

Focus topics

[Automotive](#) • [Trade](#) • [Human Rights](#) • [Energy and Climate](#)[Heads](#) • Last update: 19. June 2023, 0:16 Uhr

Shirley Lin – Taiwan's search for identity



Shirley Lin is a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute and Chair of the Center for Asia-Pacific Resilience and Innovation (CAPRI).

Taiwan's democracy is more fragile than it seems, warns Syaru Shirley Lin. This is also why she founded CAPRI, Taiwan's first international think tank with an Asia-Pacific perspective. Its goal is to develop and promote innovative ideas for governance in the Asia Pacific, including Taiwan's vibrant democracy.

Thanks to her education, Lin, who was born in Taiwan, is ideally prepared for this mission. Lin studied at Harvard University in the United States and taught at the Chinese University of Hong Kong – and also looks back on successful years on Wall Street. She received considerable attention in 2016 with her book "Taiwan's China Dilemma." In it, she describes the dangers of Taiwan's economic dependence on China. Today, seven years later, she says, "The discussion could not be more appropriate."

Innovation for democracy

Because China, which sees Taiwan as a breakaway province, is increasing pressure on the island through military maneuvers and cyberwarfare. Taiwan's China dilemma allows Beijing to exert indirect influence on Taiwan, Lin explains. And she warns that Taiwan's young democracy is not that resilient to such outside threats. This is evident, for example, in the increasing polarization in Taiwan. A small but vocal minority of Taiwanese call for closer relations with China – even at the expense of democracy, Lin fears.

To become more resilient, governments must provide answers. That means tackling high rents, inequality, and youth unemployment in Taiwan and across the Asia Pacific. Because when governance doesn't deliver "people want fast and simple answers," Lin explains. At CAPRI, Lin wants to connect Asia-Pacific countries to learn from each other. What keeps her optimistic is the innovative power of democracies. They can solve problems and anticipate problems of the future, she explains. "Because in democracies, you have the freedom to think and to create."

Taiwan's democratic identity

A freedom that did not yet exist during Lin's childhood in Taiwan: Taiwan was still a military dictatorship when she went to school: "For me democratization was something throughout my childhood we longed for," she recalls. In the meantime, the ideas of freedom rights and democracy have shaped the identity of Taiwanese people – and Lin is proud of this achievement.

She observes that more and more people on the island identify themselves as Taiwanese and less as Chinese. This also means that there is less support for closer economic ties with China. China and Taiwan are still very close culturally, she says, for example when it comes to family or traditions. But when it gets political, Taiwan is different, Lin explains. "Taiwan is very progressive, especially the younger generation believes in democratic governance."

It is precisely these contradictions that fascinate Lin and motivated her to join academia after nine years at Goldman Sachs. What drives her now is the question: "How can people with completely different ideas about policy and innovation can get along?" As a lecturer and banker in Hong Kong, she experienced how China has violently imposed its system on other people. Like the people in Taiwan, Hong Kongers have separated themselves from a Chinese identity. "But China couldn't tolerate that" she warns. *Jonathan Lehrer*

Geopolitics

Geopolitics

Trade

Related

Daniel Zhang – change at Alibaba's top

Zheng Shanjie: from local to national chief planner in 20 years

Yang and Steffen – podcaster duo 'suesssauer'

Wu Ming-yi – fighting environmental destruction with eco-fiction