TAIWAN'S SELF-CONSCIOUS NATION-BUILDING PROJECT

Daniel C. Lynch

Abstract

Some Taiwanese nationalists express, with alarm, the view that their country is about to be absorbed into a rising China, yet they are paradoxically optimistic that broader international trends will make it possible to secure de jure independence as early as the end of the decade. Their first and most urgent task, in the process of thoroughly de-Sinifying the culture, is to imagine a new Taiwanese nation—a radical project that, in the aftermath of President Chen Shui-bian's reelection, is certain to roil cross-strait relations in the coming months and years.

Taiwan is in the midst of a self-conscious nation-building project whose architects feel anxiety at China's economic and geopolitical accomplishments and worry that unless Taiwan can achieve formal independence soon, it will—peacefully or otherwise—be extinguished as an autonomous entity. The Taiwanese nationalist project is uniquely "post-Andersonian" in that its proponents pursue their quest in the transformed intellectual terrain that developed in the wake of the 1983 publication of Benedict Anderson's contemporary classic, *Imagined Communities*.[1] In this extremely influential book, Anderson argued that no nation is essential and all are constructed through

Daniel C. Lynch is Assistant Professor in the School of International Relations of the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Calif. Email: <dlynch@usc.edu>. Research for this article was funded in part by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation. The author thanks the Foundation, as well as Luo Chih-cheng of the Institute for National Policy Research, for providing a collegial and stimulating environment in which to work. He also thanks Dennis Engbarth, Tom Gold, Bruce Jacobs, Ed Friedman, and an anonymous reviewer for thoughtful comments and suggestions.

1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

Asian Survey, Vol. 44, Issue 4, pp. 513–533, ISSN 0004-4687, electronic ISSN 1533-838X.

processes of collective imagining. Such a conception of nation-building gives politically engaged Taiwanese intellectuals and other activists unusually strong self-confidence in their ability to transform Taiwan into a bona fide nation-state. "If nations are constructed," they seem to reason, "then we can construct one, too"—threats from China and the lack of a notably distinctive (to outsiders) history notwithstanding. As nationalist intellectual Ch'iu Kwei-fen writes, "Ordinarily we think of nations as consisting of territory, a government, and people. But Anderson points out that actually these things are not enough. The formation of a nation relies importantly on people's 'national imagination'—that is, a common identity among the people living on this piece of territory."[2]

Taiwan already has a territory, government, and people; the challenge remaining is to construct a strong collective identity. Nationalist intellectuals such as Ch'iu believe that this task is not inherently difficult; as a result, their project makes Taiwan a sort of crucial case study for Andersonian constructivism. Given the fact that just a little over a century ago Taiwan was an underpopulated outpost of pre-nationalistic Qing China—deeply divided by ethnic strife and clannish feuding, culturally and economically a global backwater—it surely would have seemed to contemporaneous observers an extremely unlikely candidate to become a successful nation-state. Nor would Taiwan's subsequent history as a colony of Japan and then the last bastion of the rump Republic of China (ROC) have convinced observers to alter their conclusions.

But Taiwanese nation-builders today frequently seem to be bursting with confidence about their project's chances of success, exuding extraordinary optimism about what could end up becoming a suicidally quixotic quest. The nationalists' efforts arouse the sympathy and admiration of outside observers and even the cautious acknowledgement that they *might* succeed. After all, Taiwan is the society that, according to one report, may have generated the highest rate of economic growth in the world during the 20th century and then pursued democratization successfully in the face of constant pressures from China to accept a fate similar to that of Hong Kong and Macau.[3] Taiwanese society is thoroughly open to the outside world, and this fact affords intellectuals and activists the opportunity to study the processes of nation-building in other countries and consciously

2. Ch'iu Kwei-fen, "Zai Tan Taiwan Wenxue Shiguan: Xingbie, Zuqun Shuxing yu Taiwan Wenxue Shi Chonggou" [Reexploring historical perspectives on Taiwanese literature: Gender, ethnic belonging, and the reconstruction of Taiwanese literature], in Chang Yen-hsien, Tseng Chiu-mei, and Chen Chao-hai, eds., "*Maixiang 21 Shiji de Taiwan Minzu yu Guoji*" *Lunwenji* [Collected essays on "The Taiwanese nation and state's march to the 21st century"] (Taipei: Wu Sanlian Jijinhui, 2002), pp. 307, 308–21.

3. On the economic growth rate, see Wu Jung-i, "Ershiyi Shiji Taiwan Jingji Fazhan Mianlin de Tiaozhan" [Economic development challenges facing Taiwan in the 21st century], in Hsu Ch'ing-fu, ed., *Diqiucun zhong de Taiwan* [Taiwan in the global village] (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1996), pp. 1–32.

to import strategies and tactics proven to work. These nationalists can exercise the advantages of nation-building late in history. Whether they succeed is not only a matter of cardinal importance for the peace and security of East Asia but also for conceiving nationalism and contemporary nation-building more generally.

Taiwan's best-known nationalist is surely Lee Teng-hui, the former president (1988–2000) and then—after his 2001 expulsion from the Kuomintang (KMT, Nationalist Party)—founder of the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), the pro-independence party that won 13 seats in the legislature in December 2001 and then embarked upon a program of high-profile agitation. Lee's activities and those of the TSU are considered at various points in this essay when the issue is activism, but the main purpose here is to discuss the *intellectual* effort to construct a Taiwanese nation: the actual act of imagining the national community. This effort, which is linked to the TSU's actions but not coterminous with them, has many leaders. One of the most prominent is historian Chang Yen-hsien, curator of the National Museum of History since being selected for that prestigious post in 2000 by President Chen Shui-bian of the ruling (and independence-leaning) Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Chang said straightforwardly in a January 2002 interview that his mission as curator was to help lead Taiwan in nation-building, a task that "constitutes not only the aspiration and objective of Taiwan's people over the past century but the ongoing driving force behind its historical evolution."[4] Chang pursues his work not only by publishing articles and books and giving lectures and interviews but also by cultivating a coterie of younger intellectuals who specialize in particular aspects of the struggle: relations among Taiwan's ethnic groups, the economy, law, literature and the arts, and key themes in Taiwanese history. Chang assembles the younger intellectuals for conferences and presides over publication of the conference proceedings in edited volumes. The younger scholars then go on to cultivate their own students so that the struggle can continue indefinitely.

Efforts to reshape the identity of Taiwanese youth actually began with a series of educational reforms implemented during Lee Teng-hui's tenure. From 1995 to 1997, a committee chaired by Nobel Laureate and Academia Sinica President Lee Yuan-tse researched, debated, and eventually approved a new high school history and social studies curriculum that came to be called "Knowing Taiwan" (Renshi Taiwan). The committee sought to revamp educational content by sweeping away the KMT's Sinocentric Greater Han chauvinism and replacing it with a Taiwan-focused curriculum that, among other things, discussed the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945) objectively and gave

4. Chang Yen-hsien, "Towards a New 21st Century Taiwan," *Taiwan News*, January 7, 2002, <http://www.etaiwannews.com>. On the National Museum of History's general political role, see Lin Miao-jung, "Historians Alter Their Perspective," *Taipei Times*, March 27, 2002, <http://www.taipeitimes.com>.

