

The Democratic Progressive Party in 2000: Obstacles and Opportunities*

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Chen Shui-bian's March 2000 election to the presidency of the Republic of China on Taiwan was the greatest triumph in the Democratic Progressive Party's 16-year history. The victory crowned the party's rise from an underground opposition movement to a mainstream political party capable of winning Taiwan's highest elected office. Capturing the top post not only increased the party's political influence tremendously, but also enhanced its legitimacy and popularity. In sum, the presidential election result set the party on a new course for the future.

Nevertheless, Chen's victory was not the unmitigated success many in the DPP had expected it would be. The office into which Chen was inaugurated in May 2000 bears little resemblance to that occupied by Taiwan's previous two presidents, Lee Teng-hui and Chiang Ching-kuo. Under Lee and Chiang, the presidential office was the centre of power in Taiwan; its occupant exercised decisive command over both the legislative and executive branches of government. But the authority of the ROC presidency under Lee and Chiang was ephemeral; the true source of power for those presidents was their dual role as chief executives and chairmen of the ruling party, the Kuomintang (KMT). Since assuming office, President Chen and his party have discovered that the ROC constitution establishes a weak presidency, and divides real political power between the legislature and cabinet. Although the president is empowered to appoint the head of government, or premier, lacking the support of a legislative majority, neither president nor premier can govern effectively. In President Chen's first year in office, his party held only a third of the legislature's seats. As a result, the DPP was unable to implement Chen's legislative initiatives and his influence and authority faced severe limitations.

President Chen's election was a turning-point for Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party. But the long-term significance of this event is not easily discerned. How did the DPP overcome the obstacles arrayed against it to win a national election? What does Chen's victory reveal about the party's standing with Taiwanese voters? And what does this election portend for the DPP's future – and for the future of Taiwan?

From Permanent Opposition to Contender for Power

For well over a decade, the DPP's role was limited to that of a permanent opposition. The party consistently won between 30 and 40 per cent of the vote nation-wide, enough to make it a significant political player but not enough to make it a contender for national power. The

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KMT's historical advantages seemed overwhelming. The Kuomintang had dominated Taiwan politics since the Republic of China assumed control over Taiwan upon Japan's surrender in 1945. After it was forced off the Chinese mainland in 1949, its leaders worked hard to establish it as the island's uncontested ruling party. The KMT's approach to governing combined two complementary elements: an authoritarian institutional structure and a political strategy based on popular mobilization.

Although the institutions described in the ROC constitution are democratic, the KMT-led government used the state of war between the KMT and Chinese Communist Party to justify curtailing its democratic features. Political and civil liberties – including the right to form new political parties – were suspended under martial law provisions in effect from 1947 to 1987, while members of the national legislative bodies elected on the mainland before 1949 were retained in office until the early 1990s. These “emergency measures” guaranteed the KMT's political monopoly for more than 40 years. Thus, members of the Mainlander minority (those who came to the island with the KMT after 1945) continued to run the central government with little input or interference from the “Taiwanese” majority as late as the 1980s.

Even as the Kuomintang sought to insulate political institutions from popular pressures, it also recognized the need to penetrate Taiwanese society. Given Taiwan's perilous location less than 100 miles from a large and hostile People's Republic of China, it was not enough for the KMT to coerce the Taiwanese into passive obedience. The party needed the people's active support if it was to survive long enough to accomplish its most important objective, wresting the Chinese mainland from communist control. To win this support, the KMT established elected offices at the village, township, municipal and provincial levels. Election to a local post conferred both social status and material benefits, and competition was fierce. By the mid-1950s, tens of thousands of native Taiwanese had been recruited into the KMT, mostly through local elections. Elections, in turn, gave rise to an elaborate network of local factions that competed for power in municipal and township races. Although nearly every faction was affiliated with the KMT, the competition among factions in each locality was intense.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the Kuomintang used this two-pronged strategy to manage domestic politics on the island. Even as the ruling party protected the central government's policy-making apparatus from popular participation, it encouraged Taiwanese to take part in politics at the provincial level and below – so long as they did so under the KMT umbrella. Beginning in 1968, a few Taiwan-elected politicians even attained national office, winning supplementary seats in national legislative bodies.

The Genesis of the Democratic Progressive Party

In the 1970s, a small group of dissident intellectuals made common cause with a handful of opposition-leaning politicians who had carved out niches for themselves within the realm of electoral politics. Together they

constructed a loose association they called the “Dangwai” or “Outside the Party” movement. While Dangwai intellectuals struggled to stay one step ahead of government censors and circulate their dissident publications, Dangwai politicians used elected offices and electoral campaigns to fight for political reform. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the movement took on more and more characteristics of a political party. Dangwai “service centres” across the island provided a broad organizational base. Politicians running under the Dangwai flag became bolder and more organized, adopting common platforms and co-ordinated campaign strategies. Activists circulated the candidates’ campaign platforms in their publications and speeches. By the mid-1980s, the movement was a party in all but name. Then, in September 1986, Dangwai activists meeting in Taipei to prepare for year-end elections voted to defy the martial law ban and found a political party, which they called the Democratic Progressive Party.

