Part III
Introduction to Taiwanese Society, Culture, and Politics

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Taiwan, also known as Formosa, is an island off the southeastern coast of China. It was originally inhabited by aboriginal, hunting, and gathering tribes. Migrants from the nearby Chinese mainland, such as the province of Fukien and Kwangtung, began to settle the island in the 1600s and drove the aboriginal people back into the mountains, where some still survive (Shepherd 1993). Today's population of 23 million consists about 70% of descendants of the southern Chinese immigrants, who now consider themselves ethnic Taiwanese. Most of the rest of the population are from central and northern China and came over with the defeated and retreating Nationalist Army in the late 1940s. The Taiwanese think of these newcomers as a distinct ethnic group, mainlanders. The ethnic split between Taiwanese and mainlanders underlies many of Taiwan's domestic political tensions (Gates 1981; Jacobs 2005).

Since the end of World War Two, Taiwan's unique political situation has been a central issue for China, the USA, and other Pacific countries, and of course Taiwan itself. In 1945, the Chinese Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) took control of Taiwan and in 1949, after defeat by the Chinese Communist Army, the Kuomintang and its military fled to Taiwan. There, they established their own Chinese government-in-exile aimed at retaking China in the future and regarding Taiwan as no more than a small province. To establish control, the Kuomintang ruled Taiwan very harshly. Taiwan's postwar era began with the bloody suppression of an island-wide social protest. In 1947, the Kuomintang ruthlessly crushed the natives' call for political reform and greater autonomy (the February 28 Incident) (Kerr 1965).

After the military massacre, the émigré Kuomintang regime embarked on a white-terror reign that consolidated its hold over the society. The regime conducted a systematic social engineering of native society, first for anti-communist war mobilization and later for export-led industrialization. It imposed martial law that forbade any protest movement or suspicious gathering. In its economic development policies, the regime favored its compatriots from the mainland and put them into leadership of new industrial enterprises. The Taiwanese had to content themselves with starting small businesses to serve or as subsidiaries to the influx of foreign manufacturing industry (Johnson 1992). This economic

inequality intensified ethnic tensions between the ruling mainlanders and the suppressed native Taiwanese, with oppositional political movements forming among the latter. In the 1970s, Taiwanese intellectuals began to voice their criticism of the dictatorial regime and published a journal, Formosa Magazine, to publicize their views. They demanded democratic reforms and fairer treatment for peasants and workers. The opposition began to form movements and groups to give stronger voice to their demands. But the government's 1979 crackdown and arrest of the dissident intellectuals publishing Formosa Magazine hastily concluded that brief period of intellectual fermentation (Jacobs 1981).

Scholars have debated the effect of traditional Neo-Confucian values on the KMT party state and its governance of Taiwan. Some scholars see a strong effect of Neo-Confucian values, arguing that in general the KMT state exercised relatively loose control over society and was efficient in promoting economic growth (Vogel 1991; King 1996; Gold 1996). Other interpretation contends that the KMT systematically tailored out a conservative cultural policy out of the traditional cultural elements. Chinese nationalism, political loyalty, and Chiang's personal cult were thoroughly propagandized through state-controlled communications and education channel in an effort to combat the twin threats of cosmopolitan liberalism and local popular culture (Winckler 1994).

The KMT's official ideology is Sunism, or the political philosophy developed by Dr. Sun Yat-sen in the early twentieth century. Sunism advocated for Chinese nationalism, a gradual evolution to democracy, and state socialism for the benefit of people's livelihood. Baptized as a Christian and trained as a modern medical doctor, Sun admired the western science and liberalism, but he cherished the cultural legacies of Chinese Confucianism. Upon the death of its founder in 1924, the KMT was internally divided by rightwing and leftwing forces, both claiming to be the legitimate interpretation of Sunism – a schism that was aggravated by the rise of communists. The rightwing was cultural traditionalists who envisioned a national unity under a tutelary state (Dirlik 1975), while the leftwing aimed at national liberation through worker and peasant movement (Chesneaux 1968). Although Sunism largely underpinned the 1947 Constitution, its ideological ambiguities never ceased to exist. In Taiwan, the KMT made a pragmatic use of Sunism to justify its anti-communist crusade and domination of native society. Thus, nationalism became submission to the US-imposed Cold War world order. The gradual evolution to democracy meant electoral procedures could be indefinitely postponed. And the claim of people's livelihood justified state ownership and land reform which decimated the native class of industrialists, managers, and landlords. The ideological incoherence prevented the KMT from embracing the totalitarian attempt to "remake human beings according to a political blueprint," but Leninist organizational control was installed in Taiwan (Hood 1997, 28–29). During its mainland period, the KMT was faction-ridden and exercised ineffective and uneven rule over a vast tract of war-torn territory, but once in Taiwan, it underwent a tremendous Leninist transformation by building

party-state infrastructure into every sphere of native society under its tutelage (Dickson 1993; Ho 2007).

