



# Hong Kong's 'Umbrella Revolution'

BY GREG TORODE, JAMES POMFRET, BENJAMIN KANG LIM, KINLING LO,  
YIMOU LEE AND DAVID LAGUE

JULY 2 - OCTOBER 1 HONG KONG / BEIJING

# The battle for Hong Kong's soul

BY GREG TORODE, JAMES POMFRET AND BENJAMIN KANG LIM

JULY 2 HONG KONG / BEIJING

**S**ince Britain handed back colonial Hong Kong in 1997, retired primary school teacher and Falun Gong devotee Lau Wai-hing has fully exercised the freedoms China promised this city of 7.2 million.

Lau and fellow believers regularly staged protests to explain the teachings of their spiritual movement and draw attention to the persecution of followers on the mainland, where the sect is banned. Until about a year

ago, their protests were uneventful. That changed when a noisy rival group set up their placards and banners on the same pavement in the busy shopping area of Causeway Bay.

The 63-year-old Lau and her fellow protesters said they've been punched, shoved and sworn at since the newcomers from the "Care for the Youth Group Association Hong Kong" arrived with their blaring loudspeakers. Each protest is now a battle to be heard. "It is much more difficult now given these attacks, this external pressure, these forces from China," said Lau amid the amplified din on Sogo Corner, Hong Kong's neon-lit version of New York's Times Square.

For critics of the pro-Beijing government in Hong Kong, groups like the Care for the Youth Group Association are part of a campaign from the mainland to tighten control over China's most freewheeling city. Increasingly, they say, Beijing is raising its voice. In the streets, boardrooms, newsrooms, churches and local government offices, individuals and organisations with links to the state and China's Communist Party are playing a bigger role in civil and political life, well-placed sources in Hong Kong and Beijing say.

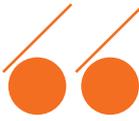
Whenever there are anti-government public protests, a pro-Beijing counter movement invariably appears. This year's 25th anniversary commemoration of the protests centred on Beijing's Tiananmen Square drew a rival demonstration to defend China's bloody crack-down on June 4, 1989.

Mainland officials based in Hong Kong now routinely seek to influence local media coverage.

Catholic priests in Hong Kong report that agents from China's security service have stepped up their monitoring of prominent clergy.

And, Beijing's official representative body, the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Hong Kong, now is able to shape policy in the office of city chief executive Leung Chun-ying, say two sources close to the city's leader.

Residents of this global financial centre could not help noticing a more overt sign of



In the past, the mainland compromised toward Hong Kong too much and was perceived to be weak.



China's rule in the former British colony: Huge Chinese characters spelling out "People's Liberation Army" in a blaze of neon alongside the military's waterfront headquarters that suddenly appeared at the beginning of June.

For Beijing's critics in Hong Kong, the 1997 handover is feeling more like a takeover.

"Blatant interference is increasing," says Anson Chan, who led Hong Kong's 160,000-strong civil service in the last years of British rule and continued in that role for several years after the handover.

Chan cited as examples pressures on Hong Kong companies not to advertise in pro-democratic newspapers, attempts to limit debate about democratic reform, and the higher profile increasingly being taken by Beijing's official representatives in the city.

"It's not another Chinese city and it shouldn't become one. Hong Kong is unique," said Chan.

### **XI'S TOUGHER LINE**

In China's opaque political system, it is impossible to determine whether the party's growing clout in the territory is entirely the result of a campaign organised from on high, or partly the doing of mainland and local officials eager to please Beijing. Still, a tougher line on Hong Kong is coming from the top.

Despite promises that post-handover Hong Kong should enjoy a high degree of autonomy, China's President Xi Jinping, is said to have decided that Beijing has been too lenient.

"Xi Jinping has rectified (China's) policy for governing Hong Kong," a source close to the Chinese leader told Reuters in Beijing, requesting anonymity. "In the past, the mainland compromised toward Hong Kong too much and was perceived to be weak."

This tightening grip has fuelled resentment and sparked a civil disobedience movement called "Occupy Central", which threatens to blockade part of Hong Kong's main business district.

Mass protests can paralyse this high-density city. Business leaders have warned that Occupy could damage businesses: Four of the largest

multinational accounting firms placed advertisements in local newspapers warning against the movement, which has been branded illegal by Chinese authorities.

Occupy's primary aim is to pressure China into allowing a truly democratic election in 2017.

Beijing says Hong Kong can go ahead with a vote in 2017 for the city's top leader. But mainland officials stress that Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, specifies that only a nominating committee can pick leadership candidates. Pro-democracy activists demand changes that would allow the public to directly nominate candidates.

Nearly 800,000 people voted in an unofficial referendum that ended on Sunday, which called for Beijing to allow open nominations of candidates for the 2017 poll — a vote China's State Council, or cabinet, called "illegal and invalid", said the state Xinhua news agency.

Fears that the screws are tightening were heightened when Beijing published an unprecedented cabinet-level White Paper in June on Hong Kong. It bluntly reminded Hong Kong that China holds supreme authority over the city.

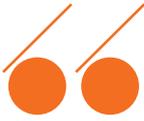
"The high degree of autonomy of (Hong Kong) is not an inherent power, but one that comes solely from the authorisation by the central leadership," it says.

The policy document took about a year to prepare and was approved by the 25-member, decision-making Communist Party Politburo around a month ago, a second source close to Xi told Reuters in Beijing.

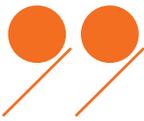
It's a tricky issue for China's new leadership. Hong Kong's democratic experiment is seen as a litmus test of Beijing's tolerance for eventual political reforms on the mainland, where calls for greater civil liberties and grassroots democracy have been growing, experts say.

President Xi, who has swiftly consolidated power in China since taking office by taking a hard line on domestic and foreign affairs, is unlikely to compromise on Hong Kong, the sources close to the leader said.

"Hong Kong is no different," the second source with ties to China's leadership said.



The real cabinet is the shadow cabinet.



