
Political Scientist Raises Awareness of Present Controversial Climate in Hong Kong

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Monday 27th October, the Institute of Political Science at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University was pleased to host the City University of Hong Kong's Professor Joseph Cheng. Professor Cheng, in association with the International Documentary Film Festival Jihlava, presented information regarding Hong Kong's current tense struggle with China to regain political autonomy and invited discussion with the audience.



<blockquote class="rightfloat"> <p> We must not be afraid of dreaming the seemingly impossible if we want the seemingly impossible to become a reality. </p> </blockquote>

Speaking to a largely Czech audience with a collective background in political and economic science, Professor Cheng opened with this quote by former Czech President Václav Havel. Cheng continued with a short video depicting the discontent presently occurring throughout Hong Kong's financial district, and explained how this so far non-violent conflict is showing signs of becoming anything but peaceful. Talking the audience through a timeline of recent political events in Hong Kong, Professor Cheng made it clear that the relevant organisation, Occupy Central with Love and Peace, is a primarily student-and-academic-led movement formed in response to Chinese authorities increasing limitations on Hong Kong's political autonomy, effectively denying democracy.

Internationally better-known as a part of the 'Umbrella Movement', Occupy Central has the intention of employing non-violent civil disobedience tactics. This is exemplified by the June informal referendum in which 800,000 votes favoured a democratic election model for Hong Kong, and the famous 5-day-strike in late September by university students, amongst those then-17 year old Joshua Wong, a political activist recently honoured by Time Magazine as one of the 25 Most Influential Teens of 2014. Chinese authorities initially retaliated against these academics by mobilising the pro-Beijing Alliance for Peace and Democracy to protest against the democratic supporters. However, according to Professor

Cheng, where the Occupy Central movement strive to keep non-violence as one of their motivations, others have the will to employ rather more drastic tactics, such as police allegedly using tear gas against the students and bearing placards which read 'disperse, or we fire'. It is difficult to really know about the current events and the extremity occurring on either side from outwith Hong Kong, as Professor Cheng pointed out, due to the issue of media self-censorship. He asserted that media organisations are largely concerned with alienating the Chinese authorities and so do not wish to 'rock the boat' – a problem he claimed has also affected Hong Kong's potential for international support.

Occupy Central with Love and Peace realise that their goal for a democratic Hong Kong is a long-term enterprise. Professor Cheng stated that realistically his current short-term goal is to raise international awareness of the struggle against the formidably powerful and resourceful Chinese Government. This, in short, is an important reason for his visit to Charles University – to engage with students and academics alike and increase support for the movement in Hong Kong. Cheng, and indeed a politically active Taiwanese member of the audience, acknowledged that Taiwan has already taken notice of the activism in Hong Kong and is preparing for the ripple effect of the democratic movement. 2014 has already proven to be a popular year for international internal political struggles, with the recent Scottish independence referendum and rumours of Catalonian desires to be independent from Spain.

'We need an honourable exit.' Cheng stated finally. 'These protests cannot last indefinitely.' Perhaps, as Professor Cheng wishes, the current international political climate will increase awareness of the Umbrella Movement in order that Occupy Central's protests can achieve a satisfactory conclusion before the potential for violence becomes a reality.