

Transitional justice, pension reform, stolen state assets: These are just some of the many challenges that confront President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) in addition to the constant everyday concerns of government. If these are not enough, additional issues lurk in the wings, such as the Mega International Commercial Bank scandal with its potential for far-reaching money laundering indictments and the inane ever-recurring "Chinese Taipei" moniker that constantly clouds Taiwan's identity and participation in international sporting events.

Although democracy has been fully functional in Taiwan since 1996, these problems remain. They are part and parcel of the baggage from Taiwan's past, and its one-party state days under the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石).

It would be nice if it ended there, but it does not. New, disturbing signs emerged from the KMT's recent congress to indicate that this is more than unwanted residue. Questions come up again and again, such as how deeply does the current KMT hierarchy believe in democracy for Taiwan, especially vis-a-vis its priorities regarding Taiwan and its relationship with China?

On the positive side the KMT showed that it is beginning to allow greater participation from the lower ranks in choosing leaders, but the overall discourse and narrative remained the same. KMT Chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱) spoke of seeking Chiang Ching-kuo's (蔣經國) legacy, but on closer examination, points to the entrenched nondemocratic mindset of the Chiang Kai-shek era.

Insights on this mindset difference are found in Jay Taylor's extensive 2009 biography, *The Generalissimo, Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle of Modern China*, a work that was written after his biography of Chiang Ching-kuo, *The Generalissimo's Son*.

Many books have been written on Chiang Kai-shek and Taylor admits that the general consensus among authors had not been favorable to the "Peanut," "General Cash-my-check," aka, the man, who despite so many advantages, "lost China."

And thus, while Taylor's biography with its thousands of footnotes and extensive sources is probably one of the better attempts to "rehabilitate" or mitigate Chiang Kai-shek's reputation, in

the final analysis, it still falls short, forcing Taylor to concede that he “stayed on the stage too long.”

An interesting early point Taylor makes is the unusual special relationship between the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Zhou Enlai (周恩来) and Chiang Kai-shek. It is a relationship that would carry over into his latter days, when Zhou would secretly keep Chiang Kai-shek informed on how then-US president Richard Nixon and then-US secretary of state Henry Kissinger were preparing to “sell him down the river” even as those US leaders thought they were making history with China.

In this relationship, Zhou, along with Mao Zedong (毛泽东), early on had recognized Chiang Kai-shek as a self-delusional Ah-Q figure whose fantasies and dreams of becoming the savior were something they could and did exploit to their advantage in the struggle to control the destiny of China.

Chiang Kai-shek and Mao were united in their belief of restoring Chinese power, but they obviously differed in who would take the role of the new-found emperor to bring that about. Both read the Chinese classics, although Mao read them more pragmatically for strategies in dealing with others, while Chiang Kai-shek to foster his sense that he would be the benevolent Confucian emperor.

Neither of the two, despite lip service to Sun Yat-sen's (孙逸仙) “government by the people,” were interested in democracy in China — certainly not in their lifetime.

In this interplay, however, Chiang Kai-shek's Ah-Q sense of spiritual superiority and destiny was not enough. He needed a supporting cast who would not threaten or challenge his role, and so, as Taylor points out, loyalty became his highest priority. It trumped competency in selecting those beneath him.

Zhou and Mao could feign this loyalty and flatter Chiang Kai-shek when necessary, but with others in the KMT it created a symbiotic codependence. Chiang Kai-shek could tolerate corruption if people were loyal and the loyal would support him if it lined their pockets. Both profited. Chiang Kai-shek could also then exhort his staff with platitudes and admonish them on how the communists were more dedicated, but in the final analysis he seldom took action

against his loyal subordinates. Chen Yi's (陳儀) greatest sin was not the murder of Taiwanese, but that he was thinking of changing sides.

Throughout the biography, Taylor extensively quotes Chiang Kai-shek's journals, and there, in Ah-Q fashion, Chiang Kai-shek promotes a "suffering servant" role as found in the Biblical book of Isaiah. In his righteous quest to be the "savior of China," Chiang Kai-shek accepted that he must suffer "humiliations and betrayals" on all sides.

China's Civil War would become a focused struggle between Chiang Kai-shek and Mao, as these two wannabe emperors sought to create a unified China in their image. In this, Mao also stayed on stage too long, something which would put China through the Great Leap forward and the Cultural Revolution, but that is a separate story.

For Chiang Kai-shek, his dilemma in priorities between "one China" and personal power continued. At one point Zhou and Mao offered him guaranteed rule in Taiwan if he would join them. Finally it all came to the fore with the UN issue in the early 1970s.

Chiang Kai-shek had numerous opportunities in China's Civil War where he could have developed a 38th parallel situation and avoided the Manchuria debacle; he also had numerous chances for "two Chinas" in the UN.

What would Ah-Q do? Taiwan was not a backwater area like much of rural China; it had already gained the right to select its delegates to the Japanese Diet before World War II ended. Chiang Kai-shek could not use the excuse of "tutelage" as he did in China to keep his rule there.

To stay in the UN, Chiang Kai-shek would finally have to bring democracy to Taiwan. He found an Ah-Q route and "left" before he was kicked out, claiming that gentlemen would not sit down with thieves. It was ironic that fascist Germany and Japan had already achieved democracies, while this gentleman and his KMT cohorts ran a flourishing drug trade in the Golden Triangle in then-Burma and Thailand. Similarly the loyal profiting KMT had also allowed Chiang Kai-shek to break from the Constitution with its required limits of presidential terms. Still, they left the UN "with honor."

Fast forward to the present where the current old-guard KMT finds a new and different dilemma in how to relate to China now that Taiwan has democracy.

In any democracy, the ultimate question all parties and their leaders face is whether they would sacrifice democracy to gain the presidency and control of the nation.

The old KMT claims that it is the only one that can make peace with China, yet it seems to ignore something. In 1991, it had abolished the Temporary Provisions during the Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion. China never responded by renouncing the use of force on Taiwan.

In the fabricated "1992 consensus" the KMT had at least held onto a claim that each side could interpret its belief in "one China" in their own way. The current KMT leadership has abandoned that as well. What is left for the old-guard KMT to sacrifice to mollify China and stay on the gravy train? Where does the KMT stand on Taiwan in its relationship with its idea of "one China"? Would it sell out Taiwan's democracy to maintain a profit role?

This is what Taiwanese worry about. Perhaps the old-guard KMT has been on the stage too long.

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