

Is it time to dump the name ROC?

Written by Jerome Keating
Monday, 28 July 2014 10:01

In the Shakespearean tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, vexed with questions of family loyalty versus her love for a Montague, Juliet asks the provocative question: “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

Her thoughts and interest of course go far beyond the relationship between nomenclature and the characteristics of flowers.

In the same vein, applying Shakespeare’s words to countries instead of flowers, Taiwanese can ask: “What’s in a name?”

Nomenclature may not be Taiwan’s largest problem and it may not be the most pressing, but it still remains a problem that, like it or not, must eventually be admitted to and faced.

Taiwan’s official name is the Republic of China (ROC), a name that comes with a lot of baggage — too much baggage. True, Taiwan is a republic, but other than that, Taiwan is Taiwan and China is China and that is where the trouble begins.

For some, the ROC with its name was stillborn; it never got off the ground. It was hijacked by the first president, Yuan Shikai (袁世凱), in 1912, then spun off into a warlord period followed by a civil war that resulted in the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

For others, the end officially came with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) winning the Chinese civil war in 1949 and declaring its version of a republic.

For still others, the ROC hope and dream ended in 1971, when the ROC left (read, was thrown out of) the UN.

Again for others, it ended when the US officially moved its embassy from Taipei to Beijing in

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January 1979 and formally recognized the PRC as China.

And for others still, it ended in 1992, when Taiwan (ROC) surrendered any forlorn hope to “retake” the mainland.

And for a few others of course, it still exists in an alternate universe that they call “different interpretations.”

Regardless, the name ROC remains a past dream, a dream that came and went with the winds of change sweeping Asia in the early 20th century.

However, the name of that dream remains; perhaps with a touch of sympathetic nostalgia for some, but still like an albatross around the neck that cannot be gotten rid of.

And as that dream remains, the baggage grows. The ROC will never re-enter the UN as the ROC; that chance is gone. It is gone not only because the CCP will not allow it, but also because the other countries have agreed that there cannot be “two Chinas,” just as there cannot be two Canadas or two of any country.

Of course, the “One China policy” held by these countries does not mean that Taiwan is then a part of China, but simply that the ROC cannot be China because the PRC is China.

Similarly, Taiwan under the name ROC cannot participate in the Olympics or other international sports events, again because of the PRC dictates on the ROC name. The ROC must use another name, the insulting name of “Chinese Taipei.” Can one imagine the absurdity of countries called Spanish Buenos Aires, Spanish Bogota or another called Portuguese Brasilia playing in the World Cup, even if Spain or Portugal had had enough promised trade and wealth to try and purchase world opinion?

For Taiwanese, the question returns, what’s in a name? And why do some in Taiwan want to

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cling to the name ROC?

One reason is because some in the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) cannot admit that they lost the civil war and the dream that ROC founding father Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙) once had. Sun's dream is a dream that even the PRC wants to claim, though it remains eons away from any hope of government of the people, by the people and for the people.

However, even in that same driven-out KMT that wants to cling to that ROC name and dream, some members find themselves in a different dilemma. They hanker for the money, power and control (not democracy) that the CCP has created, but their dilemma is how to join it without surrendering the shred of the name of ROC.

In the Qing Dynasty, the Manchus had a way of welcoming people with such a mentality back. These losers could live in a compound called xiu lai ("cordial relations") and all they had to do was recognize their subservient place. Cheng Chih-lung (程其龍), the father of Cheng Cheng-kung (程程龍), and some of his followers chose that and survived, at least for a while. Could those KMT members swallow that?

In the meantime, for Taiwanese and Taiwan — aka Formosa — the burden of the ROC name and baggage continues.

Taiwan cannot participate in anything like the World Health Assembly or the WHO without the "cordial relations" permission of the PRC and even then it must do so under that ridiculous name Chinese Taipei.

Taiwan needs an exit strategy in its nomenclature, a strategy that can handle the current complications that exist on many fronts.

Temporarily, perhaps it can be done by simply ignoring the name ROC.

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The US, a longtime ally and supporter of Taiwan's democracy, maintains its strategic ambiguity by saying that it is "undecided" about Taiwan, though it does have a Taiwan Relations Act and not a Republic of China Relations Act.

Taiwan remains an island; it is not part of the main. And as an island it is a republic, a democratic republic with a democratically elected government. It achieved this by dumping the past one-party KMT state.

Now, as Taiwan's identity continues in its development, it is an identity in process. Its eventual name is a part of that process. It is not the greatest of its problems, but it is still a problem.

And if Taiwan wants to move on from the baggage of its past, it will eventually have to face that problem.

While Taiwan and Formosa are among some of the possible name choices it has, the name ROC is not one.

What is in a name anyway?

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