

Ma denies he is a head of state in key speech

Written by Bill Chang 何昌

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On Double Ten National Day, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) said that cross-strait relations are not “international relations.”

The majority of Taiwanese probably do not accept this and neither does such a view conform with reality.

In June 2008, when Ma’s first month in office had just ended, the Chinese-language magazine Global Views Monthly (全球觀點) conducted an opinion poll in which 73.7 percent of respondents agreed that “Taiwan and China are two countries that have developed independently.”

Earlier this month, a Taiwan Mood Barometer survey (台灣心情溫度計) asked the same question, to which 69.7 percent of respondents agreed, while only 12 percent believed Taiwan and China were the same country.

Of the last group, 9.6 percent of respondents equated “one China” with the Republic of China (ROC), while 2.4 percent equated it with the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

Evidently, there has been a consistent majority consensus in Taiwan on this issue, with negligible disagreement as to which party is in charge.

The president believes that the ROC is a country, but contends that the PRC is a country, too.

No matter what the law says, it is difficult to deny the fact that the PRC is a country. It is therefore obvious that relations between the two countries called the ROC and the PRC have to be “country to country,” that is, international relations.

Legally, none of Taiwan’s policies need to be directed by Beijing. No country signing an agreement with China needs to announce it to Taiwan, nor are any agreements signed with

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China applicable in Taiwan. Furthermore, none of Taiwan's laws are applicable in China. It has been this way since 1949.

None of this has been the result of bilateral negotiations or agreement or approval by either side. Therefore, the relations between Taiwan and China are indeed international in nature.

Regardless of what happens in the future, this is how things stand at the moment.

For Ma to say that cross-strait relations are not "international relations" strongly suggests that he is laying the groundwork for a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平).

China naturally does not want a meeting between Ma and Xi to be interpreted as a meeting between two heads of state. Xi is the head of state in China and if he were to appear at an APEC summit and meet Ma, he would necessarily do so in this capacity because APEC is not a forum for meetings with "leaders of ruling parties from various countries."

If the relationship between Taiwan and China is not international, what would be the nature of a meeting between Ma and Xi?

Without clarification, the repercussions for Taiwan could be serious. Surely Ma would not attend such a meeting in the capacity of a "special guest of honor," or some such title?

Unless Ma believes the term "president" does not mean a head of state and does not refer to someone who represents a particular country, he should not be making comments about there being no "international relations" between Taiwan and China.

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