



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

## BACKGROUND

### Land and Climate

Covering 13,892 square miles (35,980 square kilometers), Taiwan is a subtropical island about the size of the U.S. state of Maryland. It is located about 100 miles (160 kilometers) east of mainland China. The government of Taiwan also controls the Penghu Islands (off Taiwan's west coast) and islands near China's coast (Chinmen, Matsu, and Wuchiu). A north-south mountain range forms the backbone of the island. The highest peak is Yushan, with an elevation of 13,110 feet (3,996 meters). To the west of the central mountain range is a fertile plain, which contains the majority of the population and most of the agricultural activity.

Taiwan's north has warm, humid summers and cold, rainy winters; some snow falls at higher elevations. Southern Taiwan is warmer, and rain falls mostly in the summer. Typhoons are possible from June to October. Average summer highs range from 89 to 100°F (32–38°C); average winter lows are between 54 and 64°F (12–18°C). The island is subject to numerous small earthquakes every year and larger quakes on a less frequent basis.

### History

Chinese immigration to Taiwan began as early as the T'ang Dynasty (AD 618–907). In 1628, the Dutch took control of the island. In 1683, the Manchus of mainland China conquered it and made it a province of China.

The island was ceded to Japan following the Sino-Japanese War (1895) and remained under Japanese

control until 1945. During that period, forces on mainland China battled for control of China's government. A successful revolution inspired by Sun Yat-sen founded the Republic of China (ROC) in 1912, but the new government was overshadowed by the activities of contending warlords. Sun's Nationalist, or *Kuomintang* (KMT), political movement was led by General Chiang Kai-shek after Sun died (1925). Chiang battled the Communist forces of Mao Zedong, but they both fought against the Japanese (1937–45). After Japan was defeated, the civil war continued. Mao's growing army forced Chiang's troops to flee to Taiwan, where Nationalists expected to regroup before returning to the mainland.

When a return proved impossible, Chiang declared the KMT the legitimate government of all of China. Plans by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to invade the island were blocked in 1950 by the United States. In 1954, the United States signed an agreement to protect Taiwan in case of attack from the mainland. Much of the world recognized Taiwan's sovereignty as the ROC.

In 1971, however, the PRC was admitted to the United Nations in Taiwan's place. In 1979, the United States normalized diplomatic relations with the PRC and broke them with the ROC. However, Taiwan-U.S. relations continue on an unofficial basis. In fact, many countries with no formal political ties to Taiwan enjoy relatively strong economic relations.

The KMT ruled Taiwan as a one-party state under martial law. The National Assembly members who took office in 1946 on the mainland held power until the late 1980s, when lifetime legislators were replaced with elected local representatives. After Chiang Kai-shek died in 1975, his son

Chiang Ching-kuo succeeded him as president. Taiwan directed its greatest efforts at modernization and developed a thriving economy. After martial law was lifted in 1987, a multiparty democracy began to emerge. The KMT's Lee Teng-hui, elected president by the National Assembly in 1990, became the first native Taiwanese to lead the country. In 1996, Lee became Taiwan's first directly elected president.

On the strength of Taiwan's booming economy and new democracy, voices calling for the island's independence have grown louder. Many people do not wish to pursue unification with China and see the island as having a separate identity. China clearly opposes this view and has warned Taiwan not to declare independence. Warnings have included military movement and threats of invasion. In 1997, many pro-independence politicians won local offices, and Taiwan dismantled its provincial government—a symbol of Taiwan's status as a province in greater China. In 2000, Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected president, ending 50 years of KMT rule. Chen narrowly won reelection in 2004 but resigned as party leader when the DPP suffered a major defeat in January 2008 parliamentary elections. In March 2009, he went on trial for corruption charges.

In July 2009, China and Taiwan entered into direct dialogue for the first time in 60 years. While tension continues to underlie relations with China, Taiwanese leaders have chosen dialogue communication over confrontation. In September 2009, Typhoon Morakot triggered floods and mudslides that left hundreds dead. Outcry over the government's poor response prompted the resignation of Premier Liu Chao-shiuan.

