



Taiwan's 2008 Presidential Elections:

An Analysis of What Happened, and What May Happen Next

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Executive Summary:

- On March 22, 2008, the voters of Taiwan gave a landslide 58% victory to Ma Ying-Jeou, the presidential candidate of the KMT (Kuomintang, or “Nationalist Party”).
- The incumbent President, Chen Shui-Bian, was term-limited, but many voters nevertheless appeared to be expressing a loss of confidence in his party, the DPP (“Democratic Progressive Party”).
- In particular, voters were dismayed by DPP’s poor management of the executive branch, and by the corruption scandals involving the President’s family, which undermined the DPP’s reformist reputation.
- In addition, the KMT presented a much more attractive and energetic candidate than it had in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, which the DPP won.
- Voters were very concerned about Taiwan’s economic slowdown.
- Voters also heeded the strong anti-DPP message sent by the United States government, which has criticized the DPP for supposedly provoking China by taking small steps towards formal independence.
- Given that Taiwan already is already independent and sovereign in every practical sense, the voters appear to have made a pragmatic decision to mend relations with the U.S., whose military is the ultimate guarantor of Taiwan’s present-day de facto independence.
- Notably, the KMT’s Ma ensured his victory by promising to be a vigorous defender of Taiwan’s sovereignty.
- Over the last eight years, the DPP has led an appropriate campaign to strengthen Taiwan’s national consciousness. Ironically, it was Ma who took the best advantage of Taiwan consciousness, by running a campaign to appeal broadly to all Taiwanese, as opposed to the DPP’s tactics of appealing to ethnic resentments.
- Once Ma takes office on May 20, he will face formidable challenges in dealing with the corrupt old guard of the KMT party, which dominates Taiwan’s legislature. A great deal must be done to strengthen Taiwan’s defense capabilities.
- Rather than being intimidated by “the rise of China,” the United States and Taiwan should recognize that even powerful dictatorships can be inherently fragile. The long term objective of the U.S.-Taiwan alliance should be maintaining Taiwan’s sovereignty, and searching for ways to help restore the sovereignty of the Chinese people themselves, as well the sovereignty of the captive nations currently imprisoned in the Chinese empire.

What do you call a political party that loses the presidency in a 17 point landslide, two months after having been trounced in the legislative elections? A victim of its own success. At least that's the story in Taiwan, where the recent defeats of the Democratic

Progressive Party (DPP) demonstrate, ironically, the DPP's long-term success in changing Taiwan's national consciousness.

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The Rise of the Democratic Progressive Party

The DPP came to power in 2000, as the result of Taiwan's second direct presidential election. Chen Shui-Bian won the election with only 39% of the vote, thanks to a split between the ruling Kuomintang (Nationalist Party, KMT) and its ally, the People

First Party. The KMT had ruled Taiwan ever since the U.S. gave Taiwan to the Republic of China, following the Japanese surrender that ended World War II. Taiwan had last been in Chinese hands in 1895, when the Chinese Qing Dynasty (without asking the people of Taiwan) had ceded the island to Japanese, and the Japanese had crushed the efforts of the Taiwanese to establish an independent republic.

In 1945, most of China was ruled by Chiang Kai-Shek, who was also the head of the KMT party. Again, the Taiwanese were brutally repressed, most notably in the massacres of thousands of people that began on Feb. 28, 1947 (known in Taiwan as "the 2-2-8 incident"). After losing the Chinese civil war to Mao, Chiang, along with his army, apparatchiks, and other supporters, fled to Taiwan, where they established a dictatorship which ruled the island for decades, imposing the White Terror in the 1950s, which aimed to eliminate not only Communist subversion, but also the efforts of the Taiwanese majority to rule themselves, rather than submit to Chiang and his mainlander cadres.

As Chiang Kai-Shek gave way to his son, Chiang Ching-Kuo, a degree of liberalization was sometimes

allowed, perhaps because many of the younger Chiang's advisors had been educated at western universities. In 1986, the Democratic Progressive Party was established as the leading vehicle for Taiwanese seeking to create a government that respected political and civil rights. The DPP was successful, as martial law was lifted in 1987, and the one-party state began to give way to a multiparty democracy with a vibrant free press and free elections. The nation was blessed by the leadership of Lee Teng-Hui, the KMT party head who overcame opposition within his own party and guided Taiwan towards full democracy in the 1990s. Today he is justly revered as the father of Taiwan democracy.

