

The Black Hole of Conspiracies—Hong Kong Under Beijing’s Factional Fight: the beginning of the end of “one country, two systems”

Thursday 29 December 2016, by [AU Loong-yu](#) (Date first published: 22 December 2016).

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On 9th December, 2016 C.Y. Leung, the Chief Executive (CE) of Hong Kong, announced that he will not run for CE again after he completes his term next March. His excuse that this is due to family issues hardly convinces anyone. What is worth greater attention is how it seems to suggest that the *Sing Pao Daily*’s criticism and attack on the man and the so called “gang of four” may carry a certain degree of truth, or is at least effective enough to bring down the CE. The *Sing Pao* saga has become a window through which outsiders can have a glimpse of the inner party fight in Beijing and how it affects Hong Kong politics. Regardless of whoever wins eventually, however, it also spells the beginning of the end of “one country, two systems”.

The Sing Pao Saga

Hong Kong’s media is divided between the pro-Beijing camp and the pro-pan-democrats camp. While the other side is much less homogenous, the pro-Beijing camp has never launched attacks amongst itself publicly until *Sing Pao* did last August. The daily has a long history in Hong Kong, but in 2015 after it fell into financial crisis it was bought by Gu Zhuoheng, a Mainland Chinese businessman who is believed to have strong connections to certain high ranking party officials in Beijing. It is widely believed that his mission, as many other similar cases show, is to help Beijing to take over the media in Hong Kong, a process which began a long time ago. Since the change of ownership, *Sing Pao* has become even more pro-Beijing. But things began to take a sharp turn towards the end of last August when the daily began to attack C.Y. Leung for being the person who was responsible for intentionally provoking the rise of Hong Kong’s independence movement, with the support of the Liaison Office of the Central Government stationed in Hong Kong.

Sing Pao’s accusation is quite convincing to many because it was C.Y. Leung who helped to boost these people when, in his policy address in 2015, he loudly criticized a pro-independence booklet published by certain students, which in fact was not that popular at all. The daily also correctly prophesied Leung’s downfall. Not only did further attacks follow *Sing Pao*’s initial attack on Leung, but it also started targeting those even higher up. This included:

■ That two major organisations agitating for Hong Kong Independence were actually from the very start sponsored by “ultra-leftists” among the pro-Beijing camp. The two sides have been in close collaboration since then. (These two organizations are Youngspiration and Hong Kong Indigenous. Two of the leading members of the former were elected as LegCo members, only to be disqualified by a local court soon after for their insulting remarks made against China when taking their oaths, which triggered off the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress to make new interpretation to the Basic Law governing oath taking and which the local court must follow. The latter organization had led a riot against police early this year but with no good cause at all. – Au)

■ That Leung, the Liaison Office’s Zhang Xiaoming, Jiang Zaizhong of the Ta Kung Wen Wei Media Group and a fourth person constituted what the daily called “ultra-leftists”. Sometimes the daily has also referred to them as the “Gang of Four” who are trying to bring chaos to Hong Kong. It later implied that the fourth person was former Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa, who is himself a big tycoon.

■ That Zhang Dejiang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Politbureau and head of the Standing Committee of the People’s Congress, is the mastermind behind a joint effort by the Liaison Office to continue their corrupt practices across China, including Hong Kong. According to *Sing Pao*, Zhang is an ally of ex-leader Jiang Zemin, who has been allegedly involved in a power struggle with Xi Jinping.

■ That Xi Jinping should investigate the China Liaison Office.

Soon after the first commentary by *Sing Pao* was published, the daily *Wen Wei Po* which is run by the Liaison Office, fought back and accused *Sing Pao*’s chairman, Gu Zhuheng, of being a “fugitive” who was involved in illegal money lending and is wanted by Shenzhen police. Gu denounced the accusation, saying that it was “false” and “libellous”.

The Fall of C.Y. Leung

But the downfall of Leung seems to suggest that even if *Wen Wei Po* is correct in its characterization of Gu, the latter does have some powerful *houtai*, or patron. That may explain why C.Y. Leung had earlier taken a pan-democrat daily to court for supposed “defamation” against him but did nothing in relation to the deadly serious charges made against him by *Sing Pao*.

