

Letter to World Citizens

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Into the Maelstrom: A Trip to Taiwan

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I have been invited to Taiwan by the island's Veterans Affairs Association to discuss world citizenship and the World Service Authority's mission.

The first communication came in November from the attorney for World Citizen Feng Wang, Taiwan's leading actor and film producer. "As a human rights activist himself," wrote the attorney, Evelyn Man-i Chao, "Wang believes strongly that the work the WSA has done/does around the world for the respect of human rights and the ability to be a World Citizen and use the WSA passport could be of great benefit to the citizens of Taiwan whose human rights are being threatened."

The actual invitation to visit Taiwan came from Secretary General Gau Wen-Yi of the 230,000-member veterans' organization: "Please accept our invitation, and through your preaching of world human rights, the rest of the world will know that 21 million Taiwanese people worship freedom, democracy and equity." Copies of the invitation were addressed to leading officials of Taiwan's government, including the president and prime minister.

Regular readers of *World Citizen News* will recall our letter (WCN IX-3) to President Lee Teng-hui regarding his Cornell alumni meeting in which we enclosed a WSA passport so that he could visit the U.S. as an ordinary world citizen. His gracious reply was also published in WCN (IX-4).

Since receiving the invitation, I have been closely monitoring the escalating pressure being applied to Taiwan by the Chinese government.

"It is questionable whether the current leadership can articulate a version of nationalism worthy of the Chinese people," writes Lucian W. Pye, an MIT professor emeritus of political science, in a Feb. 19 *New York Times* op-ed article. "To call for the return of Taiwan to the 'motherland' on the basis of blood ties alone, without any overarching ideals, common values or shared vision, does violence to China's historic grandeur," Pye argues.

Patrick Tyler, writing from Beijing for the *Wall Street Journal* on Jan. 23, suggests that "some China experts fear that the Taiwan issue has become such a test of national pride for Chinese leaders that the danger of war should be taken seriously."

The Nation's Orville Schell, in a Feb. 19 commentary, offers advice on "How To Talk to China:" "When Chinese leaders find themselves confronting a nonnegotiable situation with a strong opponent, reality usually sets in."

These days, the strongest opponent to any nation-state contemplating war is humanity itself!

President Lee, now running for re-election, is a native Taiwanese whose first language, ironically enough, was Japanese, since Japan occupied Taiwan for nearly the entire first half of the 20th century. The 72-year-old Lee has degrees from Kyoto's Imperial

University, Iowa State University and Cornell. One of his rivals in the upcoming presidential election is his former mentor Lin Yang-kang, who warns that Taiwan is veering toward a collision with China. The source of this crisis, he claims, is Lee's "mistaken leadership."

Lee vehemently disputes this criticism. "The Chinese Communists have not ruled Taiwan for one hour, one minute," he has been quoted as declaring at rallies. "They have not collected a single cent of tax here, and yet they dare to shout, 'You're mine! You're mine!'"

You may wonder why Taiwan's citizens are so interested in world citizenship. A bit of history is in order.

Following China's defeat by Japan in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, Taiwan was ceded to Japan as a colony. In 1945, after Japan's defeat in World War II, Taiwan was returned to Chinese sovereignty. When the Chinese Communists took over China in 1948, the Kuomintang, or National Party, led by General Chiang Kai-shek, fled to Taiwan.

Communist China, however, did not gain recognition from most of the world's nations; instead, Taiwan was recognized diplomatically as the seat of the government-in-exile of China. For many years, Taiwan even retained the China seat in the United Nations.

President Nixon changed all that with his "one China" policy. In 1971, Taiwan was expelled from the General Assembly of the United Nations, and the mainland Chinese government of Mao Zedong took the Security Council seat.

On Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek was succeeded upon his death in 1975 by his son Chiang Ching-kuo. In 1986 President Chiang instituted a policy of liberalization, abolishing martial law and allowing non-Kuomintang parties to function legally. A successful land reform policy in the early 1950s had meanwhile spurred capital accumulation, which in turn fueled the development of an industrial base.

But even as it was emerging as one of the Pacific Rim's economic "tigers," Taiwan was becoming increasingly isolated in the realm of world affairs.

Viewed globally, Taiwan, like China, is an independent state with its own constitution and citizenry, over 90 percent of whom were born in Taiwan. Many Taiwanese are eager to be recognized as full members of world community, and are fearful of China's irrational and militantly aggressive claim of ownership.

Ironically, Taiwan's trade with mainland China has prospered despite the decades of official hostility on Beijing's part. The two parties now carry out commerce worth around \$4 billion annually.

Feng Wang writes that the Veterans Affairs Association is just one of several organizations participating in the campaign, "World Citizen for a Greater Taiwan." The term "World Citizen," he writes, "has been quoted by many high-ranking officials, including President Lee himself and many other industrial leaders in Taiwan..." Human rights and global affairs, he adds, "have become the most talked-about subject in Taiwan."

March 11—I have just returned from Washington after four days of talks with Feng Wang and Chen-Kuo Wu, president of Chinese Express Corp, Advanced Gene Corp and Harbour Securities H. K. Ltd., of which companies Feng Wang is chairman. On Wednesday last, we went to the Taiwan combination Commercial and Immigration office on Wisconsin Ave. to see about my visa. Claiming my nationality was "American," and

that my passport was global on the standard forms, we were assured by the Consul's attache, Mr. Chen, that our request would be forwarded by fax to the Foreign Ministry in Taipei.

By Friday, there was no response. Our plane tickets were for a Saturday, March 9, departure. I returned to Burlington on Friday only to learn Saturday morning that the Foreign Ministry had refused to authorize an entry visa...at this time.

David Gallup, WSA's legal counselor, then left with Mr. Wang and Mr. Wu Saturday evening for Taipei. I may be leaving after the election on March 23.

As this letter is being written prior to departure, I can only speculate on what good, if any, may be accomplished by my visit to Taiwan at this critical juncture in its tumultuous history. In order to balance the geo-dialectical equation, I have written to China's President, Jiang Semín, informing him of my visit to Taiwan and explaining that I shall be discussing world citizenship with President Lee and other government officials as well as with leaders of various nongovernmental organizations on Taiwan. I have asked to be received by President Semín and other Chinese officials following my visit to Taipei in order to discuss the same subject. A copy of this letter was duly addressed to President Lee.

By the time you read this, either I will be in Taiwan or right here in Burlington. In either case, it's still one world.