The 2000 election of human rights lawyer Chen Shui-Bian, along with Vice-President Annette Lu (a human rights activist who had spent five years in prison) marked the first peaceful, democratic transition of government control in a Chinese-speaking nation.

In 2004, the KMT did not repeat its 2000 mistake of splitting with its allies. But the party did make the mistake of re-nominating its 2000 candidate Lien Chan, widely regarded as corrupt, and indisputably a lackluster campaigner. The DPP's Chen, an excellent, fiery public speaker, beat him by a mere 0.22%.

The DPP and its allies are known as the Pan-Green coalition, while the KMT and its friends are the Pan-Blue. The most ideological persons on each side are known as Deep Green or Deep Blue. As will be detailed below, Ma won the election for the KMT by making himself, more or less, pale Green.

The 2008 Election

With President Chen term-limited and unpopular, the DPP nominated [Frank Hsieh](#), the former Mayor of Kaoshiung (a large port city in southwest Taiwan, the DPP's strongest region). The KMT wisely

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nominated Ma Ying-Jeou (literally, Horse Hero-Nine), the former mayor of Taipei, Taiwan's capital and largest city.

On election day, March 22, Ma swept to a 58.5% to 41.5% victory, carrying 20 of 25 counties, and even narrowly carrying Kaoshiung City. In every county (except for one small county that was already 95% KMT), the KMT gained 7-10% over its 2004 showing. What happened?

One difference was that the candidates, in terms of oratorical skills and campaign energy, were evenly matched, unlike in 2000 and 2004.

This time, it was the KMT that ran an issues-based campaign. Rather than promoting a positive agenda, much of the DPP's rhetoric focused on personal attacks on Ma and his family. Among the charges were that Ma's wife (whom Ma met when they were students at Harvard Law School) had stolen some newspapers from the Harvard library.

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On March 16, less than a week before the election, the DPP government's Secretary-General at the Ministry of Education attacked Ma because Ma's deceased father had, supposedly, once had an extramarital affair. Although

the DPP had been narrowing the gap in the polls, the public backlash result from the Education official's remarks ended the DPP's momentum.¹

In addition, the KMT has a structural advantage of greater financial resources than the DPP. In part this is due to the KMT's closer ties to big business, and to the resources which the KMT was able to appropriate for itself during the dictatorship of the Chiangs.

The DPP's Corruption Problem

Far more serious than alleged theft of newspaper a quarter-century ago is Taiwan's endemic problem of corruption. Every year, Transparency International uses a variety of metrics to rate the degree of

corruption in the nations of the world. In the TI ratings, a 10 is the best score, and 0 is the worst. Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perception Index gives Taiwan a rating of 5.7. Macao and the United Arab Emirates had the same score, while Hong Kong was far superior (8.3), and China was far worse (3.5).

Put another way, Taiwan is about half-way between entirely clean and entirely corrupt. Taiwan is not the only democracy to score so poorly, but the ratings show that Taiwan has a very deep corruption problem.

The KMT was notoriously corrupt, and when Ma had served as Minister of Justice during an earlier KMT government, his efforts to prosecute corruption were quashed by the party.

The DPP had won elections as by offering itself as the party of clean government. But it too fell into corruption. Prosecutors brought credible charges against the wife of the President himself, alleging that she filed fraudulent receipts to obtain cash from a discretionary presidential fund, and used the money to buy diamond rings and other luxury items.

President Chen's response was to admit that the receipts were falsified, but claimed that the money was used to pay for secret diplomatic projects, and that as President, he had the authority (which is nowhere stated in Taiwanese law) to declare anything a state secret and prevent further legal inquiry.

Bipartisan tolerance for the culture of corruption was demonstrated at the October 2007 funeral of the gangster Chen Chi-Li. Several high-ranking KMT officials or their representatives attended the funeral—but so did DPP representatives. The DPP officials were paying their respects to the memory of man who had served time in prison for his role in the 1984 assassination in San Francisco of an

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American citizen, Henry Liu, because Liu had written a sharply critical biography of Chiang Ching-Kuo (the then-dictator of Taiwan, and the son of Chiang Kai-Shek).

