

HIST 5564 Term Paper

**From Free China to Democratic Taiwan**

**Struggle for the First Democracy in Ethnic Chinese Community**

Submit to: Professor Frank Ching

Submitted by: Hongyu Alex Wang

Student ID No.: 1155009869

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### Struggle for the First Democracy in Ethnic Chinese Community

“Here... the free government of China succumbed to the communist assault. Our aid has enabled the free Chinese to rebuild and strengthen their forces on the island of Formosa”, United States President Harry Truman addressed to the State of Union on January 1953,<sup>1</sup> despite there was no free China at that time. Formosa, or Taiwan, was immersed under Chiang Kai-shek regime’s White Terror from ROC’s defeat in the civil war until the 1970s.

In this essay I will examine how the “Free China” struggled toward freedom and democracy. I will historically and analytically present each stage of Taiwan’s political development after World War II, from White Terror to international isolation, from martial law lifting to democratic election, from political disorder to a true democracy. My illustration of Free China’s political miracle will prove that democracy can be cultivated and sustained in a Chinese community.

#### Part I Free China’s Control and Repression

“Chen Yi and his henchmen ruthlessly, corruptly, and avariciously imposed their

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Frank Ching, CUHK 2011/12 Term 2 HIST 5564, February 9, 2012 lecture note, P18

regime upon a happy and amenable population”, wrote U.S. General Albert Wedemeyer on the horrible 2-28 Incident (February 28, 1947),<sup>2</sup> when ROC government brutally repressed Taiwanese rebellion for its awful administration after Second World War. Martial Law came after which empowered Taiwan Garrison Command to ban any political party except KMT while all Medias were put under severe control. Indeed, after defeating Japan in 1945, Nanking regime did regarded themselves as conquer over Taiwan, which was ceded to Japan by Qing Dynasty in 1895.

But later same year, ROC government did pass a constitution which made the regime a constitutional polity, and the constitution itself is democratic. Sun Yet-sen, the founder of ROC, suggested three steps toward democracy which was to achieving national sovereignty, cultivating “democratic citizen” and establishing democratic polity, according to his famous Three Principal of the People. The 1947 Constitution, which set up a National Assembly to elected president and a Legislative Yuan to make laws, was a reflection of Sun’s final stage of democratic development. Election of representative bodies was held in 1948 despite the severe civil war while Chiang Kai-shek was made the president. As civil war escalated, ROC authority enacted Temporary Provision Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion, which made KMT perennial ruling status until peace will be restored. In 1949 KMT lost civil war and moved to Taiwan, left a communist Mainland.

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<sup>2</sup> Shelley Gigger, *Why Taiwan Matters, “Small Island, Global Powerhouse”*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2011, P60

Taiwanese call the period from 1945 until 1970s White Terror, under Chiang Kai-shek, the entire Taiwan society was shaped for the purpose of recovering the Mainland. Mainlanders who retreated to Taiwan were separated from Taiwanese, by registering their home province on household registration. Children born in Taiwan inherited their father's provincial origin. State jobs were shared by people among different provincial origins. Taiwanese, the only "origin" of ROC's territory, received few quotas, which made Mainlanders governing the Island for a few decades. In 1951, representatives elected on Mainland in 1948 were made permanent to retain their seats until elections could be held again in Mainland, when around half of them made their way to Taiwan after KMT's defeat in civil war.

Challenging KMT authority and discussing civil rights were a taboo in Chiang Kai-shek era, thousands of Taiwanese and Mainlanders were imprisoned, tortured or even executed under White Terror. A few high-profile victims were often been discussed. Peng Ming-min, who composed a manifesto in 1964 criticizing KMT's authoritarianism and called for reform, was jailed and later expelled out of Taiwan until 1995 when he returned home as a president candidate; Bo Yang, who translated American literature was accused of sedition fun of Chiang and sentenced; Lei Chen, who formed *Free China Fortnightly* and advocated for giving up fighting back Mainland, improving Taiwan people's life, and forming a new China Democratic Party ended up in prison for ten years.

