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Taiwan International Solidarity Act, the Luocha Haishi Craze, and Beijing Responds to Devastating Flooding

China Insider #35

TRANSCRIPT

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Miles Yu:

Welcome to China Insider, a podcast from Hudson Institute's China Center.

Shane Leary:

It's Tuesday, August 8th, and we have three topics for today. The first is the passing of the Taiwan International Solidarity Act in the US House of Representatives, and what this could mean for Taiwan's position on the international stage. The second is a runaway musical sensation taking China by storm and what it tells us about the disenchantment of Chinese citizens. And third, we discuss the devastating flooding in northern China and the government's callous and insufficient response. Miles, how are you doing?

Miles Yu:

Very good, Shane. How are you?

Shane Leary:

Good. Before we begin, I know you had something you wanted to say to our listeners.

Miles Yu:

Yeah. I want to give a special thank you to those listeners who give us a lot of support and encouragement for the first episode in Chinese, which was rolled out last week, and we'll keep doing it.

Shane Leary:

Great. Well, for our first topic, on July 25th, the US House of Representatives passed HR 1176 or the Taiwan International Solidarity Act, the bills currently in review with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In summary, this bill would require the US State Department to annually report to Congress any efforts on behalf of the PRC to undermine Taiwan's participation in international organizations or in their relations with other countries. Generally, the bill's preamble, states an intention to provide that the United States should oppose any attempts by the PRC to resolve Taiwan's status by distorting the decisions, language, policies or procedures of international organizations. Miles, how significant is this? Do you think this legislation will have a meaningful effect on Taiwan's position in the international stage?

Miles Yu:

I think this is the first step to address a tremendous injustice and humiliation in the history of American foreign relations. That is the 1971 United Nations resolution 2758. In that resolution, of course, China's representation and a security council seat was restored, but on Taiwan also was expelled from the United Nations. That was done in a very, very humiliating fashion, and which I'll explain a little bit. For the US Congress to pass a resolution like this is actually quite amazing because it would've been impossible and unimaginable only five, six years ago when US Congress touched upon the sovereignty of Taiwan or Taiwan's international status, China would've reacted very viciously against this. Right now, it passed and there's barely any response from China. It shows that the context in which the Taiwan issue has been discussed globally has changed it dramatically five, six years ago is only about the sovereignty.

It's about whether Taiwan is part of China or not. Nowadays, the global dialogue on Taiwan has changed 180 degrees. In other words, people approach the issue of Taiwan almost overwhelmingly from the point of view of tyranny versus freedom. And you have many European countries, you have a US government and other Asian country talk about the Taiwan status as a

freedom and democracy, particularly in light of Russia's war in Ukraine. And this is a particularly pungent, so most countries when they talk about Taiwan nowadays related Taiwan issue to the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. So this is all by itself is pretty amazing deed that took place in the US Congress.

Shane Leary:

So we've seen this pass through the house. We still need to go through the Senate and not get vetoed by President Biden. Do you see this as a slam dunk or do you anticipate any pushback or changes made to this legislation as it goes forward?

Miles Yu:

It's hard to say this moment because historical background on this issue has been very, very telling. Initially, the Nixon administration in 1971, which at the time was literally begging China to help the United States get out of Vietnam. So Henry Kissinger was dispatched to China. So the discussion at the United Nations on PRC representation in the UN took place right after Kissinger's first secret visit to China. And then during his second visit to China, this was when the UN resolution was discussed and voted on. The Nixon Administration's initial intent was to restore the representation of PRC at the UN, give this permanent seat at the Security Council to the PRC, but maintain Taiwan as a member of the United Nations. That was the original intent, and it was very interesting because the task of fulfilling this presidential intent was given to George H.W Bush, who was then America's ambassador to the United Nations, and he did a very poor job and he failed to rally our essential friends and allies to prevent Chinese demand of getting China in the UN, but in the meantime, expelling Taiwan from the United Nations.

Ultimately, I think the issue boils down to one procedural issue that is to get China back to the UN, and that's not a major problem. US actually supported that, but to keep Taiwan in the UN would require two thirds majority votes, and China said, no, no, no. All you need is the Chinese side was basically saying, no, no, you need a simple majority, 51%, that's it. This resolution was brought up by China's ally, Albania, was debated, so the two thirds requirement would've been okay to keep Taiwan in there, but we were stopped at the back by the British and the Soviets. So the UK and the Soviet Union said, no, no, you don't need two thirds, you need a simple majority. And the US lost on that particular procedural condition. So it's very humiliating.

