Four Chinese banks that issue offshore yuan bonds in Taiwan placed large, front-page advertisements in several newspapers belonging to the China Times (□□□□) and United Daily News (□□□) groups. These eye-catching ads used the term “on the island,” implying that the nation is a province of China.

Although economic and social cross-strait relations are growing stronger, many people are likely to take offense to such a blatant reference to the unification-independence issue.

They may be disgruntled, but what can they do? The government’s pro-Beijing stance has created a heavy economic reliance on China, which is almost Taiwan’s biggest trading partner, thus making the nation vulnerable to economic colonization.

China is making good use of its economic and political resources as it expands its influence over different sectors of society and gradually turns Taiwanese dependence into a bargaining chip, which it will use to control “the island” to achieve its goal of forcing political talks.

During last year’s presidential election campaign, Beijing used Taiwanese businesspeople based in China to threaten voters, which resulted in former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) chairperson Tsai Ing-wen’s (□□□) loss to President Ma Ying-jeou (□□□), despite his lackluster performance.

The government has given up on the pro-US policies of the past in favor of China, and many of its decisions are made to please Beijing in the hope that it will repay the government economically and at the ballot box.

When sovereignty claims clash, the Ma administration is afraid of opposing China and of offending Taiwanese, and so it becomes paralyzed. This is what happened when China announced its air defense identification zone last month. The government’s reaction was delayed because it did not have the slightest understanding of the impact that the announcement would have on the nation’s sovereignty and regional security. This shows how much Ma leans toward Beijing.

To understand how China’s unification policy will work, consider how Beijing forced Hong Kong to surrender.

The manipulation of Taiwanese businesspeople in China was the first step in its plan. By using Chinese market opportunities as bait and holding Taiwanese businesspeople hostage to their investments in China, Beijing has them in a stranglehold that allows it to force companies to express support for China or to keep their mouths shut.

The second step is to co-opt politicians. The pan-blue camp is looking for opportunities to go to China for networking purposes. A look at how politicians fought to meet with Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits Chairman Chen Deming (□□□) and to be invited to banquets with him during his recent visit showed how “red” the political stage is becoming.

The third step is to use China’s huge domestic market to bait the media into becoming more pro-Chinese. A good example is how China is using soap operas to entice the pro-green TV station SET TV and how it is trying to get a hold on media outlets by buying advertising space. This approach is gradually silencing critical voices and luring them toward the Chinese market.

The advertisements for Taiwanese bonds were a testing of the waters. They straddled the line between law and politics, and if politicians, the media and the public do not protest, there will be more advertisements and other activities that continue to push the boundaries.

If Taiwanese see this as normal behavior and get used to China’s influence, it will just be a matter of time before the nation becomes part of China.

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