

Why Taiwan does not need ROC centenary

Written by Taiwan News

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The campaign by the restored rightist Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) government under President Ma Ying-jeou to stuff the political genes of Taiwan democratic national identity and Taiwan - centism back into a "great China" bottle will reach a crescendo in the coming two years with the planned "celebrations" of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of China.

President Ma personally sounded the drumbeat to launch the new ideological campaign Sunday morning at the Grand Hotel during the first meeting of the "Preparatory Committee for Celebration Activities for the Centenary of the Republic of China," which included prominent figures from government, the KMT, business circles and pro-blue cultural and performing arts.

The activities, expected to cost at least NT\$530 million during 2010 and 2011, will be bankrolled by a "private" foundation with 49 percent government funding but which will operate outside of the ordinary budgetary controls in an arrangement which Cabinet spokesman Su Chun-pin yesterday assured lawmakers was "absolutely legal" and "unrelated to electoral considerations."

Whether the drive is related to the national legislative and presidential elections scheduled for early 2012 is open to question, Su's complaint that opposition Democratic Progressive Party lawmakers were imputing "ideological motives" lacks credibility since Ma himself set a transparently ideological tone for the commemorations.

Indeed, the question of why this anniversary should be especially commemorated in Taiwan is itself a contentious historical and politically charged issue.

After all, the ROC's founding on January 1, 1912 in the wake of the collapse of the Qing Dynasty had scant direct relevance to Taiwan, which had already been ceded "permanently" to Tokyo in 1895 after the Manchu-ruled dynastic regime's humiliating defeat in the 1894-1895 Sino-Japanese War.

Despite touting of the "the ROC of 1912" by the KMT camp, the state which now uses the ROC moniker does not control 99 percent of the territory of the ROC in 1912 which are now under the actually-existing sovereignty of the Chinese Communist Party - ruled People's Republic of

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China and Mongolia.

Moreover, the symbolic trappings of the ROC now are starkly different as the initial "five color flag" was supplanted by a variation of the KMT party flag in the late 1920s while the national emblem is virtually indistinguishable from the KMT party emblem and the ROC "national anthem" is nothing other than the party hymn of the KMT, which under the late dictator Chiang Kai-shek, imposed one party rule on the China mainland until late 1949 and on Taiwan from October 1945.

In his address, Ma seemed to put the accent on what he said was the six decades of ROC rule in Taiwan and recited the praise given by a former U.S. president that "Taiwan is a beacon of democracy to Asia and the world" and observed that "Taiwan's freedom of speech and political democracy and even its fast and accurate vote counting are special in the world community."

Negating Taiwan-centrism

However, the president and once again KMT chairman promptly put a cap on the significance of Taiwan's democracy, which developed in resistance to four decades of KMT martial law rule, by stressing that "Taiwan is leading the development of freedom, democracy and liberalization within the Chinese community."

Moreover, Ma emphasized the activities aim to "continue the unique spirit which Taiwan built in the past 60 years," but defined this "Taiwan spirit " as "Chinese culture with Taiwan characteristics" which he said was fostered during the past six decades.

Ma's location of the "Taiwan spirit" under the umbrella of "Chinese culture" and location of Taiwan's democracy as "within the Chinese community" are in line with his highly "ideological" claims that Taiwan and its 23 million people (along with the "Mainland Area" including the PRC and Mongolia) "belong to the ROC," that "the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to the Chinese race-nation" and "are all children of the Yellow Emperor" and the revival of the KMT's state - financed Chiang personality cults.

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The upcoming presentation of a drastically rewritten and edited version of the twisted course of the ROC during the past century will both aim to whitewash the KMT regime from responsibility for four decades of state terror in Taiwan and attempt to reverse the growing realization of the richness of Taiwan's own distinctive historical dynamics, including its bottom-up democratization, and reverse growing appreciation of Taiwan's character as a multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural society that cannot be subsumed as a subset of the "Chinese nation."

In sum, the point of the ROC centenary commemoration activities is not to celebrate Taiwan's democratic miracle or to offer a platform that can "let 100 flowers bloom" and manifest the complex histories of both the ROC on the mainland and Taiwan and Taiwan's own history but to re-subordinate Taiwan's pluralistic history and culture under the KMT's unitary "great Chinese nationalism" and breathe "new life" into the KMT myth of unique legitimacy to rule Taiwan just in time for the 2012 elections.

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