

Taiwanese Archives and Historical Research on Modern China: A Guide

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As historians become more concerned about dwindling access to Mainland Chinese archives, Taiwan looks increasingly appealing as a site of research. But compared to the archives located in the People's Republic of China (PRC), those of the Republic of China (ROC) have received far less scholarly consideration. This paper provides a brief summary of the major historical archives on Taiwan, the kinds of documents available in them, as well as the types of historical inquiry such documents might be suited to.¹ Taiwanese archives cannot replace those of the PRC: they contain materials dealing with largely different historical trajectories. However, even as scholars begin to return to the PRC, Taiwanese archives offer an important site from which to conduct research on topics including China's Republican Era (1911-1949), Taiwan's history under Japanese colonization (1894-1945), and the period under Nationalist Party (KMT) rule (1945-1996).

For historians interested solely in the PRC, the sources available in Taiwanese archives are somewhat limited, consisting primarily of files captured by the KMT in the 1930-40s and now stored in Academia Sinica and the Investigation Bureau in Taipei. Additionally, Taiwanese archives are set to assist scholars interested in carrying out comparative studies of post-war China and Taiwan, of which currently only a small number exist.² Although historians commonly attempt to identify continuities and breaks across 1949, generally they do so exclusively through a mono-regime lens.³ This siloed framework prevents scholars from making use of a potentially enlightening analytical lens: comparing the CCP and KMT's approaches to solving common problems, and how this at times led to divergent outcomes.⁴ Identifying the various factors that led to such divergences—ranging from ideology, social conditions, to contingency—can help scholars better understand why each regime took the shape it did. Furthermore, a comparative

approach can help bring to light the different transnational networks of material aid and

expertise that the PRC and ROC drew on, helping us write global histories of China.⁵

Part of the reason for the relative neglect of Taiwan's archives lies in the abundance formerly found across the Strait. In the 1980s, scholars experienced an unexpected windfall: the PRC, closed to foreigners for so long, opened up. So did its archives. For three decades, one monograph after another made use of local, provincial and national-level PRC archives, in addition to drawing on oral histories conducted with Chinese citizens who experienced firsthand the turbulent Mao-Era (1949-1976).⁶ These monographs and articles upended previously dominant paradigms of PRC scholarship, which had largely explored elite politics, making use of the limited source base available: published official pronouncements, newspapers, and journals.⁷ Access to archives and oral histories showed the extent to which realities on the ground deviated from the wishes or statements of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), allowing for rich explorations of the economic, social, and cultural history of the PRC. Archives such as the Shanghai Municipal Archives and Second Historical Archives in Nanjing also became indispensable for Republican Era scholarship. This archival situation was always somewhat tenuous however, with unstated and variegated rules regulating what could be seen, and sudden closures.⁸ These tendencies were exacerbated upon Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012, as Xi began to roll back many of the liberalizing reforms inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping and deepened by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. The eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 effectively severed Western academics from Chinese archives, many of which shuttered their doors. Only in late 2022 did the Chinese border reopen.⁹

The increasingly stern position of the United States (US) government also contributed to this tense

situation, with the need for a firm stance on China being one of the only issues currently enjoying bipartisan support. The Biden Administration has still not reinstated Fulbright China, originally halted under Donald Trump.¹⁰ Compounding SSRC's recent pullback of dissertation funding, this means that US doctoral candidates have increasingly few avenues for pursuing research in China.¹¹ In the near future, this will likely produce a boom in research on Taiwan, whose archives remained open during the pandemic, and whose Fulbright program remains unaffected (it should be noted that visa requirements did make it difficult for some scholars to cross the border during the pandemic). This appears to reflect something of a return to the Cold War status quo, in which scholars of the PRC clustered in Hong Kong, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Mainland and waiting for the border to become more porous.

Regardless of the future of research in PRC archives, Taiwan should and will likely remain an important destination on the circuit of academic researchers. It behooves us to have an up to date understanding of the kinds of resources that await us there. In this essay, based on ten months spent conducting doctoral research in Taiwan in 2022, I provide a schematic listing of the kinds of documents found in major archives across Taiwan, as well as relevant procedures for requesting documents.¹² When applicable, I mention existing scholarship that makes use of these archives. I also provide a brief overview of some of the ongoing debates found in historical writing on Taiwan.

Academia Sinica (中央研究院 [中研院])

In 1928, the KMT-led ROC government founded Academia Sinica. Having just unified a warlord-divided China in 1927, the KMT sought to create robust institutions to guide its state-building efforts, including in knowledge production. While originally located in the KMT capital of Nanjing, Academia Sinica can today be found in the Eastern suburbs of Taipei, in Nangang (南港), where it moved in 1949. It is among Taiwan's premier academic institutions, housing twenty four research institutes and eight research centers divided amongst the fields of mathematics and physical sciences, life sciences, and humanities and social sciences. Among these is the Institute of Modern History (IMH 近代史研究所 [

近史所]), which occupies three buildings, one of which holds its archives.¹³

The archives of IMH, established in 1955, reflect its Republican roots: the vast majority of its materials come from the period of 1911-1949, having to do with the successive governments that ruled China in that period (see Figure 1).¹⁴ Catalogued according to government ministry, these collections reveal the inner workings of Republican economic, diplomatic, and military governance.¹⁵ Perhaps the crown Jewel of IMH are its diplomatic archives. These include those of both the Qing Dynasty's *Zongli yamen* (總理衙門), as well as the foreign ministries of the various governments that came and went after the 1911 Xinhai Revolution. Less well studied, however, are the economic ministries. Using the "Order by File" search function, scholars can search for various government organs, and also read brief descriptions of their timelines and functions. For instance, anyone interested in Nationalist Party economic history can learn how the ROC Economic Ministry (經濟部) formed in 1938 from the reorganization of a number of antecedents. Similarly described are numerous government organs including the Huai River Commission (導淮委員會) and the economic ministries of the Wang Jingwei regime.

