
Asia's Orphan: Democracy in Taiwan, 1895-2000

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Author's note:

For reasons of space, the following fragment on the remarkable birth of democracy in Taiwan had to be excluded from the final printed version of *The Life and Death of Democracy*. The excerpt challenges the common misconception of Taiwan as 'essentially' a Chinese society (a prejudice that readily feeds the propaganda claim of the government of The People's Republic of China (PRC) that the people of Taiwan properly belong to its territory). The fragment instead emphasises the hybrid and 'indigenised' qualities of Taiwanese democratisation, its multiple sources and the several reasons why the construction of democratic institutions and ways of life on the Taiwanese archipelago represents an important challenge to textbook understandings of democracy and its preconditions. The excerpt was completed before the eruption (in May 2006) of a vicious corruption scandal centred on the family of President Chen Shui-bian, who was forced to resign from office two years later, enveloped in allegations of money laundering and abuse of presidential authority.

Among the most astonishing political developments of the final decades of the twentieth century was the appearance of a proud and lively young democracy on a densely forested, densely populated archipelago in the East China Sea known as Taiwan. The archipelago is sometimes called Asia's orphan, and for a good reason.¹ Born of a region seemingly hostile to constitutional government, Taiwan showed that democracy with 'Asian' characteristics was possible, and even that democracy had distinctively indigenous 'Asian' roots. The local

¹ The description is drawn from the allegorical novel by the influential journalist and literary figure, Zhuoliu Wu, *The Orphan of Asia* (New York 2006). Written under the Japanese occupation and completed in 1945, its central character is Hu Taiming, a man who was born in Japanese-occupied Taiwan, enrolled by his grandfather in the Ladder to the Clouds, a school that taught the Confucian classics, only to suffer disillusionment and a deep identity crisis after being forced to teach in the Japanese-run school in a Taiwanese village, where he not only found many of his students backward but was forced to realise that his own professional integrity was threatened by Japanese contempt for the colonised Taiwanese.

pressures for democratisation proved that ‘Asians’ were not by nature deferential to superiors, or condemned by poverty to superstition, or bigoted in their association of the word ‘democracy’ (*min zhu*) with Western conceit and gambling, prostitution, family breakdown and other forms of Western decadence. And Taiwan had another, larger significance. It turned out to be remarkable above all in its defiance of the modern textbook rule that democracy could only survive in a ‘country’ defined by a strong sense of homogeneous national unity and sovereign territorial borders.

The Taiwanese population, a diverse people living on islands without an internationally recognised state, defied the gravity of so-called realist politics. They showed that the issue of official statehood did not first have to be resolved in order for democracy to be possible.¹ That is to say, they demonstrated that representative democracy and sovereign territorial statehood were conjoined twins that could be separated. Taiwan resembled a laboratory whose people embarked on a lonely search for new solutions to a problem that first appeared among the scores of self-governing city states that thrived for a time in the early years of assembly democracy: the problem of whether and how democracy can create and maintain a wider peaceful environment, that is, a ‘security community’ in which the scavengers of violence, fear and war are not welcome.

The Taiwanese experiment with democracy was born in a crucible of war, military conquest and colonial rule. It all started during the period of Japanese colonisation that lasted from 1895 (when the Qing Dynasty handed over the archipelago as a spoil of war) until 1945. Colonisation brought violence and bossing and the enforced assimilation of subjects usually associated with imperial rule. But from the point of view of democracy, Japanese rule also produced some ironic effects with long-lasting implications.² It had the

¹ Compare the claim about the fundamental importance, in transitions to democracy, of solving the number-one problem of ‘stateness’, in Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, “‘Stateness’, Nationalism and Democratization’, in *Problems of Democratic Transition And Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, And Post-communist Europe* (Baltimore 1996), pp. 16-37.

² The following draws from my interview with Rwei-Ren Wu, Taipei (2 July 2005); his excellent doctoral dissertation, ‘The Formosan Ideology: Oriental Colonialism and the Rise of Taiwanese Nationalism, 1895–1945’, University of Chicago (2003); and E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Japanese*

unintended consequence of ‘nationalising’ local identities. A certain feeling among the local educated elites of being ‘Taiwanese’ (*dai wan lang*) was strengthened, along with some aspirations for self-rule. There was some talk of the nation (*min zoku*) and popular sovereignty (*min-pon shugi*) and self-rule (the Japanese term *jichi* was used for this) and the right of people to participate in politics (*sansei ken*). In 1920, a Movement for the Establishment of the Taiwan Parliament was born; it dared even to petition the Imperial Diet in Tokyo, which had the effect of stimulating the strong growth of local associations and factions (some of which had antecedents in traditional Chinese associations, known locally as *huiguan* and *jishi gongye*). Then came local elections, the first of which was held in 1935.

