

## Cash brings culture of corruption

Written by Chang Kuo-tsai 張國才

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There is a saying that goes: “Money can’t buy everything, but without it, you can’t do anything.”

Then there is the Taiwanese proverb: “The children of the wealthy never turn out well.”

What ties these expressions together? Money: what it gets you, and what too much begets.

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) is the world’s richest political party, with tens of billions of New Taiwan dollars in assets, but even this much money could not prevent it from being severely bested in last year’s nine-in-one elections. Its assets, on the surface, are a resource, but in reality are a burden to it; the source of its troubles.

The existence of the KMT’s assets robs it of any claim to righteousness. Accounting for their existence by saying they are the product of mistakes that occurred at a time when the party and the state were inseparable does not in any way justify or explain the illicit assets.

All of the industries and assets owned by the KMT were taken from the defeated Japanese or from the national coffers when the KMT arrived in Taiwan after World War II, or are “derivatives,” commandeered from state-owned real estate at a low price or for no money at all. The fruit of the poisonous tree is itself poisonous. Any wealth that derives from these dodgy dealings is tainted, too.

Even now the KMT insists on clinging to its “precious,” using the assets for its own purposes. It refuses to sell them off or return them. This not only creates an uneven political playing field, it also sets a bad example for society: that money is central, while principles and justice are set to the side.

The KMT has created a culture of corruption.

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In 2005, when President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) were competing for the position of KMT chairman, Ma accused Wang of being corrupt, using the phrase “black gold.” In so doing, Ma was essentially absolving himself of involvement with corruption, and ignoring the KMT’s own system and the way that it had been governing through corrupt means.

It was at this time that the adjective “black,” which was previously reserved for corruption and the criminal underworld, took on a new meaning in Taiwan, that of the “black box” way of negotiating agreements and decisionmaking through entirely non-transparent means.

Was this not the way the Ma administration negotiated the terms of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), the cross-strait trade in services agreement, adjustments to the school curriculum guidelines and the meeting in Singapore with Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平)?

In the past, the KMT was successful because of the connections and networks it made at the grassroots level. The polite way to say this would be that it established an extensive and tight-knit network, although it might be more accurate to say that the money flowed far and wide.

The KMT’s assets have turned elections into a game of those who have and those who have not.

Deputy Legislative Speaker Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱) had to make do with meager campaign donations for her short-lived campaign for the presidency this year. For Hung, it was assets, assets everywhere, and not a cent to bring: no cash was forthcoming from the party coffers for her. At this point, the campaign was truly moribund. Then Hung was ousted and replaced by KMT Chairman Eric Chu (朱立倫), and suddenly the money rained down on him, greasing the party machine and bringing it into motion.

The problem is, what can a governing party bring to the nation if it only shows unity when the cash comes rolling in?

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Does that spell fortune or disaster?

Once again, the temple troupes are marching in the streets and coach-loads of people are being shuttled free of charge to scenic areas.

Who, pray tell, is paying? Where is the money for all this coming from?

Especially today, when times are hard, pockets are shallow and the media industry is in its twilight years, the KMT is bringing its prodigious assets to bear, splashing cash like a sugar daddy out on the town. One fears that the media are increasingly less able to resist such offers or to swim in the other direction.

Numbers speak volumes. Eight or nine out of 10 elected representatives of all levels who have had their electoral victories declared null and void due to graft are affiliated with the KMT.

Money is the main culprit; if this is not all down to the KMT's party assets, then what is it down to? In the interest of leveling the political playing field, of consigning corruption and vote-buying to history, those with the right to vote should exercise it to say to the KMT, which has done so much damage to Taiwan: "No more."

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Translated by Paul Cooper

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