Instead of celebrating the fact that Leung is not running again, as many pan-democrats politicians are, Hong Kong people should worry about what the whole saga of the *Sing Pao* event has revealed. It is impossible to verify the claims of *Sing Pao*. But one thing is certain; the CCP’s inner party struggle is not only carried out in Mainland but is also now definitely being carried out in Hong Kong, and the tragedy is that Hong Kongers have no escape from it. Surely, it was already crystal clear that the writing was on the wall back in the 2012 CE election campaign when Jiang Zemin’s alleged favoured candidate Henry Tang was kicked out and replaced by C.Y. Leung. It was also around this time that Xi Jinping was to be appointed as the head of the CCP.

According to a senior Japanese journalist Kenji Minemura, the transition from the leadership of Hu Jintao to those of Xi Jinping involved a triangular power struggle between Hu, Jiang and Xi, not only a two sided struggle between Jiang and Xi as some might think. Minemura argues that it was actually the fierce struggle between Hu and Jiang at first that eventually benefited Xi. Again, we cannot verify these claims, but one thing is also sure, the fact that Henry Tang was abruptly replaced by C.Y. Leung must have taken place with the intervention of the top CCP leaders who were fighting among themselves, although we cannot be sure who is the real patron of C.Y. Leung.

Different factions used Hong Kong as leverage to bring down the other sides. That this has been happening for a long time is proven by the floods of reports and counter-reports relating to corruption stories by different factions, which make full use of Hong Kong's freedom of the press. What is particularly alarming to local tycoons, however, was the way their representative (Henry Tang) was replaced. His secret – that his house had an illegal structure – was reported on the news and deeply discredited him as a trustworthy candidate. It was also widely believed that the leaking of his secret was a conspiracy.

Inner Party Fight and Hong Kong

If the 2016 *Sing Pao* saga was slightly different from what happened in 2012 it is only because it revealed even uglier revelations as far as the inner party fight is concerned. Long before *Sing Pao*'s report, circumstantial evidence already pointed to a scenario where suspicious agents might have been involved in the sudden rise of the far right localists / Hong Kong independence advocates. Surely one must not dismiss these people as having no roots at all in a highly insecure society such as Hong Kong, along with growing politicization and polarization. These people do represent a rising far right mood among certain sectors of the population. But the fact that they rose up so quickly and that many of their very young leaders suddenly had so much money to run for election, and that many things that they said or did simply did not add up to what they publicly stood for, should lead us to cast suspicion on most of these leading Hong Kong independence advocates. The *Sing Pao* report only confirmed our distrust of these people.

Actually even without relying on *Sing Pao*, every sensible person in Hong Kong knows very well that the Communist Party has not only been doing vote rigging here, it has also recently started to pay money to politicians to run for election against pan-democrat candidates, either under the banner of "localist" or "Hong Kong independence". A Hong Kong court case proved this. Last October a certain Cheung was found guilty and sentenced to four years imprisonment for having bribed many localist candidates to run against pan-democrats in the 2015 district board election. Cheung admitted in court that he received money from a person from the United Front Department of the Communist Party, and that this person was ready to pay 150,000-250,000 HK dollars to each candidate in forty electoral districts.

Why is the way that the CCP's inner party fight affects Hong Kong so deplorable? It is because it shows no concern for the welfare of the people, and least of all for Hong Kong's autonomy. It is entirely conceivable that, for the opposing faction, in order to destabilize Xi Jinping, the option of purposefully destabilizing Hong Kong is always lying on their table. This does not require us to believe everything *Sing Pao* told us, especially its accusation that the Liaison Office chief and C.Y. Leung are all gang members of Beijing leader Zhang Dejiang, or that they manufactured the rapid rise of the Hong Kong Independence movement. Both the bitter experiences of the party struggles in the past decades and the equally bitter experiences of power struggle in the Chinese Empire for centuries could lead people like the Liaison Office chief and C.Y. Leung to purposefully provoke the Hong Kong Independence movement just in order to stay in power.

