

Taiwan needs to develop its own culture

Written by Lee Min-yung 林敏雄

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Taiwan appears to have successfully carried out its democratization and developed a Taiwanese identity. This is reflected in how parties other than the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) can be elected to rule. As it stands, if the KMT rejects desinicization, it will have no chance of a comeback.

Culturally, however, Taiwanese find themselves mired in the remaining fragments of the party-state ideology from the Martial Law era: a cultural affinity for China, hostility toward democracy and an obsession with outdated, conservative feudalism.

These are factors that the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and other parties must face before Taiwan's democracy and national identity can be further consolidated. Although the DPP has been voted into power, the nation's arts and cultural scene remains under the influence of the party-state ideology.

Many DPP politicians also identify with the old culture, having grown up with it. The same holds true for a majority of Taiwanese.

Political transformation must go hand-in-hand with cultural transformation. Otherwise, no amount of effort can bring true awakening to a society.

If the KMT were not so anti-Taiwanese, lacking in "Taiwaneseness" and unfairly disadvantaged, there would be no guarantee that it would never regain power. A reminder of this danger was when Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) in 2009 replaced former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) after having successfully promoted himself as an upright, law-abiding citizen.

Education reforms carried out by former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) helped build the foundation for a new sense of national identity, which has become more rooted among Taiwanese born since the 1990s.

However, this was not a structural change, as the definition of Taiwan's national identity has

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differed depending on the party in power.

Following the chaos caused by the KMT during Ma's presidency, President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) administration must set things straight.

Today, Taiwanese still lack the vision required to transform Taiwan into a normal, progressive nation. The proportion of classical Chinese in Chinese textbooks is but one aspect of this issue, as it concerns only the form of the literary works, while the content and spirit of the works included in textbooks remains undiscussed. In a world that is continually progressing, Taiwan's Chinese education is doing little to inspire students.

Poet and essayist Yu Kwang-chung (余光中) passed away at the age of 90 on Dec. 14. Although Yu was known as a leading literary figure, he was also controversial — both loved and hated. The passing of time should permit people to evaluate his contribution more accurately.

Chinese educational, social and cultural circles in Taiwan have long been dominated by similar views on culture, leading to many generations being confused about national identity.

The re-evaluation will not be limited to Yu, but will include the contributions of many other artists and intellectuals.

After World War II, both the winners and the losers had to rise from the ashes and move forward. Having neither won nor lost, Taiwan made the economy a priority, but gave little toward culture under the quasi-colonial rule of the KMT.

Post-war Taiwan had no opportunity to build a Taiwan-centered identity. Under the KMT, the nation was nothing but a military base where the Republic of China (ROC) could be revived.

Although Taiwan has undergone democratization and localization, it has yet to develop a true national culture. The KMT has used it to replace its dead ROC — this is not a political problem, but a cultural problem.

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