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**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND
CHALLENGES OF NEW DEMOCRACIES:
REMARKS ON CHINA AND TAIWAN**

SEVERAL AUTHORS HAVE NOTICED the relationship between the internationalization (or the globalization) of the economy of a country with its democratization as an inevitable process. Nonetheless we can find important variations in this relationship that show, as in China, that there is not an inevitable relationship between economic liberalism and democracy. In the contemporary changing process in China towards an increased local electoral participation of citizens, not to be considered as democratization, the endogenous factors along with the prevailing of the authoritarian state weigh more. On the other hand, in Taiwan, the democratic process can be linked to the search for international legitimacy. Additionally it is important to consider the presence of a political and intellectual elite, educated in Europe and the USA that is strongly imbued in western democratic values, which has been in power since the early 90s. We are taken by these instances to the various forms that a political system can adopt with citizen participation, as Levitsky and Way have studied through applying several adjectives to democracy, marked by authoritarian traces, or through

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authoritarianism with some forms of political participation (Levitsky and Way, 2002, Pershing, 2004). The case of Taiwan leads us to the well known debate between procedural democracy and its efficiency in terms of its consequences as studied by Amartya Sen (Sen, 1995).

THE ROLE OF LOCAL ELECTIONS IN CHINA

The changes in the Chinese political system during the reforms can be summarized as the transition from a totalitarian regime to a single party authoritarianism. This last form has required to decentralize decisions and to introduce innovative ways of political participation.

In order to understand the political changes in China, it is necessary to consider first that as a result of the reforms, the complexity of the society has grown at great speed in the last twenty five years, in such a way that, today, roughly speaking, we find a well educated intellectual elite raised in the most sophisticated worldly thought trends, traumatized by the Tiananmen repression in 1989, alienated by its privileges, not willing to risk its status, co-existing with a rich middle-class which accepts that itself is a by product of the authoritarian and developmental regime and because of that is also unwilling to risks its favorable circumstances. They are in a melting pot along with a wide majority of farmers and urban population strongly oriented to the satisfaction of their own basic needs; with a group of internal migrant workers that is more than ten per cent of the population, excluded from development; with a middle stratus of cadres from the Communist Party that use their power to get material profit from the new conditions; and all of them led by a political elite that not only searches to preserve its power through the Party but that requires specific instruments of governability and legitimacy to guarantee the feasibility of the political system.

In terms of space there is an important sector of the population living in the urban communities of the oriental coast with high income and a cosmopolitan and consumerist culture coexisting with the majority of the population living with little resources and difficult information access in the broad central and western areas of the country. There is also a great diversity of ethnic groups in the scarcely populated extensive south-west, extreme west, and center north territories, which have different ways for relating to space, economy and politics.

The study of the actual Chinese political system reveals that while the political elite acknowledges that the country's severe inequality and corruption problems can be a real threat to governability, that elite is also forewarned by its own origin and nature to respond to this challenges within an authoritarian and single party frame. In order to face this situation, the new leadership has resorted, at least in the discourse, to instruments such as surveying functionaries and transparency and

has been using terms such as democracy and rule of law. However, the political elite has been clear about this matter: it moves within the frame provided by preserving the hegemonic position of the Communist Party, which is endorsed by the Constitution and other related Laws. In other words, the defense of the rule of law in China means the confirmation of the predominance of the Communist Party.

Therefore, these changes in the political discourse cannot be analyzed under the same lens as the meaning of the rule of law in other countries; instead, it has to be examined as an instrumental use of mechanisms that have been traditionally linked to democratic systems to help the survival of an authoritarian regime. In bringing together all these paradoxical elements we can search for the goal of citizen participation through voting in the local congress elections.

The first element that catches our attention from the new leadership discourse is their stress on the great problems of the country that are no longer submitted as contradictions but as imbalances. Those submitted more frequently are: the inequalities in income and poverty, the regional inequity in development, corruption and the excessive resource waste which is associated with environmental damage.

One of the more interesting issues of the political change in China is the direct elections in the lower levels of the government structure. Though those changes were already in 1982's Constitution they became relevant from the mid 90's onward. Besides their inclusion in the Constitution, the direct elections in China are supported by two important legal instruments. The elections for the National People's Congress and the People's Congresses of the lower levels are regulated by the Election Law of 1979. The direct elected village committees were regulated first by the Organic Law on Village Committees approved provisionally by the Standing Committee of the Six National People's Congress on November 24th, 1987. This Law was amended later and approved in its definitive form on November 4th, 1998 in the Fifth session of the Standing Committee of the XI National People Congress.