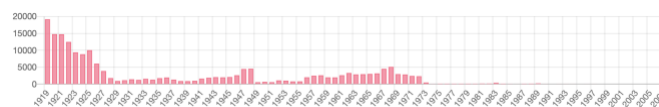


Figure 1 Volume of IMH Collections by Year¹⁶

These collections are decidedly government oriented. They are not directly amenable to writing histories-from-below, or of the subaltern. This is the case for most Taiwanese archives.¹⁷ However, these collections can help us bring governmentality back into Republican scholarship. Beginning in the 1980s, scholars of Republican China made use of rich archives in Shanghai and Nanjing to explore the rapid and exciting social changes of major cities; in particular, Shanghai.¹⁸ In recent years, that focus has shifted to the countryside, revealing how diverse parts of the country took part in China's political and economic modernization.¹⁹ Often left out of these narratives, however, are the Republican governments. This is largely due to dominant historiographical understandings of the Beiyang and KMT-led governments as inept, corrupt, and

destined to fail. In contrast to this, over the last two decades, scholars have begun to look at the large-scale projects various governments undertook (such as Huai River waterworks), the state's attempts at imposing national scientific standards, and its setting of industrial policy.²⁰ This scholarship reveals the extent to which the KMT and other governments worked with transnational philanthropic and international organizations, and how their participants drew on their overseas education, particularly in America. The collections of IMH shed light on the diverse projects led by the KMT, and how these projects unfolded through bureaucratic technologies and genres of writing. These government communiques and reports can thus provide a robust foundation for further studies of Republican Era governmentality.

Although the majority of these government materials originate from before the KMT moved to Taiwan in 1949, IMH's collections do extend post-1949. For instance, IMH possesses the meeting minutes of Taiwan's post-war economic planning institutions, including the Economic Stability Board (ESB 經濟安定委員會 [經安會]), the records of the Executive Yuan's Council on US Aid (CUSA 美援運用委員會 [美援會]), and materials from the Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction (JCRR 農村復興聯合委員會 [農復會]). Scholars interested in Taiwan's post-war industrial and agricultural construction would be wise to look here in addition to the more-familiar Academia Historica.

IMH also contains a certain amount of CCP materials from the 1940s. IMH's possession of these materials is a result of its close connection to the KMT government and its intelligence services: in particular, the Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau (法務部調查局). During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and Civil War (1945-1949), the KMT worked to collect materials on the CCP as a part of its military intelligence operations. So far, IMH has published two batches of these materials, with a third to be released in September 2023, altogether totaling close to 5,000 items. These documents range in date from the early 1930s to late 1940s, covering a range of subjects including education, propaganda, work reports, and policy documents. While likely not a large enough source

base for a monograph-length work on the Sino-Japanese War, it does represent a largely unexplored set of supplementary materials for anyone interested in both the CCP's wartime operations, as well as KMT intelligence gathering.²¹

This is not the only Investigation Bureau archive, however. The Investigation Bureau is still an active bureaucratic organ and has its own archives, which include CCP materials. These materials are available at its Taipei headquarters in Muzha (木柵). A contact number is available on the Bureau's website that researchers can reach out to.²² They may require a letter of affiliation and identification, and the process can take several weeks.²³ After this, the Bureau will invite the researcher to make an appointment via email, and to visit the actual Bureau at Muzha. A gate guard will review identification and buzz the researcher into the complex itself. After this, researchers can request materials from the front desk. The entire catalog is not available, but researchers can ask the front desk staff to search for terms, after which they will print off matches that visitors can select from. Researchers can only read ten items at a time in the reading room. Many items are digitized. Photographs are not allowed, but notetaking on laptops is. It is not clear exactly what materials the archive holds. The catalog contains over 17,000 items (冊), from which the IMH collection originates.²⁴ Some recent scholarship makes use of post-1949 documents from the PRC's disciplinary apparatus (紀委), and there are military materials dating through the 1960s.²⁵

Finally, IMH contains a large number of personal papers from notable historical figures, most of whom had some connection to the KMT-led government, as well as with the Academia Sinica itself. Ranging from scientists, democratic activists, to politicians, these personal papers include correspondence, memos, essays, and personal writings. They vary in size, and depending on the study, represent a potentially rich and unique set of sources.

Understanding the accessibility of these collections takes time, as each is subject to different requirements. Some collections are available only in the archive itself, either digitally on local computers (such as the foreign ministry collections and personal papers), or in paper form (Republican Era economic

ministries). Other materials are accessible online outside the archive. Previously, to view online collections remotely, researchers were required to download IMH's image display software, which ran only on specific Windows operating systems, and at times with considerable difficulty. In the past, the best option was often simply to use the local computers for these materials. However, in Spring 2023, IMH began a process of allowing researchers to access some files using an online image reader similar to that employed by Academia Historica. This site is now up and seems to be fully functional, offering overseas scholars the ability to view many collections remotely. However, certain collections still only offer low resolution images outside of the archive itself. In general, IMH materials are made available for viewing online as soon as they are digitized. However, many economic ministry materials remain undigitized.

