

Beijing chasing an unrealistic goal

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) National Day address yesterday contained no surprises regarding her China policy, as she maintained the stance she set in her May 20 inaugural address that "the pledges we made remain unchanged, our goodwill is unchanged, but we will not succumb to pressure from China, and we will not revert to the old path of conflict and confrontation."

Beijing was most probably "disappointed," as it had described Tsai's inaugural address as an "incomplete test" because it did not recognize the so-called "1992 consensus." It was probably hoping that Tsai might "complete the test" by providing an "answer" it deemed satisfactory.

Beijing has been pressuring Tsai's administration into accepting the "1992 consensus" since she took office. Insisting that the "1992 consensus" is the political foundation for cross-strait dialogue and development, China has more than once pointed at the Tsai government's rejection to recognize the "1992 consensus" as the reason cross-strait communications have been "suspended."

However, if Beijing has been observing Taiwan as closely as it claims, it should have seen that expecting the Tsai administration to recognize the "1992 consensus" is completely unrealistic.

Taiwan is a robust democracy where the president, who is voted into office, has to respect public opinion.

As Tsai said in a recent interview with the Wall Street Journal, "no administration in Taiwan can make a decision that runs counter to public opinion."

In an interview with the Japanese Yomiuri Shimbun, Tsai said that "the young people in Taiwan grew up in a free and democratic environment, and have independent thinking and judgement, so they accept values that they can identify with, rather than being indoctrinated" like older generations of Taiwanese.

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Whether to accept the “1992 consensus” is a matter that Tsai cannot, and should not, decide alone.

In a poll conducted by the Taiwan Brain Trust in April, 76.2 percent of the respondents said they were unaware of the contents of the “1992 consensus” and only 18.2 percent said they had a clear understanding of its contents. When asked whether they supported letting the “1992 consensus” be the foundation of cross-strait interactions, the poll showed that 52.3 percent of the respondents opposed the idea, compared with 33.3 percent who supported it.

In addition, 62.1 percent said they cannot accept Beijing’s repeated attempts to pressure the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government into accepting the “1992 consensus” and make it a prerequisite for cross-strait exchanges.

The poll shows that — despite former president Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) and the Chinese Nationalist Party’s (KMT) clamoring during his eight years in office that the “1992 consensus” refers to a tacit understanding between the KMT and Beijing that both sides acknowledge there is “one China,” with each side having its own interpretation of what “China” means — most Taiwanese do not know what it is, nor do they accept it.

Chinese officials have said that they hope for peaceful cross-strait development. If they truly mean it, then they should engage in dialogue with the DPP government and forge a new understanding for cross-strait relations, rather than holding on to a fictional “consensus” that is neither supported nor recognized by Taiwanese and their government.

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