As a result there are several kinds of direct elections: the village committees, the people's congresses of townships and counties, the neighborhood committees and the popular assembly of districts and urban districts. These processes are also ruled by local regulations where the provinces have worked on them. In general terms these elections must follow the popularity principles, i.e. that all the legal age people can vote; equality, direct elections, secret ballots, multiple candidates, guarantee the right to vote and the supervision and recall of the chosen ones.

The urban equivalent of the village committees are the residents or neighborhood committees (*chengshi jumin weiyuanhui*) which go

back to 1954 when they were established to organize the urban residents that were not affiliated to a working unit. The law for urban elections was approved in 1989 and it was based on the experimental law of the village committees. Since 1999, the direct elections of these city-dweller committees have been in effect, when the Ministry of Civil Affairs selected and then the Party approved the experiment with a group of cities among which were Beijing, Nanjing and Chongqing. In cities with high unemployment and where urban transformations have changed—in some cases violently—the way of living of its inhabitants, these elections channeled the dissatisfaction.

Since the village elections were implemented, two positions arose in the party, on one side, the middle and lower cadres were against the law because it undermined the roots of their power; on the other side the leaders at the central power of the party defended the law as an instrument for recovering of legitimacy among the people, which could be read as the ideological commandment of “masses line”.

However, in practice, it was more relevant to maintain political control, avoid the popular unrest caused by the local authorities’ abuses, and to guarantee the country governability. That is why, during the first period, the lower cadres of the party tried to grasp most of the village election positions, frequently using unlawful practices and causing local political tensions expressed in countless peasant protest movements.

The legitimacy crisis that followed the 1989 repression made the party leadership devoted to a big campaign to promote the rule of law which was systematized in the mid 90s. During this process the leadership reached an important consensus on governability, stability and unity of the country.

Given the aforementioned circumstances as well as its need for renewal and legitimacy, the Communist Party, after a thorough analysis of the situation, took a new position, which was posted in a document in July 2002. This document clarifies to the members of the party that they must respect the electoral laws and avoid imposing their own candidates. The document says;

It is advocated that candidates for secretaries of party branches shall run for village committee election first; after they obtain the approval from the people, they can be nominated as candidates for secretaries of party branches; should they fail to be elected head of village committees, they shall not be nominated as candidates for secretaries of party branches. Members of village committee can hold a concurrent post in party branches after s/he is approved by the inner-Party election. Members of village committees and village group leaders and

representatives of villagers can be admitted into the Party in order to infuse rural basic-level party organizations with new blood (Circular concerning improving villager committee election, 2002).

Direct elections in Chinese countryside have been observed by local and foreign Non Government Organizations and have been managed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs whose educational work is highly and widely recognized. However, the majority of these elections don't follow the law closely, but surveillance along with education has slowly shown their effect.

Meanwhile, in big cities like Beijing, these local elections have taken independent defenders of popular causes to local congress, and in some places local entrepreneurs have won elections to local representation. A noteworthy case was when Wang Youhua, brother of the former Tiananmen democracy activist and founder of the Chinese Democratic Party, Wang Youcai, was pressured by local government officials to withdraw his candidacy for the village chief elections in Liwu village committee in the east coast province of Zhejiang. (Asia Times, May 25, 2005) Through these examples we can state that the emphasis on the law and on the institutional reforms, such as local elections, can be mechanisms for a small change within the political practices and culture of the country.

During 2005 there were more than 300,000 local direct elections for village committees in 15 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions. Since 1988 when the provisional Organic Law for Village Committee was approved there have been elections in the majority of the provinces and autonomous regions of the country. Up to 2005 more than 700,000 elected village committees had been established. Even though the law has been interpreted locally in many ways, these elections involve open nominations, secret ballots and more candidates than positions. According to the international observing agencies the first urban elections have been mainly free and transparent.

Since 1999 more than a dozen main cities have been selected to carry out direct elections of the neighborhood committees, the lowest level of municipal government. In 2005, after several experiments, the government decided to increase the number of cities that hold elections to choose their representatives in the local congresses. Among others these elections have taken place in Beijing, Shangyang, Nanning, Tianjin, Nanjing, Wuhan, Harbin, Jinan, Changsha, Yinchuan y Ningbo.

