



# Taiwan

## Introduction

Official Name: Republic of China (Taiwan)

Nationality: Taiwanese

Area: 35,980 square kilometers (13,892 square miles)

Languages: Mandarin Chinese (official), Taiwanese (Min), Hakka Chinese dialects

Currency: new Taiwan dollar (TWD)

Location: Eastern Asia; islands bordering the South China Sea, Philippine Sea, East China Sea, and Taiwan Strait; north of the Philippines and southeast of China

## Statistical Information

Population	22.9 million
0-14 years	17.8 percent
15-64 years	72 percent
65+ years	10.2 percent
Birth rate	9 births/1,000
Death rate	7 deaths/1,000
Fertility rate	1.12 children/woman
Pop. growth rate	0.304 percent
Life expectancy	77.6 years
Literacy	96.1 percent
Below poverty line	0.9 percent
Ethnic groups	84 percent Taiwanese 14 percent mainland Chinese 2 percent indigenous
Religion	93 percent Buddhist/Taoist 4.5 percent Christian 2.5 percent other

## Economy

Taiwan has a dynamic capitalist economy and is a leading producer of high-technology goods. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Taiwan was dependent on U.S. aid, but has transformed itself into an aid donor and major foreign investor. The country is highly industrialized, and runs a high trade surplus. China is Taiwan's leading export market, with the U.S. following closely behind. Taiwan's GDP growth rate in 2006 was over 4 percent, with unemployment levels below 4 percent.

## Government

Capital: Taipei

Taiwan is a multiparty democracy. The president and vice president are popularly elected for four-year terms on the same ticket; the president then appoints the premier and vice premier, who head the cabinet, or Executive Yuan. The legislature consists of the 225-seat Legislative Yuan, which was scheduled to be reduced to 113 seats in December 2007.

Note: Taiwan has no official diplomatic relations with the United States and thus no embassies in the States; the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) in Washington, D.C., functions as an unofficial embassy. In Taiwan, the American Institute in Taiwan functions as an unofficial representation from the United States.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) claims sovereignty over Taiwan and insists upon eventual reunification. The government of Taiwan, along with many Taiwanese, desires official independence for Taiwan. Taiwan is seeking entrance into the United Nations, which the PRC continually blocks.

## Climate

Taiwan's climate is marine tropical. The northern part of the island has a rainy season from January to March, during monsoon season. The middle and southern parts of the island do not experience a monsoon season during the winter months, but they often get several weeks of rain after the lunar New Year. June through September is hot and humid all over the island, while October to December is cooler and more pleasant. Taiwan is cloudy year-round.

## Environmental Concerns

Industrialization has contributed to air and water pollution; Taiwan also experiences contamination of drinking water supplies due to pollution and raw sewage. There is a black-market trade in endangered

animals which further endangers species endemic to the island.

### **History**

Taiwan's earliest settlers were its aboriginal tribes, Polynesian in ancestry. Little is known about them in ancient times, but they are believed to have been culturally diverse. Chinese dynasties most likely knew of the existence of the island, but the idea of an island as part of the Middle Kingdom was unfathomable to the early Chinese, and so they made no attempts to explore or colonize the island.

Portuguese sailors first sailed past the island in 1544, calling it "Ilha Formosa" or "Beautiful Island" in the ship's log. From that point, the island was known as Formosa. In 1582 the survivors of a Portuguese shipwreck battled malaria and aboriginal peoples for ten weeks when they were stranded on the island. They eventually escaped to the Portuguese colony of Macau.

The Dutch arrived in 1623 and built a fort, intending to use the island as a base for trade with Japan and China. They soon recognized the trade potential in the herds of deer roaming the island, and began paying the aboriginals to hunt deer, which the Dutch then sold to Japanese and Chinese traders. In 1633, the Dutch built a second fort and began working earnestly to make Taiwan a Dutch colony. It was during the Dutch colonial period that the first wave of Chinese migrants from Fujian Province came to Taiwan, where the Dutch hired them to farm sugarcane and rice for export. The Dutch then began a campaign to subdue the aboriginal tribes, punishing those who offered resistance.

In 1644, with the overthrow of the Ming Empire on mainland China, the Dutch were pushed out of Taiwan by the armies of Ming loyalist Koxinga, who hoped to use Taiwan as a base from which to retake the mainland. After a nine-month siege of the Dutch fort of Zeelandia, the Dutch surrendered and withdrew from Taiwan in 1662.

