the things states do, and the ROC is a state in their eyes.

A second conclusion to be drawn from this broad consensus on the ROC's statehood is that Taiwan is fundamentally a "civic nation." Jurgen Habermas defines this concept in his essay "Citizenship and National Identity." According to Habermas, "The nation of citizens does not derive its identity from some common ethnic and cultural properties, but rather from the *praxis* of citizens who actively exercise their civil rights. At this juncture, the republican strand of 'citizenship' completely parts company with the idea of belonging to a prepolitical community integrated on the basis of descent, a shared tradition and a common language."⁹ In Taiwan, the absence of consensus on nationality does not spark a crisis, because there is a consensus about the process by which decisions should be made: democracy. As Chu and Lin point out, even those who strongly support unification or independence "do not reject the idea that the future of Taiwan [should] be decided through democratic procedures."¹⁰ That is, their commitment to democracy is stronger than their determination to achieve a particular outcome.

POLICY PREFERENCE: TAIWAN INDEPENDENCE OR CHINESE UNIFICATION?

Provincial origin, nationality and citizenship are fundamentally domestic matters, although they have implications for cross-strait and international relations. In contrast, the fourth element in the conversation about national identity in Taiwan is outward looking. As a result, it is the most consequential for—and interesting to—international observers. If we assume, as prudent people must, that the PRC will use military force to prevent Taiwan from achieving formal independence, knowing the probability of such an event is a matter of considerable urgency (I will leave aside the important and thorny question of what would constitute a move toward independence in the eyes of PRC leaders).

Taiwanese social scientists have conducted scores of surveys on this topic. Still, interpreting the results of these studies and using them to anticipate the behavior of Taiwan's future leaders are difficult tasks, not least because of conceptual limitations in most of the published literature on the topic.

As I have argued elsewhere, most research on the independence-unification debate rests on two flawed

Most research on the independence-unification debate rests on two flawed assumptions: first, that these two positions are mutually exclusive, and second, that the two represent the only meaningful options in the debate.

assumptions: first, that these two positions are mutually exclusive, and second, that the two represent the only meaningful options in the debate.¹¹ No matter how the question is constructed, a plurality (and in many surveys, a majority) of Taiwanese refuse to express a preference for independence or for unification. Instead, they choose options like "maintain the status quo" or locate their preferences near the center of a Likert scale.¹² These responses beg the question: What is the content of these preferences? Are they simply pragmatic ("any change could cause trouble, so I'll choose no change") or do they have some ideological content ("there is something about the status quo that I like, and I want to keep it for its own sake")?



One innovation that allows us more insight into these responses is a conditional question style developed by Academia Sinica political scientist Wu Naitteh. Wu's studies ask respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with these two statements:

1. If Taiwan can maintain a peaceful relationship with China after it declares independence, then Taiwan should become a new independent country.

2. If mainland China and Taiwan become compatible economically, socially and politically, then the two sides should unite.

Results from a 2000 study using this format reveal the complexity of opinion on unification and independence: the largest proportion of respondents (34.4%) agreed with both statements. That is, more than a third of Taiwanese are willing to accept either independence or unification under the right conditions (The exclusive preferences were split: 24% could accept independence but not unification, while 19% could accept unification but not independence).¹³ Moreover, the percentage of respondents who could accept either option increased over the 1990s, suggesting that opinion on this issue is becoming less polarized and more pragmatic.¹⁴

Clearly, national identity is a complicated issue, one that resists easy analysis. Aspects of the issue seem contradictory; countervailing trends confound even the most careful observers. Indeed, no one fully comprehends this issue in all its complexity. Still, it is extremely important that we do our best to understand each of its dimensions. Only then can we anticipate and prepare for future developments in the Taiwan Strait.

ENDNOTES

1. Provincial origin refers to one's ancestral home province. Thus, individuals whose parents or grandparents moved to Taiwan from mainland China are considered to have their "provincial origin" in the mainland. However, this specific usage is sufficiently unfamiliar to most foreigners that scholars found it desirable to use the vocabulary of ethnicity in writing about provincial origin in English. There also is a politically-tinged argument over whether these distinctions should be described as "ethnic" or "sub-ethnic."

2. Chu Yun-han and Lin Chia-lung, "The Construction of Taiwanese Identity and Cross-Strait

Relations," *Taiwan Security Research* (1998) <<http://www.taiwansecurity.org>>.

3. Chu and Lin, 4.

4. According to statistics compiled by the Mainland Affairs Council, between 60 and 65 percent of Taiwanese believe the PRC government is hostile to the Taiwanese authorities, and about 40 to 50 percent believe it is hostile to the Taiwanese people. See <http://www.mac.gov.tw>.

5. Chu and Lin, 5.

6. Chu and Lin, Table 7.

7. Liu I-chou, "Taiwan minzhong de guojia ren-tong —yi ge xin de celiang fangshi" [The Taiwanese People's National Identity—A New Survey Method], paper presented to the 1998 Annual Conference of the ROC Political Science Association, 10.

8. Chu and Lin, 6.

9. Jurgen Habermas, "Citizenship and National Identity," in *Theorizing Citizenship*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 258–259. For a more detailed discussion of these ideas, see my contribution to the volume *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*, ed. Merle Goldman and Elizabeth Perry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

10. Chu and Lin, 4.

11. See Shelley Rigger, "Maintaining the Status Quo: What it Means and Why Taiwanese Prefer It," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 14, no.2 (April 2001), 103–114; Shelley Rigger, "Social Science and National Identity: A Critique," *Pacific Affairs* 74, no.4 (winter 1999–2000), 537–552.

12. According to a 2000 survey, the average respondent rated his/her opinion on the issue at 5.3, where 0 represented independence and 10, unification. Sheng Hsing-yuan, "Tongdu Yiti yu Taiwan xuanmin de toupiao xingwei: 1990 niandai de fenxi" [The independence-unification issue and Taiwan electorate's voting behavior: an analysis of the 1990s], paper presented to the conference on "The Beginning of a New Political Authority," sponsored by the National Chengchi University Election Studies Center (November 2001), 10.

13. Brett Benson and Emerson Niou, "Conditional Preferences on Taiwan Independence and the Security Balance in the Taiwan Strait," unpublished paper, 11.

14. Benson and Niou, 11.

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