

Taiwan's Authoritarian-to-Democratic Political and Economic Transition

Posted on July 10, 2018

Taiwan's Political Economy and the Legacy of Authoritarian Rule

Taiwan, formerly known as the Republic of China, is one of the States in China. Taiwan has a relatively large population and is one of the largest economies despite not being a member of the United Nations. One of the significant changes that Taiwan faced was changing its political system from an economic and authoritarian regime to a middle-income and democratic society.

Of course, these structural changes were unnatural and had various consequences for Taiwan as a nation. Some of the results affected Taiwan's economic, political, and social conditions. In this paper, we shall, therefore, analyze both the non-economic and economic factors that resulted from Taiwan's changing political and economic structure.

Geopolitical Vulnerability and Economic Dependence on China

It is well known that a small nation that is surrounded by strong and large countries is subject to irresistible market forces and constant military threats.[1]As a nation, Taiwan faces a dilemma because its most essential economic partner happens to be an actual economic and political threat. An important fact to note is that the economic prosperity of Taiwan wholly depends on its economic interdependence with China, the second-largest economy in the world. On the other hand, China is attempting to undermine the independence of Taiwan for it to attain unification. Thus, this implies that China seeks to benefit economically from its interactions with Taiwan and sees its communications as a way of promoting unification. [2]Due to this, China has invested millions of money in its military, therefore deploying advanced soldiers and other artillery which are aimed at Taiwan. Thus, it is a clear indicator that China is trying to use excess military force, so that it may be able to prevent Taiwan from declaring it a sovereign nation. Another interesting fact is that China as a state has never in any way renounced the use of force to promote unification.

Taiwan's commercial ties with China create opportunities and challenges for Taiwan, which are relatively different from those presented by any other nation. Since China is uniquely dangerous and extremely attractive at the same time, the existence of a dilemma is self-evident. This is because the direct economic ties between Taiwan and China will have quite some benefits. Still, at the same time,

it will increase the level of economic interdependence on the state that wants to incorporate Taiwan, possibly by the use of force. Hence, Taiwan had no choice but to respond inconsistently to these conflicting pressures. Taiwan reduced its barriers to trade and the obstacles to investing in Taiwan directly. Therefore, if Taiwan wishes to continue benefiting from a glowing global economy, it must maintain economic interdependence with China. In this case, Taiwan has few alternatives if it wants outbound investments and trade flows to move away from China to evade political and economic risks. As a final point, the economic balance of power between China and Taiwan is in China's favor.

Shifting our attention to political factors, two major political issues have been most evident in Taiwan since the 80s. These problems include the demand for equity, greater participation, and fairness in Taiwan's political system.[3]The second issue is the lack of accord concerning national unity. Both of these two problems are related. In the past years, those individuals believed that Taiwan should be led as an independent state by elected officials from the residents of Taiwan. This is because the residents of Taiwan were demanding opportunities for political participation from those who were in power and who were against rule through the use of an authoritarian system.

Democratic Reform and the Demand for Political Participation

One of the primary reasons why people from Taiwan demanded great participation in the political process was because they were oppressed, their lives were repressed, and the authoritarian system was, in one way or another, ruthless. The competition between the opposition and the government was the central question of political power. Thus, whether one associates him or her with the opposition or the state, the main issue is the matter of identity. Despite the fact that there have been contending outlooks of national identity, this has been the central character of political life in Taiwan. China still believes that despite the political separation of Taiwan, the state remains a part of China in terms of independence and territory.

According to history, Taiwan has been a portion of China long before anyone claimed it. Despite the fact that Taiwan surrendered to Japan after China was defeated in the war in 1895, it was later reverted to China in the year 1945 when Japan was overpowered in the Second World War. Research has proved that the main cause of the current separation between Taiwan and China is as a result of the war between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Communists, which was triggered in 1940.

Similarly, most Chinese people tend to believe that the attempted intervention from the United States military brought about the Korean War in the year 1950. This war was seen as the critical factor that hindered China from liberating Taiwan, and that was the beginning of all the problems between China and Taiwan. During that era, the corrupt KMT and the authoritarian government had run away to Taiwan, and this was after it was defeated in the communist war. Regardless of the situation, the government of China believes strongly that the best way to control, contain, and resolve the Taiwan problem is through negotiation, dialogue, and consultation[4]. However, China has declared several

that it is willing and ready to fight a war to defend its territorial integrity. This will only happen if Taiwan tries to move towards independence by itself through; self-declaration of autonomy or through intervention by other external bodies (international intervention). China does not want war; it desires peace since it wants to unify itself with Taiwan which is their primary desire.

American Policy, De Facto Independence, and Cross-Strait Stability

On the other hand, the United States argues that Taiwan as a State has attained de facto independence. Their opinion on this matter is that Taiwan should not push China to the edge by seeking legal independence. This is because if Taiwan pushes for legal independence, that act might trigger a war in the Chinese mainland. Correspondingly, since China has grown in power and is opposed to the independence of Taiwan, the United States believes that even if Taiwan gains independence, the international community will not recognize Taiwan formally.

In conclusion, the main reason why the people of Taiwan are seeking independence is because they have suffered for quite a long span of time under the oppression and governance of the KMT presidents. As a result, the Taiwanese citizens no longer trust the government of China. The existence of political reforms created a platform for activists to promote Taiwan's independence and fan anti-Chinese sentiments. Due to the physical separation that exists between China and Taiwan, the people of Taiwan were able to create a new political identity, and they began identifying Taiwan as an independent State rather than the Republic of China. The political pressure on the government of China on matters related to Taiwan's independence is growing tremendously. If any wrong move is made by Taiwan, then China shall retaliate, and this will lead to a deadly war between Taiwan and China[5].

Finally, based on our arguments on economic factors, Taiwan must realize that its economic performance depends on China. Taiwan happens to break away from China, it would suffer from an economic breakdown, thus causing the economy of Taiwan to collapse[6]. For Taiwan to grow more, it must ensure that it maintains the financial ties between it and China. This is because the firm financial ties with China create more special opportunities than those presented by other nations. Political leaders of Taiwan should consider the option of talks and negotiations with China, so that they may come to a common agreement on how to resolve the issues between Taiwan and China.

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