

Taiwan already enjoys independence

Written by Jerome Keating

Thursday, 17 August 2017 04:25

The headline of Tony Lee's (李登輝) Taipei Times article is grossly misleading and an insult to Taiwan ("Taiwan not ready for independence," Aug. 6, page 6). It comes from referenced remarks that Lee drew from an interview with long-time Taiwan friend Stephen Yates.

However, such referencing does not legitimize the remarks, and in this case, the analogy used does not fit. Perhaps Lee stretched Yates' remarks to make a point.

Examine first the analogy and application. In the remarks, Yates is said to maintain that unlike the US founders, who were willing to defend their declared independence with "their lives, their assets and their sacred honor," Taiwanese are not so willing.

Such is not the case; instead it is the analogy that limps.

When the US founding fathers made their declaration of independence, they had been under the rule of England since the founding of the colonies. The colonies' major and continued complaint was that they were being taxed, but had no representation in the British parliament. Their cry, "no taxation without representation" presented a clear and simple reason why they, as men with rights and dignity, should risk all and declare national independence.

However, Taiwan's situation is totally different. Taiwan already is an independent, mid-sized nation; it issues its own taxes and is not beholden in any way to China. Taiwan does not need to declare independence.

The more appropriate question that needs to be addressed is: What will it take for other countries and nations to openly admit to this reality? Pursue this thought.

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As far as national sovereignty is concerned, Taiwan fits the four criteria of the Montevideo Convention. It has a permanent population; it has a defined territory; it has a government, which in this case is democratically elected by all eligible voters; and it has the capacity to enter relations with other nations and states.

Some might point to the fact that Taiwan is not a member of the UN. How then can it enter relations with other nations and states?

That situation is fraught with irony and history since Taiwan as the Republic of China (ROC) was a founding member of the UN. To use the vernacular, it is not only ironic, but also “complicated.”

The irony is all the more telling as Taiwan has a population that is greater than nearly 75 percent of all the nations in the UN.

In GDP, whether nominal or purchasing power parity, Taiwan outranks nearly 90 percent of all nations in the UN.

Going further, while only 19 countries officially recognize Taiwan as a nation, the ROC passport is given visa-free or visa-on-arrival acceptance in 134 countries. This calculates into Taiwan surpassing 80 percent of nations in the world in possessing travel freedom, and yet Taiwan is not an official member of the UN. Why?

One searches for an appropriate analogy or metaphor to explain Taiwan’s complex situation. It is a hegemonic China that continually tries to keep Taiwan out of world organizations and to restrict the travel and freedom of its citizens.

The burden of explanation instead is on the other nations of the world who want to have their cake and eat it; or, to put it another way, they want their trade and interactions with China as well as Taiwan, and so they resort to agree upon deceptions.

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One analogy used by some is to refer to China as the aging wife — the da taitai (太太) — who tries to insist that her husband does not recognize the more attractive and approachable Taiwan, seen as a xiao taitai (小太太) or mistress. These other nations, playing the role of the husband, pretend to go along with this agreement, but secretly find their own ways and means to always meet Taiwan.

A different analogy again casts China as an aging dowager or aunt who insists that she will cut other nations from her will — here seen as access to trade and cheap manufacturing — if they favor Taiwan.

Again, the other nations, like suitors or opportunistic relatives, formally agree, but play both ends against the middle and find a way around it to enjoy the company of Taiwan. China may try to shame those nations; it may try to bully them or buy them. In the end, it has to close one eye to the relationship.

We have pointed out the above reality of how Taiwanese rank better than citizens of 80 percent of the nations of the world in enjoying free travel access. China has no say in this. The nations that grant Taiwanese free entry also often keep trade offices in Taiwan to do the business of their “officially” absent embassies.

The US now is not only spending millions of dollars to upgrade its unofficial embassy, the American Institute in Taiwan, but it maintains the Taiwan Relations Act and not the ROC Relations Act, by which it can supply arms to Taiwan.

There is no question that the true enemy of Taiwan is China, because China is the only nation that threatens Taiwan’s democracy; and Taiwan’s democracy is the very thing that makes the nation an independent country. This is Taiwan’s sacred honor, and it is what Taiwanese will fight for.

The question, therefore, is not why Taiwanese are unwilling to trade their lives, assets and sacred honor for independence; they have already done so during the White Terror period when they battled the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) for more than 40 years to gain their democratic independence.

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Instead, this issue revolves around the technical and official use of the word independence.

As the saying goes, if it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, it is a duck. If Taiwan operates as an independent nation and talks like one, it is an independent nation.

Taiwanese are wise in not wanting to go to war with a larger enemy for the simple use of the word independence.

At the end of the interview, Yates also expressed that which is essential as proof of Taiwan's independence: Taiwanese are masters of their fate in as much as the citizens of any independent nation are masters of their fate. That is independence.

Those who insist that Taiwan should declare official independence are more like individuals in a schoolyard who are calling for a fight between two others. Why should Taiwanese fight over the use of a word when they have independence?

Lee's analogy and questions have been misapplied. If Taiwanese are asked whether they are ready for independence their answer is simple: "We are independent. However, we would like to ask the question: When are other nations going to accept this reality?"

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2017/08/17](#)