

Taiwan must develop self-reliance

Written by Jerome Keating
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In any youthful and developing democracy, elections — even local ones — raise the formative issues of identity and national direction.

Taiwan's nine-in-one elections have certainly proved to be no exception. In these elections, one party in particular, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), has gone out of its way to resurrect questionable "race cards" and "loyalty cards," as it tried to force its version of the nation's history and identity on the public along with its candidates. Accusations such as "traitor" and "bastard" — as well as the implication that only KMT candidates would be able to work together on intercity issues — have brought these elections to an all-time low.

However, in this process, these same conflicts have served to resurrect a different, but related, issue of which Taiwanese must be aware: the importance and need of self-reliance for any developing nation. If a nation is going to grow, it must learn to foster its own healthy concept of self-reliance.

A writer who strongly promoted this quality of respect and care for oneself was US essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his well-known essay *Self-Reliance*, he repeatedly emphasized this need to be true to oneself with statements like: "I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you or you."

Emerson spoke of course to the individual, but what he said for individuals can also be read as applicable to nations. In this regard, another quote, not in *Self-Reliance*, but often attributed to Emerson, expresses the challenge that Taiwan faces as a nation: "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."

Taiwan must seek this greatness, for it certainly has no lack of those trying to make it something else.

First, Taiwanese must constantly remind themselves that theirs is not a small nation. It is a mid-sized nation and one well capable of being itself. Taiwan is larger in population than about 75 percent of the countries in the UN and more accomplished than 85 percent of those same nations. Therefore Taiwan should never shrink from the theme of self-reliance. Instead, what it

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needs to do is challenge those who are trying to make it something else.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is the largest offender here. Operating from an autocratic control, Beijing is adamantly opposed to Taiwan's self-reliance. Chinese government officials not only constantly repeat the tired cliché that Taiwan has always been a part of China, but they also use the threat of missiles to back up their coveting Taiwan.

They alternate that rhetoric with trade "carrots" and promises of a so-called "one country, two systems" policy that are all designed to make Taiwan something that it is not.

The US, one of Taiwan's long-term allies, has ironically proved to be not much better in helping Taiwan to be itself and has added to the confusion. While supposedly promoting democracy, the US has not done much to strengthen Taiwan's democracy, especially if Taiwan wishes to express itself in ways that do not serve US self-interests.

It is now almost 70 years since the end of World War II and the official US position on Taiwan remains "undetermined." Seven decades. That makes up two to three generations of people in the US Department of State, and yet this ally cannot seem to make up its mind on Taiwan's democracy.

The issue has complications, but the US is also guilty of indirectly — if not directly — supporting the dictators who kept Taiwan under martial law and a one-party state long after the end of World War II and the US's former enemies Germany and Japan had achieved their democracies.

Even in supporting Taiwan's democracy, the US has too often tried to fashion it to its own interests. What might be sometimes said about the US — at best — is: "With friends like this, Taiwan has little need of enemies." It remains guilty of keeping Taiwan from being too self-reliant.

Taiwan's status has always been in limbo since the end of World War II, when other smaller nations were granted self-determination under the UN Charter.

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Even the San Francisco Peace Treaty did not resolve anything: It specified only that Japan should give up its former colony of Taiwan; it never stated to whom it should be given. So while the PRC and the Republic of China (ROC) both staked claims to Taiwan at the time, the third option of self-determination remained and still remains open.

The KMT diaspora, who fled to Taiwan after it lost the Chinese Civil War, has also done Taiwan few favors. It was responsible for the 228 Massacre in 1947, and orchestrated the Martial Law era from 1949 to 1987, preventing any democracy from developing.

The KMT plays its own word games in wanting to preserve the name of the ROC. KMT members refuse to speak this name in China, but try to use it as a bargaining chip to allow them to return with some sharing of power in autocratic China.

In the meantime, the KMT has become and remains one of the richest political parties in the world by profiting on the “stolen state assets of Taiwan.” In this, it does not want Taiwan to be self-reliant as Taiwan; instead the party tries to preserve its own fascination and dream of the ROC regaining the lost privileges of the “red chamber.”

Most nations — except perhaps the 22 that recognize Taiwan — are complicit in keeping the nation from being self-reliant. They trade with Taiwan, but will not admit to or officially recognize its reality. They do not want Taiwan to rock the boat of their trade with China. Bowing to China’s wishes that they do not recognize Taiwan, nor do they admit to an independent Taiwan.

Instead, they leave the nation at the edge of the precipice of succumbing to Chinese control. Even sports organizations, such as the International Olympic Committee, have gotten in on the act and only allow Taiwan to participate in Olympic Games under the innocuous and insulting name of “Chinese Taipei.” This is another attempt to make Taiwan what it is not.

Yet despite this, Taiwan as a democracy continues to succeed. Fears of losing one trade deal will not scuttle it. It remains a strong, mid-sized nation, developing self-reliance and resisting a world trying to make it into something else.

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Emerson's essay closes with words of direction: "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles."

As Taiwan continues to live by the principles of its own democracy, it will find the self-reliance and inner peace needed to survive and grow in this world.

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