

Taking ‘united front’ tactics seriously

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Taking advantage of Taiwan’s free and democratic society, as well as the importance attached to the freedom of expression by the government and the public, China has made significant gains in targeting Taiwanese and undermining the nation’s democracy.

It was out of respect for the right to freedom of expression that the Changhua County Government waited until last month to demolish a former temple that had been rededicated to the Chinese Communist Party, and for the same reason, Taipei has been condoning a group of pro-unification supporters waving the flag of the People’s Republic of China in the Ximending (西門町) shopping area day in and day out.

Taiwanese have welcomed and participated in cross-strait exchanges in the genuine hope of promoting mutual understanding and harmony, as they are freedom-loving and harbor no ill intentions toward China.

There is certainly nothing wrong with Taiwanese living up to their democratic values and extending goodwill to others. However, it is a different story when the beneficiary lacks sincerity and acts out in pursuit of a malicious political agenda.

China has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan into its fold. It also makes no secret of its promotion of policies dubbed the “three middles and the youth” (三中一少) — residents of central and southern Taiwan, middle and low-income families, small and medium-sized enterprises, and young people — and “one generation and one stratum” (一代一階) — younger people and the grassroots stratum — to “dispel misconceptions about China held by ordinary Taiwanese” and ultimately, to instill “China’s” so-called “greatness” in the minds of ordinary Taiwanese to further its goal of unification.

The latest example is an eight-day cultural camp to be attended by students from the prominent Taipei Jianguo High School next month in Jinan in China’s Shandong Province. The camp, titled “Qilu flavor, cross-strait sentiment,” is to be paid for by the Jinan Taiwan Affairs Office, arousing suspicion that it is but another Chinese “united front” operation aimed at assimilating young people into the “Chinese dream.”

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Being a democratic country, Taiwan cannot and should not prohibit people from engaging in cross-strait exchanges. However, that does not mean the government's hands are tied in the face of China's sneaky promotion of its political agenda under the guise of harmless cultural exchanges.

The principle of reciprocity is important when it comes to exchanges. Taiwan should explore that aspect creatively so that healthy cross-strait exchanges can be held while not leaving Taiwanese defenseless when yet another "united front" tactic is exposed.

For example, as China emphasizes so-called "cross-strait sentiment" and "China's greatness" at events with Taiwanese students, Taiwanese hosts should focus on the promotion of democracy and human rights when receiving visiting Chinese, thereby helping to foster democratic values.

Most importantly, the "Chinese Communism shrine" case has demonstrated that the government must not lose sight of national security when trumpeting democratic values. It is time for the authorities to consider drafting "anti-united front" or "counterinfiltration" legislation to better protect the nation from Chinese encroachment.

As Beijing's "united front" tactics become more sophisticated, the government and public alike must stop being naive and start taking "united front" operations and infiltration seriously.

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