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## Inspirations from Taiwan: The Perspective of Chinese Academic Visitors in Taiwan

Chih-Jou Jay Chen

### Introduction

“The most beautiful scenery of Taiwan is the people” was the title of a special issue in July 2012 of *New Weekly*, a magazine published in Guangzhou. This issue sold out at newsstands across major Chinese cities within days of its release and a further 200,000 editions were sold in the form of a book volume.<sup>1</sup> This view of Taiwanese people was echoed widely in Internet discussion forums. It seems that while the island’s cities appear downright provincial in comparison with the spanking-new metropolises of China, Taiwan has one attraction that remains unmatched.

This chapter examines Taiwan’s impact on Chinese people through cross-strait social interaction by assessing which elements of Taiwan’s institutions and life have touched and made the most impact on Chinese

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<sup>1</sup>Xinzhoukan zazhishe, *Taiwan zuimei de fengjing*.

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people, particularly Mainland scholars and students visiting Taiwan for educational exchanges. The major finding of this study challenges the conventional belief that Taiwanese democracy and economic investments in China are the most impressive achievements of Taiwan for Chinese visitors. For those who have personally visited Taiwan and accumulated first-hand knowledge of the country, what has left the most indelible mark on their minds are the social relationships and interactions in daily life in Taiwan. For Chinese scholars and students, the democracy by popular vote sweeping Taiwanese society is something interesting, yet they don't perceive it as an urgent necessity for China itself. However, many Chinese visitors, particularly those who have prolonged their stay and experienced closer social interactions on the island, were overwhelmed and deeply touched by the intimate "Chineseness" they encountered in Taiwanese society which they felt was absent in their home society. It is this notion of Taiwan as a "dream home" away from home that naturally moved Chinese visitors to the island. This study also finds that there exist attitudinal variations between Chinese degree-seeking students and short-term Chinese visitors. The degree-seeking students who had spent longer periods of time in Taiwan tended to appreciate political freedom and have a more sympathetic understanding of political identities in Taiwan.

Before Taiwanese investment in China and cross-strait social interactions really took off in the 1990s, there had been more than thirty years of armed standoff and hostility across the Taiwan Strait, lasting from 1949 to the late 1980s. In 1987, President Chiang Ching-kuo of Taiwan finally ended the period of martial law and began to allow family visits to China. In 1990, Taiwan went further by opening itself up to Chinese professionals, scholars, and students to visit Taiwan as long as they secured prior approval. Through these developments—beginning with visiting relatives, attending funeral ceremonies, and advancing to professional, educational, and cultural exchanges—, cross-strait exchanges have seen an increasing number of people going back and forth, engaging in various types of activities and visiting areas that interest them. Even during the eight years from 2000 to 2008 when Chen Shui-bian of the DPP was in power and tensions across the Taiwan Strait were high, the level of Taiwanese investment in China and cross-strait social exchanges continued to rise steadily. Meanwhile, from the early 1990s to the late 2000s,

cross-strait exchanges had been unequal and asymmetrical; Taiwanese could freely enter China for business purposes, capital investments, travel, and study, while simultaneously, Chinese capital and tourism were barred from entering Taiwan. During this period, Chinese professionals, especially those involved in educational and cultural exchanges, were the main groups that visited Taiwan. Despite the paucity of visitors, they have made significant contributions to shaping public opinion on Taiwan in Mainland China.

Since the KMT returned to power and regained effective control of the government of Taiwan in 2008, there had been a significant warming of Taiwan's relationship with China. Between 2008 and 2015, the two sides held ten talks and signed 23 trade and investment pacts, initiated direct cross-strait flights and made Taipei the first market outside Hong Kong to be permitted to clear Renminbi transactions. In June 2010, the signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) opened up substantial cross-strait economic relations with cultural, educational, and social exchanges in its wake. Two months later, in August 2010, Taiwan's legislature passed a bill recognizing the degrees of a total of 41 Chinese universities, and, as of 2016, the number of recognized Chinese universities had increased to 155. Meanwhile, Taiwan started to allow its universities and colleges to admit Chinese degree-seeking students. These events were a continuation of the June 2008 opening of Taiwan to Chinese tour groups, which has reached a daily quota of 5000 Chinese citizens since April 2013.<sup>2</sup>

In the initial stages of the opening of cross-strait exchanges in the late 1980s, the Taiwan government only allowed academic and professional exchanges. The intended goal of these visits was to use these exchanges to produce common understanding and trust in order to lay the social groundwork for future political and economic interaction. Activities pertaining to educational and cultural exchanges were meant to set a standard and a model that would transgress borders and to start a dialogue of values. Thus, these academic and cultural exchange programs not only cast their influence on the academic and cultural groups participating in these activities, but were also expected to have a spillover effect into the areas of both politics and economics.

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<sup>2</sup>National Immigration Agency, "Statistics of Chinese Visitors."

