

Still Not Free of KMT Bias, Taiwan Prepares for the Film, "Formosa Betrayed"

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.
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For today's Taiwanese who have grown up in a democratic country with rule by law and freedom of the press, it is difficult to visualize anything of the oppression that the people endured during the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) one-party state under Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo. For that reason, and since the new film "Formosa Betrayed" will soon be opening on the island, it may be good to step back a few years and see some examples of that. I have already written of the imprisonment of Taiwanese Peng Ming-min for advocating democracy in the 1960s and his escape from the island. I have also written in the past about Dang Nylon (having a Chinese father and a Taiwanese mother) who identified himself as Taiwanese; Dang was harassed and immolated himself for the cause of democracy as late as 1989. Use the search engine on this site to find writings on them. A third person, however, that everyone should know about is Bo Yang (1920--2008)

Bo Yang (a.k.a. Guo Yidong) was pure waishengren and came to Taiwan with the remnants of the KMT in 1949. He is a good example that many waishengren also suffered under the KMT. A prolific author with many written credits to his name, Bo is well known as the author of the work "The Ugly Chinaman" and its great metaphor of the cultural soy paste vat.

In the case of Taiwan's democracy, Bo is known for being sentenced to the Green Island prison for translating a series of Popeye cartoons. Bo suffered nine years on Green Island (1968—1977) because the authoritarian KMT rule found such simple cartoons too offensive. Unfortunately several KMT of that period still try to have influence in today's politics; some have gone so far as to change the name of Democracy Hall back to that of Chiang Kai-shek Memorial.

In an attempt to give contemporary viewers a sense of the arbitrary cruel oppression of that era and to look in retrospect at who stood up against the authorities and who sided with them, I have posted one of Bo's Popeye cartoons on my website. Go to the toolbar on the left side and click on Protest Art, you will find it in panel four. Click on the image to eventually get full resolution and be able to read the dialogue. The cartoon is mild by today's satirical standards, but it gives Taiwanese a feeling of the extremity of the times.

In one of the cartoons, Popeye and Swee'Pea approach a desert island (read Taiwan) in a boat. Popeye (read Chiang Kai-shek) states, "I'll be king of that island and you will be my darling prince." Bo translated a phrase of my fellow countrymen that was often used by Chiang Kai-shek. Later Popeye and Swee'Pea (read Chiang Ching-kuo) seem to be enjoying the island with the impression that they would rather be emperors there than return to China. In this

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cartoon, Popeye asks Swee'Pea if he likes his position and is surprised with the Presidential twist Swee'Pea gives.

Bo got nine years for such; judge for yourself if it deserved it. In my mind only a small-minded vicious, self-serving, authoritarian regime that could not tolerate the slightest humorous satire would take nine years of a man's life for that. If however that is not enough to give you the tenor of the time, go to the toolbar and click on the title Another Side of Taiwan; then click on the subcategory Chiang Kai-shek's Oppressive Legacy, and finally click on the sub-album Censorship/Fabrication where examples of how encyclopedias in Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s were painstakingly altered by little minds trying to keep the people in a state of ignorance. Seem like a ludicrous fantasy of yesteryear? Go to any major university in Taiwan and I will bet you can still find many of those altered books on the shelves.

Appropriately Bo Yang, though born in China, asked that his ashes be scattered in the ocean off the coast of Green Island where he had spent years of suffering under the KMT regime.

Source:

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