

Chinese products must be boycotted

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Wednesday, 18 July 2018 08:35

Have you ever counted how many of your personal belongings were made in China? If you have not, try doing so. You might be surprised by how much you are unknowingly paying Chinese companies.

The idea of boycotting Chinese products is bound to spark controversy. As China buys about 40 percent of Taiwan's exports, even politicians who are most vocal about Taiwanese sovereignty might have reservations about a boycott, which would surely provoke a retaliation from Beijing if implemented at a national level.

However, that does not mean that Taiwanese should ditch the idea altogether or that it is not feasible — at least not on a personal level.

Before people start asking why they should boycott or, at the very least, avoid using Chinese products, they should ask: "Why not?"

Is there any sensible reason for Taiwanese to buy everything from China?

The desire of companies worldwide to cut costs and maximize profits has led to today's global trade setting, in which nearly everything is made in China.

This has been going on for a while, so much so that China by 2013 had accumulated so much wealth from its "excess production" that it directed those resources to gaining hegemony over other nations in the shape of its international infrastructure project known as the Belt and Road Initiative.

China grants generous loans to economically weak countries that participate in the initiative, only to turn on them and demand a share of their natural wealth or infrastructure when they fail to repay their debt. The loot China has seized through the extortionist practice includes ports, natural resources and even political influence.

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US companies that have followed US President Donald Trump's "America first" policy by moving their production lines back to the US know that it is not wise to source all their raw materials and components from China.

Australian Security Intelligence Organisation director-general Duncan Lewis has warned about the "insidious threat" Beijing poses to Australian universities and media with its attempts to shape public opinion and trumpet its views on global issues. Australians might want to start paying attention to how much Chinese products they are buying.

Taiwanese who support the nation's right to self-determination and oppose unification with China should definitely boycott Chinese products whenever possible. Decrying Beijing's bullying of Taiwan while paying for Chinese goods on a daily basis is pure hypocrisy. Every dollar paid to China is making it richer — and bolder in its bullying of other nations in the region.

The Democratic Progressive Party administration is faced with the inconvenient truth that its New Southbound Policy — in which trade plays a significant role — cannot achieve its full potential without a boycott of Chinese products.

Take clothing, for example. Some well-known brands have chosen third countries over China to build their production bases. Sweden's H&M is one of them: It opened production lines in India and Bangladesh, instead of China.

Taiwanese can source practically anything they need from countries other than China — and at reasonable prices. They might also be pleasantly surprised that many of the products are made in countries targeted by the New Southbound Policy, such as Vietnam, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

They might be even more delighted to find that quite a few personal items are still being made in Taiwan and by choosing them over Chinese products, they would subtly but surely nurture local industries.

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In international politics, greater economic power means greater political clout. China needs to be stripped of its title of being the world's factory and then maybe it could start to learn some humility.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2018/07/18](#)