

Time to do away with ‘Year of the Republic’

Written by Hugo Tseng 許瑋瑋
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For many years, I have wondered if there was a possibility of replacing the Republic of China (ROC) chronology with the internationally accepted date format.

Saturday marked the anniversary of President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government's first year in office. Perhaps this would be a good moment for the public to take a calm and detached look at the issue and reach an agreement that could be presented to the government in the hope that it would consider public opinion in future government policy.

The ROC date format is increasingly becoming a source of confusion that is complicating communication.

For example, when someone talks about “oldies from the 60s,” are they talking about the 60s according to the ROC chronology — which would be the 1950s according to the international date format — or are they using the internationally accepted date format and referring to the 1960s?

Does “92” refer to the ROC date, which was the year that SARS reached Taiwan — 2003 in the international date format — or does it refer to the year of the “92 consensus” — the Chinese expression leaves out the century — which of course was reached in 1992?

More detail-oriented people will add “Year of the Republic” before the year when they use ROC chronology and include the century when they talk about a certain decade using the international date format.

However, many people prefer brevity, and as communication is breaking down, we have now reached the point where it is becoming necessary to address the issue head on.

Fortunately, this confusing system has not been in place for long and if some common sense is applied together with some fact checking, sense can still be made of things.

However, if the situation is not addressed and the practice is allowed to continue, future generations will be unable to make heads or tails of things.

In addition to these communication problems, the ROC chronology replicates the Chinese system, which had a dynastic chronology that changed as one emperor replaced another.

This system has too many limitations. Looking internationally, it is easy to see that governments come and go and there is nothing anyone can do about it.

No one knows the future of the ROC or for how long it will remain a national designation. There is little doubt that using the internationally accepted date format would be a reliable and lasting policy as it would do away with the need to start again from scratch as governments change.

If the public were to reach an agreement, the international date format could be adopted as the new standard, while the ROC chronology could remain in use in the same way that the lunar calendar date format is used: It could be included as a reference date. This would lessen the impact of the change and make a transition less troublesome.

The DPP has been in control of both the government and the legislature for a year; would it not be possible to finally come up with a solution that puts this old controversy to rest?

Everyone is looking forward to an answer.

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Translated by Perry Svensson

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