## THE PEOPLE

### Population

Taiwan's population of 23.02 million is growing by 0.2 percent annually. The three largest cities are the capital of Taipei, the southern commercial city of Kaohsiung, and Taichung, in the west. Indigenous Taiwanese constitute only 2 percent of the population. They are divided among several ethnic groups, some of which maintain their native languages and traditions. The rest of the population is comprised of ethnic Chinese—Taiwanese (84 percent) and mainland Chinese (14 percent). The latter migrated to the island after World War II. The Taiwanese are descendants of migrants who left China between the 17th and 19th centuries. As the mainland Chinese who came after 1947 pass away, their children (with no memory of the mainland) feel that Taiwan is their real home.

### Language

Taiwan's official language is Mandarin Chinese. However, most residents also speak Taiwanese, the language of the first Chinese immigrants. Mandarin is spoken in formal situations and in school instruction. In everyday conversation, young people generally use Mandarin, while older people often speak Taiwanese. In southern Taiwan, Taiwanese is more common. Both Taiwanese and Mandarin are tonal languages.

Each one-syllable word can have many different meanings, depending on the tone (voice inflection) with which it is spoken. Mandarin contains four different tones, and Taiwanese has eight. For instance, the Mandarin word *ma* can mean “horse” or “mother” and can even function as a question mark. Hakka, another Chinese dialect, is also spoken on the island. Some older people know Japanese, and the aboriginal peoples speak their own native languages. English is a popular second or third language for students and is widely understood in urban areas.

Although the official language of Taiwan and mainland China is the same (Mandarin Chinese), vocabulary and idiomatic differences exist. In Taiwan, schoolchildren use a simplified character system that helps them “sound out” a word—something impossible to do with the standard characters, which must be memorized. Westerners have developed various systems of romanization (representing Chinese characters and words in roman letters) that have been adopted by the government to help foreigners sound out names, read signs, and follow maps. The average Chinese would not understand or use romanization. Romanization systems differ; for example, the character for “please” can be written *Qing* or *Ching*. Pronunciation remains the same (cheeng).

### Religion

Freedom of religion is guaranteed in Taiwan. Ninety-three percent of the population practices a combination of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Confucianism, which emphasizes ancestor veneration, is not regarded as a religion. Rather, it is a philosophy that orders social patterns and relationships and forms the Chinese value system. It does not proclaim loyalty to any specific deity. Worship rituals and beliefs come mainly from Buddhism, including a belief in reincarnation and in *karma*, or that good deeds bring good fortune while bad deeds have negative consequences. About 5 percent of the people are Christians of various denominations.

### General Attitudes

People in Taiwan generally are reserved, quiet, generous, and friendly. Frankness or abruptness, especially in offering criticism of any kind, is avoided. Causing public embarrassment or bringing shame to anyone (a “loss of face”) is unacceptable. Even if one disagrees with another person, one would not express opposition to that person in public. Loud or boisterous behavior is regarded as being in poor taste.

The Confucian ethic of proper social and family relationships forms the foundation of society, although rising rates of violent crime indicate that economic prosperity is eroding that foundation. Schools and government foster the tradition of respect for, and obedience to, parents. An individual's actions reflect on the entire family, and people act with this in mind. Taiwanese are group and community oriented. Young men must serve one year either in the military or performing community service.

As society changes, people are adjusting to new social patterns and concepts. When new ideas conflict with traditional ideas, tensions increase between the older and

younger generations. Traditionally, men and women do not show affection for each other in public, although this is changing in the larger urban areas. While people value material possessions, they most desire a good education. They appreciate those who are diligent and hardworking.

### Personal Appearance

Western-style clothing is the norm in Taiwan. People, especially in large urban areas, enjoy the latest fashions. Older people prefer conservative clothing. Cleanliness and neatness are the most important factors in appearance. Western suits and ties are the most common attire for businessmen. Businesswomen wear skirts or pantsuits. For everyday wear, women usually wear jeans or other casual clothing. Most women reserve dresses for special occasions.

## CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

### Greetings

Asking others if they have eaten (*Chyr bau le meiyau?*) is a common Chinese greeting that stems from the tradition to never let anyone go hungry; it was always polite to ask if others had eaten and offer them a meal. Today it is used simply as a “How are you?” The greeting *Ni hau ma* (How are you?) is somewhat formal; it is used when people have not seen one another in a long time. More common greetings are *Ni hau* (Hello), *Zao* (Morning), and *Ching tzuo* (Please sit); the latter is spoken to visitors in the home. After initial greetings, polite questions may follow.

