

## Taiwanese can stand proud, shake off China

Written by Lee Min-yung 李敏勇

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Following the end of World War II, Taiwan endured the 228 Incident, the Martial Law era — which lasted from May 21, 1949, to July 15, 1987 — the White Terror era of the 1950s and a half-century of Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) party-state rule, which is the root of society's present ills.

After martial law was lifted, Taiwan experienced a decade of radical democratization movements, before the era of directly elected presidents was ushered in with the election of then-president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) in 1996. Despite this, the conditions for the establishment of a true Taiwanese national identity were not present.

Disputes over national identity stem from the Constitution. Its conceptualization of Taiwan as "China" has become a noose round the necks of Taiwanese and caused confusion over what it means to be an inhabitant of this nation, a situation that remains to this day.

Having lost absolute power, the KMT colonialists are now attempting to thwart Taiwan's transition to becoming a "normalized" nation, while the Democratic Progressive Party is often forced by events to jettison its original aim of creating a new national framework.

The struggle for political power in China between the Republic of China and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), caused the KMT — at that time still ruling from China — to impose a form of martial law on Taiwan.

The strength of the CCP regime in the People's Republic of China (PRC), after it embraced capitalism, has in effect functioned as a kind of externally imposed martial law on Taiwan.

After the KMT retreated to Taiwan in 1949, Taiwanese were trapped in the mentality of Chinese nationalism. Imprisoned by ideology and absorbed in making money, strong feelings of community and common destiny never took hold, leaving many Taiwanese feeling aggrieved at the rotten hand they have been dealt in life.

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When martial law was lifted, the “external martial law” imposed by the Chinese party-state remained, as Beijing’s long-standing propaganda campaign and military scare tactics are designed to simultaneously threaten and bribe Taiwanese.

The KMT occupied Taiwan and adopted it as its home after losing the Chinese Civil War, yet despite breakthroughs in political reform and democratization, it still lacks a compelling argument for Taiwan’s continued existence and, as such, the nation now faces an existential crisis.

Not only has Beijing illegally detained Taiwanese human rights advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲) and turned a deaf ear to appeals for Lee’s release from both Taiwanese and international human rights organizations, this dictatorship also imprisoned the late Nobel Peace Prize-winning author of the reformist manifesto known as Charter 08, Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波), who was imprisoned until he died of cancer. Chinese leaders have shown themselves to be even more cruel and heartless than their KMT counterparts.

Taiwan has undergone democratization that stands in stark contrast to the two “Chinas” administered by the KMT and the CCP. Within Asia, Taiwan can stand proud as a truly democratic nation alongside Japan and South Korea, having independently forged a path toward freedom and liberty.

In its dealings with China, Taiwan should stand tall and proud in the knowledge that it has established an enduring democracy and built the fabric of a new state. All Taiwanese should remember that they threw off the shackles of martial law in the name of freedom and not to simply ingratiate themselves with China.

*Lee Min-yung is a poet.*

Translated by Edward Jones

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