

My 2016 book, *The Paradigms that Guide Our Lives and Drive Our Souls*, was the result of continuous research on how issues of science/physics, metaphysical communities, and individual identity interplay and reflect our numerous paradigmatic views of the world we live in, as well as the realities we live by.

The book's roots dated back decades to my doctoral dissertation on the "concept of personal identity" as found in three unique Americans: Jonathan Edwards, an 18th-century Puritan divine; Ralph Waldo Emerson, a 19th-century transcendentalist; and Alfred North Whitehead, a 20th-century process philosopher.

That initial research had fostered a nagging realization that although those three prominent figures had completely different paradigmatic views of the world, individual identity, and communities they wished for, each in his own way still contributed to shaping the current imagined community and psyche of the US.

While each wrote in an inspiring, goal-setting manner for the nation, one could not find a more different *weltanschauung* of life than that of the puritan, the transcendentalist and the process philosopher.

What followed was the question of how could any citizen be true to their own individual identity and still best fit in with the resultant imagined community?

Such research continued and culminated with my cross-cultural experience in coming to Taiwan, and writing five books on its unusual story and the dialectics of its imagined community.

Taiwan's imagined community has made a long unique journey from its Austronesian roots, through diverse Western and Eastern colonial periods into its more recent autocratic one-party state, martial law and White Terror days, all finally ending in its current vibrant democracy — a democracy not unlike that Edwards, Emerson and Whitehead lived in.

How did that happen?

Further, because of its unique island status and history, Taiwan's story now makes a clear case of how this nation can exemplify the micro and macro challenges that all nations face in a world desiring unity.

By its very existence, Taiwan continues to expose numerous problems and threats found not only in the Asia-Pacific region, but also globally, whether it is the pursuit of world peace or simple progress.

What has all this to do with Taiwan, paradigms and life's big picture?

In the 2016 book, I advocated two major paradigm shifts:

The first was that "as humans, our destiny is our galaxy."

On the surface, this seems an idealistic space odyssey type shift, but it is brutally realistic. The perils of overpopulation, climate change and a shrinking environment loom on the horizon. Our world is growing too small for humankind. If we do not destroy our planet and its environment with our consumptive habits, we will overpopulate it and destroy ourselves in fights for water and land.

This "galaxy paradigm shift" depends therefore on the second shift. A shift from Marshal McLuhan's "global village" paradigm to that of a more difficult, but necessary "global home" paradigm.

It is a paradigm in which all are family and all lives matter, again idealistic, yet realistic in terms of survival.

Taiwan studies and paradigm shifts

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It is in the context of this second paradigm shift that Taiwan studies become saliently relevant.

Taiwan and its democracy clearly exemplify the micro and macro issues involved in achieving the needed “global home” vision. It is economically a major national contributor, yet it is an outlier in the family of nations. Why?

Return to examine the first advocated galaxy paradigm shift. We are already moving toward that goal as we explore our solar system.

The signs are there. Despite man’s long history on Earth, within a little more than a century, great strides have been made since the first powered flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903.

Within that brief time, several spacecraft have probed the planet Mars. Another has brought back samples from an asteroid; an exploratory space research station lingers in the skies; men have walked on the moon, etc.

Space travel and the destiny of our galaxy are more temptingly possible. Many nations have been involved; sometimes they cooperated and sometimes they have not, but the progress has been rapid.

The second shift of a global home paradigm is ironically more challenging. Although positive signs of cooperation between nations can be seen in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the Paris Agreement, continued cooperation also unfortunately involves human nature and that includes all its basic and selfish “me first” desires.

How do Taiwan studies illustrate this contrasting dilemma and Taiwan’s role in it?

In its early history, on a macro scale, Taiwan contributed to the development of the Lapita Culture and the development of the “Austronesian Empire,” which stretched from Madagascar in the west to Easter Island in the east. It also went from Taiwan in the north to New Zealand in

the south. It fostered growth, development and expansion.

However, on a micro scale, the numerous indigenous groups within Taiwan were later so beset with tribalism that they could never unite and repel the early colonial incursions of the Dutch, the Spanish, the fleeing Ming loyalists and even the pursuing Qing.

Eventually, their numerical superiority dwindled and now they are a very clear minority. Tribalism has its lessons, but they are rarely learned.

From the opposite perspective, Taiwan later overcame other “tribalistic” differences in its move to achieve democracy.

During the Japanese colonial era, the four major divergent groups on the island that often fought for land in the past, ie, the two Hoklo groups from China’s Fujian Province — the Hakka, and the indigenous people — realized that they had a common enemy in the new Japanese colonial power.

Japan was bent on controlling the whole island; no one could escape.

It was in that period that the sense of a united Taiwanese identity developed.

The people sought and achieved the first step toward the goal of self-governance and earned the right to elect their own representatives to the Japanese Diet.

What contributed to that shift in unity and identity?

Return to the present issue: Why also is democratic Taiwan important now and how did it achieve democracy from a troubled past?

Taiwan is a major player in the world economy; as a mid-sized nation, it ranks in the upper-80th percentile in GDP and is in the 70th percentile for population. Yet it cannot come to the table of being recognized in the UN because of the macro economic influence of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Taiwan is also among the countries that have made the largest improvement in human freedom from 2008 to 2018; the Human Freedom Index has shown. Taiwan finished 19th of 162 nations and territories.

This year, Taiwan has further made the short list of The Economist's most improved countries and is a candidate for its "Country of the Year" award.

In containing COVID-19, which emerged from the PRC, Taiwan has only had seven deaths. In addition, it has had a far stronger economic performance than most nations and leads a relatively a normal life with no lockdowns. In solving the global pandemic, it is a leader.

What factors make it an outlier?

In the eyes of many countries, Taiwan technically is not a nation. Taiwan should be a major contributor to the WHO, but it is not even allowed in that door. From this micro perspective, it has the short end of the stick.

How was a model democracy achieved in this nation, which was once so divided, and how did it peacefully overthrow more than 40 years of one-party state rule?

Economics, identity politics and international law all come into play in Taiwan studies, even the ongoing problems of the San Francisco Peace Treaty's silence on who Japan gives Taiwan to.

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On a different level, why is Taiwan so vital to the PRC? This gets us into the politics of macro world players and their dangerous zero-sum gains.

Forget the smokescreen of the PRC's fake historical claims. Three pragmatic reasons stand out:

First, Taiwan's location makes it crucial for a hegemonic PRC to have blue-water access to the Pacific Ocean, and to dominate access to and from the South China Sea.

Second, Taiwan has economic value, primarily with its strong role in the semiconductor industry.

Third, it serves as a distraction from the internal problems of the PRC.

On the macro scale, the PRC can only think in terms of dominance and zero-sum control; the weltanschauung that it lives by is far different from that of Taiwan. Hong Kong bears that out.

On its micro scale, how did Taiwan achieve its present prominence? How did it also weave its way through the interplay of the many nations in its history to rise to the economic and independent power it is?

That did not come by chance.

Unlike nations that continue to play destructive zero-sum games with boundaries and control, Taiwan remains aloof and supports progress. It will be a prominent player when future space travel will need the nation's semiconductor chip capabilities.

Taiwan and its studies are not simply academic issues; Taiwan is a realistic player in today's

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dangerous games, particularly between the US and the PRC.

That this medium-sized nation shook off colonialism and one-party rule to develop a prosperous and democratic imagined community is a wonder; how it found identity amid its diversity to form today's imagined community is worth studying and emulating.

If there is a model for a developing, future global home paradigm, it can be found in Taiwan.

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