Despite the party’s illegal status under martial law, the KMT-led government declined to prosecute its founders. In 1987, martial law was lifted, and the DPP won recognition as a political party. The young party participated in elections, which occurred almost every year thereafter, but its vote share stagnated. In the four legislative elections held between 1989 and 1998, the DPP’s vote hovered between 28 and 33 per cent. DPP candidates performed better in most executive contests; in elections for county and city executives (1989, 1993, 1997) and provincial governor (1994), the DPP captured between 38 and 43 per cent of the vote. Even the DPP’s 2000 presidential win did not depart from this pattern: Chen Shui-bian won 39 per cent of the vote – a shade below the DPP’s average vote share in executive races. But because Chen faced a divided KMT, he was able to turn the DPP’s minority vote share into a victory over KMT-politician-turned independent Soong Chu-yu (with 37 per cent of the vote) and KMT nominee Lien Chan (with 23 per cent).

In short, the DPP has never won a majority of votes nation-wide, nor has it held more than a third of the seats in the Legislative Yuan. By the end of the 1990s, it appeared the DPP might never overturn these barriers to become a serious contender for national power. It seemed fated to play the role of permanent opposition pioneered by the Japan Social Democratic Party and Mexico’s Party of National Action (PAN), both of which had contested elections for decades without attaining national power. One question frustrated DPP activists and intrigued political scientists: why was the DPP unable to break through the 40 per cent ceiling on its popular vote share – a ceiling that applied even to its successful presidential bid?

This article argues that two factors best explain the DPP’s disappointing electoral performance between 1986 and 2000. First, Taiwan’s political system preserves undemocratic elements that give the dominant party, the KMT, significant advantages over its competitors. Secondly, during most of its history, the DPP emphasized ideological and symbolic politics, which limited its appeal to Taiwan’s pragmatic, conservative majority.

The KMT's Structural Advantages

Chen Shui-bian's election as president may yet reshape Taiwan's political landscape. Clearly, many of the advantages that benefited the KMT in the past will not survive the defeat of its presidential candidate and the election of an opposition president. Whatever happens in the future, however, there is no question that the KMT enjoyed a strong advantage over its opponents throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Over the course of its long history as Taiwan's dominant party, the Kuomintang accumulated numerous policy successes and a large popular base. While these accomplishments gave it a head start in electoral competition even after the DPP came on the scene, they are not inherently unfair or undemocratic. At the same time, some of the political institutions and practices that became ingrained in Taiwan during the period of single-party KMT rule actively suppress opposition parties' opportunities to participate and compete effectively. These phenomena *are* inherently unfair and undemocratic; however, they have also created a backlash recently that benefits the KMT's leading opponents, the DPP and the newly-formed People First Party (PFP). This backlash helped give President Chen his narrow victory.

There is no doubt that the KMT secured its political power over Taiwan through undemocratic means. Still, to understand its continued popularity and electoral success – even after the advent of competitive, multi-party elections – one must acknowledge its impressive accomplishments. Above all, KMT-led governments managed for more than 50 years to achieve sustained economic growth and development (the fruits of which were divided relatively equally among Taiwanese) while protecting the island's security and autonomy in a perilous time. The ROC government's economic and political successes in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s played a key role in solidifying the KMT's popular base and promoting its electoral fortunes.

The KMT's social foundation is extraordinarily broad, thanks to its strategy of mass incorporation. Over the decades, the KMT built a cross-class coalition that included farmers (first mobilized through land reform, then through Farmers Associations), labour (organized into state-sponsored unions), government employees, military personnel and entrepreneurs (granted special access to the state through party-sponsored business associations). The only significant constituencies omitted from this coalition were independent professionals and entrepreneurs in small and medium-sized businesses. Until the 1970s, the former sector was relatively small, and the latter was brought under the KMT umbrella through the patronage networks known as local political factions. Thus, the only social sectors available to the opposition movement were a small community of independent intellectuals and professionals, and disgruntled politicians whose personal ambition or ideological preferences could not be satisfied if they remained within the KMT. (Many of these politicians had cultivated networks of supporters whose loyalty shifted to the opposition along with that of their leaders.)

The willingness of most Taiwanese to support the KMT is not surprising, given the party's record of economic management. To begin with, a KMT-led government implemented the land reform programme that transformed thousands of tenant farmers into independent landowners. The landlords whose property was appropriated represented a small minority; for most rural-dwelling Taiwanese, the land reform was a great boon. But agriculture soon yielded its dominant economic role to manufacturing. By 1990, Taiwan had become the world's 14th largest trading nation, with more than 95 per cent of its exports taking the form of industrial products. Along with industrialization came higher incomes and living standards: between 1950 and 1990, per capita income increased 60-fold. Taiwan's long-term economic growth rate was 8.8 per cent between 1952 and 1990.¹ Throughout this period, Taiwan enjoyed social stability and peaceful relations with its neighbours, despite the unsettled relationship between the ROC and PRC, both of which hoped to impose its own form of government on the other.

