

An Encounter with Taiwan in Transformation

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I am grateful for this opportunity to recognize the ground breaking research work of Academia Sinica on issues of justice both in Taiwan and more globally. It is a privilege to reflect back with you to pre-pandemic times and to what was a truly exceptional moment for the country and for myself. This was so for a number of reasons, personal to political.

My own awareness of the Academic Sinica's work began with my exchanges with the organizers of a lecture invitation; in conjunction together with the Asian Human Rights Court Simulation. Yet, at the time of the invitation, whatever I knew of Taiwan, and its vexed political history, was through my colleague renown New Haven School Professor of International Law Lung-Chu Chen who had been a longtime advocate of Taiwanese sovereignty and equal statehood.

This would change rapidly — first for personal reasons because that same summer 2019, my nephew Gideon Teitel who had an abiding interest in the region had accepted a fellowship as Huayu Enrichment Scholar and raved about the place and its people.

The other is that the invitation to visit the summer of 2019 would prove to come on the heels of the creation of the Transitional Justice Commission significant political events in the country, created the space for new

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opportunities for long delayed transitional justice response to periods of predecessor authoritarian and repressive rule.

Hence the visit would involve the full range of transitional justice-related activities from stimulating exchanges with extraordinary research scholars at the Academia Sinica, many of whom were doing probing work on normative questions concerning Taiwan's transitional justice often in comparative analysis with other historical and contemporary instances of political transformation, to productive discussions following my Maestro Lecture which was on a regional reframing of political transition and related developments in the conception of transitional justice. There was also in tandem the Asian Human Rights Court Simulation with an eye to change in the region and an articulated concern for human rights that in the last two years given regional developments have become all the more timely. Two other happenings made visit experience remarkable. One was a visit to Taiwan's transitional justice commission where I was able to hear in real time how the country was addressing terms of reckoning with its past, with an eye to its future. The other was a bookstore event at Linking Bookhouse, where my publisher in Taiwan for my first book *TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE*¹ was holding a readers-meet-author event with a book panel of scholars including Dr. Cheng-Yi Huang of the Institutum Iurisprudentiae, Academia Sinica. To my surprise, though convened on a hot summer Saturday night this book event attracted a standing room only audience-largely young college age.

The book event at Linking Bookhouse as well as the high caliber of research at the academia made me excited for Taiwan's future. I remember in particular an exchange in the Q&A discussion at the bookstore, echoing similar questions I'd gotten throughout the week, where a student asked me for advice about what to do. He asked: "What knowledge about the past do we need to find?" My answer was that it was not for me to say but that this inquiry was

¹ RUTI G. TEITEL, *TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE*, 2000.

political and contingent and would come from current civil society and would depend on its commitment to political transformation. In a follow up, the student then went on to elaborate: “It is the knowledge we need to understand how we got here and where we are going.”

References

Teitel, G. Ruti. 2000. *Transitional Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

