Taiwanese these days often use the word “woo-tzoo” (鬱卒) to express their feeling about current domestic life. Woo-tzoo is a Taiwanese phrase which means frustrated, miserable, depressed and helpless and is a very complex statement about some mixed, negative feelings. People in Taiwan feel woo-tzoo because they are haunted by the current economic and political situation in Taiwan.

There is a widespread perception that, in the past several years, people have suffered from a decline in economic well-being and a steep increase in the magnitude of social problems. Relations with mainland China have become a mixed situation of economic interdependence and political stalemate. Cutthroat partisan struggles are polarizing society and an unwillingness to face up to international competition, resulting in Taiwan's marginalization in the global and East-Asian communities. Despite the country's ongoing democratization and localization, it has failed to pay attention to the forces of globalization and international developments.

Taiwan was hailed as a major success story of democratization, but now Taiwanese wonder when the young democracy will become a mature one. When Chen came to power in 2000, Taiwanese saw it as a new dawn on the young democracy’s horizon. However, Chen’s recent involvement in scandals and endless partisan power struggles are contributing to the polarization of society. Only woo-tzoo can express the feelings of Taiwanese about the current turmoil and chaos of political life in Taiwan.

President Chen’s Second Term since 2004

When Chen was elected President in 2000, there was a feeling that a new generation of leadership had come. People hoped that Chen would change the system and cope with the corruption that had become entrenched under the long-ruling Kuomintang (KMT). Chen won the 2000 presidential election with only 39% of the vote and only as a result of a split of factions within the incumbent KMT, when James Soong ran as an independent against the party nominee Lien Chan. Lacking a clear mandate and inheriting a bureaucracy largely loyal to the KMT, Chen faced a difficult first term that resulted in a mixture of domestic chaos, economic stagnation, and cross-strait stalemate.

Taiwanese gave Chen a second chance in 2004, with a razor-thin margin of 0.2 percent of the 13 million total votes. But because the KMT contested the election due to the election-eve assassination attempt on Chen – one they felt was fabricated by the
incumbent – domestic politics in 2004 continued to be plagued by partisan struggles. In December of that year, following the failure of the Pan-Green coalition to gain a majority of seats in the legislative election (as many had expected to occur), Chen resigned as chairman of the DPP.

Various international blunders marked Chen’s presidency in 2005, most particularly with the US’s unwillingness to grant Chen a stopover visa in New York or San Francisco. For many in Taiwan, this “snub” increased their feelings of isolation leading to further feelings of helplessness.

President Chen and Embezzlement Charges

Entering 2006, Chen’s once high approval rating of 70 percent in the early days of his first term fell to 20 percent, when charges of corruption levelled at officials in Chen’s administration has left the government and ruling DPP in disarray. On May 24, 2006, his son-in-law, Chao Chien-ming, was charged with insider trading. Chao, an orthopedic surgeon at Taiwan University Hospital, was detained on May 25 this year but was later released on bail.

On November 3, 2006, Chen faced his worst political crisis yet after public prosecutor Eric Chen indicted first lady Wu Shu-chen and three of the president’s aides on corruption charges involving NT$14.8 million (US$450,000). Moreover, the president is suspected of corruption but cannot be indicted because of presidential immunity. "The High Court prosecutor has determined that President Chen is involved with the crimes of corruption and faking of documents but this part of the case is subject to guarantees provided under ... the constitution and we must wait until the president is recalled or finishes his term before we can pursue further investigation," said Chang Wen-cheng, chief secretary of the High Prosecutor’s Office.

President Chen, in a televised address on the evening of Nov. 5, denied all charges of corruption leveled against him. He acknowledged submitting other people’s receipts to claim refunds and admitted that he had misled investigators. But he promised that all of the money actually went to diplomatic missions and did not go into any private pockets. Additionally, President Chen vowed to stay in office until a court convicts his wife of the charges leveled against her by the public prosecutor.

Three Recall Motions

After several months of political gridlock over allegations that members of Chen's family engaged in insider trading and corruption, public opinion polls suggested that

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more than 60% of Taiwanese want Chen to step down. However, most lawmakers in the ruling DPP are standing by him, at least until evidence surfaces of any direct involvement. Only two lawmakers from the DPP have quit parliament in protest of the way their party handled the scandal.

Allegations of corruption have generated three recall attempts by the opposition-dominated legislature, unprecedented in Taiwan's young democracy. The incessant infighting between the two camps ensured that any important legislation would not be passed, further inflaming feelings of woo-tzoo.

Although the pan-blue camp has the most seats in the legislature, the key to recalling Chen is his own Democratic Progressive Party, which has enough votes to block the recall motion if its parliamentary members back him. Many have expressed disappointment with Chen's actions, however, and party officials acknowledged some could translate that into a vote for impeachment. A dozen defections would be needed to seal the two-thirds majority required for passage.

