

“Why Should?” and Other Common Sense Questions on the Taiwan—China Problem
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The most recent of subterfuges to have come out of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is its government’s desire to pass an anti-secession law. Most see this as directed against Taiwan, an already independent nation. Such a law would give China a flimsy but usable excuse to try to force Taiwan to become a part of China.

To use secession is a strange choice of words, especially since it rests on the false presumption that in order to secede Taiwan and the PRC had to once have been joined.

Beyond this basic question of how anyone could re-unite something that had never been joined in the first place, other questions should be asked. From Taiwan’s perspective, the following are a few of them.

Politically, why should an independent democracy want to join a dictatorial one party state?

Why should a country that struggled long and hard to achieve democracy want to regress under a controlled country that continues to jail, punish and even kill any dissident voices?

Why should a country that had already suffered under the flags of six different nations in achieving independence and identity, now want to suffer under a new flag that has never flown over it? (Cf. Note 1)

Put simply, why should Taiwan want to become a part of the People’s Republic of China?

Why should Taiwan or any country want to become part of the PRC?

Economically, why should a country that has moved up to the 4th place ranking in the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) list of the top world economies (out of 104 countries for 2004—2005) want to join a larger, poorer country with an economy that is ranked 46th? China ranked behind countries like Malaysia (31), Slovak Republic (43), Latvia (44), and Botswana (45). In its listing, WEF recognized China’s deceptively appealing growth, but it still ranked China low for reasons footnoted below. (Cf. Note 2)

Why should a democratic country that ranks 22nd in economic freedom in the world, want to regress and join a one party state country that ranks 90th in economic freedom in the world? Why not just enjoy the complacency of doing business with that country like everyone else?

Why should a country that ranks 21st in “The World in 2005” Quality of Life Index want to be part of a country that is ranked 60th and eventually have to pay for that country’s clean up? Why not just do business with the PRC like everyone else?

Why should any country want to join a country that the World Bank lists as having sixteen of the top twenty polluted cities on planet earth? This is all the more poignant when that country's rapidly growing consumerism and exploding manufacturing capacities promise more pollution.

Why should Taiwan or any country want to be a part of the PRC? Why not ignore its problems and just do business with it as the rest of the world does?

Why should a country of 23 million free people with a population larger than 75% of the countries of the United Nations want to join a country that continues to work to prevent those 23 million from having any say in the United Nations? (Ironically, the United Nations freely gives voting rights to independent island countries like Tuvalu and Palau that have minuscule populations of 11,000 and 14,000 respectively.)

Why should a country with an economy better than at least 90% of the countries in the United Nations still be denied access into that organization and other world organizations because another country (the PRC) wants to control the first country's economy?

Why should a country whose economy has become a high-tech rising star with ever developing science parks want to become a part of a vastly poorer country? Taiwan's rising stars would eventually be turned into cash cows to fund the PRC's question mark and rising star businesses as well as bail out its many state-owned dogs

Healthwise, why should a country with a constantly improving health record want to be part of a country that covered up its SARS epidemic until the body count got too high?

Why should a country that has its HIV problem under control want to join a country where AIDS still runs rampant in several provinces because of its poor medical care, greed and again the government's continued proclivity to try to cover up its past ineptitude until it is too late?

Why should a country whose taxes are already strained to support an excellent National Health Insurance system want to join a country where its taxes will have to help foot the bill for the health of that other country's impoverished 1.3 billion people?

Why should a country even want to be associated with a country, which had used its political muscle to deny it help from the World Health Organization (WHO) during the SARS epidemic?

From the perspective of basic freedoms, why should a country with a free press and open access to Internet and global news communications want to join a country where all the above are restricted, kept under surveillance and often denied?

Why should a country where government officials and/or lawmakers have the possibility of doing good in their own country want to join a country where they would be puppets

like Tung Chee Hwa of Hong Kong and have to go running to Beijing when any real issues come up?

The list of “why shoulds” can go on and on, but then there are the “as ifs.”

