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Taiwan's COVID-19 Experience: Governance, Governmentality, and the Global Pandemic.
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This volume, edited by three well-established Taiwanese scholars, brings to the academic discussion Taiwan's experience encountering the unprecedented public health crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2023. Taiwan has been described by international communities as "abnormally normal" in the early stage of the Covid-19 outbreak: not only was there no mass outbreak of viral infection and no territory-wide lockdown due to the imposition of anti-epidemic measures, but there was also no large-scale confrontation between government and society. All these things have been surprising from the perspective of Western democracies, where leaders had their accountability called into question over Covid-19 death tolls, infection figures, and economic consequences. This volume therefore seeks to provide a thorough introduction to what happened during these three years in Taiwan – a fully democratised place that evolved from colonial and authoritarian administrations, and that has drawn international renown for its rapid economic growth, but whose governance systems are still not well understood in the West.

The editors skilfully streamline the discussion by concentrating on two keywords in public administration and policy studies: (1) *governance*, which refers to the effectiveness of government in protecting marginalised and vulnerable groups in terms of epidemic management; (2) and *governmentality*, which asks how a public health crisis gives rise to state-form repression (p. 2). The introduction by Ming-Cheng Lo provides a very concise explanation of the objectives and structure of this volume: how to make use of the Covid-19 experience to gather Taiwanese academics from various disciplines and explain what made Taiwan "abnormally normal" during those three years. The volume, which is divided into four main parts comprising 12 chapters, offers comprehensive research stemming from both Taiwan- and American-based Taiwanese academics.

Showing how the island compares with other liberal democracies, the book also reminds readers of the specificity of the Taiwanese context, which still features remnants of authoritarian governance from its Japanese colonial past and the Martial Law era of the 1950-1990s. The editors also highlight how the geopolitics of East Asia shaped public opinion, and thus, policy options, throughout the pandemic. Notably, the editors argue that academics and practitioners alike usually overgeneralise the complexity of the Taiwanese policy context and thus have made assumptions that take much for granted and are consequently inaccurate. Against the common argument that focuses on defining Taiwan as a "collectivist society," the editors believe that "Taiwan endures much political fragmentation, is actively targeted by disinformation campaigns, and has been increasingly threatened by populism" (p. 6). They therefore believe that an informed account and in-depth analysis of Taiwan's policy context are essential to facilitate intellectual debates on this significant topic of governance.

While some overseas-based Taiwan researchers are keen on identifying "authoritarian" versus "democratic" practices in governance, the editors of this volume propose a rethinking of this dichotomised categorisation, which over-simplifies the island's public policy context. Instead, they argue that types of "new power relations" between government and civil society emerged during pandemic governance in the transforming and democratised Taiwan (p. 2). This statement echoes similar arguments in recent academic analyses and maintains that the "uniqueness" of Taiwan's public administration system lies in its combination of both colonial and continental models, with remnants of authoritarian control features still operating despite Taiwan's complete democratisation before the millennium (Cao, Huang, and Sun 2015). Public administration in Taiwan is in fact characterised by a bottom-up and spontaneous mobilisation approach within district-level bureaucracy rather than following the path of autonomous civil society commonly observed in Western liberal democracies (Chen, Tsai, and Ho 2023; Ho and Li 2024). Public figures exhibit an unconscious drive to balance "sentiment," "reason," and "legislation" in their daily operations, with "sentiment" often taking precedence (Martin 2013, 2019).

The chapters in the third section of this volume, which specifically review interactions between the government and citizens during Covid-19, seek to explain this pattern of civil society in Taiwan. While Hsuan-Wei Lee, Chi-Shiun Tsai, and Chih-Han Leng study the rationality of citizens' compliance with quarantine regulations (p. 155), Fan-Tzu Tseng uses an ethnographic approach to describe the quarantine experience of returnees to Taiwan (p. 178). Their discourse echoes recent scholarships such as that by Chen, Tsai, and Ho (2023), Wong et al. (2022), Chu et al. (2021), and Huang (2020), all of whom have made similar observations on the ways collaborative governance, disciplined citizens, and effective new technology deployment could explain citizens' proactive compliance with anti-pandemic policies without major confrontations between government and community.

Chapters in the second and final sections describe and analyse how the effective use of digital technology supported pandemic governance. Li-Chi Chen and Ta-Chien Chan (p. 61-90), Shun-Ling Chen and Yu-Ling Huang (p. 91-112), Chuan-Feng Wu (p. 113-33), and Perng et al. (p. 134-52) masterfully propose that

the public health crisis constituted a showcase of Taiwan's "thickness of governmentality" (Chen, p. 221). In the fourth section, which specifically tackles issues of nationhood, nationalism, and global health, Yu-Yueh Tsai addresses how the anti-pandemic campaign worked with limited institutional support from international bodies (p. 285), while Yu-Hui Tai illustrates how the government engaged in "cognitive warfare" to consolidate public trust in the government (p. 249). Po-Hsun Chen draws readers' attention to the advancement of biomedicine in Taiwan as represented by the innovation of locally-made Covid-19 herbal remedies (p. 227).

As highlighted in the introductory chapter, existing research on Covid-19 in Taiwan has limitations that prevent readers from understanding the organisational features of the governance systems in Taiwan. This research is either too "thematic" – concentrating on discussing precise dimensions in a particular academic discipline – or over-generalised and descriptive – with a consequent lack of in-depth accounts on Taiwan's sociopolitical context and historical heritage. This edited volume therefore contributes significantly to the scholarship on Taiwan, whether in public administration, sociology, or history. The volume will be an essential choice for instructors teaching modules in Taiwan studies, as the various chapters offer a comprehensive overview of recent discussions related to Taiwanese public policy processes, the transformation of civil society, and its interaction with the government.

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