

# Reality Check

**Misconception #1: Taiwan has always been part of China.**

**Reality:** Taiwan was occupied by many different imperial powers throughout its recorded history, including the Dutch and Spanish (17th century), Ming and Qing Manchu Dynasties (17th – 19th century), and Japanese (20th century). Taiwan currently enjoys de facto independence, with its own government, military, and economy. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has never ruled Taiwan, not even for one day.

**Misconception #2: Taiwan is a renegade province of China.**

**Reality:** From 1895 to 1945 Taiwan was a colony of Japan. After Japan's defeat in WWII, Taiwan was occupied on behalf of the Allies by Chiang Kai-Shek's Chinese Nationalists (KMT), who were fighting a losing Civil War in China. Chiang's forces retreated to Taiwan in 1949 and established the Republic of China (ROC) government there.

**Misconception #3: The future of Taiwan must be decided by the Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.**

**Reality:** Over 85% of Taiwan's citizens consider themselves Taiwanese. During the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty, delegates determined that Taiwan's future should be decided based upon the Principle of Self-Determination as dictated by the Charter of the United Nations.

# The Taiwanese American Story

## A History in Progress

### A New Chapter

The Taiwanese American community has seen tremendous growth in the United States since the 1960's. After the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 was established, which repealed the Asian Exclusion Acts, the stage was set for immigrants from Asia to immigrate in equal numbers as from Europe. Taiwan was no exception as the first wave of young immigrants sought new opportunities in North America during the late 60's and early 70's.

### The First Wave

The initial wave of Taiwanese immigrants came as well-educated physicians, health professionals, scientists and professors. Others came for graduate school education and to seek a better future for their families. The "American Dream" was real and desired by many. During an era of martial law in Taiwan (1949-1989), many early Taiwanese immigrants also sought refuge in America from the numerous arrests and executions of the ruling Kuomintang party's "White Terror." Political activists also used this opportunity to promote Taiwanese independence, democracy, and reforms from overseas.

Taiwanese immigrants settled in major metropolitan areas typically around new industrial centers or cities where universities and graduate programs could be found. Early Taiwanese American communities were concentrated in areas such as Monterey Park, CA outside of Los Angeles (earning it the original moniker "Little Taipei") and in Flushing, NY. They also settled in the suburbs of San Jose, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, St Louis, Houston, Kansas City, and Dallas. Unlike other Asian ethnic communities that created ethnic enclaves such as Chinatowns or Koreatowns, most Taiwanese during that time tended to be dispersed in suburban regions. Monterey Park, CA and Flushing, NY were the exceptions where even today there are still significant numbers of immigrants of Taiwanese heritage.

### A Strong Network

The Taiwanese American community remained strong in its association. New immigrant families would connect with the growing organizations that were established with the first immigrant communities. In the 1970's, The Taiwanese American Association was one of the first nationwide networks of locally active chapters in most major metropolitan areas. Other organizations serving varied interests would soon follow. Among them: In 1982, the North American Taiwanese Professors Association (NATPA) was created; in 1984, the North American Taiwanese Medical Association (NATMA) soon followed; in 1985, the Taiwanese American Citizens' League was founded; and in 1988, the North American Taiwanese Women's Association (NATWA) was established. Each of these organizations held local meetings, sponsored cultural events, and met at national conferences. Often, these were vehicles by which the community would voice their support for Taiwanese independence and support for democratic reform of an outdated system that the Republic of China government had established on Taiwan since 1949. Organizations such as the Formosan Association for Public Affairs and the Formosa Foundation were formed to support Taiwan on the political front and help establish its recognition on the international stage.

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### The Next Generation

As the community matured and immigration trends shifted and diversified over the following decades, the Taiwanese American community witnessed new waves of immigrants. The San Francisco Bay area's Silicon Valley tech boom during the late 80's and early 90's drew large waves of Taiwanese immigrants. Furthermore, what was once a community hub concentrated mostly in Monterey Park started to see an eastbound shift towards more suburban areas centered around Arcadia, Rosemead, and San Gabriel. Organizations and infrastructure established during this period reflect the change in demographics and a growing community in America. Networks brought together by groups such as the Taiwanese American Chamber of Commerce, Taiwan Centers, the North American Taiwanese Engineers Association, Taiwanese Language Schools, and several well-established summer camps from coast to coast reflected a generational shift and the diversity within the community. In time, an emerging 2nd generation of Taiwanese Americans would begin to establish themselves as new groups were founded: Inter-collegiate Taiwanese American Students Association (ITASA), Taiwanese American Professionals (TAP), and Junior Taiwanese American Student Association (JTASA, a high school level network). A whole host of other organizations would reflect the visions and dreams of the parent organizations that spawned them.

### From a Storied Past to a Promising Future

Taiwan continues to evolve from its decades-long history of one-party rule and a tragic martial law era to a now vibrant young democracy that has seen peaceful transitions of power between the two major political parties. Furthermore, the diversity within the immigrant groups and those who declare themselves to be "Taiwanese" have broadened in recent decades. It is estimated that between half to one million Taiwanese Americans reside in the United States, but this number is often undercounted due to overlap with those identifying as also ethnically "Chinese."

The future is promising as a stronger sense of Taiwanese American identity and pride emerges, and ideas between generations are shared, molded, and transformed. Even as the young 3rd generation of Americans of Taiwanese heritage is blossoming, the community still finds ways to connect with a new demographic of bicultural Taiwanese 1st and 1.5 generation that came to settle in the United States. As we move forward, one thing is for certain: Taiwanese America is a strong, proud, and growing community with a story to tell.

### About TaiwaneseAmerican.org

*TaiwaneseAmerican.org is a non-profit website and organization that highlights the people, events and organizations that represent the next generation of Taiwanese America. Our vision is to create an allied community for Americans of Taiwanese heritage by intersecting the diverse paths and passions of all our people.*

