

How can East Asia achieve democracy?

Written by Tim Maddog
Sunday, 08 November 2009 08:13

Remembering the events that brought about the fall of the Berlin Wall

On November 9, 2009, Germans will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Twenty years ago on October 7, 1989, the 40th anniversary of the [German Democratic Republic](#) (AKA East Germany), the communist leadership wanted adulation, but the people offered defiance. The East Germans were supposed to be celebrating the "accomplishments" of socialism, but instead they staged three days of protests in Plauen, Dresden, and Leipzig. Read [the Beginning of the end of East Germany](#), and take note of how the police responded to the demonstrators in Dresden and in Leipzig.

There is a lesson to be learned here for East Asians: At a crucial moment, police discipline -- namely their submission to authority -- should not compel an officer to act against his own citizens (i.e. to kill or harm unarmed civilians against his conscience merely because he is following orders), and of course this must be accompanied by wise decisions by the authorities (usually the top leadership of a nation). Demonstrators against a nation's leadership can be non-violent concerned citizens whose request is simple, freedom. It is how the police react to unarmed crowds that determines the course of such events. Confrontation and violence are the inevitable result when crowds are mishandled and provoked by the police. Unnecessary casualties follow unwise decisions; therefore, people in authority are always responsible for the outcomes.

Back to 1989 Berlin...

Several weeks of civil unrest -- actually starting as early as the summer of 1989 (known as [the Peaceful revolution](#)) -- took place in several cities. This finally led the East German government to announce on November 9, 1989 that all its citizens could visit West Germany and West Berlin. Shortly thereafter, crowds of East Germans climbed onto and crossed the wall, joined by West Germans on the other side in an atmosphere of celebration. The [fall of the Berlin Wall](#) did not come easily -- it only happened due to East Germans' defiance against their rulers.

Twenty years later, in East Asia, the picture looks grim. Democracy is under the threat of communism. Taiwan is on the verge of being converted from a young democracy to communism. Are people in East Asia more tolerant towards repressive rulers? How can this be happening?

The Berlin Wall stood for 28 years; that was long enough. But in Taiwan, from 1945 to 2009 -- 64 long years -- Taiwanese have not had a formally recognized nation to call their own after the General Order No.1 which initially brought the Chinese Nationalist Party government and their Republic of China (KMT-ROC) to the island to act as an administrator for the Allied Forces. This was then complicated by the defeat of the KMT by the Chinese Communists in 1949 which

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extended the KMT-ROC's temporary stay rather permanent as a Chinese government-in-exile on Taiwan waiting to retake China. The Taiwanese lived under a dictatorship -- led by the KMT's Chiang Kai-shek and his son -- for nearly five decades after WWII.

Although Taiwan did democratize to some extent, it did not normalize. Taiwan had a short period of some attempts to normalize their country when the [DPP](#) came into power (8 years from 2000 to 2008), but it ended with no success -- only rebukes from western leaders who believe that a Taiwanese referendum on UN membership was unnecessary troublemaking. When western politicians see economic opportunities with China, the rights of Taiwanese to build a nation of their own is not important anymore.

However, since the KMT regained power in 2008, this brief period of further strengthening of democracy is gradually being replaced by the seemingly democratic election of a president (Ma Ying-jeou [馬英九],) who won on empty promises about "improving the economy" and "no unification" during his term; but his hidden agenda -- which should be apparent to nearly everyone by now -- was to bring Taiwan under Chinese Communist control through the illusion of cross-strait détente.

Similarly, the period from 1949 to 2009 has been six long decades for Chinese dissidents who were living either abroad or in "[black jails](#)" while their rulers celebrated and marched on [a chemically-induced sunny October 1](#) this year with a show of force.

Chinese citizens take advantage of every opportunity to stay abroad once they have completed their education because they admire the freedom that their own country cannot offer.

Minorities within Chinese-controlled territories receive worse treatment from China's Han Chinese citizens. People belonging to minority groups

[are being continuously executed by the Chinese authorities without fair trials](#)

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This explains why most of the post-World War II Chinese immigrants to Taiwan (the so-called "mainlanders" -- those who don't identify Taiwan as their "motherland" yet have no qualms about exploiting it), who have been able to visit China since long ago (contrary to the situation in Berlin-Wall-era Germany), are somewhat hesitant to embrace their original motherland. These mainlanders obviously have doubts, because no one would like to go back to authoritarian rule after they have enjoyed a period of freedom fought and gained by their Taiwanese counterparts, those who have always identify themselves as Taiwanese, against Chiang Kai-shek's dictatorship. But the young democracy in Taiwan may not stay for long, it is like a bubble: it may stay and shine for a little while, then it will burst up in the air.

