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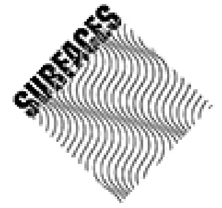

Toward a Version of China
The Taiwan Experience

Lin Yaofu

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Résumé de l'article

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Toward a Version of China

The Taiwan Experience

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ABSTRACT

This essay elucidates the components and modalities of Taiwan's cultural identity. In describing this cultural identity, which includes issues of literature and language as well as of collective self-understanding, it characterizes the context of Taiwan's social, political, and cultural history, particularly with regard to China but also in reference to Japan.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet essai explique les composantes et les modalités de l'identité culturelle taiwanaise. En décrivant cette identité, laquelle inclue les questions de littérature et de langue ainsi que de conscience collective, le texte caractérise le contextes de l'histoire sociale, politique et culturelle de Taiwan, particulièrement par rapport à la Chine, mais aussi en référence au Japon.

In an editorial on Jiang Zemin's "Eight Points" policy for future China-Taiwan relations, issued on the eve of the Year of the Pig, *China Times,* a leading Taiwanese paper, commented: "By saying that culture ties Chinese together, Jiang apparently means that reunification involves not only settlement of economic and political issues, but also a common effort to cement cultural identity." Behind the policy statement and the editorial, it seems obvious, lies a shared position that culture, humanistic Chinese culture, is the common denominator that provides the foundation for the eventual reunification of the divided state. One risks arousing great passions to

question the validity of this shared position. Yet by saying that a common effort to "cement cultural identity" is needed, the editorial, and by extension Jiang, is aware of the danger that this shared cultural identity might break up.

The danger, indeed, is made eminently real by the anti-reunification sentiments now surging in Taiwan, which, rather than encouraging a shared cultural identity with China, precipitate the quest for a separate and independent identity. Differences are seized upon and played up, and pushed as far back as are historically justifiable--or unjustifiable. The fierce separatist Shih Ming's *The Four-Hundred-Year History of the Taiwanese* (*Tai-wan-ren si-bai-nian shi*,1980) becomes a sacred text for those who seek to construct a Taiwanese identity on the basis of its "unique" historical experience. The gubernatorial race last December, for example, was billed by the separatist Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as the "first battle in four hundred years."

Since the early 16th century, when Han Chinese immigrants from the coastal provinces of Fujian and Guangdong began to settle on the island, Taiwan has at least twice been subject to foreign rule, including a brief period of Dutch colonization in the 17th century and domination by the Japanese for a total of fifty years since 1895. Throughout most of its "four hundred years," however, Taiwan has primarily been Chinese—under Zheng Cheng-gong (Koxinga), a Ming loyalist who routed the Dutch and sought to recover the Ming territory from the Manchus; then more than two hundred years under the Qing dynasty, which established Taiwan as a province; and finally, since 1945, under the Kuomintang as (a province of) the Republic of China. Despite the separatist emphasis on the "uniqueness" of its historical experience, no separate Taiwanese consciousness had developed before 1895, when the Japanese wrested Taiwan from China through war. Any serious discourse on Taiwan identity must therefore begin with 1895, rightly a critical turning point when Taiwan was forced down a separate road that seems to lead it further and further away from China. The hundred years fall roughly into three stages with regard to the development of a Taiwan identity, of which the third stage—the present—is central:

1)1895-1945. The half century covers the period from China's forced ceding of Taiwan to Japan, after losing the War of *Jia-wu* (1895), until the end of World War II, when defeated Japan returned Taiwan to China. Although none of the battles of the war, on land or at sea, took place on Taiwan, in the negotiations for an end to the war Japan, already harboring imperial ambitions, forced a helpless China to yield Taiwan *forever* as a base for its expansion southward. The Taiwanese—or rather the Chinese on Taiwan—appealed to the Qing court not to cede Taiwan, for their Chinese patriotism forbade them to become subjects of a "barbarian" power. The appeal was heard, certainly, but from the thoroughly defeated and broken Qing China no help was forthcoming. The Taiwanese were forced to declare independence hastily, calling themselves The Democratic Republic of Taiwan (*Tai-wan min-zhu guo*), and took up arms against the invading Japanese. In their declaration of "independence" they made it known to the world that it was but an act of expediency taken the better to resist the Japanese and keep

Taiwan for China. The republic, however, collapsed within a month, and in less than half a year Taiwan was subjugated and made a Japanese colony.

