

What can the world learn from Taiwan? From dictatorship to democracy; from miracle to anxiety, from China to the World, from Ilha Formosa to Garbage Island, and maybe back again.

*Draft ready to be translated for publication in 思想*

This article is a revision of a keynote speech given at the North American Taiwan Studies Association Conference in Santa Cruz, California, in July 2006. Originally intended for an audience of English-speaking, mostly Taiwanese people, it has been revised for a more general Taiwanese audience, and updated to reflect changes since 2006. The article has been translated by [Antonia Chao Yen-... and...] and the author has reviewed and approved the translation. When I was asked to be the keynote speaker for that conference, I decided to organize my talk around a broader question of the importance of Taiwan, and the consequent importance of studying it. And of course the importance of studying something comes from what one can learn from studying it. So I decided to address the topic "What Can the World Learn from Taiwan?"

I do believe, in fact, that the world can learn a lot from Taiwan, about issues that are paramount on the agendas of thoughtful people everywhere--about dictatorship and democracy, about prosperity and its discontents, about the vagaries of national, ethnic, and class identity, and about the environmental challenges of too many people living on too small a planet. And because I think these lessons are ones that people everywhere ought to be aware of, I wanted to challenge scholars of Taiwan to get the message out, to tell the world about this Island and the lessons--both positive and negative, both inspiring and cautionary--it has for the rest of the World. And as examples of those lessons, and the challenges that come from them, I want to speak about the implications of four transitions that have happened in Taiwan in the last quarter century: from dictatorship to democracy; from miracle to anxiety, from China to the World, and from Garbage Island to, if we are lucky, something once again meriting the sobriquet of "Ilha Formosa."

### 1. From Dictatorship to Democracy

Taiwan's first great transition of the last 20 years has been from an orderly, brutal one-party dictatorship under Martial Law to a messy democracy with guaranteed civil rights as great as those anywhere in the world. What can the rest of the world learn from this first, political transition?

The first thing is that such a transition can happen peacefully, even when the United States gives no help. 1987-91 were key years in the transformation of the world political system; they marked the end of the post-War era or the Cold War Era, and were characterized by massive regime change and reorganization in many countries. This took a series of forms, both in terms of the processes internal to the countries undergoing the transformation, and in terms of the relations between the transitional countries and other world powers. I would argue that Taiwan's

model, however, was a unique conjunction of internal-external processes, and for that reason was among the most successful of the transitions. It was peaceful, and it happened without any help (and probably with some resistance) from the United States, which made it unique. We can see this if we compare Taiwan's transition with those of some other countries.

The worst transitions, of course, were those that happened in Yugoslavia and the Caucasus, where unscrupulous nationalistic leaders stirred up very quiescent ethnonationalist sentiments in the wake of the retreat of the ideologically multinational communist regimes, leading to bloody wars that seem to be over for now in the Balkans, but continue, tragically, in the Caucasus. In the Caucasian case, the separatist movements had at least been encouraged, if not outright financed, by the US as an aspect of its previous Cold War policy, and in the South Slavic lands, the US stood by for a long time, making pious statements but taking no actions and only covertly taking sides, before intervening in the late 1990s.

Slightly better, perhaps, was the transition in Russia--violence happened, but it was restricted and restrained, corruption and cronyism reigned for awhile, and now Russia has devolved into a semi-stable neo-authoritarianism that the US, who supported the authoritarians to start with, now wrings its hands about while it cooperates with the authoritarians.

Still better were Eastern Europe and European former Soviet Republics, actively encouraged to democratize by the US, with varying results that have now led in most cases to stable regimes based on popular voting, but still carrying the threat of returns to authoritarianism, and sometimes stimulating popular revolutionary activity as happened in Ukraine in 2004.

Taiwan really stands out here, because its transition was initiated by the former authoritarian regime itself--though I still don't think anybody knows why Chiang Ching-kuo decided to repent his Leninism on his deathbed; because there was no violence involved; and because the former authoritarian regime, unlike those in Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Caucasus, was a friend rather than a foe of the US, so the US did nothing to encourage or promote the democratization. Taiwan democratized in spite of the United States, not because of it. The world can learn from this that home-grown democracy can in fact work. The transition was not really complete, I don't think, until 2008. A-bian's first election ended the 70+ year rule of a formerly Leninist party (though admittedly no longer Leninist by that time), the same year, interestingly enough, that the election of Vicente Fox did exactly the same thing in Mexico, ending the rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. But the institutions of democracy were not really established firmly until Ma Ying-jeou's election showed that a party voted out of power could still be voted back in. 幕後

