

Aiming for Real Peace: The Republic of China's Efforts in Building a Democracy Since WWII

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Warm Greetings from Taiwan, the Republic of China!

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to participate in this conference and have the opportunity to share with you some perspectives about our country's road to a constitutional democracy.

As you are all aware, China in the 19th and 20th centuries was marked with many civil wars and wars against foreign invading forces; and China's defeats and humiliations prompted its people to stage a national revolution against the imperial government. One of the important goals of that revolution led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen at the beginning of the 20th century was to build a united and democratic China so that she would be able to withstand foreign invasions while also maintaining a real peace for its people and for the entire region.

Although the national revolution succeeded in 1912 and the first republic in Asia, the Republic of China, was established, as a result of years of internal divisions and external conflicts, a modern day Constitution Draft was promulgated only 25 years later in 1936. Unfortunately, Japan started a war against China in the following year, 1937, so the process of formally enacting and implementing a democratic constitution was delayed until after the end of World War II.

On the day of Japan's surrender on August 15th, 1945, the Chairman of the National Government of the Republic of China, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, sent a broadcast to the people of China and the world. In it, he quoted Christian values, and emphasized that now that

peace had finally arrived after an 8-year bitter war, Chinese people must remember that the war criminals were only the Japanese warlords, not the Japanese people. He exhorted the Chinese people to bear no grudges against the Japanese people and instead return good for evil. Subsequently, the Chinese National Government used its precious aid from the U.S. to ship more than 2 million Japanese military personnel and civilians from Mainland China and Taiwan back to Japan without demanding any indemnity. The main purpose for Chiang Kai-shek and his government was to form a long term and real peace between the Chinese and Japanese peoples; and as a result, we all witnessed that, in the following decades, many Japanese indeed felt indebted to the Republic of China and its people and maintained friendly relations. In this connection, I am pleased to find that in the book we received yesterday, with the kind compliments of President Baba, entitled "Okinawa 1944-1945" and published by Soka Gakkai Okinawa Youth Division, the authors concluded that "the essence of the Battle of Okinawa was the uncontrollable evil of militarism" and that "we should never forget the fiendish nature of authorities". Those statements also echoed the spirit of Chiang Kai-shek's broadcast message to the world at the end of the war.

In China, right after the war had finished and the National Government had regained control of most of the areas formerly occupied by the Japanese forces, it resumed the efforts to draft a constitution aiming to build China into a real democracy. In 1946, the Constitution of the ROC was finally adopted by the country's National Assembly, which was a body of representatives elected by Chinese citizens in the areas under government administration, totaling over 2000 of them, including 18 representatives from the newly recovered island of Taiwan, and 81 from the former Manchuria, as well as 24 from Tibet and 25 from Mongolia. Taiwan had been ceded to Japan 50 years prior by the imperial Chinese Government while the former Manchuria had been occupied by Japan by force since 14 years ago and by now had returned to the Republic of China. Despite the fact that the Chinese Communist Party did not participate in the process, this democratic constitution was passed by the National Assembly in 1946 and went into effect in 1947. It had been drafted in accordance with the teachings of the country's founding father, Dr. Sun Yat-sen.

Basically, the political foundation of the Constitution was centered on the "Three Principles of the People," which calls for the establishment of a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. While a government of the people invokes the idea of civic nationalism standing up to imperialism, a government by the people seeks to create a parliamentary democracy and a separation of powers in order to protect human rights. A government for the people means that the government, to a certain extent, must provide services that are essential to its citizens' well-being. In addition to the establishment of the executive, legislative and judicial branches in the government, the Constitution also created separate branches of examination and control, according to traditional Chinese practice.

Although the process of constitutionalization and democratization of the ROC was further

suspended due to civil war between the National Government and the Chinese Communist forces, it was restarted after the government was relocated to Taiwan in 1949; the Constitution was finally implemented in Taiwan. The ROC Government implemented local elections for county magistrates and county legislators in the early 1950s in spite of its recent defeat by the communists in the mainland and the safeguarding of Taiwan was the first priority at the time. From the 1970s to the 90s, members of parliament who had taken on their positions decades prior were gradually replaced by newly elected representatives in Taiwan. In the meantime, education about democracy started taking root in Taiwan society. In 1996, the ROC even held its first direct presidential election.