“Pushing for democracy in Hong Kong is tantamount to asking the tiger for its skin.”

### SHADOW CABINET

**China’s Liaison Office in Hong Kong is housed** in a skyscraper stacked with surveillance cameras, ringed by steel barricades and topped by a reinforced glass globe. Soaring above streets filled with dried fish shops and small traders, it is known in Cantonese slang as “Sai Wan”, a reference to the gritty western end of Hong Kong Island where it is located. Each day, hundreds of staff, mostly mainland Chinese, stream into the matte-grey building and its marble lobby with a large Chinese screen painting of pine trees.

Hong Kong is both part of China and outside of it as defined in the 1984 Joint Declaration, the treaty under which Britain handed over its former colony.

“One country, two systems” — conceived by China’s then-paramount leader Deng Xiaoping and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher — let Hong Kong keep its free-market economy and internationally-respected legal system, with the exception of foreign affairs and defence.

As China’s on-the-ground presence in Hong Kong, the Liaison Office’s formal role is described in China’s recent White Paper as helping to manage the Chinese government’s ties with the city, as well as “communication with personages from all sectors of Hong Kong society”.

Two high-level sources with close ties to Leung, the Hong Kong Chief Executive, say the Liaison Office does much more than that: It helps shape strategically significant government policies.

“The real cabinet is the shadow cabinet,” said one source close to Leung. “The chief executive’s office can’t do without the Liaison Office’s help on certain matters.”

The Chief Executive’s office did not directly respond to questions on the extent of its ties with the Liaison office. It said in an emailed response that China and Hong Kong shared a close relationship on multiple fronts, including

at “government- to-government level”. The office stressed Hong Kong’s autonomy and noted that the Basic Law says no Chinese government body may interfere in Hong Kong affairs.

China’s Liaison Office did not respond to faxes and phone calls seeking comment. The Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office in Beijing, which has Cabinet-level authority over the territory from Beijing, did not respond to faxed questions.

The Liaison Office uses its broad networks, spanning grassroots associations, businessmen and politicians, to help the Hong Kong government push through policies needing approval from a largely pro-Beijing legislature. These have included the debate over democratic reforms in Hong Kong and a multi-billion-dollar high-speed rail link to China, one source said.

Liaison Office chiefs were once rarely seen. But the current director, Zhang Xiaoming, has taken on a far more public role since taking office 18 months ago - around the same time that Xi Jinping became China’s leader and Leung Chun-ying became chief executive in Hong Kong. Zhang has lunched with legislators and also attends society gatherings alongside local tycoons and business leaders. Zhang did not respond to requests for comment.

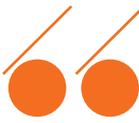
Liaison Office staff, including some from the propaganda department, regularly phone editors and senior journalists at Hong Kong media outlets.

Sometimes, these officials give what are known as “soft warnings” not to report sensitive topics, according to media sources and a report by the Hong Kong Journalists Association in 2013.

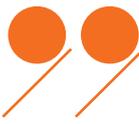
In one case, a television journalist was called by a Beijing official who mentioned an interview the journalist was planning. The journalist “learned that this was a warning meaning that he was ‘being watched’ and that he should not conduct sensitive interviews,” the report said.

### COMMUNIST PENETRATION

**Foreign diplomats and local academics believe**



The tactics and techniques of the United Front have been refined and perfected over the decades and we are seeing a very modern articulation of it in Hong Kong.



the Liaison Office coordinates and implements the strategy of the Communist Party inside Hong Kong, although the hierarchy, membership and structure of the party in Hong Kong remain a secret.

Before the 1997 handover, the Chinese Communist Party focused on courting businessmen, academics and activists to secure influence and loyalty. It has now become more assertive, attempting to isolate party enemies, silence critics, and deliver votes, Hong Kong scholars and a source close to the Liaison Office say.

The vehicle for this strategy is a Beijing-based entity called the United Front Work Department, an organ of the Communist Party's Central Committee, whose mission is to propagate the goals of the Party across non-party elites.

The Liaison Office's Coordination and Social Group Liaison departments report directly to Beijing's United Front Work Department, according to a source in frequent touch with Liaison Office staff, who declined to be named.

"There is deeper penetration by the United Front in Hong Kong in recent years," said Sonny Lo, an academic and author of a book on China's underground control of Hong Kong. "In part, the United Front is working to counter and adapt to the rise of democratic populism and as a result we are seeing these new groups take to the streets.

"United Front groups are being more heavily mobilized to not just support government policy but to counter rival forces."

A legacy of the earliest days of Leninist communist revolutionary theory, the United Front Work Department's mission is to influence and ultimately control a range of non-party groups, luring some into cooperation and isolating and denouncing others, according to scholars of Communist history.

"The tactics and techniques of the United Front have been refined and perfected over the decades and we are seeing a very modern articulation of it in Hong Kong," says Frank Dikotter, a Hong Kong University historian and author of nine books on Chinese history.

The United Front — like the Communist Party itself — doesn't exist as a registered body in Hong Kong. There is no publicly available information about its network or structure. Neither the United Front Work Department in Beijing, nor the Liaison Office in Hong Kong, responded to questions from Reuters about the purported activities of the Front in Hong Kong.

But it is possible to trace links from some grassroots groups to mainland-owned businesses and the Liaison office.

A Reuters examination of the societies registration documents for the Care for the Youth Group Association obtained from Hong Kong police show that the group's chairman is Hung Wai-shing and the vice chairman is Lam Kwok-on.

Police and corporate filings also show Hung is a director of a New Territories clan association that researchers believe is a core part of China's United Front operations in the city's northern fringes close to the Chinese border.

Hung is also a director of several Hong Kong subsidiaries of Beijing Yanjing Brewery Co. Ltd, a state-owned Chinese brewery that stock exchange filings show is in turn majority owned by two investment vehicles ultimately tied to the Beijing city government.

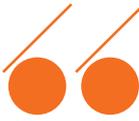
Reports in the *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po* newspapers in Hong Kong — both mouthpieces for Beijing — have described Hung socialising with Liaison Office officials in the New Territories.

