Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism, and the Pursuit of Democracy: Lessons from Taiwan and China

John F. Copper, *Rhodes College*

China and Taiwan are useful contrasting models for assessing the growth of political party competition and democracy. Both nations (or political entities) are demographically, historically, and culturally similar; thus, these and other situational variables are controlled such that the causality of the type of economic system and the openness of the political system emerges more clearly.

Introduction

One of the most serious questions asked by students of politics almost everywhere in the world in recent years is: Why do certain countries or political systems evolve into democracies more easily than others? This is also a question that is of great interest to political observers and to laymen.

The answer is, of course, manifold: there are many reasons. On the other hand, an assessment of the reasons -- since there are many and all are difficult to look at intellectually -- should, at least to some degree, focus on the political party structure of the political systems. A one-party system is typically not democratic (as a rule) and is in many ways resistant to the development of democracy (Almond and Powell 1978, 220-224).[1] In other words, democratizing countries must shed or change their one-party systems. This is patently easier for some countries or political systems than for others, and, therefore, the question must be posed: Why can some one-party systems give way to competitive party systems while others cannot?

The ability, or willingness, of dominant or monopoly-type parties to allow other parties to form or to exist, and thus tolerate competition and the possibility of their own demise, depends upon a number of factors. Theoretical factors include whether that nation is communist or non-communist (meaning traditional authoritarian), and to what degree an ideology (especially an anti-democratic one) is part of the system. One may also cite the degree of authoritarianism or totalitarianism in the said nation (if indeed there can be a "degree of totalitarianism"). Both of these dichotomies are quite controversial among political thinkers.

Also of considerable relevance to the ability of nations or political systems to evolve into democracy are conditions such as the security of the said system; the level, speed, and kind of economic development; social development; and

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political leadership. The author will discuss those elements as well as issues of political culture, the democratization process, and, of course, those "ideological" matters cited in the paragraph above in relationship to the development or the non-development of political party competition.[2]

It should be evident that the two nations (assuming for the purposes of this paper that Taiwan is a nation-state) under consideration make for a very interesting, and, in many ways, advantageous comparison, inasmuch as they are populated by the same people who speak a common language and have a common culture. This enables the writer to exclude a number of variables, especially historical and early cultural factors, and focus his attention on "newer" variables. In fact, it may be argued that the two Chinas make for an excellent model of equating political systems while noting their advantages and shortcomings vis-a-vis the democratizing process.

Differences in the Polity and Party Systems: China and Taiwan

The polities, and to a lesser extent the party systems, of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China share the same origins. They evolved from two or three thousand years of Chinese history and came, more recently, from a revolution in the early part of this century -- 1911 to be precise -- which overthrew the Ch'ing Dynasty and with it the imperial bureaucratic system that had prevailed for two millennia. There are some major differences, however, between the two that are of considerable interest and relevance in terms of explaining the later development of party competition and democracy (Hsu 1970, ch. 20).

The Nationalist Party and the government it established traces its origins directly to Sun Yat-sen's revolution and his political philosophy. This revolution was a democratic one, at least in form and intent. Philosophically, and in terms of the central role given to a political party (though many Western democratic revolutions saw the formal development of parties follow the revolution), it was patterned after Western models of political change and political modernization of a democratic kind. Though Sun became disappointed in the West for not supporting his efforts, he never abandoned Western political thought or Western democracy. But he also knew democracy had to be delayed in its implementation in China because the Chinese people were not ready for it. Sun himself developed a political ideology, but that ideology (or collection of political ideas, as many would describe it) was not as systematic or as powerful and uncompromising as communism, at least as it took root in China a decade later (Gregor 1981).

Following Sun's demise, Chiang Kai-shek took Sun's mantle of power and supported his revolutionary cause. However, Chiang was not so much a democrat in spirit; rather, he was a pragmatist and a military leader. His ultimate goal was to unite China and make China strong. Chiang was somewhat anti-Western in his attitude about China's problems, as can be seen in his book, *China's Destiny*. Still, he was pro-Western in his political thinking and came to depend upon ties with the

West -- notably through his wife and others. He also became anti-communist (after the Chinese communists made an attempt on his life and Chiang began to see them as competitors and as traitors).

