

During his visit to Japan last month, former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) gave a speech to Japanese lawmakers in Tokyo. The main thrust of Lee's speech, entitled "The Paradigm Shift of Taiwan," was to inform Japanese lawmakers that Taiwanese identity has undergone a significant transformation following the nation's democratic reform. National identity has changed from a vaguely China-centric, ethnically Chinese concept to a localized, Taiwanese identity, Lee said.

The current phase of cross-strait relations is centered on the practical reality that "Taiwan is Taiwan and China is China," the former president said. However, to ensure the long-term peace and stability of Taiwan, Lee believes Taiwan must fully clarify its more than half-a-

century-long ambiguous relationship with China. Naturally, Lee opposes President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) continuing obsession with his "one China, each side with its own interpretation" exercise in creative confusion.

Lee deserves praise for recognizing that the formation of a new Taiwanese identity represents a paradigm shift in public opinion. For example, the Taiwan Braintrust think tank released a poll on July 17 which showed that as many as 76 percent of Taiwanese recognize Taiwan as a "sovereign and independent nation." This is a significant increase of 15 percent within the past year. It seems that last year's Sunflower movement has raised public awareness of Taiwanese sovereignty and independence. The movement also directly contributed to a growing sense among Taiwanese that they have a duty to uphold the will of the country.

Since mainstream public opinion holds Taiwan to be a sovereign and independent nation, concepts such as Ma's "one China, each side with its own interpretation" and Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) presidential nominee Hung Hsiu-chu's (洪秀柱) "one China, same interpretation" are, of course, unacceptable to Taiwanese.

The vast majority of Taiwanese could not care less what form of so-called "one China" description is used by the KMT to orientate the country politically, since all of these "one China" labels are incompatible with the profound realization borne out of the Sunflower movement that "The only country I belong to is Taiwan." When the Sunflower movement called upon Taiwanese to "save your own nation," the country being referred to was certainly not any country external to Taiwan.

Since Taiwan is our country, we obviously cannot be citizens of another nation.

As such, within the past year, the proportion of the public who identify themselves as Chinese has floated around the 7 percent mark, while almost 90 percent view themselves as Taiwanese. Among young Taiwanese aged 20 to 39, the number who identify themselves as Taiwanese is as high as 95 percent. Furthermore, within this new generation of Taiwanese, only 1 percent, on average, identify themselves as Chinese; and to drive the point home, among those aged 20 to 29, the number who are willing to accept unification with China fell to a new low of 7.5 percent.

The young generation of Taiwanese are to be admired: They organized the Sunflower movement in opposition to the cross-strait service trade pact, which prevented Taiwan from further falling into the “one China” abyss. Young Taiwanese forced the nation’s democratic representatives to take action at the 11th hour to prevent Taiwan from being lost forever.

Additionally, the recent student movement against changes to the high-school social sciences curriculum was not just a reaction against opaque government policy emanating from the president’s office down to the Ministry of Education. It also held high for all to see the Ma administration’s distorted curriculum that discarded and twisted Taiwanese history and which held unification with China as sacrosanct. What young Taiwanese want is for Taiwan to be placed at the center of a curriculum that recognizes Taiwan as a country.

If Taiwanese of all ages were sufficiently schooled in Taiwanese history, then they would all understand this salient truth: Leaving the Japanese era aside, from the end of World War II to the present, if the Republic of China (ROC) government had not relied upon Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu, it could not have continued to survive. The ROC is the official name of Taiwan, yet the only territory over which the ROC is able to exercise any sovereign rights at all is Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu. This is the sum total of the ROC’s pretensions to hold sovereign territory over “China.” The irony is that Taiwan is the reality of the ROC and the ROC is Taiwan’s official name, yet it is only when Taiwan becomes an independent and autonomous nation that the “ROC” will truly become a nation state.

Arguments against Taiwanese independence that rely on fear and threats are a form of verbal intimidation and saber rattling from China and are ideological in nature. Beijing has always

Taiwanese is the new 'status quo'

Written by Michael Hsiao 蕭師

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harbored a wild desire to annex Taiwan. However, here in Taiwan, Hung has taken up anti-independence as her core philosophy. She has not only attempted to tarnish the current social sciences curriculum as a “pro-independence curriculum,” she has also, unbelievably, openly called into question the existence of the ROC.

Hung, deep down, clearly opposes the idea that Taiwan is a sovereign and independent nation. It is truly incredible that a presidential candidate who opposes Taiwanese independence — and yet cannot bring herself to recognize the ROC — is running for the office of president.

If there already exists a strong consensus for the transition of Taiwan into becoming a sovereign nation, then any move or act that seeks to sway, damage or distort the new status quo, will be blocked and resisted. The upholding of Taiwanese sovereignty and the safeguarding of Taiwan's national interests is nothing more than upholding the so-called “status quo.” Therefore, arguments that oppose unification and annexation are really arguments for maintaining the “status quo,” which is a channeling of the collective consciousness and power of the Taiwanese people.

Michael Hsiao is director of Academia Sinica's Institute of Sociology.

Translated by Edward Jones

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