It should not be a surprise, then that many Taiwanese voters preferred the KMT to other political parties. As recently as the late 1990s, Taiwanese consistently rated the KMT above the DPP on key political issues. For example, a 1998 DPP survey found that 35.6 per cent of voters thought the KMT was the party most able to enhance economic prosperity, while only 10.3 per cent believed the DPP was most able to do so. On the issue of national security, the KMT enjoyed an even larger advantage: 46.5 per cent of voters thought the KMT was best able to ensure national security, compared to only 6.4 per cent for the DPP. Overall, more than twice as many of those surveyed said they would prefer the KMT to lead Taiwan as said they wanted the DPP in charge.²

Given the KMT's broad social base and impressive record of accomplishments, even after a decade and a half of two-party competition, the DPP's biggest successes to date were by-products of KMT missteps. Chen Shui-bian won the Taipei mayoral election in 1994 with just under 44 per cent of the vote, thanks to a split in the KMT's traditional coalition. When the KMT co-operated with its break-away faction, the New Party, in 1998, Chen lost the mayoral election, despite gaining approval ratings above 70 per cent and increasing his vote share by more than two percentage points. In the 1997 municipal executive elections, maverick candidacies split the KMT in many districts, allowing the DPP to capture 12 out of 21 municipal executive seats with only 43 per cent of the votes cast. The 2000 presidential election was a replay of the 1994 Taipei mayor's race. Chen Shui-bian almost certainly would not be president today had Soong Chu-yu not wrenched away the key KMT constituencies of Mainlanders, urban moderates and local factions in

1. Chu-yuan Cheng, "The ROC's role in the world economy," *Issues and Studies*, November 1992. Reprinted in Jason C. Hu (ed.), *Quiet Revolutions on Taiwan, Republic of China* (Taipei: Kwang Hwa Publishing Company, 1994), pp. 145–49.

2. "Cross-strait relationship: survey on party images in Taiwan," *Taiwan International Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (1998). Available on-line at www.dppmission.org/TIR/TIR_V4_14.HTML. Accessed 6/1/99.

north-central Taiwan. But a divided KMT helps the DPP only in executive elections; in legislative elections, where multi-member districts promote KMT unity and discipline, the DPP's vote share remained below 35 per cent through the 1990s.

The KMT's broad social base and policy successes provide positive incentives for voters to prefer its candidates. At the same time, however, some characteristics of Taiwan's political system work to make life more difficult for opposition parties – especially the DPP. Above all, the DPP has found it nearly impossible to compete with the KMT's political machine. Although direct manipulation of elections through fraud is rare in Taiwan today, politicians and local factions affiliated with the KMT control networks capable of mobilizing millions of votes. These networks, riddled with corruption, intimidation and vote buying, undermine fair competition.

Clientelistic networks are most important in local elections. They are somewhat less effective in mobilizing voters in national legislative contests, and least effective in large-scale executive races, such as the provincial governor's race or a presidential election.³ But local networks cannot be counted out as a force in Legislative Yuan contests, because Taiwan's electoral system (single, non-transferable voting in multi-member districts) allows candidates to win legislative seats with startlingly few votes – often well under 20 per cent of those cast. The greatest uncertainty surrounding local networks concerns the stability of their loyalty to the KMT. Some local factions, especially in Central Taiwan, abandoned their party to support Soong Chu-yu's independent presidential bid. Soong's backers included Taichung Country's Red Faction, led by Liu Sung-fan (a former speaker of the Legislative Yuan) and the Lin Faction of Chiayi Country, headed by former Justice Minister Liao Cheng-hao. All three of these politicians – Soong, Liu and Liao – enjoyed long careers in the KMT prior to 1999.

As long as the KMT was in power, it was impossible for the DPP (or any other party) to compete with the Kuomintang machine on its own terms. Only the KMT was in a position to deploy the political and economic resources of the state to support a pervasive system of patronage networks. In order to keep the networks loyal and compliant, the ruling party maintained a steady flow of public works projects, patronage appointments, "safe seat" nominations and cash to its lower-level supporters. At best, the DPP could offer only nominations; otherwise, candidates were on their own. Even with Chen Shui-bian in the presidential office, the DPP will find it very difficult to displace the KMT as the purveyor of grassroots patronage. And if the DPP does attempt to channel public money to its supporters, KMT and PFP legislators will do their best to obstruct such measures.

