

An easy way out of Functional Constituency, Mission is Impossible?!

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The road of constitutional reform in Hong Kong is yet to be easy, obstacles after obstacles are always there for pragmatists to overcome. Idealists' hue-and-cry in their quest for democracy is nothing but a manifesto with zero cost involved. Despite this, hope is still there given our insurmountable stamina hurdling over 'surmountables' in a rational manner.

Regarding the proposed abolition of all functional constituencies (FCs) of Legislative Council (Legco) in the future, **road to universal suffrage is by no means cleared of landmines despite its go-ahead in 2020 by Beijing**. Having this target, coupled with a feasible proposal, FCs would become 'ashes to ashes' in the foreseeable future.

System of FC, a political spinoff in colonial period, is of a long history. Despite the fact that, at that time, all Legco seats were appointed by Governor, it is not his arbitrary favor that made the decision. Legco, as a convention, is supposed to represent interests across different walks of life. **The above-mentioned 'makeshift' has been institutionalized since early 80s**, a period in which colonial Government started embarking upon political engineering of democratization; this resulted in the FCs we have seen nowadays.

As far as 'the system' is concerned, long history implies intricate and entrenched cobweb of interests involving people from various political, economic and business sectors. In the light of this, **what every seat represents is not any individual member but one's underlying cobweb of interests**. Any success of FC's abolition hinges on rational calculation of 'vested interest' amongst these representatives. **It's not practical, other than being altruistic, to urge them to 'abdicate' in compliance with any thought beyond their 'comfort zone'**. It is not 'idealism' that starts the dialogue but careful calculation of 'vested interest' in a way that avenue is possible.

It is doomed to be an endless debate regarding which FC should or shouldn't be kept in the first place. A feasible alternative is to come up a proposal in which two-third of majority is guaranteed so as to abolish all the seats of functional constituencies in one go when time is ripe. This 'two-third' implies that at least 10 FC

members, coupled with those from geographical constituencies (GCs), are about right to make thing happen. This is one of the tricky parts of the question and there, as a maiden lane, requires more mention.

In retrospect, New Forum, a policy think-tank, tendered its proposal on constitutional reform to Commission of Strategic Development in 2007, a year in which Government's first consultation on constitutional reform had been launched. **According to the proposal, in the term starting from 2012, 10 new seats, 70 in total, will be evenly distributed amongst GCs and a newly formed FC composed of incumbent District Councilors (DCFC) so that ratio between GCs and FCs remains intact.** The same principle carries on in the term that follows and finally, given the de-facto support from the 11 DCFC members as well as a few FC members, it is very likely that Legco grabs the necessary 'two-third' to uproot all the FCs, a system that has been draining Hong Kong society of its spirit and stamina over the last two decades.

Regarding the proposal there are two advantages. First and foremost, **it abides by the principle of gradual and orderly democratic development laid down by Basic Law.** Second, something subtle will be achieved **to avert the arguments in the process of seat curtailment. This is of the utmost importance to have a smooth transition without huge friction of existing FC members.** In view of the fact that opinion leaders like Exco member Professor Anthony CHEUNG and Basic Law committee member Mr. Nai-Keung LAU came up something similar, this proposal proves to be feasible in a sense that people can have a useful reference in their pursuit of well-being in the future.

The Government is about to launch a new consultation very soon. With all due respect to those voices yearning for universal suffrage in 2012, there also come a considerable amount of people who prefer the development in a mild and pragmatic manner. According to a poll conducted by New Forum in September 2009, over 50% accepted NPC's timetable regarding the pace of democracy, whereas 60% preferred a milder proposal so that some progress, at the very least, is guaranteed in 2012. In addition, 50% shared a view 'thing would get worse when democrats stand firmly against Beijing'.

What we are expecting is **a synergy amongst various political parties via which they can put aside their differences and finally come up something in unison with general request, as revealed in our poll.** Punctiliously, step after step, upcoming

consultation could be a way forward to ensure constructive deliberation and then our bright future. Keep our finger cross, Hong Kong, here we go! Strike while the iron is still hot!