

Sino-America International Politics in a Local American Context

Many people know Silicon Valley, but not many people know the city of San Jose, the “Capital of Silicon Valley.” I even did not know the correct spelling of the city until I moved to San Jose seven years ago. To know the politics of San Jose, it took me much longer time, until I established some connections with local social/political communities (such as Peace Center, Labor Party, and Human Agenda). Though not an American citizen, I decided, as a San Jose citizen, to contribute my knowledge to the local community. The first case is a Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) statue inside a San Jose public park.

On February 4, 2004, I attended City of San Jose Parks and Recreation Commission’s monthly meeting at the City Hall. Besides the commissioners, there were a couple of city officials and two public audience (me included). I was given two minutes and I made my suggestion briefly. It was recorded in the Commission’s Synopsis section 5 “Oral Communications: Jing Zhao, from US-Japan-China Comparative Policy Research Institute, requested that the statue of Chinese “Dictator” Chiang Kaishik from the Chinese Cultural Gardens in Overfelt Park be removed.”

In the letter I addressed to Parks and Recreation Commission later, I pointed out: “This is perhaps the only public space in South Bay with the name of "Chinese Culture Garden", but it is too politically controversy. It was built decades ago by a city in Taiwan. It has Confucius statue, Sun Yat-sen memorial and Chiang Kaishik statue, and the Taiwan's mayor's stone script.

There are two concerns regarding them:

As a dictator, Chiang was overthrown by the Chinese people. He is also the root of today's Sino-American troubles over Taiwan. He has no relation with Chinese culture at all.
Sun Yat-sen was a Chinese political leader, but was not a Chinese culture figure.”

I was invited to attend the Commission’s March meeting on March 3 at Shirakawa Community Center. Anticipating that there would be a discussion, I sent notice to two local Chinese university alumni emailing lists, asking interested/concerned people to participate. Upon arrival, however, I noticed three unknown Chinese seniors sitting in the front of the public audience space. They were from the Chinese Cultural Garden organization (<http://www.chineseculturalgarden.org/>).

The meeting agenda section 8.4 is “discussion on removal of status of Chinese dictator Chiang Kaishik from Chinese Cultural Park in Overfelt Gardens”. Julie Mark, Deputy Director of Parks, recreation and Neighborhood Service, provided a memorandum, with the following “information” and “analysis”: “The underlying theme of all the Chinese artifacts is the teaching and philosophies of the ancient scholars.” “Chiang Kai Shek was the first elected president of...the national Government of Taiwan...He advocated for education, economic prosperity, the well being of the people, and the development of a strong democracy.” “Chiang Kai Shek’s philosophy centers on the livelihood is for the development of mankind and the purpose of life should foster the potentials of the human race.”

This is not a big deal for the Commission, but it still prepared enough material and allocated 20 minutes for this matter. I knew it is impossible to change commissioners on this issue at this time, so instead of presenting modern Chinese history’s basic facts with two minutes, this is an

experience for me watch how the city official, the Chiang's royalist (who is a third-generation Chinese-American) and the commissioners express themselves about China and Sino-American relations. In the end, the Commission politely thanked my suggestion to San Jose and decided to keep the statue untouched. I am certain someday later this matter will be raised by others, and my case will be rediscovered and revised.

Jing Zhao, CPRI, San Jose
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