

## Taiwanese must show China their tenacity

Written by Huang Tzu-wei 黃子偉  
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During the recent visit by China's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) Minister Zhang Zhijun (張志軍) to Taiwan, there were many calls, from both sides of the local political divide, for Zhang to listen carefully to what the public has to say.

Although this was one of those very rare occasions where people with political differences — pan-blue camp and pan-green camp — agreed, it is, frankly, rather naive to place any hopes that the normalization of cross-strait relations will lead to the public's voice being heard in the heady heights occupied by the powers that be in Beijing, or that this will make any difference.

For a long time, the Chinese authorities — from the core leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference right at the top, down through to the Taiwan Affairs Office itself, the United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee, the People's Liberation Army General Staff Department or the Chinese Ministry of State Security, and indeed to the innumerable institutions peripheral to the centers of power, the think tanks and the university research groups, have sought, snatched, snooped, pilfered, plundered and scrutinized every single available piece of information about Taiwan.

In other words, the problem with China's understanding of the inner workings of Taiwan's democratic system, or of the aspirations of ordinary Taiwanese for independence and autonomy for their country, is not one of an "information gap," it is one of an unwillingness to accept them on the emotional level, born of a difference in values.

In addition, Hong Kong's experience is one worthy of scrutiny for us, too, as it could be seen as a trial run, a precursor for what we are to expect. Way back in 1947, China, hoping to reinforce its influence in Hong Kong, then still a British colony, set up a Hong Kong branch of the Xinhua news agency.

The Hong Kong branch would later, after the 1997 hand-over, be renamed the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

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It was not so long ago that former Chinese president Jiang Zemin (江澤民) reiterated assurances that Hong Kong people would run Hong Kong under the “one country, two systems” model, and that this would not change for 50 years, that we cannot still hear those words ringing in our ears.

Now Beijing is prevaricating, fiddling with Orwellian tweaks to its initial undertakings, saying that people must “love China and love Hong Kong” (愛國愛港) and that the “two systems” part of the formulation must be subverted to the “one country.”

Do you really suppose that after almost two decades of running the show in the former British colony, Beijing is blissfully unaware of the desire among the people of Hong Kong for autonomy? Or that Beijing has the ability to keep tabs on the media and to constrain freedom of speech, and yet still has not noticed, after a string of street demonstrations, the Hong Kong public’s demands for true universal suffrage in choosing the Special Administrative Region’s chief executive?

Simply put, whether Taiwan is going to be able to engage with China on an equal footing during negotiations and maintain its independent, autonomous way of life, depends to a considerable degree on just how unequal the dynamics of reliance between Taiwan and China are, and whether Taiwanese are able to adequately express, at this crucial moment in time, how determined they are. We cannot just hope the authorities in Beijing will be moved by our exhortations.

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Translated by Paul Cooper

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