

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Chinese, metric and British imperial units are all in common use in Taiwan. The government has indicated a movement towards a metrication program in areas where it is most directly responsible.

LANGUAGE

The official language of Taiwan is Mandarin Chinese, the language of education. However, the majority also speaks a Taiwan dialect similar to one of the dialects spoken in Fukien province of the PRC, as well as other dialects of Chinese. English is widely taught and spoken, especially by younger people, although destinations written in Chinese should always be carried when taking a taxi.

RELIGION

Buddhism and Taoism are the predominant religions in Taiwan. However, approximately 5 percent of the population are Protestants or Catholics and there is also a small minority of Muslims.

CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM

Since 1949, the Kuomintang (KMT) has administered Taiwan, claiming to be the legitimate government of China under the title "Republic of China". Approximately 4 million of the island's population of 20 million are from "mainland" families, who came to Taiwan in 1949. Through the KMT they continue to dominate the island's political life.

In 1986, a reform program was launched allowing the establishment of new political parties, lifting marshall law, searching for a new formula to elect representatives to parliament and reforming the party itself. In 1986, the presence of the largest of the opposition parties, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was officially recognized.

On July 14, 1987, martial law, which had governed the island for 38 years, was lifted. The law was replaced by a new National Security Law. Although the new law legitimizes opposition political parties for the first time, it prohibits political parties from challenging the Constitution of 1946, which claims sovereignty over all of China for the KMT. On February 3, 1988, a 12-member KMT Committee, approved the first officially proposed plan aimed at gradually retiring some 1,100 mainland-elected deputies who fill the central parliament's three chambers.

Since 1947 the Central Government has been organised under the Constitution of the Republic of China. It provides for a National Assembly, an office of the President and Vice President and five government branches known as the Executive, Legislative, Judicial, Examination and Control Branches (Yuan). The President is the Head of State and the highest ranking government official.

POPULATION DENSITY

Taiwan has a population density of approximately 579 people per square kilometre (over 1400 per square mile), which is among the highest population concentrations in the world. The density is highest in the agricultural land which lies along the west coast. Population growth remains less than 2 percent per year. Government encouragement of migration to the eastern coast has met with limited success.