

# FROM LETHBRIDGE TO HONG KONG: FIVE DEMANDS AND NONE LESS

By Chloe Gust

*Editor's Note: Due to rapid changes on the situation in Hong Kong, the most up-to-date events and actions are not able to be reflected in our print magazine, however, the events detailed in this article are current as of November 18, 2019.*

*Content Warning: This article contains details on violence, assault, and death.*

The phrase “Five Demands and None Less” has become a framework guiding demonstrators in Hong Kong. This phrase came to my attention while interviewing a collection of concerned University of Lethbridge Students with deep connections to Hong Kong earlier this month. When considering how to approach this story, which is a continuation from the timeline in the November issue, these five demands outline the frustration behind the demonstrations, an exact list of what reform needs to happen, and how they want Hong Kong to grow from the current conflict. My conversation with these students covered a wide breadth of topics, yet each discussion came back to the core of one of the five demands.

## Demand #1: The Full Withdrawal of the Extradition Bill

In April 2019, Chief Executive Carrie Lam proposed legislation to extradite criminals from Hong Kong to other parts of China, including Taiwan and “mainland” China. The intent of this legislation rooted itself in the prosecution of Chan Tong-kai for the murder of his partner, Poon Hiu-wing. The Hong Kong couple visited Taiwan, where the murder occurred, for a Valentine’s Day trip. This bill would allow Taiwan to extradite Chan from Hong Kong and have him tried in Taiwan.

While talking with the students, the space between this initial conflict and the current climate in Hong Kong seemed impossibly large. Yet, as the conversation continued, the severe repercussions of this legislation were made more and more clear. If passed, this legislation would disrupt the relationship between mainland China and Hong Kong, upsetting the tradition of “one country, two systems” by allowing China to extradite residents of Hong Kong, even though there are a number of people who find refuge in Hong Kong. Those people, who have done nothing wrong according to Hong Kong law, would be persecuted if this bill were to pass. Though this bill was created with a tragedy in mind, the repercussions hold the potential to change the political foundation of Hong Kong.

Though this issue has been covered in the news, it was brought to the Meliorist’s attention through writings found in the new Science Commons building. When asked why they choose Science Commons to share their messages, they responded with logical answers.

To them, the space is highly visible, high traffic, they were in the area already, and nobody else was using it. The last point, however, has changed. These students who shared their messages have encouraged a series of others to share their thoughts and ideas in the space. Some comments were pro-China responses, but some comments shared support for political conflicts happening around the world.

Why Lethbridge? “In Canada [this story] is viewed as news, but there is no sense of belonging,” said one student. “In larger cities there is a community there, they can pay attention, they have the resources, small centres don’t.”

Bringing attention to this story is important from a news perspective, but it is also important because this community is affected by the ongoing conflict on as well. The first demand - for the extradition bill to be completely withdrawn, happened on September 4, 2019. Tensions are still high, and that is because the story isn’t just news, it isn’t just the reporting on a bill. This story is about people in Lethbridge worried about the future of their friends and family. The tensions remain, and so do the four other unmet demands.

## Demand #2: An Independent Commission of Inquiry into Alleged Police Brutality

When asked what the biggest issue in Hong Kong is right now, the answer from the students was resounding: police brutality. Other issues were brought up, yet they all returned to the same issues of the abuse of power; every question brought up the violence happening to some degree, and the frustration of having no avenue for the perpetrators to face legal repercussions.

Confirming the details of these violent acts was more difficult than expected. Officers verbally threatening demonstrators, civilians being assaulted in metro stations, and a political candidate having his ear bitten off were some of the stories shared over the interview, yet when looking to confirm them, almost all official comments through traditional media disregard or refute that the incidents even happened. Narratives of what is going on change from channel to channel. This has lead to a massive community of people

sharing videos, photos, and stories online.

This turn to social media is because social media is working, as the students say, both in getting access to the news and stories but also in sharing and saving those pieces of content. "It's a basic thing, the least we can do," the students continued, "recording things as a history, a record". But the frustration is real, especially when there is strong evidence of violence, the media still refuses to acknowledge what happens. "We are looking at the facts, but they're saying it's not true."

One of the students, who frequently posts about the events happening in Hong Kong, mentioned "I have had only one response, it was 'thank you for posting, if it weren't for you, I wouldn't know'."

For this demand to be met, all of the students agree that there should be fair investigations through the legal system. "Everyone needs to be held accountable". Though far removed geographically, these students are using their platform to document what is happening and stop censorship and suppression. By sharing photos and videos without the lens of the traditional media, or just by sharing more content, a better record can be kept.

