

THE LIFESTYLE OF PROTEST

.....

HOW THE ANTI-EXTRADITION
MOVEMENT LIVES ON AND
HONG KONG'S WAY FORWARD

HKBU 11
2020







Letter to Reader



Timeline



Battle Without
Smoke



As roiling protests divide
families, new bonds are
formed



The post-anti-extradition
protest media landscape



Looking towards the
future



LETTER TO READERS

When 19 year-old Chan Tong-kai made the news and became a suspect for the murder of his pregnant girlfriend, few thought much of the case except for as a heated argument between lovers which ended in horribly tragedy. But there was one complication: he is a citizen of Hong Kong and returned to the city after the alleged murder was committed in Taiwan, and though he is officially wanted by the Taiwan authorities, Hong Kong saw a lack of legal means to extradite him to Taiwan to face trial. This seemingly small complication that many thought could be negotiated between Hong Kong and Taiwan eventually made Chan the butterfly which set off the worst political storm Hong Kong has seen in more than 20 years, which might permanently transform life in this city.

The controversy started when in February, 2019, the Hong Kong government proposed an extradition bill aimed to fix a legal “loophole” so the suspect in question can be handed over to Taiwan. However, since the local government under Beijing’s control do not recognise Taiwan as a separate country from China, this bill would also allow suspects to be transferred to mainland China – where a fair trial is not guaranteed – to face trial by the mainland government’s request.

As a result, Hongkongers saw this as a move to compromise the city’s judicial independence and to create opportunities for political persecution. For months, almost every sector in the city protested and created petitions, but to no avail. Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive refused to withdraw the bill despite a clear public sentiment against it.

On June 9th, the first spark was ignited when a peaceful million-people march ended in conflicts with the police. Three days later, the city made international headlines after thousands of protestors adorned in masks and armed with umbrellas surrounded the Legislative Council to prevent a scheduled debate on the extradition bill. Although they successfully brought the legislation to a halt, the day resulted in the worst bloodshed and brutal police crackdowns most people in this generation have ever seen, and in the aftermath, more became discontent and angry at the government.

Over the following few months, anti-government protests sprouted and became increasingly violent, as allegations of police brutality with evidence and a triad attack launched by pro-Beijing attackers added fuel to the fire. By the time the bill was formally withdrawn in late October, the traumatised public have largely lost faith in the current government and fear that the home city they have known has gone too far to turn back.

Pro-democracy people have drawn up a list of five demands, including an independent investigation into police brutality and genuine universal suffrage, morphing the movement into a larger cry for democratic reform and more autonomy.

By March 2020, after more than 16,000 canisters of tear gas from the police, more than 500 public political gatherings and nearly 8,000 people arrested, the government have not answered to the protestors' demands. The pro-democracy movement still continues to live on not just through protests, but also through daily life.

In the first two articles, we are going to take an intimate look at how the anti-extradition movement changed people's priorities, their living habits and their relationship with others. People begin choosing businesses to support based on their political affiliations, celebrations of festivals have been turned into acts of protests, and while some relationships fell apart due to political differences, others grew closer. The changes those families and individuals went through are mesocosms of much larger social changes.

In the third article, the way the anti-extradition movement have reshaped the media landscape will be discussed. Through mediums like live broadcast and online updates, the protests have not only made many Hongkongers more aware of news itself, but also more aware of the people who are bringing the news.

Finally, the last article will review the broader picture of how the protests gave rise to new labour unions and young pro-democracy politicians that are making the movement sustainable, and how Hong Kong can move forward as a city when neither the Beijing backed government nor the opposition forces are willing to back down and when there is growing economic and political pressure.

Sincerely,

Katherine Li



A SIGNIFICANT EVENTS TIMELINE

JUNE 2019 - AUGUST 2019

June 9th A

More than a million took to the streets in a mass rally organised by the Civil Human Rights Front, in protest against the extradition bill.

June 15th

Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced the suspension of the bill, yet refused to completely withdraw it.

June 21st

The first siege of the Police Headquarters in Wanchai is yet another reaction to signs of police brutality. The tension was high and the walls of the headquarters were vandalised, but there were no major clashes during the day.

June 12th

The very first violent clash as the police cracks down on the thousands of protestors that surrounded LegCo, which successfully put the extradition bill discussion to a halt. Tear gas, rubber bullets and bean bag rounds were fired, and this ignited the first spark of public anger against alleged police brutality.

June 16th

The signs of police brutality displayed on June 12th drew an estimated 2 million demonstrators who flooded the streets of Hong Kong Island. The "Five Demands" are born, including demanding independent inquiry into police violence, Carrie Lam's resignation and a full withdrawal of the controversial bill.