But resistance, armed and civil, against Japanese rule never really died throughout the half century of Japanese rule. This stubborn refusal to give up their Chineseness provoked the Japanese colonial rulers to adopt harsh and extreme measures to break their spirit. In order to effectively control and govern Taiwan, the Japanese left hardly anything untried: brutal suppressions, mass executions, harsh laws, inciting ethnic hostilities, but also building new roads, developing the economy, promoting education. The Taiwan Education Decree of 1919 (revised in 1921), and later the imperial subject movement (the *kominka* movement), which included such major programs as religious reform, the national language movement, and the name-changing campaign (*kaiseimei*), touching practically every aspect of Taiwanese life from religion (converting to shintoism, the Japanese state religion) to language (using Japanese at home and at work), to names (giving up their Chinese names for Japanese names) and to general Japanese ideas and values inculcated through education, were especially effective in making the Taiwanese over in the image of the Japanese. However it was perceived, the very fact that the Taiwanese were under the rule of a "foreign" government and were Japanese rather than Chinese subjects did open up large space for the emergence of a separate consciousness. Taiwan's colonial experience undeniably marks the beginning of its divergence from China.

2). 1945-1988. With the defeat of Japan in World War II, Taiwan was returned to China in 1945, then under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, chairman of the ruling Kuomintang, and president of the Republic of China the following year. But the euphoria of "return to the arms of the Motherland" was short-lived, for relations soon turned sour, in a large measure because of mutual unfamiliarity and misunderstanding caused by long separation. And with the deterioration of relations, open hostilities eventually flared up. The unfortunate incident of February 28, 1947, triggered by altercations between a local cigarette vendor and a policeman, more than permanently damaged relations between the ruling Kuomintang, newly arrived from the Chinese mainland and soon to be defeated by the Communists in the Chinese civil war, and a large segment of local Taiwanese; it sowed seeds of animosity and separatism that would grow into great luxuriance.

It is not that Chiang Kai-shek did not try to mend the damaged and strained relations, but the paranoia of a defeated regime fighting for its very survival largely reduced the effectiveness of his efforts. On the contrary, the "white terror" of the fifties, a sort of witch hunt for suspected reds and separatists, tended to exacerbate the wound and widen the rift between mainlander Chinese who came with Chiang and the Taiwanese Chinese. When the elder Chiang passed away in 1975 and his son Chiang Ching-kuo became president of the Republic of China three years later, greater pains were taken to heal the rift through "localization"--notably the sharing of power with local Taiwanese (appointing such Taiwanese politicians as Lin Yang-kang, Lee Teng-hui and Chiu Chuang-huan, successively, governor of the province of Taiwan), and full-scale development of Taiwan economy, which

resulted in the widely publicized "Taiwan miracle." The younger Chiang's policy met with a high degree of success, which won him great respect from the Taiwanese (he ranked first among three recent presidents of the Republic of China, even above incumbent Lee Teng-hui, in a recent Gallup poll on their contributions to the development of Taiwan, commissioned by the opposition party, the DPP).

But however successful the policy of localization may be, it was but a tactical maneuver in the Chiangs' master strategy to safeguard the oneness of China, which for them was a sacred issue that admitted of no opposition. They were fierce Chinese nationalists who were as intolerant of Taiwanese separatism as they were of their mortal enemy, the Chinese Communists. Thus before 1988 the father-son tandem ruled Taiwan as an "anti-Communist bastion," from which they hoped to launch their holy counter-attack, much as Zheng Cheng-gong did some three hundred years ago against the Manchus, to recover "lost territory" from the Communist and reunify China under the Kuomintang regime. During this period the Chiangs tried very hard to bring Taiwan back to the mainstream of Confucian China, and actions symbolic or substantial—the renaming of Grass Mountain, a scenic resort in suburban Taipei, as Yangming Mountain, after the Ming Neo-Confucian scholar Wang Yang-ming, and the requirement of Basic Texts of Chinese Culture as a subject for all high school students are but two examples—were taken to insure success. This is a time when Taiwan was writ large as New China to soothe the Chiangs' homesickness, to erase the island's colonial character, and, most importantly, to offer a contrasting portrait of Mao as an un-Chinese traitor who destroyed traditional Chinese culture and replaced it with an imported, alien ideology.