Chiang's political party, the Nationalist Party or Kuomintang (KMT), was structured after Leninist organizational patterns and may be called a Leninist party. However, it was not so clearly an elite party as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and was somewhat more tolerant of other political parties or party competition. The KMT's ideology was Sun's "Three Principles;" but this was not of such overriding importance as communism was to the CCP, and was democratic in its outlook or goals (though not in its style of rule for some time), unlike the CCP's dictatorship of the proletariat (Clough 1978, ch. 2).

Similarly, the KMT was not so determined to control the economy through central planning. In fact, its economic development scheme was to use the free market and avoid too much central control, though one could argue that central control was not really feasible when the Nationalists controlled China. Nor was the KMT and its police system interested in controlling the population beyond maintaining law and order and precluding the development of an opposition that might threaten the Party and the government. In contrast, from the very onset of its rule over China, the CCP endeavored to use political authority to control the population in more than a restrictive sense: it also sought to create a new society, used movements and campaigns to change the individual psychologically, and much more.

Under the KMT from 1928 to 1949, China was an authoritarian system. Since then, under communism, China has had a totalitarian system. The differences are considerable, and are especially noticeable with regard to the completeness or thoroughness of political control sought and attained by the two regimes, and the degree to which the parties have accepted and now allow (in the case of Taiwan) political thinking and actions not exactly like their own.

When the Nationalist Government moved to Taiwan in 1949, it encountered some significant changes in the political milieu in which it had to operate. China's was a bureaucratic political culture based, according to Karl Wittfogel, on the control of water -- in his words, a *hydraulic culture*. In China, feudalism (a decentralized political and economic system) had long been a matter of historical record and little more, having passed two centuries before Christ. Taiwan, on the other hand, did not develop a hydraulic culture; there are no rivers in Taiwan which need to be controlled or which kill millions or damage agriculture when they flood. Moreover, Taiwan is fragmented by mountains, making central government more difficult. And Taiwan was ruled for fifty years, from 1895 to 1945, by Japan -- a nation that had only recently (in the late 1860s) emerged out of feudalism and which retained many of the political characteristics of a post-feudal country (Copper 1990a, 53-55). This explains to many students of Asian political development why Japan adjusted to the West quickly and efficiently whereas China did not, and may explain Taiwan's recent success in democratization.

Taiwan also was historically cosmopolitan; it had ties with other nations and civilizations in the area. China was not; it had been isolationist for centuries and remained so under communism. Similarly, Taiwan had a history of being ruled by foreign countries: Holland, China (though the term colonization may not be appropriate here), and Japan. It also was more eclectic in terms of religious thought. Through trade with other countries in the area, it laid the groundwork for the development of capitalism (Copper 1990a, 53-55). China, on the other hand, was less influenced by foreign religious ideas (or at least more slowly, as in the case of Buddhism) and, considering itself an autarky, did not trade -- and did not see the evolution of capitalism until much later.

After 1950, Taiwan had the advantage in terms of democratic political development because it was basically secure. When the Korean War started, the United States put the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait, precluding an invasion of Taiwan by Mao's forces. Taiwan also felt safe since, being an island, it could not be invaded easily, and it was generally less vulnerable to espionage, sabotage, and so forth. (One should recall in this connection that democracy first evolved in England -- a secure, island country. Then it grew in the U.S., which was shielded from invasion by two oceans and bordered by weak countries.) In contrast to Taiwan, China was threatened (or so it perceived) by American "imperialist" forces in Korea and in the Taiwan Strait from 1950 on, and in Southeast Asia eventually thereafter. It was also influenced by insecure borders elsewhere along its periphery, including its tense mutual borders with (1) the Soviet Union (the longest in the world) after breaking with Moscow in the late 1950s and skirmishing in the late 1960s, (2) India, with whom it warred in the 1960s, and (3) Vietnam, with whom it warred in 1979. China, in fact, borders more countries across unnatural frontiers and has had more border disputes than any other nation in recent history. In fact, it can be argued that China's totalitarianism reflects to a considerable degree its physical insecurity, inasmuch as its various mobilization campaigns, the size of its standing military and militia, and its tight social control all have been rationalized by reference to external threats (Huck 1970).