Another factor obstructing the DPP's progress is the KMT's huge financial advantage. Taiwan's long-standing ruling party seized assets

3. Electing a provincial governor turns out to have been a one-time event. Prior to 1994, the governor was appointed; before a second election could be held, the post was abolished.

from the departing Japanese colonial regime and created many new ones from scratch. According to the KMT's own estimates, its assets total about US\$2.6 billion at the beginning of 2001.⁴ A *Taipei Times* report dated 1 March 2000 put the figure much higher, at US\$6.7 billion. The DPP, by contrast, has long suffered extreme economic straits. Until 1997, the party relied on individual donations for most of its income; it laboured under a burden of chronic debt and financial shortfall. In 1997 the situation improved when the government began paying subsidies to political parties. Nevertheless, in early 2001 the DPP reported assets of US\$900,000, a tiny fraction of the KMT war chest.⁵

Related to the KMT's riches is the special treatment it receives from most of Taiwan's leading mass media outlets. Until 1987, all of Taiwan's TV stations were owned by party and government agencies; the publishers of the major newspapers were routinely elected to the KMT Central Committee. After the ROC government lifted martial law in 1987, a much wider range of voices was permitted, but well-established media companies, especially the *United Daily News* and *China Times*, continued to enjoy significant competitive advantages. These two newspaper groups leaned toward different KMT factions, but both were (and continue to be) highly critical of the DPP. When cable television arrived in the early 1990s the range of perspectives available on television broadened, but the quality and objectivity of news reporting remains patchy.

Finally, over the course of five decades as Taiwan's ruling party, KMT officials made all the administrative and judicial appointments in the central government (and most of those in municipal governments), raising the spectre of administrative and judicial bias against the opposition. The DPP and other opposition parties have long complained of government officials using their positions to campaign for KMT candidates, as well as harassment of opposition supporters by police and tax authorities. In the 2000 election, incumbent prime minister and KMT vice-presidential candidate Vincent Siew (Hsiao Wan-chang) raised eyebrows more than once when he attended events in his capacity as head of government, clad in campaign garb.

The DPP's Internal Liabilities

While the Democratic Progressive Party can – and often does – point to the many ways in which the KMT has exploited imperfections in Taiwan's political process to obstruct its progress, it cannot entirely escape blame for its stagnant electoral performance. Over the years the party has made decisions that have hurt its prospects at the ballot box. One error that the party could not easily have avoided was the decision to include all anti-KMT elements in Taiwanese society in the DPP. Because the KMT is a cross-class coalition of social groups, the DPP had

4. "KMT estimates assets to be entrusted," *Taiwan Headlines*, 5 January 2000. Available on-line at <http://www.taiwanheadlines.gov.tw/20000105/20000105p2.html>.

5. *Ibid.*

no choice but to adopt the same model, pulling together the anti-KMT members of all social groups. Each DPP supporter had his or her own reasons for opposing the KMT. Opposition supporters included intellectuals, founders of small and medium-sized firms, local politicians, feminists and environmentalists. They had little in common beyond their preference for democracy (whether for ideological reasons or out of personal ambition) and desire to remove the KMT from power.

As the major elements of the DPP's democratization agenda were implemented, the party had difficulty finding new issues that would unify its existing supporters and attract new members and voters. In the absence of other issues with equally broad appeal, it made a more serious error: it chose a political strategy based on ethnic mobilization. Ethnic politics solidified the DPP's core, but eventually drove away pro-democracy Mainlanders who came to see it as an anti-Mainlander party, and also nervous moderates who viewed its positions on cross-straits and national identity issues as provocative and risky.

In 1991, the Democratic Progressives amended their party charter to call for a referendum aimed at establishing an independent Republic of Taiwan. Since then, the independence issue has dominated discussion of the DPP and overshadowed all other elements of its ideology and programme. The results of this are overwhelmingly negative. It alienates a majority of Taiwanese voters, gives the KMT a cudgel with which to pound the DPP during electoral campaigns, and creates the perception in the West that the DPP is irresponsible and unworthy of support. It also has made the party anathema in Beijing. Thus, it is worth considering how it came to adopt this position.

When it was first founded, the DPP did not take a position on Taiwan independence. Some would argue that this was due solely to pragmatic considerations; the party feared repression if it violated the legal ban on independence advocacy. In fact, however, the early party's position was subtler than this logic suggests. As T. J. Cheng and Yung-ming Hsu write: "The formation of a political cleavage based on the [independence-unification] issue was not predetermined. The DPP was not born as a nation-building party, but it was turned into one via the shrewd strategic manipulation by the New Tide faction."⁶ When it comes to the DPP, few topics are more important than understanding how and why the DPP adopted the "independence plank" in 1991 – and how and why it retreated from that position a few years later.

The DPP's early platforms articulated two central objectives: political reform and ethnic justice. For most Taiwanese, these two goals captured the essence of their grievance against the KMT. Political reform was necessary to forge a truly democratic political system in which all Taiwan residents would enjoy full participation and civil rights. But ethnic justice was necessary, too, to overcome the Mainlander minority's long domi-

6. Cheng Tun-jen and Hsu Yung-ming, "Issue structure, DPP's factionalism and party realignment," in Hung-mao Tien (ed.), *Taiwan's Electoral Politics and Democratic Transition* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), p. 139.

nation of politics, culture and education. In a sense, the two goals were inseparable: without political reform, Taiwanese would never achieve full citizenship, and until Taiwanese enjoyed full citizenship, the ROC could not claim to be a democracy.

