

American Councils for International Education

TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN TAIWAN

Tamkang University

Course Title	Modern Taiwan Politics Economy and Technology
Instructors	Shun-jie Ji
Class Periods	September to December 2026. In total 15 weeks.
Objectives	
By the end of the course, students will be able to: 1. Understand the historical and political forces shaping Taiwan's modern identity. 2. Analyze Taiwan's economic policies and their impact on global trade and innovation. 3. Evaluate Taiwan's technological advancements, particularly in the semiconductor and tech industries. 4. Assess the challenges and opportunities of Taiwan's geopolitical position in the Asia-Pacific region. 5. Critically engage with primary and secondary sources to develop informed perspectives on Taiwan's development.	
Course Description	
This course provides an in-depth exploration of Taiwan's transformation from the mid-20th century to the present, focusing on its political evolution, economic development, and technological advancements. Students will examine Taiwan's unique geopolitical position, its transition to democracy, its role as a global economic powerhouse, and its leadership in high-tech industries, particularly semiconductors. Through lectures, readings, case studies, and discussions, the course will analyze the interplay of politics, economy, and technology in shaping modern Taiwan and its global significance.	
Textbooks and Teaching Materials	
1. Roy, D. (2003). <i>Taiwan: A Political History</i>. Cornell University Press. 2. Rigger, S. (2011). <i>Why Taiwan Matters: Small Island, Global Powerhouse</i>. Rowman & Littlefield. 3. Wong, J. (2006). <i>Healthy Democracies: Welfare Politics in Taiwan and South Korea</i>. Cornell University Press.	
Requirements and Grades	
◆ Attendance : 20% ◆ Mark of Usual : 30 % ◆ Midterm Exam : 10 % ◆ Final Exam : 40 % ◆ Other : %	
Recommended Readings:	
Selected articles and reports (provided via course platform).	

Course Outline

	Subject/Topics	Description
Week 1	Introduction to Modern Taiwan: Overview of Taiwan's history, geography, and global significance.	1. Images of Taiwan, past and present. 2. Taiwan in global history, from 17th to 20th century. 3. Too big to be ignored? Readings: Rigger, Why Taiwan Matters, Introduction.
Week 2	Historical Foundations (1945–1970s): Post-WWII Taiwan, KMT rule, and early authoritarianism.	1. What is 1943Cario Declaration about? 2. Taiwan's undecided status, really? 3. How did Chiang Kai Shek come to this small island? Readings: Roy, Taiwan: A Political History, Ch. 1-2.
Week 3	The Martial Law Era and Political Control: KMT governance, White Terror, and suppression of dissent.	1. 228 incidence, the deepest scar of Taiwanese. 2. The ethnic conflicts among major groups of Taiwan. 3. How did Chiang Kai-Shek ally with democratic bloc? Readings: Roy, Ch. 3
Week 4	Taiwan's Economic Miracle (1960s–1980s): Export-led growth, land reform, and industrial policies.	1. What was the picture of Taiwan before the miracle? 2. Why did the land reform succeed comparatively? 3. How did agriculture support and transform Taiwan's industries? Readings: Wong, Healthy Democracies, Ch. 2.
Week 5	Democratization and Political Transition: End of martial law, rise of the DPP, and democratic reforms.	1. Why democratice reform? 2. Whose credits of lifting the martial law? 3. How did DPP emerge and thrive? Readings: Rigger, Ch. 3-4.
Week 6	Regional integration for Taiwan	1. How did New Southbound Policy work? 2. How did Taiwan involve with CPTPP and RECEP? 3. Political economy and Geopolitics perspectives. Readings: CSIS report on “The New Southbound Policy.

Week 7	Taiwan's Political System Today: Structure of government, political parties, and electoral politics.	1. Is it Sun Yat Shen's legacy or barrier? 2. How to categorize the political systems of Taiwan? 3. Electoral democracy to liberal democracy, Taiwan's long journey. Readings: Roy, Ch. 6.
Week 8	Mid-term Reflection	
Week 9	The Semiconductor Industry: TSMC's rise, global chip shortages, and technological leadership.	1. The masterminds behind TSMC 2. Is it a common profit? 3. All kinds implications of chip empire to Taiwan. Readings: TSMC annual report; The Economist article on semiconductors.
Week 10	Trade Policies and Global Integration: Taiwan's trade agreements, U.S.-Taiwan trade relations, and tariffs.	1. FTA, fair or unfair? 2. ECFA, how it was played in the bigger political-economic chess. 3. How U.S. trade policies dominated Taiwan's direction of political-economic development? Readings: USTR reports; 2025 tariff policy analysis.
Week 11	Environmental Challenges and Green Technology: Climate change, renewable energy, and sustainable tech in Taiwan.	1. Economic miracle but environmental nightmare? 2. The nuclear power debates in Taiwan, all things considered. 3. Green? Environment Green or Greenback indeed? Readings: Taiwan's 2050 Net-Zero Roadmap.
Week 12	Taiwan's Global Role and Soft Power: Taiwan's cultural exports, international aid, and diplomatic strategies.	1. Why soft power? 2. Comparasion between Taiwan and China in cultural influences. 3. How did Taiwan navigate in the global trouble water? Readings: Rigger, Ch. 6.
Week 13	Future Challenges and Opportunities: Aging population, economic diversification, and cross-strait scenarios.	1. The future images of Taiwan. 2. What are the alternative scenarios between Taiwan and China? 3. How did people see the future? Readings: Policy papers on Taiwan's future.
Week 14	Overall Review	
Week 15	Final Exam.	

References

1. Copper, J. F. (2025). "Taiwan - Politics, Economy, Society". In Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Taiwan/Politics-Economy-Society> (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Taiwan/Government-and-society>)
2. Ho, M. S. (2024). "Geopolitics in Taiwan". In Z. Cope (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Geopolitics* (pp. 1–25). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-47227-5_38 (https://link.springer.com/rwe/10.1007/978-3-031-47227-5_38)
3. Ku, Y.-W. (1997). *Welfare Capitalism in Taiwan: State, Economy and Social Policy*. London: Macmillan Press.
4. Rigger, S. (2025). "On Prosperity, Taiwan Ranks High—But Its Future Hinges on Chinese Power Plays". Atlantic Council. Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/on-prosperity-taiwan-ranks-high-but-its-future-hinges-on-chinese-power-plays/> (<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/books/on-prosperity-taiwan-ranks-high-but-its-future-hinges-on-chinese-power-plays/>)
5. U.S. Department of State. (2025). "U.S. Relations With Taiwan". Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-taiwan/> (<https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-taiwan/>)