

## Potter King incident exposes China

Written by Gao Jian-ying 高建英

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Taiwanese Internet celebrity Potter King (侯爵) on Dec. 14 released a video in which he chatted with President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and addressed her as “president.”

Soon after he posted the video on YouTube, Facebook and Chinese microblogging site Sina Weibo, his agent in China told him to delete it from the sites. He then found that he had been denied access to his Sina Weibo microblog, from which the video had been removed.

The incident sparked an uproar in Taiwan, with a particularly angry reaction among young people. The large number of people who have spoken out in support of King shows that Taiwanese are not willing to kneel before China.

The incident is a rerun of one four years ago involving Chou Tzu-yu (周子瑜), a Taiwanese member of South Korean girl group Twice. Both incidents show how seemingly insignificant actions — such as waving the Republic of China flag, as Chou did on a TV show, or calling its head of state “president” — can splinter China’s fragile ego. When China reacts that way, it makes a lot of young Taiwanese angry.

These incidents also highlight that no matter how hard the Chinese government tries to lure young Taiwanese with its “united front” tactics, whenever the problem of national identification crops up, it becomes an unsolvable conundrum.

Following the 2014 Sunflower movement, Beijing adopted the “three middles and one young” policy as a central plank of its strategy to influence Taiwanese society, targeting small and medium-sized enterprises; medium and low-income groups; people from central and southern Taiwan; and young people. Above all, China has done everything it can to win over young Taiwanese. This includes a whole range of measures such as providing bases for start-ups; preferential deals and subsidies for Taiwanese entrepreneurs; and favorable treatment for Taiwanese who study or work in China.

In the past two years, the Chinese government has announced 31 measures favorable to China-based Taiwanese enterprises and individuals, and a subsequent list of 26 such measures, which offer Taiwanese businesses and young people ever more alluring “equal

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treatment” with their Chinese counterparts.

When these policies were announced, many young Taiwanese who were not familiar with China flocked to take advantage of them, seeing the huge market as the holy land for turning the “China dream” into reality. However, many returned to Taiwan after less than a year with their tails between their legs.

There are many complicated reasons for this. Some of them did not understand the culture in China, or they applied Taiwanese values and did things the Taiwanese way. Some of them could not bear the way China blocks access to information. Generally speaking, for young Taiwanese who harbor the “Chinese dream,” it is only when they actually go there that they realize it is no more than that — a dream.

Moreover, resentment in China is a factor. Chinese officials often say: “When Taiwanese companies come here to invest, they bring money, but when young Taiwanese come to start a business or find employment, they come to take money.” Not surprisingly, local governments in China are less than enthusiastic about implementing such costly and thankless policies.

Whenever things touch on the question of national identity, many young Taiwanese get angry, even if they cannot express their ideas properly. Even though many avoid such sensitive subjects, the huge difference in national identification often makes young Taiwanese in China identify with Taiwan even more strongly.

As the presidential and legislative elections draw near, more focus than usual is being placed on the sensitive question of national identity. The “sense of the nation’s impending doom” has become a key issue for the Jan. 11 vote. China-friendly commentators keep denying an impending doom and have even said that the issue is being manipulated, but for young people, there is a real fear, especially given the months of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and the response of local authorities to them.

The King incident illustrates just how much China is meddling in Taiwan’s affairs and it shows that the sense of the nation’s impending doom is more than just a figment of the imagination. This sense of doom is a mixture of fear, anger, dissatisfaction and grievance toward China, and it is generating political heat.

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However much effort China puts into its “united front” work and however many Taiwan-friendly policies it offers, all it takes is a Chou or King incident to show that China does not mean what it says.

King is an Internet celebrity who has hundreds of thousands of followers on social media and the furor his treatment has stirred up among young people will further sully their perception of China.

*Gao Jian-ying is a legislative assistant.*

Translated by Julian Clegg

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