Introduction

Taiwan is located between the Philippines and Japan, 100 miles off the south-east coast of mainland China. Its earliest inhabitants left no records but anthropological evidence suggests that people from Pacific islands may have lived there for about 10,000 years, with migration from China as early as the 12th century. The modern history of Taiwan goes back to around 1590, when Jan Huygen van Linschoten, a Dutch navigator, passed by the island on a Portugese ship and exclaimed ‘Ilha Formosa’ (‘Beautiful island’). In the late Ming Dynasty, Taiwan was occupied by the Dutch and Spanish until Cheng Cheng-kung drove them out and reclaimed the island for China. Cheng used Taiwan as the base for his anti-Ching, Ming loyalist movement, which aimed to overthrow the Ching Dynasty (1644–1911) and restore that of the Ming (1368–1644). Taiwan was a part of the territory of the Ching Dynasty, and belonged to Fu-Jian Province from 1683, from which time it remained a part of the Ching Empire for more than 200 years, until 1895 when it was ceded to Japan under the Treaty of Shimonoseki following the first Sino-Japanese war in 1894.

The Taiwanese Republic, which was formed to resist Japanese imperialism, was crushed by over 12,000 Japanese soldiers, who landed in the northern part of the island on 29 May 1895 (for details, see China Times, 25 May 2001; Su, 1986). The Japanese colonial occupation, which

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1 The Treaty (also known in China as the unequal treaty) marked the end of the first Sino-Japanese war on April 17, 1895, and the defeat of the Ching Dynasty army. It was negotiated and signed by Ito Hirobumi for Japan and Li Hung-chang for China. Besides the termination of Chinese sovereignty over Korea, Taiwan and other places, China was obliged to open its five new treaty ports to Japan.
lasted fifty years, outlawed the use of Mandarin and local dialects, and attempted to make Taiwan’s people forget their Chinese heritage and adopt Japanese language, culture, traditions and values; in short, to become loyal Japanese subjects. To confront this, a viable Taiwanese language movement was formed in the 1920s that advocated a new written language based on a version of the southern Fujianese dialect used by the majority of the people. The resulting Taiwanese New Literature movement was initially a form of sociopolitical resistance against Japanese colonial domination (Government Information Office, the Republic of China, 2004). In 1949, Chiang Kai-shek lost the civil war on the mainland, and fled to Taiwan, where he established his regime and chose Taipei as the capital. During the Chiang regime, he attempted to promote and construct a Chinese national outlook in a people who had once considered themselves Japanese subjects. Besides dealing with unstable internal politics, the government also had to manage difficult international relations. During the Korean War, which began in 1950, the United States considered Taiwan as a buffer against communist expansion in Asia and provided financial support and military supplies. US President Harry Truman agreed to protect Taiwan against a possible attack from communist China and sent the Seventh Fleet to police the waters between Taiwan and China. But on 1 January 1979 the United States terminated its diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and on November 15th of the same year the Taiwanese Republic of China was expelled from the United Nations in favour of the mainland People’s Republic of China. After the death of Chiang Ching-Kuo in 1988, Lee Teng-hui, the first native-born president, succeeded to the

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2 I refer to the local dialect as Taiwanese. In Taiwan the main dialect was the Hokkienese Minnanhua, locally named as taiyu or Taiwanese. Today most people in Taiwan speak both Hokkienese and Mandarin.

3 There were significant parallels between Taiwanese New Literature (also known as the Taiwanese New Culture movement) and the Chinese mainland’s 1919 May Fourth movement. Intellectuals in both societies advocated the integration of the democratic ideas of modern Western society. The Taiwanese New Literature movement also instigated the anti-imperialist (or anti-Japanese or anti-colonialist) movement that marked the beginning of the upsurge of nationalist feeling.

4 Lee Teng-hui (1924–) was born in Sanchih, near Taipei. Lee admitted that his deep feelings towards Japan were because he was in fact Japanese, and consequently changed his name to Iwasato Masao. He was educated at Kyoto Imperial, Iowa State, and Cornell universities. He was the President of the Republic of China from 1988 to 2000, during which time he supported the Taiwanese localization movement that was established in the Japanese colonial period and sought to establish the independence of Taiwan from mainland China and even Japan.