

Lee Teng-hui's legacy must live on

Written by Chu Meng-hsiang 許瑋

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Memorial services for former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), who died on July 30, were held on Saturday at Aletheia University and nearby Tamkang Senior High School in New Taipei City's Tamsui District (淡水). As a participant, I found myself back at the school where I taught 23 years ago and where Lee studied long before me. The school was the first in Taiwan to teach mandatory courses on the school's own history and the history of Taiwan.

Within the school grounds is a cemetery where 19th-century Presbyterian missionary George Leslie Mackay, his family and other foreign missionaries were laid to rest.

Having devoted his life to Taiwan, Mackay expressed his final wishes in a poem: "My heart's ties to Taiwan cannot be severed! To that island I devote my life ... I should like to find a final resting place within sound of its surf and under the shade of its waving bamboo."

Mackay was Canadian, but he loved Taiwan, so he chose to be laid to rest at Tamkang Senior High School. Lee, for his part, took to heart Mackay's motto: "It is better to burn out than rust out," and followed it throughout his life.

Lee inherited and kept alive the spirit of Mackay. During his 12 years as president, he laid the foundations of today's Taiwan. Among them are: the National Health Insurance system; the National Affairs Conference, which convened six times to decide on constitutional amendments; a broad program to train an army of farmers; humanistic education that has set down the roots of Taiwanese consciousness; the "two-states theory"; legislative elections; shelving the Taiwan Provincial Government; amending Article 100 of the Criminal Code concerning sedition; and direct election of the nation's president.

After leaving office, Lee applied his abundant knowledge in many fields to finding ways for Taiwan to escape from its predicaments. Let us be thankful that, among the great changes of recent history, God chose Lee to lead Taiwanese into the dawn of a new era. Even after striving for these goals throughout his life, in his later years he turned his mind to a second wave of democratic reforms and Taiwan's path to normal nationhood.

Lee led the nation with great clarity of foresight. A good example is his "no haste, be patient"

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policy with regard to investment in China. Behind his political language lay his philosophical ideas. As a “philosopher president,” he believed that there were two essential tasks for building a Taiwanese ideology and forming a Taiwanese spirit.

One of these tasks was to consolidate consciousness of a living community, and the second was to awaken the consciousness of new-generation Taiwanese.

Lee grew up in the years before World War II, when Taiwan was much more civilized in the spiritual sense than it was materially. This background endowed him with great wisdom and a selfless sense of purpose.

In a rigorous environment over many years, he sought to make the concept of “Taiwan first, homeland foremost” gradually become the mainstream ideology of Taiwanese society.

As of today, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) that Lee once led has abandoned the path that he set. The KMT has become a rootless, empty shell that will sooner or later follow the New Party into oblivion.

As well as leading Taiwan to become a democracy, Lee also developed the nation into an economic power. His clarity of thought pointed in the forward direction, and he persuaded more people to identify with Taiwan as a nation.

I could not help crying as I watched a film on his lifelong efforts. It is for good reason that Lee is known as the father of Taiwan's democracy and the father of Taiwan.

One complaint concerns the flag presentation ceremony that took place at the end of the memorial service. Military police held a Republic of China (ROC) national flag and folded it until only the KMT's party emblem was visible.

This scene was broadcast nationwide, with a view of the folded flag for at least five seconds

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before the flag was placed in a box. This was absurd.

The issue is the same as with the new design for the ROC passport. Is the KMT emblem also our national emblem? Lee's greatest dream was for Taiwan to join the community of nations, so the flag he pictured must surely have been a flag representing Taiwan.

The nation now has a Taiwan-centric government, so let us hope that it will carry forward Lee's unfinished legacy, namely his clear objective of normalization for Taiwan as a nation and a second wave of democratic reforms that would make Taiwanese confident to forge ahead.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

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