

Xi, Lien and two parades of political alignment

Written by James Wang 王健

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Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) has a fondness for the grandiose. Last week, he put on a huge military parade to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War — which China calls the “War of Resistance Against Japan.” However, Western leaders chose to boycott the event, leaving only dictators and the leaders of minor countries in attendance.

In Taiwan, former vice president Lien Chan (连战) longs to be crowned emperor, yet has consistently failed to gain popular support. He has received a barrage of criticism for running off to Beijing to ingratiate himself with Xi at the parade. Yet, on his return to Taiwan, Lien astonishingly organized his own, small “parade” — a high-profile banquet to celebrate his birthday and golden wedding anniversary. However, all the big shots stayed away from the event.

The two “parades” — one large, one small — clearly illustrate the changing temperature of the political environment on either side of the Taiwan Strait by revealing who politicians are willing to mix with.

Having loudly proclaimed China’s ascent to the top echelon of world powers as a “peaceful rise,” Xi last week sought to portray the Beijing event as a “peaceful military parade.” Yet the public was barred from central Beijing while foreign heads of state were invited to attend. Xi’s actions do not live up to his words: He is famous for issuing contradictory statements. No wonder Beijing’s show met with the rebuff from Washington that military parades are not a US tradition.

It was certainly no accident that Western leaders stayed away from the event: There was clearly an orchestrated boycott, organized behind the scenes. Out of all the Allied nations, only Russian President Vladimir Putin was in attendance: a man who, on taking over the reins of power, has returned Russia to autocracy. South Korean President Park Geun-hye represented the most democratic country at the event, but she had an ulterior motive: to enlist China’s help to restrain North Korea.

With no Western leaders in attendance, China has returned to its former status under former Chinese leader Mao Zedong (毛泽东) as head honcho among developing countries. Xi’s odious friends belong on the list of unpopular dictators.

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His guest list also included New Party Chairman Yok Mu-ming (吳伯雄), People First Party Secretary-General Chin Ching-sheng (陳水扁) and other unnamed Taiwanese politicians and self-satisfied businessmen with links to the government. These “friends” are in reality Beijing’s slaves; certainly not international allies.

Lien’s wantonly extravagant festivities bore a strikingly similar resemblance to Beijing’s parade. Lien has served as Taiwan provincial governor, premier and vice president as well as chairman of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). Dripping with wealth and with business connections that vastly outweigh those of any other politician in the nation, Lien has never taken his political posts seriously.

However, his opportunistic trip to Beijing to ingratiate himself with Xi has incurred the wrath of the public. Although Lien laid on a sumptuous banquet to celebrate his birthday and 50th wedding anniversary, Vice President Wu Den-yih (吳登益), Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平), KMT Chairman Eric Chu (朱立倫) and KMT Vice Chairman Hau Lung-bin (郝龍斌) all ducked out, one after the other.

Lien was left to celebrate with a bunch of geriatric KMT old-timers and a handful of super-rich chief executives: The only people in Taiwan who have the nerve to ride roughshod over public opinion and console a has-been, aging political couple.

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Translated by Edward Jones

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