

Taiwan Stands Up: Toward the Dawn of a Rising Era

Transcript of inaugural speech delivered, May 20, 2000, during the inauguration of Mr. Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) as the 10th president of the Republic of China.

Leaders of our friendly nations, honored guests and compatriots from Taiwan and abroad; this is a glorious moment; it is also a moment of dignity and hope.

I thank our honored guests, who have come here from afar, as well as those friends from around the world who love democracy and care about Taiwan, for sharing this glorious moment with us.

We are here today, not just to celebrate an inauguration, but to witness the hard-won democratic values, and to witness the beginning of a new era.

On the eve of the 21st century, the people of Taiwan have completed a historic alternation of political parties in power. This is not only the first of its kind in the history of the Republic of China, but also an epochal landmark for Chinese communities around the world. Taiwan has not only set a new model for the Asian experience of democracy, but has also added a moving example to the third wave of democracy the world over.

The election for the 10th-term president of the Republic of China has clearly shown the world that the fruits of freedom and democracy are not easily come by. Twenty-three million people with an unwavering will have allayed enmity with love, overcome intimidation with hope, and conquered fear with faith.

With our sacred votes, we have proven to the world that freedom and democracy are indisputable universal values, and that peace is humanity's highest goal.

The outcome of Taiwan's year 2000 presidential election is not the victory of an individual or a political party. It is a victory of the people, a victory for democracy, because we have, while at the focus of global attention, transcended fear, threats and oppression and bravely risen to our feet together.

Taiwan stands up, demonstrating a firmness of purpose and faith in democracy.

Taiwan stands up, representing the self-confidence of the people and the dignity of the country.

Taiwan stands up, symbolizing the quest for hope and the realization of dreams.

Dear compatriots, let's always remember this moment; let's always remember to value and feel gratitude for it, because the fruits of democracy did not come out of the blue. It was realized by going through many perils and dangers, and by experiencing countless hardships. If not for the fearless sacrifice of our democratic forebears, if not for the unswerving faith of the tens of millions of Taiwanese people in freedom and democracy, we could not possibly be standing on our beloved land today and celebrate a glorious occasion that belongs to all the people.

Today, it is as if we are standing before a fresh new gate in history. In the process of democratization, the Taiwanese people have created a brand-new key to our shared destiny. The

new century's gates of hope are soon to open. We are humble but not submissive. We are full of self-confidence but not the slightest bit of self-satisfaction.

Since that moment on March 18 when the election results came to light, I have accepted the mandate of all Taiwanese people in a most earnest and humble frame of mind, and have vowed to devote all my efforts, understanding and courage to assuming the heavy responsibility of this country's future.

I personally understand that the significance of the alternation of political parties and the peaceful transition of power lies not in that it is a change of personnel or political parties. Nor that it is a dynastic change. Rather, it is the return of state and government power to the people through a democratic procedure. The people are the true masters of the country, which no individual or political party can possess. From the head of state to the rank-and-file civil servant -- the government exists for all the people and serves all the people.

The alternation of political parties does not mean an all-out negation of the past. We should be fair in evaluating the contributions made by those in power throughout the ages. Mr Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) deserves our highest praise and heartfelt honor for his promotion of democratic reforms and for his excellent performance during his 12 years of leadership.

Taiwan society has rallied and participated energetically in the election. Despite the diverse views and stances, all individuals share the same intent -- to come forward for the sake of their political ideas and the country's future. We believe that the end of an election is the beginning of reconciliation. After the curtain falls on emotional campaigns, rationality should prevail. Under the supreme principles of national interests and the welfare of the people, those in power and in opposition should both fulfill their duties by the people and realize the ideals of fair competition in party politics, as well as the checks and balances of democratic politics.

A democratic society with fair competition, tolerance and trust is the strongest impetus for a nation's development. Placing national interests above those of political parties, we should solidify the will of the people and seek consensus among the ruling and opposition parties, to promote the country's development and reforms.

