

Voting choices key for independence

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Where people are today is a combination of every decision they have made in their lives. Food choices yesterday might not have an immediate effect on health or appearance today, but they have a cumulative effect over time. It is the same with voting decisions.

Taipei City Government spokeswoman Huang Ching-yi (黃晶儀) said this week on a political talk show that independence and unification is a “pseudo-issue.”

“I do not understand what the fuss is about unification and independence. The [same debate] re-emerges once every two years, but Taiwan is not going to become independent or be unified right away because of my vote today,” Huang said.

The issue is an ideological threat issued by politicians to scare voters into supporting them, she said, adding later on Facebook that economic development is what people care about.

However, while the results of a single election might not immediately decide whether Taiwan would become a de jure independent nation or be annexed by China, it is naive to think that the voting decisions of Taiwanese will not decide the nation’s future.

Given the growing disparity between the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) over cross-strait policy, with the former becoming more open to unification, it is safe to assume that every electoral victory for a KMT member, especially for high-ranking positions, including the presidency, pushes Taiwan one step closer to China’s clutches.

Likewise, in light of the DPP’s traditional stance toward independence or the “status quo,” a DPP leader steers the nation in the other direction.

Democratic rotation of leadership from KMT to DPP is probably what has kept Taiwan from developing a dangerous level of economic dependence on and political integration with China.

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If Taiwanese voters had not believed in the power of their ballots and voted the KMT out in 2016, the rapid growth of economic ties across the Taiwan Strait due to then-president Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) pursuit of cross-strait rapprochement and economic benefits since 2008 could have prompted both sides to enter the political arena now.

Instead, President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) election in 2016 has helped tilt the balance away from China since her inauguration and ensured that Taiwanese can continue to enjoy freedom and democracy.

This is not to say that no DPP politician who warned against the prospect of unification did not do so to drum up support for themselves. Some of them might have been tapping into people's fear of losing their freedom for selfish reasons, but it does not mean that threats of annexation are not real.

The rhetoric about independence and unification might be old and repetitive, but it is unfortunately a situation every Taiwanese inherited, which is why it is going to be brought up until a resolution on Taiwan's status is reached.

Dismissing the issue as a far-off problem risks instilling a false sense of security in Taiwanese. Such naive self-deception would only make it easier for Beijing to snatch Taiwan away, even if the process is subtle.

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