

Taiwan leaders blind to PRC pact politics

Written by Taiwan News Editorial
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Premier Wu Den-yih of the rightist Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) administration cast doubt on his qualifications to govern Taiwan last week when he publically acknowledged his blindness to blindness on the political risks of a proposed "cross-strait economic cooperation agreement" with the authoritarian People's Republic of China.

Wu, who was appointed last September by President and KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou, promised to resign during questioning in the Legislative Yuan March 4 if the term "unification" appeared in the proposed agreement, which Ma wants signed by mid-year.

Premier Wu could save Taiwan citizens the anxiety of suspense and begin his job search now since he (along with Ma and other KMT government officials) seem to be blind to the overarching framework built by Beijing around the cross-strait ECFA composed of its "one China principle" and "peaceful unification."

Since beginning to promote ECFA early last year, Ma has incessantly led his economic and China policy ministers in chanting the mantra that the ECFA "only concerns economic issues" and "will not impinge on unification or independence or other political issues."

Accordingly, on March 7, MAC Vice Chairman Kao Chang declared that the pact "will not involve unification or independence or political issues" and insisted that phrases such as "one country, two systems" and "the on China principle" will not appear "in the body of the agreement."

If so, the "cross-strait ECFA" would differ from the "Mainland - Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement" signed on June 29, 2003, which did explicitly state the CEPA shall "abide by the 'one country, two systems' principle."

But the CEPA's preamble also clearly defines the two parties as "the mainland" (or "inside territory" (境 內), defined by a footnote as referring to "the entire People's Republic of China," and the "Hong Kong Special Administrative Region," which is the former British colony's formal name in PRC domestic and international law.

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It is also critical to note that the "Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Co-Operation Between ASEAN and the People's Republic of China" signed on November 4, 2002 used the formal constitutional and World Trade Organization titles of both the PRC and ASEAN.

Besides the unknown question of how Taiwan will be referred in the final draft, it is by no means the case that the lack of a direct reference to "one country, two systems" would guarantee that what Ma calls the "Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement" will not "impinge" on Taiwan's status or "unification."

On the contrary, the parallel use of informal terms such as "Mainland" and "Hong Kong" and "Cross-Strait" hints that both pacts are situated under a substantively different "framework" than the ECFA signed between the PRC and ASEAN which strictly adheres to international protocol.

Indeed, Wu's own comments responded to a statement by a senior PRC official which seemed designed to rub the noses of the Taiwan people in the reality that the PRC's "framework" for Taiwan's status under ECFA would be precisely the same "one country, two systems" cage used for Hong Kong and Macau.

Beijing's visible cage

During a news conference March 4, PRC National People's Congress Spokesperson and former foreign minister Lee Zhaoxing related that both sides had agreed to make the "Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement" the focus for the fifth meeting between Taipei's Strait Exchange Foundation Chairman Chiang Ping-kun and Beijing's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait Chairman Chen Yunlin.

The NPC spokesman also pointedly stressed that "the mainland side has always used the 'one China principle' in handling all questions related to Taiwan."

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On the following day, PRC Premier Wen Jiabao cited signing of the cross-strait ECFA as one of his government's top objectives for 2010 in his administrative report to the NPC and directly tied to the pact to the task of "upholding the great program of development of cross-strait relations and promoting peaceful unification of the motherland."

It should be obvious that if senior PRC leaders publically insist that the "Cross-Strait ECFA" will be signed "under the framework of the 'one China principle" and is part of "promoting peaceful unification," then Taiwan's status as a state distinct from the PRC is absolutely a "political issue."

Of course, the PRC stance would not "impinge" on Taiwan's "unification or independence" if the Ma government accepts Beijing's "one China" framework.

This possibility is implied by Ma's agreement to negotiate the pact under the informal SEF-ARATS channel and to define the pact as a "Cross-Strait ECFA" and thereby set aside both Taiwan's official state title of the "Republic of China" and our internationally guaranteed status in the multilateral WTO system as the "Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu."

Hence, even if the term "unification" or the phrase "one country, two systems" does not appear in the body of the pact, the KMT government's refusal to uphold Taiwan's status as a state or even a "customs entity" under the WTO into an eminently "political" issue for Taiwan's 23 million citizens.

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