Malayo-Polynesian aboriginals a more exalted place in Taiwanese history. The goal was to teach young Taiwanese to "establish themselves on Taiwan, have concern for the mainland, and open their eyes to the world" (*lizu Taiwan, xiong-huai dalu, fangyan shijie*).[5] New textbooks assert that Taiwan's ethnic pluralism has produced a distinctive "Taiwanese consciousness" and that the Taiwanese people have repeatedly demonstrated heroism over the centuries by resisting the imposition of authoritarian rule from abroad, especially from China.

To some Taiwanese nationalists, however, the new textbooks already seem hopelessly outdated, the products of political compromises between Lee Teng-hui and the Chinese mainlanders who dominated Taiwan from 1945 until the mid-1990s.[6] To imagine a completely new and genuinely autonomous Taiwanese nation will require much more thoroughgoing change. It is to these radical programs and the intellectual constructs that undergird them that this article now turns, focusing on the often-startling set of nationalistic ideas developed by historian Chang and his younger colleagues in three edited volumes.[7] These ideas have been crucial not only in reshaping intellectual discourse but also in galvanizing DPP and TSU members and supporters into taking political action designed to realize nationalist goals.

Taiwan: A "Subject in History"

The nationalists' most fundamental mission is to cultivate a sense of "Taiwanese subjectivity" (*Taiwan zhutixing*), an exceedingly arduous task given the island's intentional "peripheralization" throughout history, yet a task crucial to resisting absorption by China as economic integration across the Taiwan Strait deepens and threatens to rule out any possibility of Taiwan ever becoming an independent nation.[8] To cultivate Taiwanese subjectivity requires rewriting history from a Taiwanese perspective and then using the new history to socialize children into the concept of a Taiwanese nation. Chang argues in "Taiwan

5. See Stéphane Corcuff, "The Symbolic Dimension of Democratization and the Transition of National Identity under Lee Teng-hui," in Stéphane Corcuff, ed., *Memories of the Future: National Identity Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), pp. 73–101.

6. Author interviews of Taiwanese nationalist intellectuals and politicians, July–August 2002, Taipei.

7. The three volumes are Chang Yen-hsien, Chen Mei-jung, and Lee Chung-kuang, eds., *Taiwan Jinbainian Shi Lunwenji* [Collected essays on Taiwan's recent 100 years of history] (Taipei: Wu Sanlian Jijinhui, 1996); Chang Yen-hsien, Lee Hsiao-feng, and Tai Pao-cun, eds., *Taiwan Shi Lunwen Jingxuan* [Selected essays on Taiwanese history] (Taipei: Yushan she, 1996); and Chang et al., "*Maixiang 21 Shiji.*"

8. From 1995 through 2001, the total volume of trade between China and Taiwan exceeded $163.5 billion, with Taiwan enjoying a surplus of $109.2 billion. In 2002, China became Taiwan's largest trading partner, surpassing the United States. Meanwhile, Taiwanese firms contracted to invest $31.2 billion in China in nearly 24,000 projects between 1995 and 2001, and the boom continued into 2004. Up to 500,000 Taiwanese citizens had taken up residence in China by early 2002.

Shi Yanjiu yu Taiwan Zhutixing" (Taiwan historical research and Taiwanese subjectivity) that there was nothing essential or inevitable about Taiwan's intentional peripheralization in the writing of history, but peripheralization has become an iron fact with profound contemporary consequences.[9] The primary result was that Taiwanese people have never seen themselves as being a Subject in History, only an appendage of someone else's subjectivity—whether the Manchu Qing Empire (1683–1895), the Japanese Empire (1895–1945), or Republican China (1945–2000). Chang argues that by means of political, economic, and cultural peripheralization, the Qing, Japanese, and Republican Chinese rulers were able to cultivate precisely the passive and "tragic" mind-set among the Taiwanese that Lee Teng-hui and the TSU worry could lead them to accept China's blandishments and a Hong Kong-style "one country, two systems" status, without putting up a fight. This would genuinely be tragic, Chang argues, because the notion of Taiwan being peripheral is *itself* imagined and constructed; there is nothing essentially Chinese about Taiwan, just as there was nothing essentially Japanese about it before 1945. For the nationalists, then, the first and most fundamental task in the struggle is to cultivate a sense of Taiwanese subjectivity: the conviction that Taiwan is every bit as much a Subject in History as other nation-states are and enjoys the right to determine its own future autonomously, free of Chinese (or, for that matter, American) pressure.

This task is arduous because forced peripheralization has deep roots in history, and history-writing, on Taiwan. Yet, the seeds of subjectivity were also planted early.[10] KMT Chairman Lien Chan's grandfather, Lien Ya-t'ang, published an influential *Taiwan Tongshi* (Taiwan popular history) in 1920, but wrote it in a traditional Sinocentric style, as Chang explains, "resisting Japan," but not "transcending Han consciousness." Still, during the 1920s, many Taiwanese people learned Western concepts of nationality and citizenship through a Japanese filter and began the pioneering quest of building a Taiwanese nation. Doctors, intellectuals, and engineers worked to cultivate a sense of Taiwanese subjectivity through such rallying slogans as "Taiwan belongs to the Taiwanese" (*Taiwan shi Taiwanren de Taiwan*). They gave public lectures, staged plays, and published newspapers before finally being suppressed in the early 1930s. Many Taiwanese did identify with China at the time, but it is notable how alacritously the society took to the "Japanization" (*huangminhua*) movement that began in 1937. During the war years, Taiwan actually "lost itself," Chang writes, blindly acquiescing to Japanese demands and becoming a targeted forward military

9. The essay appears in Chang et al., *Taiwan Jinbainian Shi Lunwenji*, pp. 431–51.

10. On the early development of Taiwanese subjectivity, see A-Chin Hsiau, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 29–49; and Leo T. S. Ching, *Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 51–88.

base for operations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. In fact, Taiwan had only started to "find itself" in the 1920s and never had a chance to consolidate those early gains or develop genuine Taiwanese subjectivity. In 1945, devastated by the war and harboring illusions about the greatness of China, the Taiwanese embraced retrocession to the KMT but soon regretted it.

