

The world that we live in is far different from that which experienced the Cold War mentality and ideological struggles at the end of World War II. At that time, the Allied powers had defeated the Axis alliance, and a new struggle appeared between communism and democracy.

Ironically, however, even as that ideological struggle emerged, it was itself being subtly questioned in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. One of the basic points that Orwell was making and which is often lost in the allegory is that at the end of the story, the other farm animals found it difficult to distinguish between their previous capitalist rulers and the pigs that replaced them.

This insight is what makes Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* all the more intriguing and worth re-examining from at least two perspectives. First is how capitalism, which contains many destructive seeds of humanity, can span ideology, and second, the highly important and slowly realized attention that this places on the burgeoning democracy of Taiwan.

Piketty's main thesis treats the growing problem of wealth and income inequality, which he found in Europe and the US since the 18th century, and how it threatens democracy.

What Piketty does not delve into are those countries allegedly fashioned by Marxist communism, where the same wealth gaps and disparity hold true as well. Age-old desires for power and control remain the sought-after ends and unchecked capitalism has quickly supported this by creating new oligarchies in Russia and China.

These two nations, along with the US, are the top three countries with the largest number of billionaires. The families and princelings of oligarchs have replaced the families of the czars and emperors in Russia and China.

On the US side, capitalism appears to be returning to the past days of the robber barons. In short, oligarchies are becoming the new bloodlines of inherited power and the new despotism; this is a point that fits Orwell's allegory.

Unfortunately, oligarchies and privilege are the same the world over. A different book by business journalist Duff McDonald, *The Firm: The Story of McKinsey and its Secret Influence on American Business*, shows how this firm has become the “godfather of CEO megapay” in a leading democracy.

This contributed to the new phrase: “We are the 99 percent.”

The truth of this slogan is increasingly becoming real. One can argue with Piketty over the means of determining wage gaps, but one does not need to be a rocket scientist to see the disparity in a country where its Congress and state electors argue over a minimum wage of US\$15 for average citizens while CEO pay has skyrocketed to 500 times that of ordinary workers. This is the new “Animal Farm.”

Who can tame the new pigs? Transparency and a free press are essential to this and often lacking even in the US where the growing consciousness of the meaning and implications of who the “99 percent” are is taking hold.

Transparency, transparency, transparency. For US citizens, those who put their faith in the blustering and boasting promises of US President Donald Trump, history states that they are asking to be disillusioned. There is a weasel quality about a man who now even seeks to hide who visits him in the White House and who refuses to honor his promise to show his tax returns.

This is a man who wishes to hide how his wealth was built and how he profits from the system even as he lives surrounded by the trappings of privilege. This is not a man who will be honest with the people, despite his boasts.

All this leads to the second point and the important focus, as well as burden, that it places on Taiwanese democracy.

Capital and Taiwanese democracy

Written by Jerome Keating
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Taiwan is a mid-sized nation. It is a democracy with a robust economy. This makes it fertile ground for examination of the role of democracy as it struggles to find ways to cure the disparity of wealth and ills of transitional justice left over from the one-party state days of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT).

True, a major threat to Taiwan's democracy comes from China, the one-party state on the other side of the Taiwan Strait. However, our focus here is on the strength of Taiwan's democracy and why the relationship of that to wealth is worthy of the world's attention and study.

Taiwan's highly manageable and observable size, as well as its short democratic history, makes its research and study all the more manageable.

Other recognizable advantages of study are the following: The privileged are more easily recognized. Those who benefited from Taiwan's past one-party state and those who suffered under it are still available for interviews.

Those who have benefited from the guaranteed income of a pension system and privileged retirement package from the one-party state days are also evident, as well as how they are at odds with Taiwan's present day economics.

Taiwan has a declining birthrate; it achieved this by choice of its middle class and not by the draconian methods of a one-child policy that harmed Mao Zedong's (毛泽东) China.

In Taiwan one can see that voters do have a choice and that they can make a difference. It is a representative democracy. Lawmakers do not benefit yet from gerrymandering of districts that is so prevalent in the US.

Taiwan has a national healthcare system that surpasses many nations of the world and covers 97 percent of its citizens. Socialism can work in a democracy. Insurance companies are not king here.

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The US pales in comparison with this. After seven years of complaining about the Affordable Care Act, the Republican-dominated Congress has provided nothing substantial, better or equitable to replace it.

Instead it has thrown together a patchwork Band-Aid replacement that its lawmakers do not wish for themselves, but are more than willing to foist on the public without proper examination.

These and many other issues place a burden on the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government, which has risen from a minority party and now controls the presidency and the legislature. Can it answer the call for resolving these issues in its democracy?

In facing this challenge, the DPP is reminded of the phrase: If you cannot stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. It must look to solve these matters, as well as the tax disparities that Piketty and McDonald's books point out.

Their message is that those who profit most by the system should help pay most for the system instead of hiding their wealth in offshore accounts and tax dodges.

Taiwanese voters experience clearer choices; they can more easily see that those who profit most too often seek to control the system. This was evident in the change in voting patterns when the Sunflower movement and voters in subsequent elections refused to accept the black box imposition of the past KMT legislature and president over unexamined trade with China.

As they find an answer to the new threat from the oligarchies of capitalism that Orwell foretold and that Piketty and McDonald exposed, Taiwanese will partake in the creation of a new paradigm.

The global village paradigm of the 1960s spawned by capitalism and free trade is no longer adequate. The world has increasingly shrunk to become a much smaller place in needs, effect and communication. It is becoming a global home in which all live and in which all must be protected. That is the new paradigm and arena that is being fashioned; it is one that even impacts immigration.

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New battle lines are being drawn in this new Hegelian paradigm shift and struggle. Taiwan's democracy is there in the thick of it. It is a crucial struggle not only for Taiwan, but also for the rest of the world.

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