

Beijing puts George Orwell to shame

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The White House on May 5 hit back at Beijing's demand that US airlines comply with Chinese standards on how they refer to Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, dismissing the demands as "Orwellian nonsense."

Beijing's Orwellian bent continues to be on display.

The state-owned Global Times reported that online commentators have been complaining about a T-shirt sold by US clothing retailer Gap, showing a map of China. The map omitted Taiwan, Tibet, part of the South China Sea and Aksai Chin, a large disputed border area between India and China.

Gap on Monday apologized and withdrew the T-shirts. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Lu Kang (陆慷) noted the apology and said the ministry would be following the company's actions.

Da Ai TV has withdrawn a historical drama, Jiachang's Heart (家常饭), after airing only two episodes. The drama was inspired by the story of a Taiwanese nurse who served with the Japanese imperial army in China during World War II, when Taiwan was a Japanese colony.

Despite denials by Da Ai media development manager Ou Hung-yu (欧 Hung-yu), the decision to cancel the show reportedly followed pressure from China's Taiwan Affairs Office, which was unhappy about the show's favorable depiction of the Japanese army.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintains its political power through censorship and control of media through official outlets such as the Global Times. It is no surprise that the "omissions" in the map on Gap's T-shirts were noted by Chinese online commentators. They are relentlessly fed the CCP's propaganda about Taiwan belonging to China, as well as the rejection of dissenting voices. Neither is it surprising that official media outlets or China's foreign ministry picked up on it.

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In George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, people's minds are controlled by constant state surveillance, state-controlled historical revisionism and the pared-down, concept-poor language of "newspeak."

The CCP subscribes to constant surveillance and historical revisionism. Its version of newspeak is the persistent repetition of a simple message. Pertinent to Taiwan, the message is: "Taiwan is part of China. Taiwan is part of China. Taiwan is part of China."

However, historically and in terms of international law, there is little to commend that claim. It is certainly one that the majority of Taiwanese reject.

In *Animal Farm*, Orwell explored the power of messages and how its gradual and subtle modification can lead to the creeping extension of power. In the story, the rule "All animals are equal" becomes "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" overnight, giving more power to the pigs.

The CCP's model of governance is its own business. It cannot expect organizations, broadcasters or retailers from other nations to comply with its dictates.

In November last year, Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) told a forum for foreign political groups in Beijing that China "will not import other countries' models, and will not export the China model." Since then, it seems the message has become "China will not import other countries' models, and will not export the China model, unless deemed necessary."

In other words, Beijing wants to have its cake and eat it.

Foreign companies bow to Beijing's bullying because of corporate interests, while the governments of other nations concede to Beijing's unilateral historical revisionism due to political and economic expediency.

Calling China's tactics Orwellian is accurate. Being Orwellian, the normalization of the message and the gradual, almost imperceptible alterations to the narrative are pernicious. Not

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calling these out for what they are is the mistake.

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