It is remarkable that in some cities even foreigners have been candidates as was the case in Pudong or the Taiwanese entrepreneur who contested representation in the local congress of Tianjin (People's Daily, October 23, 2005) In the same way experiments in consulting and transparency were registered in some Guandong districts, where officials

have begun publishing their budgets and employment policies. In 2003, in a district of Jiangsu, the local authorities held a public referendum so the residents could choose the worst official in each administrative department. As a result nine officials were suspended for six months.

It could not be said that the electoral laws are accurately enforced, in theory the elections are open and their limit is the formation of political organizations, the candidates must only represent the interests of their communities. One of the main problems of these elections is illegal vote induction. In this regard, Zhan Chengfu, director of the department in charge of the administration of the basic level of the Ministry of Civil Affairs said:

There is only one article dealing with the problem in the existing “Organizational Law for Villager’s Committee” and moreover it is in principle singular and vague in sense. There’s no definition on what is a bribed vote, nor is there any definite rule as regards how to deal with the problem and so it is somewhat difficult to handle the problem. Now what we can do is only to work out some rules and regulations on the basis as a related department, which can be used by local administration for reference. When these rules or regulations are testified to be correct and suitable in practice they can be taken as amendments for legislation. This is an accumulative process in the construction of a system (People’s Daily, 2005)¹.

Many scholars have interpreted the opening of the political system in China as an after effect of globalization. From my personal point of view, the local elections are an instrument that the authoritarian elite utilizes to face the generalized discontent of the population –resulting from the corruption of local officials– which threatens governability. In 2005 there were 87,000 officially reported “mass incidents”, which are in fact social protest movements. The factors that caused these changes appear to be completely endogenous and the Chinese elite confirms it. During an important political meeting to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the National People’s Congress, the President and General Secretary of the Communist Party, Hu Jintao stated “... history proves that blindly following western political systems would lead China to a dead end, and China’s current people’s congress system has strong vitality and great superiority”. The President also said:

We must be active in learning from all human civilizations, including the positive results of political civilization. But we will never

1 About the legal problems of elections see also <<http://www.nanfangdaily.com.cn/zm/20050202/xw/tb/200502030042.asp>>.

blindly copy the mode of other countries' political systems (People's Daily, 2004).

NATURE AND CHALLENGES OF THE NEW DEMOCRACY IN TAIWAN

Taiwan requires a closer analysis because, from an institutional point of view, its democratic liberal system has been recognised worldwide as one of the most democratic countries. This process began with the end of Martial Law in 1987; however, the political opening can be traced back to 1972. In that year, the only party dictatorship of the Kuomintang, presented signs of opening alternated with ferocious acts of repression. These first political changes occurred as an answer to Taiwan's diplomatic isolation after being expelled from the United Nations in 1971. This international event undermined the position of the authoritarian government; from that moment on, and with growing intensity, some of the social forces began to express themselves such as: human and women rights or even early worker and student movements.

The death of Chiang Kai-shek in 1975 and, three years later, the rise to the presidency of his son Chiang Ching-kuo who was more liberal took place precisely when the pressure of the opposition groups was growing. On January first of 1979 another international event intensified the problems: the USA diplomatic recognition shifted from Taiwan to the People Republic of China, which meant another hard blow to the stability of the Taiwanese state. In December, some civilian groups led wide mass meetings in Kaohsiung, the second city on the island, that were followed by a brutal police repression. By the early eighties the existence of the group called *tangwai* was already evident; these were organisations outside of the ruling party that fought for the regime's liberalisation by imposing strong political pressure.

In March 1986, Chiang Ching-kuo announced to the KMT's central committee that the moment of leading the country to constitutional democracy had arrived. Consequently, he named a group of twelve central committee permanent members, including liberals and conservatives, to assess the situation and propose a strategy. In June, the group presented a six point program: carry out extensive elections to choose the central organs representatives, reform local governments, directly elect the governors and mayors of Taipei and Kaohsiung, simplify national security laws, legalise the new civilian associations and political parties, strengthen public order and fortify the work of the party.

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) –which was tolerated for some time– made its foundation public in September 28th, 1986. Even though, the ministry of justice pressed charges against it for violating Martial Law, the president mediated and lifted the Mar-

tial Law. In addition, he allowed the political parties that abandoned the communism and Taiwan's independency causes. The DPP carried out its first congress in November and adopted a Party constitution which supported in its documents –in ambiguous language that would not upset the government even more– Taiwan's self-determination and its return to the United Nations.(Clark, 2000). The DPP, still without legal recognition, participated in the legislative elections of December 6th, 1986, where 84 members of the Legislative Yuan and 73 members of the National Assembly were elected. The DPP won 21% of the votes. On July 15th, 1987, Martial Law was suspended and on October 14th Taipei allowed family visits to the mainland for the first time.