Ming loyalist rule was fairly brief, and in 1683 Koxinga's grandson Zheng Keshuang submitted to Qing Dynasty rule. The point of the Qing campaign had been to subdue the last of the Ming loyalists, not to capture the island of Taiwan. The emperor didn't see any value in retaining the island, and his ministers advised removing all Chinese from the island and resettling them on the mainland.

Admiral Shi Lang managed to convince the emperor not to abandon the island, but Koxinga's followers were all forced to move back to the mainland. About

7,000 ethnic Chinese were left on the island, as they had intermarried with aboriginal women and owned land in Taiwan. From 1683, the Qing Dynasty ruled Taiwan as a prefecture, placing it under the jurisdiction of Fujian Province. The mainland government tried to limit immigration to Taiwan, forbidding mainlanders to visit family members on the island in hopes of pushing those living on Taiwan to return to their families and ancestral grave sites. The government also prohibited Chinese and assimilated aborigines from entering the "wilderness" of the island, afraid the highland aborigines would incite rebellion.

In the 1760s, the Qing Dynasty relaxed its restrictions on immigration to Taiwan, and by 1811 there were over 2 million Chinese immigrants on the island. In 1885 Taiwan was made a Qing province, with Liu Mingchuan as its first governor. The new governor worked to modernize the island. He developed a railway from Taipei to Hsinchu, opened a mine in Keelung, and built up an arsenal to improve the island's defense system in case of foreign invasion. Liu Mingchuan also worked to improve relations with Taiwanese aboriginals still outside Qing jurisdiction.

In the winter of 1871, a ship from the kingdom of Ryūkyū was shipwrecked on the southeastern tip of Taiwan, where the aboriginal Paiwan people killed and beheaded 54 crew members. Japanese envoys complained about the incident to Qing ministers, who replied that the issue was none of Japan's business, since the Ryūkyū kingdom was under the jurisdiction of the Qing Dynasty. Furthermore, Qing ministers explained to the Japanese envoys that although Taiwan was a Qing province and some aboriginal tribes were peacefully governed by China, there were aboriginal tribes settled on the island who were considered barbarians beyond the reach of the Qing government, and any foreigners traveling in those areas of Taiwan did so at their own risk. Japan, however, claimed that it was sovereign over the Ryūkyū Islands. Japan also falsely claimed that the Qing government had disclaimed any jurisdiction over the aboriginal Taiwanese, and sent 2,000 soldiers to Taiwan in 1874 in an attempt to make Taiwan part of Japan. The Japanese withdrew after the Qing government sent 9,000 of its own soldiers to repel the Japanese aggressors.

After the defeat of the Chinese navy at the end of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Qing China was forced to cede Taiwan, along with other territories, to Japan. In response, pro-Qing officials and the local elite of Taiwan proclaimed the island a republic, giving it the name the Republic of Formosa. They

hoped to prevent Japanese acquisition of Taiwan, since most non-aboriginal Taiwanese had ties to China. Instead, their short-lived republic produced only chaos and disorder, as soldiers looted and pillaged the island. Leaders of the Republic of Formosa sent an envoy to advancing Japanese troops, inviting them into Taipei to restore civil order. Despite official concession to the Japanese, sporadic armed rebellion continued until 1902.

Japanese control of the island fell into three distinct periods. It began with an oppressive period of cracking down and stamping out rebellions, followed by a period of aims after World War I to treat all peoples alike, influenced by Woodrow Wilson's ideal for the self-determination of nations. The final period of Japanese rule, during World War II, was a period of *kōminka*, a policy designed to turn all Taiwanese into loyal subjects of the Emperor of Japan.

In 1942, after the United States entered World War II against Japan, on the side of China, China renounced all diplomatic ties to Japan and made the return of Taiwan to Chinese jurisdiction one of its wartime goals. In the Cairo Conference of 1943, the Allied Powers made the return of Taiwan to China one of several Allied demands, and on October 25, 1945, Japan surrendered and Taiwan officially reverted back to Chinese control.

The Kuomintang (KMT) administration of China under Chiang Kai-shek was repressive and extremely corrupt, leading to local discontent. Anti-mainlander sentiments exploded on February 28, 1947, when Kuomintang authorities injured a cigarette seller and killed an innocent passerby. Taiwanese rebels began to fight the military regime, and for a few weeks after the 2-28 Incident, as it was called, rebels held control of much of Taiwan. Under the pretense of negotiation, the Kuomintang government assembled a large military force and attacked Taiwan, massacring nearly 30,000 Taiwanese and imprisoning many others. They targeted and eliminated many Taiwanese intellectuals and elite. The Taiwanese White Terror followed the events of 2-28, during which thousands of Taiwanese were killed or imprisoned for real or imagined opposition to the Kuomintang regime. The brutality of the Chinese government led to a deep-seated bitterness toward mainlanders on the part of many native Taiwanese. For nearly 50 years, the 2-28 Incident was never publicly acknowledged by the government, and families dared not speak the names of relatives who were killed or went missing during the massacre. It wasn't until 1995 that Republic of China (Taiwan) president Lee Teng-Hui issued an official apology

and made plans for a monument to victims of the 2-28 Incident.

