

Wu Poh-hsiung: Tears, Just Desserts, Or the Simple Inevitable Slap in the Face?

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.
Friday, 12 June 2009 15:25

One can almost feel sorry for Wu Poh-hsiung as he steps down or is pushed off the stage as Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Chairman by Ma Ying-jeou. I say almost, but that is as far as it goes. Wu is one of those strange Hakka who have a rightful place to be masters in their own land of Taiwan, but have given it up to be a second class citizen in the KMT. Why? It seems that such would rather settle for the guaranteed crumbs and secure lower status provided by the KMT than enter the competitive world of finding principles on which they can build their lives and living those principles.

Wu has held semi-influential KMT positions. He did get to be mayor of Taipei and while all presidents of Taiwan have been mayors of Taipei that was never in the cards for Wu. Wu has never been one to risk all in seeking greatness like James Soong. He has never risked, he has only accepted. Thus Wu even became KMT Party Chairman but solely with the backing of Ma Ying-jeou. That was only to serve a temporary stopgap purpose. That purpose served, Ma is now telling Wu to step aside because Ma wants to be not only President of Taiwan but also KMT Party Chairman. Wu of course is accepting this.

Wu has certainly been the typical company/party man. Loyal, unquestioning, subservient to the hierarchical totem pole, such party men always bend to those above; they accept the fact that they will always be dependent upon bestowed and not earned positions. They are the unfortunate suffering servants. I mean this not with any reference to the prophet Isaiah. Rather these men are simply servants in what should be a democratic society, and they certainly suffer. So do they deserve our sympathy? Or do they simply get what they deserve?

Wu was born in Taiwan in the Japanese Colonial period. He should understand what it is to be under a colonial regime and therefore should realize that with the KMT, he has been substituting one colonial master for another. Wu's family suffered under the KMT during the White Terror period, but instead of learning that this is the price of democracy, Wu has only learned to bow and serve his new masters.

Hakkas claim that they have a fighting spirit and their history often bears this out; but their history also bears out that many of them have sacrificed a fight for principles and have chosen to fight for bestowed favors. They do this even if it means continuing their second class citizenship.

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Lee Teng-hui, was one of the few Hakka that played the system in an alien regime and kept his principles; biding his time, he rose to the top and became President of Taiwan. In the 1990s, no one did more in a concrete way to develop Taiwan's democracy than he. But Lee also eventually suffered from the KMT for that. Because he fostered democracy, he had to bear the brunt of the blame of the KMT losing its one-party state rule. Lee ended up as an unwelcome Hakka guest in the KMT ranks.

So Wu exits the stage in Prufrock fashion. He has been an "attendant lord" and started a scene or two. He has been "an easy tool," deferential and glad to be of use. But that is all. I don't mourn his passing, even if they do give him the hollow title of Honorary Past KMT Party Chairman.

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