Hung denied any connection to the youth association when Reuters visited him at his Yanjing Beer office in Hong Kong's Fanling district.

"What you refer to, the Care for the Youth association, I tell you I'm not involved," said Hung, a lean, middle-aged man with bushy eyebrows and thinning hair, who then called the police to complain about being questioned.

Youth care association Vice-chairman Lam is a regular at the anti-Falun Gong protests on Sogo corner. He ignored questions from Reuters about his role with the youth association at a recent demonstration.

Other street groups, including the one that



The visits of these agents, who travel into Hong Kong on short-term permits, have become more frequent and their tactics more assertive.



opposed Hong Kong's Tiananmen commemoration, are run by individuals linked to a network of business chambers and associations in Hong Kong, including some that are at the vanguard of United Front work in the city, scholars say.

The chairman of one of those groups, the Voice of Loving Hong Kong, Patrick Ko, is shown in company filings to be a director of the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, which the researcher Lo identified as an organisation under the United Front umbrella in Hong Kong.

Ko denied any ties to Beijing's United Front Work Department. He said his group and the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce were "run by Hong Kong people".

### SECRET AGENTS

Behind the scenes, agents from Beijing's powerful Ministry of State Security are also expanding China's reach into Hong Kong, diplomats and members of various professions say.

The Ministry of State Security sits at the apex of China's vast security apparatus, responsible for both domestic and external secret intelligence operations.

Professionals in Hong Kong have been invited, often discreetly through intermediaries, to "drink tea" with agents.

The visits of these agents, who travel into Hong Kong on short-term permits, have become more frequent and their tactics more assertive, say multiple sources who have had contacts with such agents.

Their targets include Hong Kong-based priests, journalists, lawyers, businessmen, academics and politicians.

Two sources told Reuters the agents offer gifts in exchange for information and favours.

"They said they have an unlimited budget" for gifts, said one Hong Kong-based professional in regular contact with agents.

Two priests said they received repeated visits from State Security agents after recent tensions between China and the Vatican stemming from China's moves to ordain bishops

without the consent of the Holy See.

One priest recalled meeting a young and polite agent who "said he was a friend who wanted to help" while making it clear he was reporting to Beijing for State Security.

"It was clear he wanted secrets – gossip and views about (Hong Kong) relationships and trends and what might be going on at the Holy See," said the priest who declined to be identified.

In recent months, the agents have been asking about the Catholic Church's support for the Occupy Central movement, two priests said.

The Ministry of State Security did not answer calls to its main telephone number in Beijing; the government does not disclose other contact numbers for the ministry to foreign reporters.

While the battle for influence continues, there is no let up on Sogo Corner for Lau Wai-hing and her fellow Falun Gong devotees.

On a recent Saturday, not far from where Lau was standing, members of the Care for the Youth Group Association held a "wanted" poster carrying Lau's photograph with the words "evil cult member" below it.

Lam, the group's vice chairman, raised his portable loudspeaker rigged to a car battery. "Wipe out the evil cult Falun Gong," he shouted, his voice reverberating down the busy street.

Lau, however, would not be deterred.

"People can see we only want to make ourselves heard. Hong Kong should give us that freedom." 

Cover photograph by **Tyrone Siu**  
 Additional reporting by **Yimou Lee**  
 Editing by **David Lague and Bill Tarrant**

# China asserts paternal rights over Hong Kong in democracy clash

BY JAMES POMFRET

SEPTEMBER 11 HONG KONG

**J**ust days before China was set to deliver its edict on electoral reform in Hong Kong, Beijing's most senior official in the city held a rare meeting with several local lawmakers whose determined push for full democracy had incensed Beijing's Communist leaders.

The setting at the Aug. 19 meeting was calm: A room with plush cream carpets, Chinese ink brush landscape paintings and a vase of purple orchids. The political mood outside, however,

was fraught. Democratic protesters were threatening to shut down the global financial hub with an "Occupy Central" sit-in if Beijing refused to allow the city to freely elect its next leader.

After the formal smiles and handshakes with Zhang Xiaoming, the head of China's Liaison Office in Hong Kong, the mood soured. Pro-democracy lawmaker Leung Yiu-chung asked Zhang whether Beijing would allow any democrat to run for the city's highest office.

Zhang, 51, dressed in a black suit and a navy blue striped tie, delivered a blunt response. "The fact that you are allowed to stay alive, already shows the country's inclusiveness," he answered, according to two people in the room who declined to be named. Zhang's office did not respond to several faxed requests for comment.

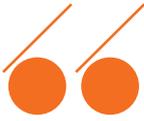
## VISIONS OF CHAOS

Zhang's remarks stripped away any pretence China could find common ground with Hong Kong's democracy camp. The two sides have been wrangling over what it means to have "one country, two systems" for the past 30 years — China stressing "one country" and democrats in the former British colony the "two systems".

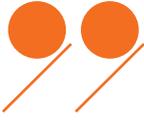
For Beijing, Western-style democracy conjures up visions of "colour revolutions" and the "Arab Spring", of chaos and instability that could pose a mortal threat to the ruling Communist Party. For many Hong Kong residents, free elections means preserving the British-instituted rule of law, accountability of leaders, and multi-party politics as a check on government powers.

At the Aug. 19 meeting, Zhang said Beijing had been generous even allowing democrats such as Leung to run for legislative seats. He insisted that the next leader had to be a "patriot".

"We were shocked," said one person who attended the meeting. "But Zhang Xiaoming is only an agent who delivered the stance of the central government without trying to polish it."



Zhang Xiaoming is only an agent who delivered the stance of the central government without trying to polish it.



Few were surprised, though, when China's highest lawmaking body, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC), announced an electoral package on Aug. 31 that said any candidate for Hong Kong's chief executive in the 2017 election had to first get majority support from a 1,200-person nominating panel — likely to be stacked with pro-Beijing loyalists.

Democrats say the decision spelled out China's bottom line on political reform: A direct vote will be allowed, but only if Beijing vets the candidates.