While the bulk of the aboriginal and settler population had not been drawn fully into the resistance to Japanese imperial rule, it was plain that the seeds of non-violent, constitutional government were planted locally, by the efforts of the people of Formosa, as they were still called at the time. The sentiments stood them in good stead for the painful history that awaited their archipelago. With the crushing surrender of Japan after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, the Formosans were handed over by the Allies to the Kuomintang government of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek. The change was at first welcomed locally, but his rule quickly proved unpopular. On February 28, 1947 it sparked an island-wide uprising that was eventually crushed through a murderous campaign (the so-called ‘Countryside Sweep’) waged by Chiang Kai-shek’s KMT troops. The wanton cruelty and violence, in which at least twenty to thirty thousand people died, prefigured something much worse: the arrival of between one and two million refugees (the local population was around six million) and Chiang Kai-shek’s army of 600,000 troops after their defeat by the communist forces of Mao Zedong in the year of the ox, 1949.

So began nearly four decades of White Terror – the twentieth century’s longest unbroken period of martial law. The Chinese nationalist government of Chiang

Colonial Education in Taiwan, 1895-1945 (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1977).

Kai-shek resembled an oversized Leviathan, a garrison state apparatus that was permanently mobilised to root out and destroy all local resistance, in preparation for the day when it would return to the Chinese mainland, to replace the communists and govern an empire that would include 600 million Chinese people, plus Tibetans and Mongolians. These were of course times of Cold War, and dictators using totalitarian - communist and fascist - methods of rule were welcome in the world of freedom, so long as they did not call themselves communists or fascists. There was naturally a ticket required to enter the gates of freedom. Dictators had to be seen to be on the side of liberty, which meant signing up to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and choosing a good name for the state - Formosa was blessed with the democratic-sounding Republic of China - as well as allowing a good measure of private property and market freedom, capped off by the staging of periodic – rigged – elections.

The colonised population proved to be no pushover; and the fact of elections, even though they were held only at the local level, kept alive memories of old struggles against the Japanese, as well as extended a hand of hope by encouraging people to imagine the day when the nationalist KMT dictatorship got its comeuppance. The military regime did its best to ensure that its day of reckoning was a long time coming. Protected from Mao's China by the US Seventh Fleet, the KMT constitution was used as if it were a book of instructions issued by the Generalissimo and his faithful officials. There was lifelong tenure for Him and for some two thousand KMT parliamentarians, who claimed (following elections on the Chinese mainland in 1948) to represent the will of their constituents in support of the only 'legitimate government of China'. The death penalty was brought in for the designated crimes of rebellion and troublemaking. Local religious bodies, such as I Kuan Tao and the popular Buddhist Nichiren sect, were treated as if they were worms in the guts of the body politic. A blanket ban on visits abroad, especially to visit relatives on mainland China, was enforced. Everyone aged fourteen or older was required to carry an ID card at all times, or otherwise risk being carted away as a

‘communist agent’. Billboards were splattered with messages like ‘Caution! A spy is by your side!’

Nets of suspicion were cast widely, so that imprisonment was sanctioned for ‘knowing but not reporting bandits’. That commitment to detecting and eradicating enemies meant that virtually all friends and every household and workplace were placed under suspicion, especially because those who grassed on their fellows, or who made false accusations, were rewarded with thirty per cent of the assets of the convicted dissident (thirty-five per cent was awarded as well to personnel handling the case, so increasing the chances that sycophants and other law-abiding subjects would strike it rich by proving that crime paid after all). Anyone suspected or accused of favouring local ‘independence’ from mainland China was treated harshly. Plainclothes police, telephone tapping, mail inspection, the fabrication of facts, and trumped-up accusations were their lot. Whole families and villages were rounded up, disappeared, tortured or murdered, then (if they were lucky) buried secretly in unmarked graves. Not even lovers were safe, as proven by the tragic fate of Su Su-hsia, a talented young entertainer whose dalliance with an advocate of independence for Taiwan, the musician Tseng Kuo-ying, attracted the sexual jealousy of a secret agent who had been shadowing the couple (figure 1). He promptly arranged for the arrest and imprisonment of Su Su-hsia’s lover. Trapped in a cat’s cradle of fear and violence, she bravely secured the release of Tseng by marrying the secret agent, who grew nasty at her blanket bedtime refusals, so leaving her with no free choice except that of committing suicide.