July 1st B C

On the anniversary of the Hong Kong Handover, protestors stormed into LegCo and vandalised the facility, while Carrie Lam continues to refuse a full withdrawal of the bill. Clashes with the police occurred during the day and the break-in is seen to have tested the limits of what other pro-democracy supporters consider acceptable during protests.





VIOLENCE



PEACEFUL



DEATH



ANNOUNCEMENT

**July 21th**

Protesters vandalised the Liaison Office in Sheung Wan during a protest and severed clashed with the police on those narrow streets.

August 9th~12th D

A massive number of protesters flocked to the Hong Kong airport and brought flight operations to a standstill. Hundred of flights were cancelled and many passengers were stranded for days. The demonstration started out peaceful, but towards the last day, the riot police clashed with protesters at the airport.

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July 9th

Carrie Lam announced the bill as "dead", or in a direct translation from the Chinese proverb she adopted during her speech, it "came to a natural death in its bed". This has not been considered a full withdrawal, since announcing a bill as "dead" has no legal binding effects.

Later on that night, citizens and journalists were indiscriminately attacked at Yuen Long station by nearly a hundred stick-wielding thugs clad in white shirts who are suspected to be triads with pro-Beijing political affiliations. Some attacked citizens may be the ones returning home from the protest during the day, but many were not. The police arrived on scene more than 30 minutes late, while additional footages caught officers letting thugs with sticks still in hand walk away from the scene of crime. This event pushed public discontent with the police force to a severe point.



AUGUST 2019 - MAY 2020

AND STILL COUNTING

October 1st E

Violent clashes occurred all over the city on China's National Day, stealing international spotlight on the PRC's 70th anniversary much to Beijing's dismay.

October 4th F

Carrie Lam turns to the Emergency Ordinance Regulations to enact the anti-mask, banning people from attending unlawful assemblies with their masks on. On the same day, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets with masks on as serious clashes occurred in various parts of the city into the night.

November 12th

CUHK became the first university to turn into battle ground as riot police stormed the campus. They fired tear gas and projectiles into the university, as masked protestors who are mainly students put up roadblocks and thrown bricks and petrol bombs in retaliation. The conflict was resolved as the police eventually left.

August 31st

Water cannons with blue-dye infused water are deployed for the very first time. Into the night, multiple journalist footages caught the riot police storming into Prince Edward MTR station, assaulting passengers in their way but not attempting to arrest the majority of the people they have beaten with batons and have pepper sprayed. MTR denied requests to fully release CCTV footages from that night, which led to a widespread conspiracy theory that someone has been killed by the police that night within the station.



November 8th G

Alex Chow, a 23 year-old student of HKUST, died after days of hospitalisation from a head injury sustained after falling from a high place in a parking lot during a small scale protest in Tsung Kwan O. Multiple memorials were held for him as students begin to occupy campuses, while this tragic incident spawned more confounding theories regarding how he fell.



November 18th

The police fired 1,458 canisters of tear gas, 1,391 rubber bullets, 325 bean bag rounds, and 256 sponge grenades at the Polytechnic University campus which was occupied by protestors who are mainly students. The police force besieged the campus and threatened to use live bullets if the protestors did not come out and turn themselves in, which put the entire city on edge and led the protestors to fight back. The campus roiled in flames for almost two days, until the situation was resolved through a series of escapes and mediations. Those who turned themselves in and are above the age of 18 are going to face rioting charges while minors were let go, but the campus itself suffered unimaginable damages.



January ~ April H

The Wuhan coronavirus scare sent citizens scrambling for masks and social distancing in fear that this would turn into a rendition of the 2003 SARS crisis. The medical workers went on strike for days to urge the government fully close borders with mainland China, which the government partially obliged. The coronavirus epidemic is seen as a consequence of China's tight information control and delayed response to its initial outbreak in Wuhan, so though the focus shifted from protesting to combating the said virus, the pro-democracy camp utilised the opportunity to gain more influence through assisting people in need during the outbreak.

November 24th

Just days after the Poly U siege traumatised and angered an entire city, the district councillor elections were held and the pro-democracy camp gained landslide victory as the voting turnout rate is the highest ever recorded since 1997. Not counting the few with unclear affiliation, the pro-democracy camp won 388 seats while the pro-establishment camp obtained 59.



The movement lives on ...

May 10th

Small scale protests in shopping malls and mass arrests on the streets have started again upon a brawl in LegCo on Friday. More than a hundred were arrested in Mong Kok, including first-aiders and several online platform journalists with no press passes. This is seen as an ominous hint to what could come next in June.



G



H

A battle without smoke



**The less visible
struggle for
democracy in
ordinary daily life**





A midst neon lights and the Lunar New Year bustle of Causeway Bay, a hidden market that nestled in a three story store space drew crowds as night approached. Unlike the traditional annual flower market within its walking distance, this market place does not only have new year merriment in the air, but also food, merchandise and new year decorations inspired by the recent wave of pro-democracy social movement which shook the city and its relationship with mainland China.