During the Cold War, ROC was supported and aided by United States and western powers for preventing communists' expansion in Asia and thus was carrying the sobriquet "Free China", despite there's little freedom Taiwan people enjoyed under Chiang. But gradually, KMT government adopted and tolerated some dissidents in the Island for living up its sobriquet to its people and western supporters, and opposition eventually grew strong while a free Taiwan was eventually realized.

## Part II Struggles From Free China to Early Democratization

As repressive as it was, KMT didn't took over everything like the CCP, outside the central power which was dominated by Mainlanders, Taiwan society left space for people to voice. Local election was a unique feature, where Taiwanese could elect leaders in villages, townships, counties, and cities, and representatives in Taiwan's Provincial Assembly. Local election was a vehicle for enticing Taiwanese into KMT system. Taiwanese politicians usually start career independently and later been included into the system after winning local elections. Local election was also a way for reducing central government's administrative burden, because it's always easier for Hokkien, Hakka or Austronesian speaking locals to govern their regions with limited power endorsed by Taipei. Nevertheless, under martial law, new political parties were prohibited, allowing KMT to monopoly the electoral process with only a few independent candidates' participation whose financial and organizational

recourses cannot compete with KMT candidates. Corruption was rampant, KMT intervention was common. Gradually, in most counties and cities, KMT-linked politicians formed factions within the party to help manage elections, factionalism allowed groups in KMT to compete for recourses and power openly.

Another trend is the emergence and struggle of Non-Party movement, where independent candidates gathered for a better position. In 1957 Non-Party Candidate Alliance was formed, while KMT staffs dialogued with Alliance leaders and offered to work together for democracy. But indeed, popular, elected Taiwanese politicians joined forces with Mainlander reformers thus posed threat on KMT's regime. Many independent campaigner were arrested, the earlier discussed three high profile cases were just a tip of the iceberg.

By the 1960s, KMT was facing severe problems, national politics were frozen and crabbed, government institutions were unfit for economic and social development, and fewer than half of 1948 representative members were still attending Legislative Yuan and National Assembly sessions. Breakthrough was made in 1966 when supplementary election was held for the two representative bodies, twenty-six Taiwanese were elected, though only accounted less than three percent of total representatives, Taiwanese did for the first time had their voice in national institutions. This little action couldn't prevent ROC regime from declining, by 1970s, the Island was immersed in crisis, economy stagnated due to oil crisis and international

recession; more importantly, PRC took its seat in the United Nations and its Security Council, normalized relations with United States and Japan and began to establish relations with the west. The aging Chiang Kai-shek apparently failed to find any resolute measures until his son Chiang Ching-kuo, or CCK inherited the position of KMT chairman and ROC president in after 1975.

CCK opened new opportunities for Taiwanese in government, both at the grassroots level and in the leadership. He appointed the first Taiwanese provincial governor and vice premier, in 1982 he made Lee Teng-hui, a Taiwanese, to be his vice president and apparently his successor. But CCK's early reform was limited; those criticizing high officials, demanding the termination of martial law, or suggesting negotiations with PRC were jailed.

Nonetheless, Non-Party movement enjoyed substantial growth in this period. In 1977 provincial and municipal elections, independent candidates launched New Non-Party Movement under the leadership of Huang Hsin-chieh and Kang Ning-hsing, with the victory of occupied more than one quarter positions from municipal executives and Provincial Assembly seats. In 1978, government cancelled the new round of election due to the break of relations with United States and the later's turn to PRC, Non-Party camp divided on how to respond while this shaped the factions in this camp for a decade long. Moderates, represented by Kang, believed the regime is justified in postponing the election while the militants insisted KMT's intention to derail

Non-Party camp. Militants started the *Formosa* magazine to call for direct actions against government, while moderates opened *Eighties* magazine to advocate working within the system. Despite the differences, Non-Party moderates and militants worked together. The *Formosa* group organized a rally the later year in 1979 to recognize International Human Rights Day but only to find police violently crashed them outside their service in Kaohsiung and major advocators were arrested, eight were sent to military courts and thirty-seven faced civilian trials. Chen Chu sentenced twelve years; Shih Ming-teh sentenced life in prison while Hsu Hsin-hang took asylum in Sweden, though in late 1980s they were all released amid the democratic breakthrough at that time. After this Kaohsiung Incident, moderate leader Kang Ning-hsing assembled a team of first-class attorneys to defend their militant comrades, the best attorney among was Chen Shui-bian.

