

Taiwan's complex history and its current political situation are important for American students to understand.² By studying in Taiwan, students can gain insights into Taiwan's relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC), its struggle for international recognition, and its democratic development. In this essay, I describe a faculty-led program to Taiwan in the summer of 2023 modeled on the idea of "read-

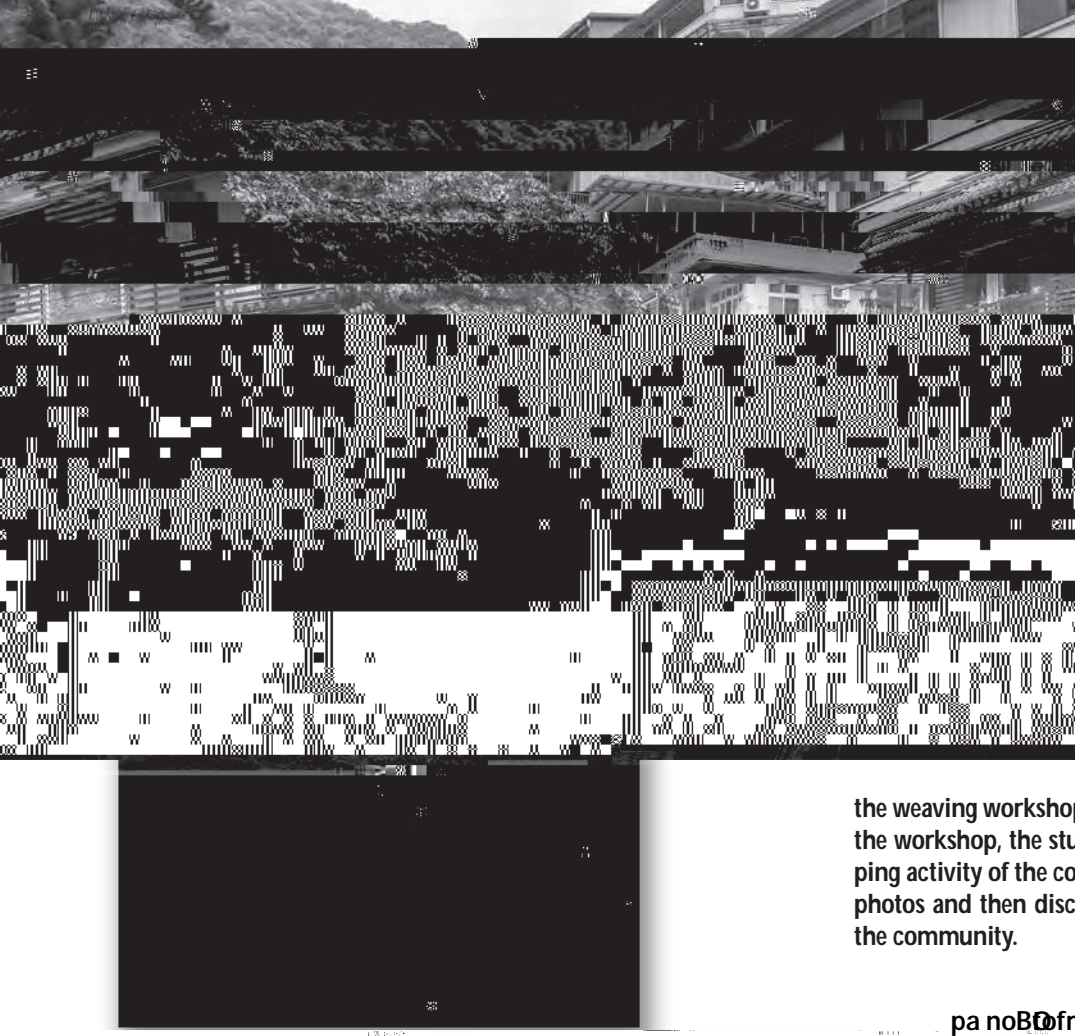
just thirteen formal diplomatic allies—Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in the Americas, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, and Tuvalu in the Pacific, Eswatini in Africa, and the Vatican City in Europe. However, many countries, including the United States, under the One China Policy, established diplomatic relations with the PRC while maintaining unofficial ties with Taiwan.⁹

These different historical experiences and political ideologies of Taiwan and the PRC have resulted in distinct national identities and competing historical narratives. The PRC

Mao Zedong led to their retreat to Taiwan, where they established the ROC government. Meanwhile, the Communist Party formed the PRC on the mainland. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) still troubles the current status of Taiwan and its efforts toward territorial independence.⁷

Today the continued unresolved tensions between Taiwan and the PRC have created a situation where two governments claim to be the legitimate authority representing Taiwan. In recent years Taiwan's international recognition, with only thirteen nations recognizing it as a sovereign nation as of July 2023, has dwindled rapidly.⁸ Nine countries have switched allegiance to the PRC since Tsai Ing-wen became president in 2016 (President Tsai's second and final term ends in 2024), and Beijing continues its efforts to diplomatically isolate Taiwan. Taiwan now has

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Excursion Two

Wulai, Weaving, and the Indigenous Atayal People

The second group showed a particular interest in Taiwan's indigenous history, and learned from a local contact that on the very outskirts of Taipei was the traditionally indigenous mountain community of Wulai. With the assistance of Facebook and one of our Taiwanese guides acting as translator during a phone call to the Wulai Atayal Museum, the group connected with the local head of the women's weaving cooperative, who agreed to give our class a brief workshop on traditional weaving practices. Although it was a one-and-a-half hour journey, we traveled there by taxi and public transit and learned how quickly the urban core of Taipei transitions to rugged mountain terrain. This excursion in particular required the group to do a large amount of scenario planning and have a backup plan in case

the weaving workshop didn't come through. In addition to our time in the workshop, the student leaders engaged the group in a visual mapping activity of the community where everyone was tasked with taking photos and then discussing evidence of indigenous Atayal identity in the community.

Excursion Three

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history of Taiwan's LGBTQ+ movement and the display of political posters and rallies for the New Power Party advocating for Taiwanese independence. A program design asking students to take control of part of the curriculum allowed for a deeper engagement with the city, its people, and its stories, fostering a sense of ownership and connection to the learning process. Ultimately, this approach highlights the importance of pedagogical innovation and experiential learning in study abroad programs, providing students with the tools to critically analyze and understand complex historical and political narratives. ♦

NOTES

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