

Dear Reader,

The protests that have dominated Hong Kong for months may represent the most consequential unresolved political situation in the world today. The handoff of control over Hong Kong from Britain to China in 1997 was accompanied by a lot of optimism about Hong Kong's ability to maintain itself as a distinct system within the Chinese sphere, with far more freedom than on the mainland. There was even talk of China's moving over time toward the Hong Kong model, rather than vice versa.

The magnitude and persistence of the protests, and the intransigence of the Chinese government's reaction, make it clear that the optimism was misplaced. We can't know yet exactly what the outcome in Hong Kong will be, but it clearly will represent the end of the dream of China's tolerating a different kind of political order in Hong Kong. We are getting a clear signal from the world's rising power that it has no patience with supposedly universal democratic norms.

Jeffrey Wasserstrom, one of the leading American experts on Hong Kong, has been a regular visitor there for decades and an eyewitness to many of its dramatic events. *Vigil*, his new book, represents a rare example of deep historical, cultural, and political context produced on deadline about a major ongoing news event. Drawing on a rich store of knowledge and wisdom, and writing with literary power as well as analytic rigor, Wasserstrom makes us understand the deep roots and the broad significance of the tragedy we see unfolding day by day in Hong Kong.

Sincerely,



Nicholas Lemann