

Preface: Studies of Taiwan Politics

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In an earlier special issue that this journal put together on the "The State of the China Studies Field," Shelley Rigger's review of political science and Taiwan domestic politics opined:

Some would argue that Taiwan is a field in its own right, not a sub-field of China studies. But in political science, I do not find this to be the case, at least not yet. To my knowledge, there is no position in any political science department in the United States that is designated for a Taiwan specialist. Thus, the vast majority of graduate students interested in Taiwan politics work with faculty advisors whose primary interests are in other fields, usually Chinese politics. Also, the great majority of courses offered in U.S. universities on East Asian politics focus on China and Japan, although some also incorporate material on Korea and Taiwan. One can easily complete a Ph.D. in Chinese politics without taking a course devoted to Taiwan; completing a Ph.D. in Taiwanese politics without studying the PRC is impossible, given the state of the field today.¹

There clearly are many *studies* of Taiwan politics, as, for instance, is readily apparent in the work presented in this special issue: the Issue Focus for this volume includes a mix of political scientists, sociologists, media

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¹Shelley Rigger, "Political Science and Taiwan's Domestic Politics," *Issues & Studies* 38, no. 4/39, no. 1 (December 2002/March 2003): 50 n. 1.

experts, area studies specialists, and policy analysts discussing the 2004 presidential elections and referenda; and the Book Review Roundtable offers a selection of opinions about Taiwan/Chinese identity as held by political scientists, sociologists, historians, and anthropologists.

Much less certain, however, is whether the current research/research community constitutes a field or *study* in its own right. This special issue was thus conceived in order to help consolidate the field by: providing review essays that examine the development of the field and some of its subfields; offering various fora to present the views of different scholars from different disciplinary and methodological approaches on key issues within the study of Taiwan politics (including the use of formats which allow interaction between the participants); presenting some of the experiences and personal insights from different generations of Taiwan watchers; and offering up practical reference information to help define some the field's electronic resources and logistical support.²

To meet the above goals, *Issues & Studies* thus invited thirty-three experts from different countries, professions, age cohorts, research foci, and methodological approaches to discuss various aspects of Taiwan politics. Their views are expressed herein via a variety of formats—including review articles, debate forum, research notes, issue focus roundtables, and book reviews.

But why study Taiwan politics? First of all, as Jih-wen Lin notes in this volume, "Taiwan is a land abundant in surprises," and politics on Taiwan is thus inherently interesting. The year 2004, for example, was certainly an eventful and even tumultuous one for Taiwan politics. The island experienced a hotly-contested presidential election, one marked by a controversial gunshot attack on the campaigning President and Vice-President the day before the election, by what will likely go down in the history books as one of the closest-ever margins of electoral victory for any head of state,

²Note that the goal of this issue is not to make an argument for the importance of Taiwan studies vis-à-vis China studies, but rather to help consolidate the study of Taiwan politics for its own sake.

and by a loud and prolonged challenge of the election results by the losing candidates and their parties.

Second, the study of Taiwan politics is an excellent case study from which to delve into important social science questions. The introductory article to this special issue, written by **T.J. Cheng** and **Andrew D. Marble**, shows how the study of Taiwan went from being a marginal focus of social science research in the 1960s and 1970s to becoming an important and productive theoretical research area in the 1980s and 1990s due to the island's unique path to democracy and strong economic performance (with the latter brought on, as some argue, by an effective state-led development strategy). Although the field is now facing challenges to stay relevant, the authors find four research areas in which the study of Taiwan can continue to lead general social science theorizing: (1) East Asian economic development, (2) the systems and governance of newly-democratizing Asia, (3) the politics of political identity and nationalism, and (4) asymmetric dyads.

Third, Taiwan politics also matters in terms of East Asian stability and U.S. foreign policy, as noted in **Wei-chin Lee's** review of both the practice and study of Taiwan's foreign policymaking. Focusing on the three main areas of democracy, cross-Straits relations, and security, he highlights the island's strengths and weaknesses that Taiwan must take into consideration in its relations with other countries. He notes that there is an awakening of Taiwanese consciousness which is causing Taiwan to be more vocal, assertive, and even unpredictable in its foreign policy. Lee even warns that Taiwan's belief in international liberalism—especially the view that democratic countries will come to the island's aid if it is challenged by a non-democratic state (i.e., China)—could very well bring about disastrous consequences for regional stability, with Taiwan ending up as a clear loser.

The danger that Taiwan's domestic politics could result in a crisis occurring in the region has been raised by many others as well. **Jieh-min Wu's** contribution discusses, in part, the national security dimension of the 2004 referenda: the fears that since this form of direct democracy could be wielded either as a tool for Taiwan's "creeping independence" or as a weapon of deterrence against threats from China, they could tip the subtle

balance in the U.S.-China-Taiwan triangle. **Robert Sutter**, in his essay, confirms that Taiwan's recent referenda and elections have made many U.S. policymaking elite much more pessimistic about the ability of mainstream opinion on the island to keep Taiwan from any assertive moves toward self-determination.

No where is the explosive nature of cross-Strait relations more apparent than the study of identity politics. The **Book Review Roundtable** for this issue looks at Melissa Brown's stimulating book, *Is Taiwan Chinese? The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities*. The roundtable presents a lively debate over the issue of identity formation and its implications for the political relationship across the Strait. The editors trust that the exchange of ideas between **Murray Rubinstein, Cal Clark, Fu-chang Wang, Alan Wachman, Kuangchun Li, Shiaw-Chian Fong, Chih-yu Shih, Timothy Cheek, and Melissa Brown** will stimulate much further discussion and research on this provocative topic of Chinese/Taiwanese identity—including its effects on U.S.-China-Taiwan triangular relations, cross-Strait stability, and social unity on the island.