The appeal to ethnically-based grievances tapped a deep vein of dissatisfaction in Taiwanese society. In 1947, Nationalist troops violently suppressed an island-wide rebellion against an arbitrary and brutal KMT military government. In the wake of the rebellion, the regime launched a campaign of terror and repression against political dissidents that lasted more than two decades. Even in the 1980s, few Taiwanese dared to mention the events of 1947. Under the surface, however, resentment smouldered, fuelled by policies that devalued Taiwan's native language and culture and singled out Mainlanders for special privileges and opportunities. The education system was a particular focus of dissatisfaction. An Academia Sinica study published in 1988 concluded; "Controlling for sex, age and place of residence, Mainlanders' educational attainment is, on average, higher than that of Taiwanese."⁷ At the same time, many Taiwanese bitterly resented being taught only mainland Chinese geography and history and being punished for speaking their mother tongues in school.

The DPP's dual objectives intersected in its demand for Taiwan's self-determination. The DPP's first platform stated: "All the residents of Taiwan will decide Taiwan's future through a process marked by universality and equality."⁸ Conservatives accused the DPP of using self-determination as a euphemism for independence, but the young party's position was more nuanced than its opponents appreciated. While some DPP activists supported independence, others argued a more modest line, opposing action by the authoritarian KMT-led central government to lead Taiwan into unification without consulting the Taiwanese people.

Between 1986 and 1991, the DPP's internal debate over the independence issue intensified. Key political reforms were enacted in this period, including lifting martial law, increasing the number of locally-elected national legislators, easing restrictions on the mass media and legalizing opposition parties. Ironically, in winning the fight for such reforms, the DPP was deprived of its most appealing demands. As a result, it increased its emphasis on ethnic justice and self-determination. In addition, the DPP successfully persuaded the KMT to allow exiled dissidents – including many independence activists – to return to Taiwan. Meanwhile, enforcement of the law banning independence advocacy grew lax. Together, these trends tilted the balance within the party towards the independence cause. Still, moderates in the DPP resisted efforts to enshrine Taiwan

7. Tsai Shu-ling, "Shehui diwei qude: shandi Min Ke ji waisheng zhi bijiao" ("Social status attainment: a comparison of the Aboriginal, Minnan, Hakka and Mainlander populations"), in Yang Kuo-shu and Chiu Hei-yuan (eds.), *Bianqian zhong de Taiwan shehui* (*Taiwanese Society in Transition*) (Nankang, Taipei: Academia Sinica, Institute of Ethnology, 1988), p. 34.

8. Li Hsiao-feng, *Taiwan minzhu yundong 40 nian* (*40 Years of Taiwan's Democratic Movement*) (Independence Evening Post Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 246–47.

independence in the party platform. They worried about reprisals from the regime and from the PRC, but also from the voters. In the early 1990s, most surveys put the percentage of Taiwanese favouring independence below 15 per cent.

The logjam finally broke at the DPP's 1991 National Party Congress. The New Tide faction proposed to change the party platform and charter to call for an independent Republic of Taiwan. Chen Shui-bian offered an amendment to soften the proposal. Instead of advocating independence directly, Chen suggested that the party seek a referendum on the issue. The DPP's moderate Formosa Faction found itself in a weak position vis-à-vis the pro-independence New Tide faction and the returned exiles, and accepted Chen's compromise in exchange for a larger share of leadership positions.

This decision cemented the DPP's reputation as a pro-independence party and undercut its efforts to portray itself as a mainstream political force. The extent of the damage was evident in the 1991 National Assembly election. DPP candidates turned in their worst performance since the party's first electoral outing in 1986; they won only 24 per cent of the vote. Many factors contributed to the disappointing result, but there was no doubt that the independence platform was among the most damaging. A post-election poll highlighted the gap between the DPP's position and the voters' preferences. Asked to agree or disagree with the statement "If Taiwan could maintain peaceful relations with the Chinese communists after declaring independence, then Taiwan should become independent and establish a new country," 42 per cent disagreed. In the same poll, 57 per cent agreed that, "If Taiwan and the mainland were comparable in their economic, social and political conditions, then the two sides should be unified."⁹

Nevertheless, it was only after its candidate's embarrassing defeat in the 1996 presidential election that the DPP finally achieved a consensus in favour of a more moderate position on independence. The party's unapologetically pro-independence nominee Peng Ming-min won only 21 per cent of the popular vote. To make matters worse, tension in the Taiwan Strait escalated sharply during the run-up to the election. The combination of electoral rebuke and PRC military threats convinced many in the DPP that a formal independence bid was untenable. As scholar Chu Yun-han put it, a "consequence of the recent showdown in the Taiwan Strait was the convergence of the DPP's reading of the island's structural constraints and realm of possibilities with that of the KMT. A growing number of DPP leaders have recognized that there is no realistic chance for Taiwan pursuing *de jure* independence in the foreseeable future."¹⁰

Hardliners who could not accept retreat from the strong pro-indepen-

9. Shyu (Hsu) Huo-yan, "Taiwan voters' national identity, party identification and voting behavior, 1991–1993," paper presented to the first annual conference of the Taiwan Political Science Association, 1994, p. 6.

