

## Why Taiwan Cannot Afford to Waste Another Four Years on Ma

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.  
Tuesday, 27 December 2011 08:37

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As Taiwan's January 14 presidential election approaches, one idea is becoming more and more clear; Taiwan cannot afford to waste another four years with Ma Ying-jeou as president. Despite measured hopes and claims, predictions on Taiwan's GDP for the coming year continue to fall; they have now dipped into the 3 per cent bracket. This indicates that the so-called up-coming Golden Decade that Ma proposes as his campaign slogan has already died in the same way that his 6-3-3 promise never got off the blocks. James Soong's description of Ma as a Persian Cat (something pretty to look at but inept at catching mice or doing anything) is being seen more and more as on the mark. Ma has too long lived on King Pu-sung's hype and surface imagery while he foregoes substance and results; he remains in effect the inveterate poseur par excellence.

In Ma's eight years as Mayor of Taipei, Ma posed and took plenty of photos and Taipei saw some cosmetic changes but nothing substantive. Traffic flow did not improve; housing prices spiraled and the city barely kept its budget only because Ma welched on the city's national health care premiums and passed them on to the national government. In the presidency, Ma began with great promise; he had veto-resistant control over 76 per cent of the Legislative Yuan, even a mediocre president could have done wonders with such an advantage. But what has Taiwan to show? Never has so little been done by one with so many advantages. Typhoon Morakot revealed there was no plan. Posing could not stop it. And now, the wealth gap widens; housing prices are more prohibitive and graduating university students earn less than their counterparts four years ago. Some try to counter saying that there are more flights to China, but that program was initiated under the past Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) president. What about the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA)? It was rammed through with no Legislative examination and still did not salvage Ma's 6-3-3 promise. Thus far ECFA has only benefited a few rich; substantive progress is not there; few, very few protective trade agreements have been signed and little of those are advantageous to Taiwan.

What are the chances for the future? The 2012 Legislative Yuan (LY) will be a totally different mix of the various parties; Ma's KMT will not dominate. If Ma was ineffective in the green wood, imagine how ineffective he will be in the dry. Taiwan and the LY will need real leadership, Taiwan-centric leadership. Taiwan cannot afford to waste another four years under a China-reliant Ma.

One of the reasons that compounds this failure is that Ma insists on living in the past, in another world, trying to preserve the still-born, half successful, unfulfilled 1911 Republic of China (ROC) revolution. It is a world that never got off the blocks in China and never will, but Ma persists on clinging to that illusion. On the run, Chiang Kai-shek had dragged that ROC illusion to Taiwan and justified the White Terror and his one-party state subjugation of the

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Taiwanese by it. Chiang insisted on perpetuating the unrealistic myth that under him, the ROC could return, retake and rescue China. Ma has followed suit in that dream. Rather than face the reality of a brave new democratic world and all of its numerous developments, Ma perpetuates the myth of a return of that same ROC, believing that he, with it, could one day rule China. Taiwanese do not want that. True, they are willing to trade with China as any other nation is, but they have no desire for union with China and all of its problems. Despite this, some few in the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) also cling to Ma's illusion. To do otherwise for them would be to admit that the Taiwanese ("taibazi" in their ROC eyes) are capable of ruling themselves outside that myth.

The United Nations (UN) had rejected that world of the ROC in 1971; and Taiwan will never gain admission to the UN as the ROC. Ma does seem to recognize the futility of that and he no longer applies for membership as ROC, but he is still too afraid to apply for UN membership as Taiwan. The United States (US) rejected the same concept of the ROC in 1979; it tolerates Ma's clinging to his myth because as a good little boy, Ma will not rock their boat. As regards Taiwan (not the ROC), the US's official position is "undecided and undetermined;" that clashes with Ma's myth and he pretends the US still believes in the ROC. The People's Republic of China (PRC) tolerates Ma also because he, with his ROC myth, will not violate the PRC's belief in "one China." The PRC knows the Persian Cat is ineffective, so it only waits till the Taiwan apple falls into its hands. The illusion of "peace in the Taiwan Strait" exists because the US and the PRC for separate reasons tolerate "good boy Ma" who though ineffective, at least will not rock their boats.

Hoping that people would forget his ineffective campaign promises and in an effort to perpetuate the ROC myth, Ma's government blew this year's national art support budget (US\$7.1 million) on the two-night musical performance of Dreamers. However, people have not forgotten Ma's many unfulfilled promises. In 2005 as Chairman of the KMT Ma promised to divest the KMT of its ill-gotten gains. That remains unfulfilled. The profit from the few things sold was simply put in the KMT war chest and it remains one of the richest parties in the world. Ma also promised (2005) to protect Taiwan with increased arms procurement, only to block such until he could get credit when his party returned to power. Finally in 2011, Taiwan got simple "upgrades" on old equipment. As the list of unfulfilled promises continues to grow, Taiwan must realize it cannot afford to waste four more years on Ma.

Is there any hope for new strategic economic revival? That was further abandoned when Ma dropped the seemingly savvy Vincent Siew as VP candidate and replaced him with the lackluster but loyal foot soldier Wu Den-yih. With little accomplishments to show for the past four years, Ma's final strategy appears to give up on the development and presentation of new policies. Instead he will circle the wagons and rely on fabricated "smear" tactics to vilify his opposition. In such a campaign loyal soldiers unashamed to promote and support such stories

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with a straight face are the best and only help.

Lee Teng-hui said it well enough some time ago, "Dump Ma to save Taiwan." Finally more and more Taiwanese are beginning to realize the full meaning of what he said. Time is running out. If Taiwan is to move forward, it cannot afford to waste another four years under Ma Ying-jeou.

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