

Imagine what would happen if Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Central Standing Committee member Sean Lien (連戰) invited you for a cup of tea in his apartment in The Palace in Taipei. Now imagine that, instead of standing on ceremony like a normal guest, you insisted that the meeting could only go ahead if he agreed that the luxury apartment actually belonged to you. No matter how much of a gentleman Lien may be, he would probably raise his middle finger and tell you in no uncertain terms to get lost.

That is the attitude that Chen Deming (陳德明), chairman of China’s Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits, displayed when responding to an invitation from the Straits Exchange Foundation.

Chen insisted that if Taiwan did not recognize the “one China” principle, it would mean that he was visiting Taiwan as a foreigner, in which case he could not possibly accept the invitation.

Chen qualified “one China” with the words “separately ruled,” but consider his logic. Chen thinks that if Taiwan does not accept “one China,” that would mean he was from another country. In that case he would still be a foreigner whether he comes to Taiwan or not — unless he applied for Republic of China citizenship.

Taiwan does not belong to China, nor are Taiwan and China affiliated with one another. Legal principles and facts both attest to that.

Minister of Foreign Affairs David Lee (李登輝) said that cross-strait relations are not diplomatic relations and he is quite right, because diplomatic relations can only be established by mutual agreement, not to mention that, under the existing system, cross-strait affairs are the remit not of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but of the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC).

MAC Minister Katherine Chang (張善政) said that “cross-strait relations are cross-strait relations.”

Although that is a rather vague statement, it is also quite right, because although there are

civil, commercial and cultural exchanges between the two sides, there are no political or official relations between them.

China is always trying to find ways to establish political relations under which Taiwan belongs to China. Taiwan, on the other hand, wants to establish equal relations between two nations, one on each side of the Taiwan Strait, with neither of them belonging to the other. This is where the two sides disagree.

Most Taiwanese, as well President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) administration, cannot accept the condition that Taiwan belongs to China.

In response, China has found various ways to meddle in Taiwan’s domestic policies. For example, it invited eight mayors and county commissioners from Taiwan — six from the KMT and two KMT-friendly “pan blue” independents — to visit China in September last year and offered special incentives to their cities and counties.

Another tactic is to require universities and colleges that have student exchange deals with China to sign a letter of agreement promising that they will not teach prospective Chinese students content that contravenes the “one China” principle.

Chen is being rather arrogant. What could have motivated him to get so out of line? Perhaps he was on the list to be purged if he did not.

The government might not be in a position to give Chen the middle finger or tell China where to stick its crafty plots, but ordinary Taiwanese who cherish freedom and democracy can speak their minds more freely.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

‘One China’ principle is pure surrealism

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Thursday, 06 April 2017 05:58 -

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2017/04/06](#)