The second thing the world can learn from Taiwan's transition to democracy is that, despite all the theories of political economy, class, international relations and whatever, that explain historical events without reference to individuals, is that Great Persons (alas, it still *is* mostly Great Men) can make a difference in history. I am thinking of Lee Teng-hui here, who I do not think has gotten anywhere near enough credit as one of the most visionary, skilled, and compassionate political

figures of the late 20th century. The only other leader I can think of with whom to compare Lee is Nelson Mandela. Each took over a formerly authoritarian government, each came from a majority ethnic group that had been excluded from power, each used a skilled combination of parliamentary legislation and behind-the-scenes dealmaking to ease the former rulers out of their position, retiring them off with no vengeance or even punishment; each set up a commission to investigate and memorialize dark episodes of political repression in his own country; and each retired from office on schedule, preserving democratic process and participation for his successor. If Lee led a corrupt regime and had connections with every major gang faction in Taiwan--and I suppose he did; if, as Perry Anderson said, he betrayed everyone except himself--these are minor compared with the peaceful transition he pulled off. Nelson Mandela, after all, never repented of having been a terrorist.

The third thing the world can learn from Taiwan's transition to democracy is that democracy can be messy and still work. Lots of people--most of them Taiwanese or Chinese--attack Taiwan's democracy for being impure. There is corruption. Vote-buying is rampant. A lot of votes are cast on the basis of patronage rather than ideology or free choice. The Legislative Yuan has been the site of not only cynical, self-serving maneuvering by parties on all sides of the aisle (Taiwan's aisle is more like a mass of interwoven goat trails than a single footpath), but has been the scene of behaviors, such as fist-fights and pig's blood splashing contests, that have been an embarrassment to many Taiwanese intellectuals, including probably some readers of this article.

But then I, as an American, look at our democracy, beneath the surface of its hoary traditions of Senate-floor courtesy and bean soup, and see the inner workings of a system where voter turnouts are much lower, where vote-buying happens at a much larger scale in the contests for campaign contributions, where the content of campaign messages is reduced to the lowest common denominator of cynical patriotic militarism, where gerrymandering by the party in power practically prevents any real contests in most of the legislative seats, and where the current opposition party has an agenda of nothing but obstructionism and demagoguery, and I start to cheer for Taiwan's real democracy, where people get out in the streets, where 70 or 80% of them vote, where seats are contested and really do go back and forth among parties, where coalitions come and go in the strangest ways, and I think, this is probably as good as democracy is going to get in the real world.

A fourth lesson is directed at those who espouse ideas about clashes of civilizations, Asian cultures, or certain versions of Confucian civilization. This is that the democratic transition and the true if far from perfect democracy that has evolved in Taiwan has happened on Asian soil and among a people whose most significant cultural inheritance comes from China. To the Lee Kuan-yews of the world, who claim that "Western Style Democracy" is not suitable for Eastern Cultures, and particularly to the Chinese Communists who have made a variety of excuses ranging from the cultural one much like Lee's to the "immature populace" one much like the Kuomintang's former idea of "political tutelage," Taiwan's democracy says, in effect, "sorry, but we're doing it." Taiwan is of course not unique in Asia here--Korea has undergone a similar transition in the same time

period--but Taiwan's is uniquely significant because it has happened among Chinese-speaking, mostly ethnically Han people, and thus threatens China not only by its autonomy but by its good example. And it rather pulls the rug out from under the idea of "Western-style democracy," anyway. What is "Western-style" about Taiwan's democracy? Taiwan and Korea--along with, of course, earlier examples like Japan and India--help destroy the idea that democracy is somehow uniquely associated with something called the West.

The fifth and final thing that I think the world can learn from Taiwan's transition to democracy is that a country--and I use the word advisably to mean a territory, such as Taiwan, the Penghu, and a few offshore islands-- can be ruled by constitutional democracy even when there is no agreement among the political and intellectual elites or among the populace as to whom--what nation--the democratic institutions represent.

