

TAIWAN: OUR MOTHER LAND
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"This essay is written for the young Taiwanese readers in North America. We hope parents will encourage their children to read this essay so that they will have an idea about their parents' motherland and understand the reason their parents care about Taiwan and its people."

這篇文章是寫給北美洲台灣人第二代的讀者。我們希望父母親能夠鼓勵孩子們閱讀這篇文章，讓孩子們對他們父母親的祖國能夠有更多的認識，以及了解為什麼他們需要關懷台灣這塊土地和人民的理由。

A. LAND OF TAIWAN:

TAIWAN is an island nation with a land area of about 14,000 square miles, i.e. about the size of West Virginia, and estimated population of over 23 million, or 1/12 of US population, in 2004. It is situated in the western Pacific Ocean and separated from southern China by the 100-mile-wide TAIWAN STRAIT.

The heavily forested hills and mountains of central and eastern Taiwan reach their summit at YU SHAN (13,113 feet); there are about 70 peaks exceeding 10,000 feet. The broad coastal plain in the west supports most of the island's population and is the chief agricultural zone. Natural disasters such as TYPHOONS AND EARTHQUAKES are common. Taiwan has a semitropical climate and rainfall ranging from moderate to heavy. With abundant sunshine and rainfall, the island is AGRICULTURALLY VERY PRODUCTIVE. Today, in terms of land use, arable land accounts for 24% of total land area, while forests and woodland still take up 55% of Taiwan.

B. HISTORY OF TAIWAN AND ITS PEOPLE:

THE SETTLEMENT OF TAIWAN BEGAN NO LATER THAN 4300 B.C., according to recent research findings. One group of TAIWAN'S ABORIGINAL SETTLERS subsequently expanded through the Philippines and Indonesia to Polynesia (including Hawaii), the Malay Peninsula and Madagascar. This expansion accounts for the fact that of the ten subgroups of AUSTRONESIAN LANGUAGES, nine of them are found in Taiwan while the tenth subgroup encompasses all Austronesian languages outside Taiwan. The peopling of and spread of Austronesian languages to these islands are consequently, in the words of Professor Jared M. Diamond of UCLA, "TAIWAN'S GIFT TO THE WORLD."

For some time, the Japanese as well as the Chinese had known the existence of the island of Taiwan and had visited or even used it as their base of activities. In 1544, the Portuguese sailing in the western Pacific "discovered" Taiwan, and called it ILHA FORMOSA, the beautiful island. Ever since then, Taiwan has been better known as "FORMOSA" to Westerners. Once known to Europeans as well as East Asians, Taiwan increasingly became a prize in the international competition for territorial expansion. As a result, Taiwan and its people had tragically come under ONE ALIEN RULE AFTER ANOTHER IN THE MODERN CENTURIES.

I. The EUROPEAN Era (1624-1661) The Spaniards and Dutch struggled for the control of western Taiwan in the early 17th century. The Dutch ultimately emerged victorious as the sole colonial rulers of western Taiwan in 1642. The Dutch colonial authorities encouraged southern ETHNIC HAN Chinese from the other side of the Taiwan Strait to settle and farm in western Taiwan plains.

II. The Era of KOXINGA and his descendants (1662-1683) In 1662 a Ming Chinese general Cheng Chenkung or better known as Koxinga led about 25,000 followers to invade Taiwan and succeeded in expelling the Dutch from the island. Using Taiwan as their base of military operations, Koxinga and his successors resisted the Manchus, who had conquered China in 1644, until they were defeated by the Manchu forces in 1683.

III. The MANCHU Era (1683-1895) With some reluctance, the Manchu rulers of China incorporated Taiwan into their vast empire. In spite of the danger involved in crossing the Taiwan Strait and the initial Manchu imperial restrictions on emigration to Taiwan, the people from southeastern China took the risk to reach Taiwan for opportunities of a better life. In the early years the vast majority of the immigrants were men and many of them subsequently married aboriginal women. As the Manchu court relaxed its emigration regulations, Han women and even children joined the immigration waves from the mid-18th century on. By 1893-95, Taiwan's population had increased to about 2.5 million inhabitants. Taiwan had essentially become A SOCIETY OF IMMIGRANTS. Due to the fact that from the beginning the Manchu government had adopted a passive policy toward the island and its people, Taiwan had remained very much a frontier society. But this would change once Japan secured Taiwan as a result of its military victory over Manchu China in 1895.