10. Chu Yun-han, "The political economy of Taiwan's mainland policy," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 6, No. 15 (July 1997), pp. 229–258.

dence line left the party in mid-1996 to form the Taiwan Independence Party (TAIP). Although many Democratic Progressives feared the move would split the party's base, the TAIP in fact attracted very few votes. The vast majority of DPP voters and politicians moved to the centre with their leaders. The party's change in emphasis gained official standing in 1999, when the DPP Central Committee passed a resolution accepting "Republic of China" as the appropriate name for Taiwan. As Bi-khim Hsiao, who headed the DPP's International Affairs Department in the late 1990s put it: "To alleviate the voters' fears of the DPP provoking a war with China, the DPP's active pursuit of independence became a more passive protection of the status quo ... As the logic goes, there is no need to declare independence. Although when first mentioned by a former party Chairman, such a statement ruling out the need to declare independence invited tremendous protests from within the party, today it has become the mainstream consensus."¹¹

Despite the efforts of its leaders to distance themselves from the independence cause – including those of President Chen, whose effectiveness in office depends upon convincing Taiwanese that his party will not endanger the island's security by moving towards independence – Taiwan independence still has supporters among the ranks of Democratic Progressives. Nor has the DPP shed its reputation as the "pro-independence party." Indeed, it has not yet amended its platform and charter to remove its endorsement of a referendum on the independence issue (although its reluctance to do so is at least as much a matter of strategic calculation as ideological commitment). Undoubtedly, decisions made in the early 1990s will continue to haunt the DPP for some time to come.

Adopting a position favouring independence was the DPP's most damaging mistake, but it was not the only one. The party's eagerness to achieve democratization compounded its problems. For example, in agreements inked in the early 1990s, the DPP allowed the KMT to retain many of its pre-reform structural advantages. Although the DPP achieved its goal of opening national political offices to direct popular election, it has done little to dismantle the KMT's political machine. If anything, election-related corruption and violence have increased since 1986. Initiatives aimed at ending machine politics, including proposals to eliminate grassroots elections and make people convicted of corruption ineligible for local office, have made little progress in the KMT-dominated legislature. In short, during the transition to democracy, the DPP accepted reforms that addressed the technical issues of institutional structure, but preserved many of the unfair informal practices that helped preserve KMT dominance.

Finally, the DPP's organization has contributed to the party's problems. The DPP is modelled on the KMT's Leninist structure – it has a

11. Bi-khim Hsiao, "Trends and perspectives in Taipei," paper prepared for a conference sponsored by the European Institute for Asian Studies and published by the Government Information Office, Republic of China, at <http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/su/no_2/index.htm>.

central committee, party congress and other Leninist features. However, it lacks the strong central leadership that was the KMT's most significant organizational characteristic for more than 50 years. Instead, the DPP is a highly democratic party, offering abundant opportunities for individual party members to promote their opinions and ideas. Strong personalities and a political star system dominate the DPP, while factional struggle and negotiation drive its decision-making process. As a result, the DPP has not responded effectively to new policy opportunities and challenges. Without a strong central leadership to guide it, the party tends to fall into embarrassing public squabbles and weak policy consensus, as its debates over the independence issue attest.

Overcoming Obstacles in the 2000 Presidential Election

Given this litany of reasons for the DPP's weakness, is not its failure already overdetermined? How can this author account for Chen Shui-bian's victory in March 2000? Three factors are most important. First, the DPP faced a divided KMT in the presidential election, greatly reducing the number of votes Chen needed to win. (It also is important to note that the candidate the KMT did not nominate, Soong Chu-yu, was far more popular and charismatic than the candidate it did nominate, Lien Chan.) Secondly, many of the phenomena that have worked to the KMT's advantage in the past ended up hurting it in this election: they tended to divide the KMT vote and push some undecided voters into the DPP camp. Thirdly, the DPP corrected some of its own errors. Working together, these factors gave the Democratic Progressives the edge they needed to overcome the party's long-standing disadvantages, at least in this election. In order to increase its share in the next legislative election, the DPP must push these trends even further.

The reasons for the KMT split in the 2000 election are beyond the scope of this article. However, the DPP did play a role in the KMT's disintegration, in that pressure from the opposition helped undermine KMT unity and discipline. The loyalty of the patronage networks on which the KMT machine depends has been diminishing since the DPP came on the scene. When DPP candidates began to attract significant numbers of votes, they introduced a "wild card" into an electoral system that had long depended on the predictable, orderly sharing of votes among KMT candidates. Once local politicians and factions realized the KMT could not guarantee their success, they increasingly acted as political entrepreneurs. They used the presence of DPP candidates in their districts as a source of leverage over the ruling party, and in some cases even threw elections to the DPP.¹²

Once the KMT's patronage networks came to see themselves more as

12. Chen Ming-tong, *Paixi zhengzhi yu Taiwan zhengzhi bianqian (Factional Politics and Taiwan's Political Evolution)* (Taipei: Yuedan Publishing Company, 1995), p. 190. See also Shelley Rigger, *Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 114–16, 144–46.