In the early 1950s, both Chinas undertook land reform. In both, the political impact was deep and long-lasting. In Taiwan's case, land reform destroyed feudal society in the rural part of the country. It gave land to the farmers and provided them a stake in the political system. It increased agricultural productivity, thus fostering urbanization (see below) with its accompanying democratizing impact. It is no coincidence that local elections and democracy in local politics began at this time (Copper 1990a, 42-43). In China, on the other hand, land reform accentuated class differences -- coinciding with a political purge of the landlord class, scapegoating, and persecution of the enemy class by the Chinese Communist Party and the government. It did not create political awareness in terms of building a political community or in terms of individuals attaining a stake in the nation or the political process. Nor did it increase agricultural productivity. In short, the effect of land reform in China was not the creation of a civic culture or the dilution

of authoritarian tendencies, but rather increased tension in the society, class struggle, and the continued need for centralized political control (Mosher 1983).

Economic development in the two countries also sheds some light on political change in the direction of democracy. Taiwan took off economically in the late 1960s and became, over the next two-plus decades, the fastest growing national economy in the world. Economic growth based on a free market and on foreign trade created a large middle class and an aware population -- aware of events and political change (and systems) abroad. Growth with equity was particularly important in creating an interest in politics, voting, political change, political parties, and related matters. As the business community became more politically influential, and entrepreneurs realized that a free flow of information was needed to sustain economic growth, this created an impetus for expanded civil rights, particularly rights related to information flow (speech and press), the right to assemble, and the right to move. In other words, capitalism engendered democratic freedoms (Copper 1988, chs. 2-3). In China, economic growth was slow after the first few years of economic rehabilitation. In fact, through the late 1950s, 1960s, and into the 1970s, China's economic growth rate fell below the world average. Economic equality prevented a regression to class politics of the old style; yet, the system based on central planning created a new class and limited political change of a democratic bent that economic development could have produced.

Social change that occurred during this same period can be seen to be related to the economic change, and, again, the situations in the two Chinas are very different. Land reform, higher productivity in the agricultural sector, and industrialization all engendered rapid urbanization in Taiwan -- the fastest of any nation in the world during the 1960s and 1970s. Social mobility increased markedly. People travelled. They learned about politics elsewhere in the world, especially in the Western democracies with whom they traded and visited. City political machines developed. New publications sprouted. A highly educated populace resulted. Political interest groups that performed the functions of interest aggregation and articulation (to use the terms of Almond and Powell) developed and proliferated. These things did not happen in China. There, political movements were launched to fulfill the momentary objectives of the Party (or of one of its factions); most were not intended to produce genuine political participation, but rather to force participation, and thus contributed little to political development. As these were started and halted capriciously, citizens became not only cynical, but fearful of commitment to campaigns that could expose them to tomorrow's backlash. Meanwhile, China's population remained 80 percent rural. Few people learned much about the rest of the world and few travelled. In fact, in the 1970's, most people in China had not been 100 miles from their birthplace.

Recent Evolution Toward Democracy in China and Taiwan

The recent drive toward political modernization in each of the two Chinas began at almost the same time. Perhaps one can identify the year 1978 as the watershed year in both. That year, Deng Xiaoping consolidated power in China and quickly began to put various reforms into practice. He oversaw the writing of a new constitution in February. Late in the year, Democracy Wall was launched, reflecting efforts by Deng to enlist public participation in political decision-making and a new, or at least revised, practice of free speech (Nathan 1985, 1990). At the same time, in Taiwan, the country was about to hold a significant national election that was to increase the number of the locally elected representatives (most seats still represented areas in China) to the National Assembly and to the Legislative *Yuan*. The election was cancelled because the U.S. broke diplomatic relations with Taipei and moved its embassy to Beijing, which drastically undermined the credibility of the government and evoked public insecurity. Otherwise, 1978 might have been a turning point in the democratic political development of Taiwan.

One may argue that what happened after 1978 in the two Chinas was the product of earlier developments and that success and failure in Taiwan and China, respectively, was determined by previous conditions, developments, and events. Still, what transpired during the decade following 1978 is important and instructive.

In 1979, the Taiwanese public demanded democracy in response to the loss of credibility that U.S. derecognition inflicted upon the Nationalist Party and the government. Democracy was seen as necessary for the nation to survive: Taiwan needed to win support from the United States and other Western democracies (and the global community as well) to fend off efforts by China to force negotiations that would, it was perceived, end Taiwan's sovereignty. Democracy and self-determination became synonymous. An opposition formed that advocated quick democratic reform modelled after Western democratic systems. The efforts of this opposition had the support of the Western media, which long had been critical of the Nationalist regime, and democracy advocates were well aware of this (Copper and Chen 1984, ch. 3).

