

Letter to Hong Kong students: tonight I picked a side

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As a mainlander in Hong Kong, I constantly feel the prejudice and ill will against us but also understand the helplessness that underlies these feelings. For many years, I have lived with the awkwardness of being stuck between two worlds; but tonight I picked a side. Tonight I stand by you, because you are doing what I never dared to dream.

When I first came here, I was impressed by the political awareness and involvement of Hong Kong students. The posts on democracy walls and the frequent political discussions and lectures at the university indicated the major role that students played in leading social development. I was often asked about the political situation on the mainland and even about my own stance. I found the questions very difficult to answer, not only because the situation was too complicated to be explained in a few words, but also because of my ignorance of such issues.

Yet I appreciated your concern and your sincerity in reaching out. Looking back at us mainlanders, not only do we seldom care about Hong Kong issues, we barely understand our own. As a rough estimate, fewer than one in ten mainland university students know in any detail the procedure for electing our leaders. It is not even in our mindset to consider the legitimacy and integrity of that process. We don't know that it's possible to ask, 'What do we want?' Yet we label our silence "maturity".

Tonight, I saw more than passion and participation. I saw a determination and solidarity that I have never experienced, and that has not been seen in China for a long time. When the boycott and occupation started, I did not expect it to last long, let alone that it would grow to such an extent. Then I saw the yellow ribbons spreading from universities to all of Hong Kong, not only on students but also on professors, on people who'd just got off work and on tottering grandmas. I saw the crowd refuse to be driven away by tear gas, and watched it create a poignant symbol out of an everyday umbrella. I saw you running around, distributing food and drink to people you didn't even know. Tonight, I saw you become brothers and sisters.

I asked myself, when did I ever see such a scene back home? When did we ever work side by side for the same goal, other than for our college entrance exam? Sadly, not once in my life. Is it for me to be blamed for regarding bravery as foolishness and courage as naïveté? Some say this is just not the way we deal with things, but seriously, how do we ever deal with anything? I cannot hide my jealousy of you for having the opportunity to fight. In my twenties, I am one example of so many who are going to be the hard core of our society – again, we never knew that there is such an option.

I am also deeply impressed by how calm and disciplined you have been during this revolution. In the occupied area, I saw students doing their reading by the light of cell phones, picking up litter and sorting out the recyclables. In your operation guide I read: 'Avoid physical confrontation, but also avoid developing hatred in your heart'; and I saw the

banner declaring “Equality, Tolerance, Love, and Care.” To stay calm and rational may be the hardest act, for angry youths in particular. But you learnt from previous experience, and you know it is the sharpest weapon. Tonight, you taught me the real meaning of maturity.

A friend of mine, an activist, told me that she didn’t really think the Nonviolence Occupy Central Movement would lead to the result we all hoped for; what she wanted was simply to have her voice heard and to raise consciousness, so that one day it would succeed. I cannot imagine how much courage it must take to strive for hope, and hope alone. But I know this is how you have come this far. We are on our way.

I understand the fear behind your courage. If you don’t do anything now, the day will come that you are going to be just another me. Honestly, this is my fear too. In a city so busy and crowded, you don’t give in to its burdens but keep your faith in democracy and liberty, in the power of the masses. To me, this is the fascination of Hong Kong. I don’t dare to think what the city would be like without the hoarse voices on the streets and the fists waving in the air.

Sitting next to you, I know the pain and anger I feel at this moment is less than a thousandth of what you have felt. We cannot know if the situation is getting better, or if the future is getting brighter. Nonetheless, I have to say to you that what you have now – your courage and hope, solidarity and discipline – are so precious. You have no idea how people in the dark corners of the world, me included, covet it. It is an honour and a blessing. Hold on to it, for your own hopes, and for ours too.

I stand by you tonight, till the dawn of democracy.

Written by a mainland Chinese writer studying in Hong Kong who used a pseudonym, this letter was first published in [Asia Literary Review](#) and republished by the Post at ALR's permission.