

Beijing has only itself to blame

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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China's rise and its efforts to expand its diplomatic and economic reach have been the subject of torrents of analysis over the past two decades, with much praise coming from domestic pundits and a lot of handwringing from those in other nations, especially Western ones. The one thing the two camps appear to agree upon has been that China's rise is seemingly inexorable.

Lost, or all too often dismissed, in all the hubbub, however, has been the accompanying rise in antipathy to Beijing's rule and tactics, especially by those along China's periphery or closest to the edge. This is why, given Beijing's divide-and-conquer tactics, it is so important for those on the edges to find common ground and provide common support.

The findings of the latest poll by Hong Kong University's Public Opinion Programme show that 35 percent of the territory's residents support Taiwanese independence, the highest level of support in 21 years, although a majority of respondents continue to disapprove of the idea. Compare those results with the group's poll taken just before Taiwan's presidential election in 2004, when 71 percent of respondents opposed independence and just 12 percent supported the idea, although 44 percent were not confident in cross-strait unification, while 35 percent were.

The idea that "one country, two systems" was applicable to Taiwan was also down to 33 percent of the respondents in the latest survey, while those who said "one country, two systems" was not applicable amounted to 52 percent in the latest survey.

The pollsters said that support for Taiwanese independence was divided along generational lines: The younger the respondent, the greater the likelihood that they would support independence and the less confidence they have in cross-strait unification.

One cannot help but think that Beijing's increasing disregard for the promises it made prior to the territory's handover in 1997 and its interference in Hong Kong's affairs have played a part in the shift in opinion. It is no wonder that scores of Hong Kong residents visited Taiwan ahead of the Jan. 16 presidential and legislative elections to watch this nation's democracy at work, or why *Ten Years*, a film about the territory in 2025 when Cantonese can no longer be used, a character imprisoned for supporting Hong Kong independence dies after a hunger strike and another character self-immolates, packed theaters for two months until it was abruptly pulled.

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It just seems as if Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) and the current crop of Beijing leaders have not learned anything from the failure of their predecessors to “handle” Tibetans and Uighurs. Beijing has “ruled” Tibet for 66 years and yet it has conniptions at the very mention of the Dalai Lama’s name, as shown by its efforts this week to stop diplomats and UN officials from attending an event yesterday at the Geneva Graduate Institute in Switzerland, where the Buddhist leader was on a panel of Nobel laureates. Of course, Thursday was the 57th anniversary of the start of Tibetans’ peaceful uprising against the Chinese invasion and occupation.

However, one does not have to be the Dalai Lama to upset Beijing. Tashi Wangchuk, a 30-year-old advocate for bilingual education in Tibetan regions, has been detained since Jan. 27, even though, as the New York Times noted, he has praised Xi for having “promoted a democratic and law-abiding nation these last few years.”

Meanwhile, unrest in Xinjiang simmers, not because of Muslim extremists, but because of Beijing’s efforts to eliminate the Uighurs’ cultural and religious identity, including their language.

The history, status and identity of Hong Kong and Taiwan are very different, but Hong Kongers and Taiwanese can see that what has happened in Tibet and Xinjiang could be in their future, which is why it is so important to speak out against Beijing’s efforts to bribe or terrorize its opponents into submission.

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