In China and Taiwan, educational and cultural exchanges were often assigned the role of “publicizing value and fighting for people’s hearts.” Although there are tendencies to internationalize higher education leading to increased revenues for private universities in Taiwan, the governments in both Taiwan and China are fully cognizant that academic and cultural activities do have political overtones.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, cross-strait academic exchanges can be regarded as a major component of cultural politics or so-called “public diplomacy,” promoted by the government but carried out by non-state institutions and scholars. In contemporary international relations, public diplomacy has been expanded from state institutions to encompass non-state actors, such as universities, associations, and churches. The most effective form of public diplomacy are people-to-people exchanges, as they involve understanding each other and the building of lasting relationships. As such, economic capacity and military force are deemed “hard power” factors, while public diplomacy is seen as a “soft power” factor which aims at the media, art, culture and the academia to achieve national interest.<sup>4</sup>

Since both confrontation and competition characterize cross-strait exchanges, both Taiwan and China use exchanges to win over the identification of the other side’s intellectuals and cultural elites. After all, it is the academics and cultural elites who lead the ideas of civil society, foster public opinion, and influence the state’s policies. Since the mid-1990s, as China’s economic power burgeoned, Beijing has applied political and economic pressure on Taipei, aiming to bring Taiwan back onto the track of reunification. Thus, Taiwan has been gradually drawn into the economic ambit of China. As such, China uses cultural and educational exchanges to win the hearts and minds of the Taiwanese. Beijing is not overly concerned that the Chinese intellectuals and cultural elites visiting Taiwan might be influenced by their counterparts in Taiwan.

For its part Taiwan is confident that its market economy, social vitality, multi-party democracy, and free media will project a positive image to visitors from among China’s cultural elite. The Taiwanese government

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<sup>3</sup> For the internationalization of higher education in cross-strait academic exchange, see Chou and Ching, *Taiwan Education at Crossroad*, 263–74; Schucher, “Where Minds Meet.”

<sup>4</sup> Nye, “Public Diplomacy Soft Power,” 94–109; Nye, *Soft Power*.

expects that Chinese visitors' contacts with Taiwan's democratic politics and open society will promote civic awakening and political reform in China, and encourage Chinese visitors to adopt a more peaceful stance toward Taiwan. The democratic institutions and associational activities that Chinese visitors observe in Taiwan may induce a challenge to the legitimacy of China's one-party state and foster the development of a dynamic civil society in China.<sup>5</sup> More importantly, to Taiwan, cross-strait cultural and educational exchange is deemed helpful in improving mutual understanding and respect. This is especially the case in relation to reaching political reconciliation and achieving a shared consensus towards a lasting peace.

This chapter considers how Chinese visitors respond to Taiwan. It does so by drawing upon the data from a questionnaire survey and individual reports of Chinese scholars and students visiting Taiwan, as well as recent publications by Chinese students who have studied in Taiwan. It examines how, and to what extent, the ideal goal of cultural and educational exchange has been realized through visitors' visits to Taiwan. If it has, then what negative or positive impressions did Chinese visitors have of Taiwan? That is, what aspects of Taiwan are known and appreciated or criticised by visiting Chinese guests? And what kind of social institutions and mechanisms are involved in facilitating such an understanding and exchange? I shall first analyse the nature and development of cross-strait cultural and educational exchanges. I shall then highlight how individual perceptions of Chinese scholars are influenced through their visits to Taiwan, and outline the social and political implications of these exchanges.

## **A Survey of Chinese Academic Visitors to Taiwan**

In the late 1980s, Taiwan for the first time in its nearly forty-year cross-strait confrontation with China opened its border to permit Chinese professionals to visit the country. Initially, there were only a limited number

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<sup>5</sup> See also Goldstein, "Foreign Policy Tool," 23–50.

of visits, being made mostly by Chinese students studying abroad. By 1992, however, the number of Chinese professionals visiting Taiwan had begun to increase, exceeding an annual figure of 1,000. This number rose sharply from 3653 in 1993 to 15,105 in 2000. Since 2001, an average of more than 20,000 professionals have visited Taiwan every year. After the KMT returned to power under Ma Ying-jeou, the number of Chinese professional visitors more than doubled, rising to 45,106 in 2008, and to 113,673 in 2009. In the period 2010–2013, an annual average of 150,000 Chinese professional visitors went to Taiwan, with educational and cultural exchanges accounting for around 57 percent of these. Meanwhile, the number of Chinese tourists to Taiwan first surpassed that of Chinese professionals in 2005, and the gap has been widening with the influx of Chinese tourists increasing rapidly, from 54,162 in 2005 to more than two million after 2012 (2,263,476 in 2013) (Table 4.1).

The data for this research were drawn from a survey conducted by the Chinese Development Fund.<sup>6</sup> The survey was conducted during the period of 2008–2010, interviewing 1,720 Chinese visitors who entered Taiwan for educational and cultural exchanges. Of these respondents, the largest group was composed of university professors, accounting for 44 percent of the total professional visitors, followed by students (28 percent), and other professionals (from media, culture and arts, and religious spheres) (also 28 percent). The majority of the respondents, 29 percent, were middle aged, being 39 to 48 years old. This group of academic visitors was highly educated, with 27 percent of them holding PhDs, 19 percent master's degrees, and 41 percent bachelor's degrees. For 82 percent of the respondents, this was their first visit to Taiwan.