After Chiang Ching-kuo's death, on January 13th, 1988, the vice-president, Lee Teng-hui², rose to the presidency. Lee, as the first president born in Taiwan, started a 'taiwanisation' process within the government and proceeded to immediately dismantle the old structure of the state, brought by Chiang Kai-shek directly from China. Therefore, on March 2nd, 1988, the National Security Council requested the voluntary retirement of the members of the parliament elected on the continent during the 40's.

Along with this taiwanisation process of the government, Lee Teng-hui started extending democratic liberties. Thus on January 20th, 1989, more political parties were allowed, and on December 2nd –that same year– they were able to stand in the elections for the Legislative Yuan, the Provincial Assembly of Taiwan, Taipei's and Kaohsiung's Municipal Councils, and County Magistrates and Town Majors. The DPP won 35% of the votes and the KMT 60%. The National Assembly elected Lee Teng-hui president for a six-year term on March 21st, 1990.

The pressure for more reforms was expressed in mass meetings and President Lee decided to search for consensus among the island's different groups; so, in the summer of 1990 he called a conference on national issues, where the leadership of the KMT and the opposition achieved an agreement. During the conference the most important aspects on democratization were discussed, and the participants reached a consensus on the necessity of a political reform. Consequently, in April 1991, a constitutional reform cancelling some National Assembly prerogatives was carried out. An organisation devoted specifically to deal with Mainland related issues was also constituted. The same year, on December 21st, the elections for the National Assembly took place; the DPP obtained 24% of the votes

2 Mayor of Taipei 1978-1981, Governor of Taiwan Province 1981-1984, and Vice President since 1984.

and the KMT 71%. On December 31st, 1991, every Mainland-elected member of the National Assembly, the Legislative Yuan and the Yuan of Control finally retired.

Since 1991, the Constitution has been amended several times with the purpose of changing some foundations of the government structure and the electoral mechanisms. The acting periods of both the president and the members of the National Assembly were reduced from six to four years; the proportional representation was introduced in the Legislative Yuan and the National Assembly also. The president and the vice-president could be elected by direct popular vote instead of being elected indirectly. The president with the approval of the Legislative Yuan instead named the members of the Yuan of Control, that used to be elected by the Provincial Assemblies and the Municipal Councils, so this organism was transformed into a semi-judicial institution. Moreover, on June 7, 2005, the National Assembly was finally abolished by a constitutional amendment.

All these reforms implied a redefinition of relations with China. The new ascending Taiwanese elite wanted to abandon the reunification project and began constructing an all-Taiwanese political structure and a new form of nationalism. At the same time, informal channels of communication with the continent were open; travel, telephony communication, and triangular commerce increased. At the moment, the intensification of the economic relationship has made the island highly dependent on its commerce with the continent.

It is important to emphasise that the opening process was not only a product of the island's domestic social forces but, also, of the relationship with China and the international context. China's economic reforms, initiated in the late 70's, were already consolidated with a clear capitalist bias which, together with the dismantlement of the Soviet Union in the early 90s, made the phantom of communism vanish. For the KMT the only recognised enemy had been the Communist Party, hence the island's economic prosperity, the success of anticommunist education and the rise of a particular society, were the reason why the KMT did not see a threat in the domestic opposition forces. Besides, the extreme isolation of the island after the shift of the American diplomatic recognition, convinced the KMT leadership to undertake the political opening to assure some international legitimacy, especially because in the 80's it was already clear that the Chinese Communist Party wouldn't choose the political opening.

Simultaneously with the creation of political parties, the contained elements of a highly educated civil society began to be expressed in publications and in the formation of new social organisations out of the KMT's control. (Hu, 1994:479, 481, 485-6) Likewise, in

January 1994, the Law of Universities granted to those communities a bigger participation in the management of their own issues.

Another remarkable element of Taiwanese society is the civil organisations or foundations devoted to the achievement of community goals. Many of them played an important role during the Martial Law period; however, their independence was questionable. Over time, those foundations acquired a bigger role and began following their own objectives, aside from the state. (Hsiao, 1994, pp. 393-399) Most of those foundations are oriented to philanthropy, education or culture and only 3.6% of them are devoted to social activism; most of them are privately financed and depend neither on government nor on big corporations.

