

Ma's deadly fantasy of acceptance by Beijing

Written by Mark Kao 柯 柯
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On May 11, the Wall Street Journal published an extensive interview with President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), in which Ma defended the rapprochement he has forged with China, saying that the closer ties have boosted Taiwan's economy and security, and should not be tampered with by his successor.

The problem with Ma's account is that his policies have severely undermined Taiwan's sovereignty, democracy, security and international space. Like the fictional Peter Pan in J.M. Barrie's tale, Ma is putting a glossy glow over events and development, while his policies have pushed Taiwan into the unwelcome economic embrace of a repressive China.

In the very beginning of the interview, Ma contends that "[The Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT)] election defeat last year [in the Nov. 29 municipal elections] was not related to our mainland policy."

Ma must not have read the major international publications at the time: The Wall Street Journal concluded: "Taiwanese Electoral Rebuke, A landslide verdict against growing dependence on China," while CNN headlined: "Taiwan's 'black Saturday' election: A rebuke to China."

The problem with Ma's policies toward China is that they have been conducted under a "one China" premise that considers Taiwan to be part of "China," and just about everyone around the world considers the People's Republic of China (PRC) to be "China."

Ma's definition of "China" as the old "Republic of China" lost traction way back in the 1960s and must be relegated to Never Never Land.

While Ma's fictionalism might have given the international community the false idea that cross-strait relations are easing, the reality is that the PRC's designs to incorporate Taiwan are now colliding with the desire of the great majority of Taiwanese to remain a free and democratic nation that is accepted by the international community as a full and equal member.

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Ma's make-believe also includes his assertion that trade agreements with China are a necessary precursor to trade agreements with other nations, in particular that the proposed cross-strait service trade agreement with China — which was derailed by last year's Sunflower movement — will boost Taiwan's chances of joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Nothing is further from the truth: Taiwan needs to apply on its own strength and its own merits. It needs to work hard to push through structural economic reforms so it meets the high standards of the TPP. China is not even in the TPP and it would be outrageous if it could veto the accession of other states.

So, instead of acquiescing in, or even abetting, Taiwan's growing dependence on China, Ma — as president of the nation — should have strengthened Taiwan's self-reliance. It is a proud, free and democratic nation that has been pushed into diplomatic isolation by the grandiose, but short-sighted, "one China" fictions of the KMT of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣 經 國).

The developments after Taiwan's momentous transition to democracy in the late 1980s and early 1990s show that Taiwanese want to live in peace in a nation they can call their own. Yes, they want a "status quo," but one defined by the democracy and freedom they presently enjoy.

They want one in which they elect their own president and government, and where the government is responsive to its citizens. Not a nebulous "status quo" in which they are considered second-class international citizens, or where their peace and stability is determined by the whims of rulers in Beijing.

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