Figure 1: Su Su-hsia

Christian missionaries were meanwhile banned from carrying on their work in local vernacular languages, such as Hoklo, Hakka and several aboriginal tongues. Communication media were heavily controlled, and in general the regime did everything it could to turn journalists into hierophants, guardians and enforcers of the mysteries of state. In the name of conserving paper, newspaper production runs were strictly controlled. Magazines and publishers suspected of disloyalty were closed down; in one year alone (1969), 4.23 million copies of ‘bad publications’ were burned, buried or shredded.¹ Private radio stations were banned; official radio stations were controlled with heavy hands; and all listeners were required to register for a user’s licence and to pay a monthly fee. School textbooks and materials were vetted. Bans were slapped on so-called effeminate songs, local folk music and any tunes that were inclined to social realism. The KMT regime did everything it could to define and

¹ From the figures cited in *The Road to Freedom. Taiwan’s Postwar Human Rights Movement* (Taipei 2004), p. 28; see also the doctoral dissertation by Liyun Lin, *The Transformation of Press - State Relationships in Taiwan 1945-1995*, University of Westminster (1997).

exterminate what it called ‘red poison, yellow harm, and black crime’ (communist, pornographic, and gangster influences). It even waged a war against bodily resistance to power. It tried to get under people’s skin, beginning with young people at school. Men’s hair could not be longer than one centimetre. Girl’s hair that crept over their ears was not permitted. The regime was otherwise even-handed in matters of appearance: hirsute young men in bell-bottomed trousers and mini-skirted young women with funky hair were equally subject to arrest and imprisonment, or worse.

There was a local saying that those who create enemies pay high prices, and so it was with the Kuomintang regime. Its moment of reckoning came with its enforced withdrawal in 1971 from a seat on the United Nations Security Council and, the following year, the historic visit of President Richard Nixon to Beijing for the purpose of negotiating an end to two decades of frosty relations between the United States and China. Opening the UN door to Communist China signalled the end of an era. Suddenly, from that moment, the regime of Chiang Kai-shek lost its *raison d’être*. It became the orphan of Asia. Its relations with the giant panda across the straits grew tense. Once more, the settlers of Taiwan found themselves playthings of big powers. The effect was to embolden many Taiwanese people, to make them see that they were on their own, that taking things into their own hands was not just desirable, but imperative.

The highlights of this resistance are now part of the history of the twentieth century. Among the first group of citizens to protest publicly were local Presbyterians whose roots on the archipelago extended back several generations. True to their sixteenth-century invention in Scotland of the practice of constitutional conventions, they called upon the government several times to respect human rights, including freedom of religion and the entitlement to social justice; they proposed as well a full re-election of the national legislature and recognition of ‘the right of the people’ to determine their own

future in ‘a new and independent country’.¹ These were brave words that brought the secret police flocking to their chapels, but to no avail.

Bit by bit, month by month, citizens’ resistance began to cut the claws of the KMT state. A tattered string of open protests against election fraud led (in November 1977) to violent scenes at Chungli, where a flamboyant opposition candidate for county magistrate, Hsu Hsin-liang, was declared winner, denied victory by the government, then – after rioters wrecked a local police station – declared the winner. At Kaohsiung, a town on the southern coast of the main island, a large demonstration on International Human Rights Day (December 10th, 1979) produced martyrs when the city was shelled and its police rioted, killing and injuring scores of young civilian men and women. Troubles doubled and began to spread, to the point where, by the mid-1980s, the KMT regime grew nervous, especially with the founding of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). It was soon to score the first of a string of electoral victories, by capturing the post of mayor of the capital city, Taipei. The party used well-targeted, sometimes witty, state-of-the-art campaigning methods. One of them featured a smiling Mona Lisa (figure 2). Others drew upon nativist themes (like ‘patching the broken fishing net’ or ‘humble administration’ or ‘have confidence in Taiwan’) that could mean different things to different voters, especially when expressed in Taiwanese dialect rather than the Mandarin used by the KMT authorities.²

¹ Further details are to be found in Christine L. Lin, ‘The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and the Advocacy of Local Autonomy’, *Sino-Platonic Papers* 92 (January 1999), pp. 1-123.