**Red Shirt Army Protest**

One of the clearest manifestations of woo-tzoo came at the beginning of September, 2006. With the political landscape sharply divided between the pan-green camp, led by the DPP, and the pan-blue camp, led by the KMT, a new color emerged in Taiwan's political spectrum when political activist and former DPP chairman Shih Ming-teh launched a campaign called "Million Voices against Corruption, President Chen Must Go". By September 7, more than one million signatures had been collected, each with a donation of NT$100 (approximately US$3). On September 9, according to organisers, around 200,000 to 300,000 people, wearing red, demonstrated in the streets of Taipei. The media in Taiwan have dubbed them the Red Shirt Army.

The red shirt army movement has undoubtedly had a big impact, the first in recent times that has not been mobilized by political parties for their political ends. The protests drew most of their support from Taipei residents who are pro-KMT and who have seen their salaries stagnate or drop.

**Becoming a More Mature Democracy**

The decision by public prosecutor Eric Chen to indict the first lady and President Chen shows that Taiwan has entered the stage of forming and consolidating a system of law and affirming democratic values. Eric Chen’s indictment of the first lady is even more remarkable because he is known to be sympathetic to the ideals of pro-localization that the DPP espouses. For a judicial branch regarded as a weak constitutional pillar, it was a historic moment. During the KMT one-party era, the judiciary was not an independent body separate from the ruling party but rather an extension of that party’s

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power. With the change from authoritarian to democratic rule, it is inevitable that past influences will still have an effect on the party and politicians in power.

But for many, news that the President's wife had been indicted on charges of corruption was a day of hope, a milestone in the island's maturing democratic process and a vindication of the independence of its judicial system which had shown it could withstand political pressure.

**Wanted: Clean and Decent Politicians**

Just as Taiwanese were feeling _wootzoo_ about President Chen’s various legal problems, it emerged that KMT chairman Ma Ying-jeou may also have been involved in illegal activities. Seen by many as a clean politician and a 2008 presidential hopeful, Ma was questioned by prosecutors over his alleged misuse of his "special expenses" fund as Taipei mayor. He was also questioned by prosecutors about another half of special expenses which the DPP insists Ma has directly remitted to his personal account rather than spending the total on public affairs.

Compounding people’s feeling of _wootzoo_ is the increasing awareness by Taiwanese of how institutionalized this kind of corruption is. Like Ma, it has emerged that roughly 6,400 other officials are entitled to this kind of discretionary budget, where only half of the budget requires documentation and the other half can go directly into their personal bank account. This relic of financial accounting is a holdover from the KMT era when officials had their incomes supplemented because they were expected to present money vouchers – also known as “red envelopes” – when attending weddings and funerals.

The reason why the Ma case has created such an enormous controversy is – like Chen in 2000 – Ma was seen as an incorruptible politician. Ma erred, as many other officials did, in remitting the special fund money directly to his personal account, instead of drawing cash or checks, making it easier to trace the expenses and find out whether there was any balance, which, legally speaking should have been returned to the government.

The unraveling of the mismanaging of special expense in Ma's office has effectively balanced the pressure with Chen's alleged corruption – a fortunate shift for the DPP, though many see huge differences between the laws governing the president's state affairs fund and the mayor's special expenses,

**Taipei and Kaohsiung City Mayor Elections**

Before the two city elections in Taipei and Kaohsiung, it was widely expected that the charges brought against the first family had caused the DPP's popularity to sink to new lows and would have a significant effect on the party's ability to win electoral battles.
The KMT argued that the two elections were not local elections at all, but widely seen as a barometer of public support for President Chen Shui-bian and the ruling DPP.

Political pundits on the island argued that the election outcomes were a litmus test for next year's legislative election and the presidential election in 2008. The two local elections were considered an election between President Chen and Mayor Ma, or between the DPP and the KMT. For the KMT, a win in Kaohsiung would help it make further inroads into southern Taiwan, which is traditionally a DPP stronghold.

The result was that the DPP narrowly won the crucial mayoral election in Kaohsiung, while the KMT candidate won comfortably in the capital of Taipei. The DPP scored a narrow but psychologically important victory in the closely fought mayoral race in Kaohsiung, the pan-green's traditional stronghold. A key factor in the DPP triumph in Kaohsiung was its appeal to staunch supporters. The DPP said the election was a vote on Taiwan identity against the KMT's party platform of engagement with China.

Regardless of why the DPP won, the results of the Kaohsiung city mayoral election is good for both Taiwan’s domestic politics and cross-strait relations in 2007. Since neither side was given a complete yes or no sign from the people, both sides, KMT and DPP, will be rational and realistic about domestic and cross-strait issues. Both sides will also be more cautious and prudent to make sure that they can win the upcoming legislative election in 2007 and presidential election in 2008.

The result revealed that voters in Kaohsiung did not cast a vote of non-confidence against President Chen and the DPP, and, on the other hand, Ma did not get the vote of confidence he wanted from southern Taiwan. The result gave Taiwan's troubled President Chen and ruling party breathing space after months of fighting off scandals. This was a morale-boosting victory, as southern Taiwan is considered to be the DPP's heartland, and a KMT victory there would have been an ill omen for the DPP's chances in the legislative and presidential elections.