To view these documents, users first must register either by email or in person. From the web portal, the researcher can then order materials. Generally, it takes a few days and up to a week for the archivists to prepare the materials for viewing, upon which they will notify the requester. IMH allows for researchers viewing collections from pre-1949 ministries to take unlimited photographs. Previously, for the paper collections, researchers had to use a camera of IMH, whose hard drive would then be uploaded onto a CD-ROM. However, IMH recently changed this requirement, and researchers can use their own device to take photographs.²⁶ For other collections (those from Taiwan, personal papers, and on the CCP), users can print up to 500 pages of material total per calendar year. However, for both personal papers and captured CCP materials, researchers are only allowed to print up to half of each individual collection. Consequently, scholars may require more time on site to view these collections.

IMH has a Visiting Scholars Program that draws in researchers from around the world. Upon acceptance, IMH informs the local TECO office to assist with processing the applicant's visa. This is a means of obtaining a full year's stay in Taiwan apart from Fulbright.²⁷

Those interested in Taiwanese history should also take note of the Institute of Taiwan History (台灣史研究所 [台史所]), which has a large archive of materials related to Taiwanese culture and society under Qing, Japanese, and KMT rule. Its collections include materials ranging from Japanese-era postcards, official documents, the personal and professional writings of cultural figures, to records of the provincial assembly and political associations.²⁸

Libraries are also an important source for the Qing, Japanese, and KMT eras, holding digitized collections, as well as published memoirs, compilations of government documents, and monographs. Of particular note are the various libraries of Academia Sinica, as well as the National Taiwan Library, National Central Library, and National Taiwan University Library.²⁹

Getting to Nangang from downtown Taipei poses no particular challenge. One easy route is taking the subway to the Nangang Exhibition Station (南港展覽館) and either riding a U-Bike or taking the bus south (intrepid souls can attempt the 20–30-minute walk). Alternatively, there are a number of buses that go back and forth from central Taipei to Academia Sinica. The journey can take up to an hour depending on the traffic.

Taiwan Historica (國史館台灣文獻館) and Academia Historica (國史館)

Academia Historica and Taiwan Historica are two of the most well-known archives for Taiwanese History.³⁰ Taken together, their collections offer a view into how the Japanese colonial government and ROC operated on Taiwan. Both of these governments came to Taiwan as external forces whose control of the island resulted from post-war military settlements. Both governments confronted populations that were to some extent suspicious, if not outright hostile, to their rule. As such, both engaged in policies of social and economic control and mobilization, whose unfolding patterns are documented in these collections. Though these materials have long been a mainstay of historical and cultural studies of 20th century Taiwan, they still offer underused collections that can aid scholars seeking to rediscover new histories of Taiwan's response to successive waves of modernization.

Although Taiwan Historica is technically part of Academia Historica, this institutional affiliation was only established in 2002. Founded in 1948 as the Taiwan Provincial Common History Historica (臺灣省通志館), it successively changed affiliation over the coming decades. Because of this, Taiwan Historica is essentially a separate institution from Academia Historica, with a separate catalog and ordering system.³¹ Taiwan Historica is located in Central Taiwan's Nantou County (南投), on the former site of the Taiwan Provincial Government (TPG 台灣省政府), whose dormitories and buildings now lie abandoned after the abolishment of the TPG, a process that began in 1996 and ended in 2018.³² Taiwan Historica holds materials dating to the period of rule by the Japanese Government-General (總督府), as well as the archives of the TPG. These records reveal the ways that the Japanese government used policies of ethnic categorization to rule Taiwan, including classifying indigenous groups, creating trading relationships with them, and subjecting them to policies of moral suasion. They also include reports by the Japanese government on local groups and state-society interactions. Such files also show the projects of early industrialization and agricultural modernization begun under Japanese rule.³³ These files are written in both Japanese and Chinese. However, located in the archive itself are translations into Chinese of various collections of materials, and the archive continues to translate its holdings. The records of the TPG start in the mid-1940s and extend to the present, having to do with a wide range of topics including personnel decisions, land reform, fertilizer distribution, and many others.³⁴ Many of the pre-1945 materials are digitized, and available online upon registering, which can be completed via email. However, many collections (especially post-1945) remain undigitized and are only available in the reading room in Nantou. As is the case with all Taiwanese archives, collections that have not yet been reviewed for sensitive personal data will require additional time for review and redaction. The speed at which such requests are processed is directly affected by the Personal Data Protection Act enacted in 2015 (個人資料保護法).³⁵ To meet compliance standards for this law, archives must review documents for protected personal information, which greatly extends the amount of time required before

receiving access to documents. When materials are already reviewed, they are processed much quicker. This does not apply to Academia Sinica, which has already reviewed the entirety of its collections.

To get to Taiwan Historica, scholars can first take the high speed rail (HSR) from Taipei to the Taichung (台中市) HSR station, from which buses are available heading south towards Nantou. Taxis are available using local taxi apps, but are not very reliable near Taiwan Historica. There are bus routes in the area, however. Hotels are not plentiful near the archive, but there are options in Nantou City (南投市). Overall, the relative lack of transportation and lodging compared to Taipei means that visiting scholars should give themselves generous traveling windows. Scholars with access to a car should find the situation easier to manage, as it is only a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Taipei. There are also buses that run from Taipei to Nantou.

Academia Historica was founded in 1947 in Nanjing and subsequently reopened in Taipei in 1957, where it now has two locations.³⁶ One is the primary reading room in downtown Taipei, in which researchers can view digitized files. The other is the reading room in the southern suburb of Xindian (新店), where paper files are kept. A large percentage of Academia Historica's files are accessible online without an account. However, there are still a large number of collections that must be read either on the local reading room computers, or through viewing paper copies in Xindian. Some files require an application and redaction process for personal information that can take a number of weeks (files that have never been requested or processed before will state "not yet reviewed" [尚未檢視]).³⁷ When requesting documents, scholars are allowed to look at whole folders; this applies to both digital and paper collections.

