

Taiwan's destiny in people's hands

Written by Wayne Pajunen

Tuesday, 04 October 2016 09:15

Previous generations of Taiwanese never dared share their desires for freedom and democracy.

They weathered an existence in fear for almost four decades of Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) martial law.

Not a soul outside an inner circle was safe from Chiang Kai-shek's (蔣經國) thought police, while for many freedom was just a dream shrouded in a living nightmare.

Fertilized by the graves of Taiwanese from Taipei to Los Angeles, George Orwell's Animal Farm had taken root under the father-and-son-Chiang's Republic of China (ROC). The KMT newcomers dictated a national name, flag and Constitution they imported from Nanjing, China, after fleeing their civil war in 1949.

The repercussions of the KMT's early years of terror rule engendered a slavish population for decades.

However, with the introduction of democracy and the advent of the Internet in the mid 1990s the sun began to shine on democratic freedom and discussions of autonomy sprouted hopes to be harvested. This era also effectively moved the citizenry beyond concern for the untoward state of civil war between, and buttressed by, the KMT and Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Then in 2000 after the KMT lost the presidency for the first time it contrived — admittedly — the now infamous “1992 consensus.” This collusion between the KMT and CCP misled the susceptible international community to suppress Taiwan's emerging independence voice.

In the tacit agreement the ROC and the PRC agreed to individual definitions and different interpretations of “one China,” indicatively contrary to the true definition of a consensus. However the CCP never publicly referred to these two clauses and neither has the KMT — outside of Taiwan.

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This “1992 conspiracy” turned a supposed agreement, with wiggle room for Taiwan to express its independent authority, into an effective “one China to which Taiwan belongs” international muzzle on Taiwan’s flourishing democratic voice.

Twenty years after democracy, a vibrant new dawn was cultivated by the nation’s tenacious youth, aka the Sunflower movement. They precipitated momentous change and on Jan. 16 elected the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to the presidency and handed it a first-time legislative majority, burdening themselves with great expectations.

Taiwanese had for the first time wrested political control of their land and domestic emancipation was at hand.

The Sunflower movement debuted in the spring of 2014, occupying the legislature in protest of the KMT’s unyielding path toward ratification of the proposed cross-strait service trade agreement. Community support for the student-led seizure was unprecedented in reaction to the KMT’s use of its legislative majority to halt review and negotiation of the pact. Many across all demographics and affiliations believed the deal to be poison fruit of “black box” — backroom — negotiations. The perceived selling out of economic independence triggered unprecedented student protests validating the Sunflower movement’s push to halt pending ratification.

Since the student’s epochal engagement in 2014, previous generations have transplanted their long-buried ambitions into the Sunflower movement’s garden of promise.

Only four months into Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) presidency, eager Taiwanese are growing frustrated over seemingly apparent inaction on the diplomatic front. They find it hard to swallow that for now and the foreseeable future, Taiwan shall continue to be confined by the CCP and international suppression.

This perception is rightful, as the new government must be preoccupied with its obligation to appease its protector, the US, to uphold an election campaign pledge to maintain “status quo” relations with China. At the same time the DPP administration must grapple with uncooperative KMT-influenced unions and state-owned enterprises; migrate economic trade

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“south, north and westbound” from overdependence on China; lay groundwork for long-term diplomatic breakthroughs, transitional justice legislation and implementation; and other pressing domestic issues. The list goes on.

President Tsai's ability to satiate the Sunflower movement's restless thirst is most likely in the distant future, at best.

Taiwanese would do well to revisit former US president John F. Kennedy's famous inaugural address, in which he challenged his fellow democratic citizens.

Kennedy's iconic speech addressing Americans could just as well be a sermon to Taiwanese. Some poignant excerpts are:

“We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans.”

“Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”

“And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country.”

Taiwan's past and present is one uniquely manipulated by nations kowtowing to CCP bluster isolating and repressing democratic Taiwan, as previously detailed in this space (“CCP's Tom Sawyer ploy nears end,” July 29, page 8).

Beijing has coerced Taiwan's isolation from the international community since the early 1970s when the UN, without reference to Taiwan, expelled “forthwith the representatives of Chiang

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Kai-shek from the place which they unlawfully occupy at the United Nations and in all the organizations related to it.”

Thus began Taiwan's unfortunate diplomatic segregation.

Successive ROC-on-Taiwan governments, from both sides of the aisle, have since actively lobbied democratic nations to aid Taiwan's security and resistance to CCP regional hegemony. While this has kept China's People's Liberation Army at bay, the required give-and-take has preserved Taiwan's diplomatic limbo.

And this is where “ask what you can do for your country” becomes germane.

The people of Taiwan could take agency over their future to win formal recognition from democratic nations. Their longings are in the hands of any people and means that facilitate awareness and empathy among citizens of democratic nations. The injustice Taiwanese suffer is at the hands of democratic leaders complying with CCP territorial expansionism.

People could reach out with traditional media campaigns funded by the public and private sectors, new technology platforms. They might resolve to publish editorials and letters, create viral publicity “stunts” performed in virtual and real space along with other creative means of acquainting, connecting, friending and educating to onboard democratic brethren around the world with Taiwan's just aspirations.

By favorably connecting in this manner, the fates of presidents and prime ministers would lie in the hands of a Taiwan-conscious and sympathetic citizenry. This could compel a paradigm change of heart from hollow platitudes for Taiwan's “vibrant democracy” to democratic leaders walking their democracy talk.

True democratic elections worldwide might then hear promises of: “It's time for us to bring Taiwan in from the cold” or “We must welcome Taiwan to its rightful place among democratic nations of equals.”

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After all it would be an ideal democratic election pledge to garner electoral sympathy among concerned voters; a just cause without budgetary cost.

Achieving membership — or at least observer status — in international organizations is of utmost importance to all nations wishing to advance their welfare.

Democratic governments have the right, the opportunity and even a moral responsibility to unite and further Taiwan's diplomatic cause.

Jointly coordinated there would be little that Beijing could or would do to tangibly counteract. Any retaliatory measures Beijing might contemplate to back up their rhetoric could be precariously self-defeating to essential economic trade, international relations and — vitally — the CCP's grip on China.

The crux is that democratic nations are not incentivized to change course.

It is ostensibly more convenient to obscenely leave 24 million Taiwanese blowin' in the diplomatic winds than to upset the applecart of promised riches from the rising "middle kingdom." As long as electorates are politically uninformed, Taiwan will be hung out to dry.

Bending to Beijing's demands to isolate Taiwan, though, is not necessary to buy "made in China," nor is it to sell natural resources indispensable to China's development.

To reverse this, concerned Taiwanese could coalesce to take their destiny in their own hands.

Should they succeed in sharing their once-latent desires on the international stage Taiwanese might mobilize the support required to oblige democratic leaders to redress their international plight.

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Oppressed Taiwanese may then flee Beijing's birdcage to realize diplomatic freedom, economic license and equality among democratic nations fulfilling their shared dream of a national name, flag and constitution "of the people, by the people, for the people."

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