Good, But Not Great, Political History

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With a strong recommendation from a respected colleague, I came to Denny Roy's book, *Taiwan: A Political History*, with very positive inclinations. The book begins in pre-European times, has a chapter each on the Qing (**清**) and Japanese periods, and looks at both the domestic and international aspects of Taiwan's development over the past several decades. Yet, I finished the book with a sense of dissatisfaction.

I believe two sets of reasons help explain my sense of unease. First, the book makes a series of basic errors. In addition, the book is very lightly footnoted. This makes it difficult to discover the source of the errors (or, for that matter, the source of the good points as well). When discovering basic errors in areas that one knows well, the reader then wonders about the accuracy of areas he or she knows less well.

Secondly, the writer's organization sometimes lacks clarity. Very strange chronologies are strung together and thereby confuse the reader. Sometimes, this results from an overtly American viewpoint.

My first major concern with the book begins on page 3. Roy says in footnote 1: "One of the major studies on this subject [Taiwan's aborigines] is Emily Martin Ahern and Hill Gates, eds., *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1981)." The Ahern and Gates volume was and is an important book, but not one of the seventeen chapters deals with aborigines.

New worries come on pages 4-6. Here Dr. Roy asserts that Hakkas (**客家人**) came to Taiwan well before the Hokkien (**福建人**). He writes, "About a third of Guangdong's [**廣東**] Hakkas sailed to Taiwan in the

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latter part of the thirteenth century" (p. 5). To the best of my knowledge, there is no evidence for such a Hakka migration to Taiwan at that time. The issue was first raised by William G. Goddard, an Australian with close Kuomintang (KMT, **國民黨**) connections, who asserted:

> The first to respond to this urge to cross the sea in quest of a new life, based on the ownership of land, were the Hakkas, the untouchables of China... As long as they remained on the Chinese mainland, there was no hope for them. It was land they wanted, land that would respond to their tilling... On the southern part of the great western plain of Formosa the migrants found the land they sought. The age-long dream had come true. The long bitter persecution had ended. They had their problems, not the least of which was the enmity of the natives, descendants of the Proto-Malayans, whom they had dispossessed of their land and driven into the foothills... Soon the western fringe of that coastal plain was green with sugar-cane, and rice production was so extensive that Formosa was forecast as the "future granary of Fukien"... Such was the progress that, during the year 1000, arrangements were completed for the export to south China of sugar, rice, tea, and dyes. Peikang [**北港**] was the port from which the junks sailed with their cargoes, initiating the first trading concern across the Strait of Formosa.[1]

Unfortunately, Goddard presents absolutely no evidence for these musings.

John Copper similarly states that the first Chinese to come to Taiwan were Hakkas when he says, "By about A.D. 1000 there were Hakka settlements in southwest Taiwan in significant numbers,"[2] but he does not cite Goddard or any other sources at this place in his book. Roy too does not cite any sources, though on the next page, and a couple of paragraphs later, he does cite Copper.

In Taiwan, Hakkas occupy inferior hill land, a strong indication that they arrived *after* the Hokkien, not before. In twenty-first century Taiwan, this issue of whether Hokkien or Hakkas came to Taiwan first is of little importance. Goddard may have made such a claim in order to reduce any Hokkien claim over Taiwan. As we gain a stronger understanding of Taiwan's history, however, it is important not to repeat—especially with-

[1]See William G. Goddard, *Formosa: A Study in Chinese History* (London, Melbourne, Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), 24-25. This book was also published in East Lansing by Michigan State University Press, 1966.

[2]John F. Copper, *Taiwan: Nation-State or Province?* 2nd edition (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), 11.

out citation—such problematic claims.

Ironically, only a few pages later, Roy states, "Other than aborigines, the island's first settlers were likely Japanese pirates and traders," who arrived between 1598 and 1628. "Prior to the 1600s, there were comparatively few permanent Chinese settlements on Taiwan" (p. 12). Yet, two pages later, he cites Goddard, as he writes, "Many of the first contests with aborigines over living space involved Hakka settlers" (p. 14).[3] Such inconsistency raises serious questions about the quality of Roy's analysis.