The advocates of democracy became more radical and began to push both reform and independence for Taiwan, both of which challenged the right of the government and the Nationalist Party to rule. This culminated in the Kaohsiung Incident of December, 1979, a major protest demonstration that turned violent. Exactly who provoked the violence is not quite clear, but a number of police were injured. The incident turned public opinion against the radical reformers. The government put their leaders in prison following trials a few months later.

This chain of events (the public support for reform and change of heart when the protest turned violent) was cause for sober reflection by both sides during mid-1980. Both showed willingness to compromise, and in that context a new election law was written and preparations were made for competitive elections in Decem-

ber. Scholars, including many from abroad, participated in rewriting the election law. Compromises or gentlemen's agreements were made behind the scenes. The most important were that the government would allow free speech during the campaign and would allow an open and fair election, if the opposition would refrain from advocating overthrow of the government or proclamation of independence.

The December, 1980 election, though a supplementary one (many seats still represented districts in China and new representatives could not be elected), was unprecedented in terms of openness, lively campaigning, and competition. The Nationalist Party vied with *tangwai* (literally, outside the party) candidates, who, acting in concert with regard to platform and objectives, behaved like a political party (although forming new parties remained illegal). Voters were astonished by the candor of the candidates and the criticisms voiced against the government, the ruling party, and top leaders of both. This election, to many observers, was a turning point. Taiwan now had democracy, many said. Others contended that it was an "election holiday" -- a show to impress the United States and the Western media. Some said it was a ploy (Copper and Chen 1984, ch. 5).

In 1983, after another national election that was at least as open and competitive as the election in 1980, no one spoke of the 1980 election as an "election holiday." Competitive national elections had become institutionalized.

In 1986, Taiwan held the first two-party competitive election ever held in a Chinese nation. Before the December election that year, *tangwai* politicians met and formed the Democratic Progressive Party. It was a true opposition party. (Two small parties had run candidates in previous elections, but were not really competition for the Nationalist Party.) After this election, observers said that Taiwan was no longer a one-party system (Copper 1990a, ch. 3).

In 1987, Taiwan terminated martial law. Protest marches and demonstrations increased. In early 1988, President Chiang Ching-kuo died, and Lee Teng-hui became president. He was the country's first locally-born or Taiwanese President, something that critics of Taiwan's "authoritarian government" had predicted would never happen. The government had been led up to this time by Chinese who fled to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek in 1949 and comprised only 15 percent of Taiwan's population. At the same time a new press law went into effect, allowing new newspapers to begin publishing and old ones to expand their editions. Later that year, the Nationalist Party held its 13th Congress and adopted democratic rules for party business, something many parties in Western democracies have yet to do.

In December, 1989, Taiwan held another national election. This time, according to virtually every newspaper in the country, the opposition party won. Though the Democratic Progressive Party did not get more votes or elect more of its candidates, its performance improved so much that it had a sufficient number of representatives in the Legislative *Yuan* to propose legislation. And it won executive positions in the counties so that it had jurisdiction over 40 percent of the

population -- including Taipei county, which is the seat of the national government. Some said this election had brought democracy to Taiwan (Copper 1990a, ch. 5). Whether or not Taiwan is now a democracy remains debatable. Nevertheless, the rapid and remarkable progress it has made in that direction is obvious.

This has not been so in China. Democracy made some progress on the mainland between 1978 and 1988. But this proved only temporary, or at best it was set back a great deal in 1989. Why? There appear to be a number of explanations.

Some observers say the Chinese people spoke out for democracy in April, 1976, after Zhou Enlai's death. There were massive public rallies in favor of political reforms. But this had little impact. Deng, who was then the Party's strongest advocate for democracy, was purged. After Mao's death in the fall, a power struggle ensued. Mao's successor was decided by force. The Gang of Four (Mao's closest supporters) lost in a struggle with Hua Guofeng, who was not a proponent of democratic reform. Deng made a gradual comeback over the next two years and there seemed to be new hope of democratic reform. Deng encouraged democratic discussions and used "Democracy Wall" to his advantage -- to get his opponents off guard and to disgrace Mao and the Party's left (Nathan 1990, ch. 2).