Yet the pro-democracy movement is vowing to press on with its campaign of civil disobedience. It is threatening to lock down Hong Kong's main business district with sit-ins in October, protesting what they call "fake" Chinese-style democracy. Students plan to boycott university classes later this month. And the city's 27 pro-democracy lawmakers have threatened to block Beijing's 2017 electoral package in the legislature, where they hold nearly one-third of the seats — enough to veto the law and block future government policies.

Benny Tai, one of the movement's three leaders, takes a longer-term view. "I call this a process of democratic baptism ... by participating, people will be baptised by democratic ideals," Tai told Reuters. "So it is not the end of the movement, it's the beginning of the movement, the beginning of a disobedience age."

### **"LEAD CHINA FORWARD"**

As a colonial power, Britain appointed Hong Kong's governors and never encouraged democratic development for almost all of the 156 years it ruled the colony. It was only when Britain and China broadly agreed on how to hand over the colony to China, beginning with a "Joint Declaration" in 1984, that a blueprint for democracy was envisioned. It led to the signing of the "Basic Law" in 1990, which said the city could keep its wide-ranging freedoms and autonomy, and for the first time stated universal suffrage as "the ultimate aim", while ensuring China still had ample levers to ensure

its influence over the city.

Martin Lee, a founder of the city's main opposition Democratic Party who helped draft the Basic Law, recalls meeting late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in Beijing's Great Hall of the People on April 16, 1987.

"He said many things. But one of them was if 50 years should prove not enough for you, you can have another 50 years," Lee said, referring to China's pledge not to change anything in Hong Kong until 2047.

China's 1989 crackdown on the protests around Tiananmen Square was a watershed for both sides on how democracy might evolve. After mass demonstrations erupted in Beijing, new democratic groups sprouted up in Hong Kong. China began to see Hong Kong as a potential national security threat.

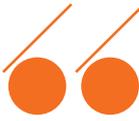
"When Deng formulated 'one country, two systems', I suppose he didn't anticipate there would be the June 4 massacre which caused Hong Kong people so much anger against the Communists," Lee said in his law office, which contains a bronze bust of Winston Churchill and a picture of a June 4 candle-light vigil in the city. "He thought he could win us over."

Fear and anxiety mounted instead. The years leading up to the actual handover of the city to Beijing in 1997 saw a wave of people and businesses emigrating abroad, fearful of the imminent handover to China.

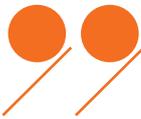
### **DISMEMBERMENT BY 'BLACK HANDS'**

Chinese officials rankle at current-day comparisons to British rule, pointing out that Britain never brought democracy to Hong Kong during a century and a half of colonial rule. "Hong Kong people did not stand up to demand democracy," said a person with ties to the leadership in Beijing. "This is a big improvement compared with the British. Still, some people do not see it as the glass half full, but half empty."

Any criticism of China's handling of Hong Kong by countries like Britain and the United States also draws claims of foreign



Beijing also hoped that people in Hong Kong would slowly begin to identify with the Chinese nation over time.



intervention from Beijing. China, ever mindful of how it was carved up in the 19th century by foreign powers, fears the democracy movement in Hong Kong could precipitate another break-up, said a source in Beijing close to the Chinese leadership.

“When there is chaos in Hong Kong, they will push for Hong Kong to become independent,” said a second source with leadership ties, referring to meddling by “black hands,” or foreign agents. These forces “want to influence the mainland to become a democracy and be dismembered like the Soviet Union.”

In the years after 1997, Beijing seemed content to stay at arm’s length from Hong Kong. Former president Jiang Zemin made reunification with Taiwan a top priority and so it was important for China that the “one country, two systems” formula was seen as successful.

Beijing also hoped that people in Hong Kong would slowly begin to identify with the Chinese nation over time, especially younger generations schooled under a post-colonial system.

But a series of opinion polls taken every six months since the 1997 handover tells a different story. The number of respondents in the University of Hong Kong survey expressing confidence in China’s future has fallen steadily from 75 percent in 1997 to 50 percent in June. Moreover, the survey showed the younger the respondent, the less proud they were of becoming a Chinese national citizen.

China’s current unbending line on Hong Kong also has to do with its emergence as a power on the world stage and is in line with a more assertive posture adopted by President Xi Jinping. When Jiang negotiated the territory’s future in 1997, China’s gross domestic product was US\$0.95 trillion (7.9 trillion yuan). Today it is US\$9.4 trillion, making it the world’s second-biggest economy.

“(Beijing) was poor, tolerant and made concessions then to (try to) win the hearts of Hong Kong people,” said the first source with ties to the leadership, referring to China’s more conciliatory approach under Deng and his successors.

It may also have to do with internal Chinese politics. Xi’s uncompromising line on Hong Kong may be an effort to protect his flank as he pushes ahead with economic reforms and a far-reaching anti-corruption campaign that has targeted powerful figures in the Communist Party.

“China needs to draw lessons from the achievements of foreign politics, but the foundations of our system should absolutely not be given up,” Xi said in a September 5 speech in Beijing.

## PEACE AND LOVE

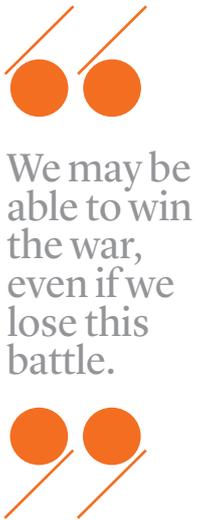
“The Occupy Central with Love and Peace” movement coalesced in January 2013 after Benny Tai, a law professor at the University of Hong Kong, wrote a newspaper column proposing a Gandhi-like civil disobedience movement – an escalation from the usual marches and candlelight vigils – to press for universal suffrage.

The movement got an indication of Beijing’s bottom line on democratic reform in June when the Chinese government issued a “White Paper” that reminded Hong Kong residents that it wields supreme authority in the city. Hong Kong administrators, including judges, had to “love the country” as a basic requirement to hold office, it said.