Civil war had been raging in mainland China since the 1930s between Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China government and the Communist Party of China under Mao Zedong. In 1949, the victorious Communist Party of China established the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland, while Kai-shek fled to Taiwan and established his seat of government at Taipei. Throughout the Cold War years, Western powers and the United Nations continued to recognize the Republic of China, based in Taiwan, as the legitimate government of China, refusing to accept the Communist People's Republic of China.

The Republic of China government, controlled by the Kuomintang party, continued to claim sovereignty over not only Taiwan but also mainland, PRC-ruled China. The Kuomintang government ruled Taiwan as a single-party state under martial law from the time it relocated, with the official goal of being vigilant against Communist infiltration and preparing to retake the mainland.

In 1971, the PRC replaced the ROC as the true representative of China in the United Nations. In 1979, the United States switched its official recognition to Beijing, acknowledging the PRC as the legitimate government of China, but remaining vague on the issue of PRC jurisdiction over Taiwan.

On December 10, 1979, following some relaxations in government rules regarding dissension, the first Human Rights Day was organized in Taiwan with the intention of pushing for a more democratic society. Political demonstrators clashed with KMT troops, and the government arrested nearly all known opposition leaders in what became known as the Kaohsiung Incident. Reports of severe mistreatment by KMT police filtered out of the detention centers. In 1980, public trials were held for detained opposition leaders, many of which resulted in prison terms. Outrage over the Kaohsiung Incident led to the formation of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which began to push for change within the government.

The repressive Chiang Kai-shek was succeeded by his son Chiang Ching-kuo, who initiated reforms and began to liberalize the government. He lifted martial law in 1987. His successor, Lee Teng-hui, was the first native Taiwanese president of Taiwan. He continued to hand more power to the Taiwanese people, and in 1996 Taiwan held its first direct presidential election. The PRC, in an attempt to

intimidate Taiwan into installing a pro-unification candidate, conducted a series of missile tests in the Taiwan Strait in what was known as the 1996 Taiwan Straits Crisis.

The 2000 presidential election marked the end of the rule of the Kuomintang party, as the DPP's candidate, Chen Shui-bian, won the popular vote. The PRC army conducted a series of military drills in Fujian Province during the election, causing many Taiwanese to fear an invasion. President Shui-bian won reelection in 2004.

In March of 2005, the PRC passed its Anti-Secession Law, which defines three triggers for an immediate declaration of war with Taiwan: first, if events occur which lead to the separation of Taiwan from China under any name; second, if a major event occurs which would lead to Taiwan's separation from China; and third, if all possibility of a peaceful reunification is lost. China maintains some 700 missiles perpetually aimed at Taiwan. On September 30, 2007, the DPP of Taiwan approved a resolution asserting Taiwan's separate identity from China and calling for a new constitution. The resolution also supports the use of "Taiwan" as the island's name, without abolishing the official title of the Republic of China. The DPP is pushing for the island to enter the United Nations under the name "Taiwan," but Taiwan's admission under any name is doubtful since China possesses veto power as a member of the U.N. Security Council.

### **Ethnic Groups**

About 86 percent of Taiwan's residents are considered "native Taiwanese." This designation refers to early immigrants of Han Chinese descent who migrated to Taiwan beginning in the 1760s, mostly from Guangdong and Fujian Provinces. These Taiwanese have intermarried extensively with Taiwanese aborigines. Most native Taiwanese either support an independent Taiwan or are content with the status quo.

The term "mainlander" is used to refer to Chinese who have immigrated to Taiwan since World War II. This group includes ROC supporters who fled China in 1949 after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. This group of people generally favors eventual reunification with China.

A mere 2 percent of Taiwan's population, or around 458,000 people, are Taiwanese aborigines, further divided into 13 major groups. These groups reflect only tribes officially recognized by the government of Taiwan, and do not identify any alliances dating from pre-modern Taiwan, as Taiwanese aborigines

lived in many independent villages before the arrival of Europeans. Many distinct cultural groups of aborigines have died out or become assimilated into Chinese culture due to the colonization of Taiwan. Of 26 known languages of Taiwanese aborigines, referred to as Formosan languages, 10 are extinct and at least five are dying, with only a few native speakers left alive.

