

The Election Day

"One Hun-dred and twen-ty five", in sync with the mechanic voice, neon words on the electronic panel flashed, 125.

I handed the receptionist a crumpled slip of paper with the same number, feeling relieved to have left the crowd peeping in from the reception counter. Hong Kong people are taught by their surroundings to wait obediently and gratefully, without a word of discontent.

The receptionist led my friends and I past the wooden folding screens, and turned into the dining hall lit with monstrously big and scarlet lanterns. On round tables covered with pine green cloth spread the porcelain tea ware with silver lining, and the heat of the tea rose and lingered, blurring the stuffy hall. Sticky rice noodle rolls, translucent shrimp dumplings and greasy phoenix claws all glimmered with a ghastly hint of crimson.

We sat next to the window. The weather was more than perfect and the sun warmly lit the basketball court downstairs. For Honkongers, what else can be more soothing than yum cha on a Sunday morning? Heads immersed in newspapers, frowning, concerned eyes fixed on the TV, and fingers impatiently tapping on the screen of their smart phones. Under the cloudless blue sky, the banyan trees shaded the basketball court, where people would gather for

protesting against the small-circle election of the Chief Executive of Hong Kong. Could we rely on the 1,200 electors, keenly detecting even the untraceable smoke signals from Beijing, to cast their votes for us, the 7 million Hong Kong citizens? I mused as I sipped my bitter cup of pu'er tea, so strong that it was almost black.

"More than 220, 000 voted on a unofficial mock election of the Chief Executive yesterday. Some had to line up for more than 1 hour. The result was announced after midnight. Most voters abstained." People all looked up to the TV screen, chewing dim sum, a stern and solemn look in their eyes. How many of them had voted the night before, for voicing out their dissent about the small-circle election and trust in none of the candidates? Will they turn up downstairs later? Or have they taken it as the victory of the people and felt satisfied? I glimpsed at my watch, it was a quarter past the gathering time. Protestors couldn't even fill half of the basketball courts. The sunshine, apparently had no idea what was happening, danced cheerfully through the tree branches on the three-point line.

Middle-aged men threw loud comments and argued feverishly across the tables. "My bet is on CY. He's the one, a communist, appointed by the Big Brother!".

"But the rich and the upper class back Tong Tong!"

"Laap saap! Both are rubbish!"

My Facebook overflowed with status updates like this - "Go on to the street! Show our anger!"

I cast a final look at the basketball courts. Protestors were still scarce. They began to stroll towards the Convention and Exhibition Centre, where the election and the counting of ballots would be held.

We checked the bill and joined the protestors at the end of the queue. The police signaled the direction along the way and the protestors followed quietly, one by one, holding self-made banners and flags. No one spoke.

At the foot of a pedestrian bridge, a group of police stood chatting. Among them was a young policewoman with a boy cut. She smiled, her white teeth and carefree giggle made her look like a school girl. Chauffeured limousines sped under the bridge and turned into Harbour Road, a pair of white-gloves on the wheel, and crossed legs in glowing velvet trousers at the back seats. Are they electors heading to the same destination like us?

We turned into Harbour Road from another street. The 4-lane road was fenced off with police every several steps. Protestors scattered and stretched their legs as if they were enjoying a day off work. We sat down around a corner

and stared blankly at the stage. We'd better find something to occupy ourselves. The election might take a long time. Beijing leaders, local businesspeople and politicians wrestled about who to select, after Tong Tong was unexpectedly involved in the hilarious scandal of illegal structure, and CY lacked experience and networks. Yet these were too far-fetched for ordinary people in Hong Kong - we just want something tangible, a vote.

One of my friends took out his iPhone and read the live news. "First-round election's done."

"Uh-huh." We nodded.

Some teenagers were sitting next to us, in a manner almost too casual and fun-loving. The girls wore colourful full skirts and their long hair was braided messily into little tails that ran around their forehead. A male member banged on a small tin drum from time to time, making a playful tune.

A middle-aged couple was deep in conversation. Their little son rolled a pebble on the road with his fingers. He covered his ears with both of his hands and pretends to cry when the technicians on the stage tested the microphone. Police began to carry extra metal barriers away and piled them up at the far end of the road.

"Today, I am honoured to stand here." Everyone raised their head and

turned to the stage - the source of a hoarse and low voice. There stood a red and skinny old man, wearing glasses with a thick black frame.