free agents than as team players, holding the party together was nearly impossible. Taiwan's electoral system for legislative races masks party disunity by permitting nominations of candidates from each of several factions. However, this option is not available in executive races, in which each party must present only one nominee. The KMT has faced defections in municipal executive elections since 1977; as shown above, the DPP's success in these elections in 1997 was due in large part to rebellious local factions. The 2000 presidential race provided another opportunity for the leaders of patronage networks to flex their political muscles. Soong Chu-yu skilfully exploited their ambitions in his campaign, appropriating numerous KMT factions for himself. Soong laid the groundwork for this strategy back in the mid-1990s, when he was the governor of Taiwan province. The peripatetic Soong visited each of Taiwan's 309 towns and townships at least once, forging intimate personal connections with a vast number of local faction leaders. Many of these local bosses returned Soong's favour, encouraging their grassroots supporters to vote for the maverick candidate in the 2000 presidential race.

The KMT's performance in the 2000 presidential election also suffered from a backlash against many of the features of the political system that had given it a headstart in the past. Although its wealth still bought a superior access to the voters in 2000, it also was an embarrassment. With the KMT presenting an unpopular candidate and using its wealth to drown out its opponents, many Taiwanese joined the chorus of criticism. On 2 January, the KMT's presidential candidate, Lien Chan, promised to put his party's business holdings in trust, in the hope of eliminating suspicions that the KMT might use its business assets to manipulate the economy for political advantage. Although many hailed the gesture, others doubted the KMT would carry out its promise. According to Wu Jau-hsieh, a political scientist at National Chengchi University: "What Lien promised today was nothing new, as some have perceived. The problem is that the promises have never been realized ... It would be a good thing if the KMT put its party assets in trust, or even returned all its assets to the state and put itself on a equal footing with other parties in competing for voters." Wu continued, "but I still doubt whether the KMT is going to do it."¹³ In the end, the KMT-dominated Legislative Yuan failed to pass the necessary legislation to carry out Lien's promise. A year later, the KMT had made little progress towards establishing a trust.

One of the key issues in the 2000 election was political corruption, known in Taiwan as *heijin zhengzhi*, or "black and gold politics." Voters were especially offended by widespread vote buying, bid rigging in public construction, political violence and the penetration of elected bodies by criminal organizations. Each of these phenomena is linked, directly or indirectly, to the KMT's machine politics. Vote buying is a

13. Oliver Lin, "Lien wants KMT assets put in trust," *Taipei Times*, 3 January 2000. Available on-line at <http://www.taipetimes.com/news/2000/01/03/story/0000018073>.

key component of the local factions' strategy for mobilizing KMT votes. Bid rigging is one of the ways local political bosses are rewarded for supporting the KMT and co-operating with its strategy. And political violence has increased in recent years, in part because the money to be made through the manipulation of public policy has grown. Finally, Taiwan's mass media recently have called attention to the gangland connections of many elected officials, especially county and city council members, but also including national parliamentarians. In October 1999, the Judicial Yuan revealed pending charges against 205 elected representatives. According to former Justice Minister Liao Cheng-hao, a third of Taiwan's elected officials have criminal backgrounds.¹⁴

Media favouritism and administrative and judicial bias also prompted criticism of the KMT during the presidential campaign. Media watchdog groups publicized accusations of bias. Meanwhile, civil servants from both parties accused one another of engaging in partisan activity during working hours, and accusations of judicial bias gained wide publicity. A month before the election, police raided the home of a prominent Soong supporter, former Legislative Yuan speaker Liu Sung-fan. Although the search was part of a long-standing investigation into a banking scandal, many observers interpreted it as evidence of judicial bias. What troubled observers most was the timing of the raid, which followed hard upon Liu's endorsement of Soong. In sum, instead of hindering the DPP's progress, traditional KMT advantages – party wealth, machine politics and administrative, judicial and mass media bias – backfired against the KMT in 2000.

Another important development in the 2000 presidential race was Chen's retreat from the DPP's pro-independence charter provision. By pulling away from that stance, Chen Shui-bian made his candidacy acceptable to many Taiwanese who otherwise would have been unwilling to support him. In this sense, he corrected the error his party made in 1991. Throughout the campaign, Chen stressed his moderation on this issue, promising to eschew independence unless Taiwan came under military attack. At the same time, he called for a higher level of cross-strait economic integration than even the KMT was willing to accept, including establishing direct trade and transit links.

The DPP's Opportunities – and Continuing Challenges

After the DPP captured the presidential office, a daunting new set of challenges appeared. At the same time, however, Chen's victory offers the first real opportunity to remould Taiwan's political system in a way that will improve his party's chances for future success. Under Chen it may be possible to dismantle some of the roadblocks that have obstructed the DPP's progress in the past. Overcoming these obstacles will not be easy, however. Improving the quality of Taiwan's democracy seems an unimpeachable goal, but concrete measures aimed at accomplishing this

14. Stephanie Low, "Legislator warns against gangsterism in politics," *Taipei Times*, 5 December 1999. Available on-line at <http://www.taipeitimes.com/news/1999/12/05/story/0000013643>.

objective are sure to provoke controversy, both from those whose privileges will be reduced and from those who desire more thorough-going reform.