Under the dictatorship, Taiwan experienced rapid economic growth and the development of a middle class (Gold 1986; Vogel 1991). The early-1980s witnessed the rise of middle-class movements for consumer rights, gender equality, and environment conservation, as the chapter by Michael Hsiao relates. Building on this momentum, the political opposition reorganized and in 1986 founded the first successful opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). By this time, the original leader Chiang Kai Shek had died in 1975. His successor and son, Chiang Ching Kuo, was less ardent about the goal of taking back mainland China and more concerned about the situation in Taiwan. However, its authoritarian stance was more a product of the KMT desire to have the autonomy from society to someday launch an invasion of the Chinese mainland and retake control. As this dream faded, so did the internal rationale for martial law. Moreover, the corruption that arbitrary rule occasioned ran against the Confucian paternalism still admired by some state officials (Vogel 1991, 18; King 1996, 243). Thus, aside from other pressures, the state was going through an internal process of self-transformation (King 1996, 242).

The USA was also putting increasing pressure on the regime to democratize. This crumbling of the regime's inner resolve led it to lift martial law one year later in 1987. The unmistakable signs of liberalization released pent-up discontent (Ho and Hsiao 2010). Social mobilization reached high tide in the late-1980s and early-1990s. Social movements sprang up from many groups with different issues, including peasants, students, workers, aboriginals, pollution victims, Hakka minority, teachers, and political prisoners (Hsieh 1994; Hsiao 1992; Wright 2001; Weller 2006). During 1990–92, larger scale demonstrations clashed violently with the police. The Kuomintang government tried to suppress such movements by incriminating and arresting their members, but to no avail. Civil society had escaped its former confines and mushroomed rapidly. The growth of civil society and democracy in Taiwan fundamentally challenged the authoritarian governance practices of the KMT party-state.

Hoping to mollify this unrest by compromise, in 1988 the teetering Kuomintang government allowed a native Taiwanese, Lee Teng-hui, to become president. But this move only hastened the process. President Lee Teng-hui, by ousting conservative mainlander hardliners from their posts and promoting Taiwanese political consciousness, set Taiwan on a course of further democratization. Social movements in the 1990s were noticeably more peaceful (Chen and Lin 2006; Ho 2006; Lu 2002; Wong 2004). While some movement demands (women, education reform, and environment) began to be incorporated into policies, movement activists continued to find new niches to sustain their activism. Community movements, movements by marginal persons (gays, licensed prostitutes and urban squatters), and reform movements in professional areas (judicial reform, medical reform, and journalistic reform) were new developments in the mid-1990s. During this period the Democratic Peoples' Party gradually detached itself from social movements and shifted its primary

focus to the Taiwanese nation-building process. In 1996, the Kuomintang regime finally allowed free and fair elections with party competition for the presidency and all the legislative seats – the first democratic election for state office in China's many millennia of history (Chu 1998). Lee Teng-hui won the first election. But in the second election (2000), DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian won and became president.

During his presidency (2000–2008), Chen Shui-bian had a relatively weak government since the KMT still dominated the legislature body. Social movement organizations gained influence in the decision-making processes and helped design and implementing new public policies. But social welfare, labor, and environmental activists became frustrated by the DPP's centrist turn. Counter-movements (teachers against taxation and opponents of education reform) rose to exploit the political opportunities present in a weak administration (Ho 2005). The heightened partisan conflict led to the reemergence of large-scale political mobilization by both camps. Demonstrations occurred in 2005 against a law prohibiting Taiwan's secession from China, in 2006 against President Chen for alleged corruption and in 2008 against China itself. In the 2008 election, a Nationalist Party candidate, Ma Ying-jeou, recaptured the presidency and opened a new period of conservative shift. Its impact upon social movements remains to be observed.

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