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The Economy

The DPP was also blamed for slowing economic growth and rising unemployment during its tenure. Between the parties, the differences on economic policy are not large, but the party in power is naturally the one that bears the brunt of voter wrath.

The corporate income tax rate was recently lowered to 17.5% from 25%. However, this change, modeled

on the good example set by Ireland, whose 12.5% corporate income tax rate helped make Ireland the most prosperous nation in Europe, came too late to affect the economy sufficiently before the election.

The state energy monopoly, Taiwan Power Company, loses enormous sums by selling electricity and natural gas according to government-mandated price caps. Prices for water, also set by the government, have not risen for 15 years, leading to tremendous waste, and a lack of resources for investment in water treatment, so that most of Taiwan's cities spew untreated sewage into rivers and the ocean. This hardly helps Taiwan's efforts to promote itself as a site for eco-tourism and green high-tech industry.

In the Heritage Foundation's 2008 Economic Freedom Index, Taiwan ranks 26th-best in the world, and 6th-best in Asia—behind Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. (But far ahead of 119th-ranked China).

The Heritage scores range from 1 (no freedom) to 100 (complete freedom). Taiwan's overall rating is 71.0, meaning "mostly free." This is based on strong scores on Government Size (87.8), Monetary Freedom (83.3), Trade Freedom (86.7), and moderately good scores on Business Freedom (70.7), Fiscal Freedom (75.9), Investment Freedom (70), and Property Rights (70). Taiwan scores poorly on Freedom from Corruption (59), Labor Freedom (56.9), and Financial Freedom (50).

According to the country report section of the Heritage Index, starting a business in Taiwan takes an average of 48 days; dismissing an employee for poor performance is legally difficult; and work hour regulations are rigid. However, neither of Taiwan's major parties has indicated much interest in streamlining small business start-ups, or in reforming labor laws.

Ma's major economic proposal, thought up by his Vice-President Vincent Siew, was for a "Common Market" with China, although Ma was quickly forced to retreat from any suggestion of a real common market, which would allow the import of labor and agricultural products from China. Ma's current proposals are simply allowing regular direct air links with China, allowing extensive Chinese tourism, and allowing Chinese to buy real estate in Taiwan. Ma and Hsieh both favored loosening current restrictions on Taiwan corporate investment in China.

The post-election surges in Taiwan stocks and the value of the New Taiwan Dollar probably reflect excessive optimism about how much the effect the expanded business with China will have on the overall economy. A short-term property boom resulting from an influx of Chinese investors might Ma keep his promise of 6% economic growth (currently 5.7%), and unemployment reduced from 4% to 3%.

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But in any case, the voters were fed up with the DPP's economic management, and decided to give the other team a chance. At least, a KMT executive branch should provide more predictable regulation and licensing than in the DPP years, where very frequent changes of cabinet ministers and their subordinates resulted in an unstable regulatory environment, with bureaucrats left to their personal whims. Investors seeking regulatory permission to start projects were left dangling for months or years without final responses to their applications.

Preserving Taiwan's Independence

During the DPP's presidential tenure, support for so-called "re-unification" with China has declined from about 20% of the population to 12%—roughly

the same percentage as those who think of themselves as "Chinese only." Taiwan is in every practical sense a sovereign, independent state. [Under international law](#), a sovereign government is one which controls a defined territory and population. Taiwan easily meets the international law definition of "sovereign." All governmental decisions for Taiwan are made by a government chosen by the people of Taiwan, and no decisions are made by the dictatorship in Beijing, whose claims of sovereignty over Taiwan are wishful thinking.

Yet many other governments and international organizations

pretend that Taiwan is not sovereign. The result is humiliating for Taiwan diplomatically, and Taiwan citizens are often excluded from participation in international fora. Yet Taiwan still has diplomatic relations with most of the world, under the fiction that these embassies and consulates are "trade and cultural relations" offices. (Taiwan also has formal diplomatic relations with nearly two dozen nations.) Except in the pretend world of diplomacy-speak, the people of Taiwan are sovereign and independent.

Under Chen, the DPP took a variety of steps to recognize the obvious. These steps conformed to the Confucian principle that the first step of good government is "to rectify their names"—to call things what they really are.²

Thus, the word "China" was removed from some state-owned corporations. Passports now bear the word "Taiwan" along with "Republic of China."

