

Taiwan Studies Book Promotion: A World Book Tour of Taiwan's Green Parties during the Pandemic

Dafydd Fell (SOAS Centre of Taiwan Studies)

My book *Taiwan's Green Parties: Alternative Politics in Taiwan* was published on March 16, 2021, over eight years after I started the research project in late 2012. Like all authors, I wanted to make sure the book is widely read and sells well. However, I faced a number of challenges as well as opportunities. A long-term problem faced by many academic writers is that so many of our books are initially only published in prohibitively expensive hardback. Multiple attempts to persuade my publisher that the book would be a bestseller that could justify publishing as paperback were not successful, though a more reasonably priced eBook was released together with the hardback. A further challenge was that the Covid Pandemic meant that in person book launch events, one of the most enjoyable parts of publishing and best ways of selling books, would not be possible.

When I first started studying about Taiwan books on the country in English were quite limited but nowadays in the golden age of Taiwan Studies there are so many books on Taiwan published each year. This means that authors need to be much more proactive in promoting their books, especially as academic publishers are usually unable to devote enough marketing resources beyond their traditional university library markets. A major mistake I made with my first book *Party Politics in Taiwan* (2005) was that I did not do any promotional activities, but since then I have always worked hard to promote both my own subsequent book publications, as well as those published in the Taiwan Book Series that I have edited since 2009.

Given how long it had taken me to complete this new book, I set out to take the way I marketed it to a new level. In this essay I wanted to recap and reflect on my experiences of doing a World Book Tour of *Taiwan's Green Parties* during the Pandemic.

One initial step in preparing the promotional tour was deciding what kinds of readers to target. The book itself was written in a way that I had hoped would allow it to appeal to multiple readerships, such as those interested in Taiwan's party politics and civil society, students more broadly interested in comparative studies of small parties and green parties, as well as people involved in the 25 years history of the Green Party Taiwan and green party

supporters worldwide. Naturally, I was aware that though the main potential buyers of the book in the first year would be libraries, I still hoped that the tour would allow the findings of the book to reach as diverse and wide audience as possible.

In the months leading up to the publication of the book two key tasks involved seeking out places to review the book, as well potential locations to do book talks. These both require being thick-skinned and patient. Getting books reviewed also requires the author to go through multiple hoops, such as first persuading/encouraging publications to review a book, sometimes finding a reviewer for the publication, arranging the publisher to send out a review copy and making sure the reviewer submits their review. I have probably reached out to about 25 or more potential publications to review the book and about ten responded positively. Four months after the book came out, three book reviews have been published, with the latest being a Chinese language book feature in the Hong Kong newspaper *Ming Pao*. Having two positive book reviews coming out almost simultaneously with the actual release of the book in the *Taipei Times* and *New Bloom Magazine* were the perfect launching pad for the start of the tour.

While in the past I have tended to do no more than two launch events for a new book, this time I embarked on a World Tour with 13 stops. I started off with an initial online book talk at my own university, SOAS University of London, on March 19, three days after the official publication date.

The next few weeks coincided with the Easter break so there would be no more university talks until late April. The only talk I gave was a brief five minute introduction at the book launch panel of the European Association of Taiwan Studies Conference at Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. However, it would be an important period preparing the ground for the main part of the tour. I could reflect on the initial online book talk and what I would change for subsequent talks. Additionally I continued to reach out to potential talk locations, as well as encouraging contacts to lobby their university librarians to order the eBook.

A further new initiative I trialled was creating a Facebook fan page for the book shortly after the official publication date. I had observed how colleagues Ming-yeh Rawnsley and Darryl Sterk had also created book fan pages for their Taiwan Studies publications. Often other similar book pages seem to quickly run out of steam, so I have tried to keep the page active with regular posts

every few days for the last four months. Posts include book talk news, book reviews, photos related to stories in the book and from fieldwork, or even announcing which libraries have got copies of the book! Despite the fact that the page has over 300 likes, I am not sure how useful it is for promotion in itself but it serves as a useful repository for myself to collect everything related to the book. However, my impression is that promotion of the same content on my own personal social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn seem to have generated more attention to the book.

To reach more diverse audiences I have tried to engage more with different media platforms for this book. On April 9 I appeared on Taiwan's English Language Radio Station ICRT's *This Week* show and was also able to discuss the book's research when interviewed as part of the University of Alberta's Taiwan Studies Programme's *Taiwan Expert Series*. I also enjoyed joining two very different podcasts focused on the book. Firstly, I was very impressed with the episode on Ghost Island Media's show *The Taiwan Take* that came out in early June. The production quality of the recording was excellent but what really made it stand out was the way the well informed show host Nate Maynard engaged with the topic of environmental politics in Taiwan. The second podcast was on SOAS Radio's *Research Forum* that came out on June 19 and was hosted by my PhD student Leon Kunz. In this podcast our discussion focussed more on the research process and methods that led to the book and potential lessons for research and early academic careers.

Readers may wonder whether I got bored doing the same book talk again and again. In reality each of the subsequent six academic talks was very different and rewarding. These talks featured quite distinct audiences, discussions and sets of questions. But one reason for the quality of discussion was the fact that the universities had got the eBook in their libraries well in advance of the talks. As an author there is nothing better than questions from readers who have already read your books! The talks at the University of Tübingen and University of Washington were for their Taiwan Studies programmes, so I could pitch them for an audience that already had a deep understanding of the state of Taiwan's political system. In contrast, the talks at the University of Central Lancashire, Notre Dame University and Ljubljana University in Slovenia were integrated into teaching courses and so often required giving their audiences more contextual background information.

Two of the book events that I especially enjoyed featured quite alternative formats. At Zurich University's Taiwan Studies Lecture Series it was a more interactive event in which the author of a book *Environmental Governance in Taiwan*, that was frequently cited in my book, Simona Grano, led the discussion on Green Parties in Taiwan and environmental politics in Taiwan. The final event of the world tour was held back at SOAS as part of the 2021 SOAS Taiwan Studies Summer School. On June 28 we held an event titled *Writing books about Green Parties*. This featured five authors speaking about their experiences of writing books on green parties in Taiwan, Japan, Germany and Canada. What made the discussion especially rewarding was that it was led by the former Convenor of the Global Greens, Keli Yen.

I am hoping that this event on *Writing books about Green Parties* will be the start of greater success in reaching international green party supporter readers. Another method with this goal in mind was getting a short essay on Taiwan's Green Diplomacy republished with *Green World*, the publication for the Green Party of England and Wales, as well as on the Global Greens website. A next step will be to do events specifically for green party members and supporters.

Four months since the publication of Taiwan's Green Parties I am glad that I have been so active in promoting the book. When it comes to reaching my target audiences, the results have been mixed. Although I have been able to share the results with much more diverse audiences than my earlier publications, I have struggled to reach some of those targets, especially those interested in comparative studies of small parties and those who are supporters of green parties worldwide. Getting books reviewed in academic journals can be frustratingly slow but also important for raising awareness of books beyond our own personal networks and especially for university libraries. I am thus hopeful that the first academic journal reviews will come out later this year.

Looking ahead I am hopeful that doing book events in Taiwan, as well as the planned Chinese version of the book, will also make it possible to share the research with readers that do not read English. I am now looking forward to the next stage of the book's promotion with the autumn tour for *Taiwan's Green Parties!* Although I expect most events to still be online, I am looking forward to the first in person book signing events once the paperback is out!

Bio: Dafydd Fell is Reader in Comparative Politics at the Department of Politics and International Studies, SOAS University of London. He is also the Director of the SOAS Centre of Taiwan Studies and was one of the founders of the European Association of Taiwan Studies.