

Taiwan

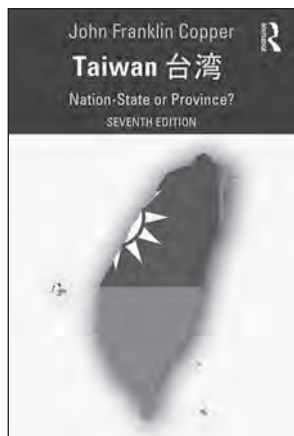
Nation-State or Province? (Seventh Edition)

By JOHN FRANKLIN COPPER

LONDON: ROUTLEDGE, 2019

366 PAGES, ISBN: 978-1138337749, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Thomas J. Shattuck



For reasons both good and bad, 2020 has perhaps been a banner year for Taiwan in terms of increased global identification and international acknowledgment of its contributions and plight against the People's Republic of China (PRC). In January 2020, President Tsai Ing-wen, a member of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was reelected to a second term, winning an unprecedented eight million-plus votes over her challenger, Nationalist Party (KMT) candidate Han Kuo-yu.

Between Tsai's electoral victory in January and her inauguration in May, Taiwan—like every other nation on the planet—has

battled COVID-19. Taiwan's performance has garnered significant global praise. The way that the government has responded to the disease thus far resulted in what is called the "Taiwan model" since the country did not experience a massive shutdown akin to what occurred in China, Italy, and the United States. With slightly fewer than 500 cases as of September 1, and only seven deaths, Taiwan has been able to tout its response and work with countries in desperate need of help.

Partially due to Taiwan's stellar response, it launched a very public push for inclusion in the May 2020 World Health Assembly, the annual meeting of the World Health Organization (WHO). It had the support of major players, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, and Europe, but due to Beijing's pressure on other nations to exclude Taiwan from the meeting, it was clear that it didn't have enough support. Taiwan's Minister of Foreign Affairs took Taiwan's inclusion off the agenda to not distract from the pressing COVID-19 discussion. Beginning with the United Nation's 1971 decision to expel Taiwan from its General Assembly and admit the People's Republic of China, the WHO decision is consistent with how international organizations and other nations have treated Taiwan. Only fifteen states officially recognize Taiwan today.

Notwithstanding the country's international standing, the way in which the government and people responded to the crisis has resulted in an increase in national pride. National Chengchi University's Election Study Center, which has conducted public opinion polling in Taiwan since 1992, released a poll showing that a record 67 percent of people in Taiwan characterize themselves as "Taiwanese," an increase in almost 10 points from 2019. The same polling found that support for "maintain status quo, move toward independence" jumped to over 27 percent, almost eclipsing the option for "maintain status quo, decide at a later date," which has over 28 percent of support.¹

These issues—elections, COVID-19 response, international standing, public identity, and more—play into the key theme of John Franklin Copper's latest edition of *Taiwan: Nation-State or Province?*. Since Taiwan's loss of diplomatic recognition around the globe, including US President Jimmy Carter's 1979 decision to formally recognize the PRC, and sever formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, the question of what Taiwan is and isn't has sparked debate.

Copper's text, for the most part, is an encyclopedic treatment of the island's history, society, political system, economy, and foreign and military policies, including the often-fraught China–Taiwan relationship. Populated first some 30,000–50,000 years ago by seafaring travelers from probably Southeast Asia, and much later by small numbers of mainland Chinese, Taiwan, like much of Asia, encountered various European colonial powers—especially the Dutch, who established jurisdiction in the mid-1600s over the island. The Dutch East India Company exploited Taiwan for profit, but introduced new crops and farming methods, and improved the island's infrastructure and defense. Modernization and immigration policies helped increase Taiwan's Chinese population: The Dutch "offer[ed] tax breaks, free land, and protection from the Aborigines" (50). The policies—some of which (namely tax breaks and special status) China has adopted recently to attract talent from Taiwan in the twenty-first century—helped put Taiwan on its current path, and shape questions surrounding its identity.

