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35pc favour free Taiwan in poll shock

By China Desk

A TAIWANESE public opinion poll shows only a small percentage of Hongkong residents want to emigrate to Taiwan, but about a third support the island's independence.

The survey published yesterday was conducted in Hongkong by the private Public Opinion Research Foundation in Taipei and the Hongkong branch of the US Gallup Poll Centre last month.

The first of its kind by a Taiwanese organisation, the poll was based on telephone interviews with a sample of 1,033 Hongkong adults.

The results were released by pollster Wu An-chia, vice-chairman of the mainland China affairs committee at the semi-official think tank, the Institute for International Relations.

The findings said although 34.5 per cent of the interviewees planned to emigrate, only 8.7 per cent would consider moving to Taiwan before 1997 and only 3.2 per cent make the island as their first preference.

The survey showed 35.5 per cent of Hongkong residents tended to support the independence of Taiwan while 36.6 per cent were against it.

The finding that about one-third of Hongkong residents support Taiwan's independence was interpreted as a reflection of Hongkong people's opting for the territory's own independence.

Professor Shaw Chung-hai, of the National Chengchi University, said: "The Hongkong people's support (for Taiwan's independence) may be a reflection of their yearning for Hongkong's independence.

(But) they do not have a deep understanding of Taiwan's political reality."

The surprising results have caused concern in



Hongkong's pro-Beijing sectors.

One researcher with a major mainland company here doubted the intention of the survey.

"In view of the strained relations between the mainland and Hongkong, a poll with findings showing support for Taiwan's independence may fan local emotions," the researcher said.

On the promise of "one country, two systems" after 1997, the Taiwanese-sponsored survey indicates 32.8 per cent of the interviewees have a faith in Beijing, but 53.3 per cent are sceptical.

The poll shows 47 per cent Hongkong people are worried by the rapidly deteriorating public security on Taiwan, but 27.2 say it is not so bad. On the island's economy, 67.7 per cent say it is "very good" or "good".

The research concludes those professionals of younger age, higher education and higher income are more inclined to doubt Beijing's promise of the "one country, two systems".

Concerning Hongkong's future, 42 per cent of interviewees are pessimistic about the political situation, while 45.5 per cent are not optimistic about the economic future. And 63.4 per cent think limits would be imposed on their everyday lives.

While 59 per cent of the interviewees long for the organisation of political parties and 82.5 hope to have general elections for Legislative Council members before 1997, 51 per cent pessimistically consider Beijing will not respect their wishes.

While 50 per cent think from now to 1997 the political situation in Hongkong will become increasingly unstable, 9.5 per cent consider it will improve.

In the poll, 62 per cent are against the People's Liberation Army being stationed in Hongkong after 1997 while 25 per cent support the idea.

When asked if it was possible to choose a future for Hongkong, 14 interviewees or 1.4 percent would like to see the territory become a province of China while 226 people or 21.9 per cent opted for the "one country, two systems" scheme.

But 385 or 37.3 per cent preferred Hongkong to maintain its current status, while 176 or 17 per cent wanted Beijing to take back the sovereignty but allow the British to continue governing the territory.

The other 107 people or 10.4 per cent wanted to see independence for Hongkong.

Among the interviewees, 47 per cent think it impossible for political changes like those in Eastern Europe to take place in China in the next five years while 28.5 regard it as possible.

Concerning relations between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait in the next five years, 49.4 per cent expect the current situation will be maintained while 22.4 per cent think the mainland and Taiwan may form some kind of federation.

Only 3.21 per cent see the chance for the independence of Taiwan and 0.7 per cent look forward to the unification of the mainland and Taiwan.

Survey Taiwan

34.5