It's the beginning of this tremendous dangerous ambiguity on Taiwan's status. Since then, the United States carry out what we now call One China Policy versus the Chinese government one China Principle. The difference is this, the Chinese side said one China Principle clearly would say that Taiwan is part of the People's Republic of China, the United States says no, the One China Policy from Washington DC simply means that we're aware there is such an argument that Taiwan should belong to the PRC, we're not endorsing it. Second part of that one China policy is that United States opposes use of force unilaterally to change the status quo. And the third I think is the most important part of the US one China policy is that all settlement on Taiwan's future must be agreed to by the people of Taiwan. And that's it. Hopefully that when the Senate overwhelmingly passed this bill, which I think probably will happen, and they'll send to the desk of President Biden and he will sign it. That's my hope.

Shane Leary:

This is an important step towards away from that ambiguity, as you said. In your opinion, do you think we will see anytime soon outright congressional or presidential support for Taiwan independence?

Miles Yu:

I don't think there is a particular call for Taiwan independence. The reality is that I mentioned earlier about status quo. The United States support status quo. Nobody wants to change the status quo. Then the question is what is status quo? 85% to 90% of people in Taiwan want status quo preserved. Status quo means that no unification with China, no declaration of independence, which also means that status quo actually is de facto independence because Taiwan, for all practical purposes, is a functional democracy, is a functional government, which is the own national identity and its own foreign ministry defense ministry, its own trade policy. Taiwan has never been ruled by the People's of Republic China for not even one second since 1949. So the question for the US Congress and for the US administration is how do we then interpret the status quo, is status quo independence? Taiwan is the leaders from President Tsai Ing-wen. Ang has said repeatedly, there's no need for Taiwan to declare independence because Taiwan is already an independent state and his name is Republic of China in Taiwan, the Chinese government has always used the issue of Taiwanese independence as a red herring declaring that there is a tremendous force, a powerful clique in Taiwan seeking new declaration of independence. That's just nonsense, doesn't exist.

Shane Leary:

For our next topic. Here's something I imagine a lot of our domestic US audience may have missed a runaway musical sensation in China being called the Luocho Haishi. This song is built as a combination of Chinese folk songs and stories from a Ching dynasty classic, but commentators have noted that it seems to be a satirical takedown of the Chinese entertainment industry and society through coded insults. Miles. Could you explain what's going on here and why this song is so popular?

Miles Yu:

Well, this is a song by a relatively obscure but popular singer. His name is Dao Lang. Lemme spell it out. D a o and L a n g. And the song's title is called Hai. It is L U O C H A, and then H A I S H I. It's basically they came out about two weeks ago, and I want listeners to pay attention to what I'm going to say next. Since it's rollout two weeks ago, it has been played over 9 billion times, 9 billion times in China, primarily on Douyin, which is the Chinese domestic version of TikTok. It's owned by the same company ban by all account. It's a smashing cultural phenomenon that's sweeping China right now. Its popularity is growing. Why? Well, the song itself, it's a very, very interesting.

Segment of Luocho Haishi plays

The title Luocho Haishi is the title of a Surrealistic Short Story told by China's foremost, satirist and surrealistic ghost story writer Pu Songling. This short story is part of a masterpiece, which is roughly translated into something like Strange Tales from a Storytelling Chamber. This book was published in 1740, nearly 300 years ago. In this story, describe a handsome young merchant man, his name is Maji, who on one of his commercial trips, his ship was blown off course by a storm, and he stumbled upon an absurd and ridiculous kingdom called Luocho, the where everything is upside down, ugliness is beauty, vice is virtue. Prostitutes and pimps were paragon of social maurice, the ugliest person on the island with three nostrils whose ears were grown backwards is the Prime Minister, the donkey in the kingdom finds itself as a stallion, the flightless chicken dream of itself, of being a soaring bird of power and virality. Everyone needs kingdom is a pretender, a cheater, and a phony.

This song by Dao Lang that that's rule two weeks ago, use all the characters in this story of 1740 from the beginning of the song and explicitly suggests that this kingdom is in fact to this China. That's where the power comes, and its popularity just began to increase dramatically

because this song writer, the singer Dao Lang himself, has been vilified by virtually all the big shots in China's official music establishment. All the characters in the lyrics can be easily related to each of the individual celebrities who are endorsed by the Communist Party, who have bullied and humiliated the singer Dao Lang. This is why people feel these lyrics were incredibly suggested powerful. Not only that, in this very surrealistic song, Dao Lang ends this, his song with a serious sentence. The last sentence of the lyrics says, this is surreal and ugly state of affairs in the kingdom, Luocha, meaning China is the fundamental problem of mankind.

