

In 1996, Taiwan held its first direct presidential election. As a native Taiwanese and a member of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), then-president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) played a key role in the nation's transition to democracy. This offered an opportunity for the KMT to transform itself into a "Taiwanese Nationalist Party" and for the Republic of China (ROC) to gain a new lease on life here in Taiwan.

If Taiwan could have had a new constitution as a result, the ROC in exile would have entered history, putting an end to the period between 1949 and 1996, although, since the writing and implementation of a new constitution would take some time, that would perhaps not have happened until 2000.

That would have been the prelude to the formation of a new country. A constitution based on Lee's 1999 "special state-to-state" formula would have led to the creation of a new reality and a new political vision for Taiwan.

This new political vision would have looked something like this: China in exile would have ceased to exist in 1949, and the creation of a new China would not be incomplete because there was another China elsewhere. Perhaps Taiwan and China would have been able to establish peaceful state-to-state relations, and as the two countries devoted themselves to their own national development, a new era would have begun in Asia.

Rather than saying that the presidency of Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) from 2000 to 2008 and the presidency of Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) from 2008 to next year signify the development of a nation, it would probably be better to say that this period has been a competition between two nations within a single statehood; between a Taiwanese Taiwan and a Chinese Taiwan. This split identity has destroyed the significance of the attempt to rebuild the nation through direct presidential elections.

The KMT's change from being anti-communist to being pro-communist was a negative consequence of the party's Chinese identity. The ROC state apparatus has existed in Taiwan for longer than it existed in China, but it still values the 38 years that it ruled China over the 66 years that it has ruled Taiwan. This regime in exile has failed to accomplish its localization, but this fictional state has never stopped extrapolating from its fragmentary existence and fantasizing about the completeness of its own existence.

Reform key to creation of national structure

Written by Lee Min-yung 李敏勇

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The KMT has hijacked the ROC and become obsessed with the party-state. In an effort to secure its minority rule, the party has recruited a group of native Taiwanese politicians who have forgotten their integrity due to personal gain.

However, democratic principles are all but certain to eliminate such minority rule, and the wise and enlightened Taiwanese will not continue to obey a colonial ruler. This is the predicament facing the KMT as it attempts to maintain a fictional Chinese state in Taiwan.

No matter how much it wants to make “micro-adjustments” to high-school curriculum guidelines, the government will be unable to curb the Taiwanese identity from growing stronger.

Still, some people continue to fail to think things through, and they are entering a dead end that everyone else rejects.

Without a new constitution, there is still no way out for this “country,” even after five direct presidential elections. Both the party-state and pro-localization formula face challenges today. Despite the expedient measure of maintaining the “status quo,” a revolutionary new Taiwanese national structure must be established.

Lee Min-yung is a poet.

Translated by Eddy Chang

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