



DISRUPTION WEITSENG CHEN

Weitseng Chen, born in Taiwan, teaches at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Faculty of Law. He specializes in comparative Asian law – particularly within the greater China area, with an emphasis on law and development. After he received his JSD from Yale Law School, he worked for Stanford University as a Hewlett Fellow of the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL). Immediately before he joined the NUS Faculty of Law, Weitseng worked as a corporate lawyer at Davis Polk & Wardwell. Weitseng's recent research interests include authoritarian legality in South Korea, Taiwan, and China, Asian state capitalism, China's outbound investment, shadow banking in Asia, property rights transition in greater China, and the legacy of German law in East Asia. He has published many articles and five books, including *Regime Type and Beyond: The Transformation of Police in Asia* (with Hualing Fu; CUP, 2023), *Authoritarian Legality in Asia: Formation, Development and Transition* (with Hualing Fu; CUP, 2019), *The Beijing Consensus? How China has Changed Western Ideas of Law and Economic Development* (CUP, 2017), *Property and Trust Law: Taiwan* (with Yun-Chien Chang and Ying-Chieh Wu; Wolters Kluwer, 2017), and *Law and Economic Miracle: Interaction between Taiwan's Development and Economic Laws after World War II* (in Chinese, 2000). Besides research, he loves cooking Asian cuisine, practicing Tai Chi, flying his DLG glider, and playing cello. – Address: Faculty of Law, National University of Singapore, 469G Bukit Timah Road, Eu Tong Sen Building, 259776 Singapore. E-mail: weitseng.chen@nus.edu.sg.

“Have you found the rhythm of life?” During my first two months at Wiko, I noticed that this is one of the most frequent questions in conversation among Fellows over lunch and

dinner. We of course talked about scholarship, discussed current affairs, and shared the experience of our adventures in Berlin. But this question always slipped into our conversation as the topic of small talk, as a convenient way to fill in awkward silence between new friends, and as a sign of deepening friendship among Fellows who began to feel comfortable revealing anxiety to each other. Be that as it may, it manifests a disruption of life.

Many Fellows, me included, came to Wiko with an ambitious project, something we otherwise would not be able to accomplish at our home institutions. Quickly, this ambitious and romantic plan went bust. Every day by 1 p.m., after various rituals in the morning, either a cup of coffee or a walk along the lake, our brains finally got warmed up, but it was now time for lunch. There were times when a few paragraphs had been produced by then; most of the time, however, it was not that ideal. This daily lunch, seemingly too early, always led to a paradoxical feeling that the day is nearly over after lunch. Lunch did not end when I left the canteen, because it was not just a meal. Interesting, or disturbing, ideas always lingered around for a while. Curiosity, or just the lack of knowledge, often compelled me to do quick Google research to close this lunch stimulation. When finally returning to my project, I could become extremely efficient, for I realized not much time was left in the day. Unsurprisingly, that type of efficiency would not be translated into productivity. After all, Wiko's lunch is a disruption that broke my old routines to accommodate the unexpected amounts of stimulation and compelled me to accept this new normal.

Disruption goes beyond daily routines. "I am not an expert in this field...", another sentence that always appeared during the Tuesday Colloquium. It popped out when a lawyer put a question to a biologist, a historian to a photographer, a playwright to a political scientist, or a sociologist to a psychologist. It is a disclaimer that could shield us from the sense of insecurity when being pulled out of our comfort zone. Speakers, however, were not in a better position, either. When we finally could speak about what we feel most comfortable talking about, we soon realized that it was equally daunting to explain it to the audience of an entire room who do not share some basic vocabulary, concepts, backgrounds, or personal experience. This disruption, though intellectual, is equally uneasy.

Construction comes only after disruption, as some theories suggest. It is true, at least at Wiko. I sensed my fellow Fellows had tried hard to cope with such unexpected disruptions: to wake up earlier, to go to bed later, to give in and further engage in this community, or, conversely, to concentrate just on one's own project. As for me, I finally came to terms with this disruption, though far from before long, and realized how precious and

fruitful such a disruption could be. It is a disruption that might happen to us anyway, but rarely occurs in such a warm, supportive, and stipulating environment. It is a blessing that I fully used this opportunity. It is an intellectual journey that my fellow Fellows and I went through together, and it is this disruption that created the amazing community at Wiko and glued together us Fellows with very different backgrounds. During one of many “disruptive” meals, Luca Giuliani and I chatted about the norms we had observed at Wiko, such as be nice, be supportive, and be engaging. Both of us agree, however, that “disruption” is on the top of our list.