As Copper explains, the historical case for the formal and informal legality of China's sovereignty is highly contentious. The question of such a "claim" has reverberated throughout Taiwan's history and has become a sticking point in Taiwan's so-called "undetermined" status: "From 1684 to 1843 . . . official Chinese records during this period called Taiwan a 'frontier area'" (52). That characterization—spurred by the trouble caused by the residents of Taiwan and the various rebellions they launched against the government—created a particularly nonchalant attitude on the part of the Qing imperial government concerning responsibility for the island. "Because Peking consistently refused to accept accountability for difficulties foreign powers encountered in Taiwan, both British and US officials concluded that China did not claim sovereignty over Taiwan or the Pescadores" (53). In the 1880s, the Qing government began to enforce its sovereignty regarding Taiwan, but these efforts were too little and too late: Japan defeated China in the Sino–Japanese War (1894–1895), after which China ceded Taiwan to Japanese rule.

The Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), as Copper notes, had a profound effect on the island's economic development. It also shaped citizens' views on what a government can and should do for its people. Most Taiwanese, in stark contrast to Koreans, felt (and feel) that the Japanese rule was a relatively positive colonial experience, and that opinion was further amplified after the disastrous initial years of KMT rule (especially 1945–1949) over Taiwan after it received control of the island at World War II's conclusion. Copper highlights how the Japanese colonial experience "engendered the beginning, however weak, of a sense of community and national identity in Taiwan" (146). That identity hardened because of Chiang Kai-shek's authoritarian, and at times cruel, policies, partly imposed as a result of how mainland Chinese viewed the people of Taiwan after Japanese rule. Chen Yi, the governor of Taiwan under the KMT, and others from the mainland "regarded Taiwanese as traitors for not having opposed Japanese rule . . . [and as] tainted for fifty years by what they considered inferior Japanese culture" (60). That animosity came to a head on February 28, 1947, when the people of Taiwan rose up and rebelled against corrupt KMT rule. The KMT was able to restore order within a couple of weeks.

Taiwan is a diverse country, with people of varying ethnicities who speak a number of languages and participate in different religious activities. When discussing Taiwanese society, Copper addresses something that might surprise many Americans: the minimal effect religion plays in Taiwan's politics—"Religion seldom has been the basis for discrimination, ethnic enmity, or social conflict. Hence, observers have described Taiwan as a nation of extraordinary religion tolerance" (108). Religious freedom has been an area of emphasis for Taiwan to work with the Donald Trump administration over the past few years. Taiwan hosted US Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback in March 2019 for the Civil Society Dialogue on Securing Religious Freedom in the Indo–Pacific Region, an event cohosted by Taiwan

and the United States; and it also has been included in the Trump administration's International Religious Freedom Alliance as an observer.

As mentioned with the COVID-19 response, Taiwan has become a "model" for countries to follow. This is not the first time that Taiwan has been an international model worthy of emulation. The most prominent historical example is Taiwan's economic development during the 1950–1970s. Government-led initiatives and reforms—most importantly, land reform—helped Taiwan mature into an economic powerhouse. The government first reformed the agricultural industry to level the playing field before working to industrialize the country's economy. Taiwan's economic success story is still studied to this day by developing countries. Copper credits this to "intelligent planning," whereby the government directed economic changes without becoming a planned or command economy (206). As discussed throughout this review, Taiwan's international standing is precarious at best—its so-called "international space" has greatly shrunk as a result of its 1971 expulsion from the UN, and more recently from pressure by Beijing. Copper provides an overview of the origin of these issues and how Taiwan has historically relied upon the United States as its safety guarantor. As the China threat grows, the importance of the US military for Taiwan grows. The book provides sufficient background for the reader to better understand how Taiwan got to where it is today and how its history of non-self-rule has shaped its identity.

Copper, in my opinion, downplays at least one seminal event in Taiwan's post-1945 history: the February 28 Massacre played a much more central role in Taiwanese identity and eventual democratization of the island than is depicted in the book. Copper does not explain how the Taiwanese, reacting to KMT rule, rebelled throughout the island, often taking control of key facilities. For a time in early March 1947, the KMT did not control Taiwan. Copper explains how the KMT cracked down on the Taiwanese, but fails to articulate the intent of the brutality: "By the end of March order was restored, but not before thousands of Taiwanese had been killed, including many of Taiwan's potential political leaders" (62). The potential political leaders didn't just happen to die; they were purposefully found and "disappeared" by the KMT. An entire sector of Taiwan's elite (doctors, lawyers, teachers) were viewed as a threat to the KMT, and most were killed. Bodies washed up on the shores of rivers. Execution grounds were established. People were tied to stones and thrown into the ocean. It was a targeted campaign; the victims were just not casualties of fighting.

