

Preface

Is Taiwan Chinese?

On March 26, 2005, I marched with thousands of Taiwanese against the Anti-Secession Law, passed two weeks before in Beijing. I had not intended to participate. My parents were to arrive that evening, and my wife and I were cleaning madly. But when we went out for groceries and found the streets pulsing with people, we joined in. The marchers were peaceful, powerful, and confident in their right to political expression. Since the lifting of martial law in 1987, Taiwan's political freedoms have grown steadily, and today it is the only truly democratic Chinese polity. It represents the best way forward for 1.3 billion people in mainland China.

1

As we marched I began to wonder whether I was right to call my book *How Taiwan Became Chinese*. Nowadays, some Taiwanese contend that Taiwan is not Chinese, rejecting their cultural kinship with people in mainland China. What right have I, an outsider, to suggest differently? More important, I worried that my title might help hawks in mainland China argue that Taiwan belongs to the People's Republic of China, and I strongly believe that Taiwan belongs to its people and should be whatever they decide. They're doing a great job ruling themselves.

2

Yet there is no doubt that Taiwan today is culturally Chinese. In the 1600s, people from China began settling there. Most were from the province of Fujian and spoke a dialect of Chinese known as Southern Min, but they were joined later by Hakka Chinese, and then, in the late 1940s, by around 2 million Mandarin speakers. Today, all but 2 percent of Taiwan's population belongs to one of these groups. Indeed, in many ways Taiwan is more Chinese than its assertive neighbor. Three decades of Maoism stripped away parts of mainland China's traditional culture, but Taiwan preserves customs, festivals, and schools of thought that were extinguished across the strait.

3

I decided to keep the title *How Taiwan Became Chinese* because that is what this book is about.¹ It examines the first and most important stage of Taiwan's sinification. When the story starts in the early seventeenth century, few Chinese lived on Taiwan, and China's officials so disdained the island that they urged the Dutch to establish a colony there rather than on the much smaller Penghu Islands in the Taiwan Strait. The Dutch reluctantly went to Taiwan, and it was, oddly, under their rule that Chinese immigration to the island began in earnest. By the

4

end of the Dutch period, a self-sustaining and rapidly growing Chinese colony had been born, and thenceforth China's governments could not ignore Taiwan. Today, mainland China clamors loudly for reunification, and perhaps it will come. If so, let it be on Taiwan's terms, when and how the Taiwanese want.

Taipei, 16 June 2005

Notes:

Note 1: I also considered using the word "Han", because whereas "Chinese" refers to both ethnicity and political control, "Han" refers only to Chinese ethnicity. I decided against "Han" for two reasons. First, few English speakers know the word. Second, this book is also about how Taiwan first came under Chinese political control, thanks to the Ming loyalist regime of Zheng Chenggong.