

Xizang's economy and ecology are flourishing

By Roland Boer

When one walks or drives around Lhasa, the capital of the Xizang Autonomous Region in China, one notices a unique phenomenon. Teams of workers are on the slopes of the mountains to the north and south of the river valley in which Lhasa is located. And what are they doing? Planting and watering trees.

For the reader, this may not seem like a remarkable activity, so let me add a few facts. Lhasa city has an elevation of 3,646 meters above sea level. The oxygen in the air is 40-45 percent less than what you experience at sea level. Only certain plants and trees can grow at such an elevation. Further, the mountains around Lhasa, which rise to over 4,000 meters above sea level, have historically been bare of vegetation, apart from a few grasses.

Now it should be clear why this is such a unique activity: These workers are engaged in the afforestation of the mountains around Lhasa city. In a discussion with a local government official, I was told that the plan is to have the mountains covered in trees in 10 years' time. This is merely one example among many of the greening of Xizang, of what is also known as ecological civilization.

Perhaps it is time for some back-

ground. In May of 2023, I was invited by the State Council Information Office of China to join an in-depth research field trip to the Xizang Autonomous Region. For a week, we had an incredibly busy schedule, walking up to 10 kilometers per day. We visited poverty alleviation projects, new enterprises, schools, Tibet University, ecological projects, Buddhist temples, traditional Xizang opera and folk music performances, and much more. On quite a number of occasions, I was able to talk with local people about history, culture, life today, and aspirations. Out of these many experiences, three stand out.

The first is Xizang's stunning economic development. Everywhere I turned was evidence of Xizang's economic growth: new and upgraded roads and railway lines; modern building projects reflecting Xizang's architectural style; electricity, telephony, and communications networks; enterprises making the most of opportunities and government start-up funds; and the sheer innovation in a challenging environment.

The second is the effect of the economic development. Poverty alleviation is an obvious effect. By the end of 2020, Xizang was able to overcome absolute poverty in all regions. This was no small task, since Xizang has some of the remotest and harshest conditions for hu-

man existence in the world.

Another effect is the flourishing of culture and education. We witnessed first-hand the fostering of Xizang's unique high-altitude traditional medicine, the careful attention to preserving its classic texts, the teaching of children in the local language, and the teaching of traditional musical instruments and calligraphy.

We visited one of the most sacred sites in all of Xizang, the Jokhang Temple. Under state protection and managed by about 30 Buddhist monks, it was thronging with people free to express the way they felt about being there. As for education, we visited a primary school, a high school, and the Tibet University in Lhasa. The quality of the teachers, equipment, and innovative teaching methods was obvious.

Some would argue that modernization is a challenge to traditional culture, that people's attitudes change in light of modernization. I would argue that the relationship is more complex and even dialectical. Culture relies on the strength of the economic base. When the economy is growing and is strong, culture and education can flourish and innovate. Conversely, the increase in an educated and cultured work force means that the economy can strengthen even more. Further, while there is always a

strong sediment in culture, providing the worldview and assumptions of the people, each generation contributes in a creative fashion to reshaping the culture that they inherit and then hand on to the next generation. In other words, in light of Xizang's incredible economic development, the culture of Xizang is flourishing as never before. Indeed, Xizang's own culture is a significant contributor to what we know as China's fine traditional culture as a whole.

The third strong impression concerns ecological projects and thus ecological civilization. Looking out of the window as we drove through the countryside and wound our way up to mountain passes, walking many kilometers every day, and visiting ecological projects, I gained a very strong impression of the creative and world-first efforts at high-altitude ecological preservation and "greening." I am wary of using terms such as stunning, extraordinary, and exemplary, but these are appropriate to the ecological civilization projects in one of the most unique environments in the world.

The author is a Marxist scholar from Australia, overseas talent professor in the School of Philosophy at Renmin University of China, and on the editorial board of the Australian Marxist Review. opinion@globaltimes.com.cn

US Congress' crazy Taiwan-related bills will push China-US ties into a corner

By Zhang Tengjun

The US House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party (Select Committee) recently adopted its first set of policy recommendations related to Taiwan. The report on Taiwan includes 10 findings and proposals on how to "preserve peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits," which grossly interfere in the Taiwan question and challenge China's bottom line.

