

How different are Taiwan and China? Two recent incidents involving the heads of state from both sides of the Taiwan Strait illustrate the striking contrast between democratic Taiwan and authoritarian China.

Devotion (御魂), a horror video game developed by Taiwanese company Red Candle Games, was initially well-received by Chinese gamers following its debut on Tuesday last week. However, it has in recent days come under attack by Chinese gamers, who said it contained an image that mocks Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平).

The image deemed as “insulting the national leader” was a Taoist spell that bears the Chinese characters “Xi Jinping, Winnie the Pooh” (习近平，维尼熊) and sounds like a phrase meaning “Your mother is a moron.” Aside from prompting a boycott among Chinese gamers, who called it a “Taiwanese independence game,” the allegation also led the game’s Chinese publisher, Indievent, to announce on Saturday that it was ceasing cooperation with Red Candle Games.

Earlier, in Taiwan, a controversy erupted over an English-language exam designed by a teacher at National Chiayi Senior High School asking students to answer a question about a “President Tsai-englishit” doing “silly” things. While the incident has stirred up public debate over whether it was appropriate, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has said that she does not mind, with Presidential Office spokesman Sidney Lin (林錫山) adding that the school and the teacher have nothing to worry about.

The reactions from people in Taiwan and China show their distinctive differences.

What if the scenarios were reversed, with Tsai being mocked in a video game and Xi being called “shit” in a high-school English exam? Based on official statements and reactions in the past, one can imagine what the reaction would be.

Vice Premier Chen Chi-mai (陳其邁) on Saturday voiced his support for the Taiwanese video game and championed “creative freedom.” In the same way, Tsai is likely to laud the Taiwanese firm for being creative and would probably take the opportunity to help promote Taiwanese video games.

Criticism comes with democracy

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Tuesday, 26 February 2019 00:16

As for China, in 2016 Kwon Pyong, a Korean Chinese who studied in the US, was arrested by Chinese authorities and later charged with “inciting subversion” for wearing a T-shirt with inscriptions allegedly insulting the national leader, including the word “Xitler.” In the same way, the teacher would undoubtedly have faced serious retaliation from the Chinese party-state apparatus.

These examples are not meant to compare Tsai and Xi as individuals, but to highlight the differences in the cultural and political environments that Taiwanese and Chinese live in and their reactions to these issues.

A nation that is under the Chinese Communist Party’s rule is authoritarian by nature, does not appreciate humor, and shows no respect for freedom of expression and creation, let alone any voice that questions or pokes fun at the Chinese leadership.

Taiwan, on the other hand, has for the past three decades grown into a democracy. Not only do Taiwanese respect freedom of expression and creation, they also embrace differences and have a higher tolerance for criticism, including that aimed at national leaders.

Although heated debates and controversies may arise from time to time, they are part and parcel of a democracy in which people can engage in a healthy discussion of issues that are of critical importance to the nation.

As Taiwanese gradually emerge from the shadow of the White Terror era and the nation as a whole develops into a mature democracy, people in China may hopefully soon enjoy the same air of freedom, with a civic capacity that can enjoy lighthearted humor.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2019/02/26](#)