When being introduced, Taiwanese nod the head and smile. They may also shake hands, although handshaking is most common in business and on formal occasions. A slight bow shows respect. Acquaintances and close friends grasp each other's hands to show hospitality, sincerity, and warmth.

Chinese names are arranged with the family name first, followed by a one- or two-syllable given name. Acquaintances and friends call one another by full name. Otherwise, one generally addresses others by their surname followed by a title: *Yu Shian sheng* (Mr. Yu), *Wang Shiau chie* (Miss Wang), or *Kao Jing li* (Manager Kao). People do not address others by last name alone, and they rarely use given names alone. Friends who have adopted Christian or Western given names may address one another by that name.

### Gestures

One points with the open hand, not the index finger. To beckon, one waves all fingers with the palm down. People commonly “write” a character in the air when explaining it. Young female friends often hold hands in public. Putting one's arm around the shoulder of another usually is inappropriate. However, individuals converse within touching distance and may touch each other's arm or shoulder while talking. Shaking one hand from side to side with the palm forward means “no.” People do not use their feet to move objects such as chairs or doors. While sitting, one places one's hands in the lap. Winking is impolite. One gives an object to another person, especially an older person, with both hands. In conversation, one refers to oneself by pointing to the nose.

When posing for photos, people often smile and hold up two fingers in a V.

### Visiting

Visiting is an integral part of Chinese culture. Social visits occur mostly in the home. Friends and relatives may come unannounced, but most people prefer advance notice. While a day's notice is acceptable, one week is generally more appropriate. For special occasions (wedding, birthday) or official functions (business, politics), hosts send invitations to their guests. In these cases, the scheduled event is held in a public place or restaurant.

People usually remove their shoes before entering a home, and they wear slippers inside. Guests acknowledge and greet the elderly first. It is polite to stand when a guest, a superior, or an elderly person enters a room. Visitors are likely to receive tea, candy, fruit, nuts, pastries, or a soft drink. Dinner conversation often centers on the meal—how it was prepared, what ingredients were used, and where the ingredients were obtained. First-time visitors present hosts with a small gift such as fruit. Friends and relatives take gifts when visiting on important holidays such as the New Year. People exchange gifts with both hands and do not open the gifts in the presence of the giver. Visitors are careful not to admire an object too much, as the host may feel obligated to present it as a gift.

### Eating

Breakfast is usually light. People generally have steamed buns, rice, or fried bread sticks. Young people often prefer toast or sandwiches. Breakfast is usually accompanied by coffee, milk, or soy milk. For lunch, working people eat at cafeterias or restaurants. Dinner, the main meal, includes soup, rice, and meat and/or vegetable dishes. Tea is brewed and served throughout the day. After-dinner snacks are common. People often go to night markets to buy street foods such as omelets, *chou dou fu* (translated as “stinky tofu,” a strong-smelling tofu), *milk tea* (a creamy tea drink), and shaved ice with fruit.

At more formal gatherings, many different dishes will be served. Families generally only serve a few dishes at a typical meal. At a wedding banquet or another special occasion, tables are large and round, representing perfection and harmony. People typically eat with chopsticks and a soup spoon. Each person at the table has a personal bowl of rice. The diners are served or serve themselves from dishes at the center of the table, placing small amounts of food in their rice bowls as often as necessary. They hold the bowl near the mouth to eat. Bones and seeds are placed on the table or on a provided plate but never in the bowl of rice or on a plate of food. Leaving rice in the bowl is impolite. Children are taught to finish all of their food out of respect for farmers and parents. When finished, a person places the chopsticks side by side on the table.

Dining out at restaurants or outdoor night markets is convenient and popular. At a restaurant, a host expects to pay. Guests may offer politely to help but do not insist. If using a toothpick, one covers the mouth with the other hand. It is not proper for adults to eat while walking on the street.

