

Tsai refuses to stoop to China's level

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President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has pledged that her administration would neither succumb to Chinese pressure nor lower its level of goodwill toward Beijing, urging Taiwan's increasingly hostile neighbor to return to the calm and rationality it demonstrated for a short period after her inauguration.

In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* in Taipei on Tuesday, Tsai said her May 20 inaugural address — which China has described as an “incomplete test” — was an embodiment of her “maximum benevolence and flexibility.”

“Following May 20, we saw Beijing demonstrate a certain level of composure and rationality... For a period of time we also witnessed some acts of kindness from China,” Tsai said.

However, Tsai said that Taiwan's exclusion from this year's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly in Canada and its treatment of Taiwanese with different political stances as a sign that Beijing has decided to return to its tactics of suppression and division.

Despite the shift in Beijing's attitude, Tsai, who is facing renewed pressure to acknowledge the so-called “1992 consensus” ahead of her Double Ten National Day speech, vowed to honor her pledge to maintain the “status quo.”

“This promise will remain unchanged, so is our goodwill, but we will not bow to pressure. We do not want to, nor are we willing to, go down the old path of confrontation,” Tsai said, calling for a cross-strait dialogue to resolve unnecessary misunderstandings.

Urging China not to misjudge the current situation and mistakenly think that pressure could bring Taiwanese to their knees, the president said such pressure is shouldered by the people as a whole and that her administration would by no means act against mainstream public opinion.

The “1992 consensus” refers to a tacit understanding between the Chinese Nationalist Party

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(KMT) and Beijing that both sides of the Taiwan Strait acknowledge there is “one China,” with each side having its own interpretation of what “China” means. Former Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi (蘇起) said in 2006 that he had made up the term in 2000.

Tsai's refusal to accept the “1992 consensus” has resulted in punitive actions from China, including suspending official cross-strait communication mechanisms, squeezing Taiwan's international space and reducing the number of Chinese tourists allowed to visit Taiwan.

On Taiwan's economic dependence on China, Tsai said that as Taipei's and Beijing's economies have become more competitive than mutually beneficial, she intends to push for industrial transformation and establish economic relations with South and Southeast Asia.

Tsai has been relatively optimistic about the development of the local tourism sector, saying that despite the drop in Chinese tourists, the number of visitors from other regions has increased this year.

“The important thing is that we must offer some assistance to tourism proprietors that have been dependent on Chinese tourists, allowing them to make necessary adjustments and provide services to tourists from other countries,” she said.

Asked whether she would be willing to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平), Tsai said while she thinks positively about the idea of meeting with Xi, setting political preconditions for such dialogues would hinder cross-strait ties.

“Beijing has always been of the opinion that any meaningful negotiations across the Taiwan Strait cannot occur before its preconditions are satisfied. This kind of political constraint obstructs the development of our bilateral relations,” Tsai said.

Former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) held an unprecedented meeting with Xi in Singapore in November last year, the first of its kind since the KMT retreat to Taiwan in 1949 following its defeat in the Chinese Civil War.

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