

Despite the reservations and concerns of opposition parties and representatives of service industries in Taiwan, the Straits Exchange Foundation and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits signed a cross-strait service trade agreement in Shanghai last week. This was a prime example of the “close party-to-party negotiations” model used by the two “Chinese” parties — the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) — that is currently monopolizing cross-strait relations.

The warnings given by President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) national security adviser Rex How (何瑞雄) before the pact was signed — that domestic publishers were in danger of being eradicated or bought up by Chinese firms, and that the choice, freedom and diversity that the sector enjoys would disappear — have become a reality.

By opening service industries to Chinese influence, the Ma administration has left the door wide open for a cultural invasion, which is perhaps the most pernicious influence from abroad Taiwan has faced since the advent of China's economic might.

Ideally, cross-strait economic dealings should be fair and mutually beneficial, but there has been no assessment on the impact the service pact will have on Taiwanese industries. The government has also failed to offer to subsidize any of the sectors that are to be affected before it signed the agreement, leaving them to face the music on their own.

Now that Taiwan is to give access to 64 of its service industries to China, opening the door for Beijing to flood these sectors, Taiwanese professionals are destined to become workers in an economic Chinese colony, stripped of their economic, political and cultural autonomy. For this reason, the agreement needs to be sent to the legislature for a clause-by-clause review so the public can find out exactly what implementing the pact will entail.

Over the past few weeks, the Ma administration has put eradicating drunk driving at the top of its agenda, with new legislation to fight this behavior being reported in the media almost daily. However, this was but a smokescreen to shield the CCP and the KMT as they negotiated the service trade pact and the establishment of cross-strait representative offices.

Ma's pacts pave way to 'one China'

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Dealing with the problem of drunk driving is of course important, but the effects of the service trade pact and the representative offices will be felt far more keenly than the effects of stopping drunk drivers. If Ma's administration succeeds in its gambit of using drunk driving as a distraction to cover up its close negotiations with the CCP, all it will take for the two parties to sign an agreement conducive to unification is for the government to come up with another big news story with which to keep the public busy. By the time the public becomes aware of this sleight of hand, it will be too late.

What have Taiwanese done to deserve a government that seems to pull out all the stops to deceive them? Did it not do the same thing when it signed the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) in 2010? At the time of the ECFA's signing, only the CCP and the KMT were privy to the details of the negotiation, while the public and the legislature were kept in the dark.

From the beginning of his tenure in power, Ma — who is both president of the country and chairman of the KMT — has been engaged in a battle of wills with the public to force his agenda onto the nation. Furthermore, he seems to have acquired a taste for this and is up to his old tricks again with the services pact and the establishment of the representative offices on either side of the Taiwan Strait.

With the service pact, Ma has powered the ball into the bleachers. Are the opposition parties and the public going to let him score a home run?

To continue with the baseball metaphor: With the establishment of the representative offices, Ma is trying to steal second base.

The president recently said that the purpose of establishing the offices was to lay down foundations and that it was a neutral policy, in a bid to silence critics of the plan who have voiced their concerns. This was a ridiculous thing to say — how can representative offices that do not have the status of embassies be neutral?

Ma has said that “establishing the representative offices may on the outset seem to be an administrative measure, but in fact it has significant political ramifications.”

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Again, how could this possibly be construed as neutral?

As if this were not enough to show how “neutral” Ma’s plan is, he also said: “Cross-strait relations are not state-to-state relations and we are not going to regard our representative offices in China, or China’s representative offices in Taiwan, as embassies or consular offices. We cannot view the other side of the Taiwan Strait as a [separate] country.”

Since he first took office, Ma has been “laying the foundations” for what Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) recently formalized as the “one China” framework with each of the following “neutral” policies: the so-called “1992 consensus,” “one China with each side having its own interpretation,” “one country, two areas,” “cross-strait relations are not state-to-state relations,” the ECFA, the service trade pact and the establishment of the representative offices.

According to this way of thinking, one could also say that the Philippine government’s handling of the recent fishing dispute with Taiwan according to its “one China” policy was completely neutral.

Clearly, when Ma talks of neutrality, what he means is “what China wants.”

How can Ma accept the “one China” framework and the idea that “cross-strait relations are not state-to-state relations” at the same time? He also seems to think there is nothing wrong with the predicament the nation is in, even though the ECFA and the services pact will only see manufacturing increasingly moving overseas and Chinese investment continue to flood into Taiwan.

Can the public feel safe while all of this is going on?

Translated by Paul Cooper

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