Undeterred, the Occupy movement organised an unofficial referendum on universal suffrage at the end of June that drew 800,000 ballots calling for free elections. Then, on July 1, nearly half a million protesters marched to the financial district. Over 500 were arrested after activists staged an overnight sit-in.

That sparked consternation in Beijing. It was a reminder of a mass protest in 2003 when half a million people poured onto the streets of Hong Kong to protest an anti-subversion bill by the territory’s legislature – the biggest anti-government protest on Chinese soil since the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square.

“When they saw the Democrats attending these rallies, they just drew the line and treated us as enemies,” said Martin Lee.



We may be able to win the war, even if we lose this battle.

Pro-Beijing groups countered in August with a mass demonstration of their own at which they warned of public disorder and the perils of antagonising China.

Jasper Tsang, one of the founders of the pro-Beijing Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, the city's largest political party, said China's leaders never promised full democracy.

"I would think if the Basic Law were written in the last five years, it would be very likely that we would leave out the words 'universal suffrage'", Tsang said.

### **BETWEEN FATHER AND SON**

**Protest-leader Benny Tai counsels patience.** He says a time will come when China is truly ready for political reform. When it does, "Hong Kong naturally will be chosen as the experimental ground for democratic reform in mainland China," he says. "I still have confidence in the long run. We may be able to win the war, even if we lose this battle."

The view in Beijing is less accommodating.

"The mainland has been too nice to Hong Kong," said the first source with leadership ties. "The relationship between the centre and Hong Kong is not one between brothers, but between father and son. The son has to listen to the father." 

Additional reporting by **Benjamin Kang Lim**  
Editing by **Bill Tarrant and Peter Hirschberg**



# Thousands of Hong Kong students “grasp destiny” in demand for democracy

BY JAMES POMFRET AND KINLING LO

SEPTEMBER 22 HONG KONG

**T**housands of students braved sweltering heat in Hong Kong on Monday to demand greater democracy as they launched a week-long boycott of classes, underscoring a restive younger generation's determination to challenge the Chinese Communist Party.

Dressed in white and wearing yellow ribbons, students from more than 20 universities and colleges packed into the grounds of picturesque, bay-side Chinese University

where they were greeted by banners that said: “The boycott must happen. Disobey and grasp your destiny.”

Managing the former British colony is proving a challenge for Beijing, which is worried that calls for democracy could spread to cities on the mainland, threatening the Communist Party's grip on power.

Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997 as a “special administrative region” (SAR) with a high degree of autonomy and freedoms not enjoyed on the mainland under a formula known as “one country, two systems”.

But Beijing last month rejected demands for people to freely choose the city's next leader, prompting threats from pro-democracy activists to shut down the Central financial district.

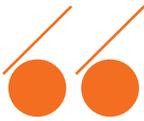
“We are willing to pay the price for democracy. No one can take away people's entitled right. No one. Not the SAR government and of course not the NPC,” said Alex Chow, leader of the Hong Kong Federation of Students, one of the organisers of the boycott, referring to China's National People's Congress.

Chow, 24, who wore a black T-shirt with the words “freedom now”, has said he was inspired by a high school teacher who began crying as he played a clip of China's bloody crackdown on pro-democracy student demonstrators in and around Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989.

The protest was peaceful but the mood at the university was defiant as demonstrators demanded nominations for Hong Kong's next leader in 2017 to be open to everyone. China's leaders want to ensure only pro-Beijing candidates are on the ballot.

Chow's federation put the number of students attending the rally at about 13,000, describing the turn-out as “inspirational”. There was no independent or police estimate.

The Occupy Central movement that has threatened to shut down the business district will likely be encouraged by the turnout. The students' ability to mobilise such a large crowd makes their support an increasingly important driver of Hong Kong's burgeoning civil disobedience movement.



As long as the spirit of democracy stays alive, we cannot and will not be defeated.



Students converged on a long boulevard at the university, with some carrying umbrellas to protect them from the baking sun, and many chanting “united we stand” and “democracy now”.

The Federation of Students said its application to hold a rally in Hong Kong’s Central district had been approved for Tuesday to Thursday.

### “NORMAL PHENOMENON”

It had written a letter to Hong Kong leader Leung Chun-ying and planned to gather outside his office on Tuesday if it had not received a reply by then.

The Hong Kong government said in a statement it respected the students’ “ambition and persistence”.

“The issue of political system development has been complicated and controversial, so it’s understandable that different groups in the society hold different opinions and arguments, which is also a normal phenomenon in Hong Kong’s diversified society,” it said.

The student boycott coincided with a trip by some of Hong Kong’s most powerful tycoons to Beijing where they discussed Hong Kong with Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

“We will continue to carry out ‘one country, two systems’ and the Basic Law in Hong Kong, which serve the interests of the nation, the interests of Hong Kong people, and the interests of foreign investors,” said Xi, who was flanked by former Hong Kong leader Tung Chee-hwa.

“The central government will firmly support and push for the democratic development in Hong Kong and will maintain the prosperous development in Hong Kong.”

The Basic Law refers to the mini-constitution for post-1997 Hong Kong which enshrines the one country, two systems formula.

Leading academics in Hong Kong have voiced support for the student boycott, with some offering to record lectures and post them online for students who miss school to watch later.

“As long as the spirit of democracy stays

alive, we cannot and will not be defeated,” said Chan Kin-man, a co-founder of the Occupy Central movement.

The student group Scholarism is planning to lead a boycott of secondary school classes on September 26 to rally further support for the democracy movement, while Occupy is expected to lock down the financial district around October 1.

Hong Kong has been dogged by a series of rallies this summer over the issue of electoral reform. A survey by the Chinese University showed more than a fifth of Hong Kong residents are considering leaving the city, spurred by concerns over its political future. 

Additional reporting by Venus Wu, Stefanie McIntyre, Diana Chan and Yimou Lee

Writing by Anne Marie Roantree

Editing by Nick Macfie

# Hong Kong students storm government HQ on challenge to Beijing

BY JAMES POMFRET AND YIMOULEE

SEPTEMBER 27 HONG KONG

**O**ver 100 pro-democracy students stormed Hong Kong government headquarters and scuffled with police late on Friday in protest against the Chinese government's tightening grip on the former British colony.