I have a dream, a sweet dream in which a democratic China lives side by side with Taiwan, Tibet, and [East Turkestan](#), all free and democratic. [My note: Initially taken from [here](#), I added the word "sweet."]

But, I also have a recurring nightmare -- a nightmare in which a "greater China" under the existing one-party rule continues to interfere with all kinds of cultural activities globally (book fairs, film screenings, sports competitions, etc.) and causes all businesses to self-censor to

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meet the standards approved by the Chinese leadership; all computer makers pre-install firewalls demanded by the Chinese leaders; and all the Taiwanese aboriginal and non-aboriginal languages and traditions become extinct while the cultures of Tibet and East Turkestan are placed onto shelves visible only in museums.

While [George H.W. Bush, Helmut Kohl, and Mikhael Gorbachev are going to meet in Berlin to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall](#) symbolizing the beginning of democracy for Eastern Europe, I wonder what will happen in East Asia?

Are Taiwanese all too pessimistic and simply waiting for the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement ([ECFA](#)) to be signed between the KMT and the CCP and be implemented upon them? Isn't the [European Chamber of Commerce in Taiwan](#) very selfish and short-sighted to [support the signing of the ECFA](#) , even if it comes at the expense of Taiwan's sovereignty? Are Taiwanese waiting for a "Gandhi" to lead Taiwan's version of civil disobedience? It is certainly encouraging to see that [there will be organized demonstrations in the coming days](#) (Lîm Gî-hông speaks out in Taiwanese). David Reid has [more info in English on the demo](#) , and here's [a bilingual post on DEMO! Taiwan Democracy Movement](#) .

I don't see why [the money spent on renovation and upgrading the Confucius temple](#) should not have been allocated for job creation. It doesn't make sense that Taiwanese have to remit taxes to the central government while the KMT continues to [sell-off the national assets which belonged to the people](#) in the first place.

[Why should the Taipei City government get a portion of its debt to the National Bureau of Health Insurance written-off](#)

while the outstanding amount is absorbed by the central government? Unfair rules simply need to be challenged one by one until they are fully abolished in Taiwan!

Civil disobedience does not always need to be carried out on the streets; it can also come in the form of economic measures such as defying the remittance of taxes. If the KMT-dominated Legislative Yuan could purposely delay the passing of the Executive Yuan's annual budget back when the DPP was in power, why can't Taiwanese withhold paying taxes to the central government until the KMT returns its stolen assets to the people? And should local governments collect taxes since there have been problems of unfair distribution among different regions of the nation (similar to the two-level tax system of a federal and a state or provincial tax)? These are just some suggestions that should be explored further.

Any successful civil disobedience movement would require massive participation because the KMT government has a finite number of prosecutors and jails. They won't be able to throw

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everyone in jail.

The fall of the Berlin Wall showed us the power of the people, when almost the whole nation came out to demonstrate against their communist rulers -- they were simply unstoppable!

Taiwan needs a wise leader amid the changing status quo. A recent opinion poll on Ma Ying-jeou's performance revealed by a pan-blue media outlet gave him a 58.6% disapproval rating. Imagine if the poll had been done by a neutral organization. The result would have looked even worse for Ma.

Ma was [a true supporter of dictatorship camouflaged beneath Harvard-educated fake democratic clothing](#) ! He is but a leader who looks back and admires how Chiang Kai-shek did it and is totally unfit for facing future challenges. If a citizen takes no action to oppose Ma's policies, one can only live with the consequences of Ma's misguidance.

While most western politicians continue to appease the Chinese communist officials and applaud Ma's cross-strait policy, let's remind them that the new focus for our world of the future -- as human beings -- is not which country will dominate world politics with its military or economic power, but rather how humans can survive by overcoming the immediate problems of climate change, energy shortage, and hunger.

Hence, a country's success is measured not by how it can [dominate outer space](#) or by the number of nuclear warheads it has, but rather by how its citizens would like to live in their own country, free of hunger and feeling content economically and politically. The people of Taiwan are among the most peace-loving and innovative citizens of the world, so give the Taiwanese the dignity they deserve.

Regardless of who *claims* sovereignty over Taiwan, whether it's the ROC (the current administrator) or the PRC (the ones who have never administered the island yet who make false claims and threaten Taiwan with the use of force), all those who have stood in the way should now step back and allow the Taiwanese to hold a national referendum on the status of Taiwan -- a long-overdue expression of democracy. This small island nation may just turn out to be the lighthouse which will transform the remaining communist countries in East and Southeast Asia into ones which respect their citizens' freedom.

For further reference:

- * [Documentary film about the history of the construction of the Berlin Wall](#)
- * [Ma's attempt to market the ECFA on the annual Europe Day Dinner by the ECCT](#)

(This post was edited by Tim Maddog.)

Source: [Taiwan Matters!](#)