

The Resilience of a People

Dear Epoch VIP,

Growing up in a Cantonese family in New York City, Hong Kong pop culture featured heavily in my childhood. My mom would turn on the cable television channel that broadcast Hong Kong soaps and Cantonese-dubbed cartoons. My dad would quote from his favorite Stephen Chow movies.

My family is from Guangzhou city, mainland China. Due to the city's proximity to Hong Kong and decades of Guangzhou people seeking refuge from war, strife, and political persecution in the former British colony, the customs and culture in both places are similar.

When I was dispatched to Hong Kong in late 2019 to cover the mass protests unfolding on the city's streets, I finally had the chance to satisfy my curiosity about this place that influenced my upbringing—and dominated global news headlines with images of youth confronting tear gas and police batons in their bid to protect the freedoms they grew up with.

In 1997 when Hong Kong was handed to the Chinese regime after nearly a century of British colonial rule, it was promised autonomy—with its way of life, separate political system, and basic freedoms left intact. But in the summer of 2019, the Hong Kong government pushed forward with an extradition bill that would have allowed individuals to be transferred to mainland China for trial in Chinese Communist Party-controlled courts. To many Hongkongers, the proposal was Beijing's latest bid to tighten its grip over the city.

It propelled millions of people to take to the streets in protest—the largest demonstrations in the city's history. As the protests went on from summer to fall, The Epoch Times wished to delve deeper into the psyche of Hong Kong protesters. And so, late last year, I flew to Hong Kong.

After spending time speaking to Hongkongers at weekly rallies and marches as well as interviewing people from all walks of life who took part in the protest movement, I was most struck with how they were undaunted and unwavering despite the possibility of arrests, injuries, and other consequences for voicing dissent against Beijing.

Despite the daily sight of police in riot gear patrolling the streets and the uncertainty of where the movement was headed next, nearly all the people I spoke with said they were not willing to give up agitating for their cause.

Earlier this year, the Chinese regime, in an unprecedented move, implemented a national security law for Hong Kong that includes broadly criminalizing what the regime deems to be acts of subversion, secession, and collusion with foreign forces, with punishments as severe as life imprisonment. Protest slogans were banned overnight. Scores of activists have been arrested. The already-limited space in which Hongkongers could voice their dissent has diminished even further.

One young activist said in an Epoch Times interview that he would not leave Hong Kong despite the increasing risks, and would keep doing his part in sustaining the movement.

“We don’t fight because we have seen hope. We fight because we want to chase hope, and hope is made by human efforts,” he said.

The right to protest, the right to speak one's mind, the right to vote in free and fair elections—this visit to Hong Kong helped me realize that these things did not come without a cost.

But it's not just Hong Kong where people bravely confront the Chinese regime's authoritarian threats. In mainland China, courageous human rights activists, lawyers, dissidents, and ordinary citizens risk their safety in order to speak the truth and defend their rights. From the whistleblower doctors who first spread information about the CCP virus to the villagers impacted by historic flooding who speak up about the authorities' flawed evacuation efforts, all chose to expose the reality of what's happening in China despite knowing the perils of doing so. That is why as the China editor, I feel an enormous sense of duty and pride in being part of a team that shares these people's stories with you, the reader.

In Truth and Tradition,

Annie Wu
The Epoch Times

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China Editor