Police used pepper spray on protesters who forced their way through a gate and scaled high fences surrounding the compound to oppose Beijing's decision to rule out free elections for the city's leader in 2017.

Student leader Joshua Wong was dragged away by police kicking, screaming and bleeding from his arm as protesters chanted and struggled to free him.

"Hong Kong's future belongs to you, you and you," Wong, a thin 17-year-old with dark-rimmed glasses and bowl-cut hair, told cheering supporters hours before he was taken away.

"I want to tell C.Y. Leung and Xi Jinping that the mission of fighting for universal suffrage does not rest upon the young people, it is everyone's responsibility," he shouted, referring to Hong Kong's and China's leaders.

"I don't want the fight for democracy to be passed down to the next generation. This is our responsibility,"

About 100 protesters linked arms as police surrounded them with metal barricades, some chanting "civil disobedience".

In the early hours of Saturday, about a thousand students remained outside the government headquarters.

## SCHOOL PUPILS RALLY

At least four people were carried off on stretchers with slight injuries. The scene marked the biggest escalation in street protests since Beijing's decision in late August to rule out free elections for Hong Kong.

About 100 protesters remained within the compound while thousands of supporters outside chanted: "Free the people."

"We're still demanding universal suffrage," said Hong Kong Federation of Students leader Alex Chow.

The protest came after more than 1,000 school pupils rallied to support university students demanding full democracy for Hong Kong, capping a week-long campaign that has seen classroom strikes and a large cut-out depicting the city's leader as the devil paraded in public.

Earlier on Friday, hundreds of school children, some barely in their teens and dressed in school uniforms, assembled in a park close to government headquarters sporting yellow ribbons and stickers saying "smash Chinese



We must stop these people from destroying Hong Kong. They must learn to love China.



Communist Party dictatorship”.

“We have to act right now and not sit back. Too many people in Hong Kong are left cold by politics, but that’s not right. These politics will deeply affect our future prospects,” said 17-year-old Louis Yeung.

About 200 students camped outside the home of chief executive Leung Chun-ying on Thursday night after he ignored their 48-hour ultimatum to meet them to discuss the special administrative region’s democratic future as tensions escalate.

After work on Friday evening, thousands more people rallied to the side of the 1,500 or so secondary pupils who had skipped classes, bringing the week-long class boycott to a close.

### PRO-BEIJING PROTEST

In the latest tit-for-tat protest, a pro-Beijing group gathered next to the students singing patriotic songs and waving Chinese flags, underscoring a deepening divide over the path of electoral reforms in the Asian financial centre.

“We must stop these people from destroying Hong Kong. They must learn to love China,” said a woman surnamed Leung, who declined to say where the group members, clad in yellow shirts and red caps, were from.

Hong Kong returned from British to Chinese rule in 1997 with a high degree of autonomy and freedoms not enjoyed in mainland China under a formula known as “one country, two systems”. Universal suffrage was set as an eventual goal.

But Beijing last month rejected demands for people to freely choose the city’s next leader in 2017, prompting threats from pro-democracy activists to shut down the Central financial district in a so-called Occupy Central campaign. China wants to limit elections to a handful of candidates loyal to Beijing.

A handful of parents accompanied their children on Friday, voicing support for the democracy campaign and slamming the Hong Kong government for rejecting demands for free elections.

“I am here to support my daughter because

I think the Chinese government has lied to Hong Kong citizens and think we are stupid,” said a parent surnamed Lam.

### STUDENTS DEFIANT

The students’ ability to mobilise thousands to fight for democracy has made their support an increasingly important driver of the city’s burgeoning civil disobedience movement.

They plan an even larger Occupy Central blockade on Oct. 1 that organisers hope will escalate into one of most disruptive protests seen for decades in the financial hub.

Student leader Wong has already won one major victory against Beijing.

In 2012, when he was 15, he forced the Hong Kong government to shelve plans to roll out a pro-China national education scheme in the city’s schools by rallying 120,000 protesters.

“I think he understands the political realities of Hong Kong, but he also understands the psychology of the mob or the protest group,” said Matthew Torne, a British filmmaker who made a documentary about the national education protests.

Wong has grabbed newspaper headlines over the past few days, although not all have been flattering.

On Thursday, the pro-Beijing Wen Wei Po newspaper ran a full-page story on Wong, accusing him of having close ties with forces in the United States and saying the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency was trying to infiltrate Hong Kong schools.

Wong has denied the allegations.

Managing the former British colony is proving a challenge for Beijing, which is worried that calls for democracy could spread to cities on the mainland, threatening the Communist Party’s grip on power. 

Additional reporting by **Stefanie McIntyre, Venus Wu, Diana Chan and Kinling Lo**

Writing by **Anne Marie Roantree**

Editing by **Tom Heneghan**

# In 'Umbrella Revolution,' China confronts limits of its power

BY DAVID LAGUE, JAMES POMFRET  
AND GREG TORODE

OCTOBER 1 HONG KONG

**I**n the heart of Mong Kok, one of the most densely populated districts on earth, an abandoned Hong Kong police van is enveloped in the student-led demonstrations paralyzing swathes of the city. Along with yellow ribbons and flowers, symbols of the city's pro-democracy movement, protesters have taped a hand-written placard in Chinese and English to the side of the locked and undamaged vehicle.

"We can't accept the Hong Kong police becoming the Gong An," it reads — a reference

to China's feared Public Security Bureau, which enjoys virtually unfettered powers on the mainland.

The stranded police vehicle and the protesters' warning encapsulate the dilemma that the mass protests pose for China's rulers and the authorities in Hong Kong. They need to contain the campaign for democracy in one of Asia's leading financial hubs without the tools employed on the mainland to suppress dissent, including sweeping powers of arrest, indefinite detention, compliant courts and a controlled media.

