Legislative Election Held in Hong Kong

Election to the Legislative Council, the local parliament in Hong Kong, was held on December 19 of this year - an event that observers outside China should be interested in from an academic point of view. It is always curious to see how one of the two leading world powers solves its internal problems, which inevitably become a matter of concern for other countries of different levels of importance.

But any of the noticeable events held in Hong Kong and the autonomous regions of China, mainly the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and the Tibet Autonomous Region, as well as in separatist Taiwan have long been scrutinized by Beijing’s primary geopolitical opponents. This is quite applicable and not academic in nature. The election in Hong Kong was no exception.

The strategy of propaganda attacks against China in connection with the indicated event and the situation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) in general, is built taking into account the specifics of the process of its accession (or rather return) to China, which occurred at the end of the last century. Beijing’s well-wishers most often talk about its violation of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, signed in December 1984 by the de facto Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, and Great Britain’s Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who arrived in China for a regular visit.
According to this document, in 1997, upon completion of the 99-year lease by Great Britain of about half of the HKSAR, the entire area became part of China. The colonial constitution was replaced by the Basic Law, adopted in China seven years before the actual restoration of Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong. This document consolidated the basic principle of “One country, two systems,” proposed by Deng Xiaoping in discussing with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher the conditions for the return of Hong Kong to China. By the way, the same principle eight years later formed the basis of the “1992 Consensus,” concluded between representatives of China and Taiwan, at the time ruled by the Kuomintang.

Concerning Hong Kong as part of China, this principle was supposed to work during a 50-year transitional period, with the socio-political and economic structure of Hong Kong preserved in a more or less unchanged state.

Beijing’s alleged violation of the proposed principle regarding the HKSAR has for about ten years been the focus of propaganda campaigns, both in London and Washington, the latter intercepting the former’s initiative.

Without going into the aspects of the “legal” relevance of such claims to China by Great Britain and the US, three points should be made. First, one must not forget that in the middle of the 19th century, Great Britain seized Hong Kong during the Opium Wars, the most criminal episode of the entire (inglorious) period of the colonial wars. Having been controlled by a political culture foreign to China for 150 years, Hong Kong returned to the rest of China as a foreign body.

Hence follows a second point concerning the nature of the transition process. This point can be put as a rhetorical question. One day in 2047, will the Hong Kong people discover that while they were sleeping, the entire socio-legislative-economic space surrounding them has simultaneously and radically changed overnight? The answer is obvious: this process should unfold gradually over the 50 years stipulated by the above Declaration.

Finally, there is the factor of the escalating global confrontation between the two leading world powers and the rather apparent external involvement in protest actions that periodically and for one reason or another have arisen in Hong Kong in the last decade. One of the most (in)famous such actions, dubbed the Umbrella Movement by the Western press, took place in the fall of 2014 and became part of the wave of “color revolutions” that swept the world at the time.

The author has previously been surprised at the patience and gentleness of Beijing’s behavior towards the local organizers of the riots in Hong Kong, who received full support from the politicians and the press of the Western countries. Perhaps Beijing was guided by considerations dictated by the need to resolve larger and more complex Taiwan issues. To implement a peaceful solution that is preferable for it, China has to maintain a positive image of the Mainland among the Taiwanese who are positively disposed towards it.

However, the increasingly real prospect of turning the HKSAR into a political abscess on the body of the Mainland forced Beijing to take decisive action. Without a doubt, the impetus for this was the ruthless events of the summer of 2019, accompanied by the atrocities of activists on the city’s streets, the blockade of the airport, and processions with the British flag. On June 30, 2020, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress adopted the Hong Kong national security law.

This act turned out to be a milestone in the entire “transitional process” of the gradual integration of Hong Kong into the state-legal field of China. Also, it became the legislative basis for adopting strict measures to control the situation in the city. The most urgent was due to the need to postpone the currently discussed legislative election for a year. In the course of the resulting electoral pause, an inevitable cleanup of the political space of Hong Kong was carried out, and the necessary components of the Election Commission were formed. This helped to prevent the emergence of unforeseen surprises in the declaration of the will of the Hong Kong people, which, to reiterate, happened on December 19 of this year.

Connoisseurs of the purity of democratic procedures, who admittedly have a reason to wrinkle their noses in connection with everything that accompanied the process of preparing and holding the discussed election, can read the three points indicated above.

Two days after the legislative election, Carrie Lam, Chief Executive of the HKSAR, was received first by Premier Li Keqiang and then by President Xi Jinping. The very fact of these meetings testified to Beijing’s satisfaction with the positive outcome of over a year’s worth of efforts to bring the situation in Hong Kong under control.

The editorial by the Global Times on the occasion of the Xi Jinping and Carrie Lam meeting hails, in particular, the end of the period of transition from chaos to stability, and the use of the city by the West, led by the United States,
as a springboard for provoking a color revolution in China. It also says that during the meetings with the highest officials of China, Carrie Lam was given the task of “integrating the Chinese city into the national development plan.”

Note that the last words do not represent a political tirade but imply specific documents adopted during several events in 2021, which marked the 100th anniversary of the CCP. One of the more remarkable of said events was the sixth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, held a month before the Hong Kong election, which, as one of its major decisions, gave the current Chinese leader a qualitatively new role in the functioning of the state.

Beijing’s well-wishers’ reaction to the legislative election itself and everything accompanying it was entirely expected. BBC made a typical comment on this claiming that “China has formed a loyal Hong Kong parliament.”

But the matter was not limited to propaganda rhetoric. Based on the US legislative act passed in 2020, which, in particular, obliges the State Department to monitor the facts of China’s violation of the Sino-British Joint Declaration (which Washington has nothing to do with), sanctions were imposed immediately after the election regarding five officials of the Chinese Central People’s Government office in Hong Kong. Add these were far from the first sanctions, and not only concerning the situation in the HKSAR.

So, in relations between the two leading world powers, political life, as they say, continues to be in full swing for various reasons. The election to the Legislative Council of Hong Kong was just another such reason. Surely, not the last.

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