

Last month, China announced that effective Aug. 1, it was banning independent travel to Taiwan, citing the current state of cross-strait relations. Beijing hopes that by harming the nation's tourism industry, it could gain leverage over Taiwanese politics.

I am a resident of Tainan, one of the nation's tourism hotspots. In response to Beijing's move, Tainan Deputy Mayor Wang Shih-ssu (王希素) on Tuesday last week launched the initiative "Free tourism in a free nation."

Wang called on netizens to post images and stories that display the beauty of Taiwan to stimulate domestic tourism and to contrast unencumbered travel in Taiwan with the restrictive nature of tourism in China.

### LOCALIZATION

Beijing's arbitrary restriction not only places political considerations above the individual liberty of Chinese citizens, but is also a clandestine attack on Taiwan's localist political parties.

However, should people also be concerned about the potential effect this could have on the tourism industry and the wider economy? The short answer is no.

Last year, 3.53 million people rented accommodation in Tainan. About 100,000 were Chinese, constituting just 2.8 percent. This shows that the overall contribution of Chinese travelers to Tainan's tourism sector is limited.

Furthermore, Beijing's clumsy "united front" tactic is just the latest in a long line of examples.

After Taiwanese made the "wrong" decision in the 2016 presidential and legislative elections, Beijing initiated a "united front" strategy that offered special travel packages to encourage

Chinese to visit the eight municipalities and counties where the incumbent mayor or commissioner was a pan-blue politician who recognized the so-called “1992 consensus.”

A propaganda poster developed by China at the time, emblazoned with the slogan “1992 consensus: Making people’s lives better,” now looks richly ironic.

Although Beijing vociferously promoted a policy of “differential treatment” in 2016, there was no visible effect on Tainan’s tourism industry.

In 2015, Tainan’s main tourism hotspots attracted 23 million visitors. In 2016, that number dropped by 1 million, but the following year, it returned to 23 million.

### **TAINAN MODEL**

Tainan’s tourism industry has been incredibly resilient in the face of multiple attacks by Beijing. Built on solid foundations, Tainan is a paragon of self-

sufficient tourism and a model for the rest of the nation.

Tainan residents, responding to the latest restriction on social media, have even boasted that their city does not need to rely on Chinese tourists.

How is it that Tainan’s tourism industry has been able to weather the storm? Many young Hong Kongers, unable to bear Beijing’s repressive rule, have been emigrating to Taiwan, and for many, their first choice is to settle in Tainan.

In addition to the old-world charm of Tainan’s historic center, Hong Kongers are also attracted to the warmth and friendliness of its residents.

## Taiwanese confidence, values key to tourism

Written by Lin Cheng-you 林成友

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Perhaps most of all, there is an indomitable spirit of defiance and freedom that permeates the city.

If Taiwan preserves its unique characteristics, exudes self-confidence and individuality, and above all protects its democratic and liberal values, this will be the most effective defense against the slings and arrows of China's dictatorship.

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Translated by Edward Jones

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