Chang believes that it is essential to remind the Taiwanese people, especially younger generations, about the forced Sinicization campaign that began in 1945. Up to one million Republican Chinese migrated to Taiwan between 1945 and 1952, Chang writes, and they propagated, with almost a single voice, the idea that the six million Taiwanese had been mentally enslaved (*nuhua*) by the Japanese, convinced to deny the "fact" that they were in an essential sense "Chinese" and, concomitantly, behaving in a disgustingly obsequious way in the face of colonialism. The slavish Taiwanese culture would have to be changed. The KMT immediately embarked upon this "important work," "educating" the Taiwanese about Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles and the spirit of the great Chinese nation and—certainly not least—forcibly implementing the use of Mandarin Chinese in schools, government offices, and most other public places. Street and road names were changed to important KMT symbols and slogans such as "Zhongshan," "Jianguo," "Minsheng," and "Xinhai."[11] Japanese newspapers were banned in October 1946, rendering educated Taiwanese publicly mute. "The result was to make Taiwanese people feel the presence of Chinese culture and the KMT at all times and places," Chang writes. It was an attempt to achieve a comprehensive transformation of the symbolic environment to implement the project of "da Zhongguo minzuzhuyi"—the "great Chinese nationalism" that would keep Taiwan peripheral, this time as an outpost of the Republic of China instead of Imperial Japan.

In the years immediately following the brutal February 28 Incident of 1947, in which at least 10,000 Taiwanese were killed for demanding democratization and quasi-autonomy within the Republic of China, it was, of course, impossible to make any progress toward cultivating Taiwanese subjectivity.[12] The environment was far too repressive during the "Age of White Terror." Chang

11. "Zhongshan" is Sun Yat-sen's formal personal name; "Jianguo" means "build the country"; "Minsheng" means "people's livelihood"; and "Xinhai" is the Chinese name for the year of the Republican Revolution (1911) that ended the last dynasty, the Qing.

12. See Steven Phillips, "Between Assimilation and Independence: Taiwanese Political Aspirations under Nationalist Chinese Rule, 1945–1948," in Murray A. Rubinstein, ed., *Taiwan: A New History* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 275–319. The February 28 Incident evolved into an "Age of White Terror" from the 1950s to the 1980s, during which an estimated 3,000–4,000 people were executed and 29,000 imprisoned for political offenses. See Lee Hsiao-feng, "Yibainian lai Taiwan Zhengzhi Yundong zhong de Guojia Rentong" [National identity in Taiwan political movements of the past 100 years], in Chang Yen-hsien et al., *Taiwan Jinbainianshi Lunwenji*, pp. 275–301, esp. pp. 288–90.

claims that many American academics contributed to the denial of Taiwanese subjectivity by going to Taiwan as historians and social scientists committed to studying it as a microcosm of China. These academics then offered grants to Taiwanese intellectuals to study the island in the same way, distorting the intellectuals' conceptions of their own nation. ROC histories of the time, such as Kuo T'ing-i's influential *Taiwan Shishi Gaishuo* (An outline of Taiwan's history), continued to deny the Taiwanese people autonomous agency but did, at least, avoid depicting them as slaves. They were instead portrayed as exemplifying the nationalistic resistance spirit of the great Chinese people, from the time of the Zheng family (Ming loyalists who used Taiwan to resist the Qing) right down through 1945. Such constructions were considered enlightened and progressive, Chang writes, because they portrayed the Taiwanese as bravely resisting Japan, thus ignoring localist grievances, while expressing the spirit of Chinese nationalism. Otherwise, the Taiwanese were dismissed as charming and naïve provincials, rendered slightly wild from intermarriage with the island's ethnically Malayo-Polynesian aboriginals, who were now also patronizingly embraced into the Chinese project as *shanbao* ("mountain compatriots"). But at least the Taiwanese were brave; they could now be granted a supportive role in the glorious Chinese story.

Fortunately, Chang argues, in the early 1960s, two very different histories appeared outside of Taiwan that served as foundations for the eventual emergence of a genuine Taiwanese subjectivity. Both Shih Ming's *Taiwanren Sibainian Shi* (The Taiwan people's 400-year history), published in 1962, and Wang Yu-te's *Taiwan: Kumen de Lishi* (Taiwan: A history of struggle), published in 1964, were the first works of history written from an entirely Taiwanese perspective. Yet, neither these studies nor the overseas political independence movement that began in the mid-1950s and was led by P'eng Ming-min made much of an immediate impact inside Taiwan, given the extraordinary repression that followed the crackdown on the "Free China" democracy movement (1957–60; see below). Not until the 1980s would these Taiwanese histories make their way openly and influentially into Taiwan.[13] Graduate students might read them abroad, but they would be in no position to articulate and disseminate a Taiwanese subjectivity back in Taiwan until well after Lee Teng-hui's ascension to the presidency in 1988. Still, in Chang's view, Shih's and Wang's books were pathbreaking: The Taiwanese national consciousness of today can be traced directly to their influence (and indirectly to the movements of the 1920s, discussed above).[14]

13. On the general transformations of the 1980s, see Thomas B. Gold, "Civil Society and Taiwan's Quest for Identity," in Stevan Harrell and Huang Chun-chieh, eds., *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 47–68.

14. See also Shih Cheng-feng, "Taiwan Minzuzhuyi de Jiexi: Zhengzhi Mianxiang de Sange Jingzheng Tujing" [Explanations of Taiwanese nationalism: Three competing political directions], in Chang et al., "*Maixiang 21 Shiji*," pp. 325–43.

Recasting the Culture

One of Chang's associates, Ch'iu Kwei-fen (cited above), a professor of comparative literature at Chung-hsing University in Taichung, believes that rather than re-writing history, the "first and most important task" in achieving Taiwanese subjectivity is "to recast (*chongsu*) the culture."[15] This is a topic that particularly animates Lee Chiao, president of the Taiwan Pen Association (Taiwan bihui), who, in "Taiwan Wenhua yu Xin Guojia" (Taiwanese culture and a new nation-state), demands cultural renovation.[16] The Taiwanese people's primary problem, Lee argues, is that they unconsciously accept as reality the Sinocentric myths propagated by the KMT and reinforced through encounters with Westerners, myths that assert that "Chinese culture is superior within the world" and "the Chinese people are the world's most outstanding"—and, of course, that Taiwan is a part of this culture. Wrongly believing that "blood is thicker than water," the Taiwanese people blindly accept the notion that they are descendants of the legendary Yellow Emperor, common ancestor of the Chinese people. In fact, "Taiwanese and Chinese culture are as different from each other as Taiwanese culture is from American culture," Lee asserts. The only thing that Taiwanese and Chinese people have in common is basic human biology and psychology, which is also what Taiwanese people have in common with Americans. What the Taiwanese people must do about their predicament, Lee declares provocatively, is to "get rid of the virus" (*jiedu*) that Sinocentrism constitutes by "exposing its vacuousness" (*xushi*), puncturing and deflating the myths of Chinese culture so that a new Taiwanese culture can be constructed in its place.

