

KMT continues to lose legitimacy

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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While the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) blasted “Taiwanese independence forces” for “hijacking” 228 Incident commemorations and interpretations, saying the uprising was part of “the Chinese people’s struggle for liberation,” the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) was busy safeguarding Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) as a great man worthy of a national monument. The two parties might assume that they have a common foe embodied by “separatists,” but the irony is manifest in the implicit contradiction in their statements.

After learning that pro-independence Free Taiwan Party members were planning to remove a statue of Chiang — which they called an authoritarian totem — from the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taipei, KMT supporters organized an event to protect the statue, asking participants to gather at the hall on Tuesday. KMT officials even went to the Taipei District Prosecutors’ Office to inform on those who threatened to vandalize the statue, citing the hall’s designation as a historical site to say vandalism would be punished.

Those who clashed with independence advocates at the hall were mostly members of the China Unification Promotion Party and the Concentric Patriotism Association, members of which a day earlier disrupted the launch of a book on the Incident. One protester at the book launch shouted that the Incident would not have happened if “cruelties — killings and rapes — carried out by Taiwanese against Mainlanders had not occurred in the first place;” an unsubstantiated pseudo-history championed by KMT Central Policy Committee director Alex Tsai (蔡正元), a former lawmaker.

The KMT and Chinese unification groups have tried to delegitimize the Incident — either by legitimizing the massacre through the fallacious argument of “you did it first” or with the relatively less horrifying argument that Chiang’s role in the Incident remains inconclusive — in order to reject Taiwanese independence advocates’ accusations that the KMT regime was a foreign, corrupt oppressor of Taiwanese. However, they might encounter an even greater wall when celebrating Chiang’s achievements than the one posed by protesters.

While the CCP and the KMT both see independence forces as a common enemy, Beijing commemorating the Incident as a struggle for liberation put the KMT in an awkward position.

“The Chinese people’s struggle for liberation” was a slogan used by the CCP against the KMT during the Chinese Civil War, while the KMT regime propagandized the Incident as instigated

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by communists, requiring that it be put down.

This was not the first time that Beijing has commemorated the Incident, which it has long strived to categorize as a popular uprising against the capitalist landlord KMT in Taiwan that coincided with the “struggle for liberation” in China in 1947. Taiwanese communists and CCP sympathizers fled to China after the Incident and were given due credit (but were not spared of the Anti-Rightist Movement’s torture and the subsequent Cultural Revolution).

It might be true that a fad of reappraising Chiang and the so-called Republic of China era (a “dynasty” that died in 1949 and became an object of nostalgia for Chinese) is evident in China, but politically, there is no room for the KMT and Chiang in Beijing’s class struggle narrative.

Beijing’s remarks — in which it failed to admit to its own misdeeds — curiously resonated with Taiwanese stories of suffering, while the KMT, by worshiping its own symbols, once again lost ground in terms of legitimacy, much as it did in its battle with the CCP in China, from which it was ousted, in large part due to its overlooking of people’s misery.

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