

Time to fight sugar-coated poison pills from China

Written by Lam Sei-lin 林錫麟

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China's announcement that Taiwanese can apply for residence permits is tantamount to a unilateral unification announcement, but the Taiwanese government did nothing. Is it just waiting to be unified?

Taiwan's system is different: The government issues 10-digit ID numbers to all foreigners in Taiwan, except tourists, but China has never issued an 18-digit identification number to foreigners. Offering it now only to Taiwanese, Hong Kongers and Macanese bears profound political implications.

According to China, the residence permit is an ID card for Taiwanese "compatriots" that would enable them to enjoy the same treatment as Chinese, except for being enlisted in the military, which is not obligatory in China. It basically differs from setting up a traditional household registration only in form.

As China's "incentive warfare" continues, Taiwan must offer timely counterattacks. On this issue, considering the unique cross-strait relationship, the definition of "Mainland Chinese" could be changed, for example by amending the law to clarify what it means to register one's household in China to include the humiliating residence permit for "resident in Taiwan, China."

China's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) claims that the permit differs from a household registration and would not affect a person's Taiwanese status. Should the government just do as the TAO says? No, Taiwan should proclaim its sovereignty and freedom to make decisions to China and the world. This would set Taiwan apart from Hong Kong and Macau, as Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam (林鄭月娥) seems to welcome China's policy.

Perhaps the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government would be cautious to do this for fear of upsetting voters living in China. Those people do not necessarily support the DPP, and they might not return home to vote. If the party never had those votes to begin with, how could it lose them? By comparison, a stern counter-action would probably receive strong public support in Taiwan.

Moreover, a decision to strike back would not infringe on the rights of Taiwanese living in China

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— they never had these rights, so there is nothing to infringe on. Also, if the plan fails, it is unlikely that China would not find other ways to solve inconveniences for Taiwanese living there.

The Act Governing Relations Between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area (兩岸人民關係條例) was promulgated 26 years ago. New circumstances require new countermeasures. As the residence permit is not an obligatory document, the government only needs to amend the law and stipulate that it is equivalent to a China-issued household registration. That way, Taiwanese who do not want to renounce their citizenship could still work or study in China and remain unaffected, while those who apply for the permit for the sake of short-term convenience would lose the right to vote, as well as access to the national health insurance.

It is time that President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), who speaks of “not reverting to the old path of confrontation,” wakes up.

It is impossible not to confront China. Confrontation might result in accusations of playing with people’s livelihood for ideological reasons, but no confrontation at all will only invite more sugar-coated poison pills. Countermeasures inflict short-term pain, but no countermeasure at all will cause long-term torture.

It is time that the government took action. No Taiwanese should enjoy advantages on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Hopefully Taiwan will keep the right people and say farewell to those who love their “Chinese motherland” more.

Lam Sei-lin is a Hong Kong media commentator.

Translated by Chang Ho-ming.

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