

John F. Copper, ed. *Taiwan: Nation-State or Province?*

**Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009, fifth ed., 304p. \$35
paperback**

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John Copper's book is probably the best introductory textbook on Taiwanese politics available in the market for two reasons. One, the organization of the chapters is based on subjects instead of chronological order. Chapter subjects of the land and the people, history, society, political system, economy, foreign and military policies, and the future can be analyzed in more depth and systematic way than in the more conventional chronological order which explores interactions of these subjects (e.g., Denny Roy's *Taiwan: A Political History* and Linda Chao and Ramon H. Myers' *The First Chinese Democracy*). The author frequently juxtaposes different interpretations of historical events in all these subjects, and makes balanced assessments of these interpretations.

The second reason is that this textbook is the newest among its peers. Roy's book was published in 2003; Chao and Myers' in 2002; and although the new edition of Murray A. Rubinstein's *Taiwan: A New History* was published in 2007, it is a new version of the early history of Taiwan. The dramatic change of regimes in 2008 (as it did in 1987 and in 2000) and the resultant impact on Taiwan's politics, economy, society, and international relations put other older textbooks on the history bookshelf since old arguments, analyses, and speculations on the future need to be adjusted accordingly. For instance, had the Democratic Progressive Party won the 2008 presidential election, Taiwan and China would still be locked around the edge of a war and the Taiwanese economy would still have trouble benefitting fully from the Chinese economic boom. The pervasive ambivalent attitude, if not outright pessimism, of most of the older textbooks would need no revision. The second turn over of the ruling party in 2008 changed all of these which Copper meticulously captured in this revised edition, particularly in the chapters on the economy, foreign and military policies, and the future. Things look much brighter now than two years ago in the eyes of most Taiwanese, Chinese and foreign observers.

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Despite its comparative merits, this edition of the book contains some minor deficiencies and controversies both of old and new. First, I quickly outline the four minor deficiencies. On page 110, the author attributed the original Constitution as mixed; however, most constitutional scholars in Taiwan would argue that the Constitution was mixed but clearly parliamentary. After seven revisions, it is a mixed but clearly super presidential system. On page 112, martial law was not a new law as the author implied but was promulgated in 1934 in the mainland, and the KMT government decided to enforce it in 1949. On pages 194–197, the author might have exaggerated the influence of public opinion on Taiwan's (or any country) foreign policy. On page 195, the "first national competitive election" was held in 1991, not in 1980 when fewer than half of the legislative seats were elected locally. Second, there also exist four controversies. On page 199 and other following pages, the author did not mention that American weapons sold to Taiwan were mostly outdated (if not out of production) versions and/or over-priced. When the DPP and KMT governments hesitated to buy these outdated and/or over-priced weapons, the US government and advisors routinely accused the Taiwanese governments for ignoring their national security. On page 218, the author did not include President Ma's new principle of foreign policy, called "diplomatic truce" with China. In practice, it meant the Taiwanese government would discontinue its past practices of buying diplomatic relations with China's friends in Africa or Latin America, if China would reciprocate it as well. Taiwan's applications to major international organizations, such as the World Health Association, would also involve prior under-the-table negotiation with China. On page 235, the Taiwan Relations Act (Section 3301 b5) obliged the United States government only to "provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character." That is, the US government would "help to defend," but not "defend" Taiwan. The former meant that the US would provide arms, but not sending troops to engage in combat missions as the latter term implied. On page 239, Taiwanese citizens are more democratic (in western sense) than the author seemed to imply. Most of the surveys done on Taiwanese citizens would reveal their strong commitment to democratic values. The "Asian value" argument never found a large audience in democratic Taiwan.

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