

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This world is interconnected and therefore needs a peaceful world order to avoid clashes. In the early 20th century, the world had been involved in many wars. Though in the 21st century, the world has adapted more of a peaceful resolution. In order to build a civilized and peaceful world, we need responsible and respectful individuals. Prior to developing respectful individuals, their rights must be promoted, and their basic needs need to be fulfilled. In terms of political system, the only system that guarantee such protection to human rights is the democratic political system. Whereas in democracy, it respects the value, voice, and opinion of individuals. Not only that, it promotes freedom as well. As in international relations, democracy is a key issue that contributes to the peaceful world order.

Where there is no war is what democratic political system aimed for, as stated by Immanuel Kant in his Democratic Peace Theory, where every democratic country would never aim for a war unless every peaceful method has to be done prior to any violence. When weighed, the loss of war will always outweigh the benefits, thus making war unnecessary as a dispute resolution. Since democratic peace theory is included as liberalism, where both prioritize economics aspect, both parties do not see the point of sacrificing lives and finance for the sake of power competition. Though the

world may collectively agree democratic political system is the way to respect individuals, some countries we know are not fond of democracy and tend to isolate their people. The difficulties, however, include the unstable process of democratization and the world uncertainty since anarchy in the international system has not completely vanished yet.¹ When the people realized their rights are not promoted, democracy movements emerged. However, as a matter of fact, some individuals went missing for speaking their voice, some went through a death punishment for going against the authoritarian government.

The process of fighting for democracy itself has evolved in the last decade. The instrument used to be in the form of offline movements, such as demonstrations, which mostly happened on the streets, and in the form of printed and audio media, in newspaper articles or radio. From Indonesia, we see the huge student's demonstration during the end of New Order, Suharto's regime, where it was an attempt to remove President Suharto from his presidency. Thousands of students went down to the street to protest the authoritarian regime. In Asia, particularly Hong Kong, used to be under British protection as a trading post. Their fight for democracy emerged during the Hong Kong government's controversial extradition bill, which is where suspects can be tried under Chinese law. Their democracy movement started on 2014, named Umbrella Movement. Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement additionally showed their full support towards Thailand's Thai Youth Movement that started in the early 2020, where

¹ Kevin Placek, "The Democratic Peace Theory "(E-International Relations, February 18, 2012), <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/17833>.

they opposed the unfair treatment towards the disqualification of Thanatorn's Future Forward Party (FFP) and the dismissal of his anti-military party.

Along in the same line, Taiwan, who has always considered themselves as an independent state, often times faced challenges and tensions with People's Republic of China (PRC). Also, with their fight for democracy, they held a democratic movement, the Sunflower Movement, involving the students and civil groups, where they protest the Taiwan's government deepening relationship with China.² On the other hand, Thailand people struggles with their military authoritarianism and Myanmar with their "coup".

With globalization, the emergence of internet has led the online platform into being an instrument of democracy, for instance, social media, where we know it has no limit of speech freedom. People are free to express themselves in any ways since there are no written rules on posting, may it be personal, comedy, entertainment, critics, even politics.

Through the internet, it produced several social media applications for the people to speak their voice. The popular ones include Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, and others. Specifically, Twitter, grown into existence in early 2006. However, it was open to public from July 2006. 20,000 "tweets" were posted in the first months and rises to 60,000 in 2007. In 2008 alone, the number went up to 300,000 per day and in

² Quinton Temby, "The Milk Tea Alliance and China's Power Gap in Southeast Asia" (ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, April 12, 2021), https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ISEAS_Perspective_2021_42.pdf.

2010, the number of tweets reached 50 million a day. Twitter started as a platform to send and share messages to friends to becoming an advertisement platform for companies to interact with customers.³ Twitter is a platform where people are free to post writings, articles, threads, picture attachments, and others. With that, the possibility of violation, arguments, fights, and online wars are inevitable. As the era changes, Twitter evolved from an entertainment platform into a platform to share controversial opinions. Though still an entertainment platform, still, Twitter has expanded into a multifunctional platform.

The use of social media is also important in today's democratic movements, as seen in Thailand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The Milk Tea Alliance, the alliances separated geographically but are united with one purpose, to resist the authoritarian regime and seek greater democracy. Milk Tea Alliance involved youth from Thailand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The start of this movement began when a Thailand actor, Vachirawit Chivaaree, better known as "Bright" became famous on Twitter back in April 2020. Going by the username @bbirghtvc, he retweeted a friend's tweet containing 4 (four) pictures of countries which one of it was Hong Kong. This sparked the rage of Chinese netizens, as Hong Kong is still listed as a country under China, not a country on its own. While apologizing and gaining support at the same time from Thailand and Hong Kong, a hashtag emerged in the social media, #MilkTeaAlliance. Both Thailand and

³ Jessica Demilt, "The Origins of Twitter" (Pennington Creative, September 12, 2017), <https://penningtoncreative.com/the-origins-of-twitter/>.