The primacy of this task results from the fact that accepting Chinese culture *by definition* peripheralizes and dwarfs (*aihua*) Taiwan. Chinese culture, Lee argues, arrogantly asserts China's centrality and superiority within the world. It "takes that which is Chinese to be the beginning and ending of all thought; takes those things that are specially China's as the standard for all countries and places; takes China's survival as a microcosm of the world's survival; and takes Chinese values as the center, using them to judge all values everywhere."[17] This, of course, is similar to premodern Sinocentrism, which Lee believes survived essentially intact through the revolutions of the 20th century and now into the 21st. Those aspects of modernity which Sinocentrism did absorb actually made it worse. Leninism in particular—which shaped both Kuomintang and Communist worldviews—taught Chinese to stand outside their culture and use it as a tool cynically to pursue material self-interests. Particularly on the mainland during the Cultural Revolution, the "great Chinese culture" was

15. Ch'iu, "Zai Tan Taiwan Wenxue Shiguan," p. 307.
16. Lee's essay appears on pp. 345–57 of Chang et al., "*Maixiang 21 Shiji*."
17. Ibid., p. 349.

"transformed into a tool" (*gongjuhua*) to be used domestically for selfish political aims and internationally to make China wealthy and strong. It stands for nothing of any higher value, Lee contends. On Taiwan, the effect of this culture's importation in the 1940s was to cause an innocent people to become unable to judge right from wrong, distinguish things of genuine value from dross, and filter incoming foreign culture. It also reduced the standards of intellectual and political elites' public behavior and generally destroyed the island society's traditional wholesome values. Chinese culture in this way not only peripheralized Taiwan and denied it subjectivity but also created a huge array of social and political problems that continue to fester and for whose solution some people wrongheadedly assert the need to rely on even *more* Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism.

In fact, Lee argues, Chinese culture must be jettisoned entirely, its awesome but undeserved prestige gutted so that it can be replaced with a newly constructed Taiwanese culture. This new culture would draw from the Han people who lived on the southeastern Chinese mainland and eventually migrated to Taiwan the traditional values of persistence, diligence, and pragmatism—but would also draw an appreciation of discipline, social norms, and the rule of law from Japan, and a scientific and democratic spirit of inquiry from the West. The new culture would fuse these varied elements, while remaining distinctively Taiwanese. It would reject a number of attributes: from Han culture, Sinocentrism and an alleged high tolerance for public disorder and pollution; from Japanese culture, a tendency toward political corruption and paralysis; and from the West, a disposition to embrace "extremist" and "corrosive" doctrines such as those of deconstructivism and postmodernism. This stance is ironic, of course, since Lee himself is deconstructing China and arguing for its decentering within Taiwan's moral universe.

As Taiwanese people thus move to imagine a new nation-state, Lee writes, they must focus on four main tasks, whose successful completion would result in profound cultural change, not mere formal independence. First, all Taiwanese people must begin to reflect deeply upon their culture and discuss critically the Chinese-derived "cynical" (*xianshi*) and "materialistic" lifestyles polluting the society; they must replace these lifestyles with new ones based on worldviews rooted in "new concepts of humanity, love, and the earth." Lee agrees with Chang Yen-hsien that thoroughly reconstructing (*gaizao*) history is important in this regard, but so is reconstructing the media landscape; after all, more people are exposed to media products than to abstruse historical debates. At present, Taiwan's television and radio stations, newspapers, and book publishers generally act as tools of Chinese cultural imperialism, inculcating the notion that Taiwanese people are actually Chinese through the news, through dazzling entertainment that distracts people's attention from important social problems, and through historical dramas that communicate the glories of

China through the ages. All of this is insidiously Sinocentric, Lee argues; therefore, if Taiwan is to establish subjectivity, the government and social elites must move to de-Sinify media content and reorient it toward native Taiwanese themes.

Second, Taiwanese must begin to work harder to try to understand the lives of people in every social stratum, present and past—particularly as the society becomes increasingly wealthy. A cardinal problem is that "Taiwanese traitors" (*Taijian*), concerned only with their own material interests, have shown themselves perfectly willing to sell out the country by disinvesting in Taiwan and investing in China. This creates enormous hardships within Taiwan's working class: Overall unemployment hit a historic high of 5.3% in 2002 and remained above 4.5% well into 2004. The phenomenon of "Taiwanese traitors" selling out the country and reducing workers' sense of security contributes to an increasingly dread-filled atmosphere on Taiwan, the feeling among some that the island's days of prosperous autonomy are numbered. "Taiwanese traitors" must be pressured to learn to recognize the implications of their actions for other people in society. They must learn to put the collective good ahead of their own private interests. If they refuse to change, Lee fears, more people in Taiwan will start trying to anticipate everything that China wants—not just economically but also politically—and provide it subserviently, at the cost of the nation's dignity and independence. What matters should be the fate of all the Taiwanese people, not just rich businesspeople—and certainly not the *Chinese* people, in whose name many of these businesspeople grandiosely legitimize their selfishness. "We are helping the motherland to develop," they sometimes boast, playing on people's mesmerization by the illusions of "great China nationalism."

Third, and even more radically, Lee argues that the Taiwanese government should work to transform the spatial and temporal landscapes in which the Taiwanese people lead their daily lives. The government should change the public holidays to eliminate all vestiges of the old KMT Republic of China, replacing Sinocentric holidays with ecologically aware commemorations linked to important events in the history of Taiwanese subjectivity. For example, May 20—the date of an important farmers' demonstration in the 1980s and the date DPP President Chen was first inaugurated in 2000—should be commemorated as Farmers' Day.[18] Relatedly, the government should recast space, by rectifying the following ugly elements that Lee asserts to be ubiquitous in Taiwanese society: general chaos in the cities; dangerously speeding vehicles; haphazardly built architectural eyesores; iron-barred windows communicating social hostility; foul-smelling garbage piled high in parks and streets; animal carcasses

18. Ch'iu similarly argues that Taiwan must create new "cultural products" (*wenhua chanpin*) to induce identification with Taiwan, e.g., national days of commemoration, new maps, new music, and, of course, a new history.

and other "road kill" befouling streets and sidewalks; lascivious advertisements and television programs promoting appearance-obsessed vanity; polluted and unkempt natural "scenic" spots; and bronze statues of great personages in Chinese history "littering" schoolyards and public spaces. Taiwan must be made orderly, clean, wholesome, and non-Chinese. Sinocentric symbols must be replaced with Taiwanese symbols, whether in high-school textbooks, government offices, private firms, or public places. Only in this way can the Taiwanese people achieve the cultural renovation necessary to replace their psychological peripherality and "tragic" self-perception with a dignified and authentic Taiwanese subjectivity.

