

Seeing Taiwan as a global 'tugboat'

Written by Jerome Keating
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As space and time continue to be more rapidly traversed, our perception and paradigmatic vision of the world shrinks in kind. This pressures citizens of all nations to continually rethink the issues that their imagined communities face in the new world order being established and what leadership they want to bring about.

Change is inevitable, but when it is the result of a major global paradigm shift and changing perception, it forces new questions: How does an individual nation relate to the newly developing paradigm? And, as economic forces often drive paradigm shifts, can these nations find a positive, proactive course in such development?

An evident past example of such change happened in the Age of Discovery. Continents were being brought together as nations found ways to sail far beyond their borders in pursuing the desired economies of global trade.

Certain nations, such as Spain and Portugal, were more financially and scientifically suited to lead the way in navigation; some were not ready, some followed, and some resisted it. Regardless, to not participate meant decline for any European nation.

In the end, the pursuit of desired economies triumphed and with that pursuit came the inevitable change. In its aftermath, one unfortunate byproduct was that the leading nations not only pursued desired economies, but also coveted new geographies. This, in turn, brought on worldwide colonialism and the slave trade.

The Age of Discovery is now a past memory. And after a couple of world wars, a new paradigm developed among the victors of the world.

Intercontinental trade had shrunk to trade within a global village, and as nations adjusted to this new paradigm, colonialism did not fit.

However, the world's problems did not end. While the colonialism and slavery of the Age of

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Discovery did not fit, the newly developed nations of the global village still continued to play zero-sum economic games.

In this post-World War II world, the need for a UN became apparent, but it did not resolve the competition and small-scale wars continued.

In addition, a new economic exploitation developed where it brought a demand for cheap labor as a left-handed means of sharing. Wealthier nations used this as leverage with those less developed.

Now, a new developing paradigmatic reality sits on the horizon: that of the global home. And it is this paradigm shift that will challenge all nations to rethink their sense of national identity and imagined community.

Boundaries must still exist, but those of a global home will be different and less exploitative than those of a global village. With this comes a re-examination of the imagined community of the human race.

Historically, most would agree that all members of the human race came out of Africa, but that agreement is often one of lip service when facing the shift to a global-home paradigm. From the tribalistic standpoint of each nation, accepting that we are all one family in the same home is challenging.

The questions return: How does each individual nation's sense of imagined community relate to this new paradigm? In this new economic milieu, can nations be proactive in its development?

Leadership continues to be a problem. Ironically, the successful ability to adapt in this fast-changing world is best observed in mid-sized nations, of which Taiwan is one, and not in the larger ones.

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Two reasons appear as to why the larger nations will not lead. First there is the problem of their size.

Large nations are like ocean liners, which cannot turn on a dime. Instead, they must swing on a wide arc, or if in tight quarters, they can only turn with the help of tugboats. One hesitates to suggest that mid-sized nations are suited to this, but that might be one of their roles.

Similarly, the size of these large nations also creates problems in the makeup of their imagined community and how they have difficulty developing suitable means of leadership succession.

One cannot deny that there is something problematic in any nation that has a large pool of potential talent and yet cannot in the span of eight years develop a continuing program that fosters new, good leadership.

Russia and China face this issue and, it appears, so does the US. For Russia and China, the past glory of their revolutions for the proletariat appears to be betrayed as they flounder in search of new leadership.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, after years of reigning like a czar, appears to be proposing that he is the only viable candidate for the coming decade. And in China, all are aware that President Xi Jinping (习近平) has now removed barriers for him to rule indefinitely.

The US fares little better. The campaign of President Donald Trump followed a prescribed path and yet his erratic leadership makes one question the outdated nature of the Electoral College process by which a candidate who lost by nearly 3 million votes was still elected.

Each of the leaders of these three nations lacks a conscious vision of the ongoing development of the global home paradigm and its responsibilities. They remain stuck on a cyclical return to their nation's past glory and continue to see the world in terms of the past zero-sum games of the village.

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Each of these nations must therefore undergo its own examination as to why it has trouble finding adequate leaders. In what ways have their institutions failed so that after eight years this is all they can come up with?

On the other hand, mid-sized nations have a better sense of sharing and looking after all their citizens.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel addressed the problem by saying that Europe must no longer look to the US for leadership.

Indirectly the mid-sized nations must play the role of tugboat in turning the larger ones back on course.

Where is Taiwan in this? It is inherent on Taiwanese, both citizens and leaders, to constantly see their nation as a mid-sized nation and a definite player in world development economically and technologically.

Armed with transparency, a free press and a continued effort toward reform, Taiwan's citizens can more easily separate the wheat from the chaff.

Taiwan must consider what Merkel said. As a mid-sized nation of importance, it remains a player, regardless of how much or little it is recognized. While not a member of the UN, it still outshines three-quarters of that organization's members. Its leadership must be its own.

Signs of hope also prevail: Trump has signed the Taiwan Travel Act, by which all of its leaders, regardless of rank, can visit Taiwan. Japan also wishes Taiwan to be included in discussions with India, the US, Australia and other interested nations to address China's hegemonic behavior in the South China Sea.

Having been an outsider, Taiwan will have little problem with the new paradigm of a global

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home. Instead, Taiwanese can recognize that with their democracy and economic strength, they are beholden to none. They might even take a tugboat role in setting larger nations in the right direction.

Jerome Keating is a writer based in Taipei.

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