

Taiwan needs a 'third force' party

Written by Chen Yi-chi 陳宜琪

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When China makes policy statements intended to influence Taiwanese who favor unification, the wording generally revolves around the Chinese nationalistic idea that “the two sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one family.” When Taiwanese reject this notion, they are expressing a national identity that encompasses lifestyle, language, culture and political values.

Among national identity movements that have taken place in recent years, during which China has been putting Taiwan under increasing pressure, the one with the greatest and deepest influence is the Sunflower movement of 2014.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Taipei City Councilor Liang Wen-chieh (梁文杰), a well-known political pundit, has described the Sunflower movement as a “party” — not a political party, but the fun-and-games type — while some New Power Party (NPP) candidates for the Nov. 24 nine-in-one elections have interpreted the movement as about procedural justice.

However, it was neither of these. It was an anti-annexationist movement centered around the idea: “I am Taiwanese and I refuse to be Chinese.”

In March 2014, the Sunflower movement was hijacked by its power center that was stationed inside the occupied chamber of the Legislative Yuan. This core group focused on the question of procedural justice, disconnected from the national identity question of unification versus independence, so that the original opposition to the cross-strait trade in services agreement devolved into opposition to the closed-door way in which the agreement was handled.

However, the differences within the movement as to whether it should oppose China's pro-unification strategies or only oppose the closed-door procedure have never disappeared. These differences are reflected in the characteristics of the various “third force” parties and constitute the main difference between Taiwan Radical Wings and the NPP.

In addition to being certified by pro-unification media as the “highest common factor between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait,” Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) has also received exceptionally generous coverage from Beijing's China Central Television, which is supposed to

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boost his re-election prospects.

This Ko-style China-friendly tendency based on the “one family” notion leaves little room for alternative interpretations. It is ridiculous for a politician who rose to prominence on the back of the Sunflower movement to speak in defense of Ko’s standpoint, based on electoral calculations.

On Aug. 16, just after returning from the US, where he raised funds from Taiwanese independence supporters, NPP Legislator Freddy Lim (林錫山) posted a commentary on Facebook in which he expressed sympathy with Ko.

Lim said that Ko is neither pro-unification nor “red” (pro-China and pro-communist).

He also said that there was no need to doubt Ko’s Taiwan-centric standpoint and called for moving on to a new stage in the debate by talking about city governance.

For the sake of political sincerity, Lim needs to explain how anyone could reasonably argue that someone can support Taiwanese independence and at the same time say that “the two sides of the Taiwan Strait are one family.”

The Sunflower movement was not just a small group of people holding microphones in the legislative chamber — it was made up of everyone who took part, including those who donated money and material aid, slept on the streets, were sprayed with hoses or beaten by riot police, and those who were cut off by the leading group inside the legislative chamber.

It was a social movement mainly supported by people who oppose China’s “united front” strategy. For someone to dismiss it as a “party” is contemptible, but to avoid mentioning the China factor and define it as just opposing closed-door procedures is also wrong.

Former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) often talked about “governing according to the law.” His

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slogan is echoed by Ko’s motto: “We will do whatever we should.”

When politicians focus purely on procedure, it is often a distraction that they use to avoid clearly stating their standpoints.

If political parties or politicians do not sincerely state their values, it generally means that they only follow “market trends” and bend whichever way the wind blows, or even that they are opportunistic “reapers” for whom values are no more than a means to an end.

In the Sunflower movement, a bunch of people who thought there was no market for Taiwanese independence disregarded what many people wanted and misrepresented the movement as only being about procedural justice.

Now the same people are defending Ko for the short-term goal of getting more votes. They are against stating their position on unification or independence as an issue for people to consider when voting, and they stand shoulder to shoulder with the more-or-less China-friendly People First Party and New Party in supporting the same candidate — Ko — for Taipei mayor.

Comparing what is going on now with what happened four years ago makes this easy to understand.

Among Taiwan-centric parties, Taiwan needs a “third force” that sticks to its principles more than the DPP does, calmly seeks to persuade the public and eventually accepts whatever judgement it receives in the court of public opinion.

Maybe Taiwan Radical Wings is not as “pragmatic” as the NPP when confronted with the electoral market, but when it comes to interpreting and continuing the aims and desires that were brought together by the Sunflower movement, it has always been more conscientious than the NPP.

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