



Taiwan - Beyond the “Current Affairs” Reporting

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 Antonia Märzhäuser, Tobias Sauer

The increased tensions between China and Taiwan are now regular headlines in the international media - but what lies beyond those “current affairs” reports? Two German journalists currently based in Taiwan, Tobias Sauer and Antonia Märzhäuser, shared their insights and perception on the country.

Antonia Märzhäuser is a journalist from Berlin who works for the German public radio and several national newspapers. She has recently published a long read for Der Stern about China-Taiwan relations.

Looking into the coming local elections in Taiwan, Märzhäuser pointed out that given the current tension between Beijing and Taiwan, the election is seen as a vote on how well the government, DPP, is handling the situation. However, this election should not be looked at through this geopolitical lens, but instead should take into account the history of local elections and the recent social changes.

Historically, the KMT (Kuomintang) has done well in the local elections because of their strong ties into the communities, on levels such as city councillors and village chiefs in the rural area. However, when talking to younger generations, they have expressed

their dissatisfaction in how the campaigns are carried out. Campaigns often center around the candidates’ personalities and false statements in their academic background instead of discussing issues that the young generation considers substantial such as environmental problems, animal rights, and the rise of the living costs. Märzhäuser also introduced an analysis that being the Taipei mayor, due to what she heard from Taiwan colleagues, is not a prominent qualifier to presidency any-more due to the rise of the semiconductor industry. When the semiconductor industry opens their businesses, those towns and cities not only increase economic power but become more important as political offices. With democracy still being young in Taiwan, Märzhäuser has the impression that the people take their vote seriously.

Tobias Sauer, reporter and editor based in Berlin, contributes to German media outlets such as Der Spiegel, Die Welt, and Geo. Taiwan has a history of dictatorship and oppression, and Sauer is delving into the topic of White Terror which took place between 1940s to 1980s. This issue being a recent past and an ongoing debate, there are unanswered questions of who was responsible back in the days. There were more

than 100,000 deaths and many were imprisoned; society has not reached yet a consensus on the historical procession of this painful experience and the older generations understandably do not seem to want to touch on the topic much.

There are questions such as how to deal with the statue of Chiang Kai-shek, in which even seemingly obvious measures like removing it do not go uncontested. One creative solution was to bring the statue to a park not far from Taipei where there are hundreds of statues of Chiang Kai-shek looking at each other as if deliberating with one another. They are not presented in the context of human rights abuses but rather in a pleasant way.

According to Sauer, victims of White Terror espionage could go to the archives and ask for access to these files but not everything is disclosed. Many victims take their time to decide whether to look at these files, as the pain will inflict on them again. However, as a foreign journalist wanting to dig into the topic, Sauer found it pleasingly astonishing how people were open and eager to talk about it from different perspectives, being more than willing to help.

In regard to Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, Märzhäuser shared that 53% of the Taiwanese who took part in a poll were in favor of the visit, which was more positive than how it was internationally received. Yet what is less known is that the sanctions China placed in Taiwan in due course are causing serious damage directly to the fishermen and farmers. Around 2000 products were sanc-

tioned and banned from the Chinese market. For the producers to ship to a more distant destination, in the case of live fish for instance, the producers now need to process the fish which requires large investments and changes in the business model. Another problem is that since China has lower import standards than other markets such as Japan, the producers cannot just simply change markets but need to first raise their product quality to a certain standard. The Taiwanese government is now subsidizing businesses so they could diversify their products and reach into other markets and increase domestic consumption.

In regard to LGBTQ, Taiwan is known to be one of the most progressive countries in the world, being the first country in Asia to introduce gay marriage into legislation in 2019. Yet there still are issues that lie ahead. Sauer explained that for instance, a woman could adopt a child if she is unmarried or in a marriage with a man, but not if committed in a gay marriage. The popular solution to this is to adopt first and marry later. Taipei Pride is also one of the biggest in Asia, recording more than 100,000 participants this year despite the pouring rain. From merely 500 people at the first Taipei Pride 20 years ago, its growth is impressive. However, it is also true that just one year prior to the gay marriage passing legislation, the referendum was voted against gay marriage.

The question of self-identity plays a role in all of these important issues surrounding Taiwan and the topic of indigenous people is one of them. Märzhäuser noted that the government is now trying to create a Taiwa

nese identity that is diverse and inclusive of people with different history and backgrounds. There are many famous figures that are from an indigenous background hence it is not that there is a divide in the country. Yet there are many who are just recently discovering their roots, and now there is more awareness at schools to teach the children about their history and identity, which plays an important role in self confidence.

The coverage of Taiwan is increasing by day, which also means that there are currently more international journalists in Taiwan, including experts on China who relocated from Beijing to Taipei. While it is an interesting topic to be covering now, there are concerns raised by the Taiwanese people, Märzhäuser points out. Many journalists take the easy way - there is a tendency to interview people who speak English and those who are loud on social media. The painted picture seems more polarized than what Taiwan might actually be, and not necessarily an accurate portrayal of the country.

