

The ghosts of imperial China sap Taiwanese

Written by Lee Min-yung 李敏勇
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The Nation's presidential inaugurations, held on May 20 every four years since the first direct presidential election in 1996, should be a day of celebration, but it is not.

On Monday, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) said that he sleeps well at night because he is improving the nation and Taiwanese. Ma is reminiscent of the incompetent emperor Hui (惠) of the Jin (晉) Dynasty.

In this era, most Taiwanese are depressed. In the face of the president's extremely low approval ratings, Ma would have resigned long ago if he had any sense of shame, but he really cannot see his own shortcomings.

Former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) was inaugurated as the first directly elected president on May 20, 1996.

In 1994, Ma was one of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) officials who opposed direct presidential elections during a constitutional amendment.

At that time, Lee was the chairman of the KMT, and as an ethnic Taiwanese, some KMT members with their colonial Chinese ideology did not like Lee as their chairman, and they tried to restrain him. Then-premier Hau Pei-tsun (郝伯村) teamed up with former presidential adviser Lin Yang-kang (林洋港) to challenge Lee, the KMT's candidate, in the 1996 presidential election. What a loyal KMT member Hau was.

On May 20, 2000, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) was elected president. The power transfer was the beginning of a new era and an opportunity for Taiwan's democratic development and the world praised the transfer as a peaceful revolution.

After losing power, the KMT expelled Lee the following year.

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When Chen was re-elected in 2004, it was a big blow to the KMT. Although the KMT had ruled Taiwan based on an anti-communist ideology for decades, it now changed its tune as top party officials fell over each other to visit China and join hands with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

On May 20, 2008, Ma succeeded Chen as president. Soon after the KMT regained power, Ma gave Chen a present by sending him to prison. It looked like Ma was making an example of Chen to warn others that the ROC belongs to China, and that there is no turning back from the KMT-CCP cooperation.

The so-called “1992 consensus,” a term former Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi (蘇起) admitted making up in 2000, refers to a tacit understanding between the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese government that both sides of the Strait acknowledge there is “one China,” with each side having its own interpretation of what “China” means.

In Ma’s version of the “1992 consensus,” when it comes to the cross-strait consensus on “one China, with each side having its own interpretation,” his interpretation is that “one China” refers to the PRC and that the ROC refers to “Chinese Taipei” or, even worse, “Taipei, China.”

In 2012, Ma was re-elected by playing the China card, but he lost the chance for the ROC to be reborn in Taiwan. As we are entering the eighth year of his presidency, the good times are about to end for him. The democratic foundation that was laid on May 20, 1996, has almost been hollowed out. Ma’s policies hang as a dark cloud over Chinese who followed the KMT to Taiwan in the hopes of starting a new life.

The nation must get rid of the Chinese colonial mindset, or we are doomed to continue taking one step forward and then one step back, never making progress. This is the problem that we must review on May 20.

In Taiwanese folk culture, people shout “cross the bridge, cross the bridge” to guide the dead across the Helpless Bridge (奈何橋) to the underworld. This is what we should have shouted after Ma on May 20.

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