The 10 policy recommendations include: The US needs additional long-range missiles and unmanned vehicles in the Indo-Pacific region; the US and its allies need to strengthen and better coordinate collective planning for how they will deter or would respond diplomatically and economically to a crisis over Taiwan; improving combined training between the US and Taiwan island's militaries will bolster deterrence...

Since taking office, US Congress has significantly increased its efforts to hype and intervene in the Taiwan question, accelerating the promotion of its own version of the Taiwan-related agenda, and attempting to use the Taiwan question to contain China in

the strategic competition between China and the US.

The frequency of congressional activities related to Taiwan is unprecedented.

First, Taiwan-related proposals have increased substantially. Second, the legislative process has clearly accelerated. Third, there is a clear trend of the Republican Party dominating the Taiwan-related agenda in Congress.

Fourth, the US is pursuing a wide range of Taiwan-related activities.

Since the new Congress took office, rhetoric and actions toward Taiwan have gradually shifted from being provocative to subversive and adventurous, attempting to fundamentally change one-China principle, overthrow the Taiwan-related consensus based on the Three Joint Communiqués between China and the US, and push the US to intervene in the Taiwan question in a more confrontational manner. The dangerous trend is mainly reflected in two aspects:

First, it explores the issue of Taiwan's "sovereignty" in legal and political terms and tries to deny the "one-China" principle entirely. Second, it increases

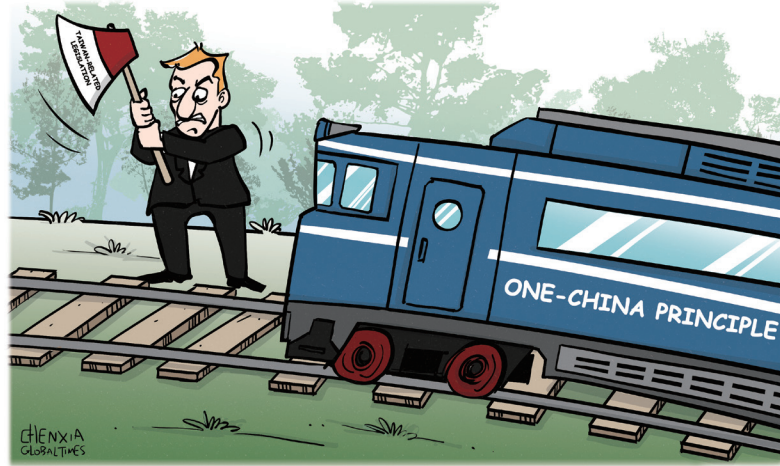


Illustration: Chen Xia/Global Times

military and diplomatic efforts to deter the mainland from the possibility of achieving reunification by force.

On the whole, Congress' stance on Taiwan policy is moving from "strategic ambiguity" to "strategic clarity." It aims to dismantle the global consensus on the "one-China" principle in legal terms and promote a substantive breakthrough in the relationship between the US and the Taiwan island, making adequate military and diplomatic preparations for a possible "conflict in the Taiwan Straits."

Given the bipartisan consensus on containment and suppression of China, playing the "Taiwan card" has become a priority option for many anti-China lawmakers. The

approach of the 2024 elections may drive both parties to manipulate the Taiwan question even more feverishly. It can be said that a "radical" Congress is becoming a major source of chaos for peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits at present and in the period ahead.

The US has vowed not to support "Taiwan independence," "two Chinas," or "one China, one Taiwan." It has repeatedly stated to adhere to the "one-China" policy. However, under Congress's continuous erosion and destruction, these promises are becoming empty words, and are more like an attempt to delude the Chinese side.

The Biden administration should be clear that when the pro-Taiwan forces in Congress

are trying to wreak havoc, it is impossible for the China-US relationship to return to a stable and healthy development track, and Washington cannot expect Beijing to satisfy its need for cooperation on other issues.

If the US side repeatedly uses the "separation of powers" or "lack of authority to interfere with congressional actions" as pretexts, it will only cause the international community, including China, to have serious doubts about the White House's ability to govern and international credibility.

The US side should be clear that the Taiwan question is the core of China's core interests. There will be no vagueness at all in our response to anyone who attempts to distort the one-China principle, and we will never back down in face of any act that undermines China's sovereignty and security. Those who play with fire on Taiwan will eventually get themselves burned.

The author is deputy director of the Department for Asia-Pacific Studies at the China Institute of International Studies. opinion@globaltimes.com.cn

Page Editor:
wangzixuan@globaltimes.com.cn