This seems peculiar. But as numerous studies have verified, people in Taiwan do not really agree very much on what nation they are part of. Some say they are Taiwanese and Chinese, some say they are Taiwanese but not Chinese, a dwindling but still significant minority say they are Chinese. Some say the ultimate ideal state of things is part of a re-unified China; others say the ultimate ideal is Taiwan as a nation with a national state; many refuse to answer and say they favor "the *status quo*," which everybody knows is not supposed to be permanent, but everybody seems to agree can and perhaps should go on indefinitely. People argue about nationhood, subjectivity, culture, inheritance, they sometimes vote at least partly because of these issues, coalitions form and dissolve over relations with China, but there has not been a constitutional crisis since the old generals and old legislators were retired in the early and mid-1990s. People play the nationhood game in the context of the political rules of the country. This is really remarkable, and refreshing. It is a lesson for a lot of other young democracies. But it also leads to consideration of the next transition, one not so worthy of celebration, but carrying valuable lessons nonetheless.

## 2. From Miracle to Anxiety:

At the same time, this political transition and the economic one--commonly known as "the Taiwan miracle"-- that preceded it, have not led to any feeling of satisfaction or security among the Taiwanese people, but rather to what seems like a long-term state of national anxiety and an island-wide inferiority complex. In other words, not only money, but money and democracy can't buy happiness. Why not? Why, to put it plainly, is the wealthy, democratic nation of Taiwan so neurotic? Perhaps examining this question further will lead to more lessons the world can learn from Taiwan. I will look at three manifestations of Taiwan's national neurosis.

The first manifestation is the fear that the economy is falling behind. I think that every time I have visited Taiwan since 1989 (I think ten times), one of the first things I have heard, from the person who picks me up or from the cab driver or from friends at whose house I stay, is something like "台灣現在不行、" meaning not that there is anything wrong with the Island in general, but rather that the

economy is going bust. There was the brain drain, capital flight, the stock market bubble, a currency crisis or two, a labor shortage and the necessity of bringing in foreign workers, the threat of a rising China, the Asian Flu, the deindustrialization of the economy, the inability to move to high-tech fast enough, the loss of competitiveness in now this industry and now that one, the necessity to move manufacturing offshore, the increasing dependence on investment in China... the list goes on. But people live comfortably. The standard home has a car, two or three scooters, a computer with internet access, numerous cell phones, the all-important air conditioner, and a lot of kitchen gadgets totally unfamiliar to us Adogas. People take vacations overseas, eat out frequently and well, send their children to graduate school in America to the point where our graduate admissions committees don't worry about support for the first year when we admit a Taiwanese student, and yet... they worry.

There are some objective reasons, as there are for economic anxiety in any society. Global, flexible-accumulation capitalism is unpredictable, energy prices are high and Taiwan has little domestic energy production, Taiwan is unusually dependent upon China as a manufacturing platform, a market for domestic products, and even--unofficially at least--a source of cheap labor. There is always competition. But still, in an objective sense, households in Taiwan are prosperous and secure, and there is still a quite low spread of incomes from rich to poor. So why the economic anxiety? I have no ready answer here, but again I want to propose a lesson for the world--that rapid development, prosperity, and a huge foreign-accounts surplus are not enough to bring about a feeling of economic security in a country, especially one where political insecurity feels chronic.

The second manifestation is anxiety about not being America. Let me begin with two analyses, both from my graduate students' work, one dealing with Taiwanese psychiatrists and the other with Ukrainian brides.

Chou Jen-yu, in his comparison of Taiwanese and Washington State psychiatric hospitals, narrates the tour he was given on his first visit to Western State Hospital, the largest public psychiatric hospital in Washington:

The unit that we were heading to was the "state-of-the-art forensic center," as the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) likes to call it. Its actual name was Center for Forensic Services (CFS), a high-security building finished in April 2002, only a few months before my visit. At the end of the visit, however, when [my guide] asked me for my comment, I was unable to tell him how I felt about the trip. I might have been praising the design of the building and the beauty of the campus and was in fact sincere when I said that. But there is no way for me at that moment to tell him what "exactly" my feeling was, since it was all too familiar and unfamiliar, too clear and vague, and probably too frightening and comforting, all at the same time. From the first moment I arrived at the hospital, I could not get images of the Taipei City Psychiatric Center (TCPC) out of my head. Something familiar yet concealed was awakened. I told myself: "so, this is what we [Taiwanese] have been heading to."

In 1997, the Training Committee of the Taiwanese Society of Psychiatry sent out a survey to the chairs of all the psychiatric residency training programs in the country and asked each of them to suggest a must-reading list of books in their training program. The committee then compiled all the information and came up with a suggested reading list. Among the 244 texts recommended, Taiwanese wrote less than one tenth of them. Moreover, most of these locally written books are solely edited translations from English texts. As to the field of forensic psychiatry, among the 7 suggested books, 6 of them were English textbooks. The only one written in Chinese is a collection of clinical case reports done by the National Taiwan University Psychiatric Department.