Full scale reform was badly needed in early 1980s' Taiwan. Taiwan's economy was developed, but KMT authorities only to find oppositions got more funds while grew strong, and the surging economy was mainly the attributes of Taiwanese small and medium sized industrialists. Taiwan was internationally isolated, PRC was reforming and opening up, KMT was corrupted and scandals after scandals were reported. In 1985 election, Non-Party candidates once again united under the slogan of New Party, New Atmosphere and Self Determination Will Save Taiwan, which directly expressed their decade-long aim of establishing a new political party.



1986 and 1987 saw the watersheds on the decades' struggle in free China. Earlier that year, CCK delivered a speech at KMT Central Committee, implied that martial law will soon be lifted, election on Mainland will be given up while restraints on political parties, elections and Medias could be loosed. In September 28, 1986, when forming new parties still remained illegal, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was established and CCK and his reformist colleagues tolerated DDP, who later become KMT's major rival in the new democracy. Martial law was lifted in July 1987, half year later, CCK died.

### Part III    Toward a True Democracy

Lee Teng-hui succeeded the presidency while continued on CCK's legacy. Lee harnessed the popularity of democratization in the 1990s to strengthen his own position in KMT and marginalize the conservatives. In 1989, county and city executives, provincial assembly seats, and supplementary positions in the Legislative Yuan were all up for election. KMT won the vast majorities but DDP, who still haven't been recognized until 1993, made significant progress. When in 1990 Lee was persuading National Assembly for another term after his inherited presidency was over, he convened a National Affairs Conference and gathered representatives of all political forces to discuss how his administration could realize the democracy promised in the constitution, thus an open dialogue among ruling and opposing political parties started, which is a watershed achievement for a true democracy. In the

same year, Council of Grand Justice ruled the senior 1948 national representatives to step down and abolished president's extra-constitution power under martial law.

The early 1990s saw another wave of breakthroughs toward democracy, including the first election of all-new National Assembly representatives in 1991 and legislators in 1992, reintroduction of direct election of Taipei and Kaohsiung mayor in 1994 and direct election of provincial governor in the same year. In 1996, Taiwan finally experienced the first universal suffrage of president, and Lee Teng-hui won an overwhelming majority over DPP's Peng Ming-min, who returned home after 25 years' exile, thus became the first elected president ever in Chinese community.

During Lee's elected term, he dealt with PRC properly while conveyed the message that Taiwan will only negotiate with Mainland on an equal basis, that is, country-to-country basis, thus finally denied Chiang Kai-shek and CCK's policy of recovering mainland and set the foundation for new cross strait relations until nowadays.

At the turn of century, Taiwan saw another watershed moment when opposition leader Chen Shui-bian won presidential election. In 2000, KMT leadership split with an official president nominee Lien Chan and a charismatic independent runner James Soong, who after failed election formed People First Party (PFP). In that year, Chen only won a tiny margin of 39 percent votes over Soong's 37 percent and Lien's 23

percent. Supreme administrative power transferred peacefully in May 20, 2000, which made Taiwan another step further toward true democracy.