At the beginning of the chapter on KMT rule in Taiwan, Roy tells us: "Dr. Sun Yat-sen ... revived the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party or KMT; originally established in 1912) in 1914" (p. 55). Sun established the Hsing Chung Hui (**興中會**, Revive China Society) in November 1894 and the Tung Meng Hui (**同盟會**) in 1905. In January 1912, the headquarters of the Tung Meng Hui moved to Nanking (Nanjing, **南京**), where in August the Tung Meng Hui joined with other groups to form the Kuomintang. However, in 1914, Sun established the China Revolutionary Party (**中華革命黨**) in Japan, where he had escaped following the failed "Second Revolution," and the party was not renamed the Kuomintang until 1919.[4] Again, some simple facts seem to be wrong.

When discussing the earlier years of KMT rule in Taiwan, Roy states "the government would promote limited democratization" (p. 81). As Roy himself then states, "serious attempts to discredit the central government were not permitted" (p. 81). To me, this clearly is not "democratization" at all, but rather a form of "liberalization." Democratization implies that the opposition can win an election and become the government; this was

[3]According to Goddard, these conflicts took place during the Song Dynasty (**宋朝**); see Goddard, *Formosa: A Study in Chinese History*, 26. As an indication of carelessness, Roy states that Goddard's book was published in West Lansing rather than East Lansing; see p. 14, note 3 et passim.

[4]Such historical facts are available from a wide variety of sources. I have used a bilingual publication on my study shelves for details: *Feiyue yibai nian, zai chuang xin shiji: Zhongguo Guomindang de chengzhang yu lixiang* (**飛躍一百年,再創新世紀:中國國民黨的成長與理想**, A century of achievement, a new era of innovation: The evolution and ideals of the Kuomintang of China) (Taipei: Central Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang, 1994?), 22-39.

never possible in Taiwan until Lee Teng-hui (**李登輝**) became president. "Limited democracy" again appears in the title on p. 158 and on p. 160.

The discussion on local factions, while better than many sources, still contains errors. There is no evidence that "The KMT nurtured competing factions in a given area and then pitted them against each other in a contest to win the KMT support and funding that would boost their own candidates" (p. 86). Rather, the factions formed independently and the KMT had a great deal of difficulty gaining any local control.[5] Similarly, while eleven new members were added to the Legislative Yuan (**立法院**) in 1969, fifteen rather than eight new members were added to the National Assembly (**國民大會**, p. 85).[6] Again, a basic fact is simply and unnecessarily wrong.

Roy's interpretation of Taiwan's land reform also lacks a critical ingredient. The absence of powerful political opposition owed to the fact that the KMT was reforming Taiwanese land. This undercut the economic basis of potential Taiwanese opposition. If, in fact, "Land reform [did] fan articulate opposition to the regime even as it benefited large numbers of working-class Taiwanese" (p. 100), I would like to see some evidence cited. In addition, the statement, "A *chia* [**甲**] is equal to about 9,700 square feet" (p. 101, note 34), is also wrong. A *chia*, a measure unique to Taiwan, equaled 0.96992 hectares.[7] A hectare is 107,638.6 square feet,[8] so a *chia* equals about 104,401 square feet—or 10.7 times more than Roy's figure.

Similarly, while discussing the unfair rice for fertilizer barter arrangements, which worked against the farmers (p. 102), no statement notes that the Farmers' Association (**農會**) successfully lobbied the government to end the barter arrangement in the mid-1970s. Nor is it correct to state that Taiwan culture "considers sweet potatoes fodder for animals" (p. 103). Al-

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[5]See J. Bruce Jacobs, *Local Politics in a Rural Chinese Cultural Setting: A Field Study of Mazu Township, Taiwan* (Canberra: Contemporary China Centre, Australian National University, 1980) for details.

