
BACKGROUND BOOKS

TAIWAN

For three decades, Taiwan has served as a kind of "substitute China" for American scholars barred from the mainland. With their Confucian traditions, complicated ethnic differences, and remarkable adaptability, the islanders have fascinated anthropologists and economists alike—especially since Taiwan began its own Great Leap Forward into industrialization.

In **Economic Development of Taiwan, 1860–1970** (Yale, 1978), Samuel P. S. Ho draws the Big Picture in great detail. Taiwan's current industrial surge, he makes clear, is the end result of many trends, notably a gradual "modernization," particularly of farming, going back to the 19th century. Taiwan's assets have included the diligence of her people, political stability, heavy investment in education, beneficial contacts with Japan and the West. Taiwan's lesson, as Ho sees it, for other Third World nations: build a prosperous agriculture, vastly increase literacy, *then* think about steel mills.

The island's economic growth was also a success for U.S. foreign assistance. As Neil H. Jacoby writes in **U.S. Aid to Taiwan: A Study of Foreign Aid, Self-Help, and Development** (Praeger, 1966), the annual gain in GNP per dollar of U.S. aid was higher in Taiwan during the 1960s than in Korea, the Philippines, or Turkey. In Jacoby's view, Washington "wisely" fostered local private enterprise and eschewed using U.S. aid as "leverage" to force political reform in 1950–65.

Perhaps no single action by Chiang

Kai-shek was more important than his American-financed "land to the tiller" program of the 1950s. In **The Socio-Economic Results of Land Reform in Taiwan** (East-West Center Press, 1970), Martin M. C. Yang suggests that the psychological effects were enormous. Not only did former tenants gain property, independence, and status, but they soon saw opportunities to "get ahead" through education, new profit-oriented farming techniques, and community action.

In a 1957–58 study of a village on the island's western coast, **Hsin Hsing, Taiwan: A Chinese Village in Change** (Univ. of Calif., 1966), Bernard Gallin finds that in that case one early effect of land reform was to eliminate the local gentry as village leaders, with new leaders slow to appear.

"Modernization" does not mean "Westernization" in rural Taiwan. Old customs persist, even as the young go off the land to take factory jobs. **Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan** (Stanford, 1972, cloth & paper) by anthropologist Margery Wolf provides an intimate portrait of village life, with its gossip, taboos, superstitions, and family tensions. And, Wolf makes clear, "a truly successful Taiwanese woman is a rugged individualist who has learned to depend largely on herself while appearing to lean on her father, her husband, and her son."

Wolf's **The House of Lim: A Study of a Chinese Farm Family** (Appleton, 1968) is equally good reading. Lim Han-ci, the hard working family patriarch, was a terror to his sons; but he taught them to aim high, and they

prospered in farming and politics. After his death, the memory of the old man long kept his quarreling descendants together in the same house; in the end, it was not enough.

Two other fine anthropological sketches of the Taiwanese are **Kinship & Community in Two Chinese Villages** (Stanford, 1972) by Burton Pasternak, who examines the recent erosion of family dominated hamlets, and **The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village** (Stanford, 1973) by Emily Ahern, who illuminates the intricate variations in ancestor worship. A disinherited son, for example, is allowed to leave the care of his father's grave to his luckier brothers.

In **The Man Who Lost China: The First Full Biography of Chiang Kai-shek** (Scribner's, 1976), journalists Brian Crozier and Eric Chou find that Mao Zedong was simply "more exceptional" than Chiang. The authors are not unsympathetic to the Generalissimo's achievements, particularly on Taiwan; but they trace his loss of the mainland to his fateful, demoralizing decision in 1931 not to resist Japanese aggression until he had defeated his Chinese Communist rivals.

Chiang, writes former State Department official George H. Kerr in **Formosa Betrayed** (Houghton Mifflin, 1965; Da Capo reprint, 1976), "quite inadvertently" was saved by Mao in 1950, when Peking publicly sided with Moscow against Washington at the height of the Cold War, then sent its troops into Korea to fight American GIs.

Kerr's book covers the period from World War II through the mid-1960s and argues for Taiwanese independence. He provides a grim picture of Nationalist repression of the native Taiwanese following their 1947 uprising. He also discusses the place of

Taiwan in U.S. politics. The 1950s "Help Chiang return to the mainland" debate in Congress, Kerr contends, and the "Democratic reluctance to increase aid" gave Republicans the chance to charge "pro-Communist sympathies in the State Department."

As former diplomat Ralph Clough notes in his well-knit survey of **Island China** (Harvard, 1978), America went to the brink in 1958, when Quemoy was shelled and blockaded by the Communists. On President Eisenhower's orders, the U.S. Navy helped Chiang break the blockade by escorting his supply ships; the crisis eased when the Communists eventually restricted their shelling to odd-numbered days ("to demonstrate," writes Clough, "its rejection of the cease-fire urged by the United States and its ability to impede or permit at will the resupply of the islands").

The 1960s saw a relaxation of tensions over Taiwan. When economic upheaval disrupted the mainland in 1962, Chiang prepared to take advantage of it. Analyzing U.S. policy under Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, in **U.S. China Policy and the Problem of Taiwan** (Colorado Associated Univ. Press, 1971), William B. Bueler shows that President John F. Kennedy destroyed a dream; he informed Chiang that America would not back an attack on the mainland by Chiang's forces.

Later in the 1960s, the Sino-Soviet split diverted Peking's attention from Taiwan, America became deeply involved in Vietnam, and Taiwan no longer needed U.S. economic aid.

In **A Taste of Freedom: Memoirs of a Formosan Independence Leader** (Holt, 1972), Peng Ming-min, a leading Japanese-educated Taiwanese

legal scholar, recalls how he was first wooed by the Nationalists, then jailed as he agitated against Kuomintang domination. He escaped (rather easily) to Sweden in 1970, then to the United States, where he taught at several universities. But, as he concedes, facing both the Communist mainland and strong Nationalist rule at home, few Taiwanese have been ready to press hard for independence.

In a helpful collection of essays, **Taiwan in Modern Times** (St. John's Univ., 1973), which covers the history of Taiwan from early Chinese settlement (A.D. 230) to 1972, editor Paul K. T. Sih and his contributors acknowledge the brain drain of Taiwanese youths who leave for the United States to study and never return. Duly noted are other looming problems—not enough jobs for the

college-educated young, high middle-class expectations, urban congestion. The book contains few sweeping predictions. But, says Sih, "Anyone who claims that Taiwan can be separated from and independent of China is denying historical facts as well as present-day realities."

It is a debate that reaches far back into Taiwan's history. In **Koxinga and Chinese Nationalism: History, Myth, and the Hero** (Harvard, 1977, cloth & paper), Ralph C. Croizier demonstrates how, for three centuries, differing groups have created their own image of the hero who expelled the Dutch from Taiwan in 1661. Honored by both Nationalist and Communist Chinese, Koxinga, according to Croizier, may one day become the symbol of a renascent Taiwanese independence movement as well.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Suggestions for this essay came from Parris H. Chang and Edwin A. Winckler, assistant professor of sociology at Columbia University.*