Democratization is indeed a long journey. In the process, many have shed blood, sweat and tears, and even sacrificed their lives in the pursuit of its ideals. Fortunately, the political system of the ROC has gradually grown into a more mature democracy. Freedom, human rights, as well as the rule of law have also become the core values of Taiwan's people over time. Democracy is not just regarded as a political ideology in Taiwan. The Taiwanese people believe that democratization is necessary to enhance the country's strategic status, its state institutions, as well as the well-being of its people. Democracy has made our civil society what it is today. It is a civil society in which the spirit of openness and freedom has become the soil that nurtures creativity.

The ROC's democratic experience constitutes a crucial social experiment, as it is the first and the only democracy ever successfully developed and practiced in an ethnic Chinese society. Today there are over 200 legally registered political parties in Taiwan. A direct presidential election, relatively fair parliamentary elections, as well as elections at metropolitan and county levels are essential elements of our political system, and we have already witnessed three handovers of power between parties at the central government level. Moreover, active civil society also plays a key role in the policy-making process. Through the media, internet, and public demonstrations, our people engage in dynamic and diverse expressions of opinion on public affairs. They do so in an environment of free speech that is protected by the Constitution. So much so that in the Freedom Rankings published by US-based Freedom House, Taiwan has always been listed as "free" with high scores (higher than the U.S. in the latest scoring). On the other hand, as our people seek out opportunities to take part in society and contribute to it, freedom of expression has become an important part of what enables us to feel genuine concern for one another. This has become our precious asset.

Our experience in journeying down the road towards full democracy demonstrates that a democratic political system and way of life can really be developed in a society based on traditional Chinese or Asian values. In fact, the Constitution of the ROC also reflects the influence of traditional Chinese culture and Confucianism, such as the teachings of "policy being people-oriented" and "people being superior." Confucianism even emphasizes that "the will of the people" directly represents "the will of Heaven." The people's will is the ultimate source of

legitimacy for political power and regimes. While some people might mistakenly argue that Confucianism confines individual freedom and therefore contradicts the modern spirit of democracy, I wish to stress that it is actually compatible with and even supportive of the current trend of democracy in the world.

A free and democratic Republic of China has also earned respect in the international community. Nowadays a total of 165 countries and territories accord visa-free or landing visa or electronic visa treatment to ROC passport holders, and the ROC passport is ranked as one of the most useful in the world.

Our constitutional democracy also provides us with a foundation to form policies toward the Chinese Mainland and to preserve peace in the region. In 2008, when the KMT government under President Ma took office, exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits began to flourish. President Ma emphasized adherence to the ROC Constitution in crafting our cross Taiwan Strait policy:

As stated before, the ROC Constitution took effect in 1947, two years before the PRC was established in Beijing, so our constitution is indeed a one-China constitution. That means we uphold a one-China stance, that is the ROC. And the Constitution's additional articles amended in Taiwan also state clearly that they were created to meet the objective of national unification in the future. This position has been tacitly accepted by the mainland Chinese government as the foundation of the "1992 consensus of one China, respective interpretations." On the basis of this tacit agreement, the exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait increased dramatically and constructively during 2008 and 2016 when KMT was in power. The two sides of the Straits signed 23 agreements of cooperation, and began more than 800 flights a week carrying passengers and cargo across the Straits. Millions of mainland tourists came to visit Taiwan, while more than 1 million Taiwanese business people conduct business and reside in the mainland. As an increasing number of mainland Chinese visitors and exchange students set foot on the island of Taiwan, they realize what a full democracy is and how it works in a Chinese society. In other words, Taiwan is now sitting on a window of opportunity to magnify its soft power of democracy to the Chinese people, and therefore contribute to regional stability and peace.

It is a fact that for the past few years our people have encountered various challenges as our democracy has matured; these include delays in the passage of badly needed laws, or at times a lack of trust in our judicial system; reforms across various aspects of the society are clearly needed. Moreover, an obvious cool down of the cross Taiwan Strait relations has taken place since the DPP won both the presidential and legislative elections in Taiwan last year; as the current government in Taipei has not accepted the 1992 consensus. However, as our people has grown more mature in the democratic way of life, they will be able to exercise pressure one way or another to address the situation domestically and also help the government to implement policies that will maintain stability and peace in the Taiwan Strait and across the region. In other words, as far as peace in Taiwan Strait is concerned, I believe that we should be optimistic about

the future.

Thank you all, and I welcome your ideas and advice.