While People's Liberation Army forces are stationed in Hong Kong, they have remained in their barracks. They will only be deployed on the streets if rioting and looting break out and the local police are unable to contain the violence, said two people with ties to the central government leadership.

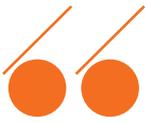
"The mobilization of PLA troops in Hong Kong is a last resort and only if things got totally out of control," one of the people said.

As tens of thousands of protesters gather for a sixth day, their demand for the right to choose their leaders in fully democratic elections poses the biggest popular challenge to the ruling Communist Party since Chinese president Xi Jinping took power two years ago. The Umbrella Revolution, so called for the protesters' use of umbrellas to shield against pepper spray, comes at an inopportune time for Xi. He is trying to steer a slowing economy while moving against powerful vested interests in one of the most wide-ranging purges and anti-corruption campaigns since the Communists came to power in 1949.

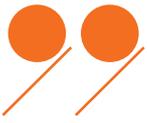
"It is a frontal challenge to their authority," Regina Ip, a lawmaker and a top advisor to Hong Kong's embattled political leader, chief executive Leung Chun-ying, says of the protests. "People have to understand how Beijing sees this... China feels threatened," Ip told Reuters.

## SKINNY 17-YEAR-OLD

At the forefront of this challenge is student



The greatest fear for China's leaders is that unrest could spread from Hong Kong to the mainland.



leader Joshua Wong Chi-fung, a skinny 17-year-old with a mop of straight black hair framing his angular face.

Last Friday, after a week-long student boycott of classes, Wong was demonstrating with hundreds of secondary school students outside the Hong Kong government's harbour-front offices. It was 10 p.m. and some of the students were beginning to drift off when Wong picked up the microphone.

"Please everybody, don't go just yet," he pleaded in his crisp, staccato Cantonese through the shrill feedback of the speaker. "Please give me some face and listen before leaving," he joked. "Ok!" the students yelled back.

As Wong spoke, fellow student leaders Alex Chow and Lester Shum, followed by their colleagues, suddenly rushed the three-metre fence and gate protecting the government offices, shouting: "Charge, charge."

Police arrested Wong immediately and took Chow and Shum into custody the next day. But legal limits on the power of the authorities soon frustrated their efforts to take the student leaders out of circulation.

In the High Court on Sunday evening, Justice Patrick Li Hon-leung ordered Wong's immediate release, granting a writ of habeas corpus, one of the British-implemented protections that Hong Kong inherited from its former colonial master. Wong would have no such protection on the mainland where an equivalent right doesn't exist and where protest leaders are often beaten and routinely detained for long periods without trial.

Wong's lawyer, Michael Vidler, says Justice Li told the court that events might have taken a different course if Wong had not been detained for so long. In the two days Wong and his fellow student leaders were held without charge, tens of thousands of protesters had converged on the government offices and three other Hong Kong districts. About an hour before Justice Li ordered Wong's release, riot police had fired volleys of tear gas in a bid to break up the demonstrations, the first time in decades that this riot control measure had been used against

Hong Kong protesters.

Flanked by his lawyers, Wong pushed his right hand forward waist-high and flashed a defiant thumbs up as he walked free. His detention had provided the spark that galvanized the city's pro-democracy movement and kick-started Occupy Central, a long-mooted plan to lock down the commercial heart of China's most important financial centre.

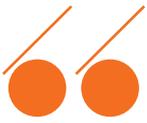
### **"DON'T REPEAT JUNE 4"**

While leaders in Hong Kong consult with Beijing on how best to clear the streets, the student-dominated protests will be an unnerving reminder for Xi and other top party leaders of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations 25 years ago, in June 1989. That isn't lost on the students. On Sogo Corner in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong's neon-lit equivalent of New York's Times Square, protesters have put up posters that carry the words "Don't repeat June 4."

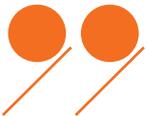
Already, an image from the Hong Kong protests that draws a parallel with the iconic "tank man" photograph from the Tiananmen demonstrations has gone viral on social media. The image is drawn from a photograph of a protester holding two umbrellas aloft as he is enveloped in a cloud of tear gas.

The greatest fear for China's leaders is that unrest could spread from Hong Kong to the mainland. While Chinese online censors have barred most discussion of the protests, during the first few days they failed to block searches for the Chinese expression for "umbrella revolution". By Wednesday, they had caught up and the term had also been barred. For its part, the state-run media mostly limited its coverage of events in Hong Kong to official condemnations of the protests.

But there are signs that news of the demonstrations has penetrated the mainland firewall. Chinese Human Rights Defenders, a coalition of mainland and international human rights groups, said on Wednesday that dozens of mainland activists had been detained or intimidated for expressing support for Hong Kong's protests. Reuters could not immediately



One country, two systems has also been touted for Taiwan. But, as you can see, today's Hong Kong will be tomorrow's Taiwan if it is adopted.



confirm the detentions.

In Macau, the gambling hub that neighbours Hong Kong and where the mainland exerts more influence, several hundred protesters gathered in a central square Wednesday evening in support of the protests. Hong Kong has an independent judiciary and its citizens enjoy wide-ranging liberties, including freedom of speech and assembly, which is denied on the mainland.

### NO EASY CHOICES

There are no easy choices for Xi or Leung, China's handpicked man in Hong Kong. If they order a harsh crackdown, it could destroy Hong Kong's reputation as a stable financial centre, jeopardize investment in China and spark capital outflows from the mainland at a time when the Chinese economy is slowing markedly. China is aiming for economic growth of about 7.5 per cent this year. But a run of underwhelming data, including sagging industrial output and falling property prices, suggests expansion may fall short of that target.

A heavy-handed response could also fatally undermine the 'one country two systems' formula by which Hong Kong has been ruled since the 1997 handover and which China's leaders have hoped would one day be extended to Taiwan. Already there have been protests in Taipei in solidarity with the Hong Kong students.

