

Taiwan's Evolving Identity

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[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]

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.

A. 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, was widely interpreted as 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 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 attempt to 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.

B. 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, the 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 being from lower classes and perhaps not very bright. [4] Students were expected to master 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 Mao Zedong in the mainland 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.

C. 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. 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 were more vivid and manifestations of a Taiwan identity more subdued, the expressions of such identity during the 1960s and 1970s 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 opined 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]

This below-the-surface 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]

D. 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 discusses 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. 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.

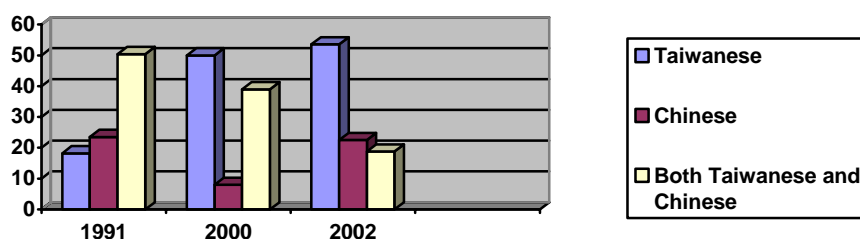
Newspapers changed their names. The *China News*, bought by the prominent Kao family, who are Hoklo, became the *Taiwan News*. The government-sponsored *Free China Journal* became the *Taipei Journal* in 1999 and the *Taiwan Journal* in 2002. Currency also changed, with pictures of KMT leaders replaced 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.

E. Cultivating an Inclusive Identity

In fostering from above this extant separate identity, the post-Chiang leadership understood that neither such movement 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 transplanted 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 that developed largely in reaction to the assimilative policies adopted by Chiang Kai-shek's mainland 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 “Taiwanese-ness.” 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 2).



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 3).

近期台灣民眾族群認同分佈：02/2002~05/2003

	02/02	02/04	02/04	02/05	02/05	02/07	02/09	02/12	03/05
Taiwanese	38.2	31.9	38.7	44.3	49	43.4	35.4	37.4	40.3
Both	46.5	52.0	43.1	41.2	40.2	41.4	50.7	50.3	44.5
Chinese	10.5	11.4	9.4	9.3	8.2	7.5	9.7	9.0	9.9
N/A	4.8	4.7	8.8	5.2	2.7	7.7	4.2	3.3	5.2
Total (n)	1081	1090	1091	1099	1115	1091	1100	1225	1182

資料來源：國立政治大學選舉研究中心。

Source: National Chengchi University's Election Research Center

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 Taiwanese 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 mainlanders-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

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1. Lee Min-yung, "An Absurd Myth and Wicked Sophistry," *Taipei Times*, June 26 2003, p. 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. Those who speak it are known as Hoklo. 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 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 was the disruption caused by 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.