Issues [of forensic psychiatry] have not appeared in Taiwan as subjects that need the collaborative attention of psychiatry and the law. When they do emerge – either as a general issue such as court testimony or sexual offenders, or specific cases such as a notorious child abuse that draws national attentions – guidelines in the English textbooks serve as a lighthouse that shows psychiatrists the way to the harbor. There could be postcolonial moments. But it remains a question whether it is postcolonial because of the imposing of American theories on Taiwanese realities, or it is postcolonial because Taiwan's modernization has made American theories indeed relevant to its contemporary conditions.

In other words, even a very green-identified, high-level professional, close to his second doctoral degree, and with extensive experience and considerable criticism of actual American life, is still anxious about whether Taiwan will measure up or not, and thinks of America now as Taiwan's future, whether that is good or bad.

In a second example, Tseng Hsün-hui explores the reasons why, despite extreme expense and low likelihood of success, some upwardly mobile Taiwanese men seek to import brides from Ukraine. Unlike those who import brides from Vietnam, for example, who are rather afraid of Taiwan's modern women and looking for wives who will be 乖, work hard, take good care of their mothers-in-law, and not ask too many questions, the men seeking Ukrainian or other Eastern European brides are looking for glamour, status, respect, and, as Tseng explains, these things are associated with America:

[T]he business in Ukrainian brides, however, would need to be considered in the dynamics of East-West relationships: how “whiteness” is widely misrecognized in the East as a symbol of “Westernization”, “Americanization” and “modernization.” A logic of the myth at work that keeps the brokerage business continuing in the market can be briefly summarized as this: all Ukrainians are blond/white, all whites are from the United States of America, America is a perfect example of modernity, modernity is desirable, and therefore Ukrainian women are desirable. In this sense, what is commodified is not these white women's household labor but

their “whiteness.”

Clearly, the obsession with America rises to the level of a national neurosis. America is so important that even critics of American life worry about not measuring up, and men will even go to the length of marrying someone from as distant and unknown (and in fact, very un-American) place as Ukraine, just to look like they have earned the right to something, or somebody, American.

There are a lot of other examples, but the lesson for the world, I think, is the degree to which cultural imperialism, intentional or otherwise, is a pervasive force in shaping the psyches of people even in a highly educated, high-income, post-industrial society such as Taiwan. Envy goes beyond the material; in many ways Taiwanese life is the equal or better of American life materially. And unlike so many countries whose citizens long for America because their repressive governments are anti-American, or because America really has material things and civic freedoms that their countries do not have, Taiwan's American dream, or American neurosis, is not a reaction to any kind of local lack. Taiwan forces the world to think about the real sources and mechanisms of American cultural hegemony.

The third and most pervasive symptom, at least among intellectuals, is the anxiety of not quite being a nation. I remember, the morning after the 2000 presidential election receiving an email from Lü Hsin-yi, entitled, "A-Bian, the President of ....?" Would he really be standing there, 白日藍天滿地紅 in back of him, portrait of 國父 on the wall, as the band played "三民。主義。吾黨。所從...." Well, yes, as a matter of fact he was, and he did it for eight years. He was an intelligent and prudent man, after all, except perhaps in his personal finances, and he had no choice but to play along with the charade, along with everyone else. But I suspect in his inner being he was not very happy about it. And neither was anyone else. The *institutional* status quo--a functioning democracy on a prosperous island, is fine with everybody right now, but the *ideological* status quo--the names, the symbols, the passports--stinks. Nobody likes it--not the Blues, not the Greens, not the intellectuals, not the ordinary people, not even the Chinese Communists. For everyone, it's better perhaps than any realistic alternative, but that's not saying much, and the result is this full-blown national, or perhaps I should say, not-quite national, neurosis. Like all neuroses, it generates, like not quite anything else in Taiwan, sad, touching, and sometimes funny stories.