3) 1988 and after. When the younger Chiang passed away early in 1988, Lee Teng-hui, a Japanese educated and assimilated native Taiwanese who happened to be the greatest beneficiary of the Chiangs' Confucian complex, ascended to the seat of power as president. It was not without self-interest in mind that Chiang Ching-kuo handpicked Lee as his successor. Holder of a Ph.D. degree from Cornell, a professor at National Taiwan University—good enough credentials to qualify as a scholar and an important Confucian asset, whose only son had died of cancer, and who had expressed a wish to become a preacher, Lee was perceived as lacking charisma, following, and political ambition, and was therefore eminently safe—for the Republic of *China*. Chiang obviously did not understand Lee; he was a fowler pecked blind by the fowl, as a Chinese saying would put it. Lee, now seventy four, was born in time for assimilation in the *kominka* years, an assimilation further secured through education at Kyoto Imperial University. Thoroughly Japanese in his mental and intellectual outlook, the iron-willed master strategist Lee also identifies emotionally with the Japanese, as he made it known in an interview with the Japanese writer Sibaryotaro last year. Had Chiang Ching-kuo realized that he was leaving the Republic of China in the lands of a Japanese assimilated leader who wastes little sympathy on the Chinese, he would perhaps not have thought it such a safe and shrewd decision after all.

Indeed, with Lee in charge Chiang's old ministers were purged in one power struggle after another, while Taiwanization of the Kuomintang regime proceeded at a dizzying pace. Soon the Chiangs' strict adherence to the

policy of one China has relaxed into open official equivocations, as Lee seeks to break Taiwan's isolation and increase its international visibility through what he calls "flexible diplomacy" (*tan-xing wai-jiao*). Ignoring the Chinese position that Taiwan is China's internal problem which admits of no foreign intervention, Lee insists on internationalizing the Taiwan issue; he tenaciously adheres to the position that, vis-à-vis China, the Republic of China—that is, Taiwan—enjoys separate and equal status as an independent, sovereign state that deserves membership in the United Nations and is free to establish diplomatic relations with any state, even though that state already has formal diplomatic ties with China. This is dual recognition, which carries a clear implication of "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan," thoroughly heretical to the Chiangs and to China. That Lee has carved out foreign policy, together with military affairs and Taiwan-China relations, as his special domain is further indication that he is ideologically and politically motivated toward a separate Taiwan. The success, the phenomenal success, of his diplomacy, as witness his storming of the U. S. despite strong initial resistance from the State Department and the White House, has further whipped up sentiments for Taiwan independence. In the seven years since Lee took the helm of state, the quest for a separate Taiwan identity, political as well as cultural, has become a major project of national construction that engages the entire society.

The Kuomintang mantle Lee inherited, however, made it imperative that he deflect the increasingly vocal and bitter charge that the president of the Republic of China is a Taiwan independence advocate. And so rather than insisting on a total rejection of China and treating it as a culturally and ethnically different alien other, as the radical wing of the independence movement does, Lee, more out of strategic considerations than sincere belief, does occasionally make public, lackluster acknowledgement of common cultural and ethnic roots with China.

The equivocation, the intended fuzziness is clear in Lee's most recent dressing up of naked Taiwanese separatism—*Managing Great Taiwan* (*Jing-ying da tai-wan*). This is Lee's recent book which envisions a new order for Taiwan—*Managing Great Taiwan, Constructing a New "Central Plains"* (*Jing-ying da tai-wan, jian-li xin zhong-yuan*). The new "Central Plains" here, a more traditional referent to China handy to one who is allergic to the term "China," refers of course to Taiwan. In other words, a new version of China, of Taiwan as China, is in order, whose official name is The Republic of China *on Taiwan*, as stressed by the more pragmatic Lee, realizing the dangerous consequences of the radical form of Taiwan independence.