As if anyone would want to be part of a country where you would have to worry that when your grandmother went down to the local park to practice her Falun Gong she might be beaten up, thrown in jail as a subversive and you would have no recourse.

As if anyone would want to be part of a country where the state strives to control your religion be it Buddhism, Christianity, Islam etc.

As if anyone would want to be part of a country that seeks to control the appointing of religious leaders of all religions so that it could tell them what they can and cannot say and do.

As if anyone would want to be part of a country where your child could be blown up in school because their greedy administrator decided the school should make fireworks to supplement his and the school’s income.

As if anyone would want to be part of a country where your uncle or aunt got AIDS because greedy officials in Henan Province (for example) skimmed on using the same needles for all blood donors.

As if anyone would want to be part of a country with well known “AIDS villages” where 80—90% of the population have AIDS because of the same above reason.

As if anyone would want to be part of a country where if your idealistic son or daughter had been crushed under a tank at Tiananmen Square in 1989, you could still not publicly grieve because this had officially been labeled a “counter-revolutionary rebellion.”

As if anyone would want to be part of a country where people like Jiang Yanyong the 72-year-old heroic military doctor who had blown the whistle on the SARS cover-up was imprisoned for criticizing the government. (Cf. Note 3)

As if anyone would want to be part of a country where the media censorship hides all of the above until they become uncontrollable crises of epic proportions. Does that not make you wonder how many unreported tragedies have been swept under the rug?

That China would want to acquire Taiwan’s economic strength and quality of life is understandable. What country in the world would not want to possess Taiwan with its ideal Asia-Pacific location, its powerful economy and industrious people?

That China would covet the economy of Taiwan to fuel its own growth is also understandable, what greedy country would not want such a place that is both rising star and could be turned into a cash cow?

That China would want to acquire Taiwan so that it could control the Taiwan Straits, isolate Japan and the Koreas from Southeast Asia, and control traffic between the East and South China Seas is understandable. In the same way it wants to control the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands to make the South China Sea its Mare Nostrum.

Because of its censorship and control of the media and lack of transparency, many people within and without China know little of what actually is going or has gone on there. As a case in point, the world remains shocked that 6 million Jews lost their lives under a one party dictatorial state in Europe in WWII. Yet that same world is not shocked, concerned or even knowledgeable that over 30 million Chinese lost their lives because of the purging, persecution, and ineptitude of the one party dictatorial state of China after WWII.

A voice says, “Even the Chinese don’t care if the thirty million Chinese were killed; the killings were done by Chinese on Chinese, so why should Westerners be concerned?”

Another voice suggests, “You have to realize that China has over a billion people so a few million lives here or there doesn’t really matter. Besides, as long as it is not my family that is being killed or imprisoned why should I care? I can say it is for the good of the nation.” These same people will probably have little concern for the 23 million people in Taiwan.

A third voice says, “The great helmsman Mao Zedong (Tse-tung), the guilty perpetrator of the above, should be cut some slack because after all he gave China pride so that it could liberate/repress Tibet and other regions. Again, as long as it was not part of my family that died, I can say pride is good to have.”

In its feigned or willing ignorance of the above, businessmen point to the growing China market as if it were a panacea. As a result, these people would like to ignore the Taiwan vs. China issue because it interferes with their making money in China. Yet none of these same people who live in luxurious trappings in Shanghai would give up their present citizenship to be citizens of China.

Businessmen point to the fast growing economy in Shanghai, Beijing and a few other major cities of China. “Look at the increasing consumers,” they say, “many who can buy their Gucci’s, Prada’s, Diors etc. etc.” However these businessmen never go out to the countryside where a greater percent of the 1.3 billion Chinese live in relative poverty and depending on the province have an average yearly income of only US\$800 to \$2,000 before expenses. How are these people going to be the consumers that businesses dream of?

The above points are never mentioned when marketing people try to sell their companies on investing in China; after all they just have to make money with China, they don’t have to live under its regime or care for its people.

