

There may be a diplomatic truce between Taiwan and China, but that has not stopped both sides from seeking to win the affection of the Scottish government. On Sept. 18 next year, Scotland will hold a referendum on whether it is to remain part of the UK or become an independent nation-state, and this has brought increased attention from both diplomatic missions in the capital, Edinburgh.

Since the early 1950s, Taipei and Beijing have competed with each other to win the diplomatic allegiance of countries around the world, with China gaining ascendancy in its campaign after it replaced Taiwan as a member of the UN Security Council in 1971.

The years 2000 to 2008 under then-president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) of the Democratic Progressive Party saw an increase in tensions across the Taiwan Strait and led to the loss of several of Taiwan's key diplomatic allies, including Chad, Senegal and Costa Rica. With President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) of the Chinese Nationalist Party taking over the administration in 2008, there has been a calming of tensions and a diplomatic truce between the two sides has been observed, while economic and cultural relations have increased.

However, it is unclear how the diplomatic truce affects newly formed nation-states, although a prominent example in recent years is that of South Sudan, which signed a joint communique with China days after its secession from Sudan was agreed in 2011.

As such, given that the Scottish government has been trying to demonstrate through recent actions and rhetoric that it would be responsible, outward-looking and respectful of international norms and conventions, it would be most irregular if it were to recognize Taiwan come next year. However, this has not stopped Taiwan from trying to establish as strong a relationship as possible.

Taiwan has been especially keen to build relations with the Scots and the Scottish parliament since it was inaugurated as a devolved chamber of the British parliament in 1999, following a referendum in 1979 and the Scotland Act of 1978. To date, the work of the Taipei Representative Office in Edinburgh (a subdivision of the Taipei Representative Office in London) has included:

Taiwan, China wooing Scotland

Written by Colin Alexander
Wednesday, 10 April 2013 08:37

- building economic relations;
- twinning Scottish high schools with high schools in Taiwan;
- building academic relationships between universities in Scotland and Taiwan, particularly the University of Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt University;
- inviting members of the Scottish parliament on all-expenses paid trips to Taiwan; and
- designing and registering the “Taiwan Scottish” tartan in 2011

It is these final two points that I would like to pick up on.

Taiwan has hosted a cross-party group of Scottish MPs every second year since the opening of the Scottish parliament in 1999. From other examples of this practice by Taiwan, we can say with certainty that these trips are intended to raise the profile of Taiwan internationally, increase awareness of cross-strait issues from Taiwan’s point of view and promote Taiwan as a place of business and study.

However, beyond the generic hosting of foreign politicians, Taiwan has appeared keen to stress the contribution that Scots have made to Taiwan, with the careers of James Laidlaw Maxwell (1836 to 1921) and the Reverend Thomas Barclay (1849 to 1935) of particular prominence.

Maxwell, a practicing medical doctor, was the first Presbyterian missionary to come to Taiwan in 1864. In 1865, he founded the Tainan Sin-Lau Hospital, the first Western-style hospital in Taiwan, and on June 16 of the same year, established the first Presbyterian church in the country.

Barclay, who arrived in 1875, oversaw the first translation of the Bible into Taiwanese and also introduced the first printing press to Taiwan.

While these individuals may be known to some sections of Taiwanese society, they are virtual unknowns in Scotland, and this has provided Taiwanese with an opportunity to demonstrate to Scottish MPs the considerable heritage that the two nations share in the hope that a bond can be solidified.

The Taipei Representative Office in Edinburgh has also been keen to engage with politicians in Scotland. One of the most demonstrable ways it has done this is through the design and registration of a Taiwan Scottish tartan in 2011. This was primarily to commemorate 100 years since the formation of the Republic of China (ROC) and to raise awareness of ROC history.

The tartan itself incorporates the Maxwell and Mackay family tartans — George Leslie Mackay (1844-1901), a Canadian of Scottish descent who was a Presbyterian missionary to Taiwan — but also has distinct blue and red elements emphasizing the Scottish Saltire and ROC flag.

Since 2011, the Taipei Representative Office in Edinburgh has been very generous in its provision of Taiwan Scottish tartan scarfs to politicians and public officials. As such, when being photographed by the media with a member of the representative office or another visiting Taiwanese official, it is normal to see the Scot in question wearing the Scottish Taiwan tartan scarf. The tartan scarf has therefore become a gesture of goodwill from Taiwanese toward Scotland's politicians, in the hope that Taiwan's interests will receive fair representation as Scotland nears its referendum next year.

However, the Scottish government has also increased its relations with China in recent years. This has come in the form of economic integration, gestures of goodwill and most recently Beijing's endorsement of the governing Scottish National Party and its pro-independence agenda. In terms of economic integration, the Scottish government's policy seeks to maintain Scotland's traditional export markets in Europe and North America, as well as target high-growth markets, particularly China. Indeed, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang (李克强) visited Scotland in a trade capacity when he was vice premier in 2011 and the two governments confirmed major agreements on investments in carbon fuels and renewable energy.

Taiwan, China wooing Scotland

Written by Colin Alexander

Wednesday, 10 April 2013 08:37

What is more, the arrival of a male and female panda at Edinburgh Zoo in December 2011, on loan from Sichuan Province, is an example of Chinese public diplomacy toward Scotland and is a testament to the prestige with which Beijing views its relations with Scotland as the country nears possible independence.

Finally, in an article on Feb. 19 in the Beijing-based Global Times, China confirmed that it was endorsing nationalist groups in Scotland and Northern Ireland primarily to combat some of the British government's China policies. Interestingly, Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond failed to meet the Dalai Lama on his tour of the UK in June last year.

It therefore seems probable that should Scotland gain independence from the UK, it will become a formal ally of China. Yet, it is also clear that Taiwan has been performing a charm offensive of its own toward Scottish politicians and that some of them at least have become quite enamoured with Taiwan's Scottish heritage and the emotive symbolism of the Scottish Taiwan tartan.

These are interesting developments given the ongoing diplomatic truce between the two sides, the significance of which will become clearer as we move closer to Scotland's referendum date next year.

Colin Alexander is a Scottish academic currently studying Taiwan's public diplomacy as part of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs research fellowship.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2013/04/10](#)