

China's honeymoon over, activist says

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Both Google's threat to withdraw from the Chinese market and the reaction of Western countries to the heavy sentence handed down to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波) may be signs that the honeymoon period between the West and China has ended, Chinese democracy activist Wang Dan (王丹) said yesterday.

Wang made the remarks at a press conference held in Taipei attended by a number of political activists voicing their support for Google and for Liu.

"Western governments' reactions to Liu's sentence and the Google incident show that the honeymoon period between the West and China has come to an end," Wang said. "In the past, Western countries looked only at the economic interests that the Chinese market represents and pretended that they didn't see the Chinese government's violations of human rights."

He said Western enterprises may have thought they could avoid political intervention by the Chinese government if they stayed away from sensitive issues, but that is apparently not the case.

"You may try hard not to get involved in politics, but politics in China involve you," Wang said.

The host of a radio political commentary show, Yang Hui-ju (楊慧珠), shared Wang's views.

Citing the example of how online social networking service Plurk was blocked last year, Yang said: "Even if you do not provoke China, China may sanction you just because they don't like something you say."

Plurk was blocked in China last year because many Taiwanese joined a movement on the site to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the death of Taiwanese democracy pioneer Cheng Nan-jung (鄭南榕), Yang said.

Several other online social networking services, such as Facebook and Twitter, have been blocked in China temporarily or permanently to prevent the spread of certain information.

Wang predicted that the Chinese government would eventually lose the Internet battle, "since the Internet has become an essential part of so many people's lives nowadays, so you can't really control it."

"I believe the Internet will become a very important tool in China's democracy movement," he said.

On the other hand, Victims of Investment in China Association chairman William Kao (高志強) said China has not changed despite economic reforms that began 30 years ago.

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“Thirty years ago, [dissident] Wei Jingsheng [衛經生] was imprisoned for criticizing the government. Thirty years have passed and Liu Xiaobo is still being imprisoned for criticizing the government,” Kao said. “The only thing that has changed in the past 30 years is that Chinese Communist Party officials have transformed from a group of bandits in Mao Zedong [毛澤東]-style outfits to frauds in suits,” Kao said.

Democratic Progressive Party Taipei City Councilor Yen Sheng-kuan (顏聖坤) urged President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) — who Yen said used to voice support for the democracy movement in China before becoming president — to follow the example of national leaders in other countries and call for Liu’s release and support Google’s withdrawal from China.

Taiwan Youth Anti-Communist Crops chairman Paul Lin (林義順) said Internet users in Taiwan should send flowers to Google headquarters to show their support for the company, as users in China and Hong Kong have done.

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