

The Old KMT's New Taiwan History

LINDA GAIL ARRIGO

Denny Roy's Preface tells us that "while many books on Taiwanese politics are clearly biased either for or against the Kuomintang or Taiwan independence, I am beholden to no particular organization in Taiwan ... My hope is that the people of Taiwan choose their own destiny for themselves...." He further states that, though he was funded by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (蔣經國國際學術交流基金會), the Foundation never attempted to influence him. Other

LINDA GAIL ARRIGO (艾琳達) is currently researching the 1970s Taiwan democratic movement at the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, Nankang, Taipei. She was a participant in the movement and the Formosa Magazine (Meilidao) organization, 1977-79, and then in overseas Taiwanese organizations until she was allowed to return to Taiwan in 1990. She can be reached at <arrigo@seed.net.tw>.

than this Preface, we have no indication of his own experience, or why he chose to write this book.

But this generally competent book is based primarily on secondary sources in English, which itself imparts a bias towards the scholarship of the past, heavily shaped by Taiwan government sources and academic funding (e.g., the writings of Ramon Myers and others). Thus the "economic miracle" appears to be preordained by the application of Sun Yat-sen's (孫逸仙) Three People's Principles (三民主義) in Taiwan, and democracy emerged due to the late largess of President Chiang Ching-kuo; in my view, both these premises are patently false. Roy, like many academic scholars viewing events at a distance and through the lens of official pronouncements, must rely largely on written sources, and writes history as if from a card file collection. Especially for the early history, some of the details seem misplaced in context. Overall, he has been assiduous in cataloging these items and has a grasp of the main outlines of the political developments, especially the recent ones, but has limited insight into the long-term dynamic, interaction, and continuity of the social and political forces.

This is not of course his particular failing, but is largely due to the nature of the available literature, especially the English literature, at this time. It is only in the last five years or so that Taiwan scholars have been able to receive stipends and recognition for study of Taiwan history; before the early 1990s their work was more likely to be suppressed. Although there are numerous memoirs of former political prisoners and now even several volumes of oral history and personal accounts of the *Formosa Magazine* (美麗島雜誌) movement and trials (1978-80) in Chinese,¹ very little of the White Terror period through to the beginnings of real democratic procedure in 1992 has been examined in depth. Only in the last year has the National

¹Meilidao Oral History Project of the New Taiwan Foundation, comp., *Zhencang Meilidao—Taiwan minzhu licheng zhen jilu. Koushu shi* (珍藏美麗島—台灣民主歷程真記錄。口述史, Treasure the Beautiful Island (Meilidao)—The true record of Taiwan's democratic milestones. Oral history), 4 volumes—vol. 1: *Zouxiang Meilidao: Zhanhou fandui yishi de mingya* (走向美麗島：戰後反對意識的萌芽, Walk toward Meilidao: The sprouts of post-war opposition consciousness); vol. 2: *Meiyong dangming de dang: Meilidao zhengtuan de fazhan* (沒有黨名的黨：美麗島政團的發展, A political party without the name: The

Archives Administration (檔案管理局) begun to function and gather official documents from military and courts; the functioning of the intelligence and Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) party agencies is still opaque.

Given that as it may be, Roy has not digested the English materials on widely-known events of the opposition movement that led up to the present Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) presidency; he is unfamiliar with the figures and their roles. Some examples are illustrative. Su Tung-chi (蘇東啟), whose case is now known to be related to the suppression of Lei Chen's (雷震) attempt to form an opposition party, was not executed in 1962 (p. 88); he was sentenced to life but released after fifteen years. Professor Peng Ming-min (彭明敏) was arrested for issuing a call for Taiwan independence in 1964, and escaped—from house arrest under 24-hour surveillance—abroad in 1970 on a forged Japanese passport, giving great encouragement to the movement; Peng was not released and exiled by the government (p. 92). His English biography is *A Taste of Freedom*. Liao Wen-yi (廖文毅), head of the Taiwan Provisional Government (台灣臨時政府) in Japan, was forced into apparent reconciliation with the KMT through threatened execution of his relatives (p. 93). If Chiang Ching-kuo proclaimed a "human rights year" in December 1976 (p. 157), it certainly never came to the attention and assistance of myself and others doing human rights reporting in Taiwan at the time; we were hounded by the security agencies and several of us were deported. Professor Chen Wen-cheng (陳文成) of Carnegie Mellon University was not found dead in his office in July 1981 (p. 163) after interrogation on his Taiwan independence activities in the United States; his body was found apparently thrown off the roof of National Taiwan University's (國立台灣大學) research library, but according to the secret autopsy ordered by his wife, he was dead before that.

development of the Meilidao group); vol. 3: *Baoli yu shige: Gaoxiong shijian yu Meilidao dashun* (暴力與詩歌: 高雄事件與美麗島大審, Violence and poetry: The Kaohsiung incident and the Meilidao trial); and vol. 4: *Lishi de ningjie: 1977-79 Taiwan minzhu yundong yingxiang shi* (歷史的凝結: 1977-79 台灣民主運動影像史, The formation of history: Images of the 1977-79 democratic movement) (Taipei: China Times Cultural Publishing Company, November 1999). ISBN 957-13-3031-0.

