

Beijing's strong dislike of Hillary

Written by Parris Chang 珊珊

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US Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton, who is likely to move into the White House in January next year, has always been a headache for Beijing.

In September 1995, Clinton attended the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing as first lady of the US and chairwoman of the US delegation, delivering a speech sharply criticizing China for discriminating against and abusing women and violating women's rights. Her speech was so embarrassing to the Chinese authorities that it was muffled.

Her phrase "Human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights" has been adopted as a slogan for the global women's rights movement.

When Clinton left her post as the secretary of state in US President Barack Obama's administration in January 2013, China's Global Times published a feature article describing her as the most-hated US politician among Chinese Internet users, blaming her for seriously damaging bilateral relations between China and its neighboring states in just a short period of time.

On the day Clinton announced her presidential candidacy in April last year, the People's Daily's overseas edition ran an article on its WeChat page calling her an "anti-China" politician.

The article gave a concise account of her criticisms against China over the past few years, including her condemnation of the human rights situation in China in 2008, a high-profile attack on Beijing's intervention on Internet freedom in 2010, sarcastic remarks in an interview with The Atlantic magazine in 2011 about the Chinese government suffering from its vain attempts to suppress dissidents, criticism against China's rapidly increased investments in Africa, calling it "new colonialism" in 2012, and her leaning toward Japan in the sovereignty dispute over the Diaoyutai Islands (钓鱼台) in 2013.

She also suggested that she would support the push for a "color revolution" in China.

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Also, other official media criticized her for having initiated the South China Sea disputes in recent years.

At the ASEAN Regional Forum in Hanoi in July 2010, Clinton took the lead to challenge then-Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi (杨洁基), saying that the South China Sea is important to US national interests.

She stressed the importance of freedom of navigation, saying that the sovereignty dispute in the waters cannot be decided unilaterally by one nation or be resolved by force, adding that it should be resolved through multilateral negotiations.

A dozen nations expressed their views at the forum, mostly echoing the US' position.

In October 2010, Clinton published an article, titled America's Pacific Century, in Foreign Policy magazine, announcing the key points of the US' Asia-Pacific policy and providing a theoretical foundation.

In a speech in Hawaii in October 2011, Clinton positioned Taiwan as an important security and economic partner of the US, and expressed hope that Taiwan will be able to contribute to Washington's "return to Asia" policy.

The remarks greatly irritated Beijing. Beijing believes that Clinton arranged for Liu Xiaobo (刘晓波) to receive the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize to embarrass Beijing, which condemned Clinton and her assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs Kurt Campbell for being "chief criminals" undermining Sino-US relations.

Generally, the massive number of Chinese Internet users echo the Chinese government's criticism against Clinton. In a nation whose political system does not value women — a woman has never been a member of the Central Politburo Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party that holds supreme power — Internet users reject strong women by calling them "mean" or, even worse, linking their successful careers to a failed family life.

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They often borrow the remarks of Republican Party presidential candidate Donald Trump about Clinton's husband's extramarital affair, saying that "If Hillary Clinton can't satisfy her husband, what makes her think she can satisfy America?"

In China, the statutory retirement age for women is 55. Quite a few Internet users wonder why Clinton, at the age of 68, does not stay home and take care of her grandchildren.

However, another, friendlier, viewpoint on Clinton also exists in China. She has a growing number of female fans, many of whom are women's rights activists, open-minded intellectuals, and social liberals, who admire and praise her career achievements.

Beijing-based Life Week magazine ran an article on its Weibo page describing her political career, which received positive feedback. The author showed a favorable impression of and respect for her "extraordinary courage and determination."

One Internet user admired "her courage to pursue her dream at this age," while another said that as a woman, she sees Clinton as a role model, and that "we should all fight for noble ideals regardless of our gender, nationality and personal difficulties."

On the eve of International Women's Day on March 8 last year, five Chinese women's rights activists launched an inter-city campaign against sexual harassment on public transportation. They were detained by the Chinese government for one month for disturbing public order and stirring up trouble.

Clinton sent a message to Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) on Twitter, saying: "Xi hosting a meeting on women's rights at the UN while persecuting feminists? Shameless."

Since then, she has significantly boosted her impression among young Chinese feminists.

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Li Tingting (李婷婷), one of the five detained Chinese women, told CNN that she does not agree with all of Clinton's politics.

"But what matters most is what a Clinton presidency would symbolize for women — even in China," Li said.

Although China's official media are spreading hatred against Clinton, Chinese seem to have their own opinions and are not completely led by the nose.

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Translated by Eddy Chang

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