In his first year in office, Chen worked hard to overcome the distrust of Beijing and Washington and to convince the Taiwanese people that the DPP is capable of safeguarding peace and stability. American reaction to Chen's overtures was generally favourable. Beijing's reaction is more complex. On the one hand, the tide of anti-Chen rhetoric that peaked in Zhu Rongji's 15 March speech threatening Taiwan with dire consequences if Chen were elected receded after the ballots were cast. In its place, the Chinese leadership vowed to take a "wait and see" attitude towards the new leader. Still, Beijing's vituperative attacks on Chen's vice-president and its refusal to back down on the one-China principle as a precondition for cross-strait talks reflect its desire to keep pressure on Chen Shui-bian. Moreover, Beijing courted Taiwanese business people and non-DPP politicians throughout Chen's first year in office. It seems PRC leaders hope to wait out Chen; his evident political weakness encourages the belief that he will be a one-term president. Even such concrete gestures as opening the "mini-links" (direct transport links between the Mainland and two Taiwan-held islands) and easing restrictions on cross-strait trade and investment have done little to soften Beijing's stony demeanour.

Whether or not the DPP can dismantle the structural advantages the KMT has enjoyed in the past will be an important determinant of its success. Unless it can make the political system fairer, the DPP is unlikely to increase its share of legislative seats significantly in 2001 and 2004, or win a second presidential term in 2004. To avoid becoming a "one-term wonder," Chen Shui-bian must address Taiwan's institutional flaws quickly and decisively.

Already, there is evidence of progress towards political reform. Shortly after the presidential election, the National Assembly reduced its own power drastically and downgraded its status to that of an ad hoc body, thereby achieving a long-standing DPP goal. Democratic Progressives view the Assembly as unnecessary, wasteful and obsolete. Moreover, the Assembly traditionally has been an important resource for the KMT's patronage networks. Up-and-coming KMT politicians used Assembly seats as stepping stones to higher offices, while the votes they mobilized on their own behalf reinforced the KMT's power. The National Assembly districts tend to be very small, increasing the efficacy of traditional KMT mobilization. Thus, eliminating Assembly elections may help to weaken the KMT machine.¹⁵

15. The reason for the National Assembly's abrupt self-destruction is not as admirable as this discussion may make it seem. The DPP struggled to carry out this reform for years, but it could not persuade KMT Assembly members to co-operate. After Lien Chan's presidential defeat, however, the KMT recognized that a National Assembly election in the near future would give Soong a venue in which to strengthen his People First Party. By downgrading the National Assembly, the KMT denied its new antagonist a critical opportunity to build its organization and popular base.

Another measure that would help undermine machine politics is action to reverse the trend toward “black and gold politics.” Rolling back corruption and gangsterism in the political realm was one of Chen Shui-bian’s basic campaign promises. Chen appointed DPP politician Chen Ting-nan to head the Justice Ministry, in the hope of strengthening anti-corruption enforcement. Although Minister Chen faced considerable resistance from within the agency, especially from staff in the Ministry’s investigation bureau, the pace of criminal prosecutions picked up after he took office. The DPP had less success passing corruption-fighting legislation. Proposals range from reducing the number of national legislators to tightening controls on public works bidding and eliminating elections for grassroots political posts. Not surprisingly, these measures – which are aimed at the very legislators who must vote for their passage – did not pass during Chen’s first year in office.

To a great extent, the DPP’s troubles are of its own making. As an organization cobbled together from diverse anti-KMT elements, the party will inevitably face internal conflict and struggle. During the presidential campaign, the DPP’s internal controversies were muted, as the party’s factions put aside their differences to concentrate on winning the election. Now that the victory has been won, however, the party leadership must find a way to preserve that fragile unity. In particular, the DPP must avoid public internecine squabbles over positions. The DPP also needs to address another major error – the endorsement of Taiwan independence – by bringing its official platform into synch with the preferences of the electorate. So far, party strategists have been unwilling to take this step, arguing that an important bargaining chip should not be sacrificed except in exchange for concrete concessions from the PRC.

Chen Shui-bian and his party face many challenges as they set out to realize their goals. Lacking a firm popular mandate, and forced to work through Taiwan’s imperfect political institutions, Chen has so far struggled to push his proposals through the legislative and executive branches of government. And given the KMT’s broad, patronage-based foundation, the DPP’s policy options are constrained from the outset; it has never had a chance to develop a fully articulated set of issue positions. Meanwhile, Beijing opposes Chen and the DPP and has offered encouragement to their opponents. Nevertheless, Chen’s presidency offers the DPP its best opportunity to date to break through the structural obstacles that have frustrated Taiwan’s political opposition for more than five decades.