² According to the DPP’s campaign director during this period, the ex-student movement leader and student of theatre, Luo Wen-Chia, the electioneering methods that were used owed something to the Maoist understanding of ‘politics as the art of locating and utilising socially meaningful points of contradiction for the purpose of forging alliances, making gains and winning the power to do things. Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party were very good at these political arts, but when stripped of their communist qualities they can be used to good advantage in a democracy’ (interview, Taipei, 31 May 2005). I am also grateful for the remarks on elections, media and the ‘sanctification’ of democracy in Taiwan provided by Felix Schöber (interview, London, 3 May 2005) and Lihyun Lin (Taipei, 3 June 2005).



Figure 2 : Mona Lisa smiling from a Taipei rooftop in support of the candidate A.Bian, photograph by Felix Schöber

The founding of Taiwan's first genuinely oppositional political party was inspired by the deepening sense among the population that public protests were now legitimate, and that they could achieve important things. Their peaceful and self-disciplined qualities were remarkable. They had as well a deep respect for the rule of law and a strong experimental air about them, for instance in the way they made use of temples as places of refuge, as public spaces where citizens could gather in safety, to feel stronger by getting to know each other better. A memorable example in the mid-1980s was the staging of unofficial election rallies by supporters of the 'Dang wai' ('Outside the Party') opposition movement. In west Taipei, they chose as their venue the wonderfully ornate, early nineteenth-century Buddhist temple at Longshan. It was a safe haven where the riot police did not dare show their face, for fear of upsetting the calm routines of local people gently chanting from scripts and praying for the health and well-being of their children and their families and loved ones. No one knew what the local goddess Guan Yin thought of the rallies that sheltered there in her presence, but one fact was plain: when ten thousand citizens at a time

huddled in solidarity in the temple courtyard, protected from water cannon and tear gas by bright flowers and sweet fruits, gongs and drums, candles and smouldering incense, they rapidly learned the arts of politics by talking freely among themselves, and openly to journalists and others, about the need to create a ‘civil society’ (*gongmin shehui*) and a ‘democracy’ (*min zhu*) that enabled citizens (*gongmin*) to cast a free and fair vote – to throw a ticket (*to pian*) as the Taiwanese liked to say.

These words proved to be the key terms in a new political language that the authorities did not understand, and certainly could never accept. The KMT state tried to remain tough, like a bully losing his grip, but state thuggery served only to steel the resolve of many citizens, who were cheered by the growing visibility and numbers of supporters outside their archipelago. One thing that was very interesting about the democratic mutations that happened in Taiwan was the way its democratisation could not have happened without long-distance, external support, by both governmental and civil society bodies. The active human rights diplomacy directed by the Carter administration against the regime was a good illustration of this point. So too was the non-governmental overseas rescue network, as it came to be called. Bound together across borders by information that travelled through disguised ‘underground railroads’, the rescue network included many hundreds of initiatives, such as church groups, university links, Amnesty International letters and reports, press and media coverage, visits by lawyers to monitor political trials, as well as efforts by groups of exiles like the Formosan Association for Human Rights (based in New York) and the Taiwan Political Prisoner Rescue Association (based in Tokyo). The wide and long-lasting effectiveness of this hotchpotch of activity was to mark the new democracy of Taiwan indelibly with unusually strong cosmopolitan instincts, which served to strengthen local feelings that resistance was worthwhile, despite everything. That cosmopolitanism - the strong sense that what was happening inside Taiwan was being co-determined by outside developments – had one striking effect. It worked to neutralise attempts to popularise simple-minded beliefs in ‘the nation’ and its right to a ‘sovereign state’.

