

## Taiwan must face what's in a name

Written by Jerome Keating  
Thursday, 22 November 2018 04:28

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As the nation prepares to vote on Saturday, one referendum stands out from the others: It is No. 13, on the name change for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

It reads: “Do you agree that Taiwan should apply to participate in all international sporting events, including the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, using the name ‘Taiwan?’”

A rose by any other name might smell as sweet, but for Taiwan, this issue is far deeper than simple nomenclature. The current name, the Republic of China (ROC), is not only dated and inaccurate, but an albatross that prevents Taiwan's participation in international affairs.

Historically, Taiwan has been dealt a bad hand and, without a name change, it will never be able to take its proper place in the world.

The 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty left Taiwan in a limbo. By it, Japan surrendered Taiwan, but it never stated a recipient. By UN practice, Taiwanese should have been granted the right of self-determination. They were not. Instead an unwanted government in exile occupied the island.

Step back to 1945-1947 when the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) drew up the ROC Constitution in China. By 1949, the KMT lost the Chinese Civil War to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and the CCP drew up a replacement constitution for the People's Republic of China (PRC). At that point the ROC technically ended.

Unfortunately, the KMT — along with its failed ROC Constitution — fled to Taiwan and like beggars occupying an empty temple set up shop there. Thus, while the San Francisco Peace Treaty was still being worked out, Taiwan never got a chance to have its voice heard.

In that interim, the Cold War began in 1946. The Korean War followed in 1950 and China sent troops there in 1951. With the threat of another world war, the Taiwan question was forced to a back burner.

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An Asian trilogy on competing paradigms of democracy and control cries to be written here explaining how Taiwan's fate for so long became intertwined with the ROC's and the PRC's conflicting claims until Taiwanese finally broke free and achieved full democracy in 1996.

For the KMT, its part in that trilogy would mimic British 17th-century poet John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It would illustrate how it betrayed Sun Yat-sen's (孫逸仙) principles of democracy as it managed to lose China and the hearts of the Chinese people.

For the CCP, its part would similarly raise the question of whether its reverence of Sun's principles has been a convenient sham.

For Taiwan, its part would be *Paradise Regained* and how Taiwanese managed to eventually free themselves from this mess and the KMT one-party state, and gain control of the nation by achieving democracy.

Such a work has the makings of an epic trilogy on the struggle of absolute power versus democracy replete with betrayed ideals, greedy leaders and wasted wars. Many soul-searching questions would need to be asked, especially on why only one people, the Taiwanese, achieved the desired democracy.

Did Sun really want a democracy or simply a China ruled by mythic Han and not Manchus? Did the KMT or the CCP simply use democracy as a front to mask a desire to control the Chinese nation? Is their predominant paradigm a desired return to the mythic Middle Kingdom, albeit with the borders that the Mongolians and Manchus had established? All this needs to be examined.

In Taiwan, many KMT supporters still bemoan their lost paradise. Some, like Milton's Moloch, have postured on how they would retake China. Others, like Mammon, were content to make a "heaven of their hell" and enjoy Taiwan's stolen state assets. And others like Belial decided to just do nothing; few have fully embraced democracy.

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People like former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) are part of the problem. Ma's three noes are an example. His "no" on how the ROC would not use force is a joke as was the posturing position of Moloch.

Since Taiwan is a de facto independent nation, his "no" on independence is a betrayal. Ma wants to shut that door. The third "no" on keeping the door open to unification reinforces that betrayal, since it suggests it would sacrifice democracy to a greater China narrative.

The US has played a double game here as well. It has jettisoned the use of the ROC name and substituted Taiwan in the Taiwan Relations Act and its de facto embassy, the American Institute in Taiwan. It supports Taiwan's "full participation at organizations that do not require state status, such as APEC and the WTO," but then it lapses into an age-old ambiguity.

When talking to Beijing, Washington resorts to the dated boilerplate response of how it honors past communiques etc, even though the world has moved on since the 1970s.

A solution is available; the US could clarify its vacuous dodge if it wished by adding one provocative clause to the end of its traditional jargon. Read that as follows: "The US remains committed to the Shanghai Communique, etc. etc. It upholds its 'one China' policy, but it rejects the 'one China' principle."

That last clause in bold italics would do much to remove the ambiguity on Taiwan that the US creates in the world and cause other nations to see where the real problem is.

These are issues that Taiwan must confront. They make referendum No. 13 on control over which name Taiwan uses, important. This also helps Taiwan to separate the wheat from the chaff among its citizens and find who among them are totally committed to Taiwan.

Referendum No. 13 sends a clear message to the world. It might not have any immediate binding effect, but it is a way for Taiwanese to state where they stand.

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All insulting past names like Chinese Taipei had been instigated when Taiwan was under the one-party state rule of the KMT, which clung to its ROC tradition. By referendum No. 13, Taiwanese can express that they wish to make their de facto independent democracy a de jure one and achieve the recognition they deserve.

In this, Taiwanese will indicate that they control their destiny and will no longer accept outside interference on how they are named or judged. And if there are Taiwanese who have fantasies about seeking participation in a Greater China narrative, they will be left in the dustbin of history.

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