In addition, efforts were made to dismantle the personality cult that Chiang Kai-Shek had created for himself. The "Chiang Kai-Shek International Airport" was renamed for Taoyuan, the county where it is located.

The "Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial"—an immense park and monument in the center of Taipei, built for Chiang posthumously by his KMT admirers—was renamed "National Democracy Memorial Hall." Gone are the exhibits showing off Chiang memorabilia, such as his automobile collection. On the top floor of the memorial, the immense statue of Chiang (seated in a Lincoln Memorial-style pose) remains; for a while the air space in the room was filled with hundreds of decorative kites made in the tradition of Taiwan's aboriginal peoples. At floor level, photographs and text detail the Taiwanese people's struggle for democracy—including the struggles against Chiang.

The name rectification campaign has infuriated not only the KMT, but also the Chinese government. For however much Mao hated Chiang, Chiang and Mao both believed in "One China."

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The referendum angered the U.S. State Department and President Bush, resulting in a dozen stern denunciations from major U.S. officials. The denunciations were a vindication of Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Hu Jintao's strategy of using the United States as a Chinese proxy to contain the Taiwan independence movement. What the U.S. has gotten in exchange, other than some favorable Chinese votes at the U.N., is not clear. China is supposedly helping with the North Korea problem, but that rogue state still has nuclear weapons.

On the one hand, the excitement over the referendum was ridiculous. Taiwan has been applying for U.N. membership every year for the last 15, and last year's application was made under the name of "Taiwan." The KMT offered a counter-referendum, for a U.N. application under the name of "Republic of China" or "Taiwan" or any other "practical" and honorable name. Nobody at the State Department pitched a fit over the KMT's referendum. On election day, both referenda

received about 90% of the votes cast, but were not adopted because fewer than 50% of eligible voters voted on the referenda. (Turnout was about 75% of eligible voters, and about half of the people who did vote did not pick up referenda ballots, which required going to a separate table.)

The votes do not indicate that the people of Taiwan do not want to join the U.N. A post-election poll showed that 67% support U.N. membership.³

However, Taiwan's voters are well aware that the major deterrent to Chinese conquest of Taiwan is the U.S. Seventh Fleet, and that a strong

relationship with the U.S. is the *sine qua non* for the continuation of Taiwan's independence.

The repeated U.S. complaints about the "UN for Taiwan" referendum caused serious damage to the DPP. The U.N. referendum was transparently an exercise in domestic politics, aimed to boost pro-DPP turnout in the presidential election. Given China's U.N. Security Council veto, it was absolutely certain that Taiwan would not be admitted to the U.N.

De jure independence would be nice, but many voters apparently felt that *de facto* independence was what really mattered. So in rejecting the DPP for pushing formal independence too far, Taiwan's voters were not voting against independence, but were voting, pragmatically, for doing whatever it takes to maintain the alliance which is the basis of their actual, present independence.

The Confucian principle of "rectify the names" was in effect replaced by the Shakespearian one: "What's in a name?"⁴

Ma worked effectively to make himself the candidate of practical independence. The 2004 KMT candidate, Lien Chan, had traveled to China in 2005, where he received a royal welcome, establishing direct KMT ties with the Communist Party of China (CCP). The reasonable perception among many Taiwanese was that Lien would readily sell out Taiwan for personal gain for himself and his KMT cronies.

Ma has never traveled to China. Instead, he moved closer and closer to what amounts to a light Green position. A few years ago, he had been saying that "the future of Taiwan should be decided by people on both sides of Taiwan Strait."

A few days before the election, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao offered to begin talks with Taiwan under the One China guideline, and said that "all the

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Chinese people, including our Taiwan compatriots” should decide Taiwan’s future. Ma [retorted](#):

The Republic of China is a sovereign independent democratic state. The future of

Taiwan should be decided by Taiwan’s 23-million people, and no intervention by the PRC is to be tolerated. What PRC Premier Wen Jiabao said was not only rude, irrational, arrogant, and absurd, but also self-righteous. And it ignored the mainstream opinion of Taiwan’s 23-million people. We want to express our most serious protest.