The last cultural change that Lee believes essential is spiritual reformation. The Taiwanese government should—in alliance with social activists—energetically cultivate religious sentiment among the people, specifically to counter the alleged "destructive" Chinese tendency to put humans at the center of the universe. Lee does not specify whether the religious sentiment to be cultivated should be Buddhist, Christian, Daoist, or anything else in particular. His only concern is to uproot what he regards as the human-centered arrogance of the Chinese worldview and replace it with something healthier and more modest. The Taiwanese people should cultivate a sense of humility in the face of nature and awe at the fragility of life. They should end their assault on the natural environment, which, Lee believes, is a legacy of materialistic Chinese nation-building that has no place in contemporary Taiwan. Heightened religious sentiment would also make the Taiwanese people resistant to the blandishments of "idiotic" advertising and the lures of illicit sex and drugs. It would make them cooperative and compassionate, concerned about social problems and motivated to go out and try to remedy them. It would strengthen the Taiwanese people psychologically in their struggle to resist Chinese hegemonism.

Literature and the Arts

Although Lee Chiao's plan to recast Taiwanese culture would obviously require a strong and invasive state to succeed, the new Taiwanese nationalism is otherwise quite democratic. Indeed, its only hope of flourishing securely is to attract the military and diplomatic support of the United States, which surely would evaporate if Taiwan were to revert to authoritarianism. For this reason, implementing Lee's desired changes to "mediascapes" and public places would unavoidably be a difficult process. In the meantime, Taiwanese people are quite likely to continue to consume what the nationalists regard as narcotizing and Sinocentric television programs and other symbols. Partly as a result, other intellectuals are turning their attention to the development of a distinctively Taiwanese literature and fine arts tradition. These intellectuals recognize that only small proportions of the population will actually seek out serious literature and fine arts, but they believe that every nation must develop its own refined

artistic traditions as the basis for a broader popular culture. In this respect, literature and fine arts form the deep structure upon which mediascapes, and ultimately, nations, are built. Simply knowing that these traditions exist can induce people to identify with the nation, and in the future, even television programs might be based upon such foundations.

Discovering and properly conceiving a distinctive and worthwhile Taiwanese literature has therefore been an important part of the nation-building process. Historian Lin Jui-ming of Ch'eng-kung University argues that a genuinely Taiwanese literature in fact emerged as early as the 1920s and 1930s, as part of the general formation of a distinctively Taiwanese collective consciousness.[19] The problem was that following retrocession, Nationalist Chinese (not just KMT propagandists but also liberal intellectuals) redefined Taiwanese literature mockingly as—at best—"Chinese literature in Taiwan" (*zai Taiwan de Zhongguo wenxue*), at worst as "frontier literature" reflecting the slavish mentality of a people who had succumbed to Japanese colonialism and intermarried with aboriginals. These Chinese argued that it was essential for Taiwanese writers to transform themselves so they could become more like the universally awakened and enlightened Chinese. At a minimum, the Taiwanese should immediately stop writing in Japanese; more progressively, they should take up themes that address the problems of "China as a whole": the themes (and only the themes) developed by mainland literati after the reformist May Fourth Movement of 1919. Beginning in the 1950s, with the descent into the "White Terror," this prescription meant simply that Taiwanese writers should parrot dull-witted anti-communism and express the spirit of resistance against "Russian influence on the mainland" (the KMT code term for the People's Republic).

A distinctively Taiwanese voice was thus lost—but only temporarily. The original 1920s–30s literature was rediscovered by a new generation of writers in the dark days of the 1960s. This generation developed the concept that Taiwanese literature tended to be "tragic" (*beiqing*) in tone, but they put the concept to new use. Originally, many bloodied and bowed Taiwanese had accepted the Chinese assertion that the tragic tone of Taiwanese literature reflected the island society's slavishness and passivity in the face of oppression. But Ch'en Wan-i of Ch'ing-hua University writes that the new generation of Taiwanese writers used the theme of tragedy as a subtle form of resistance, both in reinterpreting the 1920s and 1930s and in cultivating Taiwanese resolve to resist KMT repression in the 1960s.[20] Over the next two decades—and especially as the Xiangtu Wenxue (nativist literature) movement began in the

19. Lin, "Zhanhou Taiwan Wenxue de Zai Biancheng" [The postwar reinvention of Taiwanese literature], in Chang et al., *Taiwan Jinbainian Shi Lunwenji*, pp. 81–93.

20. Ch'en, "Lun Taiwan Wenxue de 'Beiqing'" [On Taiwanese literature's 'tragic' tone], in Chang et al., *Taiwan Jinbainian Shi Lunwenji*, pp. 95–103.

1970s[21]—Taiwanese writers developed this theme and established the notion that Taiwanese literature is in essence a literature of resistance, resistance not only to Japan but also—importantly—to "feudalism" (*fengjian*), a codeword for China. By associating feudalism with China, Taiwanese writers were implicitly identifying much of what they denigrated culturally to be coterminous with the KMT and mainlanders. The Japanese had explicitly taught Taiwanese to despise in themselves a list of negative traits that the Japanese called "*Shina*" (Chinese: "*Zhina*")—a derogatory term designed to connote Chinese backwardness and disorder. "Feudal" became a euphemistic replacement for the harsh "*Shina*," and its strategic deployment by Taiwanese writers was important in turning the tables on mainland intellectuals (and party hacks) who had institutionally defined the *Taiwanese* as "backward."

This move also constituted an effort to deny the possibility of ever imagining anything good about a political association with the People's Republic, or a fusion of Taiwanese and Chinese identities. Any possibility of such a fusion was forever ruined, Taiwanese nationalists believe, by the tense encounters in Taiwan between Chinese mainlanders and Taiwanese in the years immediately following retrocession. Of course there was the brutal slaughter and repression of the February 28 Incident, which Taiwanese nationalists discuss extensively.[22] But tensions flared in every kind of encounter, including in literature and the arts, usually caused, according to the nationalists, by mainlander arrogance and dismissal of Taiwanese subjectivity. Ch'iu K'un-liang, ex-director of the Institute for Theatrical Arts (Juchang Yishu Yanjiusuo), wrote about the tensions that developed in the arena of theater, an important medium in the initial postwar period because Taiwan did not yet have television, and films were scarce.[23] An indigenous Taiwanese theater "with a profound popular basis" had emerged in the 1920s and some Taiwanese playwrights hoped to cooperate with migrant mainland playwrights in projects that would contribute to the creation of a fused new identity. The problem was that the mainland playwrights—like mainlanders generally—denied Taiwanese even a semblance of equality on the stage. In fact, mainlanders drove the Taiwanese almost entirely out of the life of the theater, not only on stage but even as critics and commentators. One chief tool: the enforced use of Mandarin. Use of Japanese on stage was outlawed in October 1946; soon, the mainlanders also sought to ban use of the Taiwanese language (Hokkien). One KMT cultural commissar

21. Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, "Literature in Post-1949 Taiwan, 1950–1980s," in Rubinstein, ed., *Taiwan: A New History*, pp. 403–18.

22. For example, see Ch'en I-shen, "Lun Taiwan 2-28 Shijian de Yuanyin" [On the reasons for Taiwan's February 28 Incident], in Chang et al., *Taiwan Shi Lunwen Jingxuan*, pp. 303–49.