What was especially remarkable about the push for democratisation was its avoidance of nationalist rhetoric. Perhaps that wasn't surprising, given that both the Japanese and Chinese conqueror regimes had taught locals to suspect or detest talk of Nations and Enemies of the Nation. There was also the historical fact that prior to the arrival of Japanese colonisers at the end of the nineteenth century, the 'Ilha Formosa' or 'Beautiful Island', as Europeans had called it, had been colonised successively by Dutch, Spanish and Chinese forces. The point was that by the middle of the twentieth century, given this complex history, much of the population felt and understood its own hybridity. People were not inclined to fall for easy definitions of the Nation.¹ They had lost the habit of dying for their Country. Questions about who belonged to the archipelago, and why, were felt to be open questions with no straightforward answers, and that in turn was felt to be a good thing. Doctrines of racial or ethnic 'purity' – like that promoted by KMT rule – were to be feared, and resisted. Equally repugnant were the communiqués – well, the hawkish squawking by birds sitting in nests of ready-to-fire missiles – that were issued constantly by Beijing about how there was only One China, and that anybody who challenged its 'sovereignty' and 'territorial integrity' would have to be punished.²

From the point of view of the democratic opposition in Taiwan, there was to be no 'true' Taiwan, simply because 'Taiwan' and 'Taiwanese' were felt to be power-ridden rhetorical terms caught up in a life-and-death political process of continual inscription. More positively, 'Taiwan' was to be a place where many

¹ A neologism, taken from Japanese at the end of the nineteenth century, nation, the word *guo jia*, combines two characters, *guo* meaning a bounded polity or kingdom and *jia* meaning a family, the latter represented by the character of a pig in a barn (国家). I am grateful to Mark Harrison (interview, London, 2nd November 2004) for clarification of this meaning, and for his comments on an earlier draft of these pages.

² See, for example, the official reaction of the Chinese Communist Party to President Chen Shui-bian's inauguration speech, 'One-China Principle Allows for No Evasion or Ambiguity: Commentary' (Beijing, May 21, 2000), at members.tripod.com/~Ken_Davies/response.html: 'Anybody who dares insist on splitting Taiwan from China, in spite of the warning from the Chinese government and people, must bear responsibility for all the serious consequences arising therefrom. The principle concerns China's reunification, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the Chinese government and people will make no concession on this major matter of principle.'



Figure 4 : A demonstration in support of language rights by Hakka people carrying a portrait of Sun Yat-sen, himself a Hakka

Like all other defenders of differences of language and culture, Hakka citizens were more or less prepared to identify politically with ‘Taiwan’ – the word itself was anathema to the KMT regime – but only on the condition that it was used as an open signifier, that its meaning as a symbol and vision and reality was kept incomplete, and not monopolised by any particular power group. The point is worth underscoring: the historic significance of the Taiwanese people’s resistance to totalitarian rule was that it stood beyond the confines of narrow-minded nationalism. It was not a repeat performance of the old play called the Third World struggle for ‘national independence’. The resistance to cruel power in Taiwan was fuelled by a new form of ultra-modern or ‘outward-looking’ patriotism that favoured mutual respect and solidarity among the different settlers of the archipelago. Resistance sprang from a new alliance of Taiwanese based on principles of equal justice and freedom and respect for all groups. The

alliance both required and implied a civil society made up of many different senses of the meaning of being Taiwanese. It implied making room for new migrant workers from south-east Asia, well over a quarter of a million of whom landed on the shores of Taiwan after the defeat of the KMT dictatorship. The right to be different was important. Taiwan was to be a colourful *kolonko* democracy: a self-organising archipelago whose civil society contained all the variety of the kolonko fruit, the fish-shaped melon with white flesh and black seeds and pink, green and yellow skin that grows in abundance on its soils.

In its commitment to social pluralism, the Taiwanese battle for *kolonko* democracy repeated, under very different circumstances, and in much quicker time, what the Congress Party had first attempted in India. In just over a decade, Taiwan started to build democratic structures that protected different lived views of how to define Taiwan. It managed to do what Europe - through a complicated and messy process of integration - took more than half a century to initiate. But the case of Taiwan was not only quick-paced and polymorphic. It was also something very special because it was the first-ever transition to democracy in which neither a single organised religion nor a strongly shared sense of common dependence upon the sacred played a significant role. Local democrats used methods - flowers, processions, even a smiling Mona Lisa on billboards - that had the effect of sanctifying democracy, certainly. There was also plenty of respect for people's different personal senses of the sacred (*shen-shen*). In search of the Way, many people visited temples and frequented worship circles (*ji si quan*) for the purpose of expiating their wrongdoings and nourishing their vital powers; politicians followed after them, in search of money and votes. Some people called on the gods and goddesses to help them out of a tight spot; demonstrators, especially those engaged in environmental politics, referred often to the sea goddess of mercy, Mazu; and there were plenty of lingering beliefs in 'small ghosts' (*xiao gui*) and magic (*wu shu*). But the *kolonko* democracy was not tied tightly to these practices. All things considered, it dispensed with self-justificatory talk of trusting in God, or goddesses and gods. It proved that a thoroughly secular, this-worldly democracy - a *shi su shing* democracy - was possible. It was felt by millions of

