

New constitution must drop 'China'

Written by Huang Jei-hsuan
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Taiwan's sovereignty has become an issue of global importance courtesy of Beijing for its impatience toward Hong Kong's autonomy and its dubious role in the birth and spread of COVID-19.

The novel coronavirus has engulfed the world and experts have deemed it the costliest pandemic in the past 100 years, in terms of loss of human life and economic damage. Its toll on Taiwan has been relatively minor so far, with seven deaths and a slightly muted economy that never entered a recession like in many other nations.

This is in spite of Taiwan being a WHO outcast for at least four years running. The Beijing-dominated organization justified its decision to block Taiwan on the ground that it is not a sovereign state.

However, imagine if Taiwan had been internationally recognized and thus a fully participating WHO member that could have more effectively shared its early warning public health expertise.

It is an understatement to say that sentiment in the West is generally in support of Taiwan. However, when people started to advocate "a nuclear Taiwan," it was often seen as a sign that anxiety over the nation's safety has reached a feverish pitch in some quarters. There were reasons for that.

In February last year, Hong Kong authorities introduced extradition amendments that touched off a nearly year-long row that culminated in the Chinese National People's Congress decision in May to introduce national security legislation for the territory. The legislation is expected to render Hong Kong's autonomy moot.

Taiwan is thrust to the forefront, guarding the world's liberal order against an assault from China's authoritarian hegemony, and Taiwan's sovereignty has become the focus of international attention.

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More significantly, Beijing's move to impose national security legislation on Hong Kong effectively marked its abandonment of the so-called "one country, two systems" framework, leaving Taiwanese with little choice, saying "be a part of China or else." This reduces the number of viable options for Taiwan to just one, a challenge Taiwanese swiftly answered.

Following on the heels of Beijing's fateful action, a grassroots movement to recall a Chinese-leaning Kaohsiung mayor attracted an unprecedented 41 percent of eligible voters to come out in favor of removal — the threshold was 25 percent.

The implication was far greater than initially believed, because it might have just pointed the way toward Taiwan independence.

For decades, Washington and the rest of the West have believed that issues surrounding Taiwan were remnants of the Chinese Civil War, a strait jacket Beijing furnished to constrain governments and opinion influencers in the West from arguing against China's justifications for invading Taiwan.

Yet, the solution to the impasse could very well lie in plain sight: Taiwan's full democratization.

Claims of sovereignty officially started in 1996 when Taiwanese first voted to directly elect a president. Over the period of nearly a quarter century since, Taiwan's democracy never ceased to deepen.

The part that stayed out of touch and refused to evolve is the archaic Constitution, which is the single obstacle that stands between Taiwan and the full realization of its democratic potential.

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) tried to coin a name of "Republic of China Taiwan" and proclaimed the nation factually independent.

Other than soothing people's yearning for independence, her attempt did little to deter China's

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aggression, because unlike true independence where an appropriate name such as "The Republic of Taiwan" would be applied, what she suggested retained too much of "China" to render an invasion completely baseless.

Instead, she has exposed the limit of what the government can do. The government must deal with near-term security first.

On the other hand, as long as there is any thread of "China" attached to the Taiwanese identity, Beijing's aggression toward Taiwan would never cease, because of its tortured rationale of "it is our sacred obligations to recover all lost territories."

It is easy to argue that Beijing's fixation on Taiwan, if not checked now, would become a curse on both nations for generations to come. It also boils down to Taiwan choosing between short-term pain and long-term suffering.

Since Beijing's recent actions do not leave any room for procrastination, much less wishful thinking, the time is ripe to launch a grassroots movement to replace the Constitution with a new Taiwanese constitution — free of any reference to China.

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