"I used to be a construction worker, and I can tell you, it was tough! I didn't grumble. I thought I was building Hong Kong, my home. It'll be a better day tomorrow!" He paused for a second. All the people were absorbed in his magnetic voice. "But now, what? I'm old. I still can't choose the Chief Executive. Who can represent me in there? Tell me! Who? Whoo?"

His powerful voice echoed, yet he remained totally composed. The silent crowd burst into applause. They stood up and demanded, "Votes! Votes! Votes!" The police moved their eyes from their feet to the stage.

"Hey, CY's got more than half the votes," my friend hit me with his elbow.

"What? The counting just started 5 minutes ago."

"The news said so," he showed me his iPhone.

"How is it possible?"

A stir came from opposite the stage, near the entrance of the exhibition centre. Some demonstrators stopped shouting and murmured to each other. The glitter in their eyes went off all in a sudden. The crowd went dead quiet again.

"Shame on you, CY! Resign! Resign! Resign!" A yell pierced through the

frozen air. The hope and passion of a moment ago turned into despair. It twisted their faces. It sparkled and exploded into roaring flames of anger. They pumped their fist in the air.

"Resign! Resign!" The swarm of demonstrators thundered and rushed towards the entrance of the exhibition centre. Several teenagers jumped over barriers and dashed forward. This unexpected breakthrough sent the police chasing after them. The crowd pulled down the first line of metal barriers and barged the way through the police.

Tons of police swarmed back to the next line of barriers to contain the surging crowd. They held the fences tight with both of their hands. The protestors lowered their body and pushed their weight against the metal wall. "One, two, three," they pushed together. Again and again they tried, like angry sea rushing against the jetty. The metal barrier didn't budge a bit. Their sweaty T-shirts stuck tightly to their back. They could only stand there, grasping the fence and glowering at the police.

Some police officers at the back erected a towering scarlet banner with huge white words - "STOP CHARGING OR WE USE FORCE". The number of police was twice of the protestors.

A slender and frail shadow slipped through us and shoved towards the

barriers. "False election! We want universal suffrage!" The voice! The old construction worker who has been speaking from the stage. There he was braving the police in the frontline.

"You're our police. Help your people!" he howled at the police. They ignored him. He kicked the fence, stretched his arms and tried to overturn it. They looked at him coldly. "Shame on you!" He threw himself at the fence. A protestor dived forward. Another followed. One by one the protestors shook and rocked the metal barriers.

The police officers exchanged a few glances at the back. More police were called to support the barrier. The policewoman with the boy cut ran towards the front with her colleagues.

"Ouch," a low and long wail shocked us. The old man covered his eyes. He was locked by a policeman, his glasses snatched by another. A bottle of pepper spray was in the hand of the policewoman with the boy cut.

Other demonstrators held and sent him to the back, his eyes and face were burning red. People passed him bottles of water and towels. He sat down and washed his eyes like a wounded child. The police used pepper spray, a chemical that inflames the eyes. He was not the only victim.

I patted his shoulder and handed him my bottle of water.

"It didn't hurt. I couldn't see much anyway. I'm old, old and useless now. Give it to other fellows." He returned the bottle to me.

When someone wins, another loses; it is the rule of the game. On the screen of the iPhone, the tiny CY bowed to the Election Committee members. There he extended his right arm over his head, his hand straightened, almost like a Nazi salute, but in a wary manner. Maybe the number of votes he got was far less than he had expected, maybe he couldn't believe his luck to win when so many outsiders were thumping on the metal barriers. Finally he lowered his right arm, and lifted his left one, this time, he drew a slightly upward curve with ease, and waved thanks to his supporters. He knew that victory had come to him, his hands finally laid on Hong Kong.

Left in helpless anger, protestors began to toss ghost money, with prints of red, gold and silver, as if to salute to the pathetic spirit in the unspeakable world, and to console the inevitable failure of the election day. Millions of it flied high, swirled in the wind and were lit by a patch of sun.

A piece of it fell silently beyond the fence and landed on a policewoman. There she was - the innocent face. She swept it away in disgust, and continued to joke with her colleagues. Her laugh rang like a rusty iron gate.

I picked up a stone right next to my feet and clutched it in my fist. The

picture of CY raising his right arm hit my head.