

PRC pushes integration of Taiwan culture

Written by Taiwan News Editorial
Tuesday, 07 September 2010 10:32

In the wake of the signing of a controversial "Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement," the authoritarian People's Republic of China has launched drives to push President Ma Ying-jeou's rightist Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) government to accept political negotiations and help promote "cultural unification" under a "Chinese national identity."

While Ma appears committed to delay political talks until after the crucial Nov. 27 municipal mayoral elections, the KMT government seems to have fewer qualms about cooperating with the Chinese Communist Party - ruled PRC's intention to subordinate Taiwan culture under the reactionary umbrella of "Chinese national culture."

This agenda was showcased yesterday in the second KMT-CCP "Cross-Strait Cultural Forum" held yesterday in Taipei under the theme of "seizing the opening and creating a new situation."

National Cultural Association Secretary-General and former premier Liu Chao-hsuan set the tone by reaffirming that "Chinese culture is the common denominator between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait," followed by Council for Cultural Affairs Minister Emile Sheng's parroting of Ma's denigrating definition of Taiwan culture as "Chinese culture with unique Taiwanese characteristics."

Platitudes aside, the main course of the conference was PRC Culture Minister Cai Wu's upfront demand for the rapid signing of a "cross-strait culture cooperation agreement" under the ECFA umbrella in order to establish an "institutional mechanism" to promote "comprehensive cooperation" in fields including resource integration, financing, talent cultivation, content creation and global marketing and even participation in the "re-examination of culture policies and regulations."

Statements by Cai and other PRC delegates showed that Beijing's short-term objective is to appropriate the fruits of Taiwan's higher development in cultural creative industries, including artistic creation, techniques, commercialization and marketing, and turn our cultural assets into "local content" for the PRC to market globally as "Chinese culture."

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Besides predicting that "cross-cultural industry will become a new economic growth point and provide a pillar industry for the national economy," a term which surely did not refer to Taiwan, Cai settled any doubts about the ultimate purpose of "cross-strait cultural cooperation" with a resounding call to "commonly plan for the great revival of the Chinese race nation!"

Ironically, Cai's proposals are all in line with the "Creative Taiwan" blueprint approved by the Executive Yuan in May 2009 when Liu was still premier which clearly put priority on building "cross-strait partnerships" with the PRC in fields from television content, motion pictures and popular music to serve as "platforms" for Taiwan's culture and creativity products to "enter the world market," with the crucial difference that the marketing brand would be "Chinese" and not "Taiwan" culture.

Fortunately, Sheng stated that the CCA has no immediate plans to sign such a pact and instead said that its most pressing issue was the improvement of protection of intellectual property rights for Taiwan creators in the PRC, a goal which is quixotic indeed.

Unfortunately, Sheng's position can only be a delaying tactic since the KMT government has already surrendered the high ground in the contestation in the cultural field across the Taiwan Strait by retreating to its authoritarian era's reification of a monist "Chinese culture" and by Ma's own denigration of Taiwan culture into a subordinate component of "Chinese culture."

There should be no illusions that Cai's proposal represents a grave threat to Taiwan's cultural sovereignty and national identity and our global competitiveness in cultural and creative industries.

There should also be no illusions on whether the "cooperation" will take place on the foundations of parity and reciprocity, especially in terms of "dialogue" on core values.

Besides the lack of reciprocity in literature and news media, Taiwan's core cultural values of democracy and human rights are systematically blocked from the PRC and are not even present in cross-strait forums in Taiwan itself, while PRC officials have no scruples about loudly proclaiming the hegemony of "Chinese racial nationalism," insultingly referring to Taiwan's varied languages as "dialects" and even making comments rife with gender discrimination in public forums.

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Moreover, the vitality and competitiveness of Taiwan's cultural creative offerings is predicated on the distinctiveness of Taiwan culture thanks due our multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual society and rich international linkages deriving from our character as a democratic independent "ocean nation" and open economy.

This unique mixture has been immeasurably enriched by values of democracy, autonomy and human rights during decades of resistance to Japanese colonialism and KMT authoritarianism and cannot be subsumed by KMT or CCP chauvinistic denigration as "part of Chinese culture."

We urge the Ma government not to consider any "cultural cooperation pact" with Beijing until it builds robust cultural cooperation with partners from North America, Europe and East Asia through Southeast Asia and Africa, not to mention Oceania where our own rich Austronesian heritage is indeed a priceless asset.

Moreover, all Taiwan-centric parties, civic groups and ordinary citizens should uphold and support Taiwan-based creative art and performers, who themselves should look beyond China for inspiration so that we can, as the late Taiwan Cultural Association activist Wang Ming-chuan urged, "become a Taiwan that is part of the world" and not just another part of "China."

Source: [Taiwan News Online - Editorials 2010/09/07](#)