Hsü Ching-wen wrote a whole chapter of her Ph.D dissertation about the passport problem. You get to the airport, they ask you where you are from, you say Taiwan, and unless they heard "Thailand," they look in their notebook and say "sorry, there is no Taiwan." "Well, my passport is from the Republic of China." "Oh, you're from China, OK." "Well, no, not actually...." Eventually you get through customs, but with a slight headache that isn't due entirely to jet-lag. Luckily, Dr. Hsü found the passport she had misplaced, so she could attend the 2006 meeting, but I almost think losing it, however briefly, was a Freudian non-accident that probably happens more to people holding Republic of China passports--issued in Taiwan, of course--than to people holding passports from any

other government.

And of course, there are not only no Taiwan passports, but there are no Taiwan embassies (or even ROC embassies anywhere that counts), only "Taipei Economic and Cultural Affairs Offices." There is no Taiwan in the WHO, which usually doesn't matter, but became quite important during SARS in 2003, and the Olympics are graced by a slate of usually-not-very-notable athletes representing the "Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee." At least the New York Yankees are not an official government organization, so Wang Chien-ming, who for awhile was a *very* notable athlete, could be identified as being from Taiwan.

On the surface, the problem here is the one that Chen Chia-ming identified in a NATSA paper: Taiwan is caught in a system of nations that does not allow for its free subjectivity. This is one way to phrase it, from the viewpoint of Taiwan itself, but the lesson for the world is really about the nature of nation--it is an artificial construct formulated by a state whose legitimacy is recognized by other states--rather than any kind of naturally occurring social unit deriving from common history and culture. Lots of states are of course effectively multicultural and multi-ethnic, the United States and China among them. And we all recognize from these and other examples that a nation is something that has to be built. But the case of Taiwan, as tragicomic as it may be for passport holders and Olympic athletes--teaches us a critique of the nation on a deeper level. It is not only something constructed, but also three other things. First, its construction can be blocked by factors entirely external to it, even when the state has effective control within its own borders (or, in Taiwan's case, its own shores). Second, this bothers people. In today's world, they want to be a nation, to have not only their flag and their government and their army, but also their passport and their Olympic team, just like people from universally recognized nations do. And third, while this causes a huge national neurosis, it causes only a few practical problems. The state and the country, unlike the nation, are functioning just fine--which is to say, muddling through much better than many--in Taiwan right now.

### 3. From China to the World

Mark Harrison's paper for the 2006 conference reminded us of some things that are easy to forget, given today's journalistic and scholarly standards: that there used to be names for our Island other than just Taiwan or R.O.C—中華民國.

Most people know about Formosa, but we forget that it was once 琉球, 自由中國, Nationalist China [NOTE: LEAVE THIS IN ENGLISH], and a lot of other things. We also forget that "Taiwan" used to refer, at least in some contexts, to something rather other than the Island in question. In the 1960s or 1970s, when someone in the U.S., Japan, or some other country, was described as being pro-Taiwan, this did not mean anything about the person's attitude toward Taiwan. It meant that they favored dealing with the R.O.C. government in Taipei, rather than the P.R.C. government in Beijing, at a time when one could not simultaneously deal with both. In fact, from the standpoint of Formosan independence activists of that time, someone described in this way as



"pro-Taiwan" was actually anti-Taiwan, because they favored a policy that would strengthen the KMT's dictatorial rule. The term "Taiwan," in this context, was a synecdoche for "The Republic of China," referring to the small section of the ROC's claimed territory that the ROC government actually controlled. It also meant Chinese cultural conservatism in the face of the Cultural Revolution that was going on in Mainland China.

I mention this name game because it is a nice lead-in to talking about the lessons of Taiwan's third recent transition, from a China-orientation to a world-orientation, and perhaps in the current regime partway back again. When I first lived in Taiwan, in the years Minguo 57 and 58, the world that foreigners saw in Taipei was a strangely displaced little China. Food from many of China's 39--count 'em--provinces, but not from Taiwan, Peiping opera, and all the slogans: 消滅萬惡毛賊, 實現三民主義, 反攻大陸, 解救同胞; and the biggest one, over the Taipei train station, 毋忘在莒, though we never figured out exactly where or what Ju was. And the media blackout of real news, especially news that concerned anything to do with China--Zhou Enlai's pictures in the overseas editions of *Time* or *Newsweek*, either torn out altogether, covered in black, or most fun for us, stamped with the character 匪。

And, as I have written elsewhere, this China-orientation was also embraced, in a rather different way, by the anthropologists. While R.O.C. citizen anthropologists were busy continuing both the Japanese colonial tradition and the Chinese tradition of 民族學 by recording customs and material culture in Austronesian Villages, foreign anthropologists were only in Taiwan to study China, because we could not go to The Mainland, and because the Communist revolution had transformed "Chinese Culture" irrevocably on the mainland anyway. So while the government was imagining a far away China that had never existed, in the vain hope that they could create it again by an invasion, the foreign anthropologists, while totally contemptuous of the silly government thinking it had any legitimacy to rule China, and ridiculing the notion of Counterattacking the Mainland, were imagining a very real China--real in every aspect except that it wasn't China-- right there in 新興 or 溪洲 or 鯤鯓. Stephen Murray and Keelong Hong's diatribe against the anthropologists for being stooges of the KMT was probably overblown, since most of them hated the KMT. But Murray and Hong did have a point.

