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Dirty Innards

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Taiwan has recently been upset by the news that imports of American beef will soon resume, including internal organs. The resulting upheaval has featured more hysteria than science, but has nonetheless had an impact on the current government’s popularity, with President Ma’s approval rating plummeting by 14%. In the midst of the discomfort about potentially contaminated beef, however, concerns are also being raised about other forms of filth at the political and social levels:

1. Yet another KMT legislator is facing the end of his political career, with the Taiwan High Court yesterday upholding a lower court ruling annulling his 2007 election. This is the fourth such case, so far...

2. The recent election of the KMT’s Central Standing Committee (中常委) was so ridden with vote-buying (or at least gift-giving) allegations that it will now have to be redone on November 14. Chairman Ma is now trying to soothe the feelings of disgruntled KMT loyalists, especially newly dethroned CSC members.

3. Taiwan’s baseball fans are facing yet another game-fixing scandal. This is the fifth to rock the league in the past twenty years, with the previous one occurring just one year ago (see my China Beat post). Current allegations have even implicated one of the league’s most popular players, former MLB pitcher Tsao Chin-hui 曹錦輝, a fact that has caught the attention of the United States media as well. The government in general and the prosecutors office in particular are facing strong criticism over leaking details of the investigation, perp walking suspected players for show, and failing to lock up the gangster kingpins at the root of this problem. The local media is also living up to its sterling reputation for finding people guilty before they have been convicted of a crime. Despite the fact that only two of the nine suspected players are facing detention (the rest, including Tsao, have been released), there is the possibility that there will be no professional baseball in Taiwan next year.

Election fraud, vote-buying, and throwing ballgames are hardly new features of modern Taiwanese life. Political scandals are also party-blind, having afflicted the DPP as well as the KMT. Nonetheless, the nagging persistence of these problems indicates systematic political and social failings that must be addressed. It is high time for Taiwan’s leaders to do their utmost in purging these ills, for while corruption may rank among the world’s oldest cultural phenomena, its vigorous uprooting represents one key hallmark of a successful society.