Plains aborigines, native to the plains of Taiwan, are the most assimilated into Chinese culture. In colonial days, they were often used as translators and messengers between Chinese settlers and highland aborigines.

Highland aborigines, native to the mountains of Taiwan, had very little interaction with the Chinese or Europeans until European and American explorers and missionaries led expeditions into the mountains in the 19th and 20th centuries. Nearly all highland tribes were traditionally headhunters, and because of their low level of contact with other civilizations they retained this practice until Japanese rule ended the practice by 1930. Many aboriginal tribes practiced symbolic tattooing until the Japanese eliminated this practice as well.

The 13 recognized aboriginal tribes in Taiwan are: Ami, Atayal, Bunun, Kavalan, Paiwan, Puyama, Rukai, Saisiyat, Sakizaya, Tao, Thao, Tsou, and Truku.

### **Religion**

Taiwan's small percentage of Christians is mostly comprised of aborigines who were converted by European and American missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries. One of the main indicators of a Taiwanese aboriginal village in modern times is the presence of a church building.

Buddhism is by far the dominant religion in Taiwan; although there are many practitioners of pure Buddhism, it is frequently mixed with Taoism, folk religions, and Confucianism. Chinese schools of Buddhism were introduced during the Qing Dynasty, while Japanese Buddhism made inroads into Taiwan during the period of Japanese rule. In more recent times, other schools of Buddhism, such as Tibetan Buddhism, have begun to gain followers in Taiwan.

Nearly all Taiwanese who practice Taoism combine it with some form of Buddhism or folk religion. They believe that Tao is the force that keeps nature in order, and is also associated with a proper lifestyle, morality, and attitude. Te is believed to be the expression of Tao; that is, Te is integrity and wholeness, a way to live out Tao. A central concept

in Taoism is *wu wei*, which literally means “without action.” The concept of *wu wei* states that man must place his will in harmony with the natural universe, since harmony is disrupted when man exerts his will against the universe. Adherents of Tao are thus very peaceful. During Taoist festivals, food sacrifices are set out for the gods or for spirits of the departed. Street festivals take place, involving firecrackers, colorful floats, and traditional dragon or lion dances. Astrology, I Ching, and divination are traditional Taoist pursuits, along with mediumship, in which the possessed medium communicates messages from the spirit world. Incense and the traditional yin and yang symbol are also associated with Taoism.

Many Taiwanese also profess to follow the teachings of Confucius. Confucianism is generally considered more of a secular ethical tradition than a religion. Confucians try to follow the teachings of Confucius, an ancient Chinese philosopher who lived around 500 B.C. The system of Confucian thought is based on virtue and loyalty. Confucianism does not support laws, but rather emphasizes relationships. Filial piety and veneration of ancestors is extremely important; family members older than yourself must be treated with the utmost respect. The concept of a gentleman, or *Jūnzǐ*, in Confucianism refers not to nobility through blood, but to nobility through virtue. The man who embraces benevolence, acts humanely, shows filial piety and loyalty, and displays strong morals is a true, perfect gentleman. The man who is petty and small in character is no gentleman, even though he may have noble blood. The idea of meritocracy was also introduced by Confucianism. Meritocracy refers to a government in which high officials earn their positions through merit rather than through heredity or wealth. Confucians believe that one’s everyday life should be marked with politeness and propriety.

### **Culture**

**Food**—The people of Taiwan eat large amounts of fish. They make fish soups and stews along with deep fried fish. Restaurants offer a variety of Chinese cuisines along with some Western foods. Tea is very important to Taiwanese people. They believe that tea is healthy and stimulating to conversation. Taiwan is especially famed for its oolong tea. Because of the predominance of Buddhism and Taoism, Taiwanese restaurants and stores offer many vegetarian options.

**Social status**—Taiwan is a consumer society, and social status is marked by the number of material possessions a person can afford. Fancy cars, large houses, and expensive

clothes are all indicative of a person’s social standing.

**Women**—Taiwan is a traditionally patriarchal society. Women are able to work outside their homes, but they are often relegated to menial jobs or the lowest tiers of managerial jobs. Women’s salaries tend to be lower than men’s for an equivalent job. Women have begun to gain more rights; some successful women own or manage businesses. Men continue to resist the women’s movement, and female leaders are looked down upon.