These three phases in the development of a Taiwan identity see Taiwan wearing three different faces, with ever stronger assertion of the self. As a Japanese colony, Taiwan was placed in a space where it began to develop a different character and diverge from China. The enormous and enduring success of Japanese colonization is never clearer than it is today, as Taiwan races toward independence. This Japanese phase/face is obviously distinct from Taiwan as China under the Chiangs and Lee. The faces that Taiwan wears under the two Chiangs and Lee, two versions of "Taiwan as China," seemingly twins, are vastly different--at best estranged twins that nurse a bitter mutual hostility. The Chiangs' reseeding of Confucianism is, among

other things, an expression of Chinese nationalism which serves an overt political purpose in their struggle against the Communists. Confucianism, native and indigeneous, is marshalled against Marxism, imported and alien, in their fight over legitimacy for their Chinese regime. It is an act of "chasing after the deer in the Central Plains" (*zhu-lu zhong-yuan*). Lee's Taiwan as China is a ploy/foil against Chinese nationalism, a willing suspension of the right to chase after the deer to seed and breed Taiwanese nationalism. The current version of Taiwan as China, authored by Lee Teng-hui and in the main endorsed by the DPP, therefore represents the third face that Taiwan wears, a face that looks east toward the Pacific, with its back against continental China.

And this is precisely the direction to which theorists of Taiwanese character have turned. The fact that Taiwan is an island and China part of the Eurasian landmass is avidly seized upon for an elaboration of a special maritime Taiwanese character distinct from the continentality of the "Ah Shan" (Mountain Boy) Chinese. In the eyes of the radical separatists, this essentialist stance is fortified and made even more manifest by Taiwan's "unique" historical experience. The former chairman of the DPP, Xu Xin-liang (now a strong contender for nomination as that party's presidential candidate for the election next year), for example, defines the Taiwanese as a new maritime entrepreneur who, briefcase in hand, roams the world in search of business opportunities, much as the Mongolian nomads roamed the steppes in search of kingdoms to conquer. This spirit, which defines the character of Xu's "Rising People," creates Taiwan's "economic miracle," and accumulates the world's second largest foreign reserves. The theoretical preoccupation and ingenuity here demonstrated but reflect the great centrifugal force that seeks to break away from the political as well as cultural gravity of China. This force has translated itself into a series of events and actions which provide ample nourishment for a budding Taiwanese nationalism.

Foremost among these is the new official policy of "flexible diplomacy" (*tan-xing wai-jiao*), which seeks to carve out a diplomatic space for Taiwan by tunneling through the erstwhile sacred "one China" policy. Lee's recent visit to the United States, followed immediately by Premier Lian Chan's tour of Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, all countries with which Taiwan has no diplomatic ties, is the most dramatic breakthrough that effectively increases Taiwan's international visibility and thus boosts the claim that it is a "separate and independent political entity." And the drive to rejoin the United Nations, now a yearly ritual but pushed with full force this year when that world organization is half a century old, serves to keep the idea fresh and alive.

Less visible internationally but of more fundamental significance are measures of localization which move inexorably toward constructing and consolidating Taiwanese nationalism. Indeed, in the call for localization (*bentu hua*), a shrill propaganda that reverberates round the island, dismantling of the old and creation of a national identity proceed on all fronts. The "Three Principles of the People," a work of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, founding father of the Republic of China, and a sacred scripture, has been removed as a required subject from all civil servants' examinations. The