Nearly all those interviewed carried lasting memories of their historic visit to Taiwan, with 66 percent replying they were “very satisfied” and 33 percent that they were “satisfied.” Furthermore, all replied in the affirmative when asked if their trip to Taiwan was worth it: 75 percent said it was “very much worth it” and 25 percent stated it was simply “worth it.” The inquiry as to whether the visit would impact on their fields of expertise elic-

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<sup>6</sup> Chinese Development Fund (CDF; Zhonghua Fazhan Jijing Hui) is a non-profit fund established by the Mainland Affairs Council of Taiwanese government. It relies on government revenue to promote cross-strait civilian exchanges.

**Table 4.1** Number of Chinese visitors to Taiwan, 1988–2013

	Professionals	Cultural and educational visitors	Tourists
1988	5		
1989	71		
1990	78		
1991	205		
1992	1029		
1993	3653		
1994	3525		
1995	5379		
1996	6195		
1997	9426		
1998	12,665		
1999	14,575		
2000	15,105		
2001	25,718	13,743	N/A
2002	38,656	21,014	2151
2003	23,723	21,434	12,768
2004	28,868	14,945	19,150
2005	24,261	16,186	54,162
2006	28,572	19,819	98,548
2007	31,786	21,638	81,903
2008	45,106	27,912	90,035
2009	113,673	51,718	601,754
2010	158,530	89,469	1,188,929
2011	156,221	92,334	1,286,574
2012	155,173	85,106	2,001,941
2013	150,260	87,364	2,263,476
2014 (Jan.–Sep.)	113,302	26,441	2,470,217
Total	1,165,760	589,123	10,171,608

Sources:

1. Mainland Affairs Council, Taiwan. <http://www.mac.gov.tw/lp.asp?ctNode=5717&CtUnit=3993&BaseDSD=7&mp=1>
2. National Immigration Agency, Taiwan. <http://www.immigration.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=1222244&ctNode=29699&mp=1>

ited three responses: 39 percent replied it had a significant impact while a larger percentage (52 percent) said that it had somewhat of an impact, and a small number (9 percent) replied it had little impact. Thus, this survey safely concluded that these first-time academic visitors and professionals to Taiwan were favourably impressed and had an enjoyable visit which significantly impacted their professional expertise and disciplines (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2** Descriptive statistics of a survey of Chinese academic visitors to Taiwan, 2008–2010

Questions asked about this visit in Taiwan	2008–2010	
	Number	Percent
Being satisfied with the arrangement of this activity?		
Very satisfied	1109	66
Satisfied	563	33
Not satisfied	14	1
Very not satisfied	1	0
Total	1687	100
If the trip to Taiwan worth it?		
Very worth it	1257	75
Worth it	417	25
Not worth it	6	0
Not worth it at all	1	0
Total	1681	100
Whether it had an impact on your field of expertise?		
Had little impact	146	9
Had somewhat of an impact	874	52
Had a significant positive impact	659	39
Total	1679	100
How is the level of Taiwan's democracy than originally expected?		
Much better	175	14
A little better	507	40
No difference; as expected	465	37
A little worse	90	7
Much worse	19	2
Total	1256	100
How is the level of Taiwan's economy than originally expected?		
Much better	134	10
A little better	476	36
No difference; as expected	386	30
A little worse	296	23
Much worse	14	1
Total	1306	100
How is the level of Taiwan's living standards than originally expected?		
Much better	162	12
A little better	565	43
No difference; as expected	436	33
A little worse	137	11
Much worse	4	0
Total	1304	100
Ever visited a tourist site?		

*(continued)*

Table 4.2 (continued)

Questions asked about this visit in Taiwan	2008–2010	
	Number	Percent
Yes	1515	90
No	169	10
Total	1684	100
How is the attraction than originally expected?		
Much better	452	30
A little better	623	41
No difference; as expected	255	17
A little worse	171	11
Much worse	14	1
Total	1515	100
Had interaction with Taiwanese people in the trip?		
Yes	1611	95
No	83	5
Total	1694	100
If Taiwanese people sociable?		
A vast majority are	1214	75
A majority are	353	22
More are sociable	41	3
Less are sociable	3	0
Total	1611	100
Watched TV news broadcasts in Taiwan?		
Yes	1251	75
No	408	25
Total	1659	100
How is Taiwan's news broadcasts compared with China's?		
Livelier	1017	81
No difference	172	14
Less lively	62	5
Total	1251	100
Watched the political talk shows on TV in Taiwan?		
Yes	626	39
No	999	61
Total	1625	100
Like the political talk shows on TV in Taiwan?		
Very like	154	25
Like	307	49
Don't like	148	24
Don't like very much	17	3
Total	626	100
The effects of these political talk shows on TV		

(continued)

Table 4.2 (continued)

Questions asked about this visit in Taiwan	2008–2010	
	Number	Percent
Would engender social conflict	111	27
A good way to express opinions	301	73
Total	412	100

Source: Data are drawn from a survey conducted by the Management Committee of the Chinese Development Fund, Mainland Affairs Council, Taiwan

The survey also asked respondents about their impressions with regard to politics, economics, and civilian life in Taiwan. Their overall impression was better than they had initially expected. More specifically, on politics, 54 percent indicated that the level of Taiwan's democracy was better than they had originally expected (including "much better" and, less enthusiastically, "a little better"). A small number (9 percent), the least fervent, replied that it was worse than they expected (including "much worse" and "a little worse"). The rest, a large number, 37 percent of them, replied that they felt no better or worse than expected in terms of politics in Taiwan. Taiwan's economic development impressed a large majority, with 46 percent saying it was better than expected. A significant minority (24 percent) found it worse, and 30 percent said it was as expected. Regarding social life, a large majority (55 percent) were impressed by the country's living standards and said that it was better than expected. A small minority commented it was worse than expected, and 33 percent said there was no difference. It should be noted that even though these visitors were highly educated and well informed, they still did not know much about Taiwan before they came here. A majority of them found Taiwan better than expected, particularly with regard to Taiwan's politics and living standards.

