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**Robert Ash, John W. Garver, and Penelope B. Prime (Eds.).
Taiwan's Democracy: Economic and Political Challenges. London:
Routledge. 2011.**

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During a visit to Taiwan as part of a delegation looking at the Presidential elections in May 2008, I remember we held a short seminar at one of the main universities in Taipei. A student there, during the discussion, stood up and declared, 'What kind of position are we in? We have postage stamps, we have our own money, our own airline, and our own passports. But we can't just say that we live in a country called Taiwan, and we are Taiwanese.' His confusion is shared by most of his 24 million fellow Taiwanese, and by many outside the island.

Taiwan's contested status because of the ongoing claims, across the Strait and in the international community, that there is one China, of which Taiwan is a part, and in particular because of the resolute determination of the People's Republic of China to maintain its absolute right to sovereignty over the island, means it is one of the perennial vexed issues of international relations. Not the least perplexing aspect of this is exactly what sort of status to give the island – quasi nationality, or simply a kind of de facto sovereignty in all but name. The fact that its political, social and economic model is so different to the Mainland's doesn't help things. Taiwan is, indeed, a major aberration, and one for which there are no easy conceptual frameworks.

This collection of 8 essays, with a lengthy introduction offering an overview by one of the editors, John Garver, gives a flavour of the sorts of issues that studying and dealing with Taiwan, for those inside and outside the island, presents. Christopher Hughes essay on the nature of identity for Taiwanese, and Dafydd Fell's on internal politics, come close to the heart of the matter when they talk about the ongoing campaigns to articulate a more representative sense of what it is, in the 21st century, to be Taiwanese, while still trying to frame this in a context in which, politically and culturally, the Mainland looms large. Shelley Rigger in the opening essay on constitutional change, gives some broader political context by showing the internal evolution from an authoritarian military dictatorship from 1949 to the 1980s, to the gradual thawing under Chang Ch'ing-huo, the son of Chiang Kai-shek, to the final triumphant holding of full and free presidential and legislative elections by 1996. Over the last two decades, as she shows, one can map this political change from the numerous adaptations to the country constitution, which show how power has been diluted, redefined and shifted.

For Hughes, however, it is more a matter of how the political elite, during this transformation, decided to deal with the issue of desinification. To say that they were 'Chinese' when increasingly opinion polls showed most people agreed with the young man quoted at the start of this review seemed simply to fudge the issue. Taiwanese were able to enjoy the development and political fruits of an economic model that produced remarkable results from the 1960s onwards, making them one of the wealthiest communities in the world, on a per capita basis, and also one of the best served in terms of education and healthcare, and other social goods. To try and find common understanding in a population where only two per cent were aboriginal Taiwanese, less than 20 had come from the Mainland after 1949, and the remainder were long term third, fourth or fifth generation settlers with communities across the Strait with their own internal complexity was, and has continued, to prove hard. The highly charged campaigns by former President, and leader of the Democratic People's Party Chen Shui-bian, to rename and rebrand state and social institutions as Taiwanese rather than Chinese, led to some turbulence, and was tied up, as Fell shows, with the increasingly risky postures that Chen took

towards the end of his second and final term in coming closer and closer, despite earlier shying away from, outright declarations of Taiwanese independence. This is the ultimate red line for Beijing, and there is little doubt that Chen, had he done this, would have caused a major conflict in the region, and tested the unilateral commitment of the US to come to the island's help should it be the victim of any attacks by China.

At the heart of the island's success, however, is its flexible, productive economic model, and it discussions of this that take up the second half of the book. For Anne Booth, the main issue is how government policy was able to work with enterprises, to support remarkable growth in education, so that a place where hardly any enjoyed secondary education in 1949 became, by the early 2000s, one of the best educated in the world, and one where basic education and literacy were on a par, and sometimes above, those of other developed countries. Yun-Peng Chu and Gee San, show how government industrial policy since the 1970s had played to the islands strengths, recognising in the 1980s that the Mainland offered a vast, cheap workforce for producing key goods where the proprietorial intellectual property belonged to Taiwanese entities. Taiwan's educational levels, and in particular its skills at producing well trained scientists, meant that it was able to file enough patents in the US to put it below only the US and Japan. Big jumps in research and development supported by state policy aided this competitive edge, as Taiwan moved away from simply produce cheap mass manufactured goods which had produced the first wave of its wealth in the 1970s, to electrical appliances, and then, in the last decade, something like 90 per cent of the world's motherboards for personal computers, and through the celebrated Taiwanese company Foxconn, products for companies like Apple and Microsoft.

There are challenges, thought, and while these are more clearly stated economically, they end up being political. For Barry Naughton, the 'path to a mode of deeper globalisation with more autonomy and more prosperity almost certainly leads through China.' This was the main driver behind the conciliatory positions Fell noticed in his chapter on the newly elected President Ma Ying-Jeou in 2008. While Ma talked of a 'greater China market' on the election trail, in the end his posture was a stark recognition that China's development and increased economic expansion offered a major economic benefit to Taiwan, along with all sorts of political quandaries. Chen Shui-bian's government had created a number of barriers to Taiwanese investors deploying too much capital and resources in China. For Ma, the most important gesture was made with the Economic Co-operation Framework Agreement (ECFA), signed finally in 2010, something that Peter C Y Chow in his final essay mysteriously seems to imply is not a free trade arrangement, but which, with its reduction of tariffs and statement of the need to create a common market, looks very similar to one.

ECFA, in fact, highlights one of the more substantial failings of the book, which is that for some reason, despite being printed and published in 2011, its analysis is overwhelmingly concentrated on the years up to 2008, with very little on Ma and his period in power. As he is, in January 2012, already coming forward to re-election, it is odd why more was not done on looking at his presidency, though Fell and to a degree Hughes do do some of this work. Much of the trade data, too, in the economic chapters ends in 2008 and 2009, and the analysis of the important ECFA agreement seems to be grafted on, and would have surely merited deeper comment. For that reason, this book is probably better described as a study of the impact of eight years of rule under the DPP and Chen. There is also a small complaint, which is simply that, apart from the three editors, there are no biographical details at all, beyond names, of the chapter authors. A note of their current or former affiliation would have been helpful. Finally, for a book with three named editors, only one (Garver) seems to have written a single word for the book.

The other two are evidently distinguished silent presences, but it is not clear what their editorial function was, and odd that they simply didn't co-author the introductory chapter.

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