

## HRIC TALKS WITH HONG KONG ACTIVIST

**HRIC:** Some people have asked, why is this young girl so passionate about human rights? Why does she care about Tibetans?

**CC:** In March after the [Chinese] crackdown [in Tibet], I thought we should do something. I was looking up things online and saw Students for a Free Tibet, but there's no branch in Hong Kong. So I printed out all these posters with a brief description of what is going on in Tibet and how the Chinese government is being really violent in the crackdown. We had this Tibetan flag on the posters and we stuck them up all around the university. The first day it was about 50, the second maybe 30, 40. They were all ripped down within hours.

[Later,] when we saw all these protests that were going on all around the world during the torch relay, we thought: [If] all these people in the West that live so far away actually care about what's going on in China and in Tibet, then why shouldn't we? They're our neighbors.

I don't know if it is politically correct to say this. Of course I am really Han Chinese, and Hong Kong is a *de facto* part of China, and China is a political entity so we are Chinese. But sometimes I feel like we're still a colony. Because when we were with the British, we couldn't elect our own governor. Now, we're back to our own people, the motherland, but we still can't even pick the guy that makes the decisions in Hong Kong. We have a Chief Executive that isn't elected by us. He'll never answer to us. He will only answer to the people that elected him, which are the 800 people appointed by the central government. All these problems ... it is because we don't have a say in our own future.

*In August, HRIC Executive Director Sharon Hom talked with Christina Chan Hau Man (陳巧文), 21, a Hong Kong-based rights activist. Chan is a philosophy student at the University of Hong Kong and has been an outspoken critic of the Chinese government's human rights record. She led a protest on May 2, when the Olympic torch passed through Hong Kong, cheered by some 100,000 who lined the streets. Police quickly surrounded the protestors while others tried to drown them out.<sup>1</sup> One onlooker shouted at Chan: "What kind of Chinese are you?"<sup>2</sup> As the police shoved her into a van, Chan shouted: "We have the right to speak! We haven't done anything wrong!" She became a media sensation, but also provoked fierce criticism from many people in Hong Kong.*

I feel like Hong Kong is ruled by the CPC government in a similar way that Tibetans are, of course their situation is much, much, much worse. So I really feel for these people, to have your own language and culture suppressed.

**HRIC:** What were you trying to achieve with the May 2 protest?

**CC:** We were planning to disrupt the torch relay. We didn't want all these happy people waving the Chinese flag around and cheering when all these people had suffered because of the Olympics or despite the Olympic promise. It was just a little bit of anarchy that we wanted to put on. Then the police started calling me and insisting that we met up. We sent an email to *Apple Daily* explain-

ing what had happened; then they actually came for an interview. The rest is history.

**HRIC:** What were people's reactions?

**CC:** Of course, in the end we were carried away before the torch went by, but we also got all these international media groups that reported it straight after. I had people calling me from the States. But it doesn't necessarily mean our message is getting across effectively. I think they were just looking for an icon to sell papers. In the end people just started attacking this icon instead of the cause behind the whole thing. People [said things] like, if people go hiking in the mountains they wear more clothes to protect yourself, so if you want to go do something like a protest you should protect yourself, you should have worn more.

That is the attitude ... that is why Hong Kong is the way it is, because people expect to get hurt by the police

when they go out to protest. They see protest as troublemaking because it's anti-establishment, you deserve to be hurt violently and physically.

We used to talk about how best should we get our message across with our protests, but now we just talk about how we can protest; can we actually get a chance to protest at all. That's what Hong Kong has turned into.

**HRIC:** Do you think what you are doing is having an impact on the people of Hong Kong?

**CC:** Everybody seeks influence in society. If you can't do that through politics then you want to do it in some other way. I think that what we do is something that might raise awareness. Maybe it will just become something that people might talk about at dinner. But if they talk about that kind of thing, then maybe they will see that there is something wrong. I certainly don't expect to change the world by doing interviews with local newspapers every now and again.

Protests have gone on for all this time. I don't know whether it has changed anything, but I certainly know that if there weren't these protests, then Hong Kong would not change, because then there would be no voices like these. I can't imagine Hong Kong being like that, but that is what the government wants.

I don't want to imagine what Hong Kong would be like without activists, people that say to the rest of Hong Kong-ers, "Something is wrong here, do something, at least don't forget about it."

It's like June 4 candlelight vigils in Causeway Bay every year. Does that change anything? Maybe not, but because it's still going on we show China that people have not forgotten. That's pressure.

I thought about "Long Hair" (長毛) [Leung Kwok-hung, a member of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong since 2004, and a democratic political activist]. Sometimes he's

in a protest and there are all these cops in front of him, and he's still trying to get forward. All these journalists say: "Are you just putting on a show, why do you try to get forward when you know you can't?" He said: "I'm not going to give up the right to walk forward."

**HRIC:** Is there a question that no one else had asked that you'd wished they'd asked?

**CC:** I wish they asked me why I'm doing philosophy.

**HRIC:** Because you want to change the world?

**CC:** That is actually why. I want to change the world and I want to know what I should change it into, how it should be. Actually, no one asks me what I want to be when I grow up.

**HRIC:** You're grown up now, so what do you want to be?

**CC:** I guess I just want to be a bum. I look at the world, and ask, do I want to be in this rat race? I was pretty desper-

ate for money last summer, so I got a job in Times Square folding and selling clothes. I changed jobs. I became an "editor" in a publishing company. I basically just had to correct mistakes in stories that were already written. In all of them, the stories were really sexist, very stereotyped. So I switched all the names around so that Mum came back from work and Dad was cooking. They got angry. I told them I was supposed to be an editor and I thought there was something wrong with the story. They told me that it is not up to me to change the world, and that was when I quit. Because it is up to me to change the world!

## Notes

1. Guardian Television, "Free Speech in Hong Kong: Christina Chan," May 2, 2008, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KDOolR\\_EI0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KDOolR_EI0).
2. "Torch Relay in Hong Kong Ends Without Disruption," Associated Press, May 2, 2008, <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/05/02/sports/Olympic-Torch.php>.



Christina Chan Hau-man holds a Tibetan flag before the start of the Beijing Olympic torch relay in Hong Kong, on May 2, 2008. Photo credits: NDREW ROSS/AFP/Getty Images.