

Taiwan and Hong Kong on similar pathways

Written by Lin Thung-hong 林通宏

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A storm has been brewing in Hong Kong over the past month or so. First, 180,000 people took part in the biggest-ever candlelit commemoration of the June 4, 1989, crackdown on China's democracy movement.

Then, on June 6, opponents of a plan to build two new towns in the northeastern New Territories briefly occupied the Legislative Council lobby.

Toward the end of last month, 780,000 people voted in an unofficial referendum initiated by supporters of the pressure group Occupy Central with Love and Peace, about how citizens should be able to nominate candidates for Hong Kong's chief executive.

Finally, on July 1, more than 500,000 people took part in a major street demonstration, occupying streets around the Central District and staying there until they were forcefully dispersed early the next morning. Police arrested 511 protesters and held them for questioning before releasing them all without charge in the evening on July 2.

These events can be compared with Taiwan's student-led Sunflower movement in March and April. Some of those protests were suppressed by the authorities under President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and Premier Jiang Yi-huah (江宜樺) using violent police methods, while pan-blue media attacked the protesters, maligning them and suggesting that they were controlled by the pan-green parties.

Taiwan's media could hardly attach such labels to people in Hong Kong, so instead they ran headline stories about noodles and a call from Academia Sinica academicians for higher taxes, while giving cool treatment to the July 1 demonstration in Hong Kong. These media are intentionally overlooking the historical significance of Hong Kong's residents' movement and its important revelations for Taiwan.

Hong Kong's and Taiwan's civic movements and academic circles have long been able to interact and show concern for one another. In view of China's ever-increasing business, trade and political influence, at the end of last year, Academia Sinica and the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies conducted simultaneous surveys in Hong Kong and Taiwan on the impact

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of China.

The data gathered in the surveys provides a valuable and unique opportunity to compare the way people in Taiwan and Hong Kong view the China-friendly positions and policies of Ma and Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying (梁振英).

In recent years, under the influence of economic opening to China and other geopolitical factors, three major social contradictions have developed in Taiwan and Hong Kong — the contradiction between local identification on the one hand and Chinese nationalism on the other; the conflict between big corporations that profit from China and the economically disadvantaged who suffer; and the clash between the older generation, who tend to prioritize economic benefits, and a younger generation that gives more weight to the values of freedom and democracy.

These three major social contradictions that emerged from the data gathered in last year's opinion polls explain the negative views that Taiwanese and Hong Kongers have of their governments' performances.

The Chinese Communist Party's interference in freedom of expression in Taiwan and Hong Kong has had the unintended effect of encouraging the liberal convictions and native identities of young people in both places, who are also worried about the gulf between rich and poor.

Data suggests that Ma and Leung's administrations should not underestimate the public's support for democratic values in Taiwan and Hong Kong, or their determination to resist the social injustices that arise from opening up to China.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

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