

Taiwan says its next leader world's most handsome

Taiwan's men and women can't wait to show off their new leader Ma Ying-jeou to the world because they think he will be hands down the world's most handsome president when he takes office next month.

'Finally, we have a president who is good-looking and speaks fluent English,' Li Ping, a retired professor, said. 'He will be a good representative of the Taiwan people on the international stage.'

'I bet he is the world's most handsome president, at least among Asian presidents,' Liu Yi-hsue, a Taipei school teacher, said.

Ma from the opposition Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT), won a landslide victory in the March 22 presidential election, thanks to his policies of seeking peace and economic integration with China.

Besides those pledges, however, Ma's good looks were seen as playing a part in swaying voters. His many female fans fondly call him 'Hsiao Ma Ke,' which means 'Brother Ma,' or 'Hsiao Shuai Ke' that means 'Mr Handsome'.

Standing at 175 centimetres, Ma outgrew his nickname 'Fat Ma' from his chubby primary school days and now has an athletic build, a chiselled face, dark hair and white teeth and always appears at formal occasions in a dark suit and tie.

His fans said his daily morning jog and swimming routine help him look 20 years younger than his 57 years.

Wherever he goes, Ma attracts a horde of female fans who shout his name, snap his photos and ask for his autograph.

'He has the clean image of a good-looking man, and yet he is not crafty,' Wang Li-min, a book translator, said. 'He has the feminine charm and beauty which is often associated with Chinese intellectuals.'

Ma, married with two daughters, has not been the subject of any sex scandals and seems not to care about his good looks, and that makes him all the more attractive to his female fans.

He also has plenty of academic and political successes to add to his allure.

After graduating from National Taiwan University, he went to New York University and later to Harvard to study. After receiving a doctorate in law from Harvard, he returned to Taiwan to work as former president Chiang Ching-kuo's English interpreter.

As a rising star in the KMT, Ma held posts that included justice minister, Taipei mayor and party chairman. In last month's election, Ma, who is to be inaugurated May 20, won with 58.45 percent of the vote, the highest percentage of any Taiwan president.

His closest competitor for handsome head of state might be Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck,

king of the Himalayan Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan since December 2006.

The 28-year-old became a sensation among Thais, especially Thai women, when the then-prince, who is still single, visited Thailand in the summer of 2006 to attend the 60th anniversary of Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej's ascension the throne.

Taiwan analysts conceded that Ma's good looks are an asset to his image but added that a successful head of state must possess other qualities.

'They must possess a good family background, good academic background, good looks and good manners,' said Peng Huai-chen, an associate professor at Tunghai University. 'John F Kennedy had all these qualities, so we say he had the charisma of a great leader.'

Peng said US presidential candidate Barack Obama has the inborn charisma of a leader while Ma's was learned. Still, it and his refined manners will help Ma in his presidential career, the academic said.

But it's his looks that are the rage at Taiwan plastic surgery clinics, where Ma's election win has boosted business.

According to the Taiwan press, a number of clinics have received requests from young men who want to undergo surgeries so they can look more like Ma.

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