So with one single song, the Dao Lang has become China's Bobby Dylan, a voice of oblique protest and the powerful expression of a volcanic anti-establishment mentality. To a certain degree, if I may, the popularity of the sun also has something to do with this artistic quality. Artistically, it's very clever. It uses all the historical allegories. Metaphors never clearly spells out its specifics, yet everybody understands what and whom this song is. That is the snobbish cultural establishment of the PRC. It contains a lot of puzzles, riddles, as well as the mentioned names like the Australian philosopher, Wittgenstein, for example. Wittgenstein, of course, was famous for a study of logic and the manipulation of perception and mind, and also used a lot of very elegant and test for rendition of the Unmentionables. And this song is a hodgepodge and mystic lyrics reminds me of Don McLean the American Pie. There's a lot of very obscure references of there, given it the power of suggestion and imagination. He has this incredible power of cussing without using a single dirty word, which reminds me of the master in this category of Voltaire of 18th century in France. Of course, the difference is that Voltaire never had close to 9 billion plays of his work. I think Dao Lang sensational new song is nothing but a giant middle finger to the PRC cultural establishment that is full of snobbery or ness, fake fakery and distorted and tortured aesthetics.

Shane Leary:

Miles. This is just incredible. I mean, I guess the question I have is this song's been out for two weeks now. The meaning of the song is cryptic, but people are picking up on it spreading like wildfire. The Chinese Communist Party is not blind to the power of images and poetry and the effect that that can have on a people and how that can affect the position of a ruler or the state of a political community. What do you think the response is going to be? Does the singer need to be worried? Is he in China right now? Should he be concerned?

Miles Yu:

It's very hard to pin anything on him. The singer sell because he never used any direct reference to the party, to any particular individual. Living in China has this kind of unbearable lightness of being to use a popular expression, and people were very subdued overall, particularly this time of day of Xi Jinping's regime. But this song basically lightened people up and they got really, really excited about how to vent their displeasure and disenchantment. You can see there was a lot of copycats, a lot of funny renditions of the same song and in different kind of a form of arts, picking opera, different kind of regional opera schemes. And there are hundreds and hundreds each day coming out. As I say, China is a country of the tyranny and dictatorship, but also China is a country of extremely surreal reality. It's a very, very absurd, so that's why people began to realize not only China is a bad country, but also is an absurd country, is a very Kafkaesque.

Shane Leary:

Certainly. Well, for our last topic, looking to the government and the way it acts, in particular, Northern China is in the midst of devastating flooding right now with Beijing receiving the heaviest rainfall it's seen in 140 years as a result of Typhoon Soksuri. Millions of people have

been evacuated and relocated. There's been a significant amount of popular resentment though towards the government's response. Miles, from what I've seen, it appears that in an effort to protect Beijing floodwaters were intentionally diverted to neighboring areas which unnecessarily increase the destruction to population centers outside of the capitol. Is this correct? Could you shed some light on what's happening here and why people are so upset? And I guess just as a follow-up is the government's response is reprehensible as people are claiming?

Miles Yu:

Well, this typhoon Dux Sur, as I said, it has dumped a lot of water in Northern China, particularly in the area near Beijing, which is the capital. So in order to protect Beijing, the Chinese government has decided to discharge a lot of water from the dams, several couple dozen dams surrounding Beijing and divert the flood water to somewhere else. This has never been openly announced, but did happen. And that makes a lot of people who were affected by the diverted water very, very upset. Not only it was not clearly announced, there was no sufficient prior warning of the discharge of dam water to the residents in the area to be effective. So that's why people are very, very upset. Another source of resentment actually comes to a traditional Chinese communist methods, that is the coverup. There are very powerful propaganda on Chinese media tv, the fake helicopter rescue and the fake tired rescue workers over there.

The people actually pointed out this is totally fake, and that's why people get really, really upset. And there's some villages where Dan was supposed to be open. So the officials came in the middle of the night without telling the sleeping villagers. And then once they're discovered, the villagers get so angry they went to the place where the gate was and to confront the officials. There was a lot of body clashes over there. So that's why this was done without the consent of the people, of course, but also without the warning to the people to be affected. It shows the callousness of the government. And when this flood of almost biblical proportion took place in Northern China, Xi Jinping was in Chengdu to attend the world university games, dining and wining. So people really, really get really upset about the priority of the Chinese government. He said, this is where Taiwan is playing very smart politics. The president of Taiwan and her vice president, William Lai, promptly sent words of condolences and encouragement to the people affected in China by the flood and in simplified Chinese characters. And they score very big among popular among ordinary Chinese people.

Shane Leary:

Well, miles, I think that's all the time we have for today. Thank you so much for speaking with me, and I'll see you again next week.

Miles Yu:

Thank you, and I'll see you next week.

Shane Leary:

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