The second paragraph of the statement affirmed a formula which the DPP’s President Chen had announced when Chen first took office:

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Our policy has always been “All for Taiwan, All for the People.” Under this spirit, we think that the three nos that have helped to maintain the status quo, “no reunification with the PRC, no independence on the part of Taiwan, and no use of force by either side of the Strait,” can best represent Taiwan’s mainstream opinion and the need for cross-Strait relations.

The only significant difference between the DPP’s approach and Ma’s statement was that Ma said “Republic of China” rather than “Taiwan.” The difference is important, because “Taiwan” is unquestionably a nation separate from “China,” whereas the “the Republic of China” (which was founded in 1911 in China, after the overthrow of the last emperor) is a term which at least theoretically still connects Taiwan to the mainland.

As a press release from the DPP noted, Ma had essentially adopted the DPP’s position.

The riots which broke out in Tibet twelve days before the election were expected to help the DPP, reminding people of repression of one of the captive

nations in the Chinese empire. (The Uigher people, who also live in the west of the Chinese empire, are treated even worse than Tibetans, but they have no Dalai Lama to present their case on a world stage.)

Instead, Tibet gave Ma the opportunity to prove his toughness on China. When the DPP’s Frank Hsieh warned that Taiwan might become like Tibet, Ma scoffed, for as Ma said, unlike Tibet, “Taiwan is sovereign.” Ma had also [called](#) China’s suppression of Tibet “savage and stupid.”

Absurdly, the day before the election, Hsieh suggested postponing the vote so that Ma and he could stage a Tibet solidarity sit-in. Besides being a pathetic ploy of a candidate who was behind in the polls, the call for postponing the election could make a voter wonder if the DPP was really more committed to orderly democracy than the modern KMT.

Indeed, in January, Chen had mused about imposing martial law. At the time, there was a vigorous debate about how to distribute the referenda ballots. The DPP wanted every voter to be given referenda ballots at the same time he was given the presidential ballot; the KMT wanted to make voters get the ballots separately. Under supposed fears that conflicts at polling places might lead to violence, Chen raised the specter of martial law, sounding more like a Chiang than like a democratic reformer; hence, voters who were afraid that the KMT might backslide to its pre-democracy traditions had much less reason to trust the DPP as a guardian of democratic independence.

Taiwan Consciousness

Ironically, the growth of Taiwan national consciousness also helped create the DPP’s defeat. As noted above, the percentage of the population that considers itself Chinese-only is small and shrinking.

A plurality considers itself Taiwanese-only, while “Taiwanese and Chinese both” is also a large share of the population. Under the eight years of DPP rule,

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the shift away from China consciousness and towards Taiwan consciousness has been significant, and public dissatisfaction with Chen himself during the last two years of his tenure does not appear to have slowed the growth of Taiwan consciousness.

This is a healthy trend. For thousands of years, the Chinese and the aboriginal peoples of Taiwan developed separately. Taiwan was never part of the

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ancient Chinese empires. During the 17th century, part of Taiwan was colonized by the Dutch, who were in turn displaced by a half-Japanese half-Chinese warlord named KoXinga. KoXinga's son wound up on the wrong side of a Chinese dynastic war, and so in 1675, the western plains of Taiwan became a Chinese possession, while the eastern mountains, comprising over half the island's territory, remained in aboriginal hands. (It was not until 1878 that the Chinese made

even a nominal claim to rule eastern Taiwan, and their actual ability to exercise sovereignty there was nil.)

Beginning in the 17th century, there was extensive immigration to Taiwan from southern China, particularly Fujian province, to which western Taiwan was administratively linked. The main language of these immigrants is Taiwanese, also known as Min Nan. Other immigrants from south China spoke a dialect of the Hakka language.

While Taiwan was treated as an insignificant, barbaric frontier by the mainland governments, the immigrants to Taiwan, many of whom intermarried with the aborigines, developed their own cultural practices, including frequent revolts against the corrupt, oppressive, and incompetent governors sent by mainland.⁵

When Chiang Kai-Shek fled to Taiwan, he and his army imposed a White Terror, under which about 200,000 Taiwanese were imprisoned by the police state. Chiang also forcibly Sinicized Taiwan, imposing

Mandarin (the language of Beijing) as the national language. In furtherance of his fantasy that he would re-conquer the mainland, Taiwan's schools and media were forced to adopt a party line that Taiwan and the mainland were and always had been inseparable parts of One China. Chiang made similar claims about Tibet and Mongolia, although it was Mao in 1950 who actually conquered Tibet (which had been a sovereign nation for most of its long history). Outer Mongolia was saved from China by its alliance with the Soviet Union.

