

It does not take a political scientist to see the difference between the beliefs and expectations of privilege and entitlement found in a one-party state and opposing beliefs of merit and vision found in a democracy.

However, given the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) current struggles in determining its presidential candidate for next year's elections, it is becoming increasingly evident that the party's learning curve on democracy has a long way to go.

During the 2000 elections, the KMT received a major shock when the charismatic former Taiwan provincial governor James Soong (宋楚瑜) jumped rank over then-vice president Lien Chan (連戰) to run for the presidency as an independent. If Lien had foregone privilege for the party's sake, Soong would have won hands down and the party would have had the presidency for the next eight years.

However, Chan chose not to and this allowed Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate, to sneak in with 39.3 percent of the vote. The KMT expelled Soong from the party and sabotaged his campaign with the Chung Hsing Bills Finance scandal. Nonetheless Soong almost won with 36.8 percent of the vote. Lien got 23.1 percent of the vote.

Former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) has been accused of destroying the party by supporting Lien to head the KMT ticket. Lee stepped down as party chairman after the election and shortly after was expelled. Ironically, the party then made Lien its chairman, even though Lee's support of Lien was supposedly the reason he was expelled.

In 2004, Soong (now head of the People's First Party) was accepted by the KMT as its vice presidential candidate under Lien. Lien claimed one-party state entitlement to be president, but fate was unkind. The two lost by less than 1 percent of the vote to Chen, even though in 2000, the combined tally of their votes had been nearly 60 percent.

This time blame fell on sympathy garnered from the attempted assassination of Chen. That allegedly was how Chen got his 50.11 percent. The KMT rolled on, ignoring the real lesson on

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Written by Jerome Keating  
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how 10 percent of the vote had been lost in the changing times between the two elections.

In 2008, Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), with a “knight in shining armor” image, won back the presidency in a landslide 58.45 percent of the vote. However in 2012, even though Ma was party chairman, his vote share dropped to 51.6 percent.

A growing awareness of Ma’s incompetence was replacing any hope of merit and vision that Taiwanese expected of him. Once again, the KMT did not sense the changes outside the party.

Fast-forward to Nov. 29 last year, and the KMT wipe-out in the nine-in-one elections. Ma was forced to step down as party chairman. His bumbling and ill-placed vision had done more to ruin the party than Lee, but did the KMT recognize it?

And now, after having held the presidency for nearly eight years and continued its decades-long dominance of the legislature, the KMT has no candidate of merit or vision for next year’s elections. Thus far, only a loyal lieutenant, Deputy Legislative Speaker, Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱), has voluntarily stepped forward to take the position of general.

Surely the party should ask what happened? True, in a one-party state, the KMT could have easily found a successor, but in a democracy, the party found itself at a loss to field a viable candidate.

The KMT have not been able to produce a candidate with merit and vision in the past eight years. Why? It is one of many questions the KMT must answer if it has any intention to develop democratically.

The KMT’s recent debacle has happened on Ma’s watch, but what the KMT decides to do about Ma will have to wait for a later time. The party needs to shed the lingering one-party state mentality of privilege, hierarchy and entitlement existing in its upper ranks.

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After all, the KMT as a whole promoted and relied on Ma's image to serve its needs and not those of Taiwanese. Ma is not the only one not attuned to the needs and wants of Taiwanese.

Back in the party's "good old martial law days," the KMT's ability to control the media and prevent transparency allowed the creation of two myths that would subsequently be destroyed in the Ma era. The first myth was that the KMT was the only party able to handle the economy.

This myth has been challenged first by current studies that show the Taiwan Miracle was slowed by the KMT and second by the obvious faltering of the economy under Ma.

Ma's first term with the alleged economic whiz Vincent Siew (宋楚瑜) as his vice president ended poorly. And now as the next presidential election approaches, the facetious "6-3-3" promise is sounding the death knell to the end of that myth.

The second myth is that the KMT is the only party able to deal with China and its expansionism. The KMT's attempted party-to-party negotiations with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have not only failed, but they have been at odds with the will of Taiwanese.

Who is there outside the KMT who could believe that the party that lost both the Civil War and the war of propaganda to the CCP would be the one best able to deal with them in the current era?

In a democracy, the needs of the people and the political landscape continue to change as a country develops. For Taiwanese, any remnants of the "brainwashing" of the martial law era have worn off.

Today's public is more informed and alert even to changes in textbooks by the Ministry of Education, but if a party is still mentally locked in its past one-party state days, it remains out of touch.

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What candidate will the KMT come up with? Is there any new blood that would be trusted with the party's ill-gotten assets? Will there be a backroom deal? Denial and anger are evident, even as Ma tries floating ideas that he should return as party chairman. Whatever candidate is finally chosen, chances are the candidate does not have the merit and vision needed.

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