

A TRIBUTE TO HONG KONG'S LEUNG KWOK-HUNG

BY YU JIE

One of China's most outspoken intellectuals describes the inspiration he has gained from street activist Leung Kwok-hung, who was elected to Hong Kong's Legislative Council last year. Yu Jie was among six writers reported to have been blacklisted by China's Propaganda Department in November, and was detained by the Public Security Bureau for 14 hours in December.

At 2:30 in the afternoon on October 6, 2004, the Legislative Council (Legco) in Hong Kong commenced the inaugural ceremony for its newly elected legislators. Unlike past ceremonies, this one was marked by one legislator's deviation from the standard oath. Leung Kwok-hung, also known as "Long Hair,"¹ personalized his oath in a gesture that created the effect of a rock dropped in placid water.

Leung Kwok-hung attended the ceremony wearing a black t-shirt printed with the words, "Rehabilitate the June 4th Movement; Return the government to the people," and a black band wrapped around his left wrist. (He later explained to reporters that the black band symbolized his respect for the June 4th victims.) Prior to taking the official oath, he raised his left fist into the air and shouted, "Rehabilitate June 4th! Return the government to the people! Release political prisoners!" Leung then walked to the platform at the center of the chamber and announced, "I am here to loudly declare that I swear allegiance to the people of China and the residents of Hong Kong, oppose collusion between businessmen and officials, defend democracy and justice and uphold human rights and freedom."

After his declaration, Leung took the official vow approved by the legislature: "I, Leung Kwok-hung, hereby declare and affirm with my deepest sincerity that, as a Council member for the Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, I will uphold the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, and swear allegiance to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's

Republic of China." He intentionally paused after certain phrases, however, in order to subtly alter the oath's original connotations by emphasizing the word "People" rather than "Republic."

After the official vow, Leung again declared loudly in fluent English and Chinese, "Long live democracy! Long live the people! Power to the people!" He then added in Chinese, "Elect the chief executive and Legislative Council by universal suffrage!" Contrary to custom, Leung returned to his seat without signing the written oath. Legislative Council Secretary General Ricky Fung said, however, that there was no legal provision requiring a member to provide written confirmation of the spoken oath.

After formally assuming his role as legislator, Leung's choice of attire became his first battle in the Legislative Council. Leung insisted on wearing t-shirts to meetings. In response, Legco president Rita Fan Hsu Lai-tai explained at a press conference that t-shirts are considered too casual to conform with the standard business attire agreed upon by council members last year. "Long Hair" answered that his personal preference was to dress humbly, like ordinary citizens. After prolonged debate, President Fan decided not to argue with Leung anymore, making it clear that he had to gain sufficient support from other council members at the Friday House Committee meeting before he could gain exemption from the rule.

Although I don't have much access to Hong Kong television, I read several articles on the Internet about the recent controversy with Leung. When I visited Hong Kong during the summer of 2003, legislator Albert Ho Chun-yan² showed me around the Legislative Council. I was deeply impressed by the stately chambers. It is not difficult to imagine the stir a grassroots activist in a t-shirt would cause amongst a group of smartly dressed legislators.

In my opinion, one of the most important legacies left by the British in Hong Kong is the Legislative Council. Without the Legislative Council, Hong Kong would probably now be completely indistinguishable from mainland China. Legco is Hong Kong's last democratic bulwark, safeguarding the rule of law in society. Although the Hong Kong Legislative Council is not flawless—for example, not all council members are elected through direct elections—its mere existence has been like a



Leung Kwok-hung takes his oath. Photo: Reuters

“fish bone in the throat” of the Communist government in its attempts to take complete control over Hong Kong.

Leung Kwok-hung’s election is an indicator of the sentiments of Hong Kong people. Historically, Hong Kong has been a society with a rigid socioeconomic hierarchy—the elite, the middle class and the common citizens, each with distinct lifestyles and ways of thinking. Leung, with no background or connections to the elite, is neither a tycoon nor a barrister with a degree from a top-tier school in the U.S. or Europe. He started out as a street activist, and was able to win election by a large margin by winning the hearts of the people. From the streets to the Council Chamber, from opposition to government—his rise is a genuine miracle. Behind this miracle lies the people’s aversion to autocracy. Who says the citizens of Hong Kong are all “money-driven animals” who care more about their personal wealth than politics? When politics becomes an external threat that directly affects the daily lives of people in Hong Kong, who can remain indifferent? Leung Kwok-hung’s victory in the election demonstrates that Hong Kong people do care about politics.