"Basic Texts of Chinese Culture" which the elder Chiang instituted has dwindled in significance and is soon to be effectively diluted with a generous fare of local history, geography, vignettes, and anecdotes authorized by the Ministry of Education. A culture center was set up in each county to promote Taiwanese culture, and under the sponsorship of the Council for Cultural Planning and Development, these centers further institutionalize such promotion in the form of an official publication, the weekly *Culture* (*Wen-hua*). Conferences on Taiwanese language, literature, and culture have been held with great frequency, almost without exception with funding from the Ministry of Education, the Council for Cultural Planning and Development, or the National Science Council. Despite increases in university courses dealing with Taiwan, calls for separate and independent institutes of Taiwanese history have grown ever louder and shriller. And indeed, a separate institute of Taiwanese history has been established in the Academia Sinica, the highest research institution in Taiwan now headed by the one Nobel laureate Taiwan has produced, to stand side by side with the existing Institute of Modern Chinese History. The long debate on what is Taiwan literature, and whether it is a part of Chinese literature, or whether one should write in mandarin Chinese or in Taiwanese, has culminated recently in eighteen "cultural and educational" organizations taking open political action to pressure the liberal arts colleges of national universities to establish separate and independent departments of Taiwanese literature. In the hearing held at the Legislative Yuan, representatives of these organizations openly declared that since Chinese literature, like English or French literature, is foreign literature, Taiwanese literature should not be taught in the Chinese Department, which they insisted is a foreign literature department. But the most telling example of the rising hostility against China is perhaps the eviction of the famed elderly Confucian scholar, Chien Mu, from the house the elder Chiang built for him more than three decades ago. A leading Confucian scholar respected by Chiang, Chien was invited to Taiwan and put up in a house built especially for him in the suburb of Taipei, and treated with the respect due a great humanist scholar. Though in his nineties and of frail health, no persuasion was able to prevent his eviction under a different regime with different preoccupations, and the elderly man died a few months later.

Signs of this great centrifugal force at work are everywhere, and the force inevitably runs amuck sometimes. Indeed, excesses and extremities are not unusual when a society is gripped by a fit of xenophobia, and one can be philosophic about them and say that they are facts of life. Yet when essentialist and militant ideologues of Taiwan identity who clamor for indigenousness and critique colonization exercise selective resistance and are blithely unaware of the glaring contradictions, or simply feel no qualms about compromising their position, it can be very puzzling indeed. Lee Teng-hui's interview with the Japanese writer Sibaryotaro presents a classic case in point. To underline his resistance against China, Lee, also chairman of the ruling Kuomintang, went so far as to assert that his party was a colonizing foreign regime, while in the same breath expressed satisfaction that he was once a Japanese subject. This rejection of one's own ethnic and cultural roots to embrace one's erstwhile colonial master is most poignantly brought to mind this year in the commemoration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the Treaty of Simonoseki, which ceded Taiwan to Japan. For example, Lu

Xiu-lian, DPP legislator and declared contender for that party's vice-presidential nomination, led a 100-member pilgrimmage to Simonoseki, the site where the treaty was signed, and gave thanks to the Japanese for leading them—meaning the Chinese on Taiwan—out of China. This is basically a replay of the Taiwan independence advocate who, rejoicing over the victory of Taiwanese little leaguers at Williamport some twenty-five years ago, proudly and gratefully attributed it to the Japanese colonial legacy. Besides showing the astonishing success of the Japanese colonial remaking of the Taiwanese, it also links the present advocates of Taiwan independence to their predecessors of a generation ago whose crowning act of self-assertion was probably the proposal to make Japanese, rather than Taiwanese, their mother tongue, the national language of the "Republic of Taiwan," not because Taiwanese is a Chinese dialect (any Chinese connection is readily denied by militant essentialists) but because Taiwanese is "too vulgar and uncivilized." Such self-hate is a symptom of a schizophrenia which threatens to deliver a constructed Taiwanese identity that resembles not a little the Darwinian "humbug." It is an identity that, while virulently denying one's own "biological" father, clings beseechingly to the erstwhile colonial master for a reauthorization of one's threatened coloniality. It is resistance as/for submission, one that is also observable in the case of Hong Kong, as 1997 approaches.

