

The controversy surrounding Sunday’s cross-strait music festival at the National Taiwan University (NTU) campus was yet another example of Beijing’s incessant efforts to undermine Taiwanese sovereignty.

Billed as a cultural activity that is part of memorandums of understanding on cultural and arts events signed by Taipei and Shanghai in 2010 and 2014, the “Sing! China: Shanghai-Taipei Music Festival” was mainly sponsored by the Chinese reality TV show Sing! China, with the Taipei Department of Cultural Affairs as a cosponsor.

While it was the university’s failure to prioritize students’ right to use campus facilities that prompted the furor, the festival was nonetheless a legally permitted activity for students from both sides of the Taiwan Strait to engage in healthy exchanges and foster a greater sense of mutual appreciation between the two cities.

As Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) said yesterday: “Cultural exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait are intended to demonstrate goodwill toward each other, not to increase conflict.”

While Ko might genuinely believe that cross-strait exchanges promote mutual understanding and harmony, one should bear in mind that both sides must sincerely desire and work toward the same goal. It is a different story when one party harbors no genuine mutual respect for the other — only a hidden political agenda.

China has never given up its ambition to annex Taiwan and has never tried to hide its attempts to mix politics with anything else where Taiwan is involved. As such, so long as the China factor is involved, Beijing will always attempt — be it through trickery or outright interference — to undermine Taiwanese sovereignty.

In the case of Sunday’s event, its promotional posters labeled the NTU as the “Taipei City Taiwan University (臺北市臺灣大學)” — a sneaky move on the part of the main organizer to downgrade Taiwan’s status. This incident shows that without vigilance, anyone — in this case, the Taipei City Government — could easily be a pawn in Beijing’s “united front” propaganda

and become an actor in its “one China” game.

That members of pro-unification groups joined the fray after the event was called to a halt further exposed it as nothing more than just another “united front” tactic.

The protesting students at NTU deserve applause for bravely climbing on stage and shouting: “We are Taiwan National University, not China Taiwan University.” Reports that some students were attacked by members of pro-unification groups highlight yet another issue — the use of violence by people driven by pro-China ideology against others exercising their freedom of expression.

At a forum on Sunday discussing threats and challenges facing Taiwan’s democracy, former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) said that China has adjusted its “united front” tactics by helping gangs mobilize in Taiwan to instigate conflict around national identity and spark social unrest.

Sunday’s music festival is a timely reminder to the government and the public alike not to take lightly the ubiquitous presence of Beijing’s “united front” propaganda and its deployment of gangsters to undermine Taiwanese democracy.

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