

Accept Beijing's Authority

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I vividly recall watching a 10-minute documentary introducing the Heritage Society, the well-known US think-tank. The film clearly showed the virtues and values of American culture (even though the US flag kept appearing on screen every minute or so). Over the years, I have also enjoyed listening to George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and other US presidents and politicians making speeches and noticed that they often repeat - with affection and enthusiasm - the phrase: God bless America.

I spent six of my 39 civil service years in Tokyo as the Hong Kong government's representative. There, I noticed a strong Japanese loyalty and affection towards their country, in particular the emperor. And no doubt, many Hong Kong people must appreciate Britain's respect for the Queen.

These examples merely reveal it is natural and common for people to show affection towards their countries; feeling proud of their own culture and heritage. I have no intention of joining the debate on patriotism in Hong Kong, suffice to say that I generally agree with Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa's remark that most people here are patriotic.

What is important is that Hong Kong people, especially our community leaders, adopt a correct attitude towards the central government and our own national leadership. In brief, it means that while practising one country, two systems in Hong Kong and, therefore, never moving towards socialism, the community - especially those in power - should fully accept and pay due respect to the authority of the central government in Beijing. This is important because it has a strong bearing on Hong Kong's stability and prosperity, as well as the long-term success of one country, two systems.

As a community leader - whether in the business, social, educational, religious or any other field - adopting the right attitude towards the central government is vital. Under the one country, two systems concept, the Hong Kong way of life which we treasure is guaranteed for 50 years. There is no need to follow, agree with or in any way associate with the mainland's socialist system. Take myself, for example. Because of my education, background and work experience, it would be very difficult for me to really appreciate the value of socialism, while the possibility of joining the Communist Party is, for all practical purposes, nonexistent.



Nevertheless, as a good citizen holding a Hong Kong special administrative region passport, I must abide by the Basic Law and fully accept the leadership of Beijing, as enshrined in China's constitution. Fully respecting and accepting Beijing's authority would not mean Hong Kong is moving towards socialism, as the Basic Law fully guarantees our high degree of autonomy.

On the other hand, if Hong Kong challenges the central government's authority and hopes - or even tries - to replace it with, say, a British style of government or the US congressional system, that could only lead to unnecessary confrontation. This is bad for Hong Kong and can benefit no one. Similarly, there will be confrontation if we challenge the one country that gives rise to two systems, including advocating independence for Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet or Taiwan.

The vast majority of Hong Kong people are of Chinese origin and it is only natural that they have affections and feelings for the Chinese culture and - certainly since 1997 - the motherland. This has been demonstrated by the strong feelings and support from the community after natural disasters in parts of the mainland; when Chinese athletes and artists achieved outstanding results at international competitions; during visits by the then president Jiang Zemin and Premier Wen Jiabao and more recently Chinese astronaut Yang Liwei.

However, when it comes to constitutional matters regarding one country, as well as the role and authority of the central government as enshrined in the Basic Law, Hong Kong people can get confused and lack understanding. Hence, the surprise, disappointment and even anger among some sectors when Mr Tung suggested in his policy address that we should consult Beijing on constitutional reform, interpreting the move as inviting the central government to intervene in what some believed to be a purely Hong Kong matter within two systems.

Looking at the situation today, the Hong Kong government has to educate the entire population on what one country really means under the Basic Law, the relationship between Beijing and the SAR, and especially on Chapters I, II and IV of the Basic Law. We should study not just the words but the basic principles and rationale behind the more important sections. It is also the Tung administration's duty to ensure that the educational material, essential messages and information are disseminated and reach all families in an interesting and effective manner.

If it does not have the machinery or resources to do this, it should ask the Legislative Council to grant the money to engage a top consultant, and if necessary, buy TV and

radio time and place adverts in the press.

Understanding the essential parts of the Basic Law and adopting the right attitude towards the central government are vital for our long-term stability and prosperity. It has also been suggested that formal education on the Basic Law should be introduced in schools and universities. This means it would be properly taught, but optional rather than compulsory for pupils - similar to Constitutional Law, which can be studied at A-level.

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