

## Tsai has yet to build her legacy for the nation

Written by JoshuaTin 000

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A few days ago, there were reports that President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) had been asked about her legacy. According to the reports, a person asked Tsai that if former president Lee Teng-hui's (李登輝) legacy was the establishment of democracy, what she hoped Taiwan would remember her for. Her immediate response was: "The economy."

Lee's contribution to Taiwan was to transform it into a democracy from within the authoritarian framework established by Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國). "Democracy" was not a legacy Lee chose for himself, but it followed him like a shadow.

Freezing the provincial government, transferring the powers of the National Assembly to the legislature and introducing direct presidential elections through constitutional reform were tactically and strategically necessary, and provided the goal and the means required for a democratic transformation. This is why democracy became his legacy.

A look at the transition from authoritarianism to democracy shows that Lee's "democracy" encompassed values and direction, which are necessary to build an enduring legacy.

By comparison, Tsai's answer of "the economy" might contain profound truths, but it requires more practical evidence.

"Economy" is not an achievement in itself, it is just a constant presence in a permanent cycle of growth and decline.

For the general public, "the economy" and "becoming rich" are broad concepts. When business and industry are doing well in times of prosperity, that is an expression of how the economy creates wealth, and it is something that the government shows off in elections.

However, it is insufficient to build a legacy.

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Talking about economic performance in isolation requires several definite conditions. Tsai must concretely describe how to bring biotechnological development to a certain level, how to integrate the defense industry with the private sector, how to use automation to upgrade Taiwanese industries.

She must make solid suggestions for how a 35-hour work week could be implemented for all Taiwanese or how to help them reach a certain income level.

Taking a global view, the world has entered the post-globalization era: International exchanges are no longer focused on traditional trade, the world's factory is slowly disappearing, international capital is no longer invested in production using cheap labor, the manufacturing industry is being repatriated, industrial clusters are becoming regionalized, and new energy sources and autonomous systems are taking root.

How the Taiwanese economy should handle these global structural changes, what role Taiwan can play in them and which direction industrial transformation should take are strategic economic concerns. Tsai is engaged in economic restructuring, but the strategic and tactical outlines still have not been clearly laid out.

Legacy is conferred by historians and Tsai must understand that her legacy will only be plainly visible a hundred years from now.

In addition to economic performance, something of deeper significance is also required, something that allows Taiwan to elevate its international status, cultivate the civic awareness present in local identity and thoroughly eliminate the “never-changing Chinese value system” (醬油文化, literally “soy sauce jar culture”) — this is the kind of strategic thinking that lays the foundation for a lasting legacy.

*Joshua Tin is an economist.*

Translated by Perry Svensson

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