[6]For this election, see, *inter alia*, J. Bruce Jacobs, "Recent Leadership and Political Trends in Taiwan," *The China Quarterly*, no. 45 (January/March 1971): 133.

[7]John Robert Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier 1600-1800* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 425.

[8]*Taiwan Statistical Data Yearbook 2001* (Taipei: Council for Economic Planning and Development, 2001), 357.

though sweet potatoes are less preferable than rice, Taiwanese have long eaten sweet potatoes and have sometimes grown rice as a cash crop and then sold the rice in exchange for sweet potatoes to eat.

Roy writes, "the National Assembly elected Chiang Ching-kuo [**蔣經國**] president on March 21, 1978. He took on the title of KMT Chairman [**主席**, *chuhsi*] a month later" (p. 156). In fact, Chiang Ching-kuo took on the title of Chairman following his father's death in April 1975. This indicated that Chiang Ching-kuo had succeeded his father in power, even though Chiang Ching-kuo waited until Yen Chia-kan's (**嚴家淦**) presidential term concluded in 1978 before moving to the presidency. Similarly, Kang Ning-hsiang (**康寧祥**) was not elected to the Legislative Yuan in 1969 (see p. 158),[9] when new members received permanent membership, but in 1972. In 1969, Kang was elected to the Taipei Municipal Council (**台北市議會**).

As of the late 1970s and early 1980s (the timing is unclear in his writing), Roy asserts:

> A large percentage of Taiwanese also felt a kinship with the mainland and feared provoking a military conflict with the PRC, and thus were not eager to change the cross-Strait status quo. The passion of many *Tangwai* [*Dangwai* **黨外**] politicians for self-determination (or independence) and democratization were not necessarily shared by the bulk of Taiwan's people... *Most of the public preferred keeping martial law* [emphasis added] and cared less about seeking independence than about other matters such as crime, pollution, and the cost of living. Furthermore, most of the Taiwan public, including the Taiwanese who had no particular affection for the KMT, disliked the *Tangwai*'s [*Dangwai*'s] use of tactics such as disrupting legislative sessions and encouraging street riots [p. 162].

This passage lacks any supporting evidence. In addition, the *Dangwai* was not solely responsible for legislative disruptions. Again, without citation of evidence, Roy asserts, "Police and Garrison Command [**警備總部**] security officers could make arrests without warrants and, until 1982, interrogate detainees in seclusion" (p. 163). Certainly, according to Republic

[9]Katherine Lee, "Taiwan's Dissidents," *Index on Censorship* 9, no. 6 (December 1980): 49, makes this mistake in her otherwise very useful article following the Kaohsiung Incident (**高雄事件**). Roy does not cite this article, however.

of China law, families were supposed to be informed within 24 hours of an arrest or detention as early as 1980 and probably much before. Of course, the security agencies did not feel compelled to obey the law.

In his discussion of the National Affairs Conference (**國是會議**) of mid-1990, Roy asserts the "points of agreement included ... the ROC president ... should be popularly elected" (p. 191). In fact, the issue of directly or indirectly electing the president was still deadlocked at the early 1992 National Assembly meeting, at which it was then decided to come back to the issue before May 20, 1995. This agreement on election method actually occurred in 1994 during the National Assembly's constitutional amendments when direct presidential election finally did receive wide support. A few pages later, Roy appears to agree with this reviewer when he states, "The issue of direct election of the president was one of the most sharply debated" (p. 194). Again, the lack of consistency in argument worries this reader.

The discussion of the 1996 presidential election and the Taiwan Strait crisis is good, but there are still problems. Polling shows that the Chinese threats increased Lee Teng-hui's vote by about 20 percent, much more than "at least 5 percent" (p. 201). Also, what is the evidence for Roy's claim that "Still, most Asians wished Taiwan would stop resisting and accept unification with the PRC under the 'one country, two systems' formula" (p. 202)? This writer's Asian contacts expressed considerable concern about China's military actions at the time and gave quiet support to Taiwan.