Although these visitors were attending educational or cultural activities and not visiting Taiwan as tourists, 90 percent of those surveyed said they had visited at least one particular tourist site. Of those who visited tourist sites in Taiwan, 71 percent thought the attractions were better than expected, while 11 percent considered them to be worse. An overwhelming majority of them, 95 percent, stated they had interacted with

Taiwanese people and also almost all of them, namely 97 percent, found the Taiwanese to be sociable.

In addition to tourist attractions such as scenic spots, historic sites, night markets, and local snacks, Chinese visitors to Taiwan were most interested in the news broadcasts and talk shows about Taiwan politics. Three-quarters of respondents said during their trips they watched Taiwan's TV news broadcasts. Of this number, 81 percent thought Taiwan's broadcasts were livelier than those in China. In addition to news broadcasts, 40 percent stated that they also watched the political talk shows and debates on TV. Of those who watched the political talk shows, 74 percent replied they liked these shows and thought that it was a good way to express opinions and it would not engender social conflict.

In addition to the closed-ended questions described above, the questionnaire also used open-ended questions to ask about events or experiences which left the deepest impressions of Taiwan on the respondents' consciousness. In order to systematize the responses, I first converted all the replies into text files, before dividing them into subcategories. They were classified into three layers (politics, economy, and society), and then into 19 smaller categories. The analysis found that what had the most profound impact on visitors were social aspects, including daily life in Taiwan, personal interactions, people's hospitality and friendliness, and the lifestyles of the people. Civic volunteer groups were also mentioned as an added attraction. On average, every respondent raised a social category at least once (on average 1.2 times). In comparison, the categories of Taiwan politics and economic development were mentioned less often; on average, respondents mentioned them less than once per person.

To summarize, the survey above shows that before Chinese visitors came to Taiwan their impressions drawn from textbooks, propaganda, and media were more about tall buildings to accommodate the heavy population density of a chaotic and tumultuous democracy. After their first-hand personal experiences in Taiwan, they largely discovered that Taiwan did not conform to their original impressions. The most profound impression of the majority of respondents was in the area of social life and social relationships, rather than in either economic accomplishment or democratic politics. In the open-ended part of the questionnaire, respondents often mentioned or commented on the Taiwanese people's

politeness and hospitality, their care and respect for elders and disabled persons, gender equality, social diversity, customer service, dynamics of religious expression, investment in education, civic organizations, and people's mutual trust. They made relatively fewer comments about economic activities and political events in Taiwan.

## Reports from and Interviews with Chinese Students and Scholars

The subjects of the survey discussed in the previous section travelled to Taiwan where they stayed for periods between five and 12 days, usually as part of a group. To further explore views of Chinese scholars and students, this section uses information from their written reports and my own interviews, collected between 2008 and 2010. The year of 2008 represented a turning point in Chinese students coming to Taiwan to study since before this date there were only a few hundred Chinese students coming to Taiwan for short research trips, each staying for between two and four months. From 2008 to 2012, the numbers of Chinese exchange students coming to Taiwan increased tenfold from 1321 in 2008 to 15,590 in 2012, before jumping to 21,233 in 2013. From 2011, universities in Taiwan began to accept degree students from China pursuing undergraduate and graduate education. This number quickly increased from 928 in 2011, to 1864 in 2012, and 3554 in 2013. In 2013, there were 29,228 Chinese students enrolled in Taiwan's universities, of which 12 percent were degree students and 73 percent exchange students staying for one to two semesters (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3** Number of Chinese students in Taiwan

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Degree students	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	928	1864	3554
Exchange students	448	823	1321	2888	5316	11,227	15,590	21,233
Short-term auditors	1245	1146	1258	1307	1604	2265	3163	3163
Special programs	284	443	419	562	679	861	882	1278
Total	1977	2412	2998	4757	7599	15,281	21,499	29,228

Source: Ministry of Education, Taiwan

These Chinese students had different agendas than tourists from China. They went to Taiwan, joining different universities and staying for varying lengths of time. They had a variety of different experiences with the universities, society, and communities of Taiwan. It is expected that these students would become elites in various spheres and would have significant social influence in Chinese society. Thus, it is worth noting their feelings about Taiwan and the most vivid impressions they carry of Taiwan.

