

HK Umbrellas Now Closed

China Police evacuated the main pro-democracy protest area

This huge uproar will have consequences

HONG KONG

On Wednesday night, the first car to take the road was a taxi. This is a symbol because HK red-and-white cabbies have been contesting the HK Umbrellas revolutionists' road blocks since the beginning of the protest. On Thursday, the Police evacuated the main protest area that was blocking several roads opposite the Government HQ. At the 75th day of what has been called "Occupy Central", this clearing happened without any trouble as the 200 inveterate pro-democracy protesters accepted to get arrested without resisting the Police.

The things that HK youth have won....

The Police operation put an end to the biggest political contestation movement that HK has ever known since its retrocession to China in 1997. This movement led by students claimed the resignation of Chinese executive chief CY Leung and above all rejected the electoral framework decided by Beijing for the next Governor election in 2017. None of these two claims have been satisfied by the Government. However, the contestation will have real consequences, a point on which Andrew Leung and Sebastian Veg agree together. Andrew Leung is an international consultant including for firms contemplating to break into China and HK. Sebastian Veg runs the French Studies Centre of Contemporary China headquartered in HK.

Besides massive support from HK people after political violence, students have been able to obtain a 2-hour chat on an equal footing with the Government which was retransmitted on TV in live. This debate has been an important milestone, according to Sebastian Veg. Students have been able to express clearly and publicly their opinion towards Executive government which granted them an important privilege. The reason people were no longer supporting students in the last recent weeks is because people deemed that the struggle needed be continued under another form, according to Sebastian Veg. Anyway, it is widely agreed that the movement managed to increase pressure on Government, in particular regarding the bone of contention of the selection committee composition of next Chief of Executive. Andrew Leung recognizes a "movement full of passion", led by entrenched idealism explained by the widening inequalities gap in HK against which the Government has not fight enough against. Sebastian Veg commends and praises the political arousal of HK youth.

The things that HK youth have lost....

Andrew Leung assesses that protests were beginning to threaten the Rule of Law in HK. One may have seen it when protesters refused to comply with the Court injunction to get out of the streets. This analysis is not shared by Sebastian Veg according to whom the Government

was itself on the verge of using illegal methods while it was giving a political role to the Police instead of facing itself the tricky situation. Besides, the decision delivered by the Court relies on a Law that has to do with private property and not with public roads access.

The fight also led to people's cleavage. "The movement revealed the youth's ignorance to the Chinese reality, highlights Andrew Leung. Yet, young people forget that HK do not really belong to them, or that Beijing cannot change its mind on a decision without risking creating problems with other regions in the country. The young generation does not know that under British occupation, the colonial administration I was working for at the time was ruling on everything. Today, we have solid institutions which I am rightly proud of. This is not to no avail that the Heritage Foundation ranks us at the forefront in term of economic freedom."

Yet, more than an historic ignorance, the movement shows two different confronting visions on the ground of a generation gap, according to Sebastian Veg. Unlike their elders, the young generation born after HK retrocession is no longer dreaming of becoming millionaire. They are not fond of Chinese-bashing but they desire to realise their personal project. They are not fulfilling themselves in President Xi's nationalism. The truth is that they are only asking for a sort of federation based on democratic countries' model.

A political aftermath

"The selection committee composition of the Chief Executive can be reviewed and enlarged admits Andrew Leung. But this is vain to pretend that Beijing will not ensure the committee's loyalty to current Government. How can we work together without trust? This is the same country!" This question will be raised next year in the Parliament. Furthermore, the Umbrella Movement puts also pressure on democrat deputies who own a minority blocking power. "It will be difficult for them not to veto the final law if it does not contains any concessions"

Last but not least, student federation HKFS was surveyed as the most popular political party in HK last month. "We will see what they will do with it, resumes Sebastian Veg, but districts counsellors' election next year may enable them to get a candidate elected and break the current monopoly owned by the pro-Beijing in these circumscriptions."