

Beijing critics shouldn't overstep the boundaries

Lau Nai-keung

Jan 07, 2011

One of the first public statements from Wang Guangya , as the new director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, created an immediate uproar here. Under "one country, two systems", "well water should not intrude into river water", he told Hong Kong's National People's Congress deputies.

The expression originates from the Chinese novel, Dream of the Red Chamber, and was quoted in 1989 by then Communist Party general secretary Jiang Zemin after the Tiananmen incident. In essence, it means "I don't bother you, and you don't bother me".

This statement was not well received at that time because many feared that, after the handover, even if Hong Kong people did not meddle with developments on the mainland, the central government would still interfere in Hong Kong affairs. Fourteen years on, the central government has kept its part of the bargain, and Wang's statement is a reminder of this feature of "one country, two systems". The mainland's socialist system and Hong Kong's capitalist system co-exist side by side, and neither side should violate this golden rule.

His reminder comes in the wake of a growing number of cases of meddling by critics here in mainland affairs. Several recent Legislative Council motions were directed at mainland court cases, some of which were still in the judicial process. There has also been more frequent protest rallies in front of the central government's liaison office here. A socialist government would find this type of behaviour unacceptable; even using Western yardsticks, it is improper. For example, in the Western tradition, the legislature should never interfere with the judiciary, not to mention the courts of another jurisdiction.

A case in point is that of Zhao Lianhai , who led a lonely campaign for tainted-milk victims, after his own son had been treated and his family compensated. He was considered a trouble-maker and put on trial. Government critics here made a big fuss over the case before the court handed down his sentence. They are so self-righteous that they kept harping on the issue even after Zhao was released on medical parole and pleaded with them to leave him and his family alone. In the process, several National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference delegates joined the Beijing-bashing chorus without asking what had actually happened. It is not difficult to understand why the central government was so annoyed.

What are the intentions of our dissidents?

If they want to make Hong Kong better, by all means do so. But apart from mounting protests, they should do something constructive. If they want to change mainland China, any mainland person is entitled to tell them: pay your dues first. Hongkongers who do not pay taxes or serve any duties on the mainland should leave this serious issue to their 1.3 billion compatriots who do. According to some international polls, including one by Pew, mainland Chinese are happier with the status quo and more supportive of their government than Western people are of theirs.

If these dissidents truly believe in freedom and human rights, as they claim, how come they do not protest against the persecution of Julian Assange and campaign for the cause of WikiLeaks? I am perplexed by the conspicuous silence of Hong Kong's holier-than-thou press corps, freedom fighters and politicians like Albert Ho Chun-yan and Emily Lau Wai-hing. Where is our Journalists Association? It is blatant hypocrisy and double standards.

Wang Guangya's reminder should be taken seriously.

Lau Nai-keung is a member of the Basic Law Committee of the NPC Standing Committee, and also a member of the Commission on Strategic Development