

July 15's significance for Taiwanese

Written by Jerome Keating
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Call it coincidence or call it pure chance, but for the symbolic-minded, it is remarkably fated that the celebrations of US Independence Day (July 4), French Bastille Day (July 14) and Taiwan's lifting of martial law (July 15) all fall within a two-week period.

However, the real issue here is not the calendar month nor proximity of those days, but what they represent for their respective nations, and this is what Taiwanese need to reflect on concerning July 15 and the inner strength that brought about the lifting of martial law.

This is important because of the distracting ways that pundits frequently discuss and classify the Taiwan-China problem. Too often, they frame it strictly from China's perspective on how China wishes that this problem should be resolved.

There is what can be called the "bogus cries" of suffered patience. This perspective stresses how, despite the generosity of China's paramount leaders, Beijing's patience continues to wear thin with the unappreciative and recalcitrant Taiwan.

Mao Zedong (毛泽东) supposedly wanted to settle the "Taiwan problem." Of course, for him, the Taiwan problem was more that of ending once and for all the continuing leadership claims of Chiang Kai-shek (蒋介石), who managed to escape to Taiwan after Mao defeated him in the Chinese Civil War.

Mao outlived Chiang, but unfortunately he got sidetracked in Korea and ruined any chances he might have had to resolve the "Taiwan matter."

Former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) also would have liked to see the problem settled in his lifetime. That did not happen. Deng first had to clear up his own relationship with Mao. Once that was done he had to clean up the economic mess Mao had left China in.

In the end, Deng could only witness the US move its embassy from Taipei to Beijing. He, like subsequent others, could not see the problem from Taiwan's perspective and so he died not

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seeing it resolved.

After Deng, other Chinese leaders have come and gone without seeing the Taiwan problem resolved. The same holds true with Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平). His patience might be wearing thin, but he will die before the Taiwan problem is resolved. Why?

What is missed in all this punditry is the cause and real meaning of what July 15 represents vis-a-vis martial law and Taiwan.

However, first look at another major refrain that pundits like to point to as the means of how the Taiwan-China problem will be resolved. That message focuses on the undeniable growing military strength of China in contrast to that of Taiwan.

While pundits love to talk about China's growing military strength, it will not resolve the Taiwan-China problem, for two reasons.

First, it ignores the many other increasing developments throughout Asia and the world, and second, it continues to ignore the meaning of July 15 and the lifting of martial law.

What are some other developments in Asia?

The US remains in Asia. Technically and ironically, it has been "undecided" about Taiwan as it plays its post-World War II strategic ambiguity card. However, the US has challenged China's expansion in the South China Sea and is committed to arming Taiwan "defensively."

Further, the US is building a new, better and more expensive representative office, namely an upgraded American Institute in Taiwan complex. It has never done such a thing for any other "undecided" nation.

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Regional conflicts also continue to occur between China and India, and Japan's growing military demonstrates that it does not want to be encircled by China.

In addition, there are numerous groups within China whose patience is wearing thin with the rising privileged oligarchy there. Hong Kong is remembering 20 years of broken promises, and the Uighurs and Tibetans have not been won over by any charm offensive.

China's bonus period of its alleged double-digit economic growth has ended and the patience of half a billion unsatisfied poor people continues to wear thin. They now have better communications, and it will not be long before they all feel the pinch and imbalance of a growing elderly population that China's one-child policy has created.

However, for argument's sake, let us forgo all of the above and pretend they are not happening. Instead, imagine that in the remaining vacuum, a militarily strong China can and would attack and capture Taiwan. Such an invasion would not be as easy as projected, but having captured Taiwan, what next? China would of necessity have to place it under martial law.

Taiwan's sense of the sacred is in its democracy and therefore its resistance and hatred would not end with a Chinese victory and the imposition of martial law. It would increase.

In post-war 1945, many Taiwanese were persuaded to welcome the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). Many were brainwashed into even regarding Chiang as a rescuing hero. The 228 Massacre and the subsequent martial law and White Terror era changed that.

Now, 30 years after martial law was lifted in 1987, many still hate the KMT.

Taiwanese today are much more savvy in world affairs and democracy, and they are much better armed than Taiwanese of 1945. If Taiwanese can continue to hate the KMT even 30 years after martial law was lifted, how much more will they hate any newcoming Chinese who would take away their hard-won democracy?

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When colonial KMT rule replaced Japanese colonial rule, Taiwanese used the phrase “pigs have replaced dogs.” One wonders what choice words and what animals epithets would be used to describe any potential colonial rulers from China and the depths of hatred that these would be received with.

Taiwanese know what martial law is and how they overthrew it to win democracy. A military victory would therefore only be the beginning of China's troubles. With Taiwan's limited space, China would not be able to utilize any form of settler colonialism as it has in Tibet and Xinjiang.

When the KMT came to Taiwan, it had about 2 million people to Taiwan's 6 million. With a population of 23 million, how many Chinese would be needed to enforce martial law even if the rest of the world sat on its hands and watched?

So the pundits can write away, trolling from China's perspective on how Beijing's patience is growing thin and how China's military strength is increasing.

However, if they want to be realistic, it is time to look at the other side of the Taiwan Strait and understand why Taiwanese celebrate July 15.

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