Taiwanese that their country was ideally to be bound together by something more tangible: suspicion and ridicule of unaccountable power and deep respect for the practice and principles of human rights.

That at least was the way it was put by the politician Chen Shui-bian shortly after his successful presidential bid in mid-March 2000 – in a fierce but fair election that signalled the end of the KMT regime’s 55-year monopoly on governmental power. In his inauguration speech, the son of a poor tenant farmer and illiterate day labourer, dressed in a grey suit with a red tie, his wife Wu Shu-jen (disabled by an opposition assassination attempt in 1985) seated beside him in a wheelchair, pledged allegiance not to the flag, or to a God, but to the adherence of the Taiwanese government and its people to the ‘third wave of democracy’, to ‘rule by the clean and upright’, and to a peaceful way of life in which vote-buying, corrupt business and other ‘black gold’ practices would not be tolerated.¹ Taiwan would commit itself to the vision of a multicultural archipelago. ‘We must open our hearts with tolerance and respect, so that our diverse ethnic groups and different regional cultures communicate with each other, and so that Taiwan’s local cultures connect with the cultures of Chinese-speaking communities and other world cultures.’ Chen Shui-bian went on to say that his country would rejoin the best global trends of the twenty-first century ways of life. It would do so by adhering to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, incorporating international human rights covenants into domestic law, and by establishing - with the help of Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists - a National Human Rights Commission.

Chen Shui-bian spoke of ‘building a human rights nation’ and so did many official documents and declarations.² Such talk would later skewer both his

¹ The full text of the speech (May 20th, 2000, Taipei) is found at www.taipei.org/chen/chen0520.html

² See, for example, the statement that is reprinted from the 2002 Human Rights Policy White Paper, in ‘National Human Rights Policy’, *The Road to Freedom. Taiwan’s Postwar Human Rights Movement* (Taipei 2004), p. 163: ‘In the postwar “age of human rights”, the rights to which humankind are entitled are no longer limited to those stipulated by and protected by national constitutions, but should include all universal rights prescribed in international human

political career and second term as president, when he and his wife came under intense media and judicial scrutiny for their operation of a discretionary ‘state affairs’ fund used to conduct secret diplomacy. At the time, citizens’ reactions to his talk of a ‘human rights nation’ were divided and suitably ambiguous – as one would have expected of a democratic country that was not a country in any conventional sense. The majority of voters seemed to accept the many anomalies associated with some loosely defined, de facto ‘independent sovereignty’. They sided with the principles of human rights, and accepted (as Taiwan’s leading campaign strategist put it) that ‘although democracy [*min zhu*] may not always be the most efficient way of making decisions, it is a way of dividing and controlling power that helpfully prevents mistakes from being made and positively encourages respect for human beings, their choices, beliefs and different ways of living, such as same-sex partnerships.’¹ The majority of voters embraced the fact that the shrinking army of Taiwan was dependent ultimately for its survival on American naval and air power. But they also expressed approval of another fact: that around 50% of Taiwanese trade and investment was with China (according to local black humour, Taiwanese businessmen favouring unification with China supported the policy of ‘one country, two wives’). Only around a quarter of the voting population (the figure depended on the wording of opinion poll questions) favoured an outright declaration of independence; that figure dropped to around one-sixth of voters when it came to a formal change of the name ‘Republic of China’.²

Not everyone agreed with the tricky compromises of the new democracy. While most people seemed to accept that Taiwanese democracy resembled ‘an evening television soap series, with constant script changes and everything shot at the last minute’,³ some citizens in fact bitterly disagreed and accordingly scrambled to scupper government plans that tried to preserve the status quo. Hard-core recidivists within the KMT, now forced to play the role of opposition or

rights instruments....Taiwan, despite being isolated internationally, is still a member of the global village and is willing to take action to shoulder her rightful responsibility in the protection and realization of universal rights.’