Academia Historica contains vast archives of ROC government documents dating back to the early twentieth century, including collections of the correspondence of major KMT figures such as Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, President Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), the powerful bureaucrat K.C. Yan (嚴家淦), and many others.³⁸ The collections from ministries and commissions include the Overseas Community Affairs Council (僑務委員會

), Ministry of Transportation and Communications (交通部), Interior Ministry (內政部), and many others. Scholars interested in the history of ROC government activity, including records of key KMT committees from the 1950s, parliamentary records, and companies connected to the state, should consider first consulting the collections of Academia Historica. Similar to Academia Sinica, these records can be searched either by keyword, or by collection. Most collections were originally used as part of the filing done by the work units themselves and are often held in what appear to be their original folders. This is the case with most archives on Taiwan.

Taken as a whole, Academia Historica's materials provide a sprawling and panoramic view of ROC political and economic life stretching back on close to a century. North American, European, Taiwanese, and Chinese scholars have already made use of such materials to narrate the vast economic and political changes that accompanied the KMT's move to Taiwan, the island's subsequent entrance into the American led "Free World," and its transformation into a "developmental state" analogous to Japan and Korea. However, Euro-American scholarship has tended to have different foci from its Taiwanese counterpart. Starting in the 1950s, Americans presented Taiwan as a case of successful economic development, leading to the idea of the "Taiwan miracle."³⁹ However, scholars have disagreed over exactly what constituted the main driver of economic growth on Taiwan: either free markets, savvy economic planning, or Confucian values.⁴⁰ In recent years, studies have moved away from this problematique and begun to look at cultural and transnational histories of Taiwan, including the formation of particularly Taiwanese domestic and international identities, and how this has differentiated Taiwanese history from that of Mainland China.⁴¹ Additionally, new historical genres continue to emerge. For instance, Julia Strauss recently paved the way for the comparative study of political governance and state building on Taiwan and the PRC.⁴² As Taiwan comes more into the eye of the American public, Academia Historica will likely provide a crucial source-base as scholars explore the similarities and differences between the Cold War ROC and PRC.

Academia Historica's sources have been foundational to Taiwan's domestic historical scholarship as well. Before the 1980s, historical studies of Taiwan were largely laudatory of KMT policies of land reform and state-led industrial development, mirroring much of Euro-American scholarship. Since then, however, scholars have begun to question the predominant role the KMT supposedly played in Taiwan's success, and even accused the KMT of causing domestic strife by perpetrating state violence against political dissidents and dispropriating native Taiwanese property owners, including landlords and industrialists.⁴³ Other historians dispute this contention, questioning the "strong-state hypothesis" that emerged dominant in the 1990s, which portrays the KMT as a despotic government that overrode local autonomy and interests.⁴⁴ Both sides of this debate use diverse archives, including those stored in the Academia Historica, to make their competing claims. Less partisan views also look at the difficulties involved in the KMT's taking over Japanese assets while preventing local dissatisfaction.⁴⁵ American scholars have hitherto largely failed to engage with these debates, but bringing them into the American scholarly mainstream would offer the rest of the world a glimpse into the ways that history and memory are contested in Taiwan.

Academia Historica's main reading room is located in downtown Taipei near the Presidential Building. The closest subway stops are Ximen (西門) and Xiaonanmen (小南門), both on the Green Line. Scholars visiting the Xindian branch should take the Green Line to its southern terminus at Xindian station, from which one can take a number of buses to the archive, which is located in a concrete, bunker-like building set amidst the forested foothills surrounding Taipei (I once saw an alarmingly large snake slithering across the road leading to the archive). The security guard will show newcomers the way to the reading room. There are not many restaurants nearby, so taking one's lunch would be recommended. In the past, one could order prepared meals (便當) from the archive, and those interested in doing so should speak with the archivists.

KMT Archives at National Chengchi University

As a brief aside, for those interested in the history of the KMT, the Party's archives are now located in the east wing of the Main Library at National Chengchi University (國立政治大學) in southeast Taipei. After registering with the desk staff, researchers can peruse and order a host of administrative, literary, and commemorative documents dating to the early 20th century. The library also hosts an archive of materials from the Central Political Institute in pre-1949 Nanjing (中央政治學校).

National Archives Administration (國家檔案管理局)

Taiwan's National Archives Administration was founded in 2001 in response to the passing of the Archives Act (檔案法) in 1999.⁴⁶ It primarily holds materials dating from after the KMT took hold of Taiwan in 1945. Although on its surface many of the materials are similar in nature to those of Academia Historica, the National Archives Administration's collections contain many unique documents relating to land reform, American aid to Taiwan, building projects, and other topics. However, the slowness with which the Archives processes applications means that scholars must be careful in regard to how they approach their research there. One must prepare in advance to make full utilization of these collections.

