

The KMT is going back to the future

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The Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) less-than-one-minute nomination procedure to name Deputy Legislative Speaker Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱) as its presidential candidate appeared almost surreal: The party chairman asked for approval from the National Congress attendees and then believed he received it as the venue resounded with cheers and applause.

However, the surrealism emanated not from the formalism of the demonstration, but the inconsistency between the nomination and Hung's words.

It was not the formalism of the nomination that was to blame — although it did remind many of those political institutions that use the public's representatives as a rubber stamp — and included the attendees reciting Sun Yat-sen's (孫逸仙) will — the voicing of which is the prelude to weekly KMT Central Standing Committee meetings — and ending the meeting by chanting the “code of conduct to be adhered to by party members.” Such vocal drills are as harmlessly illusory as the “Republic of China” (ROC) that calls for the retaking of mainland China, yet serves as the backdrop for a sovereign Taiwan.

What brought this deceptive backdrop to the fore was Hung's accidental elevation to the party's A-list. A devout believer in the KMT and the ROC, she has anachronistically vowed to make the party hew to its promises of the ROC's eventual “reunification” and being a guardian of an ROC-centered historical view.

Hung's nomination, which was the result of a miscalculation on the part of KMT heavyweights, indicates the retreat of the middle-of-the-road forces within the party with the acquiescence of the top echelons. In the name of solidarity, the party leadership has chosen to align with its most rabid deep-blue supporters and expelled those who dare to think outside the box.

There was so much irony in Hung talking about tolerance, justice and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) not having apologized for what it has done; the KMT has never apologized for what it did during the Martial Law era and likes to claim that it led Taiwan's democracy to earn the world's respect.

It was cringeworthy when she said that she was fond of Beautiful Island — a song about

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treating Taiwan as the motherland that was banned by the former KMT government before martial law was lifted — before pledging that the ROC, its name and its symbols were the party's top priority. She also repeated the historically questionable claim that the ROC was “proudly founded by the KMT.”

That she then switched from Mandarin to Hoklo (also known as Taiwanese) to discuss her family's humble background only highlighted her disconnect from the reality of modern-day Taiwan.

The KMT as the ruling party for years did everything it could force Mandarin down everyone's throats, with the KMT government restricting the use of Hoklo, Hakka and Aboriginal languages. After the DPP government launched a drive to broaden the use of languages other than Mandarin, Hung once proposed limiting the accreditation program for teaching Taiwanese by cutting its budget, saying the move would save taxpayers' money.

Much of the KMT's political travails over the past decade and a half can be traced to its inability to evolve with the times.

By catapulting Hung to the top ranks of the party, the KMT has reaffirmed its dinosaur mindset, and comments from some of the rank-and-file showed that Hung is far from alone in her disconnect from reality. This is evident from remarks like: “The KMT's drubbing in the nine-in-one elections last November was the public letting [the party] down, not the other way around,” and the Sunflower movement evolved “because [the KMT] withdrew from campuses and the media [after democratization], we should start to restoration our men in them.”

It is a clear case of the blind leading the blind.

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