

Freedom to choose national identity

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.
Saturday, 06 April 2013 08:07

Performance issues cannot avoid matters of the economy, yet Lee avoided direct reference to Taiwan's lagging economy — a failed promised arena of Ma with his opening to China.

Although Ma's performance ratings have consistently been at an all-time low since his re-election, and his "6-3-3" economic campaign pledge is its own specter lingering in the wings, Lee still avoided mentioning it.

Lee's focus remained on democracy; and in this he also purposely avoided speaking of political parties, even the small Taiwan Solidarity Union, of which he is seen as the spiritual leader.

Instead, he called for less party wrangling with a renewed focus on Taiwan.

Lee's talk provided no quick answers, but he set the sine qua non framework for the future.

He could be said to have given Ma a veiled, or not too veiled, warning to change his ways; he could also be seen as saying: "You have three years remaining, the choice is yours."

However, despite Lee's simple focus on democracy, he could not cover everything. For even in a fully democratic Taiwan one point still remains to be decided on in the future. How to tell the story of the past?

Even if Taiwanese see themselves as Taiwanese and agree on their identity, there is still one unresolved point: They still have not reached an agreement on how to tell the collective history of their national identity. They still need new writers and new thought to bring together, and express the collective memory of this nation. On this point Lee had no suggestions.

Then there is also the matter that identity is not static; it is a matter in process.

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The development and changes in Taiwan's identity over the past century bear this out. However, even here, Lee may find his bases covered. For if Taiwan can maintain its democracy, whatever identity it has or develops in the future will be an identity that it freely chooses. It will not be an identity imposed by outsiders. Rather it will be Taiwanese who determine it.

I am sure Lee would have no objection to that.

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2013/04/06](#)