23. Ch'iu Kwei-fen, "Zhanhou Taiwan Juchang de Xingshuai Qiluo" [The rise and fall of postwar Taiwanese theater], in Chang et al., *Taiwan Jinbainian Shi Lunwenji*, pp. 157–68.

asserted haughtily in the September 21, 1946, issue of the newspaper *Taiwan Xinsheng Bao* (New Taiwan Life) that "if we were really to use local dialects in staging plays, that would suggest a complete misunderstanding of the meaning of plays. . . . Anyone who understands theater will recognize the truth of this statement."[24] The Taiwanese language, in other words, was only a local dialect, reflecting Taiwan's peripheral status and lack of subjectivity. Since the function of plays—and everything else—was to glorify the great Chinese nation, plays staged in Taiwanese would be utterly absurd. Ch'iu argues that this sort of attitude reflected the arrogance of a people who saw themselves as being at the center (*zhongyuan*) of history, with the Taiwanese (and many other ethnic groups) on the periphery (*bianchui*). Repression of Taiwanese subjectivity in the theater was thus an important part of the general imposition of Chinese hegemony in the 1940s and 1950s. The legacy carried through to television, which is the reason Taiwanese nationalists today believe that discovering a high-quality Taiwanese literature and fine arts tradition and using it as the basis for reconfiguring contemporary mediascapes are essential work.

Ethnic Relations

Taiwanese nationalism can be amazingly cosmopolitan. Shih Cheng-feng, an influential political scientist and member of the World United Formosans for Independence (WUFI), writes that "the Taiwanese Nation (*Taiwan minzu*) refers to all people who love Taiwan, identify with Taiwan, and are willing to struggle for Taiwan, regardless of race, ethnicity, or provincial background; the stress is on loving Taiwan, not on the blood and cultural ties of 'the Chinese Nation' (*Han minzu*)."[25] Even Europeans and Americans who meet these criteria can be considered members of the Taiwanese nation. This expansive formulation is designed primarily to accommodate mainlanders and aboriginals, and in this way stands in stark contrast to some of the darker, exclusivist nationalisms that have emerged elsewhere in the world in recent decades. But there is a catch. To count as members of the Taiwanese nation, people living in Taiwan *must identify with Taiwan first.* Those mainlanders who say "yes, I identify with Taiwan—but I identify more with China" cannot be considered members of the Taiwanese nation. They have chosen to belittle the Taiwanese identity and to regard Taiwan as a future special administrative region of China, not as an autonomous nation. They will either have to change their attitude or, by implication, exit politics.

One mainlander who accepts these criteria is Tien Hsin, a DPP member and adviser to President Chen—as well as a long-time activist in the Association of Mainlanders for Taiwanese Independence. In 1996, Tien published a chapter

24. Quoted in Ch'iu, "Zhanhou Taiwan Juchang," p. 164.
25. Shih Cheng-feng, "Taiwan Minzuzhuyi de Jiexi," p. 325.

in *Taiwan's Recent 100 Years of History*, arguing that some leaders of the "Free China" movement of the 1950s and 1960s could serve as models for mainlanders today.[26] Tien's point of departure is that Chinese liberals who arrived in Taiwan after 1945—fervently nationalistic and anti-communist but also critical of the KMT—eventually accepted the fact that the KMT was never going to rule the mainland again; indeed, they personally might never see the mainland again. Therefore, their only future was in Taiwan. What, then, should become of the ROC? Tien examines the views of three leading mainlander liberals (Lei Chen, Yin Hai-kuang, and Fu Cheng) and demonstrates how they became progressively more committed, over the decades, to the idea of an independent Taiwan—independent, that is, from the People's Republic, *not* from "China" in the abstract sense (though Yin, at least, eventually allowed for the possibility). Thus, Lei, the most important of the mainlanders and founder of *Free China Fortnightly* (Ziyou Zhongguo), shut down by the government in 1960, upon his 1971 release from 11 years in prison called for "two countries, two governments" (*liang guo liang fu*) as a solution to the ROC's intensifying United Nations predicament. Lei believed that accepting the "one country, two governments" solution then on the table would have prompted Taiwan's quick absorption by the PRC, something his anticommunist mentality could not abide. "Two countries, two governments" would be much safer. But the KMT rejected Lei's proposal and withdrew from the U.N., whereupon Lei advanced a step further and called for changing the name of the ROC to the "Chinese Taiwan Democratic Republic" (Zhonghua Taiwan Minzhuguo), a move he believed would make it extremely difficult diplomatically for China ever to annex Taiwan.

It is obvious why Lei Chen might be deployed as a model for contemporary mainlanders. Ethnic Taiwanese overwhelmingly reject China's "one country, two systems" solution to the cross-strait deadlock, but some mainlanders (including many associated with James Soong's People's First Party, or PFP) are not so adamantly opposed. Some have even stated publicly that "one country, two systems" would be better than Taiwanese independence, to which they see current trends leading. To mainlanders who lean toward accepting "one country, two systems," Tien offers the alternative example of Lei, a figure enormously respected by people of almost all political persuasions in Taiwan and certainly someone to whom mainlanders opposed to dictatorship can look for inspiration. Lei's own solution to the cross-strait deadlock of "two countries, two governments" is not so radically different from Lee Teng-hui's "special state-to-state relations" formulation, articulated in 1999. It would also be acceptable to mainstream members of the ruling DPP.

26. Tien Hsin, "'Waishengren' Ziyouzhuyizhe dui 'Taiwan Qiantu' de Taidu" [Liberal "mainlander" attitudes toward "Taiwan's future"], in Chang Yen-hsien et al., "*Maixiang 21 Shiji*," pp. 331–51. Tien confirmed this interpretation in an August 2002 interview with the author in Taipei.

Lei Chen opposed formal Taiwan independence, but primarily, Tien argues, because it would have excluded mainlanders from political life. If mainlanders could be included, Lei would not have opposed the prospect so adamantly.[27] This is actually a questionable assertion, since Lei also identified with the idea of a unified democratic China as the ultimate political goal. But in asserting that Lei's primary concern was the fate of local mainlanders in civic life, Tien can achieve a political purpose by reminding his readers that the mainstream independence movement does welcome mainlander participation: He is living proof. This is consistent with the so-called "new Taiwanese" (*xin Taiwanren*) discourse of the 1990s, eventually embraced by Lee Teng-hui.[28] The "new Taiwanese" formulation asserted that whether a person's family arrived in Taiwan 40, 400, or 4,000 years ago, he or she was to be regarded as completely Taiwanese—so long as they wished to be considered Taiwanese and were willing to work for Taiwan's autonomy, prosperity, and democratic future. The formulation was similar to Shih Cheng-feng's "Anyone who identifies with Taiwan is Taiwanese," discussed above. It hints at the pact that Tien was proposing for the mainlanders: Accept a Taiwanese Taiwan as Lei Chen and his cohorts arguably would have done and then you can enjoy a secure and respectable role in Taiwanese society. Tien himself has followed this advice and must surely be regarded as a model mainlander by the DPP.