**Marriage**—Historically, there were three ways to marry in Taiwan. The first way was called major marriage and involved the use of a matchmaker. The bride and groom would often meet for the first time on the day of the wedding, and the bride would leave her house to join the household of her father-in-law. The second type of marriage was called *sim pua*. This involved adopting an infant girl and raising her as a future wife for a family’s son. This way allowed the groom’s mother to have a large amount of influence over her daughters-in-law. The final way was called uxori-local marriage. This involved the groom marrying into the bride’s family, usually because the man had no property of his own, and the bride’s family had no male heir. *Sim pua* and uxori-local marriages are much less common today. Young men and women have more of a say regarding whom they want to marry, although they still need the blessing of their parents and a matchmaker.

**Education**—Under the Republic of China, education has been made compulsory through the ninth grade, although students may choose to continue through twelfth grade for free. Children enter kindergarten at age six, and continue on for nine years. At the end of grade nine, students take a test to determine which of three routes they should pursue: an academic high school, which leads to prestigious universities; a secondary vocational school; or a vocational junior college. Many young Taiwanese go abroad for graduate school, frequently choosing the United States.

**Etiquette**—Because of the influence of Confucianism, Taiwanese are polite and friendly. They cultivate social relationships because they feel that one cannot do everything alone, and that everyone needs the help of others. Teahouses, restaurants, and homes are places to build friendships and trust. Although they are open and

friendly, Taiwanese are very aware of status as defined by age, education, and gender. It is difficult for people of different statuses to be deep friends, although it is possible to cultivate a relationship of mutual benefit.

### **Dress**

Dress in Taiwan is completely modern within cities; aboriginal tribes in the mountains may retain traditional styles of dress. Festival days such as the Lunar New Year (second new moon after the winter solstice) and the Lantern Festival (fifteenth day of the first lunar month) are the best times to see traditional Taiwanese dress.

### **Travel/Transportation**

Taiwan has very modern public transit systems within its major cities. Well-maintained bus systems run in major cities. Taxis are plentiful in Taipei, but only a few drivers speak non-Chinese languages fluently. Taxis whose drivers have completed a basic English course will often have a sticker in their rear window which reads "Yes, I speak English." City roads are generally very congested, and scooters and motorcycles weave in and out of traffic.

The rail and high-speed rail systems are effective means of inter-city travel. Rental cars are widely available throughout the region, but in order to rent a car in Taiwan you must have either a Taiwanese driver's license or an international driving permit (IDP). An IDP is a document which allows a motorist to operate a vehicle in another nation when accompanied by a valid driver's license from his or her own country.

You can apply for an IDP in the United States or Canada before you travel. The American Automobile Association (AAA) and the American Automobile Touring Alliance are the only organizations in the U.S. authorized by the State Department to issue IDPs. The Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) is authorized to issue IDPs to Canadian citizens. The cost of an IDP is under \$20; the application will need to be accompanied by two passport-sized photos.

### **Illness/Injury**

Hospitals and doctor's offices in Taiwan are adequate for routine and emergency care. Physicians are well-trained, and may speak English. Many Taiwanese doctors have studied in the United States. Taiwan's hospitals are equipped with modern and well-maintained medical equipment. Clinics and hospitals in Taiwan generally expect cash payment at the time of service rendered, although some private clinics will accept credit cards.

### **Crime**

The violent crime rate in Taiwan remains relatively low, although it has been on the rise over the past few years. Massage parlors and illegal barbershops and nightclubs can be dangerous. These establishments are usually run by criminals and are located in higher-crime areas. Legal barbershops will clearly display typical barbershop services.

Public transportation is generally safe in Taiwan, although women should take care if they are traveling alone late at night.

### **Safety and Security**

In Taiwan, political demonstrations are very common, especially around election time, although there have been very few instances of violence during demonstrations since Taiwan democratized in the 1990s.

### **Entry/Exit Requirements**

U.S. passport holders may enter Taiwan for up to 30 days without a visa if their passport is valid for at least 6 months and if they possess a confirmed return or onward ticket. Travelers with passports with less than 6 months' validity may apply for a landing visa, good for up to 30 days, upon arrival. Travelers also have the option of applying for a Taiwan visa prior to travel. For more information on visas, contact the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) at 4201 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20016.

### **Immunizations**

No immunizations are required for entry into Taiwan.

### **Special Circumstances**

All arriving passengers are required to submit to a body scan with an infrared thermal apparatus. This reads body temperatures in order to detect and prevent communicable diseases. Passengers showing symptoms will be required to fill out a Communicable Disease Survey Form.

Taiwan is subject to strong earthquakes which can occur anywhere on the island. It is also frequently hit by typhoons during the months of July to October.

### **Electricity**

American appliances may be used in Taiwan with no power conversion or plug adaptors needed. Taiwan runs on 110V/60Hz and uses types A and B plugs.