

Ma puts Chinese students first

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Sometimes one has to wonder whether President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), despite having been elected by Taiwanese, cares more about people from the other side of the Strait.

That was the sentiment of recent college graduates and many other young adults upon learning of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government's latest policy proposals tailored to Chinese students.

On Monday, while addressing the opening of the 2013 National Conference of University and College Presidents, Ma said his administration was planning to expand the number of Chinese universities accredited in Taiwan from 41 to 112, adding that the government was also considering allowing Chinese students to enroll in Taiwan's two-year colleges as early as August.

Minister of Education Chiang Wei-ling (蔣偉寧) said the government would also review the "three limits, six noes" (三限六不) policy on Chinese students that currently bans them from receiving scholarships, taking off-campus work and taking tests for Republic of China professional certificates.

Regardless of whether the regulations on Chinese students and Chinese diplomas should be relaxed, this showed Ma's downright lack of concern for the nation's youth.

Imagine how disheartening it was for young people to see the president, only one day after at least 100,000 people took to the streets to vent their anger with his government, choosing to prioritize addressing the concerns of Chinese students in his next public appearance.

It was not enough for Ma to remain unresponsive to the protesters' appeals for a Cabinet reshuffle to resuscitate the country's economy, reform of the pension system and the government's rejection of a consortium's bid to buy out the Next Media Group's Taiwanese interests; instead he chose to ignore the plight of the nation's young people entirely in favor of addressing the needs of Chinese students.

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In case Ma has not realized, tens of thousands of the protesters who braved the chilly weather on Sunday for the protest in Taipei were young adults. Many, as a result of the Ma administration's poor governance and misguided policies, are burdened with student loans, are faced with high unemployment and are confronted with starting salaries as low as NT\$22,000, a figure lower than the levels of 14 years ago.

Rubbing salt into their wounds is the Ministry of Education's plan that, as early as this year, tuition fees for freshmen students at public universities may be raised by up to 10 percent, while tuition for sophomore, junior and senior students at public universities — as well as for all private university students — may be increased by 5 percent.

What would have served as a better platform for the president to expound on his government's plans to solve the gloomy situation facing the nation's young people than the national collegiate forum on Monday? But no. Instead, the president went on and on touting his government's plans to expand its policies on Chinese students, which, if anything, only adds to the younger generation's anxieties, as they fear allowing more Chinese students into Taiwanese colleges may affect their educational and job opportunities.

Ma may deny that he attaches greater importance to Chinese students than to young Taiwanese, but his actions spoke loud and clear on Monday.

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