

ON Aug. 31, China revealed its political reform plan for Hong Kong — which was really an anti-political reform plan. The plan has met with strong opposition in Hong Kong and attracted a lot of attention in the international media. Despite the close relationship between President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) government and Beijing, the government's response to China's so-called political reform plan — similar to its response to the alleged secrecy leaks by former Mainland Affairs Council deputy minister Chang Hsien-yao (陳希賢) — was slow and inappropriate.

Although he was born in Hong Kong, Ma is indifferent to Hong Kongers' call for democracy. He did show his concern over the issue while hosting a Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) meeting on Tuesday last week, calling for support for the selection of Hong Kong's chief executive by universal suffrage in 2017. The call for genuine universal suffrage is a significant issue, but Ma chose to express his concern in his capacity as KMT chairman, shying away from a dignified and forthright expression as the president of a nation. This makes one wonder whether he really cares about democracy in Hong Kong.

China's anti-political reform plan is a reminder to the world that the promise Beijing made during the handover in 1997 — that Hong Kongers would be allowed to administer the territory with a high degree of autonomy — has now been replaced by its statement in June that it has overall jurisdiction over the territory. Those who believed China's promise that Hong Kong will remain unchanged for 50 years have finally realized that they were fooled. Beijing is acting in a manner diametrically opposed to its pledge to further relax the Basic Law and is now instead rapidly moving toward total control of the territory. If this continues, Hong Kong will soon become just another Chinese city.

Beijing has also stepped up its united front targeting Taiwanese and the Ma administration, using the same sweet talk that it deployed to dupe Hong Kong. Ma even brags about the cross-strait agreements that the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party have signed, seeing them as assurances of peace across the Taiwan Strait.

Leaving distant affairs aside, consider the case of Taiwanese actor Kai Ko (柯俊雄). Ko was arrested last month in Beijing for allegedly smoking marijuana, but Chinese authorities did not inform their Taiwanese counterparts in a timely manner as required by the cross-strait treaty on mutual legal assistance. Is this not proof that such cross-strait agreements are unreliable?

From China's claim of overall jurisdiction over Hong Kong to its anti-reform plan, patriotic Chinese netizens have repeatedly satirized democracy activists in Hong Kong, questioning why they did not fight for universal suffrage under British rule. This is just like selling your daughter to a brothel and criticizing her for not being chaste. China ceded Hong Kong to the UK after being defeated in the Opium War, and Hong Kongers became second-class UK citizens.

After the territory's return to China in 1997, Beijing should have kept its promise that Hong Kongers would be allowed to administer the territory with a higher degree of autonomy to compensate them for their great losses over the past century and more. Instead, Chinese netizens are blaming those who were once ceded to the UK for fighting for universal suffrage now. Are they telling Hong Kongers that since they were second-class citizens under British colonial rule, they should continue being second-class citizens after the handover?

To reinforce its claim of jurisdiction over Hong Kong, Beijing is rejecting calls for real universal suffrage and accuses London of intervening in its internal affairs. This farce is particularly absurd from a historical perspective. The territory was poor when it was ceded to the UK, but it became the "pearl of the orient" under British "colonial oppression." During the Cold War era, China was isolated by Western democracies, and it had to rely solely on Hong Kong — a major global financial hub — for its financial interactions with the international community.

To be blunt, Hong Kong brought a massive dowry with it when it was returned to China. How can Beijing arrogantly believe that it is nurturing the territory after the signing of the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement in 2003?

With the rise of civic awareness in Taiwan and the regressive political development in Hong Kong, more Hong Kongers have formed a favorable impression of Taiwan today. However, the Ma administration might disappoint them. Ma advocates eventual unification with China, and in 1990 he supported indirect presidential elections rather than direct elections. Judging from such anti-democratic ideals, perhaps both Ma and Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying (梁振英) are satisfied with bogus universal suffrage and think that there is no need for real universal suffrage.

Ma's opposition to referendums exposes his political nature: What he really wants is to see the completion of Hong Kong's and Taiwan's unification with China. As Hong Kongers launch street demonstrations against fake universal suffrage, some may have forgotten that Taiwanese also took to the streets against indirect presidential elections in the past. Maybe this

Ma deaf to HK's call to democracy

Written by The Liberty Times Editorial
Thursday, 11 September 2014 07:28

is more than a coincidence.

On the same day that China blocked universal suffrage in Hong Kong, Macau held its chief executive election. Backed by Beijing, the sole candidate, Macau Chief Executive Fernando Chui (何志華), was successfully re-elected by 380 of the 400 votes in what has been called a birdcage election. Still, 8,688 Macanese participated in a referendum organized by the civil sector, and more than 95 percent of them wanted to elect their chief executive through universal suffrage.

The Ma administration has, however, ignored their call, and the MAC immediately congratulated the re-elected Chui — two days ahead of Ma's talks on Hong Kong's democracy.

This proves that Ma does not believe that sovereignty belongs to the people. As he continues to oppress Taiwan's democracy through the KMT's party-state system, sovereignty is distorted, as it no longer belongs to the people, but to Ma himself. Ma is probably preparing for the next phase, in which sovereignty will belong to Xi.

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2014/09/11](#)