

## The Film "Formosa Betrayed" Though Different from "Cape No. 7" is Important for Taiwan Youth

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.  
Friday, 06 August 2010 07:53

---

There was a time, not long ago, when Taiwanese were not allowed to speak Taiwanese. There was a time, not long ago, when Taiwanese could not say they were Taiwanese without being ridiculed. There was a worse time, also not that long ago, when Taiwanese were tortured and imprisoned if they wanted democracy. That time is what the movie, "Formosa Betrayed," opening in Taiwan theatres island-wide on August 6th is about.

Can one imagine deprivation if one has only known plenty? Can one imagine oppression if one has only known democracy? Can one imagine a one-party state violating people's rights unless one has experienced it? This is what Formosa Betrayed is about and these are some of the questions it raises for Taiwan's youth. It is a film that reveals a harsh reality of Taiwan's not too distant past, a harsh, often unspoken, reality endured by the youth's parents and grandparents, a harsh reality that is hard to imagine. It is easier to say that it did not exist.

As a foreign consultant and professor, I currently find myself in the awkward and somewhat embarrassing aging position that I have lived more years in Taiwan and experienced more of its changes than any of my Taiwanese university students.

When I came Martial Law had just been lifted, and Taiwanese were still afraid to even talk about, let alone, criticize the government. Taiwan's Strawberry Generation, born shortly after the Kaohsiung Incident, was just entering school at that time. They probably have no memory of the dreaded Garrison Command walking the streets; they may not even know what the Garrison Command was.

Today's "Consensus of 1996" generation was just starting school when the first presidential elections open to the people were held. They probably have no memory of the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) one-party state control and the lack of free elections to the positions that really ran the country. They would have no experience of fat cat KMT Legislators and National Assembly members. Elected way back in 1947, these men cockily enjoyed iron rice bowl privileges. That finally ended in 1992 when those that had not died in their positions were forced to retire, albeit with a nice sweet retirement package. As today's youth search a flimsy job market for their own survival, they must wonder at the job guarantee and privilege Taiwanese tax dollars had given such KMT members.

"Formosa Betrayed" was not that long ago. Set in 1983, the film is however not a documentary.

## The Film "Formosa Betrayed" Though Different from "Cape No. 7" is Important for Taiwan Youth

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.  
Friday, 06 August 2010 07:53

---

Rather it is a composite of the murders, torture and reality of things happening before, during and after the 1980s. It has an irony in how Taiwanese seeking democracy were betrayed not only by the KMT but even by the United States of America which too often turned a blind eye to violations of human rights in Taiwan. It has a double irony in that the same KMT that in the 1980s oppressed Taiwanese under the guise that they were "communist spies" now runs and fawns over those same communists in their present dealings with China.

In the film, a young American FBI agent, Jake Kelly (James Van Der Beek) is sent to Taiwan in pursuit of two Chinese gangsters who have just murdered a Taiwanese professor in America because of his outspoken and critical views on Taiwan's government. In that journey, a Taiwanese, Ming (Will Tiao) introduces Kelly to the side of Taiwan that most outsiders are unaware of. In turn, Kelly has his personal epiphanies and disillusionment.

The film doesn't have all the action scenes of Mission Impossible flicks; it doesn't have sexual seductresses always present in James Bond films; it has only the simple reality of a Taiwan not that long ago that few want to admit to or face.

Did such things really happen? Talk to those who know Lin Yi-hsiung whose mother and twin seven year old daughters were brutally stabbed to death in broad daylight in their home, a home that was under surveillance 24-7 by Taiwan's secret police. Talk to those who know the family of the murdered Chen Wen-chen, an outspoken American University professor. Talk to those who know the family of Henry Liu who wrote critically of government officials and was subsequently murdered in the United States. Talk to the thousands upon thousands of families that lost members to Green Island or by death from 2-28 through the White Terror to now.

Is it that long ago? The man who was Director General of the Government Information Office (GIO) an agency that helped cover up and misdirect investigations of the above high profile murders ran for President in 2000, Vice-President in 2004, and Mayor of Taipei in 2006. 2006 is not that long ago, and this man now wants to broker deals with the "communists" on the other side of the Strait.

Similarly, many of those who had their doctoral degrees in the United States sponsored and paid for by the oppressive KMT government shown in the film still hold offices in today's government. They often were the campus spies spoken of in the film.

## The Film "Formosa Betrayed" Though Different from "Cape No. 7" is Important for Taiwan Youth

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.  
Friday, 06 August 2010 07:53

---

Will the film be successful? That is up to Taiwan's youth and how much they really want to know about and visualize their past. The film, "Cape No. 7," was not that artistically strong, but it was successful because it dealt with the delightful nostalgic side of being Taiwanese. "Formosa Betrayed" deals with a harsher side of being Taiwanese that many of today's youth may not want to face. The ball is in their court.

Source:

[erome F. Keating's writings](#)

[J](#)