



Stéphane Corcuff, *Feng he ri nuan. Taiwan Waishengren yu guojia rentong de zhuanbian* (Light Wind, warm sun. Taiwan's Mainlanders and the national identity transition)

Taipei, Yunchen wenhua, 2004, 158 p.

Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/825>
ISSN: 1996-4617

Publisher

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 May 2004
ISSN: 2070-3449

Electronic reference

Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, « Stéphane Corcuff, *Feng he ri nuan. Taiwan Waishengren yu guojia rentong de zhuanbian* (Light Wind, warm sun. Taiwan's Mainlanders and the national identity transition) », *China Perspectives* [Online], 53 | May- June 2004, Online since 25 April 2007, connection on 28 October 2019.
URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/825>

This text was automatically generated on 28 October 2019.

© All rights reserved

Stéphane Corcuff, *Feng he ri nuan.*
Taiwan Waishengren yu guojia rentong
de zhuanbian (Light Wind, warm sun.
Taiwan's Mainlanders and the
national identity transition)

Taipei, Yunchen wenhua, 2004, 158 p.

Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley

- 1 Stéphane Corcuff has published a fascinating book at a fascinating time. As he has observed, readers may automatically make connections between his book and the 2004 presidential election, but we must bear in mind that his research was completed long before. This book is in fact a translation in Chinese of part of his PhD thesis, written in French and successfully defended in December 2000.
- 2 Its main purpose is to explore the formation of Taiwan's national identity by analysing how the mainlanders in Taiwan dealt with their national identification during the intensive process of Taiwanisation between 1988 and 1997 under the administration of ex-President Lee Teng-hui. Since democratisation, the issue of "unification (with PRC) v. independence (of Taiwan)" has polarised politics in Taiwan. It is widely believed that the differences on this issue have provoked much of the ethnic tension that is often considered a central characteristic of politics in Taiwan.
- 3 While it is generally understood that "mainlanders" are supportive of unification and "Taiwanese" prefer independence, Corcuff reinforces earlier convictions that this is a far too simplistic approach to identity. Ten years ago, Alan Wachman addressed this problem: "[Some in Taiwan] acknowledge their Chinese origin, but identify themselves as Taiwanese. This group, in turn, is divided into those who consider Taiwan as their nation and those for whom Taiwan is an ethnic category within the Chinese nation. In short, there is an absence of consensus¹." Corcuff's book offers a valuable and

convincing demonstration of why there is a lack of consensus, and how this absence is apparent.

- 4 First, Corcuff has tried to define who “mainlanders” in Taiwan are today. He admits that, over time, it is increasingly difficult to differentiate between “mainlanders” and “Taiwanese” on the island, but the labels themselves have so far received little examination. He explores the discourse surrounding the term and concludes that the label “mainlander” is profoundly relative. Its value depends on who is using the term (is it a tool of self-identification?), and why it is being used (does the term have dark political connotations?).
- 5 Nevertheless, Corcuff concedes that “mainlander” is a useful ethnic label in researching Taiwan’s politics, and has used it to qualify the self-reflective processes that help people define and understand their own identity. In the survey that he designed, Corcuff avoided specific definition of the term, but deemed whosoever identified him or herself as a “mainlander”, as eligible to partake in the research.
- 6 Secondly, the author has described how the mainlanders in Taiwan began to face the real dilemma of national identity at the end of the 1980s. Corcuff has examined several symbolic changes to demonstrate the trend of political and social Taiwanisation (for example, in analysing the first free elections for the National Assembly and Legislative Yuan, currency changes, the content of school history textbooks, and public holidays). Some mainlanders have found it emotionally difficult to accept such momentum, but rationally have understood the necessity of each individual change. The conflict between their hearts and minds is a consequence of their internal understanding of their national identity.
- 7 Corcuff’s research has examined several significant observable facts: 1) Identity is an amorphous concept, especially in reference to Taiwan. People’s multiple identities co-exist, often without self-realisation; 2) Identification is a process, and people’s identification can and does change both temporally and spatially; 3) Appreciating that identity is fluid helps us to understand the undeniable phenomenon of “Taiwanisation” among mainlanders. Corcuff has discovered that even for the most die-hard supporters of unification, there is evidence showing the development of their Taiwan identity, although they may not be aware of this or they may try to deny this process; and 4) There is a visible generational gap in terms of people’s national identity. While 45.5% of older generations of mainlanders (born between 1945 and 1967) still consider themselves as purely “mainlanders”, 42.9% of younger mainlanders (born between 1967 and 1981) regard themselves as simply “Taiwanese”, even though their definition of “Taiwanese” differs from that offered by supporters of independence.
- 8 Finally, the author used a detailed questionnaire to analyse the transition of mainlanders’ national identification. He has revealed how an increasing number of mainlanders have come to accept that the formation of a Taiwan polity with separate sovereignty from the PRC is an undeniable force because of democratisation. But there is also a significant percentage of mainlanders who are unwilling to separate from cultural China.
- 9 It goes without saying that identity and ethnicity have been sensitive topics in Taiwan, but few studies in political science deal with this issue in an objective manner and from the perspective of mainlanders. Dr Corcuff’s study is therefore a very welcome addition to the literature; his careful use of rigorous methodology, combining quantitative and

qualitative approaches, makes this an original contribution to the field. The Chinese translation is particularly valuable, especially after the turmoil of the 2004 election.

- 10 Dr Corcuff's work suggests the need for further research. Has the transformation in the political landscape after the 2004 election stimulated similar changes in terms of identity? After all, not all Taiwanese are independent supporters/supporters of independence?, and not all independent supporters/supporters of independence? deny their Chinese heritage. As Stéphane Corcuff confirms, it is true that many mainlanders in Taiwan support unification with China, but it is a widely-held misconception that these people are willing to sacrifice Taiwan to pursue unification. Similarly, many independence sympathizers do not necessarily want to risk war with China to achieve their goal. The creation of "New Taiwanese" should mean that ethnic identity slowly loses its relevance. The results of the 2004 election may have slowed the process down even further.
-

ENDNOTES

1. Alan M. Wachman, *Taiwan: National Identity and Democratization* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1994).