Materials related to national defense, finance, transportation, and trade comprise the majority of the National Archives Administration's collections.⁴⁷ However, these titles cannot do justice to the materials they encompass. For instance, "military" would likely include documents relating to the architectural plans and construction of dormitories and other facilities for the American GIs who lived on Cold War Taiwan, as well as legal cases relating to GI misbehavior. The archive contains numerous collections relating to the various initiatives that comprised Taiwan's land reform, such as the compilation of land registers. Other collections cover immunization campaigns and the expansion of medical services on the island. Scholars can search for these documents in an online catalog.⁴⁸

Despite the richness of these collections, in 2020 the National Archives Administration placed limitations on how many documents scholars can apply for at

any one time. Scholars can now only concurrently apply for ten documents. The registration process is also somewhat convoluted: to order materials online outside of the archive's computers, scholars must first obtain various forms of identification such as a "Natural Person Identification Card" (自然人憑證) at the National Immigration Agency, as well as a Taiwan E-Government account (我的 E 政府).⁴⁹ After logging in using an E-Government account, the requester can fill out a digital request form, sign it with a digital signature, and email it to the archive. An alternative is to order materials in person at the archive itself. Upon ordering, the archive generally takes two to three weeks to approve documents, after which scholars will receive a notification via email to review them in person. If one wants to take photographs, the archive requires that you use its camera. Photo processing then takes an additional two weeks, after which the files can be downloaded to a CD-ROM, USB flash drive, or downloaded from the cloud. One does also have the option of requesting that materials be directly uploaded in JPG format to a CD-ROM or other format. However, this means that you do not have the opportunity to review the files ahead of time.

It should be obvious that this timescale is potentially very limiting. A scholar could take a full month to only look at ten individual documents. However, there are a number of workarounds. The most audacious (and one actually recommended to me by archive personnel), is to ask Taiwanese friends to order documents on one's behalf and sign a form deputizing the scholar to view them and/or receive a CD-ROM with images. Another (which I personally used and am more familiar with) is to take advantage of the fact that when you request one document, the archivists generally bring the whole folder in which the file is contained. By making sure not to overlap requests of documents within a single folder, you can ensure that you receive at least ten folders (and sometimes more). Each folder can range from a few pages to dozens or potentially hundreds. While these restrictions ensure that such materials will generally be supplementary to other archival collections, these can be valuable sources well worth the institutional difficulties. It should also be noted that some documents are duplicates of those from other

archives. Thus, scholars should consult various archival databases before ordering materials.

To get to the National Archives, take the Airport Line (Commuter) rail from Taipei Station to Xinzhuang Fuduxin (新莊副都心). From there it is a five-minute walk. The whole trip takes approximately one hour depending on where in Taipei you start out from.

Municipal, County, and Township Archives

Municipal, county, and township archives represent a new and potentially fascinating source for local Taiwanese history. Much historical writing on post-1949 Taiwan is based on central government archives. These state-centered narratives often find themselves unable to integrate the lives of ordinary people. This is less the case for the historiography of Taiwan under Japanese rule. Recent work has shown for instance the diverse attitudes towards colonial rule that existed in the early 20th century, ranging from Chinese nationalism to pragmatic collaboration. A rich body of work exists for Taiwanese art and literature, and how this was related to the formation of Taiwanese national identity.⁵⁰ At the same time, Japanese rule brought indigenous peoples into new relationships with the state through trade, ethnic categorization projects, and tourism.⁵¹ Apart from some recent and exciting work about urban life in post-war Taiwan, there is little Anglophone cultural and social history that can help us understand how ordinary Taiwanese reacted to KMT rule.⁵²

Part of the reason for this lack is that Taiwanese archives are almost entirely state run: there are no substantial local archives run by historical associations or civic groups that I know of. However, this does not mean that social research is entirely impossible. One possibility is relying on personal archives and oral interviews. However, establishing the links required to both learn of and gain access to such sources can take significant time and effort. Another common tactic is to read between the lines of government documents in order to learn about subaltern state subjects.⁵³ However, the recently opened local government archives (here meaning township 鄉, county 縣, and municipal 市) offer another promising avenue.

Until 2021, although local governments did possess archival collections, such documents were difficult to access. Lacking a centralized catalogue, documents had to be ordered from separate catalogs belonging to various local governments and their agencies.⁵⁴ Now, however, the National Archives Administration runs just such an online catalog, called NEAR.⁵⁵ Even with a catalog, such archives are not easy to gain access to. It can take upwards of two to three months before receiving requested documents, as well as requiring substantial back-and-forth with the government agencies involved. Preparing in advance is thus crucial. However, once the application process is understood, these local archives can produce a trove of documents from across all branches of local government. Such documents include land records, court cases, and all manner of government activities. These can intentionally or incidentally provide information on litigants, landowners, and civic groups. Such sources offer the possibility of understanding urban change and formation akin to those already common in PRC studies, as well as nuanced histories of rural life. I recommend using the advanced search and specifying a date range, as the website can only display 10,000 files at a time.

The basic process of applying for documents from local governments is to use a keyword search on the official catalog. From here, users can save collections for later. Although there is an online process for ordering documents on the website, my attempts to submit requests using it met with no response or indication that a process had begun. Instead, the process that yielded results was to mail physical copies of archival request forms (檔案應用申請書/檔案閱覽抄錄複製申請書) to the intended government, as well as a photocopy of my passport. These governments generally list addresses on their websites to receive such requests, and sending the forms to the general government address often works.⁵⁶ Although some governments allowed for the use of the standard NEAR forms, other governments have a distinct request form, and different government divisions sometimes have their own request forms.⁵⁷ It often takes multiple sheets to accommodate an entire request. In general, I found that regarding these archival applications, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. I had most success

sending in paper copies as well as emails inquiring into the status of my requests. I also submitted messages via "Mayor's mailboxes" (信箱) systems on the government websites, which I generally received responses to eventually, and also called the governments to make inquiries.