"One country, two systems has also been touted for Taiwan," says Ken Kuo, a Taiwan exchange student living in Hong Kong. He joined the protests in the Admiralty district, where crowds have been largest. "But, as you can see, today's Hong Kong will be tomorrow's Taiwan if it is adopted."

There is also no guarantee that greater force will end the protests. So far, the use of pepper spray and tear gas has only emboldened protesters. It has also won them greater sympathy from residents of the city who view these police tactics as excessive. Trucks from sympathetic businesses have delivered food and bottled water to the protest areas.

The demonstrators have also adopted tactics that make it difficult for the authorities to crack down. Despite the humidity, thunderstorms, crowding and limited facilities in Hong Kong this week, the crowds have been highly disciplined, avoiding violence and confrontation since after the early attempt by the small group of students to force their way into government headquarters.

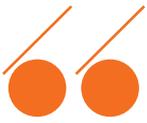
### TIDY REBELS

Teams of volunteers pick up rubbish and litter, even sorting it for recycling. Supplies of food and water are organized in neat stockpiles along the edges of the main traffic arteries in the centre of Hong Kong. And the demonstrators, who are blocking key roads, obediently part for ambulances and emergency vehicles. Protest leaders constantly remind the crowds that they must be peaceful and orderly. On Wednesday morning, when a small group of anti-Occupy Central protesters arrived in Admiralty district, pro-democracy demonstrators linked hands protectively around them to ensure there was no chance of a clash.

After the use of tear gas and pepper spray only succeeded in stoking the demonstrations, police beat a tactical retreat, distancing themselves from the main centres of protest. The hope is that the demonstrators will tire and melt away, said a senior police officer in Hong Kong. In what appears to be part of this plan, pro-mainland groups that routinely mount noisy counter-demonstrations to pro-democracy marches have been largely unseen on the streets.

But if the standoff worsens and Xi is seen to be unsuccessful in ending the protests, that could work against him, says Cheng Li, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

Xi and his supporters have launched a sweeping corruption crackdown across the mainland, partly designed to take down a dangerous rival, retired senior leader Zhou Yongkang, who used to head China's pervasive security apparatus. The ongoing purge of Zhou



From their perspective, it is unthinkable that a future leader of Hong Kong is not patriotic or that Hong Kong was allowed to become a base for subversion.



and his sprawling network of relatives, political allies and business supporters has convulsed leadership politics in Beijing. A misstep from Xi that leads to ongoing instability in Hong Kong could provide ammunition for his rivals.

### FISSURES IN BEIJING

For now, China's leaders are united in their attitude toward Hong Kong, said Li. If the confrontation escalates, Xi could become vulnerable to attack from other leaders who might be unhappy over his corruption crackdown or economic policies, he said.

"They are on the same page largely," Li said of the leadership. "But if some dramatic events start to happen, they might start to have a different view."

Xi will not back down on China's decision that only a handful of Beijing-vetted candidates can stand for the next elections for Hong Kong's chief executive in 2017, says lawmaker Regina Ip.

"In their eyes, the Hong Kong chief executive is more powerful than a provincial Chinese leader," says Ip, who held talks in Beijing last month with Zhang Dejiang, China's third-ranked leader and the top official responsible for Hong Kong. "From their perspective, it is unthinkable that a future leader of Hong Kong is not patriotic or that Hong Kong was allowed to become a base for subversion."

One China-based Western diplomat likened the showdown in Hong Kong to a game of chicken. "Two cars speed toward one another," the diplomat said. "Beijing's strategy is to throw away the steering wheel so the other party has to swerve away first. It's like that with full democracy."

Pro-democracy forces are also standing firm. Even if the protests unwind, the Hong Kong and mainland authorities will still face the fundamental question posed by the demonstrators: Why can't educated, moderate and law-abiding Chinese people choose their own leaders? As the swelling protests indicate, Xi has yet to provide an answer that would satisfy

protesters in Hong Kong or for that matter Taiwan's voters who have grown accustomed to changing their government at the ballot box.

Much of the pressure now falls on Leung. He must find a way to end the protests that will satisfy Beijing without completely alienating the residents of Hong Kong.

### "HANDS OFF"?

The leadership in Beijing appears to have shifted the onus to him. "The central government did not pressure Hong Kong to disperse the protesters," said another source with ties to the leadership in Beijing. "The Hong Kong government was proactive because it did not want to be perceived by the central government to be weak."

A person close to Leung who spoke on condition of anonymity said Beijing was being "very hands off" in what he described as a "critical" moment for the current administration in Hong Kong. He also said that Leung has "never" considered acceding to the protesters' demand that he resign.

In his National Day speech on Wednesday, Leung seemed to suggest that giving all the city's five million eligible voters the right to cast a ballot for candidates that were vetted by Beijing was better than no elections at all. "It is understandable that different people may have different ideas about a desirable reform package," he said. "But it is definitely better to have universal suffrage than not."

Leung will also be wary of the power of Hong Kong protesters when they take to the streets in big numbers. A 500,000-strong protest on July 1, 2003, stunned the Hong Kong government and eventually forced Beijing's hand-picked leader, Tung Chee-hwa, to step down. It marked the first time since the founding of the People's Republic of China that the Communist Party was forced to back down in the face of popular pressure and jettison a senior leader.

Leung and Tung, now an advisor to the mainland government, stood side-by-side in

Hong Kong at the National Day flag-raising ceremony, which marks the anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic on October 1, 1949. The protest leaders didn't disrupt the event. But as Leung, his top officials and dignitaries watched the raising of the Chinese national flag, shouts and chants could be clearly heard from the protesters in Admiralty district, a block behind them.

In an embarrassment to Leung, the protesters did force the Hong Kong authorities to cancel the traditional fireworks display, a

centrepiece of the National Day celebrations that normally draws a huge crowd to the harbour front. And he had to travel by boat to the ceremony because the roads were blocked by the protests. 

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Additional reporting by **Benjamin Kang Lim, Charlie Zhu, Donny Kwok, Venus Wu and Farah Master**  
Editing by **Peter Hirschberg**