"A government for all people" and "rule by the clean and upright" were my promises to the people during the election period. It is also an important key for Taiwan society in stepping over its fault lines and exalting to a higher level in the future.

The spirit of a "government for all people" lies in the fact that "the government exists for the people." The people are the masters and shareholders of the state. The government should rule on the basis of majority public opinion. The interests of the people are absolutely above those of any political party or individual.

I have always taken pride in being a member of the Democratic Progressive Party, but from the moment I take my oath and assume the president's post, I will put all my efforts into fulfilling my role as a "president for all people." As in the formation of the new government, we employ people according to their talents and do not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, gender or party affiliation. We will also place the welfare of the populace as our primary goal in future.

The topmost initiatives of my promise to "rule by the clean and upright" are to eliminate "black gold" -- the involvement of organized crime in politics -- and to eradicate vote-buying. For a long time, the Taiwanese people have been deeply repelled by money politics and the interference of

organized crime. A grassroots vote-buying culture has also robbed the people of their right to elect the wise and the able. These have tainted the development of Taiwan's democracy.

Today, I am willing to promise hereby that the new government will eliminate vote-buying and crack down on "black gold" politics, so that Taiwan can rise above such downward sinking forces. We must give the people a clean political environment.

In the area of government reforms, we need to establish a government that is clean, efficient, far-sighted, dynamic, highly flexible and responsive, in order to ensure Taiwan's competitiveness in the face of increasingly fierce global competition. The age of "large and capable" governments has now passed, replaced by "small and effective" governments, which have established partnership relations with the people. We should accelerate the streamlining of government functions and organization and actively expand the role of public participation.

This will not only allow the public to fully utilize their energy, but also significantly reduce the government's burdens.

Similar partnership relations should also be set up between the central and local governments. We want to break the authoritarian attitudes from the days of centralized, money-controlled power. We want to realize the spirit of local autonomy, where the local and central governments share resources and responsibilities, where "the central government will not do what the local governments can do." Whether in the east, west, north or south, or whether on Taiwan proper or on offshore islands, all will get balanced, pluralistic development, and the gap between urban and rural areas will decrease.

Of course, we should understand that the government is no panacea for all problems. The driving force for economic development and societal progress comes from the people. Over the past half-century, the Taiwanese people have toiled hard to create an economic miracle that has won global applause, and to lay the foundation for the survival and development of the Republic of China. Today, facing the impact of the fast-changing information technologies and trade liberalization, Taiwan's industrial development must move toward a knowledge-based economy. High-tech industries need to be constantly innovative, while traditional industries need to undergo transformation and upgrading.

The future government should not necessarily play the role of a "leader" or "manager." On the contrary, it should be the "supporter" and "service-provider," as expected by private enterprises. The responsibility of a modern government is to raise administrative efficiency, improve the domestic investment environment, and maintain financial order and stock market stability, so as to allow economic development to move toward full liberalization and internationalization with fair competition. By observing these principles, the vitality of the public will naturally bloom and create a new phase in Taiwan's economic miracle.

Apart from consolidating our democratic achievements, promoting government reforms, and raising economic competitiveness, the new government's foremost objective should be to adhere to public opinion and implement reforms, so that the people on this land can live in more dignity, more self-confidence and better quality.

Let our society be not only safe, harmonious and prosperous, but also meet the principles of fairness and justice. As we cultivate the ever-growing abilities of our citizens, we will let our next generation learn in an environment filled with happiness and hope.

The 21st century will be a time when "the right to a quality life" and "refined lifestyles" are much emphasized. The government will have to bring up solutions for all issues relating to the people's lives, such as social order, social welfare, environmental protection, land planning, waste treatment, cleaning up rivers and community-building. It will also have to implement these solutions thoroughly.

At present, we need to immediately improve social order and environmental protection, which are important indicators of the quality of life. Building a new social order, we will let the people live and work in peace and without fear. Finding a balance between ecological preservation and economic development, we will develop Taiwan into a sustainable green silicon island.

