

Preface

The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed rapid changes not only in global politics but also in Taiwan's quests for new identities. The notorious martial law was lifted in July 1987, and long-repressed calls for democratization began to be heard that caught worldwide attention. In sync with the economic transformation, the entire world of thought in Taiwan underwent significant changes. Both economic and ideological restructuring have been basic elements of transformation in postwar Taiwan. Meanwhile, the rapid democratization, hailed as "the second Taiwan miracle" by some politicians, has opened a Pandora's box and stirred a whirlwind of discord. Self-assertiveness and egocentrism verging on narcissism are but a few of the many centripetal forces at work in democratic Taiwan today. Is the old Taiwanese work ethic just a relic of the past? Is the goodhearted native openness now collapsing into a narcissistic decadence? Is Taiwan going to become an Armageddon of ideological wars?

The present volume contains seven of my essays on the 'where from' and the 'where to' of the Taiwan transformation. This book thus deals with some key problems that arose from the whirlpool of history and can be grasped and solved only in the context of history, the formation of Taiwanese consciousness and cross-strait relations, in particular. In essence, I seek to show that historical insights extrapolated from an understanding of history are the *sine qua non* for grasping and solving the basic problems facing Taiwan at present, including the Taiwan-Mainland relationship in the twenty-first century.

As a more Westernized frontier of the Chinese communities in East Asia, Taiwan has the advantages of a mature industrial infrastructure and a budding political democracy, which together boost the economy. The root of Taiwan's problems, however, is

that its people lack historical consciousness when facing historical questions. Few Taiwanese can view their problems within a historical context. This sort of shortcoming is not unique to Taiwanese; it is equally discernable in American and European experts on problems in China. In this book, I situate the transformation of Taiwan—especially the development of Taiwanese consciousness, which since the lifting of the martial law has induced a dynamic ethos in Taiwan—in the frame, the context of history.

Where East Asia's pressing problems are usually identified as economic and political, I maintain that only mutual historical understanding that can solve the dilemma for people living across the straits. In addition to being *homo politicus* as Aristotle argues, or *homo economicus* as modern man insists, we are also *homo historien*, both shaping and being shaped by history, just like spiders working the web of history that crisscrosses the globe. I argue in this book that the solutions to problems facing the Chinese living on either side of the Taiwan Strait are to be found only in history.

This book represents a Taiwanese historian's reflections on the transformation of postwar Taiwan. I was born and raised in Taiwan; I am also a professional historian. This twofold biographical edge makes me an insider with an objective outlook. I have an inner understanding of Taiwan because I was born, raised and educated there. I have an objective understanding of Taiwan because of the historical perspective I take.

Having reflected on the changing social psychology, noting the rising narcissism in particular, I found that a new Taiwanese self-centeredness has been revealed vividly and concretely in public and administrative responses to the outbreak of SARS in the spring of 2003. Some hospitals in Taipei were focal points of public selfishness and administrative incompetence. Initially, hospital administrators misdiagnosed the cases and went on to send the patients away in a panic. Later, public officials set up quarantines for

suspected SARS cases. But, misinformed about the meaning of quarantine, affected citizens complained that it violated basic human rights before self-righteously breaking out of the quarantine areas. Some SARS patients left their hospital and went to other hospitals but did not confess to their exposure to the SARS virus, thus spreading the ailment to other hospitals. As the phantom of SARS was wandering in the island of Taiwan, all of these events attest vividly to the problem of egocentrism in Taiwan today, a major theme of the present study.

Of course, nobody's viewpoint, no matter how personal *and* objective, can enjoy universal assent, much less be assured of its validity, whatever that means in this context. Thus, ultimately, what I offer in this volume are the personal views of a private citizen, humbly and conscientiously thought through. In light of these admitted shortcomings, I earnestly request the indulgence of the reader.

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