

Voting against Chinese annexation

Written by Yen Ching-chang 葉景昌
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The recently established pro-independence group Formosa Alliance on Oct. 20 organized a rally in Taipei to call for the right to hold a referendum against China's plan to annex Taiwan. Despite opposition from the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the rally drew more than 120,000 people, with some traveling from as far afield as the US, Canada, Australia and Japan.

The alliance is demanding a referendum be held in April, on the 30th anniversary of the death of publisher and pro-democracy activist Deng Nan-jung (鄧南雄), known internationally for his self-immolation in support of freedom of speech.

Such a referendum would allow Taiwanese to vote for the right to refer to the nation as "Taiwan" instead of "Chinese Taipei," thereby standing firm on the international stage, declaring itself a self-ruling democracy and laying the pathway to "normalize" itself as a country.

This comes against the backdrop of an increasingly belligerent Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which will not accept any move toward a formalized Taiwanese independence, and have repeatedly stated that in that direction lies war.

What will happen to Taiwan if China invades, or otherwise takes control of the nation?

First, people can take a look at Xinjiang, where hundreds of thousands of people are being held in camps, places China euphemistically calls "humane job-training centers."

Such behavior has already raised global concerns and attracted the attention of the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Let us also remember China's pledge to Hong Kong back in 1997. When the people of Hong Kong embraced reunification with China, the prevailing belief was that the wheels of governance would continue to turn as usual.

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And why not, since in accordance with the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, an international treaty — and thereby deposited with the UN — Hong Kong's Basic Law guaranteed the implementation of a "one country, two systems" for 50 years.

Fast forward 20 years and look at where Hong Kong is today, political prisoners appear in the headlines once again and yet more disappear without international media attention.

Elsewhere, the eradication of Cantonese from the educational system has been set in motion. What happened to the CCP's promise? Taiwan should be under no illusion when it comes to China's assurances.

The CCP's ferocious commitment to homogenize its population into a single, tightly defined ethnic group, a policy known as Hanification, is wiping out much of China's heterogeneous cultural heritage.

The banning of any kind of religious ceremony or ritual is one of the policies enforced upon its people.

To create a unified China, a comprehensible "motherland," the idea of a national homogeneity, extending unbroken down the length of Chinese history, has been told again and again, but it is a fiction that enables the cultivation of both nationalism and division among China's Han and non-Han citizens.

The foundation of Taiwan's democratic system, the Constitution written and adopted by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) after its defeat by the CCP in 1949, does not consider Taiwan a nation in its own right, and it needs to be changed.

For those who consider "blood to be thicker than water," it would be wise to think twice about this particular proverb when contemplating the relationship between Taiwan and China.

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Taiwanese must resist the forces of a towering totalitarian governing body that confronts their daily existence.

The call for a referendum, which voices Taiwan's desire to formally identify as a self-governing nation, is itself a statement of resistance to ever-encroaching Chinese pressure and it should not be met with any protest from its own government.

The DPP should seriously reconsider its attitude to such a referendum; that more than 120,000 people marched in spite of the DPP's negative stance demonstrates the public's appetite for a representative voice.

Such a referendum would provide a chance for the continued healthy growth of a democratic environment, with which all Taiwanese can engage.

As US Vice President Mike Pence said in a speech at the Hudson Institute on Oct. 4: "America will always believe that Taiwan's embrace of democracy shows a better path for all the Chinese people."

Why should we be robbed of this right to vote and voice the concerns of Taiwanese?

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