

Vote against China-or vote for it

Written by Taiwan Tati Cultural & Educational Foundation
Saturday, 13 June 2015 07:18

The administration of US President Barack Obama gave Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) a warm reception during her visit to the US. However, China is not happy.

Chinese Ambassador to the US Cui Tiankai (崔天凯) criticized Tsai, saying: “If she has something to say, why not speak directly to her compatriots on the other side of the Taiwan Strait? Is it really necessary to conduct a job interview with foreigners?”

Cui also said that Tsai needs to “pass the test” of 1.3 billion Chinese and accept the “one China” principle rather than try to muddle through next year’s presidential election using equivocal and ambiguous language.

The tone and choice of words of Cui’s statement were inappropriate and not up to the professional standard expected from a diplomat. As for Tsai’s trip to the US, it was part and parcel of the democratic process in Taiwan in the leadup to a presidential election. The US is a key ally, and Tsai is the nominated DPP presidential candidate. Furthermore, Tsai has previously communicated with US government officials, academics and think tanks, in addition to meeting and interacting with Taiwanese-American groups.

Cui is perhaps inexperienced in the ways of democratic relations, or he might have had too many long-term postings to autocratic regimes: Perhaps this is excusable, but to make this kind of criticism in the capital of a major democratic nation shows he is unqualified for his role.

The key question is why on Earth should Tsai need to “pass the test” of the Chinese public? She is a candidate for the presidency of Taiwan — this is a matter for Taiwanese and has nothing whatsoever to do with China.

US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel on Wednesday, while congratulating Taiwanese on being able to choose their own president, said: “This is their choice, not our choice.”

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Taiwanese do not have a God-given right to vote for a president; it is a gift bestowed upon the public through the sacrifice of many who came before them. It involved fighting against many forms of resistance, including President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) plan for indirect presidential elections, which would have restricted freedom of political choice.

Cui's shameless words have caused great offense to Taiwanese, yet the Ma administration only dares to say Cui's words were "inappropriate." There has been no official protest, since Ma's government is busying itself in ceding Taiwanese sovereignty to China.

Even worse, these words came from an official belonging to a communist regime that does not allow its people to directly elect a leader. In China, the election of a new chairman only involves one candidate and the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) internal ballot paper offers two choices: agree or disagree.

Cui has been posted to the US for more than two years. Some basic democratic values ought to have penetrated, even if his thoughts do not extend so far as the democratic revolution that Chinese so desire, but to make use of the political freedom that Chinese lack as a tool to criticize Tsai's trip to the US is bizarre.

Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) has not submitted to the test of China's 1.3 billion people either. Even Hong Kongers demanding universal suffrage and the right to elect their leader and members of their own Legislative Council have been suppressed, sparking last year's Umbrella movement.

The ideal situation for China's ruling elite is to not have direct elections for its political leadership, to hold civil service elections to placate the lower orders and keep the party and the armed forces under the same umbrella, allowing the CCP to hold on to power indefinitely.

However, the way Chinese might view this situation is not the same as the way the state does.

During last week's 26th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, armed police were posted on the square and nearby. Rifles slung over their backs, the police were nervous and

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jittery. In Beijing's blanket ban of commemorative activities, Chinese officials reacted as if they were facing a great enemy.

Rights groups were monitored and Tiananmen Mothers group leader Ding Zilin (丁子林) vanished. Former CCP general secretary Zhao Ziyang's (赵紫阳) aide — and sympathizer of the Tiananmen protesters — Bao Tong (包彤) has been put under house arrest. Democracy advocate Hu Jia (胡佳) has been “sent on holiday” and Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo (刘晓波) is languishing in one of China's “black prisons.”

China's political landscape may be transforming into a military power. On the face of it, China's society is “harmonious,” but the public do not enjoy even the most basic freedoms and democratic rights.

On Monday last week, cruise ship the Oriental Star capsized on the Yangtze River during stormy weather and attracted world concern. As per usual after a large disaster, media controls were swiftly put in place. Journalists have been banned from interviewing survivors and are only allowed to use reports supplied by the Xinhua news agency and state-run China Central Television. News is therefore restricted to focusing on the on-site directions of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang (李克强). In Beijing, every newspaper headline reads the same.

Relatives of the more than 400 people initially reported as missing who went to local government offices for information were reprimanded by officials, pushed over and even detained. The disaster, already awful enough, illustrates the pitiful lack of press freedom in China.

Similarly, Cui's haughty demeanor and arrogant words are not just directed at Taiwan, but are also an expression of China's attitude toward its neighbors in regard to territorial and maritime disputes.

The Obama administration on Monday last week called on China to cease its provocative land reclamation activities in the South China Sea, in order to prevent any unintended consequences.

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During a trip to Japan, Philippine President Benigno Aquino III made a speech in which he compared the actions of China to that of Nazi Germany and called on the international community not to appease China. From the US to East and South Asian countries, a united movement is forming to block China's path.

Cui revealed China will not be content to watch from the sidelines during next year's presidential election, but is likely to interfere in Taiwan's electoral process. For this reason, Taiwanese are faced with a clear choice next year: Vote for a pro-China party or draw a line between Taiwan and China.

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