

As expected, the US presidential election had several similarities to Taiwan's presidential election in 2000.

My prediction has unfortunately come true. On Nov. 3, I published an op-ed titled "The US presidential election is a historical turning point" in the Liberty Times (the Taipei Times' sister newspaper), reminding readers that the election in many ways would turn out to be very similar to Taiwan's presidential election in 2000.

In 2000, the attraction of the huge Chinese market resulted in Taiwan's first transition of government power, with the administration of then-president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) adopting an "active opening, effective management" policy.

Today, in the battle between "America first" and "Chinese interests," US president-elect Joe Biden, who represents short-term commercial interests, took the upper hand and won the election.

Why would the US presidential election be a historical turning point? Biden's victory is going to be closely linked to the firm establishment of Chinese hegemony.

Some Taiwanese say that no matter who is elected US president, Washington is unlikely to significantly change its Taiwan policy.

Despite that, the Biden administration is likely to relax Washington's containment policy against China and maybe even gradually turn it into a policy of "coopetition" — cooperation and competition.

Such a change could reshape the international political map, as the US repeats the mistake Taiwan made in 2000.

China must not overtake the US

Written by Huang Tien-lin 黃天麟

Tuesday, 17 November 2020 06:46

Taiwan might be a small island, but it actually broke the balance of power in the world in 2000, as Chen replaced his predecessor Lee Teng-hui's (李登輝) “no haste, be patient” policy for China with the “active opening, effective management” policy.

On the surface, the commitment to safeguarding Taiwan's sovereignty remained unchanged, but there were qualitative changes. With the help of massive Taiwanese business investments there, China was transformed from a small economy into a global information technology power within a decade.

The rise of China and the decline of Taiwan also allowed China to move toward the forceful annexation of Taiwan.

History seems to be repeating itself. If the Biden administration replaces the containment strategy of US President Donald Trump's administration, which is similar to Lee's “no haste, be patient” policy, with a softer “coopetition” strategy, which is similar to the Chen administration's “active opening, effective management” policy, US and European businesses would swarm into the Chinese market.

As they did, they would bring along their technology and capital, which would allow China to achieve the goals of its 14th Five-year Plan from next year to 2025, and it might even be able to achieve those goals ahead of schedule.

Is this just groundless fear? History tells us that this crisis is real. In 2002, while Taiwan's “active opening, effective management” policy helped bring about China's quick surge, I met with several Japanese members of parliament and warned them that China would surpass Japan by 2010 if they did not get their act together.

They snorted in contempt at my warning, claiming that there was still a long way to go before China would catch up with Japan.

However, China replaced Japan as the world's second-largest economy in 2009.

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If top US politicians continue not to take seriously that the US is being hounded by the huge Chinese market — which Trump describes as theft and plunder — and instead rashly return to the old path of globalization and free trade, China can be expected to replace the US as the world's largest economy in about 12 years.

Beijing, not Washington, would then be bossing the world around.

Faced with this new political situation, Taiwan should focus its diplomatic exchanges with the US on influencing the perception of US decisionmakers, especially the decisionmakers on Biden's team, and make them understand that the growing Chinese threat against the US is very real.

Several years ago, the administration of then-US president Barack Obama — in which Biden served as vice president — suffered a blow by the China's rising power, as the US was humiliated in the dispute over the launch of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015.

The dispute clearly served as a wake-up call for Obama, who suddenly realized that the world is no longer a place where what Washington says goes.

Today, China has won the support of more than half of the world in the race for global supremacy. If the free world does not face up to reality and unite against the threat of the huge Chinese market, it will find itself in great danger.

If that happens, the West's freedom and democracy could be replaced by China's digital tyranny.

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Translated by Eddy Chang

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2020/11/17](#)