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"I expect that both sides of the Taiwan Strait one day will share the universal values of freedom and democracy, creating greater space for people on both sides to grow in harmony and understanding." Source: Tsai Ing-wen, *facebook*, <<https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/posts/10155174584506065>>; picture source: Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan), *flickr*, <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/presidentialoffice/31943040702/in/photolist-QEGr85-QQnFFL-QTPNNR-QEGsVy>>.

Democracy as the Foundation to Develop Cross-Strait Relations

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I. Introduction

Cross-Strait relations have been in a deadlock since May 20, 2016. Beijing unilaterally suspended dialogue between the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the Association of Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) and the official contact between the

Mainland Affairs Council and the Office of Taiwan Affairs. It also went even further and imposed economic sanctions on Taiwan and increased military threats against the island. Beijing insists that President Tsai Ing-wen accept the so-called "1992 consensus" based on the one-China principle as a precondition for





resuming cross-Strait talks. The key, however, is that President Tsai cannot act against the will of the Taiwanese people. As Minister Chen Ming-tong said, “the 23 million people of democratic Taiwan will never allow their destiny to be decided under the non-democratic system of the other side.”

II. Taiwan as a Full-Fledged Democracy

Taiwan has developed into a full-fledged democracy since it held its first direct presidential election in March 1996. Indeed, according to Freedom House’s evaluation, Taiwan is the most democratic country in Asia. Taiwan’s democratic success has been described as a political miracle by many scholars. Of course, the young democracy of Taiwan is not perfect. For example, it suffers from partisan politics and its decision-making is not always effective. Nevertheless, there are no people in Taiwan who want to return to the old days when the island was under the KMT authoritarian rule. The Taiwanese people cherish their life with freedom from fear. Nowadays, they no longer worry that they might be arrested because of their different political positions or their criticism of their government.

III. China as an Authoritarian Country

It is a joke that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) calls the People’s Republic of China (PRC) a democracy. By any standard, the PRC is not a democratic country because it does not have genuine elections, the legalization of opposition parties, or freedoms of speech, media, assembly, religion, and migration. The CCP’s top priority is to make sure that it can rule mainland China forever. Therefore, the CCP regime under

the leadership of Xi Jinping, instead of carrying out democratic reforms to increase the freedom of the Chinese people, has increased the state’s control over society. People do not have free access to the internet, and teachers and the media are prohibited from discussing the seven “taboo topics.” Otherwise, they will lose their jobs or could be arrested and jailed. The seven taboos are universal values, freedom of speech, civil society, civil rights, the CCP’s errors in history, crony capitalism, and judicial independence. It is no surprise that the PRC’s human rights record is one of the worst in the world.

Rampant scandals show the problems and shortcoming of the PRC political system. The milk powder scandal in 2008 and the recent vaccine scandal are the tip of the iceberg. Although Xi Jinping launched an anti-corruption campaign after he took power in November 2012, the PRC remains one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Without real checks and balances, similar scandals will continue to emerge and hurt the interests of the people, and the PRC will continue to be a corrupt country in the future.

IV. “One Country Two Systems” Model Has Failed in Hong Kong

Democracy maybe is not the best political system, but it is the best system based on human nature. It is human nature to prefer freedom. That’s why Patrick Henry, one of the American leaders in the 18th century, said: “Give me Liberty, or give me death.” After people practice democracy and taste freedom, they cannot tolerate totalitarianism or even authoritarianism. Hong Kong is a good example. The Hong Kong



people enjoyed all of the freedoms except for full political rights under the British colonial rule. Deng Xiaoping promised to respect the socio-economic and political systems in Hong Kong. However, the CCP regime is afraid of democracy and the impact on mainland China if Hong Kong is allowed to practice democracy. Therefore, after the PRC took over Hong Kong on July 1, 1997, it has been gradually eliminating the freedoms of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong people were angry and walked into the street when Beijing tightened up its control over their society. The “one country two systems” model has already lost its credibility.

V. Beijing Is Pushing Taiwan Away from China

Taiwan and China share a lot of common interests. For example, they both want to maintain peace in the Taiwan Strait and economic cooperation serves the interests of the two countries. The barrier against cross-Strait dialogue and cooperation is not the Taiwan Strait, but is in the different political systems that the two sides have adopted. The seven taboos in China mentioned above are very common topics in daily conversation for the Taiwanese people. People in Taiwan just cannot identify with the PRC’s dictatorship.

Should the PRC have become a democratic country, the two sides of the Taiwan Strait would have shared common values, and cross-Strait communication and cooperation would have become much easier over time. Unfortunately, the CCP regime refuses to carry out democratic reforms. Even worse, it follows hegemonistic policies of increasing the military threat against Taiwan and isolating the island in the international community. Such unfriendly actions can only push Taiwan further away from China.

VI. Concluding Remarks

No political parties can rule forever. Dictatorship is against the tide of human nature. Hong Kong people refuse to accept Beijing’s authoritarian rule. Democracy has become deeply rooted in Taiwan. It is completely unlikely for the Taiwanese people to agree with the CCP’s authoritarianism. The CCP regime has already alienated the Hong Kong people. Beijing should learn the lessons from Hong Kong and respect Taiwan’s democracy. Otherwise, the gap between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait cannot be narrowed.

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Editor’s Note: The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the Prospect Foundation.





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