Now, of course, all that seems as quaint and antiquated as it was at the time, and Taiwan, aside from the problem of not being a nation, is as connected to the world, or more so, than most other countries. There is no need to litanize the way Taiwan is connected, but the ways in which Taiwan has made these connections can tell us a lot about globalization.

The first lesson from this transition is an old one, an economic one from the miracle days. It is about the impossibility of a small country staying within its own economic borders. As is well known, state-directed, export-oriented consumer-goods producing industrialization is the mechanism through which Taiwan enriched and transformed itself economically. Depending on how we

view this process, it could serve as ammunition for either pro- or anti- Free Trade ideology. On the one hand, it is widely recognized that the lowering of the trade barriers of the earlier import substitution policy, and the shift to export promotion in the mid-1960s was what brought about the so-called takeoff of rapid economic growth. Without trade, Taiwan's economy would never have expanded in its miraculous fashion. But at the same time, the growth of trade was managed by a series of adjustments in fiscal and tariff policy that regulated the market in ways that true free-marketers would consider distortions. Either way, trade--free or fair--market or managed, depending on your preconceived ideas of economic justice--was not only necessary for economic growth, but also for the other kinds of connections that formed Taiwan's transition from a China- to a World-orientation. The kind of autarky that was implied in the China-orientation simply would not have worked; the Taiwan economy could not have stayed within its own borders and grown.

The second lesson is about the inability to stay within cultural borders. This was possible, of course, during the period of martial law, censorship, and bombardment with Free China propaganda. But as soon as the censors were called off, as soon as a free press and free speech and the import of books and magazines were allowed, the cultural borders of the small country disappeared. I saw a wonderful example of this when I visited my student Lü Hsin-yi--along with cultural activist Chen Chi-nan, in Ilan in 1997, and I was treated to the official version of Ilan's cultural history as shown in architecture, which later became a chapter in her book. The county government offices imitated a 19th-century Hoklo farm house, representing the predominant local population; the library was in the style of a Suzhou garden, representing the Republic of China influence, or imperial Chinese gentry culture more generally; the museum of Ilan history was in a refurbished Japanese officers' club, representing the Japanese colonial influence; a new highway bridge was designed in a modernist architect's imagined representation of Atayal men's bows and arrows and women's gathering baskets, representing the mountain Aborigine heritage, and of the two government sponsored 宜蘭厝 I was taken to, one, called 噶瑪蘭厝, was an imagined takeoff on what the local plains Kevalan people's houses might have looked like if anyone knew, representing the original inhabitants of the Ilan plain, and the other was in a kind of Scandinavian forest modern style, representing, I guess, the rest of the world and Yilan's broad cosmopolitanism.

This, and in fact other schemes hatched by cultural thinkers like Yu Hsi-kun and Chen Chi-nan, may seem a little schematic and more than a little forced, but I see them as symptoms or manifestations of something that we can justly celebrate--the attempt by progressive thinkers on Taiwan to avoid cultural nationalism and chauvinistic cultural exclusionism. Insofar as anyone makes any kind of case for Taiwan nationalism, it cannot be in terms of a distinctive language and culture. There are distinctive slants and aspects to Taiwan's language, food, religion, festivals, and many other things, but these are not of the order that makes for a distinctive "national culture." The Hoklo or Minnan language I learned in Taiwan allows me to get around just fine in southern Fujian; the gods I can trace

back (as do the Mazu temple committees in Taiwan) to the whole southeastern Chinese maritime region; the festival calendar is more or less what it is in Changzhou and Quanzhou. In fact, a few years ago I asked a friend from Chengdu, who had visited Taiwan, what he thought of the place. He said "我非常喜歡台灣；台灣比中國還中國。" The only things that really are distinctive come from the native Austronesian cultures, who have had regrettably little influence on the Island's cultural "mainstream," from Japanese colonialism, and perhaps recently from America, but they have those American things, increasingly, in China, too.