Although I do not understand the entire internal process, and it is likely different for each government, this is my best understanding of how governments process these requests: after receiving the forms, the government division dealing with archival materials sends out information requests to relevant divisions. The Gaoxiong Municipal Government Department of Administrative and International Affairs (行政暨國際處) told me in an email, for instance, that "your request of 19 documents from 1950 to 1961 has already been reviewed, and it has been determined that the organs with rights to the documents are the Civil Affairs Bureau, Land Bureau, Personnel Department, Agriculture Bureau, and Social Affairs Bureau" (有關台端申請民國 39 至 50 年等檔案應用計 19 件，經查檔案權管機關分別為市府民政局、地政局、人事處、農業局及社會局). I then was put in touch with these divisions. Some governments contacted me to request more information about who I was, and why I was requesting such documents. Other times I had to email or call to find out whether my requests had been received. If these requests are approved, the governments will either offer to mail them to a Taiwanese address or allow you to pick them up. I used both methods. Although mailing was more convenient, I was also afraid of having documents lost in the post and made a number of trips to pick them up in person.

It appeared to me that these governments did not commonly get requests for documents from scholars. However, they were generally happy to help once they understood what I wanted. In Penghu (澎湖), members of the county government who processed my request took a photo with me after providing requested documents. They could not recall another foreign scholar having been there. Trips to pick up documents in person can entail considerable time and expense. To obtain records on agricultural statistics from one District Office, I first took the high-speed rail to Gaoxiong, and then a taxi for an hour to the former industrial processing district of Yong'an (永

安). Taxi drivers were hesitant to drive out so far away from the city and negotiated a round-trip rate. Doctoral researchers on Fulbright grants should note that Fulbright will not reimburse hotels as a research expense. Fulbright will reimburse the costs of train tickets and the copying fees for such files, however. Saving receipts is thus a good idea, including for other archives.

With enough persistence, hundreds if not thousands of pages of documents can be obtained. Although governments denied a few of my requests on the grounds of being sensitive information, the vast majority of my requests went through, and I obtained around 700 pages of materials dealing with land reform and agricultural statistics. Though at the present these archives represent relatively uncharted waters, hopefully with time scholars will find ways to forge stronger links with them, and bring their materials into scholarly conversations about Taiwan, its past, and future.

Epilogue

It is my hope that this brief essay can help Western scholars better navigate the excellent and open archival collections of Taiwan. As anyone who has lived in or studied Taiwan knows, the island possesses a rich and vibrant political, economic, and social life that deserves to be explored, explained, and engaged with. It seems likely that scholarship about Taiwan will increase in volume in the coming decades. Regardless of the reasons for this being the case, this is a welcome development. There are many untapped sources that can help us tell new and interesting stories about Taiwan, for scholarly and public audiences. While this list is incomplete and, in many ways, inadequate, I hope it can provide some orientation as we embark upon this new direction in the study of Taiwan and East Asia.

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look into the use of local archival documents in Taiwanese scholarship. Mike Thompson-Brusstar

told me about his research experience. My thanks also to the editors and anonymous reviewer.

¹ There are a few existing attempts at summarizing Taiwan's archival situation, but they are dated and focus primarily on Academia Sinica and Academia Historica. See Andrew J. Nathan, *Modern China, 1840-1972: An Introduction to Sources and Research Aids* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), 12-14. An updated but brief summary is Hsueh, Li-Kuei, I-Mei Hung, Li-Chiao Wang, Chun-Ya Wen, and I. Chang, "The Digitalization and Resource Sharing of Archives in Taiwan," *Archiving Conference 1* (Society for Imaging Science and Technology, 2006), 195-204. Another major source is William C. Kirby, James Chin Shih, Man-houng Lin, and David A. Pietz eds., *State and Economy in Republican China: A Handbook for Scholars, Volume 1* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001).

² The only major English language comparative study is Julia Strauss, *State Formation in China and Taiwan: Bureaucracy, Campaign, and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

³ For an example of recent work that emphasizes breaks, see Arunabh Ghosh, *Making it Count: Statistics and Statecraft in the Early People's Republic of China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). For continuities, see Judd Kinzley, *Natural Resources and the New Frontier: Constructing Modern China's Borderlands* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

⁴ Strauss adopts this approach. William Kirby discusses the use of such comparisons in "Continuity and Change in Modern China: Economic Planning on the Mainland and on Taiwan, 1943-1958," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* (Jul., 1990), 121-141.

⁵ For instance, by comparing Taiwan's birth control policies to that of the PRC.

⁶ Ralph Thaxton makes use of extensive oral interviews in *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China: Mao's Great Leap Forward Famine and the Origins of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); so too does Sigrid Schmalzer in *The People's Peking Man: Popular Science and Human Identity in Twentieth-Century China* (Chicago: University of

Chicago Pres, 2008). Other examples of excellent use of these archives include Jacob Eyferth, *Eating Rice from Bamboo Roots: The Social History of a Community of Handicraft Papermakers in Rural Sichuan, 1920-2000* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Denise Ho, *Curating Revolution: Politics on Display in Mao's China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁷ A paradigmatic example of books transcending simple state perspectives is Edward Friedman, Paul G. Pickowicz, Mark Selden, and Kay Ann Johnson, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁸ For instance, the foreign ministry archives were closed in 2012. For a general overview of the status of PRC archives see Charlie Kraus, *Researching the History of the People's Republic of China* (Wilson Center Cold War International History Project Working Paper 79, 2016); Glenn Tiffert explores the precariousness of PRC sources in "Peering down the Memory Hole: Censorship, Digitization, and the Fragility of Our Knowledge Base," *The American Historical Review* 124:2 (Apr., 2019), 550-56. Chinese History Dissertation Reviews also published a series, "Fresh from the Archives," which includes a wealth of information on the difficulties encountered in archives. See for example Thomas Mullaney "Tianjin Municipal Archives," *Chinese Dissertation Reviews*, October 17, 2011: <https://dissertationreviews.wordpress.com/2011/10/17/tianjin-municipal-archives/>. See also "Doing Research in the PRC," *PRC History Review* 6:3 (Sept., 2021): http://prchistory.org/2021/09/the-prc-history-review_6_3/. For a discussion of doing work outside of the PRC, see "China from Without: Doing PRC History in Foreign Archives," *PRC History Review* 2:3 (June 2017): <http://prchistory.org/review-june-2017/>.