¹ Interview with Luo Wen-Chia (Taipei), 31 May 2005.

² Interview with Michael Hsiao (Taipei) 31 May 2005.

³ Interview with Michael Hsiao (Taipei) 31 May 2005.

governing party in what had become basically a two-party system divided between ‘blues’ (the KMT and a splinter party or two) and ‘greens’ (the DPP and the pro-independence party TSU, led by a former KMT president, Lee Teng-hui), attacked Chen’s vision of the archipelago as a long-winded diversion from the immediate goal, the ‘return’ of Taiwan to its rightful owners, the regime run by the Chinese Communist Party. In response to ‘one-China’ talk, some Taiwanese politicians, government officials, businesses and citizens meanwhile thought of themselves as engaged in a struggle for ‘independence’. In the face of opposition from the government of China, some even dared to talk defiantly of ‘sovereign independence’. The two apparently divergent views were in fact cut from the same cloth. Both indulged the originally European, early modern belief that democracy can only survive in territorial states that are ‘sovereign’ in the sense that those who govern have the ultimate say, backed up by their monopoly over guns, police and the army, over what goes on within the boundaries of that state. Both positions failed to grasp the historical novelty of the new *kolonko* democracy: that this was a post-nationalist, secular democracy blessed with a plurality of different identities that managed to consolidate itself and to survive its transition, even within the field of force of governments hungry for territory and resources and bristling with arms and armies.

But what would protect democracy made in Taiwan from such predators? It is important to recall - the point crops up frequently in the history of democracy - that democracies survive and best thrive within what has been called a ‘security community’. In other words, they require for their support a like-minded group of democracies that share some sense of community and sets of overlapping institutions. These must be sufficiently strong to withstand internal and external ‘shocks’, so guaranteeing with a fair measure of probability over a fairly long period of time that peaceful co-ordination and change can take place among the members of the group, who can settle their differences short of war.¹ Only a

¹ The classic account of the idea and practice of security communities was that developed by Karl Deutsch et.al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organizations in the Light of Historical Experiences* (Princeton, N.J.,1957), and Karl Deutsch, ‘Security Communities’, in James Rosenau (ed.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy* (New

handful of democracies have appeared to escape this rule. The new American republic managed to democratise itself during the first half of the nineteenth century, thanks to some loose and shifting military alliances and the protection afforded by two oceans in the age of muskets and wind-powered ships. Perhaps the newly independent republic of India counted as another case of a state that re-shaped itself into a democracy, very often through its own efforts – and of course with some help from its good friend, the Soviet Union. But despite whatever was said or thought about the young democracy of Taiwan, it was almost certainly *not* describable in terms of either the American or Indian pathways to ‘sovereignty’. It was an entirely new democracy with *post-sovereign* characteristics.

Born of struggles to shake off two imperial powers - Japan and China - with long-term designs on its peoples and their resources, Taiwan was better described as a democratic orphan with diverse parents, as the *resultant* of many intersecting forces, both at the level of government and civil society. The strange, at times comical mixture of official and unofficial Chinese and English names given to the archipelago – province, nation, prefecture, China, Formosa, Free China, Nationalist China, Chinese Taipei, the Republic of China, Taiwan - was symptomatic of these hybrid origins and polymorphous trajectory.¹ Its fast-track transition to democracy similarly took place at the intersection of powerful forces that pulled it this way and that, sometimes helping to protect it from the clutches of war and violence, sometimes pushing it towards the nervousness and self-pity that came from being Asia’s orphan democracy in the world of territorial states and regional alliances. That made both its survival and identity as a political unit permanently controversial. But by the early years of the new millennium, the governments and citizens of Asia’s orphan had managed to do it. They clung tightly to their hybrid democratic freedoms in various and crafty ways that included support from the American 7th Fleet, doing business with post-communists in China, local civil ‘protection strategies’

York 1961). See also Emanuel Adler and Michael N. Barnett (eds.), *Security Communities* (Cambridge and New York 1998).

¹ See Mark Harrison, *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity* (New York and London 2006), especially chapter 1.

designed to obstruct military occupation, diplomatic recognition by several handfuls of states and - not to be underestimated - vigorous 'soft power' efforts by civil society and governmental agencies to make their presence felt in the affairs of the world.