

Scots' vote 'real' while HK struggles

Written by The Liberty Times Editorial
Monday, 22 September 2014 08:21

On Thursday, Scotland held a referendum on the question "Should Scotland be an independent country?" The outcome of the referendum would be critical not only to the future of the UK, but also to that of the EU and NATO. Had the referendum been passed, it would have been the historical event with the most overarching significance for international politics since the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

Disregarding the final outcome of the referendum, the vote was conducted peacefully and in a civilized manner, and it leaves people in awe before the superiority of a mature democracy.

Both Scotland and the UK approached the referendum in a mature manner. Whether they supported Scottish independence or not, the two sides tried to convince voters by appealing to reason rather than by force.

Furthermore, it was decided that the referendum should be decided by a simple majority, avoiding complex voting thresholds. In other words, the simplest of methods was applied to the handling of the most complex and multifaceted issue of independence, in the belief that the public should be allowed to make the decision and so that both parties would be able to fully embrace and accept the outcome.

In one of the ironies of history, as Scotland was preparing for the independence referendum, China was facing the "Occupy Central" movement in Hong Kong, which is calling for the election of its chief executive by universal suffrage. These calls have been suppressed by China, and the huge difference between this suppression and the democratic atmosphere enveloping the Scottish referendum is lamentable.

The most significant characteristic of modern civilization is the view that sovereignty belongs to the people, and that the public should be allowed to decide their own future. Regardless of how glorious it is to be part of the UK, the people of Scotland still had the right to choose whether they should remain as part of the kingdom or seek independence.

While UK leaders made every effort to keep Scotland, instead of relying on threats, they pledged to grant Scotland greater autonomy and substantive benefits in an attempt to move

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Scots with its sincerity. Such political interactions make it clear that the UK truly sees Scotland as a member of the family and hoped that it would remain under the same roof with dignity.

With this attitude, even if the referendum had been passed, the UK and Scotland would have been likely to continue to live together in peace as good neighbors. While the outcome was to reject independence, the two parties will continue to be attached to each other like two brothers.

By contrast, in Hong Kong, China promised in 1990 with the Basic Law that Hong Kongers would be allowed to administer the territory, that they would be allowed a high degree of autonomy and that the territory would remain unchanged for 50 years. However, everything has changed in just 17 years after the handover.

As Hong Kong residents call for the autonomy stated in the Basic Law, China has taken a tough stance and responded that Beijing has overall jurisdiction over the territory, and labels anyone who calls for universal suffrage "anti-Chinese forces," and it even criticizes them for promoting Hong Kong independence, saying that it might enforce martial law if necessary, showing off People's Liberation Army (PLA) tanks in the streets.

This is seen as a barrier for Hong Kong autonomy, which would be suppressed if Hong Kongers were to reject Beijing's tight control. In addition, the bloody history of massacres that have occurred in Tibet and Xinjiang must not be forgotten.

During British colonial rule, the British turned Hong Kong from a land of poverty into the pearl of the Orient. Hong Kong's last governor, Christopher Patten, proposed a political reform plan that would help the territory move toward democracy before its return to China in 1997. However, after the return of the territory, Beijing immediately trampled on the seeds of democracy planted by Patten and the UK before locking it in a birdcage, where it has been sitting ever since.

In other words, China's so-called overall jurisdiction of Hong Kong became inevitable the day it took over in 1997. No wonder the number of Hong Kong residents who identify themselves as Chinese has dropped in recent years, while the number of those who say they miss British colonial rule has increased.

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Perhaps Hong Kongers regret the territory's return to China and their continued colonization, but perhaps they will still have a chance to decide whether or not they should be independent in a referendum of their own.

Some people have said that it was not the British colonial rule of Hong Kong that was China's greatest humiliation, but the territory's transformation from poverty to prosperity and progress under British rule.

Today, Beijing says that the return of the territory to China cleared a century-long humiliation, but it is now facing a new humiliation, as many Hong Kongers say they miss the British and their colonial rule.

Looking back, Hong Kongers were much happier under the British "colonial deprivation," and many envious Chinese escaped from China to Hong Kong. Not long after the handover, Beijing broke its promise that it would implement a "one country, two systems" policy and instead the "rule of man" — as opposed to the rule of law — spread quickly. As a result, Hong Kong's freedom and human rights have been severely restricted in comparison with the relative freedom under British colonial rule.

Not long ago, the New York Times pointed out in an article that Scotland was already a winner regardless of the outcome of the referendum, because the referendum meant that the Scottish people had been given a chance to decide their own future.

Taiwanese all witnessed and will always remember Scotland's very real independence referendum and Hong Kong's bogus universal suffrage.

Translated by Eddy Chang

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2014/09/22](#)