

China trying to divide the nation

Written by Chen Fang-ming 陳芳明

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Taiwanese human rights advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲) has now been missing for more than two months. People know nothing about his physical and mental health except for what China's Taiwan Affairs Office has said. By detaining Lee, the Chinese government has deprived him of his basic human rights.

When he was first detained, Beijing sent a letter to Lee's wife, Lee Ching-yu (李慶餘), via a man named Lee Chun-min (李俊民), which is odd.

Lee Chun-min is said to be chief executive at the Navigation Foundation, which is chaired by Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Central Policy Committee director Alex Tsai (蔡正元).

In October last year, Lee Chun-min negotiated with Somali pirates on behalf of Taiwanese chief engineer Shen Jui-chang (沈季昌), who was captured when the fishing boat Naham 3 was hijacked, and eventually secured Shen's release.

Instead of contacting the Straits Exchange Foundation, Beijing chose the unusual approach of asking Lee Chun-min to deliver a letter to Lee Ching-yu. This suggests that Beijing views itself as being little different from Somali kidnappers.

It is a shame that a big nation like China would sink so low and insist on communicating through people who negotiate with kidnappers.

For a nation to be respected, it must act in ways that deserve respect. Causing pain to the families of detainees by using subterfuge will only achieve the opposite.

One of Beijing's goals is to humiliate President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) administration, but its behavior also hurts the dignity and image of China itself.

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Meanwhile, one might wonder what the Republic of China (ROC) government has done so far to save Lee Ming-che. When it comes to rescuing its citizens from detention in another nation, there is obviously little it can do.

Beijing's intent is clear: As soon as Taiwan acknowledges the "1992 consensus," it will begin communicating with the Tsai administration again. Despite its size and influence, China has absolutely no regard for human rights and cross-strait exchanges are entirely dependent on whether Taiwan is willing to concede to Beijing's political demands.

A simple nod by the Tsai administration to the "1992 consensus" is probably all it takes to get Lee Ming-che released. This is clearly an attempt to force the issue: The "1992 consensus" was an agreement between the KMT and the Chinese Community Party (CCP), and it is not something that the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) will automatically accept.

Taiwan has its own internal rules in place to deal with transitions of power, and the cross-strait relationship is not a matter for two political parties to deal with. In the spirit of democracy, Beijing should try to reach new agreements with Taiwan's governing party instead of asking it to follow through on plans agreed by the KMT and the CCP.

The DPP seems to have encountered foreign policy problems. Judging from the fact that the WHO has not extended an invitation for Taiwan to attend the World Health Assembly, China is blocking Taiwan from attending any international events.

Even Tsai's "new southbound policy" is being thwarted by a joint communique issued by China and Vietnam. China's relentless efforts to exclude Taiwan from the international community is making Lee Ming-che's rescue more difficult.

Lee Ching-yu understands Taiwan's plight. She knew from the start that the only way to free her husband is to go through international channels.

Taiwan cannot beg Beijing to release Lee Ming-che, nor can Taiwanese compromise the dignity of their nation in exchange for Lee Ming-che's return.

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The Tsai administration has been doing its best to avoid that, because Beijing is trying to control the nation by holding Lee Ming-che hostage.

Taiwan is being forced to pay a high price in terms of human rights, as Lee Ming-che will not be released in the near future. Beijing is using him as bait to cause a division in Taiwan. A nation with no regard for human rights will always find new ways to persecute innocent people.

For years, China has blatantly cracked down on human rights lawyers and arrested innocent people, holding them incommunicado and making political dissidents “disappear;” Lee Ming-che is just one more in this long line of people. People are arrested so often in China that it is now considered normal.

Nevertheless, Lee Ming-che’s detention is not viewed as normal in Taiwan, where people take human rights issues seriously. Taiwanese’s hearts go out to Lee Ming-che. Every day that he spends in imprisonment is a day without freedom for all Taiwanese.

Following an invitation from US Representative Ed Royce, chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, Lee Ching-yu on Thursday attended a congressional hearing to urge the US government to help rescue her husband.

Some mocked her for fawning over the US, but the truth is that human rights issues know no boundaries. Any way that could possibly help improve the conditions of the hostage is worth trying.

Lee Ching-yu’s tireless effort to save her husband is truly inspiring. Taiwanese stand in solidarity with her in the fight against Beijing and feel the pain of Lee Ming-che as he remains detained.

As it stands, there is little that the Tsai administration can do to rescue him, but no one wants to see Taiwan compromise its values.

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Lee Ching-yu's insistence and perseverance deserve the highest respect. It is the nation's hope that Lee Ming-che will be able to safely return home soon.

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Translated by Tu Yu-an

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