#### **Demand #3: Retracting the Classification of Protestors as "Rioters"**

One of the most damaging aspects of the coverage of the movement is the classification of protestors as rioters. On June 16, 2019, close to one third of the total population of Hong Kong gathered to protest the extradition bill. With this large of a turnout, it is hard to organize the demonstrators as being predominantly any age, gender, or class, though many people participating are young adults or students. The movement is widely proclaimed to be leaderless, but young activists such as Agnes Chow, Andy Chan, and Joshua Wong have been publicly arrested to discourage people from demonstrating.

A person charged with rioting can receive up to 10 years in prison. For some of the young people demonstrating, this can completely alter their future. The students interviewed voiced how unfair it seemed for there to be no formal way to hold members of the police accountable, and to be able to charge youth with a massive sentence that can change the course of their lives.

The Meliorist was able to connect with Joshua Wong, one of the aforementioned arrested activists (Wong says he has been arrested eight times over the years). Wong has been an activist in Hong Kong since he was 15-years-old, using his platform to support the movement towards a democratic and free Hong Kong. He is known as one of the leaders for the Umbrella Movement in late 2014, which was also led by students and young adults. When asked about how young the movement is, he commented, "we might expect Millennials or Gen X to not be interested in politics... but when high school students are being shown against a canister of [tear gas], or bean bag rounds or rubber bullets, it shows the Hong Kong people and their determination to continue to fight." People are willing to demonstrate, even though they risk being fined, arrested, or getting caught in a demonstration that turned violent. This is why this demand is so important.

#### **Demand #4: Amnesty for Arrested Protestors**

Is it difficult, I asked, being so far away from the demonstrations and elections, separated from family and friends? The sentiment is a resounding yes. "They're risking their lives for me. [The demonstrators] are university students, when we think about it, it's a warzone." There is also great concern for the future of the people being arrested and detained. When asked about any

future plans to return to Hong Kong, some had no plans or interest. One student mentioned they had plans to visit family in Hong Kong over the holidays, but that those plans have been postponed. "The situation is too messed up ... [my family] and I have been having minor fights over the phone about the protests, so it just seemed better to put off."

Another student said they were going back over the holiday season. "I'm interested in demonstrating," they said. I asked if they had any concerns about being detained or arrested and they responded, "if they are going to arrest me, go ahead. I've done nothing wrong."

The generational tension is common. One example the students told me about was the increase in homeless youth. In Hong Kong, most people live with their parents until they move in with their spouse. The rising unrest has caused people to choose between living with their family and fighting for what they believe in.

As of writing this, thousands of people have been arrested for their participation in the movement. The fallout for getting arrested may make demonstrating seem impossible, but Wong says, "it will trigger more and more people to continue to vote in the election, and to engage in the fight for free elections."

#### **Demand #5: Universal Suffrage, for Both the Legislative Council and the Chief Executive**

One of the primary reasons for the Umbrella Revolution was the rejection of legislation that would ensure true universal suffrage in Hong Kong. Since then, nothing further has passed. Without representation in the government, the issues brought forth by the 2019 demonstrations cannot be resolved using democratic solutions. People like Joshua Wong have tried to run in elections, but have been banned from running as a candidate. When asked how he feels about the disqualification, he says, "it is a challenge that can't beat me. It will just make me stronger in the face of political censorship."

The looks of devastation on the faces of the students when they talk about the unrest in Hong Kong is telling. Seeing the violence, divided families, and lack of change is taking its toll. The people demonstrating care deeply about the future of Hong Kong, but until they are able to pass legislation and vote in a way that represents the demand of the people, demonstrating is the only way to be heard.

Some of these methods of demonstration are drastic. A gathering at the Hong Kong International Airport in August led to thousands of flights being delayed across the world. People began gluing bricks to the road across Hong Kong, bringing traffic to a standstill. Centrally located businesses are seeing less patronage because of the frequent demonstrations. There is a lot of criticism over the consequences the protests are having on the greater population, but many demonstrators can't back down. As one student put it, "if we lose one fight, we lose them all."

When asked what the community in Lethbridge could do to help, one member just said, "care". The group expanded. "Just say that you care... share something [on social media], just one like, one share shows that you're listening". That's the crux of it. Listening. Who is listening, who are we listening to?

The conflict in Hong Kong grows. The Hong Kong government has addressed some of these issues, but as was said before - five demands, and none less. There is no way to fix part of this conflict without addressing all of the systemic issues that have been brought to the surface. The general advice from everyone interviewed is to seek out information. Read the news, talk about this in your community, follow people on social media. Find out as much as you can. As one of the students said near the end of our interview, "the consequences of this don't just have an impact on Hong Kong or China, it affects Lethbridge too."

We want freedom and freedom  
is what we will get

Give me liberty or give me death

Because Hong Kong is the land  
of Brave  
and WE. ARE. BRAVE!

— a HK citizen

"When dictatorship is a fact,  
Revolution becomes a Duty!"

Stand with Hong Kong.

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