

People voting in an online poll picked the Chinese character jia (假), meaning bogus or fake, as word of the year for last year. Citizen's Congress Watch (公民監督國會聯盟) picked the same word to typify the events of last year. Over the New Year period, many people have been talking about what the poll result means for the nation.

Over the past year, there have been instances of fakery in many arenas: food safety, environmental pollution, land acquisition, the running of the armed forces, the judicial system, crises of constitutional government and even collaborative projects between business and academia.

These issues are examples of a phenomenon that has been around for a long time — so long that most people have become inured to it. These issues and events also expose a crisis of governance that Taiwan, with its undeserved reputation as a free country, cannot evade.

For more than 20 years now, the nation has been following a trend of liberalization, which is in keeping with the worldwide shift toward globalization. Liberalization has involved rooting out the old system of party-state capitalism, so it is easy to understand why this trend has been so powerful in this country with its history of authoritarian rule. As a result, market competition and economic growth have been given pride of place. Liberalization has been seen as a panacea that can free people from hardship and the word has become a magic spell that is used and abused without limit.

Successive governments have been leading the liberalization process — but what kind of liberalization is it? How many legal regulations and systems of safeguards that should have been put in place have been omitted, intentionally or otherwise? Market disorders keep happening and keep getting worse, with numerous economic and social consequences. Has the government ever seriously examined and corrected any of them? Most people will probably agree that the answer to these questions is no.

To make matters worse, when the government does come up with regulations in response to market disorders, they have no real corrective effect. This kind of governmental disorder has become all too familiar.

Take guard against fake liberalization

Written by Liu Ching-yi 劉景熹

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For more than a decade, governments and opposition parties have been to blame for putting the nation in such a pitiful situation, yet they are unwilling to sincerely tackle the disastrous fake liberalization that their policies have brought about. All they are interested in is keeping their hardcore supporters brainwashed. Considering that successive governments and opposition parties have caused this crisis of governance, why should the public, and young people in particular, be left to pick up the tab?

The cross-strait service trade agreement, which has been stuck in a political deadlock ever since it was signed more than half a year ago, is a typical example. The agreement was signed behind closed doors — the legislature was kept in the dark before and during the negotiations. Even without considering what was actually talked about during the negotiations, and what the agreement that was eventually signed actually says, in any democratic country the secretive nature of the proceedings should have been enough to raise accusations of dictatorship against the executive branch of government.

Over the past few months, various government ministries, and the agencies they hired at great expense to taxpayers, have held a number of public hearings on the agreement in the legislature. However, the ministries and agencies have dodged awkward questions by announcing that they would not provide relevant data, could not find it or even that they were not willing to carry out impact assessments. Quite absurdly, they swear blind that the government would definitely implement various measures to manage the new environment and safeguard people's interests under the liberalized regime that would result from the agreement's passage.

After considering the Cabinet's incompetence and buck-passing over the food safety, environmental and labor issues of the past year, their assurances are unconvincing.

The content of the agreement is more complex and sensitive than the liberalization the nation has experienced up until now. If the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) is determined to drag people into greater liberalization, does it not have a duty to make a more detailed and thorough assessment than it has? If government officials are unwilling to provide relevant data or carry out an assessment of the agreement's likely impact and influence, then by what right can they tell the public to trust that the government has made all the necessary preparations?

Questions should also be asked of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). When the DPP was in government, it experienced the negotiation process, disruption and unrest associated

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with Taiwan's entry into the WTO, and it spent a great deal of money on matters to do with international trade. So why has it not established practical and persuasive arguments in relation to the agreement and controversies over associated liberalization measures? Why has it not played a convincing role in monitoring the negotiations?

The DPP has not even responded effectively to the Cabinet's intentional and glaring misinterpretation of the Freedom of Government Information Act (自由政府資訊法). It has been even less thorough in exposing the true face of the Cabinet as it exercises executive dictatorship under the guise of liberalization.

For Taiwanese to be truly free, not caged by the notion of “strengthening positive and objective reporting,” which was advocated at the recent cross-strait forum on media prospects in Beijing — really a brainwashing formula — then they should stop picking up the tab for the disastrous errors the government is making in the name of fake liberalization.

This should be the nation's New Year resolution.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

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