Educational reforms and the construction of public monuments and museums under DPP have aimed to recover the Taiwanese culture which was suppressed under the Chiang dictatorship. The de-sinicization project is one of which Jacques Derrida might have approved: deconstructing the myth of the "center" (China's Mandarin name is literally "center-nation", zhong-guo) and empowering those on the "periphery" (Taiwan itself, and particularly the pre-1949 Taiwanese who did not live in north Taiwan, which was dominated by the 1949 mainlanders).

Taiwan consciousness at its best is a beautiful vision: a people long striving for freedom and self-government, and finally achieving it. A vibrant, outward-looking, commercial nation—confidently engaging with Japan and the Philippines (whose outer islands are just as close to Taiwan island as is mainland China) and with the broader world. Innovative, freedom-loving, and oriented to international trade, Taiwan is the opposite of the often stagnant, self-satisfied, and xenophobic China. The New Taiwan embraces equality and respect for all its people, whether they be the descendants of aborigines from 5,000 years ago, or the people who left the mainland in search of a better life in 1690 or in 1949, or Taiwan's newest citizens—

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such as the many Vietnamese brides who are raising families with Taiwan-born husbands.

So far, so good. But in practice, and especially during election campaigns, things were different. The View from Taiwan, a blog written by a strongly pro-DPP American expatriate living in Kaoshiung, reports that in 2008, the DPP's presidential campaign speeches were given almost exclusively in Taiwanese. The message to Mandarin-speaking descendants of the 1949 mainlanders was that the DPP was not really interested in earning their votes. DPP used code words to polarize its supporters against the descendants of the 1949 immigrants.

The View from Taiwan [recounted](#):

Went to a meeting of FAPA, the [Deep Green] main pro-Taiwan group in the US, in Taipei on Thursday. It was painful to watch. Sometimes I contemplate taking out ROC citizenship, but the brave new world they advocate doesn't include me or my children—and if a strong supporter like me gets that vibe, how then the young on the street who chatter in a delightfully liquid lingo that is predominately Mandarin, with leaven of Taiwanese and English? Every person at the FAPA meet was older than I, and they were speaking Taiwanese. Not one speaker or two, but Every. Single. One...Not one of those people took the time to compose and deliver their speech in Mandarin, a language spoken by everyone in the room—and, mind you, a language understood by the people they most urgently need to communicate with: the Chinese. Of

course there was no English, the language of the international media. Brilliant to hold a press event in a language the press don't speak. Yes, Mandarin is the language of the hated colonialist KMT. Yes, Mandarin was imposed at gunpoint. But if you want people to listen to you, you have to speak their language. For all its gaping flaws and debased values, *the*

KMT offers this multiethnic island a multiethnic vision. The DPP and its supporters still do not. (emphasis in last sentences added).

Moreover, like U.S. Republican politicians who in 1884 were still waving the bloody shirt of the American Civil War, the DPP could not let a national election pass without making an issue out of the 228 incident. The DPP was right, in the past, to push for telling the truth about 228, discussion of which was illegal under the Chiang dictatorship.

But a terrible crime perpetrated in 1947 is not much reason to vote for somebody in 2008. Nobody who was responsible for 228 was on the 2008 ballot. Indeed, Ma Ying-Jeou had not even been born in 1947. Nevertheless, in his role as a KMT leader, he apologized for 228. For some voters, this was good enough, and continued attention to the grievances of the past was less important than choosing a President with plans to move Taiwan forward.

It was the DPP government which created a Council for Hakka Affairs, a Hakka channel on the Public Television Service, and Hakka Studies courses in universities. Yet it was Ma, who speaks excellent Hakka, who spent weeks campaigning intensively in Hakka areas, speaking the local language. Of course Ma and his running-mate Vincent Siew also campaigned in Mandarin, the one language that everyone in Taiwan understands.

Who was the best candidate for a voter committed to Taiwan consciousness? The candidate whose party pandered to intra-island ethnic divisions, or the one who worked hard for the votes of *all* the people?

