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**New Features and Developments in Taiwan Politics**

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# New Features and Developments of Taiwan Politics

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The Ma government is now in deep crisis. Political troubles kept emerging, and conflicts between the Blue and Green Camps continued to escalate, leading to even greater public grievances. New features and developments in Taiwan politics are to be discussed and analyzed below.

## 1. New features of Taiwan Politics

### *1.1 Ma's government in deep crisis*

Deep crisis faced by the Ma government can be manifested in 1) severe internal friction within the governing team has compromised its cohesion; 2) at the cost of political stability, conflicts between the ruling party and all other parties have been increasing; 3) unfavorable economic environment and poor governance accumulated public grievances; 4) obstructed by the opposing party, major policies cannot be effectively implemented, amounting to no more than a paper exercise; 5) corruption issues not only posed serious setbacks on the Ma government's clean image, but also jeopardized Ma's own reputation.

The KMT came back to power under Ma's leadership in 2008 with high hopes from the whole Taiwan society. However, due to unfavorable international economic environment, especially the financial crisis and the subprime crisis in the US, Taiwan's economy faced formidable challenges and difficulties. Coupled with the KMT's poor performance in addressing major political and social crises, as well as Ma's mistake in personnel selection, internal conflicts kept emerging and finally put the government into crossfire.

There are several causes that pushed Ma's team into such a crisis, and here are some of the key ones: 1) poor performance, especially a weak economy, proved to be the root cause of public discontent with Ma's team; 2) the opposing party's strategy of "oppose for the sake of opposing" boycotted a number of the policies, including the Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement (CSSTA), proposed by the Ma government, which are still suspended in Legislative Yuan for an indefinite period; 3) Ma's choice of personnel worsened the conflict inside the Blue Camp. Ma has always preferred scholars and doctors to take the positions of administrative officials, which led to some adaptability issues and mistakes during the implementation of certain policies; 4) Ma has failed to implement some major policies, especially internal reforms, which disappointed supporters of the Blue Camp. It also proved to be one of the key reasons of Ma's low support rate; 5) a

common mistrust against government officials has developed over the years. Public discontent has intensified to condemnation. Any single mistake caused by administrative negligence will trigger a huge wave of complaints and grievances. Such emotional response keeps government officials under constant pressure. Ma's government has thus lost all its credibility, and for the same reason, public support was compromised as well.

### *1.2 Aggravated struggle between the Blue and Green Camps*

Although Ma Ying-jeou has publicly proclaimed to eradicate struggles between the Blue and Green Camps after he came to office in 2008, there is still no sign of improvement, but instead, the struggle has aggravated. Conflicts between Blue and Green, ruling party and opposition party have been persistent over the years; they were a normality during the DDP's rule over eight years. KMT and DDP have held entirely opposite positions over the issue of cross-strait relations, therefore it has been hard to reach agreements over a number of policies. Moreover, their understanding of Taiwan's history and constitutional structure are also widely divided, which explains why political reconciliation is impossible to realize.

Ma's wish to ease the struggle since 2008 has never come true to the least extent. The Green Camp, including DDP, carries out the strategy of "oppose for the sake of opposing" to boycott almost all policies proposed by the Blue. Be it the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), CSSTA or US beef imports issue, or even internal issues such as textbook disagreement and compensation for military officials, government employees and teachers' pensions, the DDP has always boycotted the votes to disable the government from taking any action.

Apart from exhausting political resources, the conflict between Blue and Green Camps ended up with shirking responsibility and criticizing to each other. Ignorant of their public impression, the two camps saw no need to fight covertly, as their top priority is to back each other into a corner. Political power calculations are the underlying reason of such fierce battles.

Affected by the fights, Taiwan's media is showing a trend of being divided into Blue and Green. Some media companies in particular spare no effort in criticizing and distorting information against the ruling party, in order to advocate a social sentiment of badmouthing the ruling party, further disrupt the society, and accelerate confrontation between the two camps.

