

Biased civil servants act as quislings for the KMT

Written by James Wang 王健

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There are three living former presidents in Taiwan, and they belong to different political parties. Each of them attempted to change the “status quo” at the end of their presidency by redefining relations between Taiwan and China. They each have different opinions on the performance of President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) administration.

Then-president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) irritated Washington in 1999 by proposing the “special state-to-state” model of cross-strait relations after then-US president Bill Clinton reiterated his “three noes” policy the previous year: The US does not support Taiwan independence; does not support “one China, one Taiwan” or “two Chinas” and does not support Taiwan’s membership of any international bodies whose members are sovereign states.

During former president Chen Shui-bian’s (陳水扁) tenure, his proposal of “one country on each side” of the Taiwan Strait and Taiwan’s UN bid led to US interventions. However, tarnished by a Chen corruption scandal, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was kicked out of government.

During former president Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) two terms, he turned to Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) and the so-called “1992 consensus.” In the end, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) suffered a major defeat as the result of a backlash against Ma’s policies.

By promising to maintain the “status quo,” Tsai successfully led the DPP to regain power and reversed the KMT’s concessions to Beijing. Her victory represented a significant turning point for the future of Taiwan.

As for the domestic reforms that she has promised to carry out, there is no opposition, apart from the KMT’s sour grapes — the only problem is that the public is disappointed that the results of the reforms are not coming fast enough.

Putting aside any mention of Ma, as he does not identify with Taiwan, the other two pro-localization ex-presidents have different opinions on the performance of the current administration, but their disagreement is not about policies.

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Lee has said that a leader should display resolution and courage, while Chen has said that a leader should be aware of the difficulties faced in the international and domestic situations, calling on the public to lend more support and encouragement to Tsai.

To be fair, Lee spoke a bit too soon in his — perhaps a bit arbitrary — comments when he asserted that there are a host of problems that the Tsai administration is unable to solve. However, he was right to say that the transportation, financial and fiscal sectors have been manipulated by a group of former KMT officials. The key to the problem, then, lies in whether Tsai's administration can rid itself of or change this group of people.

Lee was a KMT member during his presidency. Not only did he not manage to remove this group, he was removed by them. Chen managed to make some progress in terms of nationalizing the military, but he failed to reform the well-protected civil service left behind by the KMT's party-state system. During the more than five-decade-long party-state system, these people, harboring the same attitude and interests, dominated the civil service.

When a new president takes office in the US, he or she has the authority to appoint nearly 4,000 officials who are in charge of decisionmaking and monitoring civil servants to make sure that they implement the decisions the officials make. During a transfer of power in Taiwan, only ministers and vice ministers are replaced.

This means that their ministries are controlled by the same old group of civil servants, which makes the significance of a transfer of power pale somewhat.

James Wang is a media commentator.

Translated by Eddy Chang

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