The integrity of the judiciary is a staunch line of defense for democratic politics and social justice. An impartial, independent judicial system is a safeguard for social order and a defender of the people's rights. At present, we still have a long way to go in our judicial reforms. Our compatriots should continue to give the judiciary their calls to action and their ardent expectations. At the same time, we should also restrain our administrative authority and give the judiciary room to operate independently and without interference.

Human resources are Taiwan's most important resources. Talent is the foundation of the country's competitiveness, while education is a long-term plan for empowering the people. We will seek a consensus among the ruling and opposition parties, academia and the public to carry on with educational reforms and build a healthy, proactive, lively and innovative education system, which will allow Taiwan to cultivate first-class, outstanding talents amid the fierce international competition. We will let Taiwan move gradually toward a "learning organization" and a "knowledge-based society." We will also encourage people to take up lifetime learning to fully develop their potential and creativity.

Grassroots community organizations have now been developing around the country, working to explore and preserve the history, culture, geography and ecology of their localities. These are all part of Taiwan culture, whether they are local cultures, mass cultures or high cultures. Due to special historical and geographical factors, Taiwan possesses a wealth of diversified cultural elements. But cultural development is not something that can bring immediate success. Rather, it has to be accumulated bit by bit. We must open our hearts with tolerance and respect, so that our diverse ethnic groups and different regional cultures communicate with each other, and so that Taiwan's local cultures connect with the cultures of Chinese-speaking communities and other world cultures, and create a new milieu of "a cultural Taiwan in a modern century."

The Sept. 21 earthquake that occurred last year brought to our land and our compatriots an unprecedented catastrophe, the pain of which is yet to heal. The new government will brook no delay in the reconstruction of disaster areas, including industrial and spiritual recovery. We will work to ensure that care is extended to every victim and rebuild every destroyed place. Here, we would also like to express our highest respect again for all individuals and non-governmental organizations that have selflessly contributed to the rescue and reconstruction work after the disaster. Amid the fierce power of Nature, we have seen Taiwan's most beautiful compassion, strongest faith and greatest trust. Our compatriots have been injured and wounded during the Sept. 21 earthquake, but with the spirit of a "volunteer Taiwan," Taiwan's new family will stand up resolutely on its feet once again.

Dear compatriots, 400 years ago, Taiwan was called "Formosa" -- the beautiful island -- for its lustrous landscape. Today, Taiwan is manifesting the elegance of a democratic island, once again attracting global attention, as the people on this land create a new page in our history.

We believe that the Republic of China, with its democratic achievements and technological and economic prowess, can certainly continue to play an indispensable role in the international community. In addition to strengthening the existing relations with friendly nations, we want to actively participate in all types of international non-governmental organizations. Through humanitarian care, economic cooperation, cultural exchanges and various other methods, we will actively participate in international affairs, expand Taiwan's room for survival in the international arena, and contribute to the welfare of the international community.

Besides, we are also willing to promise a more active contribution in safeguarding international human rights. The Republic of China cannot and will not remain outside global human rights trends. We will abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention for Civil and Political Rights, and the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action. We will bring the Republic of China back into the international human rights system.

The new government will request the Legislative Yuan to pass and ratify the International Bill of Rights as a domestic law of Taiwan, so that it will formally become the "Taiwan Bill of Rights." We hope to set up an independent national human rights commission in Taiwan, thereby realizing an action long advocated by the UN. We will also invite two outstanding non-governmental organizations, the International Commission of Jurists and Amnesty International, to assist us in our measures to protect human rights and make the Republic of China into a new indicator for human rights in the 21st century.

We firmly believe that in any time or any corner of the world, the meaning and values of freedom, democracy and human rights cannot be ignored or changed.

The history of the 20th century left us with a major lesson -- that war is a failure of humanity. Waged for whatever purpose or whatever imperious reasons, war is the greatest harm to freedom, democracy and human rights.