## LIFESTYLE

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### Family

Families in Taiwan traditionally have been large, but dramatic economic change and a government family-planning campaign have reduced the number of children in the average nuclear family to one or two. The government is now encouraging parents to have more children. Elderly parents commonly live with their children. In rural areas, larger extended families may share the same home. As many young people leave rural areas to seek better economic opportunities in the cities, the traditional extended family structure is changing.

Children, particularly sons, are expected to care for their aging parents. Some elderly parents from rural areas move to cities to live with their grown children. Others choose to stay in their own home. Grown children may support their parents financially or hire home health care workers to assist. People living away from their families return home for holidays and visits, a tradition that most Taiwanese take very seriously.

Although family members do not openly display affection in the Western manner, Taiwanese families have a deep-rooted unity and sense of obligation to each other. Family members will agree rather than cause disunity. Parents generally support their children until they have finished their education or until they are able to support themselves. Children generally yield to the counsel of their parents or to the advice of the oldest member of the extended family. Older siblings are expected to act as role models for the younger siblings.

As Taiwan's divorce rate increases, the number of single-parents families has also grown. Grandparents often help care for children in these families and may also provide financial support if possible.

Gender roles are less clearly defined than in the past. More women now work outside of the home and receive an education, compared to in previous generations. In more traditional families, men are still seen as the leaders of the family. However, an increasing number of couples manage the family together, although the condition of a family's home is seen as a reflection on the woman more than the man. Women are often responsible for cleaning, cooking, and laundry, while men usually take care of household repairs.

### Housing

Taiwan is densely populated, so few families live in single-family homes. An urban apartment is the most common dwelling. These range widely in size, but an average family has a two- or three-bedroom apartment with a living room and small kitchen. A large section of a living room wall is often devoted to the family altar, where people pay respect to their ancestors. A typical altar is adorned with gold statues and red candles. Family photos decorate the room. Washing machines, air-conditioning, televisions, and computers are common amenities. Many rural families still live in traditional single-storey brick houses. The center rooms are set aside for the family patriarch and matriarch, while married sons and their wives occupy the rooms on each side of the house. Due

to land scarcity, many of these traditional houses are being razed and replaced with apartment buildings.

### Dating and Marriage

Young people start dating in groups at around age 14. Students concentrate on their education and associate with peers but seldom date as couples. Serious dating generally begins once people are working or pursuing higher education. People generally meet while socializing in groups. One-on-one relationships develop from there. Arranged marriages are less common than they were in the past. Occasionally, arranged marriages take place among the upper class and are often related to political or business interests. However, young people generally feel free to choose their own spouses, but they seek their family's approval. A typical date may be going to a movie, dining at a restaurant, or going on an outing with other couples. People generally marry between the ages of 27 and 31. Families and friends of older single people often try to arrange dates for them, and dating at an older age is much more marriage oriented.

The majority of Taiwanese expect to marry, although a growing number chooses to remain single or to live with a partner before or instead of marrying. Marriage is seen as a union of both two people and of two families. After a couple gets engaged, the groom's family visits the bride's family to get acquainted, drink tea, and discuss wedding plans. At this meeting, it is customary for the bride to serve tea to her future in-laws, the groom, and her parents. After this meeting, preparations for the wedding begin. Today, some couples choose to simplify the process by not meeting with the families for tea. Couples may also light incense and pray to the bride's ancestors as part of the engagement. Couples exchange rings to symbolize their engagement.

Marriages are finalized civilly at the local Household Registration Office, where the couple registers their residence. Once they complete the registration, their marriage is granted. Christians usually have an additional church ceremony, which generally follows the form of Western wedding ceremonies. All guests rise when the bride enters, escorted by her father. The bride and groom stand before the altar, take their vows, and exchange rings. The priest announces that they are married, and the bride and groom kiss. Both Christian and non-Christian weddings include a wedding reception in the evening.

Before the reception, the groom picks up the bride and drives her back to his family's home. Then the couple rides to the wedding banquet with the groom's family. The groom enters the reception hall first. The bride follows, escorted by her father. The bride's father places her hand in her husband's, and the bride and groom walk to the front of the room with their parents. The families thank the guests for coming, propose a toast, and the banquet begins. After dinner, the couple and their families mingle with the guests. At many weddings, the bride throws her bouquet and the single woman who catches it is said to be the next to marry. After the reception, the bride and groom stand at the door to see their guests out.