The problem is that many other mainlanders have expressed an acute alienation from the new dispensation that resulted from President Chen's election in 2000. Commentators in mainlander-controlled and highly influential newspapers such as the *Zhongguo Shibao* (China Times) and *Lien He Bao* (United Daily News) mock and ridicule the president daily. Mainlander military retirees sometimes take their pensions—and, it is alleged, secrets—to China, where they return to their home provinces as well-connected heroes and then go into business.[29] The inevitable reaction from ethnic Taiwanese in the DPP and the TSU has been decidedly negative, with the TSU even proposing in spring 2002 that mainlanders should be disqualified from running for president. With ethnic relations smoldering and tense, the nationalistic Taiwanese intellectuals' program for incorporating mainlanders into the nation-building project therefore appears untenable—though Tien was quick to point out that younger mainlanders are much more likely than their elders to identify with

27. Tien, August 2002 interview with author in Taipei.

28. See Lee Teng-hui, *The Road to Democracy: Taiwan's Pursuit of Identity* (Tokyo: PHP Institute, 1999).

29. See "Plan to Restrict Movement of High-Tech Workers Seen as Exercise in Futility," *Taipei Times*, April 19, 2002, and Lin Chieh-yu, "Taiwan President Reminds Intelligence Community to Continue Guarding against Nation's Enemies," ibid., April 11, 2002.

the project. Still, even they frequently express residual loyalties to China that Taiwanese nationalists find disturbing and unacceptable.[30]

Praxis: Implementing the Project

Almost all of the Taiwanese nationalists cite two main obstacles to their project: the Chinese military and the Chinese economy. The threat from the military is obvious; the threat from the economy seems invisible to almost everyone but the nationalists themselves. In fact, much to the nationalists' exasperation and disbelief, the rest of the world seems amazingly sanguine about Taiwan's economic integration with the PRC, regarding it as an unmitigated blessing that could lead to permanent peace. Once the two sides' economies are firmly intertwined, neither will want to go to war, many commentators argue—and perhaps one day the two sides will enter willingly into political integration. Such is the optimism abroad. But to the nationalists, integration is a nightmare scenario and one they worry about with increasing urgency. Integration is occurring at an extremely rapid pace and the nationalists fear that their project is, at this stage, too young to resist it, too fragile to stand the pressure. Something must therefore be done to stiffen the Taiwanese people's resolve and dissuade them from identifying with China, if the nation is to have a future.

Even better, from the perspective of the nationalists, would be moves to slow down or reverse the integration process. Economist Chen Po-chih, former chairman of the Economic Planning and Development Council, attempts to develop a convincing academic case in a 2002 essay in one of Chang Yen-hsien's edited volumes.[31] Chen first argues that it would be naïve to view the China-Taiwan relationship purely from the standpoint of economics simply because Chinese leaders said a long time ago that they wanted to solve the so-called Taiwan problem by "using business people to surround the government" (*yi shang wei zheng*) and "using citizens to pressure officials" (*yi min bi guan*). Whether they actually did say these things is, of course, less important than the fact that influential nationalists like Chen believe that such slogans reflect the Chinese leaders' real intent. Thus, Chen worries that when Taiwanese businesspeople get themselves into financial or legal trouble on the mainland, the PRC government will swoop down to "save" them, in exchange for their promise to pressure "the Taiwan authorities" to accept "one country, two

30. See Stéphane Corcuff, "Taiwan's Mainlanders: New Taiwanese?" in Corcuff, ed., *Memories of the Future*, pp. 163–95. Accusations by the mainlander-controlled PFP that President Chen staged his own assassination attempt in March 2004 for the purpose of winning reelection drove an even deeper wedge among the ethnic groups.

31. Chen Po-chih, "Liang'an Jingji Guanxi zai Taiwan Guoji Jingji Guanxi zhong de Dingwei" [Situating cross-strait economic relations within Taiwan's international economic relations], in Chang et al., "*Maixiang 21 Shiji*," pp. 91–103.

systems." The only way to avoid this trap, Chen believes, is to slow down the investment rush. This should be perfectly feasible, because adequate profits can be found elsewhere: It is actually an illusion to say that production costs are substantially lower in China than in, say, Southeast Asia. But even if costs were substantially lower in China, and a mainland presence were necessary to secure access to the fabled China market, helping Taiwanese businesses make profits should not be the government's primary goal. "It is not correct to argue that internal and external investment should be decided on the basis of individual firms' profits," Chen argues, because investment decisions have social consequences. The government must take into account the social costs and benefits of investment decisions to Taiwanese workers and to upstream and downstream suppliers and consumers—as well as to the government itself, which depends on big Taiwanese firms for taxes. It must also, of course, take national security into account.

Chen's article therefore offers an intellectual counterargument to the prevailing "economism," which asserts optimistically that economic integration leads inexorably to peace. The fact that Chen is a respected economist makes readers pay attention to his contention that the government has an important role to play in securing the social interest, including national autonomy. Meanwhile, TSU members, and many in the DPP, face constant, concrete pressures every day from businesspeople agitating for the opening of the so-called "three direct links" (trade, transportation, and communication), as well as for loosening restrictions on both the manufacturing of advanced computer components inside China and on permission for talented Taiwanese engineers to go to work for Chinese firms. The TSU argues that Lee Teng-hui's unsuccessful "go south" policy—designed to divert China-bound investment to Southeast Asia—still holds merit; President Chen aligned himself with this policy rhetorically after his controversial "one country on either side" of the Taiwan Strait (*yi bian yi guo*) speech of August 2002. In practice, however, the DPP government continues to ease restrictions on Taiwanese businesspeople's activities in China and has agreed to allow non-governmental groups to negotiate the three direct links. The pressures from the business world are immense.

Given the seeming inevitability of deepened integration, the nationalists in 2002 began intensifying their efforts to cultivate a distinctive Taiwanese identity among broader publics. They built upon the foundations established by their intellectual allies and took the struggle to the media and the streets. Lee Teng-hui was the most visible actor in this effort. Known to be close personally to Chang Yen-hsien, Lee gave a highly publicized interview to *Open* magazine in July 2002 in which he argued that the primary problem facing Taiwan was actually not economic integration with China per se but, instead, the underdeveloped sense of "Taiwanese subjectivity" (*Taiwan zhuti de wenti*)—using the same terminology as Chang and the other nationalist

intellectuals.[32] "Right now the most important thing is identity," Lee said, a "national consciousness." Developing subjectivity requires that people "identify with Taiwan's history, geography, and values," and the task is too pressing to wait for glacially paced intellectual efforts alone to achieve it. Lee was acutely concerned that if China's economy continues to grow, by 2008, when Beijing hosts the Olympics, Taiwanese people might find it impossible to resist Chinese blandishments and pressures. They might be attracted not only by the economic benefits to be derived from accepting "one country, two systems" but also by the symbolic benefits of being associated with a powerful and internationally respected China. This would be devastating to the nationalists, because it would imply the end of any hope of establishing Taiwanese subjectivity. Joining with China would mean accepting permanent peripheralization. Therefore, Lee—and, by extension, the TSU—must take numerous public actions between now and 2008 to remind the Taiwanese people of Chinese hostility and to increase their morale and confidence in the prospects for establishing a nation.