⁹ Access to archives is a major concern. In 2021 Yale University held a series, *Doing History in a New Era*, in which they discussed Taiwan's archives. The video is available on Youtube.

¹⁰ Former President Trump ended Fulbright exchanges with China and Hong Kong through an executive order in 2020. Recently, a number of

representatives have introduced legislation to restore the program. See "Larsen, Beyer and Chu Reintroduce Legislation to Restore Fulbright Exchanges with China," *Rep. Rick Larsen*, March 30, 2023:

<https://larsen.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=2741#:~:text=China%20diplomatic%20relations,-.The%20Restoring%20Fulbright%20Exchanges%20with%20China%20and%20Hong%20Kong%20Act,and%20understanding%20between%20our%20countries/>.

¹¹ SSRC cancelled its International Dissertation Research Fellowship in 2022. See "Announcement: Social Science Research Council's International Dissertation Research Fellowship," *History of Anthropology Review*, April 18, 2022: <https://histanthro.org/news/announcement-social-science-research-councils-international-dissertation-research-fellowship/>.

¹² Information about various archives can be found on a database run by the National Archives Administration. See "Resources," across.archives.gov:

<https://across.archives.gov.tw/naahyint/resources.jsp>.

¹³ For a history of the curation of IMH see an introduction by IMH head Ning Jennifer Chang, "The Modern History Archives at Academia Sinica," *Wilson Center*, February 14, 2022: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/modern-history-archives-academia-sinica>.

¹⁴ The archive can be found at this address: <https://archivesonline.mh.sinica.edu.tw>.

¹⁵ For the history of Academia Sinica and a summary of its records see Kirby, *State and Economy in Republican China*, 143-152. For archival collections as they stood in 1960, see Kuo Ting-ye, "News of the Profession: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica," *Journal of Asian Studies* 19:4 (1960), 495-497.

¹⁶ "Order by Type" on <https://archivesonline.mh.sinica.edu.tw/browse/>.

¹⁷ Scholars have made use of IMH archives to tell some cultural and economic histories: for instance, using the Republican *Ladies Journal* housed at IMH. See Chang Che-chia, "The Visual Language of Medicine Advertisements in The Ladies' Journal," in Vivienne Lo, Penelope Barrett eds., *Imagining Chinese Medicine* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 479-486.

¹⁸ For instance, Wen-hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Labor in China* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1993).

¹⁹ Kate Merkel-Hess, *The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and State in Republican China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Shakharr Rahav, *The Rise of Political Intellectuals in Modern China: May Fourth Societies and the Roots of Mass-party Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²⁰ David Pietz, *Engineering the State: The Huai River and Reconstruction in Nationalist China, 1927-37* (New York: Routledge, 2002); William C. Kirby, "Engineering China: Birth of the Developmental State, 1928-1937," in Wen-hsin Yeh ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 137-160; Recently, Mark E. Frank makes use of IMH materials to describe state-run agricultural extension in Tibet. See "Wheat Dreams: Scientific Interventions at Chinese Model Farms in Kham, 1937-1949," in Stephane Gros ed., *Frontier Tibet: Patterns of Change in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 217-253.

²¹ This is very little on this topic in English. Primarily Frederic Wakeman Jr., *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

²² See: <https://www.mjib.gov.tw/EditPage/?PageID=85631920-f741-4f90-b196-f645d909e9a2#3>.

²³ My source for this is another researcher who used their services while gathering dissertation materials.

²⁴ In 2019 the Bureau signed an agreement with IMH. This information comes from a pamphlet published by the Bureau: 法務部調查局史料特藏室.

²⁵ Michael R. Thompson-Brusstar, "Building a Supervision Science: Bureaucratic Control in China from Mao to Xi," Dissertation, The University of Michigan, 2023.

²⁶ This change was relayed to me by Ning Jennifer Chang.

²⁷ See application information here: <https://www.mh.sinica.edu.tw/apply.aspx>.

²⁸ The web address is: <https://tais.ith.sinica.edu.tw/sinicafrsFront/index.jsp>.

²⁹ National Taiwan Library: <https://www.ntl.edu.tw/np.asp?ctNode=1686&mp=1>. National Central Library: https://www.ncl.edu.tw/links1_235.html. National Taiwan University Library: <https://www.lib.ntu.edu.tw/en>.

³⁰ For a history and additional summary of collections at Academia Historica see Kirby, *State and Economy in Republican China*, 132-142.

³¹ For this institutional history see: https://www.th.gov.tw/new_site/07aboutus/01introduction.php; for the archive's main website, see: <https://onlinearchives.th.gov.tw/index.php?act=Archive>.

³² For a history of this area, called Zhongxing New Village (中興新村), see Chapter 4 in Chang Bi-yu, *Place, Identity, and National Imagination in Post-war Taiwan* (London: Routledge, 2015).