There is even the unspoken ultimate question for the whole world that while the businessworld stokes the fires of burgeoning consumerism in China, how will all this affect the already depleted resources of the earth?

Skipping that, many hope that Taiwan will not rock the boat and many probably wish it would silently submit itself to the above atrocities so that the rest of the world can go about its business of making money in China.

When you look closely at all of the above, you wonder what does the PRC offer the people of Taiwan or anyone that would join them except the servitude of being under a one-party state dictatorship. It is a government that in its desire to control so many and so much, must (by sheer numbers involved alone) inevitably let millions fall between the cracks. Thus it constantly reacts in crisis management style only when catastrophes become too large to ignore.

The business community however still remains fascinated over the possibilities of tapping this “great China market.” You hear it everywhere, yet you wonder? Why do businesses romanticize the great possibilities of the 1.3 billion “China market” when the combined population and market of nearby India and Pakistan will be far greater than that of China by the year 2020? Whatever figures you look at, those of the United Nations, the World Bank, the USA etc., the combined population of India and Pakistan will exceed that of China by over 100 million people in fifteen years.

Why are marketing people so enamored with the growing “great China market” but ignore the growing “great India/Pakistan market?” Marketing people do not talk about the great possibilities of selling cars, cans of coke or toothbrushes to the upcoming 1.5 billion market there. There is no similar fascination about India and Pakistan.

A voice answers that this is because “India and Pakistan are considered poor and dirty.” A second voice responds “But so too is China poor and dirty when you get outside the major cities.” The first voice answers “Yes, that is true but India and Pakistan are not poor and dirty in a romanticized, exotic, Pearl Buck type of way. They are not as spin-worthy for marketing hucksters as China is.”

The list of “Why should?” can go on and on. And you Mr. and/or Ms. citizen of the world, what is your answer for the twenty-three million people of Taiwan? Do you have an opinion on what they should do? Or do you just want to ignore this issue and go on making money in China?

Do you think all this sham talk of “session” and “reunification” should be allowed to go unchallenged in the media? Do you think the business world should blindly follow the China illusion?

Or do you have the courage to say that the 23 million people of Taiwan should have the freedom to choose for themselves as the UN Charter allows even to minute countries like Tuvalu and Palau with only 11,000 and 14,000 people respectively? Do you have the

courage to say that Taiwan should not have to listen to what the control bound dictators across the Strait or the blind-eyed moneymakers and profiteers of the world think they should do? What is your say?

Note 1: Numerous and various tribes of indigenous aborigines originally ruled Taiwan; each had their own territory. Pirates, fishermen and traders often inhabited coastal villages. The first “colonial” flag to fly over the island was that of the Dutch, subsequent flags included the Spanish, fleeing Ming loyalists, Manchu Qing armies, French, and even the brief Democratic Republic of Taiwan (1895). The first flag to fly over and control the entire island was that of Japan (1895-1945). After World War II, the Allies put the island under the current Republic of China (ROC) flag; the exact intent of the Treaty of San Francisco is disputed since it only states that Japan would give up the island but not to whom. Now the PRC, whose flag has never flown over the island and who was not part of the Treaty of San Francisco covetously states Taiwan belongs to them.

After World War II Taiwan had to undergo some fifty years of white terror, martial law (lifted 1987) and one party state rule under the Leninist one-party state Kuomintang (KMT) Party. Finally after many struggles, its citizens achieved the right to elect their own president and leaders in an open vote (1996). During that same period in the PRC, another Leninist one-party state, the Chinese Communist Party defeated the KMT for control of the Mainland and drove them from it in 1949. The people in the PRC still do not have the right to elect their leaders at a significant or a national level.

