

TUG OF WAR The Story of Taiwan

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY JUDITH VECCHIONE
DISTRIBUTED BY WGBH EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION AND WGBH
BOSTON VIDEO
VHS, 87 MINUTES, COLOR, 1998
IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

Reviewed by Vincent K. Pollard

The geographic separation imposed by the Taiwan Strait is also political. Judith Vecchione's *Tug of War: The Story of Taiwan* helps students understand that the question "Who should rule Taiwan?" is not settled. Sequences from this video have enhanced student learning in three of my introductory political science courses and two upper-division Asian studies classes. Short excerpts or even the entirety of this movie will enhance high school classes in geography, world history, and Asian studies. Since teachers at any level want their students to view with appreciation, discuss with intel-

ligence, and write with focus, I recommend they enhance screenings of *Tug of War* with a viewing guide for students. Themes from the video illustrate imperialism, colonialism, authoritarianism, militarization, national identity, legitimacy, and society-foreign policy linkages. While well-read undergraduate students may have heard of Mao Zedong, Richard Nixon, Beijing, and Washington, DC, this video will give them a few surprises.

In an early sequence, *Tug of War* notes the routine character of Taiwanese rebelliousness in the face of an expanding Chinese empire. By gracefully blending interviews, archival film, and black-and-white photographs, the tenuousness of Taiwan's links with previous governments in China is emphasized. Noting Taiwan's role as a prize for the winner of international conflicts, *Tug of War* shows how Japanese colonialism, the suppression of political opposition by Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (Nationalist Party), and the Cold War shaped Taiwanese self-identification as *Taiwanese* rather than exclusively as Chinese.

Teachers may ask questions to encourage students' understanding, appreciation, and evaluation of the evolution of Taiwanese ethnicity. For example, they could be asked to identify which parts of the video clearly show close linkages between local Taiwanese politics and global or international politics. Depending on prior knowledge, students



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might be asked to compare and contrast Taiwan's situation with that of Korea's before or after 1945—or that of Mongolia, Tibet, or Hong Kong. One might ask if interchangeably referring to China as a political entity and to Chinese culture as a transnational civilization is defensible. Although *Tug of War* notes Mainlanders' reaction to evidence of the Japanization of Taiwan, the video glosses over the sensitive issue of Taiwanese collaboration with Japanese colonialism.

In *Tug of War*, Chiang Kai-shek's funeral in 1975 marks a transition to a lively depiction of the roller-coaster fortunes of Taiwan's *dangwai* (outside-the-party) protest movement in the late 1970s and the 1980s. In 1978, US President Jimmy Carter and Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping did not anticipate an unintended consequence of politically isolating Taiwan: Instead of forcing closer political relations with the People's Republic of China, isolation intensified Taiwanese identity. The video illustrates the point with readings from popular Taiwanese "homeland literature." But Taiwanese ethnicity also became more robust from interacting with domestic economic prosperity and with two global developments—the telecommunications revolution and the spread of representative democracy. The combined impact of these factors gave Taiwanese oppositionists greater resilience locally and more attention internationally. *Tug of War* mentions the first development but not the latter two.

Also, women in Taiwan and indigenous Taiwanese deserve more attention. Although courageous Taiwanese women leaders in the *dangwai* movement are depicted and interviewed in *Tug of War*, teachers might point out that by the early 1990s, three waves of feminist movements had affected Taiwanese politics. Similarly, *Tug of War* barely hints at the indigenous peoples. While KMT presidential candidates failed in the elections of 2000 and 2004 (before winning in 2008), teachers should point out that the positions of government officials and other KMT officials interviewed during the final years of President Lee Teng-hui's tenure (1988–2000) were accurate at the time of the interviews. Teachers with differing objectives may complement themes in *Tug of War* orally and with handouts or material from other videos. ■

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