

A historic day for politics in Taiwan

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Yesterday, voters changed the nation's future as Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) was elected president and her party won a legislative majority. The DPP's landslide win finally gave the party its long-sought-after total control of the government.

The election results are historic for several reasons.

First, they mark the third transfer of power since direct presidential elections were introduced in 1996. After former presidents Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) and Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and the election of Tsai, transitions of power have become routine, and the smooth process shows that Taiwan's democracy rests on a solid foundation.

When Chen won the presidency in 2000, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) held on to a legislative majority, blocking many of the Chen administration's policies, bills and budgets. As the DPP now has control of the Legislative Yuan, it will no longer be fettered by the opposition, but it will also have to shoulder all responsibility.

Second, by electing Tsai, Taiwan reached a new milestone as voters broke female politicians' glass ceiling, showing that women can enter the nation's highest offices based on their own merits and without having to rely on gender quotas.

Third, the KMT's hold on power has finally been broken and the party has been fully relegated to the opposition. The party's defeat was a result of its inferior policy record, disconnect from the public, internal power struggles, nomination of flawed candidates and party reforms that fell short of expectations. The defeat should give the KMT ample cause for reflection. If the party can open up and embrace the public, it could still have a chance to make a comeback, but if it retreats into itself and looks for support from within its right wing, it will follow the trajectory of the New Party and become a fringe party.

Fourth, some of the smaller parties saw big gains, which only goes to show that the death of army Corporal Hung Chung-chiu (洪仲丘) in 2013 and the Sunflower movement in the spring of 2014 mobilized the nation's youth, who have captured a corner of the political stage. Their

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ideals and ideas are set to add force and energy to Taiwan's development and help speed up democratic and social reform.

Finally, voters rejected Ma's pro-China policies. The DPP landslide is a victory for the Taiwanese identity, and the incoming government will change policy direction. Tsai has never recognized the existence of the so-called "1992 consensus," but she has praised the "status quo" that has existed since 1992 for acknowledging cross-strait similarities while allowing differences to continue to exist, and said that she intends to maintain that "status quo."

China will not be too happy that Tsai won, but it would not go so far as to break off cross-strait relations, which now enter a new stage in which each side will wait carefully to see what the other side says and does. There could be some minor friction in the short term, but there were exchanges between the DPP and China during the Chen administration. Tsai's statements and actions are more cautious and reasonable than Chen's were, and cross-strait relations are unlikely to become too tense.

The KMT's strategy has been to move toward the international community by way of China, while the DPP is expected to move toward China through the international community. The DPP would place greater importance on diplomatic and economic relations with the US, Japan and Southeast Asia and speed up participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the ASEAN free-trade area.

Tsai faces two main challenges: the economy and cross-strait relations. It is a difficult situation and time is running out. Formally, Tsai might not have taken over yet, but from now on, she will be in charge.

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