

Taiwan:

A soft power success story



With its modern and convenient cities, free and open political environment, and vibrant and inclusive society, the Republic of China (Taiwan) has become known as a premier business, cultural and tourist destination. One of the key factors in this success story is the goodwill that Taiwan has garnered overseas. Through the promotion of its democratic ideals, dynamic business environment, and acclaimed health care and education systems, Taiwan has managed to build a significant amount of soft power around the world.

In recent years, international studies have attested to the quality of services available in Taiwan. The nation ranks 11th globally in higher education and training, as measured by the World Economic Forum's *Global Competitiveness Report 2013-2014*. Furthermore, thanks to the nation's renowned health care system, Taiwanese people enjoy universal access to high-quality medical care while paying relatively low premiums and expenses.

Taiwanese culture has also made an indelible mark on the world stage. The nation is celebrated for the creativity of its music industry, and its mix of street snacks and high-end restaurants has earned the praise of food experts and global travelers. The nation's people, meanwhile, have become noted for their kindness and hospitality, as well as the compassion they demonstrate through their significant contributions to international humanitarian appeals.

A Modern Society

Taiwan is known for its modern and dynamic cities and the convenient lifestyles they offer. This is reflected in the nation's stores, which have adapted to meet the needs of 21st century consumers by offering unique experiences and a variety of services. There are currently over 10,000 convenience stores in the country, averaging approximately one store per every 2,300 people, the highest density in the world. People can go to these stores any time day or night to buy food, drinks and magazines, pay utility bills, purchase tickets, withdraw cash, make photocopies and send faxes. Convenience stores are one-stop shops for busy Taiwanese people.

At a time when physical bookstores are being replaced by online alternatives, Taiwan's Eslite Bookstore chain is defying this trend by expanding its operations. By offering customers a mixture



An Eslite Bookstore in Taipei City. The bookstore chain plays a big role in Taiwan's cultural landscape. (Photo by Huang Chung-hsin)

of shopping and cultural experiences, the firm has made its stores a must-visit attraction for locals and tourists alike. Eslite has dozens of branches in Taiwan, expanded to Causeway Bay in Hong Kong in 2012, and is scheduled to open a new branch in Suzhou, mainland China. Taiwan has a population of 23 million people, but individual visits to Eslite stores reached 130 million in 2013, demonstrating the immense appeal of this innovative chain.

Sharing Culinary Delights

Over the past decade or so, international coffee shop brands have popped up across the island. Yet, local chain 85°C Bakery Café has won the hearts of Taiwanese and mainland Chinese people by offering beverages and Western-style baked goods at affordable prices in top quality, multifunctional consumer spaces. The Taiwanese chain has also made inroads into the US market. The company's strategy of providing quick customer service and offering a comprehensive range of beverages and baked items is meeting the needs of American consumers and building brand loyalty.



Taiwan offers a wide range of gourmet foods. Xiaolongbao, or soup dumplings, at Din Tai Fung, a well-known restaurant chain at home and abroad (Photo by Huang Chung-hsin)

Renowned for its hand-rolled, delicate and delicious steamed dumplings, among many other exquisite gourmet offerings, the Din Tai Fung restaurant chain has successfully captured the hearts of food lovers from several countries. Founded in Taipei in 1972, Din Tai Fung now has nine branches in Taiwan, and more than 90 others in 10 countries and regions around the world, including Australia, Japan, mainland China and the United States. This Michelin star-



A FamilyMart convenience store in Taipei City. Taiwan has the highest density of convenience stores in the world. (Photo by Chang Su-ching)

winning restaurant chain has become the foremost symbol of Taiwanese culinary excellence.

Cradle of Music Creativity

Taiwan's vibrant culture is perhaps best exemplified by its renowned music industry, as the nation is the chief exporter of Chinese-language pop music. The origin of Taiwan's pop music culture can be traced back to the campus folk music movement of the 1970s, which originated when groups of college students who loved popular American music began crafting songs that conveyed their cultural identity. Their fresh style immediately became popular across Taiwan, and the music inspired by this movement set off a wave of creativity.

The subsequent boom in the music production industry led to the rise of numerous pop sensations, attracting more ethnic Chinese singers and songwriters to Taiwan from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and the United States. These new stars also appealed to music lovers in the gradually opening mainland Chinese market. Taiwanese pop diva Teresa Teng (1953-1995) became famous in mainland China in the 1980s, with her graceful voice bringing joy to millions of people there. In 2002, A-Mei, a modern diva of the Mandarin pop music scene, was interviewed by CNN and appeared on the front cover of *Time* magazine (Asia edition). The following year, singer-songwriter Jay Chou also appeared on the cover of the publication, which named him the "New King of Asian Pop."



The annual Hohaian Rock Festival at Fulong Beach on the northeastern coast of Taiwan has become increasingly popular over the years and draws bands from around the world. (File photo)

Discovery Channel produced a documentary examining how Taiwan became the largest music supplier in the 1.5 billion strong ethnic Chinese market. The film concluded that the most important factor is that Taiwanese people live in an open and free environment. The documentary also highlighted Taiwan's unique culture as a key factor in the success of the nation's music industry. Today, Taiwan remains the cradle of innovative Chinese-language music.

Caring for Communities at Home and Abroad

The kindness of Taiwanese is not only present in the hospitality shown to visitors, it can also be seen through people's

Lien Jih-ching, a professor of medical entomology, poses with children in the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, where he helps in the fight against malaria. (Photo courtesy of Lien Jih-ching)



Chang Gung Memorial Hospital and other medical facilities in Taiwan excel at reconstructive microsurgery. (Photo courtesy of Professor Wei Fu-chan, Chang Gung Memorial Hospital)

compassion and desire to help those in need. The nation has one of the highest blood donation rates in the world, while Taiwanese people have been praised for their generous contributions to international aid efforts in the aftermath of tragedies such as the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, mainland China, and the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

In the wake of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and other natural disasters, volunteers from the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation were among the first to arrive and offer help. Numerous leading Taiwanese medical professionals have also traveled overseas to practice in places where their skills are desperately needed. One example of these dedicated individuals is Lien Jih-ching, a noted professor of medical entomology who has been dubbed the Mosquito Man. Lien led a team from Taiwan's International Cooperation and Development Fund that helped reduce the prevalence of malaria from approximately 40 to 50 percent to around 5 percent in the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe.

Wei Fu-chan, an expert in the field of reconstructive microsurgery, is another Taiwanese physician noted for his global impact. Over the last 30 years, Wei has treated thousands of patients and overseen the training of more than 1,400 researchers and scholars from 75 countries.

Guardian of Chinese Culture

With mainland China being essentially a closed society until 1980, and with Hong Kong under British rule until July 1, 1997, Taiwan has been the guardian of Chinese culture through its preservation of traditional Chinese characters, Confucianism and Sinology. As it maintains its

rich cultural traditions, Taiwan also embraces and absorbs other cultures, while fostering a high quality of life and cultural creativity for all of its residents. These intrinsic aspects of Taiwanese society have led to the expansion of the nation's soft power, ensuring that it will continue to garner respect and admiration around the world for generations to come.



An exhibition in the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts featuring the works of calligrapher Grace Y. T. Dong (Photo by Huang Chung-hsin)