Future Prospects

It has been remarked that perhaps the DPP's greatest accomplishment has been making the KMT greener. Long before the 2000 election, political competition from the DPP had forced the KMT to govern better.

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filthy cities into clean, vibrant metropolises with parks and excellent mass transit.

President-elect Ma is not a Deep Green, willing to take great risks in pursuit of *de jure* independence. But he was elected as, in effect, a pale Green.⁶ The DPP's years in power moved the political center in a DPP direction.

Taiwan's independence is now an irreversible fact of political life, even if the need to placate the U.S. State Department means that Taiwan's President

cannot say so out loud. As with the broken 1951 "Treaty of Amity" between Tibet and China, the Chinese promise to Hong Kong—"One China, Two Systems"—has turned out to have a lot more "one China" than "two systems," except in regard to economic freedom. As of December 2007, only 18% of Taiwanese believe that "One China, Two Systems" is a viable formula for dealing with cross-strait relations.

Ma is rhetorically committed to "One China, two systems, two different meanings," but Taiwanese public opinion forbids any political integration with an undemocratic China.

After taking office on May 20, Ma will enjoy a honeymoon period prolonged by the pro-blue orientation of most of Taiwan's media. He will face a tough challenge in dealing with the KMT legislature, whose super-majority does not need Ma's approval to pass laws. Even as party leader, he was unable to get the KMT-majority legislature to pass some important defense appropriations. His presidency could easily be ruined by the backwards-looking, corrupt, old guard of the KMT, the party which now dominates the legislature (the Legislative Yuan, or LY).

Ma has a justified reputation as an affable man, and in the short term, his personal skills will help

him improve relations with the U.S. and China. But he also has a reputation for being easily pressured, leaving him, and Taiwan, vulnerable to KMT's Deep Blue troglodytes. President Ma may also be vulnerable to behind-the-scenes pressure exerted by China—especially when exerted via Taiwan companies doing business in China, who are readily coerced into pushing the Chinese Communist Party's agenda. After the Tiananmen Square atrocity in 1989, it was Taiwanese businessmen with Chinese connections who were the main political force urging Taiwan to ignore the sanctions that the civilized world had imposed on the Beijing dictatorship.

China currently has 1,328 short-range Dongfeng 11 and DF15 ballistic missiles aimed at Taiwan. In different ways, the KMT and the DPP have both been responsible for a serious decline over the last decade in Taiwan's ability to defend itself from China. Both parties now agree that at least three percent of the Gross Domestic Product should be spent on defense, but choices for how to spend defense money have too often been based on symbolism rather than hard-headed analysis of defense needs.

Taiwan could not defend itself in a long-term war with China, but Taiwan could harden its land-based defenses, and improve its sea and air defenses so that strategists of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) could have no confidence that a first, second, or third wave of Chinese assaults on Taiwan would be guaranteed to leave China in secure control of an entire island with its valuable economic infrastructure available for Chinese exploitation.

Indeed, the Bush administration's willingness to act as a mouthpiece for China in pressuring Taiwan against movement towards *de jure* independence should be understood in the context of administration and Congressional frustration with [years of Taiwanese failure](#) to follow through

Ma has a justified reputation as an affable man, and in the short term, his personal skills will help him improve relations with the U.S. and China.

Taiwan's independence is now an irreversible fact of political life, even if the need to placate the U.S. State Department means that Taiwan's President cannot say so out loud.

on already-approved arms purchases, and on grossly insufficient levels of general defense spending in Taiwan.

A more robust Taiwanese defense force would give President Ma more bargaining power with China, as Chinese moderates could credibly tell the PLA hardliners that a military option for taking Taiwan is unrealistic. Much of candidate Ma's White Paper on Defense Policy is vague, and consists of generalities and platitudes.⁷ However, he has spoken of the need to harden air and naval bases against a first wave of Chinese missiles and fighter plane attacks, and of strengthening the survivability of the command and communications structure.⁸

American appeasement advocates who contend that the U.S. must accommodate itself to the rise of China, and eventually to a Chinese *Anschluss* of Taiwan, are as wrong-headed as their predecessors of the 1970s who saw the Soviet rise as irreversible. In both cases, the pessimists failed to recognize the inherent fragility of dictatorships. It was not historically inevitable that Lithuania, Ukraine, Armenia, and other captive nations would always be ruled by a dictatorship in Moscow. Nor is it historically inevitable that the Tibetans, Uighers, Mongols, or Taiwanese must be ruled by a dictatorship in Beijing.