To these ends, the TSU has proposed a number of controversial measures in support of a general "de-Sinification" of Taiwanese society.[33] First, as mentioned above, the party proposed that mainlanders be forbidden from running for president or vice president. This would conveniently eliminate from politics such suspected unificationists as the PFP's James Soong, but it would also achieve the broader goal of thwarting any presidential ambitions of future mainland migrants who might arrive after the three direct links are established. The TSU also wants to "rectify Taiwan's name" by removing "China" from the names of government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and state-owned enterprises and replacing it with "Taiwan"—which of course dovetails with Lee Chiao's demands for cultural renovation and the transformation of Taiwan's symbolic environment. Eventually, the "Republic of China" would become the "Republic of Taiwan" (or something similar): a development that surely would be regarded by Beijing as an outright declaration of independence. The TSU also insists on refusing to accept the three direct links until China agrees to negotiate with Taiwan government-to-government, which is not likely to happen anytime soon. Finally, the TSU wants to regulate more strictly the flow of Chinese workers to Taiwan, so that the island is not ethnically swamped in future years and somehow taken over by default.

Yet, the nationalists' praxis is not completely defensive. Interviews suggest that some leading nationalists have in mind a sketchy roadmap for independence and—perhaps surprisingly—are optimistic about the prospects for success.

32. "Lee Teng-hui Chuanshou A-bian Si Da Zhizheng Mijue" [Lee Teng-hui bestows to A-bian four secrets of governing], *Open*, July 24–30, 2002, pp.18–25.

33. Author interviews with two TSU officials, July 2002, Taipei.

The magic year is again 2008. Not only will Beijing host the Olympics that year but also, both President Chen and President Bush will be completing their second terms, if Bush is reelected. American Republicans have been unusually supportive of Taiwan, and the nationalists worry that Bush's successor might "regress to the mean" of American politics and take a more cautious approach, especially if the Chinese economy continues to grow rapidly.[34] It is therefore imperative to act before 2008. How might this be done? In 2002, nationalists seemed to expect something magically disruptive to occur in China, a crisis that would provide them with an opportunity. Some predicted that China would soon start to collapse like the former Soviet Union; others thought that an inevitable decline in economic growth would combine with population pressures to increase unemployment and precipitate social and political unrest. None predicted severe acute respiratory syndrome, but SARS was precisely the sort of dark miracle they expected.[35] Should China enter a period of disarray, the Taiwanese must be ready to act. That is a key reason why the DPP and TSU pushed so hard in 2003 to enact a referendum law. They wanted to have a mechanism in place for legitimately declaring statehood as soon as a safe opportunity presents itself, asking voters to approve propositions that would be significantly more substantive than those decided in the March 2004 referenda. Of course, both parties have other reasons for wanting to hold referenda, too, but there seems little doubt that preparing for an opportunity to formalize separation from China was the principal reason for passing the new law allowing referenda to be held.

It is important to note, however, that voter support for formalizing nation-statehood can only be assured if, in the years prior to 2008, the nationalists—both politicians and intellectuals—successfully cultivate the concept of Taiwan as a nation, Taiwan as a Subject in History. The problem, of course, is that agitation to this end antagonizes China, whose leaders fully understand the implications. The question then becomes whether the Taiwanese nationalists are not being overly optimistic about their prospects, perhaps deluding themselves

34. Actually, Bush himself began regressing to this mean in December 2003, when he told visiting Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao that he (Bush) opposed unilateral efforts to change the status quo in the Taiwan Strait and that "the comments and actions made by the leader of Taiwan [President Chen] indicate that he may be willing to make [such] decisions."

35. Later, another and somewhat different sort of "dark miracle" occurred: the March 19, 2004, assassination attempt on President Chen, which facilitated the president's reelection. If KMT candidate Lien Chan had won instead—and most polls showed Lien well ahead in the days before—the Taiwanese nationalist cause would have been dealt a severe setback. "The President repeatedly said 'God bless Taiwan' after emerging from the hospital last Friday," a Taiwanese legislator told CNN. "It is evident that like his predecessor Lee Teng-hui, Chen is convinced his pro-independence crusade enjoys divine backing," quoted in Willy Lam, "Beijing Plots to Undermine Chen," CNN, March 21, 2004, <http://www.cnn.com>.

into thinking that the eventual Chinese response to any sort of independence declaration would be moderate. In the 1920s, Taiwanese political movements overplayed their hand against Japan and ended up being disbanded. In 1947, another Taiwanese political movement made demands on the KMT that elicited a ferocious and brutal response. So, is there an essential tendency of Taiwanese political movements toward dangerous naïveté? Absolutely not, asserted several nationalists in the summer of 2002. One, interviewed by the author in Taipei, argued strongly that they had learned from the tragedy of the earlier incidents, which is why they were demanding much more now than just home rule. "There is no need to worry so much," said another breezily. "Taiwanese nationhood is justified by the global norm of self-determination." Therefore, if Taiwan declares independence following a referendum or some other democratic/legal procedure, it will be impossible for the world community to deny its people's aspirations. "Just look at East Timor," this nationalist said, noting that China had accepted East Timor's independence. Another nationalist argued that even if most of the world opposes Taiwan, the United States, and probably Japan, will support it. In the end, even China will surely "recognize that it's the 21st century" and calculate that it would be extremely detrimental to its interests to attack Taiwan, he said.[36]

While much of the world thus sits back and hopes that economic integration will automatically solve "the Taiwan problem," Taiwanese nationalists of many different stripes are working self-consciously to resist the implications of integration, to cultivate Taiwanese subjectivity, and to establish an independent nation-state. Their drive and optimism are fueled not only by sentiment but also by the conviction that nations are constructed entities, not natural organisms sprung from history—so that arguments saying Taiwan does not have a history significantly different from China's, or that its people's identity is too confused for nationhood, fail to sway them. In the face of overwhelming danger, they pursue their project—a kind of test case for Benedict Anderson's pioneering conception of nations as "imagined communities." The Taiwanese story is inspiring and intellectually fascinating, but it also holds the potential to become a great tragedy for Taiwan's 23 million people. It is a story whose unfolding therefore bears very close watching.

36. Author interviews with Taiwanese nationalists, July–August 2002, Taipei.