

## Why Taiwan Matters *Small Island, Global Powerhouse*

By SHELLEY RIGGER

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Reviewed by Hans Stockton

Upon receiving the review copy of Dr. Shelley Rigger's *Why Taiwan Matters*, I must admit to my assumption that I would be reviewing a high-caliber, insightful, detailed, and well-documented book. Although this is in fact the case, what was surprising is that for a scholarly work, this book is a real page-turner. Rigger spins a rich tapestry of Taiwan's development in an extraordinary interdisciplinary manner and humanizes this narrative through the voices of the Taiwanese that have shaped and been shaped by these experiences.

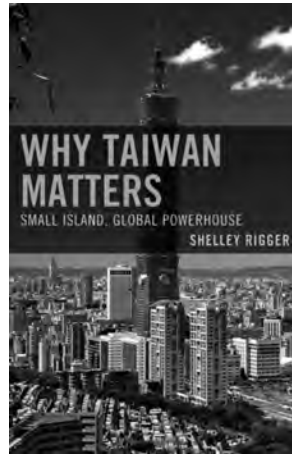
Rigger tackles a question at the forefront of current foreign policy debate in the US about maintaining our diplomatic and strategic commitment to Taiwan and its people. As indicated in the title, this small nation became and continues to be central to globalization as we know it and is an important bellwether for both American and Chinese positioning in the international system. Yet Rigger sets out to tell the story of Taiwan as the subject of its own development, rather than only an object of others' desires. The reader will find the conclusion that Taiwan and its people matter to unfold quite naturally.

Rigger chronicles and interprets those events, people, and dynamics acknowledged as central but does so in a prose that evokes the art of storytelling. For undergraduate students in particular, this will be a relief from the formal staid and scholarly style (read—"boring"). Rigger provides a satellite view of Taiwan in the global system but also zooms down to street level to illustrate how daily lives are shaped by events within and around Taiwan. This book is clearly written by someone who has not only come to know the offices and officers in high power, but who has quite literally walked the streets, explored the back alleys, and engaged the people whose lives she studies. Rigger's enthusiasm is obvious and contagious.

Following the introduction, the book proceeds with a concise history of the arrival and migration of people to the island. This encompasses early settlement by Austronesian people, waves of Han migration, colonial powers, and Taiwan becoming the Republic of China after World War II. The next several chapters discuss the social, political, and economic development of Taiwan up to 2010, followed by an anthropological intermission that describes various cultural practices, from marriage and religion to the rise of art forms and artisans on the island. The chapters prior to the conclusion address Taiwan's relationship with mainland China and its standing—and formal lack thereof—in the international community. Here is where the tragedy of Taiwan as an "object" is presented quite forcefully. Rigger concludes with several powerful arguments for why Taiwan matters, particularly to the strategic well-being of the US.

Although most of this work speaks primarily to teachers, students, and scholars in the social sciences, Rigger includes rich anecdotes and discussion from the areas of literature, film, and a multitude of interviews and personal observations that span thirty years.

Although most appropriate for courses in East Asian history and politics, the content presentation and prose of each chapter makes this work easily digestible by teachers and students in general courses on world politics, history, and anthropology, to name a few. Given its accessibility, this volume or portions would be appropriate for advanced high school students. Rigger does not drown students in theoretical jargon or lose them in a maze of his-



torical "who did what and when" minutia. She provides a linear, well-written narrative that effectively does the "heavy lifting" and gives students what they need to know in order to focus on the main ideas. This is the point where the utility of this book at the graduate level also becomes apparent. Although the narrative is straightforward, this is a function of Rigger's abilities as a writer and scholar. Unwrapping the details, concept, and theory underpinning the narrative will provide sufficient conversation and thought in the most advanced graduate courses.


This volume is best served whole.

However, individual chapters can stand alone for those teachers preferring selected readings. Although each chapter builds upon the last and toward the conclusion that Taiwan matters for many reasons, earlier chapters are not always prerequisite. ■

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