Whatever the direction of U.S. policy towards China, a free, democratic, and sovereign Taiwan is the foundation.

One of Taiwan's most-internationally esteemed scholars, Dr. Lin Chong-Pin writes:

However the U.S. eventually decides to face the rise of China, Taiwan is indispensable. To engage the rising China, Taiwan is the beacon for China's democracy; to contain it, Taiwan guards the most vital portal of the first island

chain; and to accommodate it, Taiwan stands as a buffer.⁹

The U.S. government's poor relations with President Chen's administration were exacerbated because the U.S., in excessive deference to Chinese sensibilities, generally refused to allow high-level U.S. and Taiwan officials to communicate with each other directly and frequently. The 2008 election of President Ma provides an opportunity for the U.S. to stop letting China set the terms of America's own diplomatic communications.

The 2008 election in the United States offers an opportunity for Americans to consider whether to continue a policy of accommodation with China—resembling the Nixon-Ford-Carter approach to the Soviet Union. Or whether to consider the lessons of President Reagan's Soviet policy, and begin to look for ways to strengthen the protection of the free nations which are most threatened by China, and to envision a long-term strategy for freedom of the captive nations of the Chinese empire, and for freedom for the Chinese people themselves.

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Endnotes

¹ "Chuang again apologizes over Ma remarks," China Post, Mar. 27, 2008.

² From the Analects of Confucius:

If a king were to entrust you with a territory which you could govern according to your ideas, what would you do first?

Confucius replied: "My first task would certainly be to rectify the names."

The puzzled disciple asked: "Rectify the names? Is this a joke?"

Confucius replied: "If the names are not correct, if they do not match realities, language has no object. If language is without an object, action becomes impossible—and therefore all human affairs disintegrate and their management becomes pointless and impossible. Hence, the very first task of a true statesman is to rectify the names."

³ *Taipei Times*, Mar. 28, 2008.

⁴ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, act 2, scene 2, lines 1-2:

What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.

⁵ Although a particular uprising of a colonized people may not succeed, the uprising itself affirms the colonized people's continuing desire for self-determination, which is an inherent natural right, and which is recognized by international law. When the Irish people began the Easter Uprising of 1916, they issued a Proclamation of the Republic which stated in part:

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty: six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and its exaltation among the nations.

The 1916 Irish Uprising was suppressed within a few days, but it set the stage for a war of independence which finally restored the sovereignty of the Irish people in 1922.

⁶ To be precise, Green and Blue make Cyan, which looks like a pale Blue.

⁷ "Ma/Siew White Paper on Defense Policy: A New Military for a Secure and Peaceful Taiwan," (Summary), Sept. 2, 2007. The one significant innovation is a desire to move away from conscription, and towards a volunteer force.

⁸ Ma Ying-Jeou, "A SMART Strategy for National Security," speech before the Association for the Promotion of National Security, Republic of China, Feb. 26, 2008.

⁹ Lin Chong-Pin, "China's Emerging Grand Strategy," paper presented at University of West Bohemia, Pilsen, Czech Republic, conference on "Contemporary Security Dilemmas: Reflections on Security in Central Europe and East Asia," Oct. 31, 2006. Dr. Lin is head of the [Foundation on International and Cross-Strait Studies](#), and is also a professor of International Relations at National Chengchi University.

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More articles on Taiwan are available at independenceinstitute.org and at <http://davekopel.org/international.htm#Asia>. Kopel's Chinese language website (in both traditional and simplified) is kopel.tw. Taiwan Presidential Election Analysis with David Kopel. Originally broadcast on KBDI-TV channel 12, Denver, April 4, 2008. Filmed at the Public Television Service station, Taipei, Taiwan, March 20, 2008. Kopel interviews Dr. Yen Chen-Sen from the National Chengchi University's Institute of International Relations and Dr. Lai I-Chung from Taiwan Thinktank. Video for the hour-long program is available at: http://www.kbdi.org/on_demand/video_player.cfm?series=20943835.