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Why Do We Have to Abolish the Province: an Assessment and Adjustment of Administrative Division in Taiwan (in Chinese)

by Liu Tao-yi

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The book focuses on one of the most controversial topics in Taiwan: the adjustment of the administrative divisions in Taiwan especially the abolishment of the province of Taiwan under the rule of Taiwan authority. The adjustment of the administrative divisions has significant implications on the division of political power and electoral results of political parties. Nevertheless, the author attempted to approach the problem in a scientific and rational way using the optimal allocation of resources as the basis for analysis and assessment.

The author pointed out the irregularity of the administrative divisions in Taiwan. The area under the rule of Taiwan authority was 36181 km², 98.32% of that area was under the administration of the Taiwan province. Thus Taiwan provincial government and Taiwan authority covered almost the same area and their functions were overlapping to a large extent. Nevertheless, there were two municipalities, Taipei and Kaohsiung, under the direct administration of Taiwan authority which enjoyed the same power as the Taiwan province but only had an area less than 1% of Taiwan. Based on a detailed analysis of population and area data of various settlements and fieldwork, the author proposed three basic scenarios of administrative divisions after abolishing the Taiwan province. The most desirable scenario was to divide Taiwan into 22 municipalities and 358 towns/townships.

The book provides a systematic analysis of the administrative divisions in Taiwan ranging from an overview of historical evolution of administrative divisions, conceptual and empirical analyses of rational administrative division for better resource allocation, to an analysis of the changing settlement systems and possible scenarios for the adjustment of administrative divisions in Taiwan.

The book consists of four parts each with 3-5 chapters. In part one, the author first identified the principles of administrative division. These principles are relatively complete and were illustrated by various cases in Taiwan, mainland China and foreign countries. Based on the statistical analysis of the administrative divisions in the world, the author proposed several empirical formulas for calculating the rational population size and the level of administrative divisions. These formulas were useful tools for evaluating and designing administrative divisions but they were influenced by author's subjective judgement.

The author also criticized the current system of four-level administrative divisions in Taiwan with one province and two municipalities at the second level. He compared the resource allocation under four different systems, i.e., the Taiwan system with three levels (Taiwan authority as the top level), the pseudo-China system with four levels (Taiwan

authority as the top level but also maintain a province), the China system with four levels (Taiwan become a normal province in China), the "one country, two system" with four levels (Taiwan as a special administrative region of China and only national defense and foreign affairs are handled by Beijing). The first two systems mean that Taiwan maintains its status quo but there is a major difference between the three-level and four-level system. The later two systems assume that Taiwan and mainland China are united and there will be a three-level system in Taiwan and the top level central government in Beijing. As a Taiwan based scholar, the author expressed little confidence in the "one country and two systems". He thought that "one country and two systems" would soon or later be replaced by the China system with four levels and no special provisions for Taiwan. He also was unable to see the benefit that Taiwan may derive from the booming economy in the mainland after the unification.

The second part of the book is a detailed account of the historical revolution of the administrative divisions in Taiwan since 1683 when Taiwan was ruled by the government of Qing dynasty. The author traced the origin of Taiwan province which was formally established in 1887. Taiwan was part of Fujian province before 1887. There has been adjustment in the administrative divisions since then but the current system with one province, two municipalities, five cities under the province and 16 counties was finalized in 1982.

The third part of the book focuses on the lower levels of administrative divisions among cities/counties and towns/townships. In Taiwan, the government budget accounted for 31% of GDP and its impact on living standards of residents was substantial. For this reason, the author attempted to assess whether the relative sizes and boundaries of administrative units were still reasonable and consistent with the social, economic and demographic changes especially since 1950. This involved a careful adjustment of boundary changes of administrative units for estimating the population changes in these units. Furthermore, after careful consideration of the situation of high population density in Taiwan and the experience in many foreign countries such as Japan, the author proposed a set of criteria for the designation of cities and towns. This is followed by a brief overview of 17 daily urban systems and five metropolitan areas as a basis for examining the current administrative divisions. The author argued that the upgrading of Taipei and Kaohsiung to be provincial-level municipalities and Hsinchu and Chiayi as two county-level cities were groundless. Empirical data were used to illustrate the problems in the existing administrative divisions in Taiwan.

In part four, the author proposed various scenarios for the adjustment of administrative divisions in Taiwan based on numerous experimental combinations of basic units. The three basic scenarios were the most desirable system of 22 cities/counties; the most size-balanced system of 33 cities/counties and geographically most perfect system of six administrative regions. These scenarios were derived with references to the conceptual and empirical analyses of previous chapters but subjective judgement was often used by the author.

Although the author touched upon political issues such as the unification of Taiwan with mainland China, the arrangement of political elections associated with administrative divisions, and the responsibility of the chief officers in major municipalities, his approach to the problem mainly based on the boundaries of physical and human geography and the distribution of population and settlements. The author

failed to provide a much balanced consideration of the political impact on the administrative divisions. He did not show much evidence of how the political economy and government administration were adversely affected by the current irregular administrative divisions in Taiwan.

Despite the above weakness, overall, the author provided an interesting and detailed analysis of administrative divisions in Taiwan. The book has 49 tables, 55 figures and maps. It is surely a useful reference book for scholars interested in the history, politics, settlements and administrative divisions in Taiwan.

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