The foreign educated Taiwanese play an important role in the political transformation. In Taiwan, until the 80's, the tendency was to send students abroad, mostly to the United States, to specialise in post-graduate studies. At the beginning the return rate of those students wasn't very high, due to the economy's incapacity to incorporate them. (Liu, 1981) Since the 90's, however, the return of highly qualified personnel grew dramatically because of the country's improved conditions, such as better salaries, political liberties and a special incentive system created by the Commission for the Youth.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

The transition from an only party dictatorship to an electoral democracy in Taiwan initiated when the DPP managed to participate in the 1986's legislative elections. Therefore the consolidation of this process has been parallel with free trustworthy elections and the strengthening of the parties. It was Lee Teng-hui who organised the first direct presidential elections in 1996, where Lee Teng-hui himself won with 54% of the votes. The most important highlight of this transition, though, is the second direct presidential election, on March 18th, 2000. For the first time, the elections were very hard-fought and also they were characterised by splits in the two most important parties. Five candidates contended for the presidency.

Lee Teng-hui imposed Lien Chan, the regime's vice-president, who represented the continuity option, as the Kuomintang candidate; nevertheless Lien tried to put some distance from Lee's radical positions on the State/State relation formula with China, that irritated Beijing in July, 1999. The candidate for the Democratic Progressive Party was Chen Shuibian, who was born in Taiwan from a poor peasant's family and was known for his inflexible position against corruption. He dragged along throughout his whole campaign the burden of his party's radical posture on Taiwan's independence, this implied the support

of the Taiwanese population which preferred independence, but also brought to him Beijing's menaces. James Soong, a former prominent member of the Kuomintang, decided to run as an independent candidate in November 1999, as a response to the authoritarian imposition of the president's candidate in his party. Regarding the China issue, he represented the position of the so-called Mainlanders, that is to say the most favourable for Beijing. These three were the most voted candidates, but also running was Li Ao, a leading intellectual from the New Party –an earlier Kuomintang split–, who surprisingly called on his followers to vote for Lien Chan; and Hsu Hsin-liang, who ran for a little group that had broken away from the DPP.

During the electoral process, it was difficult to predict who of the three strongest candidates would win the elections; the polls gave very similar figures. In general, the three government options didn't differ substantially from an ideological point of view or on their proposals on Taiwan's economic and social development. Two elements appeared as the most important issues during the campaigns, the relations with the People's Republic of China and the criticism against corruption; it seems however, that among the citizens the candidates' background and personality were more relevant. This element, which can lead to the citizen's preference for charismatic leaderships, may be very important in the dawn of a democratic system.

Surprisingly for the ruling party, the election results were very unfavourable. Chen Shui-bian, for the DPP, obtained 39.3% of the votes, James Soong 36.84% and Lien Chan from the KMT 23.1%. This meant a crushing defeat for the Koumingtang, not only in quantitative terms but also for the certainty that they had put on winning the elections no matter what. Still, when we consider the ideological affinities and the common origins of the losing candidates and add up their votes, we can observe a clear social tendency akin to KMT propositions.

Many elements explain the success of the Democratic Progressive Party's formula, Chen Shui-bian to the presidency and Anette Lu to vice-presidency. First, we have to consider that they were helped by the KMT's break up and the attacks between the two candidates, Lien and Soong, who each considered themselves as the great and only contender. That dispute only served to expose the past government corruption, because Lien Chan was the vice-president and Soong had been the first and last directly elected governor of the Taiwan province (1994-1998), making their mutual attacks based upon their respective administration's flaws. As for Chen and Lu, they were leaders emerging from the civilian struggle for political rights in their own party. The fact that 48 year old Chen came from a poor peasant family already marked a distance from the old political elite. Besides what was important for voters

was his well-known inflexibility –as Taipei mayor– in the fight against corruption, the system of privileges and the administrative inefficiency. All of this was very appealing for a highly educated Taiwanese society, which no longer believed in promises and coercion –old Kuomintang techniques. 55-year-old Anette Lu, was formed in the feminist struggles of the 70's, she was imprisoned for fighting for human rights and is very popular among the female population.

It is difficult to judge the relevance for the elections of the traditional Democratic Progressive Party posture on Taiwanese independence. China tried to influence the elections by different means; on February 21st, the Beijing government published the White Paper on the Taiwan issue, in a very threatening tenor, where a new condition justifying the use of force against Taiwan was added: the “indefinite delay on the conversations about reunification”. Besides, the Chinese leaders' harsh declarations on the possibility of the use of force were given great publicity. Obviously, this affected the Taiwanese society since, despite government intervention; Taipei Stock Exchange's Taix index lost 7.1% in the week prior to the elections. This could have also influenced the surprisingly high number of votes for James Soong, who represented the most moderate position about China. After the publishing of the aforementioned White Paper, the Mainland Affairs Council of Taiwan conducted a poll demonstrating that the publication had had the opposite desired effect.

