

Sledging the wrong foreigners

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Seminar presentations don't come any more laughable than this. Zheng Bijian (鄭碧堅), a former vice president of the Central Party School of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), yesterday repaid his Taiwanese hosts' hospitality with a lecture on how aspirations for Taiwanese independence would fade amid longing for improved cross-strait relations.

The seminar, organized by the pro-unification Pacific Cultural Foundation — an organization with historical links to Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) hardliners — was notable for the relatively benign language used by the Chinese speakers, in keeping with this era of presumed cross-strait detente.

It goes without saying that officials linked to the CCP Central Party School — which probably cultivates more corrupt officials per capita than any like institution in the world — are propagandists. It is incorrect to describe them as “experts” on Taiwan, as the foundation does, when the CCP line dictates that messages of simplicity dominate cross-strait debate.

Expertise implies an appreciation of complexity, but the line followed by China's “Taiwan experts” — from top to bottom — is invariably normative in analytical dress and contemptuous of other opinions.

More notable was the ennui with which the Chinese delegation was greeted. In a country of 23 million people, surely there would be just a few thousand who would be willing to mobilize and give these grim envoys a message they would never forget?

Alas, no.

These days, key Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislators are much more interested in generating political capital by hitting out at foreigners who actually contribute something to the country.

An example: It was a race to the bottom of the barrel at the legislature's Transportation Committee on Wednesday, with legislators on both sides of politics producing foreigner-bashing humdingers.

KMT Legislator Lo Shu-lei (羅淑蕾), whose willingness to publicly defy party orthodoxy has displeased President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) himself, on this occasion let stupidity get the better of her, asking why Taiwanese staff could not replace contracted foreign managers at the Taiwan High Speed Rail Corp.

But the charge was led by DPP Legislator Yeh Yi-jin (葉宜津) in her typically shrill fashion, attacking two foreign managers responsible for operations and contractual matters, whose sole offense, it appears, was to have salaries much higher than hers.

The irony, of course, is that the problems with the high speed rail system have little to do with infrastructure, which is safe, reliable and comfortable, or with contractual and operational

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matters, which have been reasonably smooth.

The DPP is thus heading into local elections with a recurring ailment: disregarding and even openly offending foreigners who in many, if not most, cases are valuable contributors to the building of Taiwan.

DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) surely recognizes this problem — and that its origins lie in opportunism rather than ideological hostility — but the DPP's reputation among foreign businesspeople, for example, has not improved under her watch. With spurious language coming from Yeh Yi-jin, a senior party official, this will not change anytime soon.

After all this time, there are still members of the DPP who do not understand the difference between “English-speaking foreigners” who help to improve and even protect the country and foreigners from China who would, as necessary, destroy everything in a heartbeat. These dim-witted DPP figures would do their party, their cause and the public a favor by pondering the consequences of alienating foreign professionals of repute for the sake of a cheap smear.

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