

## A very dangerous import from China

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
Tuesday, 17 August 2010 00:32

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The answer given by a police officer for blocking a protest could not have been more obscure, if not worrying. Asked on what grounds Tibetan protesters applying for a permit to demonstrate on Sunday against a controversial Tibetan Buddhist art exhibition at the National Palace Museum would have been turned down, the officer's response was: "Based on which law? Well, maybe I should not answer that question."

Well, maybe he should, because there is no law in this land that can bar a group from holding a protest at the museum, political or otherwise. Such a law exists less than 200km across the Taiwan Strait, however, and there are signs that the laws over there are little by little becoming a rule of thumb here.

While we can hardly blame the police officer for doing his job (and in his defense, this was a theoretical question, as the Tibetans' protest did not require a permit), clear answers should be asked of the authorities, as obscure references to some "laws" and their arbitrary application is exactly what underpins the reign of terror that keeps Chinese dissidents on their toes — and in jail.

In recent months, the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has provided many oblique references to "national security" and the "national interest" to justify barring peaceful individuals from entering the country, including people closely associated with World Uyghur Congress president Rebiya Kadeer, who herself has been "blacklisted" for three years. Then, as now, no clear laws were stated by the authorities and the arguments given would not have held up in court.

If, when it comes to certain issues, this country is no longer governed by law, then what are the foundations of the state's policies?

There is reason to believe that on the question of "splittism," the laws are now being written in Beijing, and the first victims of this de facto application of Chinese law on Taiwanese soil are the very minorities whose voices have been silenced in China: Tibetans and Uighurs. Under Ma, representatives from those ethnic groups have increasingly been treated as second-class citizens — denied entry visas, dumped by police in the mountains of Neihu after participating in a rally in Taipei, and now barred from bringing a picture of their spiritual leader to "complete" an exhibition from China at the National Palace Museum.

All of this is ostensibly meant to please Beijing. Although the suppression of Tibetans and Uighurs already warrants the strongest of condemnation, it also points to the possibility that this is merely the beginning. Legal arbitrariness is a slippery slope, one that eventually risks bringing other groups under its shadow. Next in line, we can imagine, are Falun Gong practitioners, Aborigines and supporters of Taiwanese independence.

If we are to avoid such a scenario from becoming reality, every instance of arbitrariness

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should be opposed at all cost. If no article of law governing this land justifies those actions, whoever is responsible should face the consequences.

Ma and others in the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) have attempted to blur the lines between Taiwan, the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China, especially when discussing notions of culture and sovereignty. Irritating though this may be, the ramifications of those pronouncements usually remained in the abstract, with no immediate impact on people's lives. However, should aspects of China's repressive "legal" system be imported and mixed with Taiwan's, it won't be long before certain groups and individuals start feeling the consequences.

The current targets of pseudo-legal arbitrariness are not merely "others" in the ethnic sense of the word; that could very well be us in the not too distant future.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2010/08/17](#)