

Underreaction to Chinese threat

Written by Huang Yu-hsiu 黃宇修

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Music reflects the personality of a nation's people. When I was studying abroad, I noticed a difference in the musical styles of Taiwanese and Westerners. It seems to me that most of the music played on Western radio or TV has a lively rhythm and positive lyrics, whereas the music in Taiwan commonly has melancholy tones and sad lyrics. Taiwanese singers lament their misfortunes and destinies, as well as their misery and uselessness. Even love songs are filled with self-devaluing and worthless sentiments.

Perhaps this is due to the history of colonization, as well as the White Terror of Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) rule, which led to a sense of learned helplessness that permeates Taiwanese culture, psychology and music.

Many people have been surprised by the apparent indifference among Taiwanese to China's recent threat of military attack. Taiwanese continue to live their regular lives and go about their daily routines. People are still crowding department stores and restaurants. A common response of people interviewed by news stations is: "We cannot do anything about it, can we?"

Is this an example of learned helplessness?

When faced with threats, Taiwanese must become more proactive.

I remember one time I was attending an event in London and stayed at a school dorm. For some reason, the alarm went off. Most people walked out slowly, not taking it seriously. I saw an Israeli girl running out of the shower in her bathrobe. She responded to the alarm with a great deal of seriousness. If I were her, I probably would have dressed properly before leaving the house, thinking it was just another false alarm. I must admit that I did not have the same level of awareness and alertness as the Israeli girl did. The people in her country are probably well prepared and trained for emergencies because there is a high possibility of violence and military attacks.

Is Taiwan prepared and trained for possible attacks?

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People must continue to live their lives and do their jobs without panicking, but they must also be aware of the learned helplessness engrained in the collective psyche. Taiwanese should be more active and serious about their country's future. It is essential to develop a systemic and solid approach toward potential threats, and improve awareness of the consequences.

Natural disaster prevention is important for those living in areas prone to such occurrences. People living in conflict zones must also take precautions and prepare for an attack. Robert Tsao (蔡台生), founder and former chairman of United Microelectronics Corp, has set a good example.

The sad songs were for the suppressed; they have become a part of Taiwan's culture due to colonization. Hopefully, there will be more upbeat songs that celebrate Taiwanese confidence in controlling their destiny and creating a better future.

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