While Taiwan's divorce rate remains quite low compared to that of many countries, it has increased significantly in the

past few decades. Many blame the divorce rate on a shift from family focus to individual focus. There is some stigma associated with divorce, particularly for women, who generally find it much harder to remarry than men do.

### Life Cycle

A woman who is expecting is treated with great care by those around her. Her family may encourage her to rest and to avoid exertion and doing chores. Some families believe that a pregnant woman's use of scissors or other sharp tools can be a risk to the baby's development. Many believe in a god of pregnancy that protects unborn children. Families avoid rearranging furniture during the pregnancy so as not to displease or frighten the god. A mother is expected to rest for a month after giving birth; she may spend the entire time in bed, often cared for by her mother or mother-in-law. New mothers are encouraged to eat nutritious foods, especially chicken made with black sesame oil. Male babies were traditionally more highly regarded than female babies, and today, red "good luck" eggs are still given to family members only when a boy is born.

A baby is considered age one when he or she is born. One month after the birth, the family celebrates by sending food to relatives and friends. When a baby boy is born, a typical meal to send would include fried rice with two red eggs and a chicken drumstick. To celebrate the birth of a baby girl, people send honey cake. Some parents consult fortune tellers when naming their children. Names chosen this way are said to be associated with the child's fate.

Important milestones for young people are turning 18 (when one is considered an adult and may drink legally and obtain a driver's or marriage license) and 20 (when one may vote and sign contracts). Males are regarded as adults when they finish their education and military conscription, usually by age 23 or 24. Women are traditionally considered adults when they marry, though this is changing as more women pursue careers and marry later.

After a death, Buddhist families invite a monk to come and chant *sutras* (Buddhist scriptures) in hopes that this will aid the deceased in the afterlife. Relatives and friends come to visit in the days following the death. The deceased is usually kept in a coffin in the family home for one to four weeks after the death. Funerals are scheduled on auspicious days according to the lunar calendar. Taiwanese funerals are times of mourning but also have a festive atmosphere. A colorful funeral procession accompanied by loud music is the norm. A truck decorated with flowers and a portrait of the deceased leads a motorcade of jeeps and trucks covered with wreaths. Mourners parade behind.

The traditional funeral color is white. Close relatives dress in white and wear different colored hoods representing their relationship to the deceased. Other attendees can wear any color as long as it is not too bright. Friends and relatives give white envelopes containing money to the deceased's immediate family. After the cremation, the family of the deceased holds a banquet to show their gratitude to those who helped with the funeral.

Cremation is typical, as grave sites are expensive. After the cremation, the ashes are placed in an urn, which is stored

in a columbarium. Family members visit the place 30 days after the funeral and one year after the funeral. Close relatives traditionally do not engage in any fun social gathering for one hundred days after the funeral. As a sign of mourning, many people wear a small white patch on their shirt sleeves for a month, although this practice has diminished in recent years.

### Diet

Rice is eaten with nearly every meal. Soup, seafood, pork, chicken, vegetables, and fruit are common foods, as are noodles and breads. Sauces are an important part of each meal. Most foods, including vegetables, are stir-fried. When a household meal includes soup, people usually do not also drink a beverage. They drink tea for leisure or with visitors; soy milk is a common breakfast drink. Many types of fruits are eaten in Taiwan, such as apples, bananas, strawberries, pineapples, and watermelons.

Many people believe in the medicinal properties of certain foods. Herbs are an important part of many diets, and soups are often made to serve certain purposes, such as to encourage growth in children or to nourish recent mothers. In the winter, people eat ginseng chicken soup and stewed ribs with herbs to discourage colds and stay healthy.

### Recreation

The most popular forms of recreation in Taiwan are watching television and movies, listening to music, and using the internet. On weekends, many people see movies, spend time with friends, go shopping, or take excursions to the countryside. People also enjoy basketball, table tennis, baseball, badminton, and card games. Biking for recreation (not just as a means of transportation) is growing in popularity among people of all ages. Baseball is extremely popular among the youth, and Taiwan's Little League champions consistently do well in the Little League World Series. Many people also enjoy watching baseball games on television. Taiwan has professional baseball and basketball leagues. The elderly enjoy folk dancing and *tai chi* (a martial art) for exercise and relaxation.

