

A warning ahead of negotiations

Written by Taipei Times

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Beijing doesn't need excuses to do as it pleases, even when violating its own laws — and it certainly is not concerned about the world knowing. The carefully watched case of Huang Qi (黄奇), a man labeled a dangerous dissident simply for trying to help victims of last year's Sichuan Earthquake, came to a close on Monday when Huang was sentenced to three years in jail.

The court did not even bother to give his family a copy of the verdict, as his lawyer says is required by law. But Huang, long active on social issues, seems to have been targeted because of his calls for a transparent probe into schools that collapsed during the quake. Thousands of children died or are still listed as missing after their schools collapsed, yet China's investigation into the matter was a whitewash that denied the role of corruption and substandard construction in the tragedy.

Huang is no stranger to China's prisons. He had already spent five years in jail and had only been free for three years when he was arrested again following the Sichuan quake.

Yet none of his activities, which portray him as a caring and determined citizen concerned about the injustice and tragedy he sees around him, merit this treatment. In the late 1990s, Huang ran a Web site that aimed to help families find loved ones who had fallen victim to human trafficking, often being kidnapped and taken to other parts of China.

The suspicion that charges against him are trumped up is strengthened by the court's failure on Monday to detail its case against him. That is typical conduct in China, where even the courts, instruments of upholding the law in name alone, do not feel obligated to follow it themselves.

Huang's case is just a microcosm of the Chinese Communist Party's decades of abuse and flouting of its own rules and promises.

Another example is Hong Kong's struggle under "one country, two systems." The Chinese territory is moving no closer to democratic reforms originally promised for 2007. Pro-democracy legislators could soon resign over a Hong Kong government proposal last week for "reform" that failed yet again to offer even a semblance of progress.

Unfortunately, a mass walkout by legislators might have little effect in the face of Beijing's opposition to democracy. The territory's residents, it seems, cannot hope for universal suffrage for several more years, if at all.

Over the past few years, the plight of the Chinese people has drawn regular media coverage and pressure from Western governments. Beijing, however, is not very concerned about all the bad press. On the contrary, it ploughs forward with the same old tactics at home. There are few signs of progress; in some cases, there is every indication that it is tightening controls on parts of the population, such as minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang.

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A country that cares little about the interests of its own people — whether they are the victims of state corruption, those who challenge it, or the 7 million residents of Hong Kong — is even less likely to show concern for the interests of others.

As a “renegade province” in negotiations with Beijing, that is a lesson for Taiwan’s government to keep in mind.

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