

## Taiwan and the 2011 Centennial: 100 years of What?

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.  
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2011 Yes 2011 has been designated a centennial year for Taiwan to celebrate; but as it celebrates 100 years, Taiwanese need to examine more closely just what it is that they are being asked to celebrate 100 years of? Certainly 1911 marked the year that the Manchu Empire (a.k.a. the Qing Dynasty) and dynastic rule in China began its final crumbling in the Xinhai Revolution. From that the Republic of China (ROC) was born and on January 1, 1912 Sun Yat-sen was inaugurated provisional president of the new republic. But that republican birth was short-lived. Call it a still birth or abortion since not all provinces agreed with the revolution. In the next month (February) the dictatorial Yuan shih-kai would be the one who forced the actual abdication of the Emperor Puyi and that was in a brokered deal.

Yuan forced that abdication on the condition that he replace Sun Yat-sen as president (April 1, 1912). He then proceeded to steamroll any semblance of democracy and by 1915 had himself declared Emperor. During those years the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) had tried a second revolution for the Republic of China and it failed miserably. So what was left?

Fortunately Yuan died in 1916 and the still-birth Republic of China dissolved into a period of warlords where everyone, including Sun Yat-sen had their supporting warlords. Not too much to celebrate 100 years of thus far, but further, where actually was Taiwan in all this. Taiwan was not part of any of it. One half of Taiwan had been taken over by the Manchu Qing way back in 1682 but that half had been given to Japan by those same Qing in 1895. So by the time 1911 came around Taiwan was already developing very well as part of the Japanese Empire. Maybe Taiwan should celebrate being spared the chaos?

During the warlord period of China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was formed and Chiang Kai-shek in true democratic warlord fashion eliminated the other warlords. And then he sought to massacre and destroy the CCP and other parties; it was not quite government of the people, by the people and for the people. The KMT wanted a one-party state and it wanted to be that paternalistic one-party. The CCP had its own one-party state vision; it resisted and thus began China's Civil War to see which one-party state would be top dog.

WWII came along; Japan was defeated and after the war the KMT and CCP went back to their Civil War. It was then that the losing KMT fled to Taiwan. From 1945 to 1949, the KMT denuded Taiwan of its resources in its war effort; and imposed martial law. On the continent, the KMT was too corrupt to win the people over to its side. In that war of one-party state advocates, the CCP won out and in 1949 formed the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the meantime, on Taiwan after 2-28, the KMT selectively killed off Taiwan's elite, its educated and

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anyone else capable of creating a government to rival the KMT. That is not the stuff that centennial celebrations are made of.

Taiwan continued to suffer. As the ROC, it would lose its seat in the United Nations due to the stubbornness of Chiang Kai-shek. Martial law would last until 1987, a dual party system was allowed and that coupled with the disbanding of the Garrison Command in 1992 would finally bring Taiwan's suffering of White Terror to an end.

No a centennial for the year 1911 has too much baggage in its hundred years to give any Taiwanese a reason to celebrate or feel sincere about it. Democracy came to Taiwan not because it was a gift of the KMT or its ROC but because many Taiwanese were willing to go to jail and/or shed their blood for it. That is what should be celebrated. The only thing that survives from the aborted revolution of 1911 is the name Republic of China and it is an anomaly. Taiwan may have a republic, but it is not China. Do any Taiwanese really believe or want to celebrate the Constitution of 1947 which says their country owns China, Mongolia, Tibet and East Turkestan? I would not think so.

What year should Taiwan celebrate? If Taiwan were to choose a year it would do better to select a year like 1979 when the Kaohsiung Incident marked its protest for human rights, or 1987 when martial law ended, or 1992 when the privileged "iron rice bowl" KMT Legislators and National Assembly Members selected in 1947 were forced to retire. Or best of all 1996 when Taiwan finally became a true democracy. Those are the centennials that Taiwanese should aim for.

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