

The recent repression by Beijing of Hong Kongers' campaign for authentic democracy is in stark contrast to the seemingly friendly and tolerant attitude that it shows toward Taiwan, and what is happening in Hong Kong may be a lesson for Taiwanese.

Last week, amid mounting calls for direct democratic elections for the special administrative region's chief executive, cyberattacks from China — allegedly mobilized by the government — paralyzed the Web site of the Hong Kong-based Apple Daily, a pro-democracy newspaper, as well as an online voting post set up by pro-democracy activists.

Despite the incidents, as well as Beijing's remarks that it has the final say in Hong Kong, as of noon on Monday, more than 710,000 people in Hong Kong had taken part in the voting, either via the Internet or at actual voting booths.

Commenting on the phenomenon, the Chinese government-run newspaper Global Times said in its editorial that the referendum result would be illegal and useless even if more than half of Hong Kong's population vote in it, as "more than 1.3 billion people [in China] have the right to speak on Hong Kong's political reform."

Things may seem a little more at ease on the other side of the Taiwan Strait.

With smiles and friendliness, as well as promises that China would do anything to benefit the Taiwanese, China's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) Director Zhang Zhijun (張志軍) is scheduled to arrive in Taiwan at about noon today for a four-day visit that includes meetings with local officials, business leaders and students to "accurately learn about views of the Taiwanese society on cross-strait relations."

These were all be familiar sights to Hong Kongers, recalling the friendliness that Chinese officials once showed them and the promises that the Chinese government made to them prior to the handover in 1997.

HK, Tibet have lessons for Taiwan

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Facing the anxious Hong Kong public worrying about their future, Beijing did not hesitate to promise that after the handover, the socialist system would not be imposed on Hong Kong and instead, “the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years.”

Under the Hong Kong Basic Law, Beijing also promised Hong Kongers that Chinese laws on the mainland would not apply to them, that they would enjoy the same freedoms as before and that they would “have the right to vote and the right to stand for election.”

The broken promises that Beijing once made to Hong Kong appear to be the same promises that Beijing is making to Taiwan at the moment: If Taiwan agrees to become a special administrative region under China, it would be allowed to keep its executive, legislative and judicial, as well as its social and economic, systems. Beijing even went as far as promising that Taiwan could retain its military forces.

In fact, if we look further back into history, we may find that Tibet was another victim of China's political promises, since the Chinese government has disregarded just about everything that it promised the Tibetan government in the Seventeen-Point Agreement: that it would maintain the political system in Tibet, including the functions and powers of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, and that it would preserve the Tibetan language, culture and religious traditions.

If China's promises to Hong Kong are already deteriorating only 17 years after the handover — and Tibet has seen much worse 55 years after the Chinese takeover — how can Taiwanese believe that Beijing will keep its word to Taiwan?

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