

Issue of choosing a flag for Taiwan

Written by Chen Fang-ming 陳芳明

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Double Ten National Day should be celebrated by the entire nation, but, due to discord between the pan-blue and pan-green camps, and the ongoing tension between unification and independence supporters, the annual celebrations are typically overshadowed by debates about the nation's political future.

President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) administration this year chose an unconventional stage design for the celebrations — one that features no red “double ten” symbols and no national flags — drawing ire from the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT).

In Taipei, people often see three types of flags: The Republic of China (ROC) national flag championed by the KMT; the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) flag which is a symbol of Taiwan; and the People's Republic of China (PRC) national flag, usually held by members of the China Unification Promotion Party (CUPP) during their demonstrations.

The different flags say something about Taiwan's political diversity. While the DPP has been elected the ruling party through the ROC political system — and Tsai is without question the president — it does not mean that the ROC flag must appear at National Day celebrations.

Although the decorated archway along Ketagalan Boulevard in Taipei says “ROC,” the venue design for the celebrations was panned by the KMT and CUPP for its lack of national flags.

Compared with past National Day celebrations, tension between the pan-blue and pan-green camps has increased this year, in part due to the controversy regarding the recent “Sing! China: Shanghai-Taipei Music Festival.”

Many people would also remember how the Taipei Summer Universiade in August was overshadowed by several incidents involving flags. That Taiwanese cannot bring their national flag to the Games hosted by their own nation was extremely frustrating.

This is why many supporters of Taiwanese independence brought their green flags to the

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Games. They did so to express their political beliefs and by a way of protest.

The reason the ROC has been unable to gain recognition from the international community is because of the KMT's "one China" principle. The party's concessions to Beijing have led the nation to its current plight.

Although the party has repeatedly claimed that the ROC is a sovereign political entity, it never held its ground when confronted by Beijing. By acknowledging the so-called "1992 consensus" it has lowered Taiwan's national status.

History has shown that Taiwan cannot outsmart Beijing by following its "one China" principle. The KMT has tried to justify its support of the "1992 consensus" by explaining it as an agreement by both sides of the Taiwan Strait that each has its own interpretation of what "China" means, but that is just a lie that the KMT wishes were true. The discourse has proven to be completely useless in helping improve Taiwan's national status.

The KMT never dared mention the nation's name when meeting Chinese leaders in Beijing, and when former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) met with Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) in Singapore, he was also too scared to mention the ROC.

It makes no sense that the KMT should demand that the DPP wave ROC national flags when it would not even say the nation's name without fear or hesitation.

Premier William Lai (賴清德) sparked controversy last month when he made it clear during a Legislative Yuan meeting that he hoped for an independent Taiwan, but his statement was an honest account of the nation's political reality.

Any discourse about China will be eventually be used by Beijing against Taiwan. If the DPP wants to break free from the latter's influence, it must find an alternative to the KMT's "one China" principle, which is designed to entrap Taiwan.

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Equivocation is never tolerated in politics. The ROC has been excluded from the international community and its success limited to the domestic market.

Many might wonder how the KMT felt about people waving PRC flags on the streets of Taipei; or what the retired military officers were thinking, having traveled all the way to Beijing to listen to Xi's didactic speech.

However, even more puzzling is former vice president and KMT chairman Lian Chan's (連戰) decision to attend a military parade in Beijing.

Although the tanks and missiles displayed at the parade were meant to be used against Taiwan, Lien not only felt honored to attend the inspection, but also seemed elated. He must have been insane to the point where he could not even tell the date.

From Lai's statement that he believes in independence to the PRC flags waved by CUPP members and the KMT's insistence on the "1992 consensus," it is clear that we live in a time of change, when a definitive answer is yet to be found.

Simply talking about "one China" and the importance of waving the national flag means nothing if people do not care about what makes a nation — namely democracy, human rights, justice and other values.

Although Taiwanese society remains divided, the public's vision of what Taiwan can be will not be conditioned by the national flag or the nation's name. While political chaos is expected to continue for a while, we can only trust that our democracy will eventually help us find the answer we need.

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