

Zhang Zhijun's Taiwan Visit and its Inspiration for Hong Kong

Tseng Chien-yuan

Zhang Zhijun, director of the Chinese State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office made an official four-day visit to Taiwan in late June 2014. It was the first time since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 that a cabinet-level official set foot on Taiwan in an official capacity. Zhang's visit amounts to a certain breakthrough in the political relationship between Taiwan and China, namely the completion of a gradual transition from mutual non-recognition and mutual non-denial to de facto recognition. Its political significance should not be underestimated.

Although visiting on invitation by the Taiwanese government, Zhang was tailed by protesting groups wherever he went due to the political confrontation that still characterizes the relationship between the two sides. However, we also witnessed how Zhang sought to engage with central and southern Taiwan, small and mid-sized enterprises, lower and middle class families as well as young people. We also saw him meet Kaohsiung City Mayor Chen Chu, a heavyweight member of the major opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). In any case, it was the first step toward Taiwanese politics and society outside the existing communication platform between Taiwan's ruling Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Beijing treats the Taiwanese people so courteously solely because of Taiwan's insubordination.

Since people in Hong Kong depend on supplies from neighboring Guangdong Province for all their necessities of life, they lack objective conditions for resistance against the PRC. Zhang treated Taiwan and the DPP so respectfully precisely because Taiwanese sovereignty is independent

from the PRC. On top of that, Zhang cannot afford not to be very cautious about Taiwan; he must squarely look at the public will in Taiwan. This could probably greatly inspire the Hong Kong people and the pan-democratic forces there. If they want to make China keep its promises – namely to practice a “one country, two systems” regime and leave Hong Kong's capitalist system and way of life unchanged for 50 years after 1997 – then they should demand that China demonstrates its respect for Hong Kong public opinion, when making the final decision regarding the electoral system for the chief executive and Legislative Council members. The Hong Kong people must unite and fight side by side with the Taiwanese. With the backing of Taiwanese society, they must insist on a high degree of autonomy and democratic self-determination.

On June 10, the PRC State Council issued a white paper on The Practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" Policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The paper stressed the PRC government's “comprehensive jurisdiction” over Hong Kong. The following day, Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson Fan Liqing noted that Taiwan's future “must be decided by all Chinese people, including Taiwanese compatriots.” These successive official statements both emphasized the same point: The fate of Hong Kong and Taiwan will ultimately be decided by the leader of the people's democratic dictatorship, the CCP. Reversing his ambiguous stance of the past, Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou immediately refuted these statements, declaring that Taiwan's future can only be decided by the people of Taiwan. This was the inevitable outcome of

democratic forces and logic reasoning being at work. However, Hong Kong Chief Executive C.Y. Leung will not voice any dissenting views regarding the white paper on behalf of the Hong Kong people.

In an unofficial referendum on proposals for the popular election of the chief executive, Hong Kong civil society has already demonstrated that the Hong Kong people strongly wish to directly elect their next leader. They also demand that candidates for chief executive will be produced through a procedure that fulfills universally recognized democratic standards, namely that only people who reach a certain threshold in a public signature drive are eligible to stand for election. Due to Beijing's continued provocations, Hong Kong's Occupy Central with Love and Peace movement has meanwhile gathered strength and is ready for action. As some students and some political leaders staged non-violent protests during a large demonstration on July 1 marking Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997, we witnessed the rational behavior and active citizenship of the Hong Kong people, which were crucial for the inspiring success of the Occupy Central public protests. I am convinced the Hong Kong people will only stand a chance of seeing Beijing envoys carefully listen to the will of the Hong Kong people with the same attitude as Zhang if they unite and continue to exert pressure on China. Only then will it become possible that the voices of the Hong Kong people are truthfully reported to the members of the CCP central committee to make them change their thinking with regard to ruling Hong Kong. **BT**

Tseng Chien-yuan is Associate Professor
of Public Administration at Chung Hua
University