IV. The JAPANESE Era (1895-1945) As the only non-Western colonial power, Japan was determined to make the administration of Taiwan, Japan's first colony, a success. The Japanese had to employ much brutal military force to suppress Taiwanese armed resistance. Having sacrificed hundreds and thousands of lives in their fight against the Japanese, the thinking Taiwanese ultimately realized that it was futile fighting the preponderant modern Japanese military force. The struggle against the Japanese colonial ruler consequently became a non-violent political movement by the early 1920's. Some limited political gains were won but as Japan returned to militarism and imperialism in the 1930's, even the mild political form of resistance was brought to an end. On the other hand, in spite of Japanese colonial exploitation, much material progress was made on Taiwan. Public health standards were raised. Education for children was popularized. Transportation and communication network was established. Law and order were maintained. This is not to say that the Japanese colonial rule was for the good of the Taiwanese. Whatever progress made in Taiwan was a by-product of Japanese exploitation of Taiwan's human and natural resources for the benefit of Japan itself.

V. The CHINESE NATIONALIST Era (1945-1987) Japan's defeat by and surrender to the United States ended Japanese rule in 1945. What followed was the arrival of Nationalist Chinese military forces in Taiwan to take control of the island. Initially the Taiwanese considered the Chinese as their liberators and welcomed them. Unfortunately Chinese corruption and mis-rule turned many of the Taiwanese against their new rulers in the FEBRUARY 28 INCIDENT of 1947 during which tens and thousands of Taiwanese leaders were massacred. Defeated in the Chinese Civil War, Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Chinese Nationalist Party (also known as Kuomintang or KMT for short), and his 1.5 million soldiers and other followers retreated to Taiwan. Chiang Kai-shek used Taiwan chiefly as a base for his anti-Chinese Communist campaign. To solidify its control over Taiwan and its people, the KMT regime imposed martial law on Taiwan and white terror prevailed for years in the 1950s. Development of Taiwan and welfare of the people of Taiwan were neglected until the late 1960's when it became clear that the Communist regime in China would be around for some time to come. Only then did the KMT government began to pay more attention on Taiwan's economic development. With the hard work of the people, by late 1980's Taiwan was ranked as ONE OF AISA'S FOUR NEWLY INDUSTRIALIZED ECONOMIES. For example, by the mid-1990's Taiwan had become the world's leading manufacturer of

computer chips. Interestingly, Taiwan has also become ASIA'S KINGDOM OF FLOWERS, particularly because of its well-known cultivation and export of orchids throughout the world.

VI. The TAIWANESE DEMOCRATIC Era (1987- present) Political reforms on Taiwan came much slowly in Taiwan. They came about only because of rising Taiwanese consciousness as well as expanding middle classes' demand for freedom and democracy. After decades of struggles, pro-democracy activists finally formed the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 1986. In the late 1987, the KMT regime finally lifted martial law, which had been in existence for nearly 40 years. More rapid democratic progress came about once the first native-born President Lee Teng-hui came to power in 1987. In the next decade and half Taiwan's voters directly elect the president, the lawmakers, and all other elected offices. The KMT lost control of the executive branch of the government in 2000 when DPP presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian won the presidential election by defeating his two rivals, one the official KMT candidate and the other who left the KMT to run as an independent candidate. A peaceful transfer of power took place from KMT's Lee Teng-hui to DPP's Chen Shui-bian. Winning the presidency with only about 40% of the total votes cast, President Chen encountered continuing opposition from the KMT and its sprinter groups, the People First Party (PFP) and the New Party (NP). After a hard-fought campaign and survival from an attempted assassination against him and his running mate, Annette Lu, President Chen won his re-election on May 20, 2004 by defeating Lien Chan, the KMT presidential candidate and his running mate, PFP chairman James Soong. Extremely disappointed for having lost the election by less than 30,000 votes out of a total of nearly 13 million votes cast, Lien Chan and ten and thousands of his die-hard supporters went on a protest that lasted for more than a week. They demanded a vote recount while they also went to court claiming that the election was unfair even though they were not able to substantiate with evidence. Chen's winning the election resulted from a rising number of voters who have identified with Taiwan. Indeed, Chen had gained 1.5 million votes more than the votes he got in 2000 election. Taiwan has become so democratic and free that America's Freedom House recently rated it as ONE OF ASIA'S TWO MOST DEMOCRATIC AND FREE COUNTRIES. [The other is Japan.] By the late 1990's TAIWAN'S PER CAPITA INCOME RANKED AS ASIA'S 3RD HIGHEST after Japan and Singapore.

VII. Concluding note: After nearly four centuries of alien rule, Taiwan's people have finally established at the turn of the new century a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Determined to defend Taiwan as a free and democratic country, the Taiwanese people have stood up against the Chinese military threat and rejected Communist Beijing's repeated demand that Taiwan become a part of the un-free and un-democratic People's Republic of China. They are truly THE MASTER OF THEIR OWN FUTURE ON TAIWAN.

Ching Chih Chen, received his Ph.D. in History from Harvard University. He began his teaching career at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville in 1969, but recently retired from teaching. Throughout his career, Dr. Chen has published numerous papers focusing on Taiwanese history. He is currently a freelance writer and a member of an English editorial writer of Los Angeles-based Pacific Times (Tai-ping-yang shih-pao). He has contributed editorial/opinion essays (in English) to the Pacific Times and Taipei Times.