

# Potential withdrawal of PRC students betrays fear

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Reports have been flying through the air like fast-moving clouds about the future of student exchange programs between universities in Taiwan and their counterparts (loosely speaking) in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

One day we read words in alarmist terms about a drastic reduction to come in the number of students allowed to come to our universities, with predictions that range from a calculated slow down to an absolute, complete halt. The next day, assurances float down from above. Officials at the Ministry of Education hurry to reassure and comfort. "Don't worry," they say. "Stay optimistic. No one knows anything for sure yet."

The news I've gotten (only in the popular media, and nothing from the inside track, of course) is consistently political in essence. To show its displeasure that the people of Taiwan have again elected a president from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), certain officials in Beijing want their government to slam the brakes on the flow of students between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits.

I have not seen views on the possible stoppage for any other reasons. It's not as if folks in the PRC feel their students, for example, are getting ripped off over here by a profiteering educational system, or that their sons and daughters or nephews and nieces are receiving shoddy educations with us. The whole idea appears to be revenge. Some may call it "punishment."

Now, if all this ballyhoo turns out to be a fact, that authorities in Beijing plan to put a stop to mainlanders coming to our shores to study (until, I suppose a resuscitated version of the old KMT can again move into the presidential palace), I do not expect to hear it that way. It is not as if we can expect fools to both talk like fools and act like fools, too. Or, well, just maybe, they - -.

We are of course more than aware of the fact that Taiwan's universities are currently suffering over a lack of truly qualified students. This is a fact up and down the line, from our toes to our scalps. Undergraduate programs as well as graduate are struggling to attract and hold students who are, as we say in some English speaking places, up to snuff. No one likes to say so out loud, but standards have been slipping badly for years.

No more students from the PRC for "the renegade province," would be a definite kick in the pants of our collective educational income, that's for sure.

If exchange agreements end, it is more likely to come about, I suppose, without an expressed rationale. The attack will be like cholesterol run wild, a silent killer.

And if it happens, everybody will be the loser. I'm not sure our friends on the other side believe that, but I do.

I've had "lu sheng" (mainland students) in many courses in recent years, and have them now. With few exceptions, these young people are positive role models for their peers. My "lu sheng" come on time, and are ready to work. They tend to pay attention in lectures and to take notes, which fewer and fewer Taiwanese students do. My "lu sheng" generally show politeness and an adequate grasp of "EQ" (emotional intelligence) in their use of electronic devices. In contrast, many of my local students disgrace themselves by their obvious lack of courtesy and addictive behavior with "smart phones" and the like. I wish I did not have to say that. "Lu sheng" are often more apt to voluntarily participate in class discussions. Some ask questions and remain after class to talk.

A change in point of view is in order.

In back of the childish games about politics, and behind the question of anger over any serious effort the people of Taiwan make to govern themselves by democratic values, there must lurk in Beijing a pervasive sense of insecurity and fear.

Pulling its students back from Taiwan could be a way of protecting them from what authoritarian Communism regards as the equivalent of political cancer. Heaven only knows what ideas youth from the PRC may naively admire here in what the media once called "free China." Allowing young minds the freedom to watch people argue publicly about truth and corruption in government, and about human rights, could seem like playing with fire to Communist officials.

If Beijing is antsy about Hong Kong wanting to choose the equivalent of its own mayor (it's mayor, mind you!), how could it possibly handle its own students one day wanting to vote freely for their officials, as they see their friends and classmates do here in Taiwan? (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points - -

- 1) Rumors in the media are saying that soon Beijing will perhaps cut off its flow of "lu sheng" (students from mainland China) for Taiwan's universities. The reason is that Taiwan's new president belongs to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Do you think the possible cut-off is because of our new president, or because of other reasons, for example, fear of Taiwan's influence on "lu sheng"?
- 2) This column speaks sharply about positive qualities that the "lu sheng" as a whole bring to Fu da. The comparative words about Taiwanese students is not very positive. How do you feel about this comparison? Is it a fair comparison?
- 3) What in your opinion might be the advantages or disadvantages of exchange between the Peoples Republic of China (China the PRC) and The Republic of China, Taiwa (ROC)

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