The lesson to be learned here is not that Taiwan is part of China--I personally lean quite strongly the other way--or that two nations can have a common culture--even though that is a proposition I can easily accept. The lesson is that Taiwan was forced, by circumstances, not to be exclusionary in its cultural borders, that if Taiwan was going to build any national consciousness, it pretty much had to be a consciousness based on the particular mixture of historically situated influences, not on any kind of ancient and unchanging tradition. The perhaps unintended but nevertheless felicitous result was that Taiwan's national intellectuals had to build an inclusive nationalism, one based on no hostility at all. And the lesson is, if the purpose of nationalism is to build citizen loyalty, this works at least as well as the dangerous and explosive appeals to primordial sentiments used by so many nationalist governments, including China's.

There are still dangers, of course, and this is the final lesson in Taiwan's transition to a world-orientation. One is that the inclusivist national ideology is somehow too weak to counter the primordial, exclusivist claims of Chinese nationalism. Almost everyone I talk to in China assumes that Taiwan is part of China--it's not even open for discussion--that Lee Teng-hui and A-bian were puppets of the Japanese and the Americans whose great ambitions in life are to see China fall apart so they can continue their colonial oppression where it left off in the 1940s, and that they would gladly give their lives to prevent Taiwan from doing in name what it has done in fact for the last 57 years--namely act as an independent country. This danger is compounded by the cliché-ridden accounts to be found in the world English language press, which can't print a story about Taiwan without saying that "Beijing considers the Island to be a renegade province."

Another danger is that there are ethnic tensions lurking not very far beneath the surface. The recent call by Hou Hsiao-hsien and others to resist "min-nanization" of the island's culture, certainly a temptation for the Greens when they have been widely blamed for mismanaging both the economy and foreign relations, are probably more than just paranoia, and I have heard warnings by Aborigine legislators of all three parties about the danger of Hoklo hegemony. When Taiwan had a China-orientation, this was no kind of danger; Chinese nationalism precludes exploitation of any differences within the Han, and the Aborigines are, sadly, too small a portion of the population to make any difference. The lesson for the world is that an inclusive political consensus has to stay that way, or else democracy becomes fragile. Now that the current regime is moving its

cultural and economic orientations closer to Chinese again, it will be interesting to see how inclusive the political consensus remains. I am optimistic, but not entirely dismissive of the warnings of some of my Greener friends, who think the whole idea of Taiwan is about to collapse. Another manifestation, perhaps, of the national neurosis.

#### 4. From Garbage Island to Ilha Formosa?

In the summer of 1991, right at the height of the Taiwan's plastic era, I made a brief visit to my old "second home" near Sansia in Taipei county. In a journal written a few days later in China, I wrote,

"Taiwan is garbage island. We usually think of environmental problems mainly in terms of water and air pollution, or perhaps destruction of habitat for various kinds of development. Taiwan has all of these...but garbage is the main thing. It lines the streets, it lines the streams. It drips from every porch and every tree.

Now I don't think that the Taiwanese are any less messy than Chinese people [for example]. And there's a consciousness of ecological/environmental problems which includes garbage, to the point that Ploughshare even had some demonstrations, and the folks who answered my questionnaire in the Valley in 1989 often mentioned garbage as a drawback of the place. So what's going on?

I think the main problem is simply one of volume and density. An ice-cold soda in Chengdu is 3 RMB, and that's a real treat, to the point that most people probably don't have one more often than once a week, if ever. But in Taiwan, 20NT is nothing, so when the weather is hot and you have to go somewhere, of course you get yourself a soda. So there are a lot more cans per square meter. And all the consumer goods of that goods-rich society come packaged, often in plastic or some other equally noxious substance. So the stuff multiplies...

The great paradox in all this is that everybody *complains* about the garbage. The people of Ploughshare, for example, actually instituted collective action against any more dumping into that big pile up [above the village]. They blocked trucks and marched several times earlier this year, and eventually the garbage company stopped dumping there. But in true NIMBY-land East fashion, they couldn't find any other place to dump stuff, so a few weeks ago, they started up again, and there haven't been any more demonstrations this time around...."

