

Ko Wen-je's confusion over identity is ridiculous

Written by Chiou Chwei-liang 邱偉良

Thursday, 19 April 2018 06:22

Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) was asked during a Taipei City Council meeting whether he is Chinese or Taiwanese. He stammered and found it difficult to articulate his position, but eventually suggested that, while culturally he is Chinese, he is Taiwanese politically speaking.

That really is absurd. How can Ko be considered qualified to be the mayor of Taiwan's capital if he is so afraid of saying out loud that he is Taiwanese?

His acceptance of Taiwanese values and his concept of national identity are utterly confused. He cannot seem to see straight on this issue.

Ko was, of course, being asked about his national identity, not his cultural identity. If you ask Americans, Canadians, Australians or New Zealanders the same question, regarding their national identity, they would reply that they are Americans, Canadians, Australians or New Zealanders.

Nobody would expect them to answer that they were British, irrespective of how much they approved of British culture, the political culture in the UK or the system that country adheres to.

The most ridiculous thing about Ko's response is how it betrays his utter confusion about the difference between national identity and cultural identity, not to mention historical reality or the way of things.

You cannot try to force Taiwanese culture into the mould of Chinese culture, or attempt to equate the two. The concept is inherently wrong.

Other Asian nations, such as North and South Korea, Japan, Singapore and Vietnam have Chinese cultural elements, or have been affected by the legacy of their contact with imperial China. Regardless, they have long broken such links with Chinese culture and over the years have developed their own unique cultural systems.

Ko Wen-je's confusion over identity is ridiculous

Written by Chiou Chwei-liang 邱偉良

Thursday, 19 April 2018 06:22

Taiwan, having gone through 500 years of colonial rule and experienced Eastern and Western cultural influence, just as the aforementioned Asian countries have, has grown apart from China and has its own unique culture.

Taiwanese culture is Taiwanese culture, not Chinese culture. Taiwanese values are the collective values of Taiwanese: they are not Chinese values.

China's authoritarian culture of 2,000 years, set against freedom, democracy and human rights, is entrenched in that society.

China has undergone 40 years of reform and the opening up of its markets, and state capitalism has made China prosperous, yet Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) has still been able to buck that trend, and managed to oppose and resist the universal values of civilized development.

In amending the Chinese constitution to abolish term limits, Xi has put this civilized development into reverse and essentially restored the imperial line, with himself at the head, as emperor.

Dictatorial Chinese culture like this has nothing in common with the liberal and democratic culture of Taiwan.

Ko's confused cultural identity and national identity — whether it is out of his innocence and incompetence, or done to please the voters of Taipei — is a big mistake.

This is about the ability to distinguish between fact and fantasy, so there is no room for ambiguity or compromise.

Ko Wen-je's confusion over identity is ridiculous

Written by Chiou Chwei-liang 邱偉良

Thursday, 19 April 2018 06:22

In November's Taipei mayoral election, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) should not be allowed to yield to Ko anymore and should nominate a Democratic Progressive Party candidate to compete with him for the position.

Chiou Chwei-liang is a professor at the University of Queensland, Australia.

Translated by Lin Lee-kai

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2018/04/19](#)