

The ROC represents a ‘hybrid’ stage

Written by Paul Lin 林保堃

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Celebrating Taiwan’s Double Ten National Day is the best way to counter China’s assertion that “Taiwan is not a country and will never be a country.” Unlike Hong Kong, Taiwan is an independent, sovereign nation, which is why it does not need to invite representatives from Beijing to preside over a “regional” national day celebration.

However, Taiwan’s National Day celebrations are far from perfect, just like the national flag and the national anthem.

Having grown up in China, I would be a political fraud if I claimed to belong to either those who call themselves naturally pro-Taiwanese independence, because they have only known Taiwan as an independent country, or those who have suddenly turned pro-independence.

In 1976, I left China for Hong Kong, in essence because I rejected the People’s Republic of China. I instead identified with the Republic of China (ROC), which I saw as belonging to the free world. In other words, I embraced the idea of “two Chinas.”

At the time, I held no feeling of antipathy toward the ROC, because then-president Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國) was opposed to communism, while his successor, former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), took the country down the path of “localization” and democracy.

As I then saw it, Lee’s election as the country’s first-ever directly elected president in 1996 heralded the beginning of the country’s “second republic.”

For this reason, during my time in Hong Kong, I held a favorable impression of Taiwan, often wrote articles for Taiwanese newspapers and was identified as having a “Taiwanese background” by China’s Xinhua news agency.

In 1995, I visited Taiwan as part of a delegation of Hong Kong news commentators. During a dialogue with the Taiwan Association of University Professors, I stated “respect for the choice that Taiwanese make for their future.”

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They replied that it was the first time they had heard someone from Hong Kong say such a thing.

I am fairly certain that other members of the delegation who subscribed to China's "Southern Study" political faction reported my comments to Xinhua, as my Home Return Permit was promptly revoked by Beijing.

My feelings toward the ROC's National Day celebrations have vacillated over time. When the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) pro-localization faction and the Democratic Progressive Party are in government, I feel more of an affinity with the celebrations. This is because there is a chance that the country will change its official name.

Conversely, when the KMT's pro-Chinese faction is in charge, I feel a level of resentment toward the celebrations due to the party's collusion with Beijing as a means to control Taiwan.

Today, President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) policy of maintaining the "status quo" and substantive domestic reform has lead Beijing to assert that Tsai is pro-independence. Meanwhile, some deep green members of her party are critical of Tsai and compare her unfavorably with former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九). The reason for this gulf in opinion is fascinating.

The Chinese Communist Party's 19th National Congress is to begin on Wednesday. Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平), who has been in power for five years, will lean on his security services to crush any dissenting voices. He also has yet to eliminate the last vestiges of former Chinese president Jiang Zemin's (江澤民) power base.

By contrast, Tsai, in office for more than one year now, has to rely on democratic procedures to carry out her reforms. It is difficult to see how Tsai will be able purge more than 60 years of the KMT party-state system and the officials it has placed within the civil service. Should she resort to arresting people in an attempt to resolve the problems with Taiwan's civil service?

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Xi lives in constant fear of a military coup, while Taiwan has achieved long-term political stability through its democratic system of government. Of course, Taiwan's system is not above criticism, but we should remain clear about who our enemies are.

The pan-green camp is currently at a crossroads: Should it first change the country's official name and then deal with civil service reform, or should it go ahead with reform and then wait for an opportunity to change the country's name?

Given the current domestic and international environment, I would recommend doing the latter. Taiwan needs to increase its national strength and the sooner it does, the sooner it will be able to change its name.

If the reform process is botched, leaving the party-state in place in its current guise of the civil service, plagued with corruption and graft, what use would there be in changing the country's name?

Not long after Tsai was elected, I met with Lee at a social event.

He uttered a single phrase: "Third republic."

I understood Lee to mean that this is what he hoped Tsai's election would usher in for the country. The realization of a "third republic" would mean the birth of the "Republic of Taiwan."

To quantify this in terms of the cross-strait relationship: first, there were "two Chinas," then, after the arrival of the "second republic," the country turned into a "half China, half Taiwan" hybrid. The final step in the process is to achieve "one China, one Taiwan."

This is probably what Tsai meant in her speech on Tuesday when, as a counter to Beijing, she promised that "Taiwan will get better."

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