

Ma shows alienation in US paper interview

Written by James Wang 王健

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People have thrown so many shoes at President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) lately that by now he must be at risk of developing scabies and losing all his hair from all that old, stinky footwear. Despite this, he seemed completely at ease in a recent interview with the Washington Post. Although Ma perhaps thinks that his performance in interviews with foreign media can be used for domestic consumption, it seems clear that what he is trying to do is declare his position to the US and China by hiding behind the Taiwanese public.

However, if he really intends his activities in a foreign context to be used for domestic consumption, then the Post interview was a complete failure. Ma's answers were misleading and evasive, and made it clear how disconnected he is from the Taiwanese public. Among the photographs that accompanied the interview in the print edition, a picture of an anti-Ma demonstration was made four times larger than another photo depicting him raising his fist.

For Ma, the most urgent task is to declare his position to the outside world. His statements keep changing and the surprising remarks he made in his Double Ten National Day address on Oct. 10 that "cross-strait relations are not a matter of international relations" made US academics with an interest in Taiwan suspect that he is preparing to walk that last mile toward surrender.

It was only because he wanted to dispel US suspicions that he suddenly remembered that the public are the masters in a democratic nation and therefore mentioned the idea of holding a referendum on political talks with China, saying that: "We thought it would be best to first put it to a referendum to confirm that we had strong public support."

However, if this is true, then why does the president consistently ignore public opinion, while arbitrarily accepting the "one China" framework and rejecting the view that the nature of cross-strait relations are international or state-to-state?

In the interview, Ma also gave a response to Chinese President Xi Jinping's (習近平) call for Taipei to engage Beijing in talks about "political issues." Ma divided "political issues" into two categories: procedural talks of a political nature and political talks that deal with terminating the Republic of China and Taiwanese sovereignty.

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He also hid behind the public, saying that cross-strait political talks would require a national referendum to be held first because that would make it “easier to move on with discussions.”

However, he also signaled to Beijing that: “we will not, either domestically or abroad, promote ‘two Chinas,’ ‘one China, one Taiwan,’ or ‘Taiwan independence.’”

Given that Ma is promoting the idea of holding a referendum, why does he then in effect force his views upon public opinion by arbitrarily ruling out Taiwanese citizens’ freedom to choose?

The conditions for establishing diplomatic relations between China and the US included accepting the “one China” principle, Washington’s recognition of the People’s Republic of China as the only legal government of China and demands that the US not promote the principles of “two Chinas,” “one China, one Taiwan,” or Taiwanese independence.

However, in yielding to China, Ma is ignoring that Taiwan is democratized, as well as what is acceptable to the Taiwanese public.

Anyone who ignores public opinion, but is quick to hide behind the people, will have to live with being the object of ridicule. Protecting Taiwan’s sovereignty means standing on the side of the Taiwanese public.

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Translated by Perry Svensson

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