Because of the factional nature of Chinese politics, pro-democracy movements took the form of factional struggles. In fact, both factions advocated democracy, but they had different definitions. Neither defined democracy as it was defined in the West. Maoists and the left defined it as egalitarianism. To the reformists on the right, it meant changes that would promote economic development. Debate ensued about pluralist democracy, but most saw it as destabilizing. Many said that democracy was not popular influence, but government acting in the interest of the people -- hardly distinguishable from benevolent autocracy (Nathan 1990).

Deng, however, was more an advocate of democracy in the Western sense than those to his left. He argued that democracy -- including private ownership, the opportunity to travel, and incentives -- was necessary if the free market was to work. People had to be allowed to speak freely, to move freely, and to have money and invest. The rightist reformers sought to remove the Party cadres from the management of the factories. In the rural areas, they promoted private plots and individual ownership -- contrary to Marx and Mao. Deng sought to transfer political power from the party to the government, and from the central government in Beijing to the local governments. He even went so far as to propose competitive elections with more than one candidate for each position (intraparty positions excepted).

But several times Deng moved to the left politically rather than push democratic reform further. He did this in 1983 and in 1986. He did it again in June, 1989, when the democracy movement threatened to promote genuine political change. He may have turned against the movement solely because it had precipitated a backlash which strengthened the party left. In the context of serious

unrest and insecurity brought on by the movement, the leftist leaders played on xenophobia and fear by warning of the possibility of anarchy and the breakup of China. Finally, they called on the military, which used tanks and machine guns to clear *Tiananmen* Square of pro-democracy demonstrators, killing many in the process. Thus, the democracy campaign ended (Cheng 1990, ch. 3).

Several aspects of China's "democratic experiment" differed markedly from Taiwan's. China had been penetrated by Western ideas and thinking only to a very small extent. Democracy was debated in the communist context. It was over-idealized by the rightist reformers. It was distorted. True democratic thinking and debate never really got started in China. Discussions about democracy were also limited to intellectuals and elites. The masses never got involved much; only in the economic aspect of reform. And, because of the anti-intellectual feeling in China created by communism and the Chinese Communist Party, intellectual debate did not gain credibility. For a while after 1978, Deng supported the intellectuals, but when he was accused of trying to conserve the imperial system, he allowed their standard of living, prestige, and influence to fall. Perhaps Deng did not like them, anyway.

Taiwan, unlike China, was very penetrated by the late 1970's. The ruling party and government could not dilute or alter democratic debate very much. There was too much information: international business depended upon access to information and foreign contact. Too many people had been abroad. Too many could simply call or write people in other countries to learn about democracy. In contrast, China's trade and foreign investment were yet underdeveloped, and few of China's students who studied abroad had returned. Thus, China had less need of the free flow of information, and it had not been penetrated sufficiently by Western ideas.

Another factor was the Western media. The Western media had been very critical, some say *ultra*critical, of the government of Taiwan. In contrast, it had been an apologist for the government of China. Many reporters liked Mao. The media generally ignored China's abominable human rights record, and gave it the benefit of the doubt. Hence, China was never under the kind of pressure to change that Taiwan experienced.

The U.S. government exhibited a similar pattern of discretionary pressure. Taiwan's government had been the subject of official criticism by the U.S. Congress. After 1979, this was "codified" in the Taiwan Relations Act. This law, passed by Congress, restored recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty, but demanded democracy and human rights in return (Copper 1991, ch. 3). Opposition politicians in Taiwan were encouraged by this and became more active. Competitive elections and the competitor party mentioned above followed. On the other hand, for strategic reasons, the U.S. government put relations with China in a special category: the "China Card" would help the U.S. offset the growing Soviet military threat. Thus, China's authoritarianism (or worse) under Deng, which after all seemed an improvement from totalitarianism under Mao, was not a matter of

overriding concern.

Conclusion

Examining the pursuit of democracy in the two Chinas leads to the conclusion that two sorts of variables relating to the success or failure of democratic movements can be identified: long-term and short-term. It is also evident that the newer, short-term factors are conditioned by the antecedents. The evidence above seems to imply that democratization is a long-range process, or, at least that it requires a foundation to be laid. Sun Yat-sen appears to have been prescient in saying that the Chinese people must be trained and educated before democracy could work.

