

Beijing's backfiring Huang debacle

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The video of 16-year-old Taiwanese Chou Tzu-yu (周子瑜), of the South Korean pop group TWICE, apologizing for displaying a Republic of China (ROC) flag on a variety show might seem like just another example of a Taiwanese being bullied by China, but few other examples have stirred such a backlash or highlighted Beijing's hypocrisy and backwardness in such shocking detail.

First, the fact that three Japanese members of the group held up Japan's flag in the same episode shows how much malice China harbors against Taiwan, as it clearly shows Chinese officials' inability to separate entertainment from politics.

Given the proximity to Taiwan's presidential and legislative elections, it also demonstrated how these officials were both inept and obtuse, as whoever put pressure on Chou's South Korean management firm, JYP Entertainment, obviously overlooked the consequences that such a browbeating could bring.

China's poor timing and its intimidation of JYP brought widespread international coverage after the firm apparently forced Chou to apologize in a video, in which she declared that she is "proud to be a Chinese," which, regardless of the video's purpose, is basically telling the world that China is a tyrant that wants everything — including a person's identity — its own way.

After the historic meeting between President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) less than three months ago and with all of Xi's contrived rhetoric about Taiwan and China being "blood brothers," Beijing force-feeding Taiwan, through Chou, its definition of what it means to be Taiwanese has left many questioning what it had taken the "one China, different interpretations" principle under the so-called "1992 consensus" to mean.

More importantly, it is solid evidence that the Ma-Xi summit was nothing more than a vanity project by Ma to secure his legacy.

After the video sparked public outrage on election day, Chinese netizens on the Sina Weibo microblog were reported to have ridiculed Chou's forced apology as an act of kowtowing to the Chinese market, which again reminded Taiwanese how out of sync they are with Chinese.

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The video has no doubt further alienated Taiwanese from China and was widely believed to be a contributing factor to the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) crushing defeat in Saturday's elections.

Chinese authorities responded to the debacle by freezing the Sina Weibo account of China-based Taiwanese singer Huang An (黄安), who tipped off Chinese authorities about Chou.

It was frightening how fast Huang fell out of favor with China just because he made Beijing lose face, which suggests that Chinese authorities have not improved much since the Cultural Revolution, when people who were considered detrimental to or "enemies" of the Chinese Communist Party were persecuted.

While Huang should be condemned for picking on a minor, the Chinese government could have ignored his complaint about Chou and done nothing, but instead it chose to make a move on a 16-year-old, which, coupled with the video, paints Beijing in a very bad light.

The whole debacle implies that the move to "correct" Chou was poorly planned, which suggests that it was likely executed by low-level officials and did not go through the top brass in Beijing.

Beijing's decision to curb Huang will likely not help to salvage the nasty reputation it has earned from its continued oppression of Taiwan. It only made China more notorious.

While Huang was the one that started the incident, leaving him despised by almost all Taiwanese, China's failure to acknowledge its oppressive and narrow-minded ways has made it appear like a buffoon, and made it the bigger loser.

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