

Lin Yi-shih Exposes Taiwan's Unfinished and Unresolved Past

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.
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A key theme in Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, is the inescapable legacy of unresolved past crimes involving the state; with them came their prophetic curse. The people of Thebes, caught in the mire of these past crimes (perhaps because they purposely overlooked them) suffer. As they struggle to get on with life with its immediate challenges including the riddle of the Sphinx, they find that even when that is solved, they still cannot escape the past. Their former king, Laius, is part of it all. He had been welcomed despite his own past of having abused the hospitality of the King of Pelops. Laius in turn tries to escape the prediction of death by his son by binding that son's feet and ordering him to be left for dead. Oedipus, that son, in trying to avoid his role unknowingly makes his way back to Thebes to fulfill the curse. As the play opens, the citizens have ironically come to Oedipus for the solution. But Thebes will not be cleansed until justice is rendered and retribution for past crimes achieved. Taiwan finds itself in a comparable situation; it struggles with many external threats, a hegemonic neighbor, the troubling economy of a modern world etc. But Taiwan also remains haunted by a failure to face and resolve its inescapable past. The widening corruption case of Lin Yi-shih highlights how that past, periodically buried, regularly resurfaces in the corrupt systems endemic in the state's legacy.

Lin Yi-shih is the former Executive Yuan secretary general; his appointment had rested on the direct recommendation and support of Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou. Such involvement not only raises questions on Ma's judgment, but his responsibility and legitimacy. How can Ma, with his own unresolved past, ever be the one to right the wrongs of the nation? From his early years when Ma was a suspected student spy and informer for the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) to his climb through a fawning system, to Ma's claiming ignorance and innocence of how his secretary placed over a half a million US\$ in his (Ma's) bank account, Ma's life is checkered with question marks.

As the recent corruption case unravels, Lin, as Ma's appointee, is appearing more and more as one of several KMT "go to" men, that is, those used for corrupt deals, influence peddling and bought appointments. Prosecutors, military generals, businessmen have all sought out Lin as the one who could help them. Lin would boast that he could ensure one's chances for success if one greased Lin's palm with the right amount. In such matters, Lin obviously did not act alone; he was more a conduit, one of many profiting by these "bribes." Though Lin and then his mother failed lie detector tests, this was more than a family affair; the case points to the corruption that has always run deep throughout the KMT and the systems that it brought to Taiwan. Perhaps this is why the prosecutors and Special Investigation Division (SID) appear reluctant to pursue the case with vigor to its very roots.

To outside observers, Taiwan has the veneer of democracy, but unresolved crimes and

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vestiges from its past hang over the country like the crimes in Sophocles tragedy on Thebes. Among such crimes three stand out in high regard. First, there are the stolen state assets. After that comes transitional justice, i.e. the fact that criminals responsible for the imprisonments, torture, deaths of the KMT's Martial Law, one-party state era still walk the streets. Finally there is the impoverished judicial system from which its dinosaur judges and prosecutors had never been cleansed. To this day they continue to abuse justice in the state. In the face of this, all talk of Ma's anti-corruption campaign appears as window dressing, a charade designed to beguile a complacent public. Looking deeper it even suggests that the corruption case against Chen Shui-bian was an orchestrated ruse, a double standard to distract the local people from the real corrupt system that remains well entrenched.

Begin with Taiwan's stolen state assets. This crime has never been resolved since martial law was lifted in 1987 and a multi-party state begun. Ironically in 2005, seven years ago, Ma as Chairman of the KMT pledged that he would allegedly rectify this matter; to date there has been little or no progress despite Ma being Chairman of the KMT, as well as President of the nation and his party having a majority in the Legislative Yuan. The money from the properties that the KMT did sell has not been returned to the people; rather it has simply been put back into the KMT coffers. To date, the KMT remains one of the richest political parties in the world, leaving Taiwan's democracy without a level playing field. The KMT has hundreds of millions more US dollars than the combined assets of all the other political parties in Taiwan. With such war chests, the KMT is able to buy votes, buy elections, and buy misleading advertising to consolidate its power. By maintaining its power, it can use people like Lin Yi-shih to keep new money coming in and further consolidate its power.

Then there is transitional justice. In recent news, the tracking down of 97 year-old Hungarian Laszlo Csatory, a Nazi era war criminal is an example of how long and how far others have pursued justice in World War II crimes. In Taiwan, however, true justice has never even come close to being achieved. How many of those responsible for the ruined families, the imprisonments, the tortures, the deaths etc. have ever been brought to trial? Instead, with nearly half a century of one-party state rule how easy has it been for the KMT to purge and wash away any tell tale records of the past. Other than Chen Yi, (a man executed more because he started dealing with the Communists when he was re-assigned from Taiwan) what KMT leaders have been directly punished? Who has done time for all of the political imprisonments on Green Island? Why are the perpetrators and those who knowingly accepted the high profile murders of the 1980s still walking the streets?

Finally there remains Taiwan's court system, a system that still operates more as a tool to punish political opponents and wrist slap party regulars. While many of those indicated above have gone free, it was only after years of harassment, that the ultimate court of appeals has finally absolved people like Michael Kau, Chiou I-Jen, and Hsieh Ching-chin of trumped up or

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imagined charges. This double standard in both methods of pursuit and examination point to a court system that still operates like that of a one-party state than that of the people.

In Sophocles tragedy, the people of Thebes went to Oedipus expecting him to free them from the curse enveloping their state; they did not realize that he himself was part of its cause. What the Lin Yi-shih case tells the people of Taiwan is that if they wish to cleanse their country, they must no longer be satisfied with the veneer of justice and democracy and a few scapegoats. They must realize how deep these injustices from the past run within the systems that exist in the country. Like Oedipus, they must be willing to pursue and face this reality even if by doing so they bring down and eliminate half or more of all present rulers.

Source:

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