

Facing new reality after cross-strait bubble burst

Written by Michael Danielsen
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No matter how significant it might appear in the international media, the meeting between New Taipei City Mayor and KMT Chairman Eric Chu (郝伯村) and Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) in China tomorrow is a meeting of the past.

The cross-strait bubble burst more than a year ago with the Sunflower movement's occupation of the Legislative Yuan's main chamber, and any attempts to go back to the good old days are destined to fail due to a new reality.

In the new reality, Taiwanese want politicians who consider problems in the streets and homes across the nation as their genuine concern and top priority. This new reality is slowly spreading in Europe. However, right up to point when the cross-strait bubble burst, many politicians and journalists in Europe thought that relations between Taiwan and China were better than ever and publicly praised past trade agreements as a prerequisite for peace, prosperity and mutual understanding. However, they were living in a fantasy world.

Previous political debates about cross-strait relations can be compared to overheated financial markets. As Danish philosopher Vincent Henricks highlighted, political positions can get overheated as well. When the cross-strait debate was overheated, its proponents were not willing to listen to other standpoints.

In such an environment, increased inequality, youth unemployment, demolition of housing, the fight for media freedom and the worrisome democratic development in Taiwan were to a large extent neglected and considered as small ripples across the water that would soon fade.

Except for capital punishment, the EU has not criticized Taiwan regarding democratic issues. Despite various critiques of the impact of cross-strait agreements, many European parliamentarians continued to praise the cross-strait development, as did the European media.

Even in June last year, a few weeks after the occupation of the Legislative Yuan's main chamber, European External Action Service praised dynamic cross-strait relations.

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It was clear during the trip of two of the principal leaders of the Sunflower movement, Dennis Wei (鄧偉) and Wu Cheng (吳成), and I to London and Brussels in November last year that the attitude had changed. We experienced a genuine interest in understanding what has happened in Taiwan, in the same way people wanted to understand the reasons behind the burst financial bubble.

However, it was also clear that some would like go back to business as usual, as we have observed in the financial sector.

To avoid the creation of political bubbles, politicians and journalists need to expose themselves to broader spectra of knowledge by, for instance, listening to opposition parties and civil societies in Europe and Taiwan. Knowledge is important, but it can mislead if a nuanced view is not taken.

It would be convenient to create a new cross-strait bubble based on selected information and try to neglect the new reality.

Fortunately, this is not possible because Taiwan has changed, and the political scene and debates are more vibrant than ever. In the new reality, Taiwan will continue to be peaceful and constructive in the way it engages with China and the rest of the international community. It will focus on making Taiwan an even better place.

The cross-strait bubble failed to create sustainable development between Taiwan and China. Sustainable development is only possible when policies protect the interest of Taiwanese. Consequently, the next bubble to burst is the “one China” policy.

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