It seems that this crucial issue wasn't determining as the contenders didn't show radically different positions regarding China. The following factors were the ones deciding the election in Chen's favour: first, the KMT's division and the focusing of the old party's campaign against its former affiliated, James Soong; second –but not necessarily less relevant–, the vote for change. Also important were Chen's and his partner Anette Lu's personal characteristics, the Democratic Progressive Party's promises of fighting corruption and the public support to Chen by some businessmen.

Decisively, those elections were crucial for Taiwan. On the one hand, they offered the chance to test relations with China of the new Taiwanese nationalist elite that has proved to be less radical than Lee Teng-hui, and on the other hand it has led to a readjustment of the political forces. This last process began with James Soong's departure from the Kuomintang and his unexpectedly high number of votes. Besides, when the electoral results were known the KMT militants organised protests, some of them violent, to demand Lee Teng-hui's resignation from the party's presidency and his recognition of responsibility for defeat. Lien Chan resigned from the Kuomintang vice-presidency and later on Lee Teng-hui resigned from the party presidency, which didn't satisfy his angry party fellows.

The Kuomintang immediately undertook a self-criticism process and a structural reform. In the provisional meeting of the 15th Congress of the Party, three months after the elections, Lien Chan was elected president and he nominated five new party's vice-presidents, including a woman. Subsequently, in the fourth plenary session of the 15th Central Committee, 31 new members of the standing committee were elected; none of them was imposed from above. Moreover, the party's constitution was reviewed and the direct election of the future president by all party members was introduced.

Immediately after the elections, Soong's followers insisted him to create a new party. This is the reason why he founded the People First Party (PFP), which won over many KMT and New Party legislatures, becoming the Legislative Yuan's third force.

Despite its reforming attempts, the KMT drowned in a new crisis after losing the 2000 presidential elections. It was not only affected by the strong division of James Soong's departure and the foundation of a new party, but also by the new government's fight against corruption that has revealed many details on the KMT members' corruption, which was no surprise to anybody, but hadn't been cleared up. Besides, in the December 1st, 2001 legislative elections it was defeated again by the DPP, which led KMT to establish alliances with James Soong's party.

In the 2004 presidential elections, the KMT lost again. However, the narrow margin giving triumph to the DPP –0.22 percent– and the severe accusations against the winning party and its candidate for the suspicious financing of their campaign which caused a serious discredit to the DPP in its second period, have created an advantageous situation for the KMT which recovered its large share of votes in December 2005 local elections. This party's recovery is due considerably to the continuous corruption scandals surrounding the DPP, which in its second period in government has succumbed to some corruption practices that were the KMT's prerogative in the past. Also important in this recovery has been the charismatic leadership of Ma Ying-jeou, the Taipei mayor. At the end of June 2006, the KMT and the PFP tried to pass a motion in congress to organise a referendum to recall President Chen Shui-bian amid a swirl of corruption scandals embroiling his wife and son-in-law. 119 of the legislature's 221 members, well below the two-thirds majority needed to force a referendum, backed the motion. The strong opposition in the congress has practically paralysed many actions in Chen's government. Besides, the KMT leaders have reached an important approach with China, at a time when this country was approving laws that set up its intention of making a military intervention on the island if it declares independence.

On November 3, 2006, Wu Shu-chen, President Chen Shui-bian's wife, and three other high-ranking officials of the Presidential Office were indicted of corruption. Consequently, even prominent members of DPP have criticized the President. Since the beginning of that year a prominent leader of DPP, Shih Ming-de, has been in open opposition to the President Chen. In September he launched a campaign called "Million voices against corruption. President Chen must go". Tens of thousands of people demonstrated in the streets wearing a red shirt asking for the resignation of the President. This movement, supported by the KMT, maintain a sitting on the Main Train Station of Taipei, every day from 6 to 10 pm, asking for the resignation of the president.

TAIWANESE SOCIETY AND ITS POLITICAL PROCESS

One element characterising Taiwanese society is its dynamic class mobility, as a product of development and economic opportunities. The general conditions encouraged by the State that have helped this social dynamism consist of efficient land reform, strong investment in education, industrial development and infrastructure construction. An interesting factor bearing upon social mobility is occupational crossing; many corporate employees have also small family assemblage companies that subcontract with big corporations. In the same way, because of its high level of information, people take advantage of the financial offerings so their savings grow fast with highly profitable investments.