**Identity Politics as Usual**

The result of the mayoral elections shows that identity politics remains the norm in Taiwan’s domestic politics and political life. The author argues that the Taiwanese identity is less about certain unique language, culture, or ethnicity, but has more to do with Taiwan’s reaction under its democratic mechanism toward the island's international status and cross-strait tensions. Currently, two types of "Taiwanese identities" are taking shape, "native Taiwanese identity" (or local Taiwanese identity) and a "status quo Taiwanese identity." Both identities can be regarded as “Taiwan-centered national identities” which view Taiwan as being de facto independent from mainland China. Though both groups seem to be on the same page with international politics, the two identities have different ideas about domestic politics and cross-strait affairs.

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The differences between the two identities represent a major source of conflict within Taiwanese domestic politics. Native Taiwanese identity has apparently become the cornerstone of the Chen Shui-bian administration and is forging Taiwanese nationalism. They favor a sovereign Taiwan, and, if security conditions allow, de jure independence. Polls have shown an increase in the numbers of people that see themselves as Taiwanese, rather than Chinese. The status quo identity is strongly supported by the KMT and the People First Party (PFP) policy position which also emphasizes the need to maintain the current political status quo across the Taiwan Strait while they are more willing to negotiate with Beijing on economic linkages. It tries to preserve the identity of the Republic of China and wants to see de facto autonomy remain unchanged.

Identity politics in Taiwan will continue to haunt domestic political debates and party politics. Being a young democracy that faces military threats from and international isolation by China, domestic politics have become a factor influencing Taiwan’s cross-strait policy. Enhancement of cross-strait economic relations may reduce the negative impact of identity tension, but identity politics will always emerge as an important issue in any major election. As one of the side effects of Taiwan’s democratization, identity politics is always a powerful and convenient appeal for political parties and politicians, especially for the pan-green camp, in presidential and legislative elections.

Impact on Cross-Strait and US-Taiwan Relations

President Chen has faced allegations of corruption and political bumbling for months. Though the turmoil has weakened his leadership it has not weakened his challenge to China, he didn’t trim the pro-independence rhetoric that boosted him to the presidency in 2000 and re-election in 2004. President Chen’s most challenging task has been that of handling cross-strait issues. And his strategy and remarks can always inflame Taiwanese passions and worries. From Chen's perspective, hot-button issues such as revising the constitution and cross-strait issues would accomplish a couple of things. It would prop up support for his party by inspiring voters to turn out for the next election. And it would avoid further marginalization of DPP officials and shift people's immediate focus away from the scandal. Faced with two elections – the legislative and presidential – in two years, a lame-duck president and a divided electorate almost guarantees that Taiwan will continue to muddle along politically for the foreseeable future.

The result of the elections should serve as a wake up call to the KMT who needs to thoroughly review the party's campaign strategies and crisis management mechanisms and develop a pro-localization stance as local consciousness is going to be a key factor in winning the 2008 presidential election. The election results are good for the DPP because now they have a real chance to win in the upcoming elections and to focus on policy

issues – especially cross-strait economic and trade interactions – to prove to the people that the DPP can go beyond ideology and identity issues.

Looking back on cross-strait relations over the past decade, changes in China-Taiwan relations have been determined by three important factors: Beijing’s policy on Taiwan, Washington’s cross-strait policy, and Taiwan’s internal politics. By and large, it is mainly Taiwan’s internal political environment that has complicated the situation. With the rise of the Taiwanese identity and its dominance in domestic elections, Taiwan’s policy toward mainland China depends upon the dynamic changes of its internal politics. The pattern of cross-strait interactions will continue in 2007. Washington will continue to mirror the duality of the cross-strait arena by implementing dual balancing and deterrent strategies, and more importantly, for these strategies to be successful, policy makers in Washington have to realize the complexity of the situation so as not to unwittingly provoke either side.8

One thing worth noting is that recent events in Taiwan have generated widespread interest and discussion about Taiwan’s domestic politics in mainland China, including the indictment of the first lady and the election result of two city mayors. Web sites on the mainland have been buzzing with posts commenting on the event, noting with admiration that a prosecutor can bring charges against the wife of a top leader of a country. The progress Taiwan has made in democratization is bound to inspire the people on the mainland to appreciate the value of the democratic system.

Conclusion

For the immediate future, Taiwan’s political scene will remain in turmoil. Chen’s fate, which will continue to remain precarious until the end of his term in 2008, and party infighting to run for 2008 presidential election will overshadow the normal business of government in Taiwan for some time. But provocative action that might increase cross-strait tension may also be constrained by Chen’s own party members who hope to move towards more pragmatic cross-Strait and economic policies to attract middle-class swing voters.

The upcoming 2007 legislative election will be the most important held for the Legislative Yuan in many decades, since a new single-seat constituency electoral system is widely expected to produce a new generation of legislators. In addition, the number of legislators is due to be cut in half. The presidential elections of 2008 will also be a very critical year for Taiwan. But until then, with partisan struggles set to continue, Taiwanese will continue to feel  woo-tzoo about domestic politics.