

As a democratic and diverse society, it is only natural that there would be many different interpretations in Taiwan of the term “Taiwanese values.” It is difficult to define the term, but it is easy to criticize others’ discourse on what it means, and so the debate is often reduced to people talking past each other.

Since Taiwan is not a normal nation, issues that would be taken for granted in such nations continue to be debated here.

Those who are opposed to Taiwanese values often use democracy and diversity to bring in a valuative relativism to the point that Taiwan’s core values become fuzzy and obscure, which leaves them with the much-reviled Taiwanese independence as an imaginary enemy.

It is not surprising that President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) are unable to instantly clarify their views of Taiwanese values.

An exploration of Taiwanese values could start by putting aside the internal political spectrum to avoid emotional attachments and instead describe what it is not.

By using such a negative description, we get an outline that can help us to provide a positive description of Taiwanese values. The external reference system thus created will be even more helpful if it stands in sharp contrast to Taiwan.

The best choice, then, would be to start with China. Chinese values are very clear, and in addition, China is trying hard to integrate Taiwan into these values.

However, Chinese and Taiwanese values repel each other like opposite magnetic poles. China’s one-party authoritarian regime manipulates civil society, and it uses an iron fist in dealing with human rights activists fighting for democracy and freedom.

The Chinese regime rejects universal values and insists on leftist politics and rightist economics as it tries to rewrite international norms with the use of “sharp power.” The imprisonment of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波) and Taiwanese human rights advocate Lee Ming-che (李慶祥) and the boycott against South Korea’s Lotte Group, among others, are just the beginning of the disaster caused by Chinese values.

In addition, China uses its state capitalism and state-run enterprises to dictate domestic development, while it uses its factories and market as weapons in its international battle for business.

To consolidate its hold on power, Beijing is pursuing great power status, devoting itself to putting its economy first and creating a monopoly for the rich and powerful, because once economic growth slows down, economic problems will turn into a political and social crisis.

This is why advanced construction has failed to make China a modern country.

China behaves as a pre-modern state, domestically and internationally. Domestically, it treats its people as subjects rather than citizens or the masters of the nation, which is the case in modern states. Externally, it rejects the modern international order and hopes to realize its imaginary borders relying on its hard and even sharp power.

In addition, soft powers, such as education, culture, science and technology, religious beliefs and innovation, continue to suffer from a high degree of political intervention. These areas are used to serve the party-state ideology, and Beijing’s Confucius Institutes are now reaching into the international domain.

Despite the rapid circulation of information in the digital era, China isolates itself and lacks the confidence it needs to develop peacefully. Consequently, nationalism is the last political commodity left to the state, and there is a distinct lack of a civilizational vision in its “Chinese dream.”

This outline of China serves as a mirror to Taiwan, showing that the fragmentary remainders of

the party state have not yet been rooted out.

However, the mainstream desire in Taiwan is for the nation to be upgraded to a mature democracy. Sovereignty and autonomy and freedom of opinion make up the psychological structure of this shared community.

A civilization has long existed in Taiwan, which over time has embraced immigrants and been ruled by different regimes at different times. Maritime and continental, Eastern and Western, foreign and local: All these elements interact with one another in Taiwan.

After Taiwanese became their own masters, Taiwan's current look and energy have formed as a result of criticism and heritage. When foreigners visit Taiwan, they will not have a problem sensing that this is Taiwan.

Taiwanese values are still being formed as Taiwan is developing into a normalized nation. The top-down brainwashing by the former party state's ideology has been replaced by democracy in action, and every member of this shared community now has the right to speak freely.

This, of course, means that some wild ideas and actions, such as sabotage and collusion with foreign enemies, that erode this shared community should be restrained in a timely manner.

This also makes it clear that there is still room for improvement in Taiwan's rule of law. Democracy, freedom and human rights are basically the form of these values, and these values must now be given content to form concrete Taiwanese values.

If these values are used to protect statements and actions intended to overturn Taiwanese identity, then they would be the opposite of Taiwanese values.

At the moment, the other side of the Taiwan Strait is strengthening its one-party authoritarian, arbitrary rule and imposing Chinese values on Hong Kong before the eyes of the world.

Taiwanese values mean ‘not PRC’s’

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Those who are impatient with the efficiency of democracy and bureaucracy are often attracted to the arbitrary rule of an “enlightened” leader, while forgetting that the unpredictability of arbitrary rule results in high national risk, which is demonstrated by the ongoing power struggle the top Chinese leadership.

Taiwan is currently pushing for transitional justice, and a party state is no longer in its future.

Those who despise Taiwanese values are fundamental believers in Chinese values who hope to someday include Taiwan in China’s single-party authoritarian rule, so they can join the nearly 1.4 billion Chinese people in following the Chinese Communist Party’s Chinese dream.

A tragedy occurred 70 years ago, in 1949, when progressive Taiwan was confronted by regressive China, and we must not repeat the same mistake in the 21st century.

Translated by Eddy Chang

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