All these elements have contributed to achieve a relatively fair income distribution that gives a sense of being constantly improved. However, due to the companies' internationalisation and the investments placed abroad, when it is expressed in technical figures, this fair distribution reflects a different situation. During the initial period of social transformation and accelerated economic development, the income disproportion dramatically decreased because of the land reform in the 50's. Nonetheless, the economic transformation toward bigger capital investment and technology exports, initiated in the 80's, has –marginally– increased inequalities. In 1953, the Gini Coefficient was 0.56, by 1964 it decreased to 0.33 and by 1970 to 0.30. Later on, the Gini Coefficient increased, from 0.277 in 1980 to 0.316 in 1993, which is not directly perceived by the population for it is a reflect of economic internationalisation.

This situation, combined with other social traits, has prevented severe class conflicts on the island. The economy's 'family factor', is another social element –hard to measure– that has also avoided employer-worker conflicts. A great portion of small and medium size

companies sustaining the island's economy were family businesses employing preferably relatives and other people close to the family. Likewise, from the mid 60's to the mid 80's, the demand of work exceeded the supply, which forced businessmen to improve the working conditions to attract possible employees.

Until the end of the Martial Law in 1987, Kuomintang exerted a corporative control over labour and it repressed every class conflict led by workers. Unions were utilised as a means of control rather than serving to protect the workers' interests. This has changed and several independent unions, along with public manifestations and labour disputes have emerged since 1987. Nevertheless, the workers' movement is not an important political player because of the lack of severe economic contradictions, the existence of real options for increasing income and the people's tendency to combine different economic activities. It is also essential to consider that the Kuomintang –which held the government until May 2000– took political measures to provide social welfare, as well as redistribution policies which took over some goals of the unionists. The party's corporative tendency also reached out to the business sectors; by means of state/private company joint investments, and by using regulations and its fiscal power, the Kuomintang with its political power controlled the most important businessmen. This tendency changed with Lee Teng-hui's regime, which allowed important businessmen, many of them of Taiwanese origin, to reach political power; and through different ways they have occupied legislative positions, a phenomenon that is not without its corruption accusations.

In general, we could distinguish Taiwanese society for its middle class predominance. It is composed of small and medium size businessmen, intellectuals, technicians, administrative workers of every level, et cetera. Due to the dramatic economical and political changes on the island, we can consider it mostly a second-generation middle class, characterised by a liberal political positioning, the supporting of democratisation and an open attitude toward the mixing of their different groups of origin.

From the social structure perspective, the most important cleavage that we can find on the island –for its complexity– is probably the one dividing the “Taiwanese” from the “Mainlanders”. It is an inherited identity, and it tends to dissolve. This division refers to people that arrived to the island before 1945, and to their descendents; but most of them share a common origin and the same culture. Their difference lies in the fact that Taiwanese lived under Japanese rule for about 50 years, while mainlanders arrived later to the island and settled in as a political class, monopolising key positions in the state structure, in the

ruling party and in educational and cultural institutions. They imposed things such as the Mandarin Chinese as the spoken language, or even a national concept based on a government that, in theory, controlled the whole of the Chinese territory. Another important event that contributed to widen this division was the repression against the people opposing the occupation troops, which led to the massacre of about 20,000 people on February 18th, 1947. This event is still remembered on the island and is the symbolic axe of a Taiwanese identity “oppressed” by the mainlanders. It is estimated that by the time of their arrival, the mainlanders –including administrative workers, military personnel and political refugees– were about one and a half million people; almost 20 % of the island’s population in 1949. By the mid 60’s they represented 15% of the island’s total population –probably 30% of the people living in urban areas. Nowadays, the estimation is that they amount to slightly over 10% of the population.

Regarding the work division, the separation can be expressed in the following way: relying on family labour and land possession, Taiwanese focused on productive activities, while –as we said before– Mainlanders, in general, occupied the state’s and the Party’s administrative positions as well as the management of new companies, settled on the island thanks to the state support and foreign investment³.

