

When former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) published his book *The Road to Democracy — Taiwan's Pursuit of Identity* in 1999, he was soon to leave office, and had started to sum up the major achievements of his 12 years as president of the Republic of China (ROC).

Most people are quite aware that the political reform Lee was pushing in those days went beyond the democratization of the nation; he also wanted to realize a new formula for Taiwan: a “ROC Taiwan” or “the ROC on Taiwan.”

Now Lee has released a new book, *New Road to Democracy*, an update of the 1999 volume, and people are curious on how his new take on the issue differs from his previous one, if at all, 15 years later.

First, of course, there is a wealth of new material he has to write about — the eight years of a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government and another almost eight years of Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government after it returned to power following its years in opposition.

If Lee criticizes the former for its shortcomings, namely serious corruption, then he has been even more critical of President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration.

Lee writes that Ma's declaration that cross-strait relations are relations between two areas, and not the “state-to-state relations” model that Lee formulated, has betrayed the nation and let down Taiwanese.

Comparing how the Ma administration handled the Sunflower movement last year with how he dealt with the Wild Lily student movement in 1990, Lee writes: “I am profoundly disappointed by the way Ma dealt with this; it really was a failure of government.”

Second, Lee has always kept a watchful eye on Taiwan-Japan relations. He was critical of the Japanese government when it said in 1972 that it “understood and respected” China's position

that “Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People’s Republic of China,” saying that this “neither understood, nor respected” Taiwanese.

He also criticized Tokyo for succumbing to pressure from Beijing and refusing to give him a visa to visit Japan in 2001 to seek medical treatment for an existing heart condition, calling the decision by the Japanese government “unjust and cowardly behavior.”

However, he also says that the Taiwanese universally admire and identify with the “Japanese spirit,” and that this forms the basis of the eternally close relationship between Taiwan and Japan.

Over the past decade or so the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party have consistently associated Lee with the Taiwanese independence movement, although in his 1999 book, Lee said he opposed the establishment of a “Taiwan Republic.”

He said such an action would be “confusing the issue of Taiwan’s existence with the issue of independence,” and would render the issue of Taiwanese identity vague, and jeopardize Taiwan’s sovereign independence and continued existence.

His new book provides additional information on his stance. He writes that during the latter part of his time in office, he sent now-Democratic Progressive Party Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) to the UK to consult with nine international law experts on the question of whether Taiwan could be considered a sovereign, independent nation.

The answer they gave was inconclusive, with half saying yes, the other half concluding that it could not, clearly demonstrating that Taiwan’s national status is both complex and special.

Lee said that unambiguously announcing to the international community that Taiwan is an independent nation was the first step toward the normalization of the country.

Lee Teng-hui, in his own words

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Make no mistake about it: Lee still opposes Taiwanese independence. For him, the important thing is for the collective consciousness of Taiwanese to be based on democratic values, not on nationalism.

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