

Dear Hong Kong Students,

Watching you live on CNN was how I spent my evenings during the week before the Chinese National Day holiday.<sup>1</sup> Footage of your stand was better than any TV program, for as I watched, I travelled through the magic of airwaves to be with you. Above me was a red umbrella, on my wrist a yellow ribbon, on my eyes a pair of goggles coated with a layer of plastic film, and on my face a mask. My skin burned when you were assaulted with pepper spray. My lungs protested as you ran away from the tear gas. Feeling your exhaustion, my eyes could not remain open as the midnight deadline passed.

The last time I saw anything like this was twenty-five years ago, long before most of you were born.<sup>2</sup> I was 'too young, too naïve' to recall much, but I do remember youthful faces like yours with optimistic hopes and firm wills. Who could possibly forget the selflessness of fearless souls on the square! But you see, one can only remember if he ever knows. Even if he knows, he can only recall if he wants to.

So your street solidarity is beyond the comprehension of many university students on the other side of the train to Lo Wu<sup>3</sup> – 'why are they on that fragrant island always the unreasonable ones?' And more often, 'Are their protests real?'

How do I know this? Because I am their teacher. And I make a simple request of you. Please write to my students and tell them your stories. Describe that night in Central,<sup>4</sup> how warm it felt when friends and strangers held hands and dared to dream one united dream. Compare Hong Kong old and new: What changes have you experienced? What was it that propelled you onto the street to make a stand?

You may wonder whether your letters could arrive. To be honest, I wonder, too. Yet once your letters run the gauntlet to reach only one student, be assured that he or she will spread the word about you. And then... A class. A cohort. A college. A university. A community. A city. A province. A country.

Staring at the black hole where you had been on the TV screen, I realise while you are risking your lives, I am only venturing to write this letter. The absence of you and the helplessness in

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me made this holiday the most tedious of all. Your webpage news went blank. Baidu abandoned you, and you became Who? in my inquiries. As if you were a dream. As if I was insane.

On the street, when you have finished reading and geared up for upcoming danger, be proud of your influence and write to your press across the border. Send your letters to 1597451582@qq.com to start with.<sup>5</sup> I will make certain they first go to my one hundred and seven readers.

Stay safe,  
An English Language teacher from mainland China

<sup>1</sup>The Chinese National Day holiday is held on October 1 of each year, marking the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

<sup>2</sup>The writer is referring here to the Tiananmen Square democracy protest of 1989, which was brought to an end by the intervention of the military and the deaths of a large number of students. Discussion of the events of June 1989 in China is, to say the least, discouraged, with web searches relating to that date or location returning the message 'No results found'.

<sup>3</sup>Lo Wu is the location of the main immigration control point for transfer between Hong Kong and mainland China.

<sup>4</sup>'Central' refers to the Central Business District of Hong Kong, location of the recent democracy protests.

<sup>5</sup>Letters sent to this email address will reach Haisu Huang directly.

Haisu Huang (H.H.) was born and raised in north-eastern China near the Russian border. From being unable to recite all twenty-six letters twenty years ago to now writing stories in English, she has been fortunate to study with outstanding teachers and mentors. While passing her love of the language to her own students, H.H. earned an MFA in Creative Writing from City University of Hong Kong.

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