It is also easy to argue from the two Chinas' experience with democracy that ideology and the type of political system a nation espouses affects its ability to democratize. Communism is an anti-Western belief system. In many ways, Mao made it even more anti-Western. It would, perforce, seem that the Chinese Communist polity was a rejection of Western democracy, or, at minimum, a negative response to it. The same cannot be said of the Kuomintang or the government of Taiwan. Some anti-Westernism was apparent in the KMT (inevitably so, given the historical ethnocentrism of the "Middle Kingdom"); but never was this a refutation of democracy *per se*. Democracy was delayed, and even stifled; but never was it repudiated in Taiwan.

Similarly, a political system which strives to attain complete control is antithetical to the development of democracy. The people must be given choices. They must be allowed information upon which to make choices. If their time is consumed by campaigns and movements, and sources of knowledge and information are limited, they can not make rational (i.e., democratic) choices. Similarly, if they are pushed to spy on each other in a manner that fosters mutual alienation and thus atomization, a sense of community does not develop. This happened in China; it did not happen in Taiwan.

Geography and history are also important variables. The political culture of Taiwan was different from China's in some important respects. The geographical factor, which had facilitated bureaucratic rule in traditional China, disappeared once the Nationalists went to Taiwan. The Nationalists did not endeavor to preserve China's bureaucratic tradition. Perhaps the Communists did not want to, either -- but they did. Indeed, Marxism reinforced mainland China's bureaucratic tradition -- as even Mao admitted. Furthermore, the Nationalists emphasized different aspects of Chinese history than did the Communists. They wanted to preserve China's humanist tradition, which Mao wanted to make over in the image of a new, socialist man.

Taiwan also was a secure location from the 1950s on. It hardly seems a coincidence that Washington's placement of the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait (thereby shielding Taiwan from invasion) coincided with Taiwan's first island-wide election. It is, likewise, noteworthy that the Taiwan Relations Act

guaranteed Taiwan's security in very broad terms, and Taiwan's first competitive national election was held the next year, marking the beginning of the most meaningful (i.e., final) democratization period in Taiwan. China, in contrast, has been insecure, and its political leadership has reflected that. They demonstrated that vividly in June, 1989, in crushing the democracy movement and massacring students in *Tiananmen* Square. The hardliners who made the fateful decisions declared that anarchy was threatening China. They purveyed the idea (and most Chinese understood this very clearly) that they had to act as they did because chaos could lead to the breakup of China from within, or invasion from without because of weakness and lack of unity. Thus, the strongman approach was needed, and, in that context, democracy was dangerous.

The democratization of Taiwan and the absence (or failure) of democracy in China also seem to reflect the level and kind of economic development in the two Chinas. Western scholars have argued this for years. But the evidence never seemed so clear or the cases so revealing as now. In Taiwan, democracy followed economic development. From the mid-1960's and into the 1980's, Taiwan's economy grew faster than that of any other country in the world. One may suggest that Taiwan also democratized faster than any other country during the 1980s. The type of economic development that preceded and then accompanied this political development also seems relevant: free market, export-led growth with equity.

In China, economic growth was slow after the period of post-war recovery, and China did not democratize. China did experience rapid economic growth in the 1978-88 period in consequence of Deng's economic reforms, and this clearly gave rise to democratic "urges." But this growth occurred too suddenly, and was also the wrong kind of economic growth. It was capitalist growth in a communist system, and this incongruity created various dislocations and problems. Because of frequent, abrupt changes of the party line in the past (e.g., the *Hundred Flowers*, *Great Leap Forward*, *Cultural Revolution* and subsequent periods of crackdown), many people had grown cautious to adapt, lest tomorrow find them on the wrong side of the party line. Consequently, those who were the quickest to take advantage of the new capitalist rules were the lowest on the social order, who had the least to lose. So unexpected was the rise of those who accepted the challenge of entrepreneurship, and so dramatic was their success, that the reforms fostered resentment rather than the growth of a middle class. Thus, capitalist growth created serious economic inequity, which China had become unaccustomed to since 1949.