A growing number of people choose to vacation abroad in mainland China, other Asian countries, Australia, or the United States. Others choose to tour Taiwan. Older people often prefer to take guided tours. Amusement parks are popular with families with children.

### The Arts

Taiwan's arts reflect mainland traditions. Government patronage has raised interest in the traditional arts of calligraphy, painting, and Chinese opera. Calligraphy is studied in school. A similarly high level of interest lies in the crafting of *chops* (small engraved stamps). Furniture making, jade carving, mask painting, and paper cutting are also traditional arts that have gained increasing popularity since the 1980s. Interest in puppetry has grown in recent years, particularly among the younger generation.

Elaborate costumes and makeup are an important part of the popular Chinese and Taiwanese operas. In addition to a rich tradition of folk songs often performed in Chinese operas, the aboriginal peoples of Taiwan have their own

unique musical forms, which vary among different tribes. Many performances begin with one voice improvising to a set rhythm. Others join in, frequently accompanying an improvised group dance. The government promotes traditional aboriginal arts, including singing, dancing, painting, and sculpture.

### Holidays

Official holidays include the ROC's Founding Day (1 Jan.), Memorial Day (28 Feb.), Tomb Sweeping Day (5 April; held on the anniversary of Chiang Kai-shek's death), and Double Ten Day (10 Oct.). The ROC's Founding Day is not widely celebrated. The most important patriotic holiday is Double Ten Day (the tenth day of the tenth month), which commemorates the Chinese revolution of 10 October 1911, when the Qing dynasty was overthrown and replaced with a republic. People celebrate with fireworks, parades, and folk dancing and martial arts demonstrations.

Buddhist holidays are set according to the Chinese lunar calendar. The New Year (in the spring) is celebrated with fireworks, feasts, temple worship, and ancestor veneration. Most people take the week off from school and work. Many families hold family reunions on New Year's Eve. These generally consist of festive dinners. Elders give children money in special red envelopes to wish them good fortune. People get up early on New Year's Day and wish one another a prosperous new year. Throughout the day, relatives and friends gather to gamble for fun on *mahjong* (a tile game), dice games, or cards. New Year celebrations are said to officially end 15 days into the new year, which coincides with the Lantern Festival. Streets are hung with colorful lanterns, and people come out and celebrate in the streets.

On Tomb Sweeping Day, families gather to clean the tombs of their deceased family members. Offerings are made and special foods are eaten. The Hungry Ghost Festival also honors the deceased. On this day, it is believed that ghosts are free to roam the earth again. People prepare elaborate meals as offerings for the dead. They also burn paper replicas of possessions that the ghosts may need in the afterlife, such as money, vehicles, and clothing. It is believed that burning these things allows the ghosts to use them.

The summer Dragon Boat Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival are the other two most important annual celebrations. The Dragon Boat Festival centers around the death of the famous poet Chu Yuan, who is said to have thrown himself into the river. People celebrate by dropping rice dumplings into the water to distract the fish from the drowned poet. Dragon boat races are held, representing the search for the poet's body. The Mid-Autumn Festival, also called the Moon Festival, is celebrated with *moon cakes* (round pastries) and pomelos. In recent years, barbecues have become popular ways for families to gather and celebrate.

## SOCIETY

### Government

Taiwan is a multiparty democracy administered through eighteen counties (*hsien*), five municipalities (*shih*), and two

special municipalities (*chuan-shih*), which are Taipei and Kaohsiung. The president (currently Ma Ying-jeou) is head of state. The head of government is the premier (currently Wu Den-yih), who is appointed by the president. The president and vice president are elected by popular vote on the same ticket to four-year terms. The primary lawmaking body is the Legislative *Yuan*. Members are elected to four-year terms. In 2007, constitutional amendments reduced the number of seats in the *Yuan* from 225 to 113 and eliminated the 300-seat National Assembly, once a powerful body that "represented" all provinces of China. The voting age is 20.