Copper's explanation for Tsai Ing-wen's use of "228" (as it is called in Taiwan) is incorrect—"In fact, 2-2-8 was a prop in the DPP's campaign to unify its voters and get them to the polls while bringing up an issue the KMT found difficult to deal with" (63). It was not a prop at all. It was a pillar of the Tsai campaign: she promised to work on transitional justice issues and deal with the brutal and corrupt authoritarian legacy of the KMT. Her administration set up the Transitional Justice Commission (TJC) and the Ill-gotten Party Assets Settlement Committee (CIPAS). The two groups have conducted research into the KMT's authoritarian rule, as well as the "Period of the White Terror," a particularly violent period in which the Chiang regime harshly violated the human rights of Taiwanese (and even mainlanders) in the 1950–1960s. The TJC has worked to exonerate thousands of imprisoned and executed political victims. By 2019, nearly 6,000 individuals had been exonerated. The CIPAS has documented property and assets illegally accumulated by the KMT. This was not a "prop," but a necessary (and ongoing) move to help Taiwan acknowledge the atrocities committed by the KMT between 1945 and 1987. Unfortunately, Copper fails to mention the White Terror at all in the book.

In the end, Copper correctly concludes that Taiwan's ultimate status as a nation-state or province has not been settled. He leans toward the inevitability of unification based on economic reasons, since China is Taiwan's largest trading partner. But Copper explains that unification could result in economic

chaos: "The island's economy would likely suffer because Taiwan has a different kind of economy and its global trade, upon which its economic health depends, would likely be disrupted" (317). With the ongoing political crackdown in Hong Kong and other human rights abuses in China, it is difficult to imagine that unification could occur peacefully and would not cause the problems that Copper highlights. Copper acknowledges that there is no magic bullet for settling Taiwan's status one way or another. While its status in the international arena is undetermined, the people of Taiwan will continue to carry out commerce, vote in local and national elections, and live as they have for some time.

NOTES

1. Election Study Center, "Taiwanese/Chinese Identity (1992/06~2020/06)," National Chengchi University, July 3, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/w4tu29k>; and Election Study Center, "Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with the Mainland (1992/06~2020/06)," National Chengchi University, July 3, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/y2det7b4>.

THOMAS J. SHATTUCK is a Research Associate in the Asia Program and the Managing Editor at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. Shattuck was a member of the 2019 class of scholars at the Global Taiwan Institute, receiving the Taiwan Scholarship. He received his BA in History and English from La Salle University in 2013 and his MA in International Studies from National Chengchi University in 2016. Shattuck also received a Fulbright grant to teach English in Kinmen, Taiwan, for the 2013–2014 academic year.

Ghosts of Gold Mountain

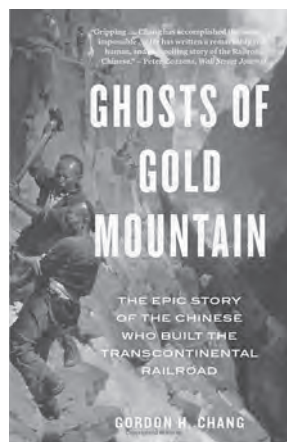
The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad

By GORDON H. CHANG

BOSTON: HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT, 2020

320 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0358331810, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Daniel A. Métraux



The meeting of two huge locomotives on May 10, 1869, of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railways at Promontory Point in Utah is one of the most notable events in American history. For the first time, the United States was connected by rail from coast to coast and the journey from New York to San Francisco, which before would have taken many grueling months, could now be comfortably completed in less than a week. Fortunately, for all those involved in the construction of the transcontinental railway, almost all the construction was completed by a virtual army of over 20,000 Chinese workers. Their hard work, reliable service, and great ingenuity allowed them to complete the building of the railway from Sacramento to Promontory Point in slightly less than four years. They had to traverse over and through a course of nearly 900 miles, through the High Sierra Mountains and through the harsh, hot deserts of Nevada and Utah to reach their final destination. Their story has almost totally disappeared from history, but author Gordon Chang, a professor of History