

It was my fourth day in the US. During the student orientation at my Midwestern university, my Taiwanese friends and I encountered a girl from China. After identifying ourselves as Taiwanese, she quickly changed her up-to-then friendly attitude and became very aggressive.

“Taiwan is part of China, right? Right!?” she asked.

She pressed the question numerous times with a condescending smile.

It was from that day that I became very aware of my Taiwanese identity and my affirmation grew stronger by the day.

Taiwanese netizens often joke that the strongest advocate for self-determination is China, or more specifically, the Chinese Communist Party.

This is true. The more China suppresses us, the firmer we stand.

After this experience, I wanted to do something more, something that would align my profession with my passion.

When the Taiwan Travel Act was enacted in March, I quickly took notice of the Formosan Association for Public Affairs (FAPA) — a Taiwanese grassroots organization in the US that promotes freedom, human rights and democracy for the people of Taiwan.

I dug deeper and was stunned by how an organization with no more than a handful of staffers could bring a law into realization.

FAPA's monumental achievements

Written by Lucy Shen 珊珊

Sunday, 09 September 2018 08:05

I was also moved by the determination of the Taiwanese-Americans for their perseverance; how these patriots have kept fighting year after year, even after having left their homeland so long ago. Ultimately, I was impressed by how this legacy was being passed to the next generation.

For more than 30 years, the association has been behind many important pieces of Taiwan-related legislation. In 1991, it pioneered calls for the US Congress to support Taiwan's participation in the UN.

That year, US Congress Resolution 210 — a joint resolution — was introduced by then-US representative Dennis Hertel, expressing Congress' support for Taiwan's membership in the UN and other international organizations.

Several years later, members of the association realized that functional international organizations should be emphasized, as problems like the spread of epidemics do not stop at national borders.

The association launched its "WHO for Taiwan" campaign in 1998, when then-US representative Sherrod Brown introduced Congress Resolution 219, a concurrent resolution backing the nation's membership in the WHO.

Taiwanese-Americans might not be aware of this, but that they are able to list "Taiwan" as their country of birth on their US passports is due to the association's work in 1994.

In 2016, a resolution concluding that the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 and former US president Ronald Reagan's "six assurances" of 1982 are the cornerstone of Taiwan-US relations — not the vilified Three Joint Communiques, which harbor the even more vilified "one China" policy — was passed unanimously by the US House of Representatives and the US Senate.

One of the association's monumental achievements is the Taiwan Travel Act enacted this year, which is binding legislation that encourages visits on all levels between officials of the two

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sides.

On June 20, US Representative Dana Rohrabacher submitted a resolution urging the US to resume formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

The association has crafted numerous pieces of groundbreaking legislation and has thus become one of the most important voices on behalf of Taiwan in Washington.

I was lucky enough to spend my summer with the association experiencing the dynamics of the US capital. I met many inspiring people who are active and eminent in their fields. All of us were here for the same reason — to stand in solidarity with the unrelenting people of Taiwan.

Much has been done. Nonetheless, there is more that must be faced. Being a part of that great momentum gives me pride and hope.

Within my lifetime, I aspire to witness the flag of Taiwan flying vigorously in front of every international institution. That day will be a celebration of Taiwanese national identity without any hesitation, bullying or intimidation.

It will mark a day of immense pride, respect for this young democracy and the realization that all of us did this together.

Forever proud to be a Taiwanese. Together, we march forward.

Lucy Shen worked as an intern at the Formosan Association for Public Affairs in Washington over the summer.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2018/09/09](#)

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