Self-hate and the absence of genuine resistance, granted, do not preclude the possibility of identity, but an identity so forged can only be, one suspects, a mutation hybrid which precludes integrity and dignity. Indeed, behind the vaunted "economic miracle" (with "democratic miracle" added to the bill now, as Lee told the packed audience at Cornell in his Olin lecture) of the "maritime entrepreneur" are a horde of genuine "Taiwan Miracles," as the novelist and cultural commentator Ping Lu so aptly calls them in her fictional lampoon, which earn Taiwan a series of not so flattering names, from the Isle of Greed, the Republic of Casino, the Garbage Dump, to the Pig Sty. While one has to be fair to a society that moves steadily toward seemingly ever maturer democracy and is vibrant with energy, one also witnesses with genuine sorrow the rapid disintegration of the moral order and decline in the quality of life. Five minutes at a Taipei crossroads watching the flow—or rather the stagnation—of men, cars, motorcycles, pedestrains, and it is impossible for one not to come home to the madhouse glory and grandeur that is Taiwan. With the air leaded, the rivers fetid and choked with dead fish, the soil toxic, the roads turned into long parking lots, vote-buying an institution (the recent offer of one billion U. S. dollars for UN membership provides one live example), the legislature a bullpen where the legislative bulls either practice kung fu or compete in bribing the voters, the government held hostage by "black gold" (a symbiosis of mafia and business bosses), and one fire after another either roasting school children alive in their school-bus-turned-oven or dining on innocent dinners, it is small wonder that a significant portion of the population entertain the idea of emigrating.

This, then, is the "new man," the Taiwanese?

If this "new man" seems grotesquely gross, it is perhaps because in the programmed mythologizing of the separatists the cultural identity that is in

danger of breaking up, instead of receiving careful nursing, is mercilessly clobbered. But whoever this "new man" is, the Taiwanese is not defined by the absence of all his ancient Chinese "prejudices." Although the hundredth anniversary of the Treaty of Simonoseki is seized upon by the separatists as a great occasion for exorcising the Chinese "demon" from the Taiwanese self, all their commemorative activities, including a massive "farewell to China" demonstraton, have failed to de-sinify the Taiwanese. As a member of the Association of Taiwanese Professors once confessed, in her research into Taiwan's folk life she discovered a worrisome phenomenon: the deeper one burrows into "indigenousness," the clearer and stronger the Chinese "connection" appears to be. The Taiwanese as "maritime entrepreneur" may be seen driving a Japanese car, going to an American movie, reading *Time* or *Newsweek*, but the nativization cum globalization does not remove Chinese food from the Taiwanese table, outlaw the worship of *Matsu*, evict *Guangong* from the temple, eliminate the celebration of the dragon boat festival, silence the firecrackers or tear off the couplets in red-colored paper from the door on New Year's day, or lead to the demise of *gezaixi*, the Taiwanese opera that dramatizes Chinese historical figures.

If even as powerful and committed an advocate as Lee is forced to equivocate and could do no better than adding "on Taiwan" to "The Republic of China," which is no less than an open acknowledgment that the national identity of the Republic of *China* on Taiwan does implicate China, other advocates, however radical and determined, can probably do no better. Jiang Zemin's "Eight Points" speech, openly affirming Chinese culture for the first time by any Chinese Communist leader, apparently proceeds from the same premise of cultural implicatedness. Lee's "Six Points" reply to Jiang's "Eight Points," in fact, deepens the implicatedness when he revises Jiang's "The Chinese do not fight the Chinese" to read, "The Chinese should help the Chinese." The Taiwanese editorial cited earlier goes on to point out that while the Chinese Communists have in the past engaged in widespread destruction of Chinese culture, Taiwan has done its best to protect it—the treasures of Chinese culture and civilization preserved in Taipei's Palace Museum is but one obvious example. This is supported not only by the active promotion of Confucianism under the Chiangs, but also by the mode of thinking and way of life of the people in Taiwan. Indeed, the reversion back to the more indigenous, traditional China that is Confucian rather than Communist, coming from a Communist, represents a great concession and, perhaps, an awakening to the power of culture over ideology. This diving into the past to reinscribe humanistic China and culture, though undertaken to serve an overt political aim, is nonetheless welcome to the humanistic scholars who are concerned about the shaping of a new Taiwan identity, and the essentialist ideologues are well advised to take it to heart.

As a project of national construction, identity, especially that of an emergent, postcolonial society, necessitates the institution of resistance—not, it should be evident, against one's own self. But the schizophrenic humbug of an identity that one sees developing in Taiwan reverses fact and fantasy in a delusionary act against the self, taking one's erstwhile colonial master for true father while denying one's true cultural, even ethnic, roots. If resistance misdirected is to be set right so that meaningful identity is

possible, then it is necessary that they navigate home to "China," if only on Taiwan.