Chieng's Surprising Success

Only 2½ years ago, the future of Taiwan, last bastion of Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China, seemed gloomy indeed. Within a few months of the mainland's opening outward with Ping Pong diplomacy, tiny Taiwan found itself practically isolated. It was expelled from the U.N. and lost the recognition of 33 of 68 countries, including such important allies as Japan and Australia. But since those dark days, the island of 16 million has not only survived, it has prospered.

Much of the credit for Taiwan's remarkable buoyancy belongs to Generalissimo Chieng's tough and respected son, Chieng Ching-kuo, 63, who became Premier early in 1972; his ailing, octogenarian father retains the titular position of President. Once a Communist revolutionary who lived in Russia for twelve years, the younger Chieng has brought a fresh approach to the patriarchal politics of Taiwan. Responding to criticism that the government had become isolated from the people, he has adopted such egalitarian practices as stumping the island's small cities and farm villages and talking directly to the people. "If I stayed in my office year round, I would not stay as healthy," he told Time's Hong Kong Bureau Chief Roy Rowan in Taipei last week. "Getting around the countryside is my responsibility and my pleasure."

One of his first acts was to crack down on corruption and inefficiency in the Kuomintang's old guard, even clapping his father's former secretary in prison. In an attempt to win support among the often disgruntled natives of Taiwan, who make up 90% of the island's population, he has brought many Taiwanese into positions of responsibility, raising two to major Cabinet posts. He has also permitted a relaxation in the K.M.T.'s ruthless demand of blind obedience. The government these days comes in for lively scolding from youthful and dynamic critics such as Chieng Chun-hung, 34, editor of The Intellectual magazine, and Kang Ning-hsiang, 34, a former gas-station attendant elected to the legislative assembly as an independent. But critics can only go so far: one of the most notable of them, Writer Li Ao, remains in prison (since 1971) for his harassment of the regime.

The island's most outstanding achievement by far under Chieng's leadership has been its remarkable economic growth. Moving away from his father's obsessive stress on military preparedness, Chieng has based Taipei's continued survival on economic strength. Indeed, after Japan, Taiwan is Asia's greatest success story. Foreign trade in 1973 rocketed to $8.3 billion, up from $5.9 billion the year before. In some industrial products, such as television sets and transistor radios, Taiwan has already surpassed Japan as the main foreign supplier of the U.S. One gloomy note in this otherwise bright picture is the prospect of curtailed foreign markets in 1974—a likely result of the energy crisis and a 30% increase in consumer prices between January and February. The price rise was intentionally designed "all at once and once and for all" by Finance Minister Li Kwoh-ting to meet the increasing costs of such imports as soybeans and gasoline.

On the diplomatic front, there has been good news. Veteran diplomat and Old Asia Hand Leonard Unger was named U.S. Ambassador to Taipei, dispelling rumors that the new U.S. trade opened in Taipei later this month would soon substitute for an embassy. Taipei is painfully aware of Peaking's demand that the U.S. drop its recognition of Taiwan as the price for the complete normalization of relations with the P.R.C., but Unger's appointment is regarded, perhaps overoptimistically, as a guarantee of three more years of U.S. recognition.

"Just from the standpoint of your own interest," Chieng told Rowan, "it is more important for the U.S. to continue relations with the Republic of China." Some foreigners in Taipei have speculated that Chieng's comparatively flexible stewardship might eventually produce cultural exchanges between Taiwan and the mainland. But for now Chieng adamantly rejects that idea. "There is absolutely no possibility of any contact with the Communists," he said. "They would use that kind of contact for propaganda purposes only."

Wishful Thinking. Asked about stirrings on the mainland reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution, Chieng said:

"The current turbulence is a result of increased contacts with the outside world and the consequent exposure of the weakness of the regime. The struggle is an attempt to eradicate the aftereffects of such contacts. The Communists are doing everything possible to suppress the people. I am confident the people will rise up and overthrow the Communists."

While that is wishful thinking, Chieng's rhetoric is far more moderate and realistic than the calls for an invasion of the mainland 100 miles away that used to emanate endlessly from Taipei. Yet the dreams of past glories die hard. Chieng insists that his is the legitimate government of all of China. "We maintain that there is only one China," said Chieng flatly. "That is the basic policy of the government of the Republic of China."

Germany

Letting Go

Perhaps because Lent is no longer so austere as it used to be, the European Catholic tradition of carnival time—a brief spasm of bacchanalian indulgence that ends abruptly on Ash Wednesday—has virtually died out in Italy, France and even in Southern Germany. Munich's once-eroticisch Fasching, for instance, has dwindled to a single parade and a few tame costume balls. One area where the annual urge to let it all hang out is as strong as ever is the Rhineland with its century-old tradition of blowing off steam as a
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