Hong Kong are famous for their special beverage, Milk Tea, thus the hashtag reflects their similarity.⁴ The name “milk tea” came from Hong Kong serving milk tea, whether hot or cold, Thailand serving iced and sweeten milk tea, and Taiwan serving iced milk tea with added tapioca pearls. The addition of milk in tea is a handover culture from the British colonialism era in Hong Kong and British trade connections with Taiwan and Thailand. The mainland China tends to serve the original tea, in which the youth emphasized on “we are not the same”, meaning Milk Tea Alliance is milk tea, not tea.⁵

Therefore, as the globalization occurred within this era, the digital world evolved and developed. Several social media platforms grow bigger with more features each day, with more people joining as well. Indeed, no rules were written in the beginning, however, some social media platforms increased their security by restricting hate speech involving ethnicity, culture, religion, and intergroup. Several individuals were also banned as they shared controversial posts, offending multiple parties. The growth of social media is inevitable and the influence of it may not be expected by the older generation, however, the digitalization has changed the world. Technology is involved in almost all activities in this era, payment, promotions, networking, texting, transportations, and others. As it came as a surprise how social media as a product of

⁴ Wolfram Schaffar and Praphakorn Wongratanawin, “The #MilkTeaAlliance: A New Transnational Pro-Democracy Movement Against Chinese-Centered Globalization?,” *The #MilkTeaAlliance: A New Transnational Pro-Democracy Movement Against Chinese-Centered Globalization?* 14, no. 1 (June 28, 2021): pp. 5-29, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-0052>.

⁵ “What Is the Milk Tea Alliance?,” *The Economist* (The Economist Newspaper), accessed January 25, 2023, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2021/03/24/what-is-the-milk-tea-alliance>.

technology was able to create a huge influence from a democracy movement, the Milk Tea Alliance proved how utilizing the online platform create as much influence as offline movements. Through this youth movement, the alliance has spread its impact to not just Taiwan and Hong Kong, but Thailand and Myanmar as well. The youth in particular, refer to people within the age range of 15 to 24.⁶ The generation for the youth in the age 15 to 24 is known as Generation Z or Gen Z. Differentiating between Gen Z and the previous generation, Millennial, can be seen through social, economic, and political factors. By the time Gen Z started, they have gone through many phases of technology and internet that previous generations went through. Thus, Gen Z grew up with digitalization, meaning internet advanced the most in this generation, with social media emerging as a product of the internet.⁷

The digital world has opened up new possibilities for the people in terms of increasing their concern towards nation-states, meaning it has an important implication for the power of state. State is no longer the main focus of their own citizens. For these reasons, the rise of digital media can preserve the solidarity movement of Hong Kong and Taiwan, who are under political repression by their states and People's Republic of China's cultural and political hegemony and their dominant ideas are being challenged by new sources of power with more innovative tools. Online social

⁶ "Youth" (United Nations), accessed January 25, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth#:~:text=Who%20Are%20the%20Youth%3F,of%2015%20and%2024%20years>.

⁷ Michael Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins" (Pew Research Center, April 21, 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

movements of non-state activists can become more important, instead of the domination by the states in the global system.

1.2 Research Questions

The milk tea alliance not only proved that a movement through an online platform can grow, but it also highlights the digitalization era. Several technology elements were used in this movement, which did not exist back then. The social media with the initial purpose to show one's life, can now be used for political purposes. This generation promotes free of speech, which contributes to the widespread of this movement.

1. How does the Milk Tea Alliance utilize online platform in their fight for democracy?
2. What is the impact of online platform on the democracy movement pursued by the Milk Tea Alliance?

1.3 Research Objective

This thesis aims to describe the Milk Tea Alliance on their ways to utilize the online platform to fight for democracy. By describing, it will also explain how they achieve their goals. Moreover, this thesis will explain the impacts of Milk Tea Alliance on promoting the democracy in the respective countries. Not only describing and explaining, this thesis will also compare both the similarities and differences on how this movement went in the 3 (three) involved countries, Thailand, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, especially in Taiwan and Hong Kong as they are still closely linked under China.

1.4 Research Significance

This paper will add to the democracy literature and its findings will help the readers understand the significant impact of Milk Tea alliance, recognizing that in the world today, we are going through a major globalization, making the important role of activists and movements now imminent. Based on the preliminary findings, milk tea alliance moves through the digital web, through media platform, specifically Twitter, and in a digitalized era, this issue makes an important factor to examine the effects and implications of the movements that milk tea alliance has done and has promote. By the end of this paper, the readers will be able to gain deeper understanding of the milk tea alliance and the impacts of it on the fight for democracy. This paper is also one of the graduation requirements.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

This thesis will be written following the requirements by International Relations department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of Universitas Pelita Harapan. Sub-chapters will be written in order for the readers to understand the thesis better, the flow and the focus of each. This thesis is divided into five chapters:

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter includes the background of the evolution of democratic movements, which used to be in the form of offline movements as the instrument. Now that technology has advanced due to globalization, the internet has created social media applications for online movements to occur, making online platform as a new instrument for democratic movements. Including brief history of the countries

involved, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, this chapter also includes research questions, research objectives, research significance, and structure of thesis.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter will provide the foundation of this thesis, including books, journals, electronic journals regarding the Milk Tea Alliance, including the history of the countries involved, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. This chapter will also include theories from International Relations to explain the phenomenon and to support the analysis in the upcoming chapters.

Chapter III: Research Methodology

This chapter explains the process and method in writing this thesis, including the research approach, data collection process, identification of sources, and the analysis method.

Chapter IV: Result and Discussion

Chapter four will be the most significant as it explains the writer's analysis on this research and the writer's point of view on the discussion of the topic. This chapter will analyze deeper on the emergence and impact of the Milk Tea Alliance, to answer the research questions. This includes the deep analysis on the three countries involved, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, more specifically Hong Kong and Taiwan on their history with People's Republic of China (PRC), their movements from the past years fighting for their freedom rights, and the development of this movement for their fight for democracy. Analysis will be based on the theories of International Relations mentioned in the chapter II of this thesis.

Chapter V: Conclusion and Recommendations

The last chapter will conclude the writer's research by wrapping the main arguments and restating the significant parts to highlight in this thesis and will also include the recommendations for further research.

