

President Ma is not the only problem

Written by Michael Danielsen
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Taiwan's democratic development and its self-determination are challenged not only by President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), but also by the policies of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). Unfortunately, there seems to be a strong focus on Ma's low popularity and his competence as a president, rather than on the KMT as a party.

The KMT deserves more attention. Just because the KMT has been on the wrong side of democracy in the past and has enforced a Chinese mentality on the Taiwanese while dreaming of unification, it does not mean that the party is now handling these issues better. Indeed, it now seems to be finding new ways to achieve old agendas.

A reality check is advisable in this respect. Despite the fact that the KMT has a vast parliamentary majority, Taiwan's democratic development has been held back over the past five years. Taiwan's press freedom has deteriorated, as documented by the US-based Freedom House, and questionable legal cases have been filed against former government officials. Moreover, Ma's involvement in attempts to unseat Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) constitutes a fundamental breach of the basic principles of the separation of power and checks and balances in a democracy.

The country even went as far as unjustly refusing entry to a German citizen in March — a decision which appears to have been politically motivated. His ban has been lifted. Given the background of this case and the fact that more Europeans are being banned from Taiwan, it is worrying that the KMT is reluctant to implement the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that Ma has signed and which protects foreigners' political activities in Taiwan.

Moreover, during the past five years, the KMT parliamentary majority has led to a lowering of Taiwan's international status. This has threatened Taiwan's self-determination.

The Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement agreement has still not been submitted to the WTO and the nation's symbolic participation in the WHO is dependent on China's annual approval. Both of these factors have lowered Taiwan's international status.

Additionally, the KMT has not reacted when Ma has said that China is not a foreign country and

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that cross-strait relations are not international relations. Chinese culture is undeniable a part of Taiwan, but the KMT government overemphasizes it. By doing this, Europe's Taipei Representative Offices miss the opportunity to brand Taiwan's culture as unique and to portray Taiwan as a modern society.

This is not only hurting Taiwan's self-determination by diminishing Taiwan uniqueness; it may also harm Taiwanese industries.

Also, in Taiwan Chinese culture is increasingly promoted in the educational system, which may serve the old goal of unification.

The most dangerous people for the KMT are those who point out how the party's policies damage Taiwan's democratic development and challenge its myth of unification. These people are directly undermining the party's belief in what the right path for the nation is. It is encouraging to observe that the number of Taiwanese concerned about the nation's current development is growing.

It continues to be a mystery why unification and Chinese national identity are so highly valued among KMT politicians, when it should be obvious that related policies hurt Taiwan's future and international status — and go against the general public trend which sees the population increasingly disassociating themselves from China.

Why is the KMT walking along these similar avenues, and where is the KMT taking Taiwan? Ma is obviously not the only problem.

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