³³ Scholars that have made use of maps stored here include Joseph R. Allen, *Taipei: City of Displacements* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).

³⁴ It should be noted that the TPG was only established in 1947. Before that, after the handoff from the Japanese, Taiwan was ruled by the Taiwan Province Civil Administration (台灣省行政長官公署).

³⁵ For the updated version of the law see: <https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=I0050021>.

³⁶ For a brief history of the institution see: <https://www.drn.gov.tw/p/412-1003-188.php?Lang=en>.

³⁷ The website of Academia Historica is: <https://www.drn.gov.tw/?Lang=en>.

³⁸ Legally, Academia Historica is the designated preservation authority for presidential and vice presidential records on Taiwan: <https://www.drn.gov.tw/p/412-1003-188.php?Lang=en>.

³⁹ The idea of the "Taiwan Miracle" was explicated in Thomas B. Gold, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1986).

⁴⁰ For a market-oriented view making use of Academia Sinica sources see Tai-chun Kuo and Ramon H. Myers, *Taiwan's Economic Transformation: Leadership, property rights and institutional change 1949-1956* (New York: Routledge, 2012). Nick Cullather discusses these

various positions in "Fuel for the Good Dragon": The United States and Industrial Policy in Taiwan, 1950-1965," *Diplomatic History* 20:1 (1996), 1-26.

⁴¹ James Lin describes the cultural and diplomatic history of the "Taiwan Model." See James Lin, "Sowing Seeds and Knowledge: Agrarian Development in the US, China, Taiwan, and the World, 1920-1980," Dissertation UC Berkeley 2017.

⁴² Strauss, *State Formation in China and Taiwan*.

⁴³ Some scholars now attempt to tell the side of the dispossessed landlords in projects sponsored by local governments. See for instance 莊濠賓, "戰後的土地改革在桃園—以地主為中心的視角研究 (民國38年-44年)," in 李力庸 ed., *經緯桃園: 2018 桃園學* (Taoyuan: 桃園市政府文化局, 2018), 135-177. Many narratives focus on the 1950s White Terror. See 侯坤宏, "戰後台灣白色恐怖論析," *國史館學術集刊* 12 (2007), 139-203. For state violence against Taiwanese see 蘇瑞鏘, "從雷震案看戒嚴時期政治案件的法律處置對人權的侵害," *國史館學術集刊* 15 (2008), 113-157.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of this history and a list of relevant parties see 廖彥豪, 瞿宛文, "兼顧地主的土地改革: 台灣時事耕者有其田的歷史過程," *台灣社會研究季刊* 98 (March 2015), 69-145.

⁴⁵ Making use of Academia Historica files, see 何鳳嬌, "台灣戰後初期製鹽會社土地的接受與處理——以高雄市縣百甲、下寮塢為例," *國史館學術集刊* 6 (2005), 109-144.

⁴⁶ For this institutional history see <https://www.archives.gov.tw/Publish.aspx?cnid=1390>; for the Archives Act see <https://www.archives.gov.tw/english/Publish.aspx?cnid=406>.

⁴⁷ For this information and a summary of holdings see: <https://www.archives.gov.tw/Publish.aspx?cnid=1466>.

⁴⁸ The catalogue is located at: <https://aa.archives.gov.tw/>.

⁴⁹ The E-Government site is: <https://www.gov.tw/>.

⁵⁰ Evan Dawley, *Becoming Taiwanese: Ethnogenesis in a Colonial City, 1880s-1950s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Seiji Shirane, *Imperial Gateway: Colonial Taiwan and Japan's Extension in South China and Southeast Asia, 1895-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022); Leo Ching, *Becoming "Japanese": Colonial*

Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Jason Kuo, *Art and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

⁵¹ Paul D. Barclay, *Outcasts of Empire: Japan's Rule on Taiwan's "Savage Border," 1874-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

⁵² There is some work. For instance, the latter part of Dawley, *Becoming Taiwanese*; Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang, *The Great Exodus from China: Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Modern Taiwan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); additionally, there is work on the 228 incident such as Lai Tse-Han, Ramon H. Myers, Wei Hou, *A Tragic Beginning: The Taiwan Uprising of February 28, 1947* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Steven E. Phillips, *Between Assimilation and Independence: The Taiwanese Encounter Nationalist China, 1945-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁵³ This is the line pursued by Barclay, Dawley, Shirane, and Yang, as is the case with Ming-cheng Lo, *Doctors Within Borders: Professor, Ethnicity, and Modernity in Colonial Taiwan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁵⁴ It does not appear that local government archives receive much use in Taiwanese scholarship either. For instance, although a number of articles in four volumes of *高雄歷史與文化論集* make use of materials published by Township Offices (公所) and local governments—such as statistics and gazetteers—these do not appear to be from archives. Scholars with whom I consulted stated that other works of local history do not cite local government archives either. Although this is a limited sample-size, it indicates that these collections do not yet form an integral part of Taiwanese historical scholarship. Cai Caixiu for instance uses a number of township gazetteers (鄉志) produced by local township offices. See 蔡采秀, “高屏地區客家聚落的發展,” in 黃俊傑 ed., *高雄歷史與文化論集第四* (Gaoxiong: 陳中和翁慈善基金會, 1997), 213-249.

⁵⁵ Located at: <https://near.archives.gov.tw>.

⁵⁶ For instance, the application portal for Gaoxiong City is <https://aia.kcg.gov.tw/fileexplain-tw>.

⁵⁷ For instance, the Land Division of Gaoxiong City Government sent me to this website after I inquired via email: https://landp.kcg.gov.tw/form_detail.php?nid=390&catid=546.