### *1.3 Crisis-ridden KMT faced by various challenges*

The KMT is now in deep crisis. 1) Incidents of fraud within the KMT emerged continuously, damaging Ma's personal image as well as KMT's reputation as a clean party. Despite Ma's self-proclaimed honesty and integrity, his close

associates such as Lin Yi-shi and Lai Su-ru were detained for alleged corruption, and local officials such as Liu Cheng-hong, Li Zhao-qing, Chang Tong-rong and Zhuo Bo-yuan were all arrested by association of corruption, breaches or abuse of power. Coupled with Huang Jing-tai's case of influence peddling in Keelung and Ye Shi-wen's case of corruption in Taoyuan, the KMT's public image has been severely damaged; 2) Aggregated conflict between KMT and DDP, especially the Ma-Wang Dispute erupted in September 2013 not only divided the KMT and loosened the tie between Taiwan government and Executive Yuan, but also disabled KMT, the ruling party, from implementing several major policies. Furthermore, the dispute proved to be the root cause for blocking CSSTA and for the outbreak of the Sunflower Movement, which in turn had a huge impact on cross-strait relations.

3) The KMT has made little progress in internal reforms, which failed to meet public expectations, at the cost of its support rate. Today, Taiwan is challenged by the wide gap between rich and poor, alternation of generation, and environmental and demographic issues, which all require new thoughts to address, while KMT's only made little improvement in terms of reform, let alone any substantial breakthrough. Naturally, the public wasn't even aware of any changes under the KMT's, and thus the support rate did not improve; 4) the KMT still needs to put more efforts into turning its Mainland policy into more votes. Although its Mainland policy was pragmatic during the past few years, which contributed to peaceful development of cross-strait relations and was popular among most Taiwanese, further attempts need to be made to turn its successful policy into more votes; 5) In the post-Ma era, alteration of generation poses a rock hard challenge to KMT. Who will represent the KMT to run in the general election in 2016 still remains a question, while Tsai Ing-wen is almost certain to be the DDP's choice. Adequate selection of the successor is the key to KMT's cohesion and harmony, as well as to the success in 2016 election.

How to unify the people and maintain the current support rate for the Blue Camp, appears to be the major challenge faced by the more than a hundred years old KMT now, especially with the drawbacks of the central government's failure in execution and local officials' poor performance.

#### *1.4 The DDP, the biggest obstacle to peaceful development of cross-strait relations*

The DDP, opposition party since 2008, has always been the focus of all sectors of the community in terms of its mainland policy. The call for an adjusted mainland policy from within DDP has been increasing ever since Tsai lost marginally to Ma, who was elected for the second term in 2012. But as the pro-secession force within the DDP is extremely strong, dominating the ideology of the party, and DDP

leaders are reluctant to adjust their mainland policy, the latter remained unchanged.

In the 2014 election for DDP chairperson, Tsai Ing-wen made her way back, and regained the control of the party. In order to fortify her power, however, she ignored the demand of freezing the political platform of Taiwanization raised by the pragmatic school in the party. This, in a sense, demonstrated that the DDP's core leadership team, headed by Tsai, is not keen on resolving cross-strait issues at all. Not freezing the Taiwanization platform clearly revealed the internal division on the party's mainland policy, where the pro-secession force has a considerable impact on the party. Tsai's approach to the Taiwanization platform is, on one hand, to avoid internal division, and on the other, a clear signal that she has little intention to address such core issue. Under the leadership of Tsai Ing-wen, the DDP's unwillingness to engage in these sensitive issues made it impossible to establish mutual trust between the DDP and the Communist Party of China.

Observing the DDP's approach of boycotting all cross-strait related acts in the Legislative Yuan, they still refuse to drop the obsolete political stand and the ideology of Taiwanization. Apart from sabotaging CSSTA and the Cross-Strait Agreement Supervision Regulations, the DDP will probably also obstruct the establishment of the Free Economic Pilot Zone and other projects that involve mainland capital. The DDP proves to be the greatest political force that jeopardizes, rather than accelerates, the peaceful development of cross-strait relations.

