

Strong backbone can thwart China

Written by Yeomin Yoon

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A nation existing globally respects what other nations think, and appropriates other nations' perceptions of itself. The element that a nation wants to see most in its international image is respect, something the People's Republic of China seems to be craving.

Criteria of respect for nations are historically and culturally variant, but one primary, essential criterion has become universal since the end of the Cold War: a respect for human rights.

How the government of a nation treats its people and how they treat one another has become an essential measure of that nation's respectability. A nation might be powerful and, hence, feared or depended on; it might be rich and favored as a trade partner.

However, neither power nor utility will elicit respect without ethical respectability.

Moreover, respect for human rights is not an implication of a newly accepted theory or ideology, but a distillate of humankind's chastening historical experience.

The rampant violations of human rights unfolding in the Xinjiang region, Tibet and Inner Mongolia are appalling.

As an opinion piece in the Taipei Times eloquently said: "China has degenerated into not just a hyper-authoritarian police state, but a Han Chinese-centric, ethnic-nationalist state" ("Beijing ramps up its ethno-fascism," Sept. 11, page 8).

Beijing's policies — ethnic cleansing and premeditated cultural and demographic genocide — have destroyed the Chinese government's credibility and ethical respectability.

The propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on building a "united, prosperous, civilized, harmonious and beautiful new, modern, socialist" country reminds me of a book by

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Guy Sorman, a prominent French intellectual, titled *The Empire of Lies — The Truth about China in the Twenty-First Century*. To paraphrase a Mark Twain expression popularized in the US: “There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and CCP propaganda.”

China “fell into a moral swamp, devoid of humanity,” as Ai Weiwei (艾未未), China’s well-known artist and activist, said in his insightful opinion piece in the *Taipei Times* (“Think sanctions hurt China? Then you are stuck in politics,” Aug. 8, page 9).

China’s other well-known dissident, Liao Yiwu (廖亦武), who is internationally respected as the “Chinese Solzhenitsyn,” said in an interview with *Agence France-Presse* in April last year that China is “a threat to the whole world and should be split up into 10 or so countries.”

The controversy caused by Czech Senate President Milos Vystrcil’s visit to Taiwan creates an interlude in which the residents and politicians of the EU should reflect on their China policy, especially given the bloc’s four goals: peace, prosperity, democracy and human rights.

Other Europeans should learn from Vystrcil’s moral values and principles, his backbone (self-respect), and stop turning “a blind eye toward Beijing’s barbarism” if they genuinely believe in the EU’s lofty goals.

On this occasion, the residents and political leaders of East Asian nations should reflect on their China policy. East Asian countries, especially China’s smaller neighbors concerned over how the “risen China” will treat them, should learn from young Taiwanese.

As a university educator, I have met many Taiwanese students in the US, Europe, China and South Korea. I have been impressed by how they strongly identify as Taiwanese, although their ancestors came from China. They have told me that they would fight to protect Taiwanese’s dignity and freedom if the Chinese military invaded their homeland.

I wonder if the young people found in China’s smaller neighbors have the kind of backbone and strong determination displayed by these young Taiwanese.

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If they do, those countries have hope.

If not, China will sooner, rather than later, claim suzerainty over them and make them its tributaries. One cannot rule out that subjugated Asian nations could become another Tibet, Xinjiang or Inner Mongolia.

It behooves educators and people in leadership positions in East and Southeast Asian nations to educate their young generation to cultivate strong backbones — that is, self-respect for themselves and their nation. Self-respecting people and governments do not tolerate invasions from other nations, even if the latter is a so-called superpower.

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