In the history of party struggle, subordinates in the party hierarchy have only been able to survive when they have not only fully implemented the "class struggle" policy laid down by the top, but have implemented it in even more extreme ways. The lesson drawn by the bureaucrats is known by the unfortunate term *Ningzuowuyou*, or "always better being more leftist than being rightist" (宁左毋右) – by leftist it actually means more authoritarian and repressive, while by rightist it means more moderate. As for the history of the Chinese Empire, it is the old trick known as *yangkouzizhong* (阳谋), which means that generals guarding the country borders would sponsor the enemy rather than

exterminating them, because it is only so long as the enemy is still there that these generals can continuously keep their titles and power. Far away from the court these generals had no other reliable tools with which to win the trust of the Emperor.

But how about the role of Zhang Dejiang, who is one of seven most powerful persons in China? Unlike the Liaison Office chief and C. Y. Leung, he is no general guarding the borders. It is widely believed that he is linked to the Jiang Zemin faction, and the latter is struggling against Xi Jinping. We have no way to verify this account. What is certain is that there is a faction fight among the top leaders and no one gives a shit about the consequences of undermining Hong Kong's autonomy. Even in the colonial period, when the CCP's faction fight was somewhat contained along the border of Hong Kong, when the fight became explosive, as was the case during the Cultural Revolution, it still directly affected Hong Kong, causing the 1967 big riot there. With the handover of sovereignty and nearly twenty years of re-integration with Mainland China, any serious faction fight among top leaders today definitely destabilises Hong Kong and erodes its autonomy.

The Logic of One Party Dictatorship

Surely there are also other possible factors which contribute to the political chaos and the rise of the Hong Kong independence movement other than the factional fight. We must bear in mind that undermining Hong Kong's autonomy is beneficial to the party state in general and hence to all of its factions. To imagine that the CCP's dictatorship can be compatible with democracy in general and with Hong Kong autonomy in particular is pure fantasy. Hence we should not be blinded by the *Sing Pao* report and overlook the fact that with or without the initiative of the Liaison Office and C.Y. Leung, the United Front Department of the CCP and the secret police still need to do their job in undermining Hong Kong's autonomy. One of the ways to do this is to provoke an independence movement so as to give an excuse to the Central government to crack down on Hong Kong. This was exactly what happened when the Standing Committee re-interpreted the Basic law last month so as to make the Hong Kong court disqualify properly elected LegCo members who has nothing to do with the pro-independent movement.

For the past dozen years there have been private reports circulating among activists about how this or that party or organizations have experienced infiltration or how individual members have being tempted or forced to be the CCP's informants and/or collaborators. Then came the Umbrella Movement, which revealed in one-go how the CCP has been working under the table for years. Hundreds if not thousands of "home village associations" pretending to be "mass organizations" suddenly sprang up from nowhere to campaign against the democratic movement, new far right and "patriotic" (read "pro-Beijing") political organizations were founded to combat the Umbrella movement, mafia was used in great numbers to beat up or scare away occupiers etc etc.

At the same time certain far right localists, instead of targeting Beijing and the Hong Kong government, attacked the pan-democrats in general and the Hong Kong Federation of Students (which led the occupation in the first place) in particular until they successfully dismantled the latter. What is funny is how during last September's election some of the old associates of this far right current came out publicly accusing their leader, the infamous Raymond Wong, who in past years had already split several pan-democrat parties, as being the CCP's accomplice. All of the above could not have been done without years and decades of preparation.

Sadly, Hong Kong people have been trapped in multiple conspiracies serving multiple purposes, public and private, of the top leaders of the CCP, of all its factions and all of its institutions and individuals which are directly involved in Hong Kong. On top of this, there is the rumour that Xi

Jinping may want to stay in power even after his second term, which implies, if it is true, that a more fierce faction fight can be expected in the years to come. Even worse is that while everyone is aware that autonomy is disappearing quickly, no common citizens know exactly who the real actors behind the screen of the puppet show are.

22nd December, 2016

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