

From ROC ashes, Taiwan can rise

Written by Michael Hsiao 蕭萬長

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The results of the presidential and legislative elections on Jan. 16 are extremely significant. They are to have an enormous impact on the future of Taiwan's political landscape on at least three levels: First, there is the continued rise of a Taiwanese identity; second, a consolidated democracy has emerged; and third, a new citizenry has taken form.

Over the past eight years, the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) has repeatedly implemented policies aimed at appeasing China, thereby undermining Taiwan's sovereignty and dignity. The outcome of the nine-in-one elections in 2014 demonstrated the rejection of such policies by Taiwanese, but the KMT showed neither alarm nor remorse.

In less than one year, Ma and former KMT chairman Eric Chu (吳敦義) have reduced the "one China, different interpretations" aspect of the so-called "1992 consensus" to "one China, same interpretation," essentially consigning the "Republic of China" (ROC) on Taiwan to oblivion. Ma's brand of diplomacy — basically kow-towing to whatever Beijing says — is not only offensive to the Taiwanese, it is also the source of some embarrassment.

The KMT is completely out of touch with Taiwanese public opinion and the public's identification with Taiwan.

That is why Taiwanese voted down the KMT again, both in the Presidential Office and the legislature. This is not populism, in which the public are manipulated, as the KMT would have had us believe, but democracy, which restores the public's right to be the master of the nation.

Had voters not already given the KMT an unprecedented opportunity eight years ago? Unfortunately, Ma abused this opportunity and did no good to either Taiwan's domestic affairs, including democracy, society and economy, or for foreign relations, such as the nation's relationship with China, the US, Japan and the world.

Consequently, Taiwanese made a different choice this time, giving the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) another chance to run the central government and demanding that it safeguard Taiwan's sovereignty and its people's right to national identification.

The forced apology of 16-year-old Taiwanese Chou Tzu-yu (周子瑜), a member of the South Korean pop group TWICE, aroused strong opposition among the public on the eve of the election, causing even more young voters to turn out to vote for the DPP and vote down the KMT, which shows that the Taiwanese do not allow their right to national identity to be violated.

Young people do not have this need to struggle to identify with their Taiwanese identity, and they are more likely to be pro-independence. They are the proof that identification with being Taiwanese has deepened in young people and flourished among older generations.

Taiwanese identity does not necessarily mean that people harbor anti-Chinese sentiment, but it does mean that Taiwanese will absolutely not allow Taiwan to be oppressed by the “one China” policy.

The election results have sent a clear message to the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party that the magic spell of the “1992 consensus” is not working and cannot be used to intimidate or paralyze Taiwanese any more.

The election results also send a message to the whole world. Taiwan is currently undergoing its third transition of power since its democratization; the public elected a DPP president and also gave the DPP, which was voted out eight years ago, more than half the seats in the legislature. All in all, it clearly shows the democratic choice of Taiwanese voters, who are clear-minded, confident and mature.

Some people use “new politics” to describe Taiwan’s political landscape from this year onward, which has the following five characteristics: First, the public demands national policies to be Taiwan-oriented; second, the government is required to address the new situation, in which young people are actively involved in politics; third, policy goals should be to ensure social fairness and economic justice; fourth, decisionmaking procedures must be open, transparent and democratic; and fifth, the public wants to remove nepotism from the corrupt old power structure.

These are what “new politics” are about and the quintessence of a rock-solid democracy. The

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new president and new legislature must work hand in hand to attain the five objectives of the new politics. The new president will, after being sworn in on May 20, form a new Cabinet and formulate new policies, which would be the touchstone for their competence. The new legislators are to be sworn in on Monday.

Their competence in enabling new politics would likewise be determined by whether they can address the post-election constitutional crisis during government changeovers in a speedy fashion, complete necessary constitutional revisions, lower the age threshold for voting eligibility, strengthen local governance and separation of economic power, allow associations and civic society to enjoy autonomy and enact independent acts to govern political parties, cooperate with the new administration in resolving national deficits and pension system crisis, etc.

Democratized Taiwan as a whole and mainstream society have abandoned its ethnic group and racial complexes; the public has stopped electing government officials based on ethnic group or race, but on national identification, democracy, reason, social and generational justice.

If a few unscrupulous politicians try to continue to manipulate the “one China” sentiment and ethnic group complexes, they will only achieve the opposite and suffer at their own hands.

This is the sign that the new citizenry has developed in Taiwan and the proof that the new civic nationalism has blossomed in this country.

Martial law was lifted in Taiwan in 1987. Thirty years later, we see the Taiwanese fearlessly choosing a new identity, with the confidence in new democracy and the mature citizenry taking root.

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

Translated by Ethan Zhan

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