The vast territorial borders and claims of the PRC (1949) are based only on a distorted and twisted sense of history and force of arms. Under the Tang Dynasty (581—907) China extended its control westward into the Tarim Basin (present day Xinxiang Province) but did not rule present-day Korea, Manchuria, Mongolia, and Tibet. Under the Song Dynasty (907—1276) and particularly the Southern Song, those borders had shrunk considerably on all sides including the loss of any influence in the Tarim Basin. The area of present day Beijing was not a part of the Southern Song Dynasty. In 1209 the Mongolians began to carve their vast empire. By 1279 they controlled all of the land from Korea to Hungary, as far north as Moscow and as far south as Persia. In that process among the numerous countries they had conquered were China, Korea, Manchuria, and Tibet as well as the Tarim Basin. They divided this vast empire into several Khanates for easier administration. The most eastern Khanate and that of the Great Khan included their homeland Mongolia as well as China, Korea, Manchuria and Tibet and a portion of the Tarim Basin. This khanate took the name of the Yuan. Marco Polo misnamed this khanate as Cathay (mediaeval name for China) and began the western misconception that the Mongol khanate was China. Taiwan, while charted on some early maps in this period, was never a part of any of the above empires or countries.

The Han Chinese threw off the Mongolians and set up the Ming Dynasty (1368—1644) while in the same period the people of Korea, Manchuria, Tibet, and the Tarim Basin also

broke free of the crumbling Mongolian Empire; they were not part of Ming China. In 1642, the Manchurian people set out to create their own empire. They first conquered Ming China, and then afterwards in succession they conquered the separate countries of Korea, Mongolia, Tibet, and the Tarim Basin. They named their empire the Qing and China was a part of it. The western half of Taiwan also fell under this empire in 1683. Taiwan along with the Pescadores (Penghu) would be ceded to Japan “in perpetuity” in 1895 by the Treaty of Shimonoseki.

In 1911, the Han people overthrew the Qing and won their freedom from the Manchus. Ironically as the Mongolians and Tibetans also began to throw off the Qing rule and gain their freedom, China sought to deny them that right. The Chinese, whose battle cry throughout the centuries was “Overthrow the Qing and restore the Ming,” did not want to return to the borders of the Ming Dynasty. They wanted not only their homeland but also whatever other countries the Manchus had conquered. Taiwan at this time was under Japan; interestingly enough Mao Zedong stated in this period that he wished Taiwan could be independent.

Note 2: The WEF’s Global Competitiveness Report 2004—2005 ranked countries and their economies as to whether they have what it takes to keep growing. In 2003, Taiwan ranked #5 and the PRC ranked #44. In 2004, Taiwan moved up to #4 behind Finland, the United States and Sweden. The PRC fell two places. The WEF recognized the PRC’s growth but stated that it would have to “improve its institutions, cut down on corruption, improve property rights and ensure its workforce is extremely educated” if it were to move up. China was deemed weak in technical innovation and its quality of public services; it also had an inefficient administration and a need for transparency.

In the Economic Freedom of the World’s 2004 Annual Report put out by Taiwan placed 22nd, India ranked 68th and China despite having one of the fastest growing economies ranked 90th. This ranking is done by the policies of the country that measure the degree of economic freedom; the country’s ability to safeguard property rights, enforce contracts, ensure sound money and limit the size and scope of government involvement.

Note 3: Jiang Yanyong was imprisoned for months this past year and forced to undergo indoctrination and study sessions to set his thinking straight. His unforgivable mistake was that he requested the government to recant calling the suppression of the Tiananmen Square students’ request for a more open government as the suppression of a “counter-revolutionary rebellion.” Jiang wanted the government to admit the brutal suppression was a mistake. What kind of government would put such a 72-year old hero under house arrest so that he could be indoctrinated? What kind of government would see him as a threat?

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This is # 17 in a series of comments and observations on Taiwan's Politics and the 2004 Presidential Elections. Future articles include "A Tale of Four Parties," "The KMT—What Happens when Good Men are Silent," and eventually "A Pro-offered Solution to the Two China Issue." Readers can share these comments with friends and interested parties. Copyright: Jerome F. Keating Ph.D. Other articles can be accessed at this website: <http://zen.sandiego.edu:8080/Jerome>