

China wants to drag Taiwan down

Written by Jerome Keating
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There are two reasons Taiwan is a democracy and China is not. The reasons, although simple, need detailed explanations.

The first reason is that Taiwan is Taiwan and China is China; to understand this people must delve into Taiwan's history and its underpinnings of identity as opposed to those of China's.

The second reason is that the majority of Chinese unfortunately remain "frogs in a well." Why are they frogs in a well and capable only of seeing the sky above their heads? That, too, demands a detailed explanation.

Begin with the question of what makes a democracy. Language and ethnicity have nothing to do with democracy. The statement that Taiwan is the first "Chinese democracy" is misleading and inconsequential. It relies too much on misguided and exaggerated interpretations of what defines something as "Chinese" and has nothing to do with the will of the public that makes up a democracy.

Democracy depends on the intensity of the public's desire for self-rule. Taiwan is a democracy, because the public have had the persistent will to overthrow the one-party state foisted on them by past leaders of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT).

In contrast, Chinese have never had the persistent will to cast off their many "one-party states" and choose democracy. Why? Blinded or misled by cultural paradigms, any wishes that they might have for democracy would always come up short when the people are called upon to sacrifice some of those paradigms. Chinese might know how to overthrow a dynasty and replace it with another, but they do not know enough nor do they have a strong enough will to carry through and replace it with democracy.

Taiwanese democracy, of course, did not come easily. Historically, the desire for self-rule existed in the Japanese era and continued to grow after the end of World War II. From that point on, protests and the public's demands are well documented through Peng Ming-min's (蔣經國) "Declaration for Formosan Self-Salvation," the 1979 Kaohsiung Human Rights protests, the political trials and suppression up until Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國) finally approved a

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multi-party system in 1987 shortly before he died.

Taiwan's history and experience are what freed its public from being frogs in someone else's well. They had experienced colonial rule by a variety of powers: The Dutch, the Spanish, Ming loyalists, the Qing Dynasty and the Japanese. When the KMT followed, they quickly realized the reality of KMT rule and expressed it in their own parlance: "Pigs have replaced dogs."

It takes little imagination to guess what Taiwanese think when the frogs in the well on the other side of the Taiwan Strait croak hollow claims of the joys of returning to a mythical "motherland." The aim of those frogs is to take away Taiwan's democracy.

In China, some pundits claim that in 1911 — when Taiwan was under Japanese rule — democracy came to fruition with Sun Yat-sen's (孫逸仙) wish for "a government of the people, by the people and for the people."

It did not. The Qing Dynasty fell, but China's democracy never developed. Despotism and civil war followed and more than a century later, China still does not have a democracy. Instead a one-party state oligarchy replaced the Qing Dynasty. The bloodline of inherited power now flows through the veins of the "princelings" of the Central Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party.

In China, as the French proverb says, "the more things change, the more they stay the same." China, with all its numbers and academics, has never experienced revisionist history or been able to create it. The only time revision can come is when a new dynastic claimant overthrows the existing dynasty. In short, the "mandate of heaven" follows success; success does not follow the mandate of heaven.

Each new dynasty then rewrites history to justify its reign. More than a century has passed since 1911 and all that replaced the Qing Dynasty was a series of attempts at one-party dynasties ending with the current "benevolent" politburo justifying its rule.

Ironically, never in the history of dynastic takeovers has there been a gap of a century where

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rulers struggled to explain or justify why a democracy does not exist. All that the current leaders can claim is a fabricated link to Sun.

In this context, Hong Kong provides a salient example of the problem's symptoms. China's one-party state, appropriately dubbed the "Bling Dynasty" by Erwan Rambourg in his 2014 book by the same name, cannot even keep a promise of free elections after 20 years. Fearful of free press and revisionist ideas, the "bling rulers" are placing bookstore owners in jail.

A freely elected mayor of Hong Kong poses no threat to a nation the size of China. However, the concepts of free elections and a free press do. Unfortunately, most of the frogs in the well cannot fathom this.

The rulers of China claim the borders of the Qing Empire as defining "the motherland." However, ask the frogs to explain why Mongolia is free from the sky over their well and Tibet and Xinjiang are not, and you will witness some fancy footwork. Why more than a century after Sun does China not have a free press? Why does China not have the transparency and the rule of law that democracy demands to have a government of the people, by the people and for the people? Overthrowing the Qing Dynasty was more about restoring the belief in Han rule than about achieving democracy.

To grasp the foundation of the paradigms that eventually dominate and are manipulated by China's rulers, people must first look beneath the cultural surface.

First, the public must be convinced that they can only find true identity and function when ruled by a "benevolent Confucian hierarchy"; the fact that those values were developed to suit a past agrarian society thousands of years ago and not the concepts of democratic choice, must be ignored.

Second, one must co-opt any attempts at revisionist history. The Mongol sky that spread in four Khanates from today's Korea to Hungary? It was really a Chinese sky called Yuan as it spread over "China's well." The Manchu sky that extended from Manchuria to Tibet and Xinjiang? That sky was Chinese as well, even though a century later, Chinese still feel the shame of the Manchu queue.

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Taiwan is not bound by such fantasies. Respecting Confucius, Taiwanese are still able to think for themselves, they are content with their island and its environs. Their identity is in their struggle for democratic freedom. Those in the well on the other side of the Taiwan Strait cannot understand this; they can only identify with size and the presumed myth of dynastic benevolence.

Many Chinese have died in the failed social experiments of the Cultural Revolution and the Great Famine directed by Mao Zedong (毛泽东). Four decades later, Chinese are still unable to revise that history. Hundreds died in Tiananmen Square and thousands rot in jail, but China is no closer to democracy than it was in 1911. No mandate of heaven can save those who can only see the sky above their well. People suggest that Chinese look to India for ideas on how to fashion a democracy out of diversity, but that would mean a second “Journey to the East” and that would be too embarrassing.

Dictatorships can get a lot of things done quickly, but they can never give people freedom of choice and they soon breed their own inherent privileged corruption. Taiwanese wanted a democracy badly enough; they struggled for it and eventually achieved it.

Instead of finding their own freedom, Chinese still remain locked in the well of past needs to find identity in size; they cling to “traditions” that Mao debunked as the “four olds” as he got rid of competition; after that he turned around and used the “olds” to prop up his reign. As a result, all that Chinese can now think of is how to drag Taiwan into their well.

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