### **Not-So-Impressive City Landscape but Easy Accessibility**

When reminiscing about their visits to Taiwan, the first impression of the Chinese students was the relatively poor state of Taiwanese infrastructure when compared with so many modernized cities on the Mainland. Their first impression of the architecture and city planning of Taiwanese cities was that it lagged behind in comparison to Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and other major Chinese cities. In the words of one student:

Taipei and Kaohsiung are like second-tier cities in China. Taiwan buildings are old, small, and decrepit. Many are losing a layer of paint. Beijing buildings are like steamed bun just pulled from the oven: the colour is beautiful and they are especially fresh. But Taiwan buildings and streets are not even up to Shenzhen standards!<sup>7</sup>

After speaking of this impression of the appearance of Taiwan's infrastructure, some of the Chinese students also acknowledged that the reason for its poor state was a result of property rights protection. Their understanding was that new buildings in Taiwan's cities were slow moving. A related issue was the accessibility of infrastructure. They were impressed with the highly developed and large number of universities and colleges, their well-equipped libraries and the easy accessibility of their services. In the separate remarks of two graduate students:

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<sup>7</sup>A written report of a Chinese graduate exchange student A, 2007.

Library infrastructure is excellent. You can freely enter and exit, sit and read, and there are even couches to recline upon. On the Mainland, students need to show their ID to go in and out, and department libraries won't let other departments' students enter.<sup>8</sup>

If you compare Taiwan and the Mainland as two houses, the outside of Taiwan is a bit old, but when you go inside and look it is all decorated and adorned and the service quality is great. On the Mainland, outside appearance is new and shiny, but inside it is as flimsy and porous as tofu dregs. The Mainland is a large structure, but inside it is sparse. Taiwan is very small, but has great attention to detail and warmth.<sup>9</sup>

Apparently and understandably, Chinese visitors were not coming to see any high-end urban development and building construction in Taiwan. Nonetheless, they still felt surprised to see such an “unimpressive” city look in the supposedly highly developed urban Taipei. They liked to compare Taiwan with China's second-tier or even third-tier cities, which also have very new constructions that have not been around long enough to show signs of wear and tear. Chinese visitors soon found that although the Taiwanese themselves also complained about how ugly and boxy their buildings were, these buildings were still comfortable to live and work in because they were well maintained on the inside. Probably due to the surprise of seeing old and shabby buildings in Taipei, many Chinese visitors felt a strong contrast when they experienced the politeness and friendliness of people afterwards.

## The Embodiment of a Harmonious Society

From 2004 onwards, the slogan of a “harmonious society” became China's announced objective, and the oft-repeated phrase was on everyone's lips. According to Chinese students and scholars, however, Taiwan is the real harmonious society. During their visits, they were much impressed by people's orderly behaviour and civil character. They found that Taiwanese society ran smoothly in good order and people were treated as “human

<sup>8</sup> A written report of a Chinese graduate exchange student B, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> A written report of a Chinese graduate exchange student C, 2008.

beings.” They mostly agreed the Taiwanese people to be hospitable, polite, and courteous. Their sense of civic values was high; they were gracious and respectful and frequently expressed phrases of appreciation, gratitude and respectful regret. Chinese students commented on the cultured manner in which Taiwanese people thanked one, excused one, and were sorry if they were unable to provide for any simple request. Visiting Chinese students observed that they “have never seen this kind of behaviour” before. “When I first arrived I could not get used to it,” one student said. She had been to Shanghai, Beijing, and Taipei, and though she felt the infrastructure of Taipei was not comparable to Shanghai and Beijing, “the difference was in people’s character.” Taiwan’s harmonious society left a lasting impression on its Mainland visitors.

For example, Chinese students most often referred to the experience of seeing people queue at the subway station as an illustration of Taiwanese civil character. They reflected and explained:

In 2008, Beijing hosted the Olympics and citizens had to practise “civilized behaviour.” At the time, university students volunteered to stand in the subway demonstrating how to line up. At the Shanghai World Exhibition, the city even printed up a “civilization manual,” telling people what was civilized behaviour. But in Taiwan, this kind of civilization education is not necessary at all.<sup>10</sup>

The civic consciousness of Taipei residents is high, and this is reflected in many aspects of life, such as separation of garbage, observation of no eating or drinking on public transportation, and standing to one side on the escalator. In these ways, the public consciousness of citizens is naturally revealed.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the order of daily life, the social values and norms in Taiwan also made a deep impression on Chinese students. They often mentioned the politeness of the Taiwanese, the attitude toward the elderly, gender equality, tolerance toward diversity, customer service, and dynamic religious activities.

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<sup>10</sup> A written report of a Chinese undergraduate student D, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

In truth, I have never been to 101, one of the tallest buildings in the world. Rather it is the common interactions that I find the most appealing here—discussions with my professors, working with my classmates, chatting with the owner of the copy shop. These all leave me with an impression of the spirit of responsibility, law abiding, and courtesy. This is something that we lost after the Cultural Revolution in China.<sup>12</sup>

What left a lasting impression on Chinese scholars and students in Taiwan were the island's social relations particularly between “strangers,” which extended beyond the traditional Chinese family ties and the circle of close friends. It was this equality in social relations and respect in interpersonal interactions that made a particular impression on Chinese visitors. One witnessed this considerate and respectable quality apparent in the daily life of a shopkeeper, a librarian, a bus driver, and even among professors and classmates.

