

Standing up to China the bully

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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While it is no secret that China has long employed the carrot-and-stick approach in its nefarious scheme to bring Taiwan into its fold, it has of late turned up the intensity and frequency of its efforts to stifle Taiwan's global presence.

On the one hand, Beijing has stepped up its suppression of Taiwan internationally through arbitrary acts, such as demanding that international airlines and hotel groups designate Taiwan as part of China on their official Web sites, revoking Taichung's right to host the East Asian Youth Games and pressuring Taiwan-based bakery chain 85°C to show its support for Beijing after President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) visited a Los Angeles branch on Aug. 12.

On the other hand, it has gone on a "charm" offensive to woo Taiwanese, such as offering a package of 31 so-called "incentives" for Taiwanese enterprises and professionals and, effective Saturday next week, a residency card that Beijing authorities say would allow cardholders from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau to enjoy the same treatment and public services as Chinese citizens.

Taiwanese holders of the China-issued residency cards do not need to have a household registration in China, nor will they have to give up their household registration in Taiwan, China's Taiwan Affairs Office Deputy Director Long Mingbiao (龍明彪) said, adding that the cards will simply make life more convenient for Taiwanese who have a stable job in China and have lived there for at least half a year.

However, this seemingly innocent offer fits right into Beijing's schemes to promote and facilitate unification of livelihoods between peoples on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. With Taiwanese holding China-issued residency cards, Beijing hopes to create the impression globally that Taiwan is part of China.

While it might come down to a personal choice for Taiwanese on whether to apply for a residency card and risking consequences such as surrendering their personal data to Beijing, the government cannot afford to stand idly by. In view of Beijing's intensified and increasingly sophisticated "united front" tactics, it should map out contingency plans to defend the nation against further Chinese attempts to infiltrate Taiwanese society.

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As President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on Saturday said, China's issuance of residency permits to Taiwanese is "motivated by a certain political agenda."

There are several approaches the government could take to counter these attempts to jeopardize Taiwan's sovereign status and international standing.

For one, it is time to take a long, hard look at the Act Governing Relations Between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area (兩岸人民關係條例) and consider whether it should be abolished as a step toward the nation's normalization.

Several Taiwanese academics have also suggested that the government invite people who have been oppressed by China — such as the Dalai Lama and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo's (劉曉波) widow, Liu Xia (劉霞) — to Taiwan. It will not only be a proactive action on Taiwan's part, but also serve to highlight the nation's free and democratic values.

In view of China's well-orchestrated campaign against Taiwan, all talk but no action projects the image of a spineless administration that is at wit's end when it comes to dealing with China.

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