Historically, these social boundaries have been expressed in the principal political parties, and they are still a fundamental issue in new political associations. Mainlanders kept their prominence in the Kuomintang as the DPP have assumed the cause of Taiwanese vindication; so Taiwanese represent the majority of its leaders and its followers. It explains why a Taiwanese president of the Kuomintang was such an important element on the structural change of these groups’ relations. The Mainland sectors inside the KMT that think that they have been left out by their leaders, founded another party in 1993, the New Party, which keeps a detailed proposal for trans-strait relations on its program platform and, moreover, its members pursue associations with the continent. The identity issue was also behind the foundation of the Taiwan Solidarity Union Party, in August 2000, which states in its platform the trans-strait relations as one of its main political concerns. This party grouped the KMT dissidents –who observed, after the electoral defeat, a change of direction on the taiwanisation tendencies imposed

3 Besides this division, it could be added that Taiwanese establish some group distinctions between the hokkien –representing the majority– and the hakka; though they both come from regions of the same province of Fujian. Likewise, they make a difference between the people coming from Guangdong province. These groups present notorious linguistic differences.

by Lee Teng-hui-, and also some of the DPP dissidents –disappointed by president Chen Shui-bian’s moderate policy towards China.

From my observation, in spite of the basis of this social division being rather weak, it is present in almost every group. It is a division encouraged by DPP as a way to present it self as a real alternative to KMT. Moreover, for many people it is a way to express their remorse for decades of repressive government of KMT. In other words, the social trauma of the repressive KMT government has been channelled to this “social division”. Contrary to other cases, the repressors have not rendered judgment.

TAIWAN DEMOCRACY’S LESSONS

The DPP’s victory over the Kuomintang, in the presidential elections of 2000, brought a regime shift that was confirmed the following year, when the KMT lost its majority in the congress. Although this has fulfilled the expectations on the democratic transition of those prioritising the change of party in government, there are still some elements of the political system that can be considered problematic for the consolidation of democracy in Taiwan.

The state structure inherited a very close bond between the executive and the legislative powers as a by-product of a long period of a single-party administration. The DPP’s government agenda has suffered some paralysis due to the opposition alliances in the Legislative Yuan that often frustrate their actions. This has shown the necessity for some political reforms and constitutional amendments allowing a definition of the political system towards a new one –perhaps one that, structurally, gives more prominence to the president; the KMT has systematically opposed this. On the other hand, inside the DPP, some disagree with the fact of having the president as the head of his own party, while others praise the system’s advantages for building more cohesive action in the congress. The conflict between executive and legislative powers not only creates economic and administrative paralyses, but it also affects the prestige and significance of democracy as an efficient political system among social sectors such as entrepreneurs and the like. The political elites from all parties do not consider the consequences of this issue on their agendas.

While in the past the core problems of the local elections were traditional local loyalties and vote buying, Taiwan has now entered a corruption wipeout process. The problem today is the way political parties are considering local election processes. For many of them these elections are only important in terms of people’s preferences toward the next national elections, especially the presidential election,

without considering that local elections may play an important role in the political education of citizens in new democratic systems.

There is a growing lack of trust in political parties, which is expressed in a growing number of candidates independently running for elections. Frequently, political party campaigns are based on a series of corruption scandals or on the personal features of the candidates. Quite often ideological considerations are neglected in order to facilitate inter-party alliances otherwise impossible. Small political parties usually “sell” or exchange voters’ preferences to negotiate and ensure political positions with big parties. All these abnormalities along with the frequency of election processes have brought a sort of “political fatigue syndrome” among voters, which could in the future be expressed by staying away from ballot boxes. It can also be expressed by looking for charismatic leadership outside political parties, a person who may not always have a strong commitment to democracy.

It is relevant also to consider the importance of the role played by the media along with the influences of local factions and interpersonal relationship networks and their effects in new democracies’ political culture. In a situation where candidates and parties are only looking for votes, they tend to sell themselves as any other commodity. Consequently, a kind of show business has become part of this new “pop electoral culture”. Therefore, expensive and efficient campaigns can result into catapulting not precisely the best candidates to power, while the scandal-hungry media avoids debating the important issues for communities.

There is a strong tendency to “personalize” leadership. Influential leaders usually abandon parties when they do not obtain the nomination they seek. Then they run as independent contenders or establish a new small party to be able to negotiate with bigger organizations. As a result, voters have to choose from a number of parties or candidates offering similar ideologies and platforms. They usually end up voting for the most charismatic candidate or supporting whichever party seems stronger.

Considering the case of Taiwan, I can conclude, that democracy is more than copying procedures and institutions. The political culture is particularly important, new democracies still need to go through political education in order to create real citizenship. The role of political parties in this process is crucial. However, political parties focused only on votes seem to neglect their role in political education. This situation tends to undermine the prestige and significance of democracy in societies where authoritarianism is not so far away historically speaking.

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