The most impressive aspect of Leung’s swearing-in is his unceasing passion for and loyalty to the June 4th movement. Not long ago, there was a wave of celebration in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping’s birth. However, when government officials paid their tributes to Deng, the Tiananmen Square Massacre went unmentioned. In the newly established Peking University Museum of History, the historical

accounts of the 1989 student movement are also largely ignored, despite the fact that numerous Peking University students were murdered in the crackdown. Fifteen years after the June 4th tragedy, Chinese society has undergone considerable change, and the Communist regime has successfully indoctrinated the educated classes. Recently a well-known scholar who was also involved in the 1989 movement commented, “Back then, I could never have imagined that China would improve as much as it has. If we had succeeded at that time, we might not have made China as good as it is today.” This has become the prevalent perspective among “Rolls Royce” scholars such as Professor Li Yining.³ The pain of Professor Ding Zilin⁴ and the vast majority of others who lost their loved ones to the June 4th massacre is naturally of no interest to them. In the U.S., hundreds of thousands of students and family members who were granted so-called “June 4th Blood Cards”⁵ have also begun to forget the bloodshed of Tiananmen Square.

In contrast to the ignorance of the majority, Leung’s June 4th sentiments are especially precious; he lost no loved ones to the Tiananmen Square massacre, and the pain he feels over the June 4th tragedy is not a matter of politics, but of conscience. Even if there is only one Leung Kwok-hung in Hong Kong, I still feel profound respect for this place, which hosted the most noteworthy and well-attended commemorative event for the 15th anniversary of June 4th.

The June 4th incident is more than the slaughter that took place in the days around June 4, 1989. It was the apex of the

Communist government's despotism and brutality and a prologue to the regime's evildoings in China for the next fifteen years. Afterwards, the Communist power started mass persecution not only of the families of the June 4th victims, but also of various groups of dissidents. The torture and killing of Falung Gong practitioners and the oppression of the masses of workers and peasants all began after June 4th. The brutal precedent of Tiananmen Square acclimated the evil-doers to their role as oppressors—if they were capable of pulling the trigger and opening fire on innocent students and citizens in the capital city, and in front of an international audience, is there anything they would be incapable of doing? In this sense, we all live under the enormous shame of the post-June 4th era.

The only way to eliminate evil is to stand up and openly reject evil. Not long ago, in the same Legislative Council chamber in which Leung took his oath, an influential Hong Kong woman, speaking of June 4th, observed that there are two sides to every issue, and that many soldiers in the People's Liberation Army were also killed. I do not understand how this woman could say something so senseless and malicious. If it had been her children who died under the tanks and guns of the People's Liberation Army, would she still be defending a regime that maintains power through violent suppression? It is absolutely unacceptable for soldiers to attack unarmed civilians. How could this simple truth not be understood by some of these supposedly knowledgeable and respected scholars and upper-class individuals? How could they still attempt to justify the actions of the brutal regime they support?

On the 55th anniversary of the Chinese Communist regime's ascent to power, festive decorations and flowers filled Tiananmen Square. The picture of Mao Zedong above the gate had been replaced with a new one. The blood stains had been scrubbed clean and the cries long silenced. Young college students, unaware of the bloody past, gathered there again to watch the flag-raising ceremony. Meanwhile, in the Legislative Council chamber, Leung Kwok-hung, his long hair streaming, was crying out for June 4th. His cries commemorated the sacrifice of the victims, comforted the survivors, condemned the murderers, and echoed the efforts of Dr. Jiang Yanyong.⁶ What is not destroyed by fear will erupt in fear. Let us overcome our fear and join our cries with those of the courageous Leung Kwok-hung!

Translated by Vicky Chang

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1. Leung Kwok-hung, a veteran activist, gained his nickname from his trademark untrimmed hair.
2. Legislative Councilor Albert Ho Chunyan is a lawyer and the Vice-Chairman of Hong Kong's Democratic Party.
3. Li Yining is a prominent professor of economics at Beijing University. Credited with an outstanding contribution to China's reform and development, he is a recipient of the International Academic Prize of the Fukuoka Asian Cultural Prizes.

4. Ding Zilin is a retired professor from People's University. She has been a strong defender of the Tiananmen Square victims and a leading figure in the June 4th Memorial Global Coalition. Her 17-year-old son, Jiang Jielian, was shot dead near the Muxidi subway station in Beijing on the night of June 3, 1989.
5. The "June 4th Blood Cards" refers to the permanent residency ("green cards") granted under the *Chinese Student Protection Act of 1992* to all nationals of the People's Republic of China arriving in the United States on or before April 11, 1990. The stated purpose of the act was to prevent political persecution of Chinese students in the aftermath of the Tiananmen protests of 1989.
6. Dr. Jiang Yanyong was a senior surgeon from No. 301 Hospital in Beijing. On February 24, 2004, he wrote to the National People's Congress, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the Chinese Communist Politburo and the Chinese State Council, calling for a reassessment of the Tiananmen Square Massacre and justice for its victims. In his letter, he praised the 1989 student protestors and denounced the government's military crackdown. The 72-year-old Jiang and his wife were arbitrarily detained on June 1, 2004, before the 15 years anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. They were eventually released in July, but remain under close monitoring.