Social change in Taiwan came about as a natural, uncontrived consequence of land reform, urbanization, industrialization, prosperity (relatively evenly distributed), consumerism, and an industrialization of the economy. In contrast, social change in China was led by the Chinese Communist Party, which , although it played a less important role between 1978 and 1988, still controlled change. Looking back, social change under Deng between 1978 and 1988 was, in reality, very superficial and meaningless, save for the suffering it caused.

Another factor in the growth of a democratic culture in Taiwan is that Taiwan was comparatively cosmopolitan and open to external ideas. Historically influenced by foreign dominion, recently it has been highly penetrated, especially by the Western democracies. China, in contrast, was metropolitan -- an emitter, not a receiver, of cultural influence. As such, it has been effectively isolated for much of history. After 1949, this pattern re-emerged as China cultivated isolationism in the name of self-reliance and building socialism. Partly in consequence of their different degrees of integration into the global community and partly because of differing extraregional imperatives, the two Chinas experienced dissimilar amounts of international pressure to improve their human rights records and to democratize. Taiwan's American connection, in particular, exerted such pressure. (Although in fairness, it should be pointed out that Taiwan moved into rare company in holding an unprompted, competitive two-party election without the tutelage of a Western democracy.) China was not similarly pressured, and its human rights abuses were not emphasized prior to 1989 because, to many, communism was a reformed or progressive system, while to others China was too important strategically to interfere in or even criticize its domestic affairs.

The evolution of political parties followed these developments. In Taiwan, the Nationalist Party was conditioned not to allow competition, but at the same time not to try to attain total control over the society. This gave way to allowance of some competition, and, as conditions changed and outside pressure influenced Taiwan, to allowance of real party competition. It is important to note that the success of the Nationalist Party in engineering rapid economic growth and social progress made it confident enough to allow challenge to the one-party system. In China, the Communist Party sought to gain unlimited authority and control from the outset. Ruling a large country with a history of centrifugal tendencies, without the assistance of modern transportation and communications nets, the Communists strove nearly always for greater central control. Frustration gave rise to power struggles; so did the lack of open debate on issues and the closing of the decision-making process from public view. Its poor record of economic development further caused the Chinese Communist Party to lack confidence in its popular support.

Political party competition has come to play a central role in the political process in Taiwan. In contrast, Deng's effort to allow party competition in China was viewed by his countrymen as a ploy. The Party left saw it as a design to undermine their strength. The effect was to fuel the fire of factionalism. Even many rightist reformers in the Chinese Communist Party feared party competition as a threat to the authority of the party. Thus ensued the backlash from the left in the spring of 1989.

To sum up, it is one thing to attempt to democratize an authoritarian system that does not go to as much effort to dominate other human activities -- such as economic behavior, foreign contacts, information control, and social change processes -- as it does to perpetuate its own political regime. It is quite another

problem to democratize a totalitarian system that attempts to extend the regime's control beyond politics into all human affairs, including the afore-mentioned activities. Although the totalitarian may wish, and try, to introduce reform into certain areas of his control -- for example, economic matters, in order to realize the dynamic growth that typically eludes planned economies -- such reforms can have little positive impact if not accompanied by the kinds of social changes (unrestricted travel and flow of information, freedom of choice, allowance of unequal distribution of wealth, etc.) that are necessary to facilitate the success of the reform. The backlash produced by Deng's experiment with capitalism and democratic freedoms in a communist setting demonstrates that regimes cannot achieve economic growth without freedom, and cannot afford both freedom and egalitarianism without the destruction of one by the other.

The lesson that the two Chinas offer to the ex-totalitarian states of the former Soviet bloc, and to those rethinking authoritarianism elsewhere on the planet, is that economic freedom, openness to external contacts and influence, accessibility of information, and tolerance of the diversity that is the end-product of each of the above, all appear to be antecedents, if not vehicles, of democratization. This lesson is all the more compelling in that the success of one democratic experiment, and the failure of the other, cannot be ascribed to differences of national character, culture, or historical experience, for these are nearly alike for the two Chinas. A structural explanation of democratization thus appears to be the most worthwhile theoretical path to explore.

NOTES

[1]Since the breakup of the Soviet bloc, it is much more apparent to most observers that this is true.

[2]For a theoretical discussion of these issues, see Almond and Verba (1980); Alford (1963); Dahl (1971, 1973); Duverger (1955); and La Palombara and Weiner (1966). For a broad comparison of the two Chinas, see Kubek (1987).

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