Things are much better now, but as we all know, Taiwan's transition from Garbage Island back to Ilha Formosa still has a ways to go. On one of my recent visits to my host village near Sanhsia, the family with whom I was staying got out an copy of my *Ploughshare Village* book to look at the old pictures from the early

1970s and reminisce a bit while showing them to an American colleague and his wife who were visiting Taiwan with me. We leafed through to a picture of some hillside rice terraces on a bend in a river, trees and red brick houses above and the river below. "li kua: hit gu kat sui....a jima pi: kat bai!" This seems to be everybody's feeling, about rural spaces at least--no more red brick compounds among green fields, in fact fewer fields all the time, more unplanned communities with jarringly incompatible buildings, no more bucolic scenes of water buffaloes coming home at dusk, no more little dirt trails across lush green forests between towns on two sides of a mountain range. And in urban terms, the air pollution in the big cities is still pretty bad--though, in my Taiwan chauvinist way, I always point out that the pollution in Taipei is nothing compared to Wuhan or Chengdu. It's been years since they took down the noise-pollution meter that replaced the 毋忘在莒 sign in front of the old Taipei Station, too, and the noise level does seem to be going down. But there are a lot of people in a small area, a lot of cars and scooters, so no city in Taiwan is any kind of model for pollution control.

Still, the grossest abuses really are gone, and how the transition happened brings us to our final series of things the world can learn from Taiwan.

The first lesson in this series is the one promoted articulately by Professor Rob Weller in his two recent books, that environmental consciousness and political democracy are partners in progress. It's not just the familiar refrain that democratic institutions really do put a brake on the environmental depredations of autocratic or repressive governments and their industrial branches or cronies, though the recent history of China has certainly shown this by negative example. It is also, as Weller points out, that environmental activism can be the impetus for political organization at the grass-roots level, and thus for democratization and political participation of the whole society. The first round of protests at Houjin in Kaohsiung, documented by Lü Hsin-yi, showed very clearly how environmental protest and the development of political opposition can go hand in hand.

The second lesson is that environmental protest and environmental activism are not necessarily elite activities, even though environmentalism may be an elite ideology. As Richard White pointed out in his now-classic essay about Washington, "Are you an Environmentalist, or do you Work for a Living," people who live in an environment care about preserving that environment so they can continue to live there, and this principle applies whether the local residents are loggers in the Pacific Northwest forest, Reikai Hunters in the Southern Taiwan Mountains, or blue-collar workers in Kaohsiung's grungy industrial suburbs. The industrial workers protesting the 5th naphtha cracker in the south, the villagers stopping the garbage trucks in the north, or the coalition of Aborigines assembled to stop the Ai-liao River reservoir, all are local people who care about the places where they live. All were taking risks in the late 1980s and early 1990s (though not as risky as their actions would have been ten years earlier), and all were doing it in the name of home.

The third lesson is that environmental activism and government may sometimes be opposed, or may sometimes be allied. At the time government and industry were the engines of development, Houjin protestors and many others were

in opposition to authority, but with Taiwan's current mania for growing the economy by getting local communities to manufacture or display something that people from other communities want to eat or photograph or put on knicknack shelves or give friends as presents showing they have been to that place, the places have to look nice. I am astonished now when I go back to Yingge, which has no smokestacks anymore because it has almost no kilns, but has a really spiffy museum of--what else--pottery, and an "old street" that is in no way old, but that is free of cars, nicely paved in fake cobblestones, and full of fun things to buy, such as the pottery bird-call whistle my friend Ma Tengyue bought for me when he took me there. The local culture movement, which is so central to the formation of the inclusive identity I wrote about above, becomes an ally of the environmentalists. If only you didn't have to drive to get there, wherever "there" is.

Which brings us back to A-bian. If his greatest accomplishment was just getting elected president (the first time), certainly his second greatest accomplishment--and, I suspect, the real reason why he could get elected, was his policy of 垃圾不落地. Former U.S. House Speaker Tip O'Neill might have been exaggerating to make a point when he famously said that "all politics is local," but in the environmental case, as Taiwan has shown, it's almost always true.

#### Conclusion:

So the world has a lot to learn from Taiwan--much of it positive, some of it cautionary, none of it horrible. Problems there are, and it is right to be concerned and committed to finding solutions. But from an outsider's perspective, there are a lot of reasons to be positive about the Island. Both the academic temperament and the national neurosis tempt one to be nothing but critical. It's easy to join in the chorus of "台灣現在不行," but think of how far the island has come in the last 30 years. Keep a balance between criticism and credit, and the world will continue to have a lot to learn from Taiwan.