In the years follow, PFP and KMT formed Pan-Blue Camp, controlled Legislative Yuan and blocked most of Chen's initiatives, Chen's high level appointments were also a mix of DPP, KMT members as well as independents. PRC didn't want to see a Taiwan that was progressing toward democracy and most likely, independence. Beijing did nothing constructive to improve cross strait relations during Chen's entire presidency, such as denied direct flight which Chen promised to work on when campaigning for president. Faced with hardliners both from KMT and his own party, Chen proposed referendum plan which could have the potential to mobilize centrist and KMT voters toward DPP's base and ideology. Chen also chose to challenge ROC's basis, the constitution, which was written by KMT back in 1947, for a new constitution which was intended to be ratified by popular referendum in 2006 and put into effect in 2008, though didn't been carried out. Thanks for Chen's "secret guardian angel" George W. Bush, referendum plan itself did passed in KMT controlled Legislative Yuan in 2003. In 2004, Chen won against Blue's Lien-Soong, the two rivals in 2000, over a 0.22 percent margin, amid the Shooting Mystery which had never been solved, when Chen and his vice president Annette Lu were shot bloody a day before voting day, in a Sweep Street campaign in Tainan.

Chen's continued to put constitutional reform in a priority in his second term, together

with institutional reform such as 2005's amendment of National Assembly representative quantity and electoral procedure which worked against DPP in 2008 election. More serious was that start from that year, series of corruption scandals erupted. In 2005, Chen's advisor was investigated, DPP Kaohsiung acting Mayor Chen Chhi-mai and labor minister Chen Chu was forced to resign due to a Kaohsiung subway construction worker demonstration and related corruption. Soon investigation was directed to Chen's family, in the following year, Chen's son-in-law was arrested while the first lady, Wu Shu-chen, was indicted. DPP was divided; Chen was facing pressure and anger within his own party than ever before. Young DPP politicians who organized New Democratic Progressive Movement, which was intended to returning the party to its anticorruption roots, were crashed by Chen. A group of Green Academics, veterans of early DDP pro-democracy movement, circulated a petition calling for Chen's resignation, Shih Ming-teh, the former DPP Chairman and who spent twenty-five years in prison, led a sit-in outside Taipei train station for the same reason. In 2008, KMT's popular Ma Ying-jeou, who was fired by Lee Teng-hui from the position of justice minister for his aggressive anti-corruption measures over a decade ago, won the falling DPP a huge margin at 58 percent votes. Chen Shui-bian handed over power and was blocked only one hour after he left the Office of the President on May 20, 2008, where he occupied for eight years, and ended up in another government building, a Taipei prison.

Both parties are willing to hand out power after losing election, the supreme power transfer in both 2000 and 2008 was a strong indication that free China, after decades of struggle, have achieved freedom and true democracy.

It's hard to say this democracy, with all its flaws, was a mature democracy. But like there's no democracy in any country in this planet that is mature, Taiwanese, a term now refers to all people in Taiwan, unlike decades ago when it only refers to local Taiwan people who were repressed by Chiang Kai-shek's Mainlanders, are enjoying freedom and liberty. There were people who worry at 2008 that Ma Ying-jeou may become a new KMT dictator giving the falling DPP, but he soon faced with challenges from all side of the politics and public, and people treated him like every other president whose authority to govern comes from voters. DPP, a party formed by brave hero and heroine who fight against White Terror in the Non-party movement under the Chiangs, failed both election in 2008 and 2012. But this time, like both Frank Hsieh and Tsai Ing-wen said after being defeated, failure of DPP was no longer the failure of Taiwan democracy, but the normal rotation of ruling parties in a democratic society.

In the speech marking the 100-year anniversary of the establishment of Republic of China on October 10, 2011, President Ma Ying-jeou said "The ideals that Dr. Sun Yat-sen sought in establishing the Republic were not achieved in the mainland during

his lifetime, but they have come to full fruition here in Taiwan.”<sup>3</sup> From White Terror to Non-Party activism, from provincial origin registration to the first Taiwanese president, from the formation of underground DPP to peaceful supreme power rotation, from martial law to full and popular election in each and every realm of political life, Taiwan built the first democracy in a Chinese community.

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<sup>3</sup> Government Information Office, Republic of China (Taiwan):  
<http://www.gio.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=99223&ctNode=2462&mp=807>

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All direct quotations from whatever sources were provided with footnotes.