

HK, Taiwan stand up as allies in US

Written by Yang Kuang-shun 楊光順
Thursday, 10 October 2019 05:22

On Sept. 17, a group of Hong Kong activists gathered in front of the United Methodist Building in Washington to celebrate the establishment of the Hong Kong Democracy Council (HKDC).

The council's aim is to be "a consistent voice in Washington, pushing the US to uphold its commitment to Hong Kong's basic freedoms and autonomy, and to preserve the US' own political and economic interests in Hong Kong."

Most of the activists, including Joshua Wong (黃之鋒) and Denise Ho (何韻詩), had just come from a historic hearing of the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China, cochaired by US Representative Jim McGovern and US Senator Marco Rubio.

They testified about the intensifying clashes between protesters and the administration in Hong Kong. They also urged Congress to pass the proposed Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act as a US countermeasure to deter a crackdown by the Chinese government.

Speaking at the council's launch, Wong said: "Taiwanese Americans established FAPA to fight for a better future. How about we Hongkongers," referring to the the Formosan Association for Public Affairs.

Today, FAPA is a grassroots organization with about 3,000 members aiming to promote US-Taiwan relations.

However, at its inception in 1982, FAPA was composed of only a few Taiwanese Americans. Just like these Hong Kong activists, the founding members of FAPA were among the first generation of Taiwanese who identify with the homeland rather than China.

FAPA's first lobbying triumph was to establish a separate immigration quota for Taiwanese immigrants to the US, rather than sharing it with immigrants from China.

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FAPA's mission is not limited to changing US policy to make US Democratic presidential aspirant Andrew Yang (楊安澤), US Representative Ted Lieu (劉德威) and actress Constance Wu (吳慷仁) identify themselves as "Taiwanese Americans" rather than "Chinese Americans."

Just like Hong Kongers today, Taiwanese were under authoritarian rule with little freedom of speech, assembly and political participation. For 38 years under martial law rule, dissidents in Taiwan were vulnerable to arrest, torture or even execution for pursuing democracy.

Overseas Taiwanese, including FAPA president Mike Kuo (郭明政), were spied on by secret agents from Taiwan and blacklisted for advocating the democratization of Taiwan.

After years of lobbying at the local level and on Capitol Hill, FAPA's advocacy resulted in legislation by US lawmakers like former senators Ted Kennedy and Claiborne Pell and former representatives Stephen Solarz and Jim Leach that contributed to the lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987.

Hong Kongers have a slogan for Taiwan: "Today's Hong Kong is tomorrow's Taiwan." It implies that Taiwan might be ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) like today's Hong Kong if a pro-Beijing administration should be elected.

One might also say that from the perspective of Taiwanese history, "Today's Hong Kong is yesterday's Taiwan." And FAPA is the offspring of this history.

One day before the congressional hearing on Hong Kong, about 80 FAPA members from across the US stood on the steps of the US Capitol for a group photograph. For decades, it has been an annual routine for FAPA members around this time of year to visit the offices of members of Congress to advocate for issues critical to Taiwan's interests.

These Taiwanese Americans extended a helping hand to their Hong Kong friends not out of a sense of responsibility to "liberate all Chinese compatriots from CCP rule." Aside from a common history of fighting against authoritarian rule, the ongoing expansion of Chinese influence in both Hong Kong and Taiwan engenders a sense of comradeship between Hong

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Kongers and Taiwanese.

The “one country, two systems” model in Hong Kong has proven to be a flat-out lie when autonomy and democracy are undermined each day. The extradition law proposed by the Hong Kong administration and Beijing encroaches on the civil rights the CCP promised in the Sino-British Joint Declaration. Initiated by Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平), the model was originally a design for a “reunified” Taiwan under the CCP’s rule.

Just like what it propagated in Hong Kong before the “return” of the former British colony, the CCP is using “united front” tactics to imbue Taiwanese with Chinese identity. Pro-Beijing politicians in Taiwan, allegedly with financial and technological assistance by the CCP, triumphed in local elections last year and are running in next year’s presidential and legislative elections. China continues to threaten to “unify” Taiwan by force, as Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) reiterated in January.

The CCP’s political maneuvering is not limited to the establishment of Confucius Institutes, promotion of its Belt and Road Initiative that leaves countries entrapped in debt and theft of intellectual property around the globe. For decades, Beijing has blocked Taiwan’s participation in international organizations, such as the UN and the WHO. It has also forced multinational corporations to mark Taiwan as “Taiwan, (Province of) China.”

Seeing the current tragedy in Hong Kong and fearing an apocalyptic scenario of Chinese annexation of Taiwan, many FAPA members passionately shared their advocacy experience with their Hong Kong friends. To them, helping Hong Kong is helping Taiwan.

FAPA is still pushing for legislation, such as the Taiwan Assurance Act, to advance the US commitment to Taiwan’s security. Issues like normalization of US-Taiwan relations, differentiating the US’ “one China policy” from Beijing’s “one China principle” and reaching a US-Taiwan free-trade agreement top FAPA’s advocacy agenda.

It is also encouraging some Hong Kongers to learn with Taiwanese members about the current situation in the Indo-Pacific region, practice advocacy skills in Congress and share their stories as activists.

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When we Taiwanese needed help, we received warm and strong support from our American friends. When Hong Kongers need help today, we Taiwanese can support them. Hopefully, Hong Kongers can promote the issues crucial to their people and homeland just like Taiwanese did.

After the council's launch, I approached Wong to express my admiration for the bravery of Hong Kongers. Despite his busy schedule, Wong took selfies with me, a stranger from Taiwan, like two friends.

"You Taiwanese have FAPA, but how about we Hong Kongers?" Wong asked me.

"Now you have HKDC," I said.

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2019/10/10](#)