The discussion about James Soong (**宋楚瑜**) also raises concerns. It is not correct to say that "the provincial government had jurisdiction over all residents of the main island" (p. 209); this level of government did not control either Taipei or Kaohsiung municipalities, which combined accounted for over 18 percent of the island's population. Secondly, it is difficult to agree that James Soong "had a reputation for integrity," especially in view of his role in the Chung-hsing Bills scandal (**興票案**). To some extent, Roy's statements come from an article by Gerald McBeath,[10] which

[10]Gerald McBeath, "Restructuring Government in Taiwan," *Asian Survey* 40, no. 2 (March/April 2000): 251-68.

Roy cites; McBeath is less clear-cut on the issue, however, and notes that, "as governor, Soong crisscrossed the island dispensing the patronage of office in ways that bolstered his personal support."[11] This spending spree, in fact, bankrupted the provincial government—and even Soong's supporters in the 2000 election admitted that he had spent huge amounts of provincial funds in order to win electoral support.[12] Later, Roy himself (pp. 227, 229) raises questions about Soong's integrity.

The book has a welcome section on Taiwan's aboriginal population, but this treatment too has difficulties. How can one write that 40 percent of the membership of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan were aborigines (p. 224)? It might be that 40 percent of aborigines belonged to the Presbyterian Church, but in no way can aborigines account for 40 percent of the Church's membership. Also, while it is true that aborigines had six seats in the legislature as a result of the 1991 constitutional revision, the constitutional amendments of 1997 gave them eight seats, effective in the elections of 1998 and 2001. It is also true that the Democratic Progressive Party (**民主進步黨**, DPP) has been quite sympathetic to aboriginal interests (p. 223), but in recent elections aborigines have still voted overwhelmingly for the KMT and for the People First Party (**親民黨**, PFP) in order to thank James Soong for the construction conducted when he was provincial governor.

The 2000 presidential election analysis also raises questions. How can one describe Dr. Chang Chao-hsiung (**張昭雄**), James Soong's running mate, as "pro-independence" (p. 231)? How can one say "Chen [Shui-bian, **陳水扁**] resigned from the DPP in May 2000" (p. 236) when he is now Chairman of the party?

As noted above, in addition to basic errors, Roy's book sometimes is poorly organized. One example appears in the discussion of the United States' recognition of Beijing (**北京**). The former U.S. embassy in Taipei became the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT, **美國在台協會**) while the

[11]Ibid., 253.

[12]Reviewer's interviews at time of 2000 election campaign. See also Bruce Jacobs, "The View from the Countryside," *Taipei Times*, March 15, 2000, 8.

Taiwan offices in the United States became the Coordination Council for North American Affairs (CCNAA, **北美事務協調委員會**). Following this, Roy then says, "Japan made a similar arrangement with Taiwan" (p. 140). This implies that the Japanese arrangements occurred simultaneously or after the American arrangements. In fact, the Japanese arrangements took place in 1972, over six years before the American arrangements, and may have served as a model for the United States. Similar cases of poor writing appear elsewhere in the text, as on page 159 where some 1976 bombings are placed before the 1970 assassination attempt on Chiang Ching-kuo. Another difficult section with a mixed chronology is "Foreign and Cross-Strait Relations" (pp. 212-22).

Overall, Roy's book has many interesting analyses. Unfortunately, this book has too many basic errors and lacks sufficient footnotes for those interested in pursuing problematic claims. The romanization is frequently terrible, providing a mix of poor Wade-Giles and poor *Pinyin* (**拼音**), often in the same citation.

Because of these difficulties, I could not in good conscience give this book to undergraduates as a main text on Taiwan. Postgraduates and scholars, moreover, will find little new. Sadly, the lack of care has hurt what could have been a fine book.