In mainland China there are two popular phrases now: harmony and humanism (*yi ren wei ben*; Putting People First). These are just slogans in China advising people and officials on ways of observing good civic habits, but in Taiwan they are the normal habits of ordinary people.<sup>13</sup>

Taiwan is not the flourishing place that I thought, but it does give one a sense of cordiality. But more so, Taiwan makes people fall in love not with its cities but with its hospitable and friendly people. For example, the service has a high standard and salesclerks have a great attitude. It is like if you don't buy from them you feel bad.<sup>14</sup>

## Diversity and Vitality of Civil Society

The vitality of Taiwanese civil society and its civic organizations also leaves Chinese students and academics suitably impressed. One visiting student said:

<sup>12</sup>A written report of a Chinese graduate student D, 2009.

<sup>13</sup>A written report of a Chinese graduate exchange student E, 2008.

<sup>14</sup>A written report of a Chinese graduate exchange student F, 2008.

Taiwan has many civic organizations that have had a significant impact on society. Many people volunteer to serve in various social associations in temples, schools, museums, and hospitals. This is valuable social capital.<sup>15</sup>

Taiwan has many different ethnic groups coming from different places and with different backgrounds. This is the situation, but we found that there is no ethnic conflict or racial problems. This is a diverse society allowing many different voices to exist. In Taiwan we discovered that people express their opinions and ideas very directly and frankly; no matter if it is about politics or public policy. If they have something to say they just say it. The news media is also very rich with different view points.<sup>16</sup>

Chinese students' most direct experience of Taiwan's pluralistic society is in their observation and participation of campus events and street protests. In April 2010, students' associations at National Taiwan University (NTU) held an event called "Doing Gender." The topic was "Climax Without Guilt; Diversity of Sexual Fun." Through an exhibition of sex toys and a series of lectures, the aim was to transcend sexual taboos and make it a subject that can be openly discussed. Seeing one of the posters around campus, a Chinese student expressed shocked surprise, taking a picture of the poster and posting it on her Weibo page to share with her friends on the Mainland, one of whom commented: "If this happened in our school on the Mainland, it would have quickly been blocked"

At the end of 2009, a plan to begin charging fees for the use of campus buses at NTU provoked a strong student backlash, with students circulating a petition and organizing a protest. A Chinese student remembered seeing the posters for the event and reacting with disbelief. He observed that the student union in China was just like the National Congress of the Communist Party, with its members automatically standing to applaud every proposal provided by the government.

Taiwan has real student unions, taking on responsibilities to reflect students' opinions and dare to challenge the university. In China our student unions just hold events, and do not address issues of conflict between students and the school. They do everything else but standing up for students' rights.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A written report of a Chinese undergraduate exchange student G, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> A written report of a Chinese undergraduate exchange student H, 2008.

On October 30, 2010, Taiwan held its annual lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pride parade in the capital. University student groups from all over Taiwan turned it into a gala event, making flamboyant speeches and flying rainbow banners. There was a carnival atmosphere with all the bustle and excitement underlying the seriousness of the parade, which demanded a free society without let or hindrance. The Chinese students who attended said it was their first participation in a political or social protest parade. Chinese students were aghast; they were not allowed to form gay and lesbian pride groups or discuss same-sex attraction issues in China. Thus, their witnessing of this kind of openness in Taiwan was an eye-opener. One student said that because of this parade he began to consider questions that he had not considered before, such as, “If I were a Chinese political leader, would I allow gay or lesbian issues to be discussed so openly? Would I allow same-sex marriages?”

Chinese students personally observed and vividly experienced key elements of a civil society in Taiwan, namely, open discussions on public issues, the transparent governance of public affairs, and respect for civil rights. This was an exceptional civil society, in contrast to what they had experienced in China where there were numerous repressions and prohibitions. As one Chinese student said, “We are coming from an abnormal society to a normal society, from an uncomfortable life to a comfortable life.” They seemed to be taking a cross-strait civics course.<sup>18</sup>

## The Relaxed University Campus Life

Chinese students respect and praise their professors in Taiwan for their commitment to research and devotion to teaching. However, they have differing opinions as to many Taiwanese students’ carefree, independent, and happy demeanour. They are most aware of the difference among students on each side of the Strait. Chinese students are characterized as serious, aggressive, ambitious, and goal-oriented. Chinese students said that they found it impossible to relax at university because the level of academic competition was so fierce. Most Chinese students are bright

<sup>18</sup> Keo, “Kuahai gongminke,” 17–20.

and shrewd, studying with the ferocity that is required by market competition. They worship certificates which attest to qualifications, and are target-oriented, always thinking about the future road ahead. Chinese students' view of Taiwanese students is that they are simple, cheerful, and "laid-back," but also not vigorous and even too lazy.

One Chinese student explained that she could see the enthusiasm in the eyes of Taiwan students. In comparing student organizations across the strait, she said,

Chinese student organizations are more goal-orientated with a focus on the collective. Taiwanese student organizations are for nurturing the individual. They emphasize that everyone should enjoy themselves in the activity and have personal growth.<sup>19</sup>

Chinese students complained that Chinese education and student life puts all the emphasis on course work and does not consider any other aspects of student life. The extracurricular activities for Taiwanese students allowed people to develop their interests and even to prolong graduation. This kind of "unproductive" activity, they said, was uncommon and abnormal in China.

