

Hong Kong and Taiwan are different

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On Tuesday, three prominent Hong Kong democracy advocates attended a forum at National Chengchi University to share their experiences of living under China's "one country, two systems" model.

University of Hong Kong law professor Benny Tai (鄧偉基), retired sociologist Chan Kin-man (陳金曼) and retired pastor Chu Yiu-ming (朱耀明), known as the "Occupy Central Three," are facing several years in jail for opposing the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) governance of the territory, as they are accused of inciting the 2014 pro-democracy movement.

At the forum, one of the trio called the "one country, two systems" model a "joke," but nobody in the room laughed.

The model has once more been thrust to the forefront of political debate in Taiwan after Chinese President Xi Jinping's (習近平) Jan. 2 address reiterated implementing it in Taiwan.

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) immediately pushed back at the idea that it could ever be used in Taiwan, or that the nation could be unified with China at all.

The vast majority of Taiwanese do not identify exclusively as Chinese, nor do they favor the idea of unification. The CCP's insistence on unification is based on a delusional reading of history and of current public sentiment. The problem is that the CCP's delusion is backed up by an increasingly capable and competent military.

It is informative to listen to the firsthand experiences of those living under the system. Nevertheless, it is also important to bear in mind that, despite the obvious similarities between Hong Kong and Taiwan regarding the CCP's favored vision of the future, there is one major difference.

Tai spoke of how he has always been a law-abiding citizen and never thought he would be thrown in jail for expressing his ideas about democracy. He said he thought that it was

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important to maintain pressure on the CCP, otherwise the party would continue to curb democratic freedoms.

Tai drew a parallel between the respective predicaments of Hong Kongers and Taiwanese, both of whom are increasingly endangered by the CCP's suppression.

Chan said that Hong Kong is still waiting for the implementation of universal suffrage, there has fundamentally never been "two systems" in Hong Kong and it has essentially been run as part of China ever since the 1997 handover from Britain.

Hong Kong was not democratic under British colonial rule, at least in part due to opposition from the CCP to any changes to the political system by the British government. Now, the struggle for a simple civil right, such as the right to vote, has resulted in law-abiding academics and pastors facing years in jail. Any hopes for democratic development under a "one country, two systems" model have been dashed.

Taiwan, in contrast to Hong Kong, already has a thriving democracy. Xi has offered the "one country, two systems" model to entice Taiwanese to embrace unification.

Aside from the simple fact that most Taiwanese reject the idea of unification in the first place, from the Occupy Central Three's account, Xi's promises are not what they say on the label.

The prospect of enforced unification via military means is unthinkable, from the invasion to the suppression of drawn-out resistance that would inevitably follow. Even if unification happened through peaceful means, Taiwanese, used to their democratic freedoms, would find themselves prosecuted for expressing their views.

Taiwanese must stand up and resist the idea of unification while they are still free to do so. As Tai said, if by going to jail he ignites a spark of hope in people's hearts and inspires them to continue to engage in civil resistance to change society, then it would have been totally worthwhile.

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