### Economy

Despite setbacks such as the Asian economic crisis (1997–98), Taiwan has maintained a dynamic economy for three decades. Early growth was fueled by an efficient agricultural sector and then by numerous small cottage industries. The system could easily adapt to global economic trends until it grew strong enough to help set those trends. Its foreign reserves are among the largest in the world, and its companies hold considerable international investments. Taiwan's labor force is highly skilled, and a strong middle class enjoys a high standard of living. Taiwan is now a major exporter of textiles, electronics, machinery, metals, timber products, and high-technology items. The 2008 global economic crisis led to a sharp decline in demand for Taiwan's exports, prompting government measures aimed at strengthening the economy. The currency is the New Taiwan dollar (TWD).

### Transportation and Communications

Before the 1990s, people mainly traveled by bicycle, motor scooter, motorcycle, and public transportation (buses and trains). As more people purchased cars, urban traffic jams became prevalent. A rapid transit system has effectively alleviated congestion in Taipei. Taxis are readily available and reasonably priced. Many people, especially in rural areas, still ride bicycles, motor scooters, and motorcycles, but more and more can afford to buy imported cars. Nearly all households have telephones, and Taiwan's communications system is considered Asia's best outside of Japan. Numerous private radio, television, and newspaper businesses form Taiwan's free press.

### Education

Education is very important in Taiwan. The attendance rate nears 100 percent in most areas. Schooling is free and compulsory for nine years (six years of primary school and three years of secondary school). Students must provide their own books and uniforms. After completing compulsory education, students must pay tuition to continue their studies. Children enter primary school at age six. Secondary school starts at about age 12. Secondary school is divided into two levels: junior (ages 12 to 15) and senior (ages 15 to 18). After finishing their required education, students may choose between studying for a vocation and preparing to enter a university. Students who wish to learn the skills needed to perform a particular job enter vocational schools, junior colleges, or institutes of technology. Those who plan to attend

a university continue on to the senior level of secondary school. Although students are not required to attend senior secondary school, most choose to complete it.

Subjects taught generally lean toward the more scholarly, such as literature, sciences, and mathematics. Subjects like art and physical education are less emphasized. Girls are encouraged to take home economics classes, while boys take military training courses. Secondary education is academically challenging, with students investing large amounts of time studying in addition to their hours spent in school. In recent years, class sizes have been reduced from 40 to 50 students per class to 25 to 35 in order to improve the quality of education. A growing number of classrooms incorporate computers and other technology into their curriculum. Parents tend to be quite involved in their children's education, helping with homework and meeting with teachers regularly to discuss students' progress.

Loans and scholarships are available for those students who cannot afford further education. University education usually lasts four years. Admission to universities is based on scores on national entrance exams, which are given in January and July of each year. Most students take the exams in January and then again in July if they are unsatisfied with their scores in January. Students work hard to prepare for these tests, sometimes studying sixteen hours a day, seven days a week, for an entire year. Many students travel abroad for higher education. While some of these students stay and work abroad for a period of time, the vast majority eventually return to Taiwan.

**Health**

Taiwan has a modern healthcare system. Private insurance programs cover the needs of most citizens, and the government provides care for those who cannot afford it. Most people enjoy good health. A new regional system, designed to create public health facilities and offer basic care to all people, has been established. While nearly all Taiwanese are now insured, challenges remain in funding and maintaining quality health care. The infant mortality rate is one of the world's lowest and the life expectancy is among the world's highest.

**AT A GLANCE**

**Contact Information**

Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office, 4201 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20016; phone (202) 895-1800; website [www.roc-taiwan.org/US](http://www.roc-taiwan.org/US). Taiwan Visitors Association, 1 East 42nd Street, Ninth Floor, New York, NY 10017; phone (212) 867-1632; web site [www.tva.org.tw](http://www.tva.org.tw).

**POPULATION & AREA**

Population	23,024,956 (rank=49)
Area, sq. mi.	13,892 (rank=136)
Area, sq. km.	35,980

**DEVELOPMENT DATA**

Human Dev. Index* rank	NA
Gender inequality rank	NA
Real GDP per capita	\$32,000
Adult literacy rate	96%
Infant mortality rate	5 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	75 (male); 81 (female)

\*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).



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