

Xi's 'dream' has no place in Taiwan

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Premier William Lai (賴清德) on Tuesday called on Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) to adjust his strategy toward Taiwan. Looking for a new cross-strait development plan, Lai urged Xi to work toward easing tension and hostility between the two nations.

His words were likely in anticipation of Xi's attitude toward Taiwan after the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which opened in Beijing yesterday.

In her Double Ten National Day address, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) spoke of her intention to show continued goodwill toward China; her resolve to protect Taiwan's freedom, democracy and way of life; and intention to upgrade and energize the military.

Xi responded to Tsai's points in his opening speech at the congress: "We will never allow anyone, any organization or any political party, at any time or in any form, to separate any part of Chinese territory from China."

"We have the resolve, the confidence and the ability to defeat separatist attempts for Taiwanese independence in any form," he said.

The problem is that the two sides have completely conflicting and intractable interpretations of their respective histories, present realities and desired futures.

Xi has constructed his leadership around the idea of the "Chinese dream," in which China progresses and prospers fully intact — that is, with the territories it unilaterally claims, including Taiwan — and continues to rise from its "century of humiliation."

In his speech, Xi extended a hand to Taiwan, presumably intended to be seen as reasonable accommodation, saying that China respects Taiwan's "current social system and way of life."

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He said that the “one country, two systems” formula is the optimum model for Chinese rule of Hong Kong. Was he suggesting this would be the best solution for Taiwan, too?

Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平) gave such assurances to the British before they handed Hong Kong over to China in 1997.

“Horse racing will continue and the dancing parties will go on,” Deng said, adding: “River water should not interfere with well water.”

That is, the Hong Kong way of life — as it was under British rule — would continue unaltered for 50 years after the handover. Ask Hong Kongers how that has worked out for them.

Xi yesterday demanded that Taiwan recognize the “historical fact” that the two sides belong to “one China,” so that Beijing and Taipei “can conduct dialogue to address the concerns of the people on both sides [of the Taiwan Strait] through dialogue, and so that no political party or group in Taiwan will have any difficulty conducting exchanges with the ‘mainland.’”

This was presumably Xi's version of returning Tsai's goodwill. It was, perhaps, his interpretation of a “new cross-strait development plan” for Lai to mull over. It was, certainly, a demand that Tsai recognize the so-called “1992 consensus.”

It coheres perfectly with Xi's “Chinese dream”: marching toward the future, united into a great Chinese nation to take our rightful place in the world.

Except this is neither the vision nor the aspiration of the vast majority of Taiwanese, who have fought long and hard for their democratic freedoms and economic and technological achievements, despite Beijing's suppression and intimidation.

That is why the Mainland Affairs Council reiterated its position that “the Republic of China is a sovereign nation,” and that it is the right of the 23 million Taiwanese to decide their own future.

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Neither side wants war, but Xi is going to have to adjust his expectations of proper conditions for dialogue to reduce tensions. He also needs to accept that the Taiwanese dream does not coincide with his "Chinese dream."

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