At the same time, the DDP's conservative approach and boycott practice is harmful to its own chances in next general election. Amid the ongoing communication, development and cooperation between the two sides, the DDP's ignorance of mainstream public opinion will probably cost it support and trust by the people. It will be the biggest challenge for the DDP's return as the ruling party.

In addition to its mainland policy, the DDP's internal conflicts over power among its different groups are getting fiercer, even in the year 2016. Disputes between Su Tseng-chang and Tsai Ing-wen have now temporarily ceased, but are yet to be settled for good. It is entirely possible that their struggle will re-emerge. If the core leadership team under Tsai's leadership fails to gain favorable positions in the Nine in One election, Tsai's chances to emerge as the DDP nominate of the 2016 election will be hampered.

## 2. New developments in Taiwan Politics

### *2.1 The struggle between the two parties intensified excessively with the dawn of the upcoming general election*

As the cornerstone of Taiwan, elections are the most important chance for political figures to seize power. Therefore, election topics have become the overwhelming issue during election campaigns. Given the fact that the Blue Camp is affected by poor performance of the central and local government, the Green Camp is expecting to enhance its political capacity during the Nine in One election, so as to lift morale for the 2016 general election. It's reasonable to suppose that both camps will, based on election topics, upgrade their political offensive against each other to an unprecedented level, which will inevitably lead to a ferocious battle with much more intensive conflicts between the two forces. KMT will be faced by stronger obstruction and boycott in terms of policy implementation of internal affairs and cross-strait relations.

### *2.2 The momentum of cross-strait relations will be lost due to the conflicts that severely hamper the development*

Taiwan politics will surely affect the development of cross-strait relations. With the ideology of "oppose for the sake of opposing", the DDP refuses to take the big picture of economic growth into consideration, but turns down any cross-strait related proposal, which adds significantly more obstacles to the peaceful development of relationship between Beijing and Taipei. Subsequently, it's impossible to pass any cross-strait related proposal in the Legislative Yuan. Without any effective policy in place, enormous peace dividend cannot be turned into real benefit, which, to some extent, lowered the public support for the Ma government's mainland policies.

Take CSSTA as an example, the DDP and the Green Camp's boycott led two provisional conferences in Legislative Yuan from late July to mid August to nowhere. CSSTA will have to be postponed for discussion till the next session. CSSTA remaining far from being settled, economic cooperation between Beijing and Taipei is doomed to be fruitless. As Taiwan people cannot benefit from the reconciliation policies, they might feel less passionate for the government's mainland policy, which will surely have a detrimental effect upon cross-strait relations.

### *2.3 Taiwan political status to affect Nine in One election at year end, which in turn affects cross-strait relations*

Nine in One local election at the end of 2014 will, for the first time in Taiwan history, combine the elections of nine categories of office into one. Since it's only

one year before the 2016 general election, Nine in One election is deemed an important skirmish that might have a huge impact on the 2016 election.

Encumbered by central and local government's poor performance, dissatisfied public, and continuously emerging corruption cases, the KMT has found itself in an unfavorable situation for the upcoming election. Under such circumstances, if the DDP gains an advantage in the Nine in One election at year end, its confidence to win the election in 2016 will undoubtedly increase, and so will its supporters', which will probably have some impact on median voters, granting better chances for DDP in the 2016 election. This is why the DDP is reluctant to adjust its mainland policy, only to seriously endanger the peaceful development of cross-strait relations in the future.

KMT's internal conflict will be aggravated if the DDP gains an advantage in Nine in One election and Ma will be dragged into deeper trouble of internal struggle, power imbalance, surfacing conflicts and intensifying disputes. The KMT's internal cohesion and power will surely be weakened.