On Thursday last week, President Tsai Ing-wen (□□□) delivered an address to mark the Republic of China's (ROC) 108th Double Ten National Day celebrations, saying: "My fellow citizens, when freedom and democracy are challenged, and when the Republic of China's existence and development are threatened, we must stand up and defend ourselves. The overwhelming consensus among Taiwan's 23 million people is our rejection of 'one country, two systems,' regardless of party affiliation or political position."

"No one has a patent on the Republic of China, and no one can monopolize Taiwan. The words 'Republic of China (Taiwan)' are not the exclusive property of any one political party, and that is the overwhelming consensus of Taiwan society," she added.

This received applause even from Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Chairman Wu Den-yih (□□□).

However, Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu (□□□), the KMT's presidential candidate, was less appreciative. That day, Han released a cross-strait policy white paper, which his team of advisers attempted to promote as a so-called "genuine '1992 consensus'" to the media.

The fictitious "1992 consensus" — which former Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi (□□) in 2006 admitted making up in 2000 — was spun by Han's communications team as having been poisoned by Tsai and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). According to their warped logic, the "1992 consensus" — which was embellished by former president Ma Ying-jeou (□□□) into the formula of "one China, different interpretations"— is the "genuine 1992 consensus," but adulterated by the DPP, which appended to it Beijing's "one country, two systems" formula. This is a gross distortion of the facts.

It was Chinese President Xi Jinping (□□□) who administered the poison by explicitly linking the two formulas — the "1992 consensus" and "one country, two systems" — in a New Year's speech on Jan. 2 entitled "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan."

On seeing that the DPP had suffered setbacks in the local elections in November last year, Xi believed that he could capitalize on the party's electoral misfortune. In his speech, Xi redefined

the “1992 consensus” to mean “both sides of the [Taiwan] Strait belonging to one China and being willing to work together to seek national unification.” Xi went further still, announcing a plan to explore a Taiwan version of the “one country, two systems” formula for cross-strait unification.

It is clear who is responsible for contaminating the “1992 consensus.” It is richly ironic that even though it was Xi who vandalized the KMT’s beloved “1992 consensus,” Han’s team is claiming that it was Tsai who inflicted the damage.

At an event hosted by his foundation on Oct. 5, Ma accused Tsai of manipulating people’s fears using “dried mango strips” (□□□) — a wordplay on “a sense of the nation’s impending doom” (□□□). In reality, it is the KMT that is petrified of the “nation’s impending doom,” with the ROC now on life support.

If Chiang Kai-shek (□□□) and his son Chiang Ching-kuo (□□□) were filled with anguish over the “nation’s impending doom,” having fled to Taiwan with the ROC government after capitulating to the communists, then their descendants appear decidedly unperturbed over the potential “second collapse” of the ROC at its last redoubt in Taiwan.

The Chiangs would be spinning in their graves if they could see the alteration of political power that has occurred within their “anti-communist fortress.” They would scratch their heads in wonder at the present-day KMT, which would appear to them a spitting image of the Chinese Communist Party back in the day.

They would also think that Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (□□□) and former Hon Hai Precision Industry Co founder Terry Gou (□□□) look uncannily like China’s pro-democracy intellectuals who assisted the communist “bandits” during the Chinese Civil War. They would also surely confuse the DPP with their old party, as they once knew it.

Xi’s definition of “one China” leaves no room for the KMT and Beijing plunders diplomatic allies at will. Ma’s much-vaunted “diplomatic truce” turned out to be a strategic pause. How much longer will the members of the KMT continue to kid themselves — and attempt to pull the wool over the eyes of others?

The national flag has once more become an emblem of patriotism. Kuo has said that one must identify with the flag, because it is only when you do this that you can identify with the nation, and only when this happens can the public hand over control of the state: only people that identify with the ROC should be allowed to govern the country.

The idea is that the nation's name and the national flag and anthem, irrespective of who decided them, must all be given due reverence and are somehow immutable. This kind of thinking, that the name, flag and anthem should be knelt before by everyone, regardless of whether they had anything to do with their creation, belongs to the authoritarian era. The mindset is a living fossil inherited from people of the past safeguarding the party-state.

If there is any confusion as to whether people should be sacrificed on the altar of national emblems or whether these emblems should be changed according to the needs of people, all you need to do is refer to the idea of "government of the people, by the people and for the people." There is no need to put the cart before the horse.

In democracies, the people, the nation and the government are a trinity, three parts of one whole, for which the sequence is clear: First, power resides in the people; second, the people decide the form of the state; third, the person installed at the apex of government is to be elected.

The fallacy in the pan-blue camp's thinking is that it is trapped in the ROC government of Nanjing in 1949, and is blind to the present-day ROC government in Taiwan. The former ruled over China prior to 1949 and was recognized by the UN until 1971 as the representative of China, but was abandoned even by the US in 1979, when it established diplomatic relations with the communist "bandits."

After the 1970s, when the Chiangs were still talking of Nanjing as the ROC's seat of government, the rest of the world could only see the ROC government on Taiwan. After that, with subsequent legislatures being elected and with the introduction of direct presidential elections, Taiwan gradually came to be regarded by the international community as the emblem representing only the 23 million people that live in nation.

The name ROC has continued to exist and various historical, educational and sentimental factors, as well as the difficulty of forging a new constitution, all led to the objective recognition of the democratic area of Taiwan and the outlying islands of Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu. The self-governing area with a population of 23 million came to represent the national territory of the ROC, with the recognition that the People's Republic of China does not in any way entail Taiwan. This became the mainstream operating definition used by the international community, with the US at the forefront.

There have already been three transitions of political power since Taiwan moved from the Martial Law era into the democratic era, and the ROC government apparatus has sought to maintain the "status quo" to avoid touching a sensitive nerve with a certain regional government, a restraint that was placed on the ROC by both the US and China.

Problems emerged when Xi attempted to unilaterally change the "status quo," setting off alarm bells among the pro-democracy camps in Taiwan. When there is talk of the Tsai administration maintaining the "status quo," it is of the constraints placed upon it by the US and China, but also those deriving from the consensus within Taiwan itself, so that Beijing can only skirt the tensions and dabble in psychological warfare, while Taiwan is free to help ensure the security of the Indo-Pacific region. This is what helped the Tsai government get through the crisis of the electoral shellacking it took last year, and gives a glimpse of how it is hoping to steer Taiwan into the future.

The Tsai government is using the trinity of the people, the nation and the government to create new possibilities for Taiwan. If the pan-blue camp truly loves Taiwan and the ROC, then it should not allow election fever to confuse it regarding the correct trajectory for the nation. Unless, of course, it has other plans.

Translated by Edward Jones and Paul Cooper

Source: Taipei Times - Editorials 2019/10/19