Over the past one hundred plus years, China has suffered imperialist aggression, which left indelible wounds in her history. Taiwan's destiny has been even more arduous, tormented by brute force and the rule of colonialist regimes. These similar historical experiences should bring mutual understanding between the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, setting a solid foundation for pursuing freedom, democracy and human rights together. However, due to long periods of separation, the two sides have developed vastly different political systems and lifestyles, obstructing empathy and friendship between the people on the two sides, and even creating a wall of divisiveness and confrontation.

Today, as the Cold War has ended, it is time for the two sides to cast aside the hostilities left from the old era. We do not need to wait further because now is a new opportunity for the two sides to create an era of reconciliation together.

The people across the Taiwan Strait share the same ancestral, cultural, and historical background. While upholding the principles of democracy and parity, building upon the existing foundations, and constructing conditions for cooperation through goodwill, we believe that the leaders on both sides possess enough wisdom and creativity to jointly deal with the question of a future "one China."

I fully understand that as the popularly elected 10th-term president of the Republic of China, I must abide by the Constitution, maintain the sovereignty, dignity and security of our country, and ensure the well-being of all citizens. Therefore, as long as the CCP regime has no intention to use

military force against Taiwan, I pledge that during my term in office, I will not declare independence, I will not change the national title, I will not push forth the inclusion of the so-called "state-to-state" description in the Constitution, and I will not promote a referendum to change the status quo in regards to the question of independence or unification. Furthermore, the abolition of the National Reunification Council or the National Reunification Guidelines will not be an issue.

History has illustrated that war will only create hatred and enmity, with absolutely no benefit to the development of mutual relations. Chinese people emphasize the difference between statesmanship and hegemony, believing in the philosophy that a government which employs benevolence "will please those near and appeal to those from afar," and "when those afar will not submit, then one must practice kindness and virtue to attract them." Such Chinese wisdom will remain universal words of value.

Under the leadership of Mr Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平) and Mr Jiang Zemin (江澤民), the mainland has created a miracle of economic openness. In Taiwan, over a half century, not only have we created a miracle economy, we have also created the political marvel of democracy. On such a basis, as long as the governments and people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait can interact more, following the principles of "goodwill reconciliation, active cooperation, and permanent peace," while at the same time respecting the free choice of the people and excluding unnecessary obstacles, both sides of the Strait can make great contributions to the prosperity and stability of the Asia Pacific region. Both sides will also create a glorious civilization for the world's humanity.

Dear compatriots, we hope so much to share the moving scene of this moment with all Chinese-speaking people around the world. The wide Ketagalan Boulevard before us was bristling with security guards only a few years ago. The building behind me used to be the Governor General's mansion during the colonial era. Today, we gather here to extol the glory and joy of democracy with songs of the earth and the voice of the people.

With a little reflection, our compatriots should be able to appreciate the deep and far-reaching meaning of this moment:

Authoritarianism and force can only bring surrender for one time, while democracy and freedom are values that will endure forever.

Only by adhering to the will of the people can we pioneer the paths of history and build enduring architecture.

Today, as a son of a tenant farmer and with a poor family background, I have struggled and grown on this land and, after experiencing defeat and tribulation, I have finally won the trust of the people to take up the great responsibility of leading the country. My individual achievements are minor, but the message is valuable because each citizen of Formosa is a "child of Taiwan" just like me. In whatever difficult environment, Taiwan will be like a selfless, loving mother, who never stops giving us opportunities and who helps us achieve our beautiful dreams.

The spirit of the "child of Taiwan" reveals to us that even though Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu are tiny islands on the rim of the Pacific, the map of our dreams knows no limits. It extends all the way to the end of the horizon, as long as our 23 million compatriots fear no hardship and move forward hand in hand.

Dear compatriots, this magnificent moment belongs to all the people. All grace and glory belongs to Taiwan -- our eternal Mother. Together, let's extend our gratitude to the earth and respect to the people.

Long live freedom and democracy!

Long live the people of Taiwan!

We pray for the prosperity of the Republic of China, and for the health and happiness of all compatriots and all honored guests.