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Taiwan needs to forge independent path

By MINEO NAKAJIMA

China has changed dramatically in the past 35 years. During my first visit there in the autumn of 1966, the Great Cultural Revolution was beginning to engulf the country. Near the hotel where I was staying in Shanghai, the streets were thronged with Red Guards shouting antiestablishment slogans. I narrowly escaped arrest for taking pictures of Red Guard wall posters and photos of armed struggle displayed at the hotel entrance.



Needless to say, Shanghai is very different today, as is much of the rest of China. Last month, during a summer vacation that marked the end of my six-year term as president of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, I made a 10-day private tour of China — the country in which I specialize. In Shanghai, following visits to Hong Kong, Kunming, Chongqing, the Three Gorges Dam and Wuhan, I stayed in the same hotel as my previous visit and strolled the same streets that Red Guards once patrolled. Signs of recent change were everywhere. In particular, the brilliant neon lights along Nanjing Street and the bustling waterfront nightspot of Huangpujiang symbolized the city's transformation over the past two years.

During my fact-finding tour, which followed a similar trip two years ago that took me to Huanan, Dongbei, Beijing and Shanghai, I traveled as far as Jinghong in the minority autonomous region of Xishuangbanna and Ganlanba near the Burmese border. The construction site of the Three Gorges Dam project, which I also visited, is a reminder of the huge-

ness of China and of the enormous problems it faces.

My latest China tour was also a golden opportunity to consider the issue of Taiwan from the vantage point of a China specialist touring the Chinese mainland.

In the summer of 1999, Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui stirred controversy with his "two-state theory" that defined contacts between China and Taiwan as "special state-to-state relations." The Chinese media fired a broadside at Lee, as they did at Li Hongzhi, the leader of the Falun Gong spiritual movement. While in Beijing that summer, I thought that President Jiang Zemin, the authoritarian leader of the communist giant, was probably incapable of understanding the deepening sense of identity of the Taiwanese, still less their delicate feelings as Taiwanese. Jiang, it seemed to me, regarded Lee as little more than a "bad guy" seeking independence for Taiwan.

In Taiwan this summer, a new political party named the Taiwan Solidarity Union came into being. Pledging cooperation with President Chen Shui-bian's Democratic Progressive Party, it calls for political stability, economic promotion, stepped-up democratization and the development of Taiwan. That is welcome. But the new party stops short of saying clearly that the future of Taiwan should be determined by the people of Taiwan by democratic vote.

China, meanwhile, is expanding into the world economically, as exemplified by its coming entry into the World Trade Organization. At the same time, it is building itself up into a hegemonic state to counter the United States. This can be seen in the inauguration of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the sign-

ing of the Russo-Chinese treaty of friendship and cooperation. In 2009, the year after the Beijing Olympics, China is expected to complete the Three Gorges Dam and the Shanghai-Chongqing superhighway, a latter-day equivalent of the Great Wall of China. The country is looking to the 21st century as the "Chinese century."

In light of all this, Taiwan might eventually be absorbed into the mainland unless it strengthens its conviction and determination to maintain its identity. Shanghai's superficial prosperity might blind Taiwan's businessmen to the problems that plague Chinese society and to the realities of the communist dictatorship, and prompt them to extrapolate Taiwan's future to China's.

During the 12 years that Lee served as president, Taiwan promoted democratic reform and established the sense of Taiwanese identity. A "Republic of Taiwan" would be a logical extension of this. As Lee puts it, "the Republic of China (Taiwan) is already independent." That can be confirmed pro forma by changing the country's name by popular consensus, or democratic vote.

It is hoped that the Taiwan Solidarity Union will work to forge such a consensus. If this is done openly and forthrightly, the United States and the international community in general will respect the will of the Taiwanese people. It will be extremely difficult for Chinese authorities to stop that by force, at least before the Beijing Olympics are held. The time from now to 2008, therefore, will be of crucial importance not only to China but to Taiwan as well.

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