Social pressure in China is particularly acute; especially since everyone wants to join the elite and cannot afford to take a wrong step. Taiwanese society respects the individual and allows young people to flourish and gives them room for caprice and experiment. Taiwanese young people can develop their interest into a career. The society can accept this kind of play. Taiwan's diverse culture and tolerance nurtures Taiwanese young people to happiness. Outside of the social framework people can go different directions and discover their own character. In Taiwan there are many roads one can choose, whereas in China there is only one road that one has to continue to follow to the end.<sup>20</sup>

Student–teacher relationships in Taiwan, as well as student relationships, also leave Chinese students with a deep impression and a range of mixed

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<sup>19</sup> A written report of a Chinese undergraduate exchange student I, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> A written report of a Chinese undergraduate exchange student J, 2009.

feelings. They found the relationships in the classroom to be warm and equal, and based on mutual respect and autonomy for each student. Taiwanese students do not have to cultivate personal relationships with professors in order to earn a high grade.

Education for all, respect for democracy, and learning by teaching, these are the biggest lessons that I have learned here. The phrase 'education for all' means that teachers treat students equally and fairly. Democracy and respect in the classroom between students and teachers and among students are expressed in their communication and treating each other equally. In China, however, the teacher's authority cannot be challenged, and conflicts among professors will influence students. Malicious slanders toward professors or students are common on campus.<sup>21</sup>

The impression that Taiwanese students are laid-back and relaxed might not be concurred with by those degree-seeking Chinese students who are studying hard in graduate schools in Taiwan. The students and professors they met in graduate schools, particularly in top universities in Taiwan, were working seriously and tirelessly day and night, no less than their counterparts in China. What Chinese students did greatly appreciate was that they felt Taiwanese scholars were "for real" and that they had "substance" with regard to their researches, whereas Chinese scholars were more interested in "name-dropping" and "false erudition" rather than to go beyond the superficial in an analysis.<sup>22</sup>

## Experiencing Chinese Culture in Taiwan

Visiting Chinese students attributed the particular nature of Taiwan's social system and life as being due to the presence of traditional Chinese culture. They expressed feeling especially close to culture and art, citing Chinese characters and literature, architecture, drama, popular rituals, funerals, prayer, and the type of common courtesy among individuals. All of these things they found to be the expression of Chinese culture. Many of them expressed the opinion that Taiwan had preserved traditional Chinese culture which had been lost in present-day China.

<sup>21</sup> A written report of a Chinese graduate exchange student K, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Huang et al., *Lusheng Yuannian*, 135–7.

In Taiwan, technology and economic development have not hampered the temples that you see everywhere. The grand temple fairs are held right by your side. Taiwan has preserved Chinese traditional culture, carried it forward, and enhanced it in ways much better than has China. I am quite moved by how Taiwan has cherished and protected Chinese traditional culture.<sup>23</sup>

In my eyes, Taiwan is more Chinese than China. In China, much of traditional culture was wiped out during the Cultural Revolution. Everywhere in Taiwan, however, you can see these things—the Earth God Temples, memorial gateways, funerary practices, various rituals for inviting and sending off spirits. It really is more Chinese than China!<sup>24</sup>

Before I came to Taiwan I already knew that there was a movement of Taiwanization and “Desinicization” and thus was a bit worried over the future of Taiwan. After coming, however, I realized that the so called Desinicization would not succeed because I deeply felt Taiwan is more Chinese than China.<sup>25</sup>

Many Chinese visitors felt a strong sense of affinity while walking in the alleys and streets in Taiwan, not only because many streets in Taiwan are named after Chinese provinces and cities, but also because in visiting them they felt they were encountering their old home towns in their memories, which mostly had been torn down in China’s recent wave of urbanization. One Chinese student compared wandering in the neighborhoods in Taipei to walking in the old Shanghai in the 1980s. “Taipei’s tree-lined boulevards are just like the Hengshan Road of Shanghai.”<sup>26</sup> However, these kinds of similarities no longer exist across the strait today, and it makes Chinese visitors nostalgic when experiencing familiar old scenes and life styles in Taiwan.

## Experiencing Democracy in Person

Social life and human interaction in Taiwan, including democracy, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly, have all touched visiting Chinese students. The 2010 mayoral elections and the 2012 presidential elections

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<sup>23</sup> A written report of a Chinese undergraduate exchange student L, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Huang et al., *Lusheng Yuannian*, 193.

on the island gave Chinese student visitors an intimate experience of Taiwanese democracy. One Chinese student said it was the first time that he had experienced an election, and that there was more to Taiwanese politics than just fist fights in the congress. They saw the streets filled with festive election banners and candidates standing on their campaign trucks driving by and asking for votes, and they themselves attended public election campaigns where they listened in rapt attention to election speeches. The students found a great difference between what they saw on the media and their own experience with Taiwanese society, which gave them new insights into Taiwan's democratic politics.