The issue of the island's social cohesion raises a fourth important aspect of studies of Taiwan politics: Taiwan is a politically and socially divided society, and research on Taiwan politics may be able to uncover methods to help mitigate these divisions. The divisive nature of Taiwan's society is reflected in a number of the contributions to this special issue: political scientist **Chi Huang** applies quantitative analysis to show the divisive effects that this year's plebiscitary politics has had on society; **Ming-chi Chen** traces the sociological roots of the division, arguing that globalization in general and cross-Strait economic relations in particular have led to a backlash from those who have lost out under these changes; media experts **Nien-hsuan Fang** and **Chein-san Feng** examine the media's role in intensifying social cleavages both before and after the presidential election; and **Mikael Mattlin** outlines some of the challenges of conducting research in such a politically-divided society.

An interesting outlier is the contribution by **Dafydd Fell**, who looks at the existing research on party position in Taiwan and what this literature tells us about the state of inter-party competition on the island. Fell does

not see a highly-polarized Taiwan, at least in terms of party politics. Comparing data from 1991 and 2001, he finds that parties have actually moved from polarized positions toward a pattern of moderate differentiation—though he does note that parties in Taiwan still do stress issues, compete on multiple issue cleavages, and remain clearly differentiated. Fell does warn, however, that smaller parties appear to be moving toward the extremes in the post-2000 period.

The general picture painted by the contributors is thus one of an island marked by a deeply polarized sociopolitical atmosphere. It is perhaps then understandable why many of these contributions have sought to help improve the situation by utilizing empirical and theoretical research in an effort to increase social cohesion in Taiwan. One example is the debate between **Jih-wen Lin** and **Emile C.J. Sheng** over whether or not a change in Taiwan's presidential election system would improve the level of sociopolitical stability on the island. Lin's article compares four presidential election formulas—*plurality voting*, *runoff*, *alternative voting*, and *approval voting*, and argues that approval voting stands out as the system most conducive to the formation of a cohesive society. Sheng disagrees, however, arguing that best is for the island to continue using the present system of plurality voting.

Another example of research having important normative implications is **Ching-Ping Tang's** review of the study of Taiwan politics in the field of public administration. Focusing on the concurrence of two reforms—democratization and new public management (NPM), he argues that because the NPM reforms actually advocate certain core values also shared by liberal democracies, and because NPM measures help fulfill certain political functions for regime transition, the two reforms actually reinforce each other early on in the process of democratization. He also finds, however, that as democratization proceeds, such advanced goals as improving the quality of civil society and promoting grass-roots deliberation with regard to a collective future begin to be emphasized on the reform agenda and thus come to be at odds with NPM.

Though Tang believes that Taiwan has yet to reach fully this later stage, those with an interest in social equality and stability can still take

heart for three reasons. First, as **Jieh-min Wu's** discussion of the referenda as a new social movement repertoire points out, vocal and sophisticated grass-roots movements are springing up to try to fill in the gap left by the DPP's abandonment of many social causes, efforts that often employ the referenda as a tool for social change (although **Jim Robinson's** review of Taiwan's referenda does warn that legislatures in general are often quite successful in avoiding responding effectively to the results of such initiatives). Second, it is also comforting to know that there is a pool of dedicated social scientists on Taiwan—Tang, Wu, Lin, and Sheng included—whose theoretical and empirical research takes into account such normative goals as improving social relations, empowering disadvantaged groups, encouraging public-spirited participation for the securing of collective goods, and promoting genuine deliberations with regard to a collective future. Third and finally, standing back from the specific arguments presented in the "Sheng-Lin debate," this forum is significant because it shows how two political scientists can use a rational and polite academic exchange of views to provide a constructive discussion on ways in which to make Taiwan less divisive—something others on Taiwan could learn from.

The above has delineated a number of reasons why the study of Taiwan politics is a fruitful line of research, and—by extension—why it should, and hopefully will, be increasingly viewed as a field in its own right. In order to help strengthen the field's identity and provide a sense of cohesion to the scholarly community who study Taiwan politics, this special issue has included an Inter-generational Retrospective on Living and Researching in Taiwan. For this roundtable we invited seven scholars—**Allen Whiting, John Copper, Bruce Jacobs, Thomas Gold, Joseph Bosco, Shelley Rigger, and Mikael Mattlin**—to offer up key insights on their experiences living and researching in Taiwan in their particular time period. Given that each scholar represents a different "generation" of Taiwan-watching, this roundtable helps contribute to a descriptive historical record of the evolvement of the field.

To further define the field, this special issue also includes a pair of Research Notes: one by **Chen-yuan Tung** and **Philip Hsiaopong Liu** which overviews the Internet resources available for those who study

Taiwan-U.S.-China relations, and a second by **Deborah Brown** which looks at foundations that support Taiwan studies. These first-of-a-kind reference works provide useful and practical information for scholars of Taiwan politics, and help define the scope of some of the field's key resources.

The four co-editors of this special issue—Keng Shu, I-chou Liu, Murray Rubinstein, and I—would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people that made this special issue possible. In addition to the authors whose works grace these pages, we would also like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to the reviewers who took the time and care to provide helpful comments. In terms of logistical support, moreover, Managing Editor Shen-chun Chang, Executive Assistant Mei-ling Chu, and interns Claire Topal, Dave Chessman, and Emily Drew all provided helpful assistance.