These errors are indicative of a general bent in Roy's presentation; more importantly he seems to miss the significance of Taiwan's mass movements against martial law, and he buries the events, as well as the continuity of the groups and the ideological advances involved, in chronologically scattered reports organized by abstract categories. The milestones of the emerging opposition were: the Diaoyutai (釣魚台) movement of 1970/71 that turned a large number of intellectuals supporting Chinese nationalism in the direction of the PRC; the island-wide organization of native Taiwan opposition politicians and dissident intellectuals, a movement that began with the publishing of *Taiwan Political Review* (台灣政治評論) in 1975, was stimulated by the Chungli Incident (中壢事件) of November 1977, and culminated in the *Formosa Magazine* organization and Kao-hsiung Incident (高雄事件, 美麗島事件) trials, 1979/80; the regrouping of the same organization in the founding of the DPP in September 1986 when opposition parties were still illegal under martial law; and the student and professors movement beginning March 1990 that demanded complete removal of the structures of the old regime. Especially in the 1978/79 period, the urgency for a public breakthrough in freedom of speech, no matter the consequences, was founded in U.S. normalization with China; i.e., if Taiwanese did not speak now, they would again be handed over to Chinese tyrants without their own choice or knowledge.

When Roy says, "Most of the public preferred keeping martial law and cared less about seeking independence than about other matters such as crime, pollution, and the cost of living" (p. 162), is he reporting a misconceived poll without attribution, or repeating KMT apologetics, or exhibiting his own perspectives as a political scientist? With only superficial understanding of the concerted and continuing mass mobilization of the opposition, despite persecution that chilled much public expression (indeed Roy does relate a long list of such persecutions, he just does not draw the logical political inferences), it is no wonder that, to Roy, Chiang Ching-kuo's pronouncements appear as the vanguard of democratization for an apathetic population. This treatment substantially misses the historical irony, hypocrisy, and prevarication in the clash of political positions, however, especially one as laden with contradictions as that of "Free China."

It is only late in Roy's account, with his diatribe against President Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), that we can clearly get the sense that he veers towards the New Party (新黨, a.k.a. the old KMT) position of Chinese nationalism, albeit one melded with the current pragmatism of economic success in Taiwan, abandoning the KMT's early anti-communism to welcome economic integration with China. We wonder how he knows that following Lee Teng-hui's 1996 election with 54 percent of the popular vote in defiance of Beijing's missile threats, "Still, most Asians wished Taiwan would stop resisting and accept unification with the PRC under the 'one country, two systems' formula" (p. 202). Similarly, he continually depicts the DPP as backtracking on or even being embarrassed by its own issue of Taiwan independence; yes, the DPP has backtracked in rhetoric as it has advanced in substance, but not to the degree or in the manner depicted by Roy.

Roy assimilates the New Party position, which decries KMT corruption and legalization of presidential power under Lee Teng-hui but, if the occasion arises, speaks with nostalgia of the dictatorships of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and Chiang Ching-kuo that flouted constitutional and legal process. This stance is obvious in Roy's quote that "the single most important reason for Lee's decline in popularity was that many of Taiwan's people came to believe he was more interested in revising the constitution to enlarge his presidential powers than in tackling ... crime and corruption" (p. 204), and "as more Taiwanese joined the KMT, their cooperative and sometimes corrupt relationships with various local constituents became a prominent party characteristic.... Gift-giving and clientelism were aspects of Taiwan culture that predated the Japanese occupation" (pp. 205-6; see also p. 162, top). That is, the Mainlander supporters of the old regime want to portray corruption as being caused by the coming to power of native Taiwanese. This ignores the other possible explanation that such malfeasance derived from the structural operation of the KMT. This operation habitually favored and sinecured the party's minions, originally mostly Mainlanders, but was increasingly compelled to co-opt the local Taiwanese factions with illegitimate patronage, as its ability to rule by fiat and martial law weakened in the late 1980s. True to this portrayal, Roy says twice that Soong Chu-yu (James Soong 宋楚瑜, Mainlander, head of the Govern-

ment Information Office [行政院新聞局局長] during the *Formosa Magazine* crackdown) had a reputation for integrity, and fails to mention either Soong's largess to local factions and contractors during his eight years as provincial governor that left him poised for his presidential bid in 2000, or Soong's five houses in San Francisco.

Once the reader has factored in this bias, however, Roy's Chapters Seven and Eight on developments since the mid-1990s are the best part of the book, and at least these two chapters describe the most relevant issues and events of the period with a sense that the author has been on the scene.

It also warrants mention that his Chapter Five on Taiwan's role in the U.S. Cold War seems comprehensive and rich in concrete detail—such as the ROC's meddling role in Tibetan resistance factions (pp. 125-26). He gives full voice to the old KMT cry that Hurley and Marshall "made" them lose China (p. 107). Slipping into the KMT's paranoid outlook, Roy does not, however, draw the conclusion that Taiwan's present "one China" quandary is the result of the Chiang regime's rationale for domination of native Taiwanese, extended to absurdity by the United States in its own campaign to isolate the PRC long past the CCP's 1949 victory in the Chinese civil war. Taiwan's roles in the World Anti-Communist League as well as in Ronald Reagan's Central American private wars circa 1980 and training death squad personnel and subsidizing El Salvador are also missing. In all this, Roy's is the conventional right-leaning history of the Republic of China, and not fully the history of the people of Taiwan.

I hope the author is not too stung by these criticisms to work on a revision of this book, which certainly shows a great deal of ambition and effort in encompassing such a large sweep of history, up to the present unfolding events. I think that with further immersion in Taiwan society, especially personal contact with the dark side of this history (e.g., interviewing former political prisoners or reading Tehpen Tsai's *Elegy of Sweet Potatoes: Stories of Taiwan's White Terror*, 2002), and as Taiwan historical studies unfold over the next few years, the author can produce an analytic narrative that is much closer to the center of balance.