

*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*

*Nelson Mandela*

The fact that I can speak to the assembly now means that things have returned to a certain degree of normality. After such a long period of absence, I am glad that school can finally resume and that students can continue to learn in a safe and orderly environment.

Like many people in Hong Kong, I have been following the news with shock and apprehension. It all started as an attempt to paralyse the financial centre of Hong Kong and to coerce the government into implementing universal suffrage according to "international standards". Yet, it has quickly gone out of control and spread to other places like Causeway Bay, Mongkok and Tsimshatsui. A student movement has suddenly been turned into a colour revolution / an umbrella revolution. What is worrying is that no one knows how it is all going to end.

I was stunned when I saw the situation taking a nasty turn and Hong Kong spiraling into chaos, violence and for want of a better word, anarchy. Reason has given way to unrestrained emotion and the whole city is plunged into eight days of tension and unruliness. I witnessed the dangerous stand-off between the police and the protesters and watched with disgust scuffles breaking out between different groups of protesters.

Yet, what saddens me most is not just the use of pepper spray, batons and even tear gas to control the crowd - to me what is disheartening to see is the erosion of something that Hong Kong has long held dear to - the Rule of Law.

The Rule of Law is one of Hong Kong's greatest strengths and it is the cornerstone of Hong Kong's success. It helps to ensure not just a level playing field for all companies doing business in Hong Kong, but also a safe environment in which to protect the rights of citizens. When everyone is equal, no one is above the law. There is no doubt that the demand for a more democratic Hong Kong is a noble one and no one questions the sincerity of those protesters who want the movement to be peaceful and non-violent.

Regardless of how noble the cause is, barricading the central government office and blocking major roads are direct challenges to the Rule of Law. People can never justify their cause if they do not show any respect for the law. The end unfortunately does not justify the means. Is this the Hong Kong that we want to see when a small group of people can force the hand of the government by threatening to sabotage government services? The basis of true democracy has to be the Rule of Law because only this can ensure equality for all and also that power is not held by a small group of people who want to do whatever they like.

So where do we go from here? To a certain extent, the student movement has raised people's awareness of the need for a more democratic Hong Kong. From this perspective the students have succeeded. The message is loud and clear for the Hong Kong Government, the Beijing Government and the international community. They have all heard it clearly. The way forward is to forge a compromise to ensure we can advance a Hong Kong style democracy within the framework of "one country two systems." Creating something that is uniquely Hong Kong is much better than tearing down what we believe is not good.

It is too naive to think that change can happen overnight. The road to democracy is a long one. Professor Gabriel Leung, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Hong Kong, is right to say that "fighting for any cause in life is a relay race." To change the world we need more than just high sounding ideals.

We need courage to change what has to be changed.

Equally, we need courage to accept what cannot be changed and have the virtue of tolerance to embrace differences and enough patience to believe that change will eventually come. Nelson Mandela, for example, spent 27 years in prison before he would see the abolition of apartheid, a system of racial segregation in South Africa.

We also need to be discerning enough not only to know what should or should not be changed but also when to advance and when to retreat when making changes.

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Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”. The school is the place where you learn to equip yourself. After such a long period of absence, I urge that you let what happened in the past few days settle and get back to your learning routine as soon as possible. Equip yourself well so that when you are in a position to be the movers and shakers of the future, you are ready to take on the world and make a difference.

Mr. Dennis Yuen

Acting Principal

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