I lived in China for twenty-one years and I never knew what an election was. Chinese elections are not transparent, and we don't know when there is an election, it is that suddenly somebody has been elected. I don't even know who our district magistrate is.<sup>27</sup>

Taiwan democratized through several twists and turns, and there is no doubt that this is a great political breakthrough. From my own perspective, no matter what kind of problem arises in an election—some intrigue or vote buying—it is not entirely a bad thing.<sup>28</sup>

Taiwan's party conflicts are still within democratic and legal frameworks. It can be said to be an orderly chaos, and it pales in comparison with the Cultural Revolution. My personal experience from living in Taipei and the Taiwan that is on the TV are two different Taiwans. Turning on the TV or opening the newspaper you can see all kinds of social chaos: political deadlock and protest, an economy in the doldrums, corruption scandals, and a deteriorating social order. This TV Taiwan makes people a bit worried. Then there is the other Taiwan that one personally witnesses, a humane and gracious society that adheres to a sincere civic culture. Putting these two Taiwans together creates an illusion, but which Taiwan is the correct one?<sup>29</sup>

Taiwan's lively election campaigns were indeed something novel and impressive for Chinese visitors, but few of them reflected on the extent to which Taiwanese democracy could be transplanted to China. They often

<sup>27</sup> A written report of a Chinese graduate exchange student M, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> A written report of a Chinese undergraduate exchange student G, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> A written report of a Chinese graduate exchange student N, 2009.

regard China as such a huge continental country with a large and diverse population that Western liberal democracy would be unable to offer a suitable model for its national development. Most Chinese scholars and students believed Taiwan's democracy was handed down by strongman Chiang Ching-kuo and only made possible by the smallness of the island – in both geographic and demographic terms. They were hardly aware that Taiwan's democracy was something fought for by Taiwanese people over several decades. They considered China to be too big and complex and, therefore, that its political system could not be equated with that of Taiwan. For them, democracy was an optional goal for national development, not a right people deserve. They cherish and value social equality, public engagement, and people's virtues in Taiwanese society, but they might not think those good social characters and interpersonal civility are associated with political institutions that underpin a dynamic civil society.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined and analysed the viewpoints of Chinese scholars and students who have either visited or studied in Taiwan. Before they came to Taiwan, they had certain fixed images of the island that were gleaned from textbooks and media as an island of skyscrapers, tempting tourist attractions such as Sun Moon Lake and Alishan, a tumultuous democracy, and probably the rejection of Chinese people. However, after several days or months spent in Taiwan, their impressions had changed considerably. They were most moved not by Taiwan's productive economic development or fashionable department stores, but rather by the normal everyday displays of hospitality, its engaging interaction with strangers, the nurturing prevalence of its traditional culture everywhere, and the vitality of Taiwanese civil society. They were visibly touched by Taiwanese good-natured kindness, equality and trust, values and beliefs, and civic organizations. For those who had stayed longer as exchange or degree-seeking students, many of them found it appealing to investigate social movements through participant observation. They attended protests and demonstrations with their Taiwanese schoolmates, and found

Taiwan's social movements a progressive force highlighting the island's vibrant democracy.

One fundamental reason for Chinese visitors being profoundly touched in Taiwan might be that they see Taiwan as a Chinese society with which they share a common origin, and a "province of China," a legacy from the unfinished Chinese Civil War of 1945 to 1949. For them, Taiwan is a part of Chinese territory. Even for those who denounced the Chinese Communist Party in China and supported Taiwan's democracy, they found it hard to perceive Taiwan as an unrelated independent country. Therefore, they felt confounded and frustrated when encountering Taiwan's growing independent identity and anti-China sentiment, which developed rapidly among the young generation in Taiwan, particularly during and after the Sunflower movement in the spring of 2014. For example, in an island-wide survey conducted in 2014, 60 percent of the respondents identified themselves as Taiwanese, the highest level since such surveys began in 1992, whereas 33 percent identified themselves as "Taiwanese and Chinese," and only 4 percent as Chinese, with both of these latter figures being the lowest since the surveys began.<sup>30</sup> When Chinese visitors acknowledged that the Taiwanese are more Chinese than themselves, they would have a mixed bitter feeling encountering more and more Taiwanese refusing to be Chinese.<sup>31</sup>

Overall, then, Taiwan's open politics and democracy, its social equality and freedom, and its economic prosperity and innovation are all spheres of Taiwan's unique culture which engages China. Taiwan's social system displays vast seminal differences in comparison with China's repressed and contradictory society based on authoritarian governance contrary to Taiwanese democracy. For Taiwan, the anticipation of cross-strait social exchanges is to make Chinese visitors feel the difference between open democratic societies and closed societies. The openness, equality, and good nature of Taiwanese society have had a considerable impact on Chinese visitors, and would surely have increased their understanding and identification with the island. It also brings about political implica-

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<sup>30</sup> BBC, "Taiwan independence."

<sup>31</sup> Hu, *Taiwan bushi wode jia*.

tions. Chinese visitors will ask of themselves and their government: if people in Taiwan can enjoy individual rights and dignity, and the feeling is wonderful when one enjoys them on a routine basis, then why can't Chinese people enjoy the same? Hopefully, in the long run, this can lead to substantial political reforms in China and a greater mutual understanding and peaceful relationship between the two societies across the turbulent waters of the Taiwan Strait.

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