"We all shop for the new year anyways, so why not spend our money on things that matter to us?" said 51 year-old Ip Chui-man, flipping over a calendar infused with protest inspired art, her daughter and son both curiously peaking over her shoulders.

Running her fingers across the silver engraving of "revolution of our times" on the calendar cover, she looked out into the night in an almost nostalgic way, and wondered aloud if anybody would be in the mood to attend the traditional new year market this year, knowing that anything products with political connotation would be banned.

"I know that we are supposed to think only happy thoughts for Lunar New Year, but not talking about what happened over the past months isn't an option. The more you repress it, the more it would appear to be the elephant in the room, so it's only natural for us to celebrate new year this way," she said.

As a single mother trying to make a living in this high-cost city, she is surprised to find how much the recent series of social events have changed her and her priorities. She admitted that she had felt frustrated six years ago during the Umbrella Movement when protestors participating in the mass sit in obstructed her ability to go to work, and felt even more uncomfortable about participating in local demonstrations after the Mong Kok "fishball revolution" when localist protestors engaged in violent clashes with the police, which is a sentiment shared by many from the older generations. She never once bothered to vote in her life nor had she ever felt strongly about politics, until the extradition movement came along to completely change her perspective.

Even since the beginning, she disliked the extradition bill and was well aware of its problems. She turned a blind eye when her elder daughter snuck out at night to participate in assemblies, but she herself never thought about partaking, until videos of an incident in Prince Edward station on August 31st horrified her enough for her to start rethinking some of her decisions. In multiple footages from that night, it can be seen clearly that the riot police rushed into the metro station and attacked passengers on board indiscriminately with batons and pepper spray with little intention to arrest them all.

"It was all over my social media feed the next morning, and angry tears just ran down my face. Anybody could have been in that train compartment. It could very well have been me or my family who would suffer those inch long head wounds just because we live in that area and often do need to take the metro. How could they be allowed to do this to us?" she questioned, the pain of having seen what she had seen still lingering behind her eyes.

What further infuriated her was when her 13 year-old son got cornered and searched by the police one night in Mong Kok. The boy wandered off in search for a cold drink after their family dinner together, and by the time she found him, he has been pushed against a wall with his hands above his head, while a squad of at least five riot police emptied his tiny backpack. When she stepped up and explained to them that the boy is her son, the police taunted her and asked her if she is the mother of a "cockroach" – a derogatory term often used by pro-Beijing people against pro-democracy protestors – before letting them go.

"Their behaviour was unacceptable. I did not work this hard to buy a decent property here and to put my children in the best schools only to have the police terrorise them. If I can't put up a barricade, at least I can do right by my everyday choices," said Ms. Ip.

Ip's family has sought out many ways to merge the movement with their lives ever since then. Permitted assemblies on the weekends became events to be attended as a family, piggy bank money went from sitting in jars to being donated to pro-democracy organisations and news platforms, a wall at home



has been reserved for the children to put up protest related stickers and posters since their neighbourhood Lennon Wall got torn down, and they are all actively boycotting mainland Chinese brands and tirelessly checking the political affiliation of restaurants before walking in for a meal.

Given the overwhelming victory the pro-democracy camp gained in December in the district elections, the public favour is currently with the yellow camp. While shops belonging to the blue camp get vandalised, set fire to during protests and actively boycotted in daily life, long queues form in front of yellow camp shops, such as the Europa Tea Foundry and Lung Mun Cafe. People who have spent all their whole lives enjoying Frappacchino from the pro-Beijing Maxim ran Starbucks and dining on Japanese beef rice from Yoshinoya have now found reasons to abandon their routine to opt for what aligns with their political beliefs.

“I’ve never thought about politics before when out dining with friends,” said Ms. Ip’s 17 year-old daughter, Cara Ip. “Food was just food back then, but now even eating and shopping is a form of protest, which to me is easily done in comparison to taking to the streets. ”

However, many brands that have been labelled as “pro-Beijing” have denied that label and came to their own defence. After Annie Wu, the eldest daughter of the founder of Maxim’s Caterers Limited, had publicly condemned the protestors and voiced support of the police force in the UN Human Rights Council, the company issued a statement clarifying that she holds no position in the company and is not involved in its management, thus attempting to distance the brand from any political connotations.



Another night of vandalism in Mong Kok after the anti-mask law was adopted.

To the delight of many pro-democracy supporters, the idea of a yellow camp economy as economic tactic has also clearly alarmed the Beijing government. Pro-Beijing politicians and mainland Chinese media such as People's Daily have said that the idea of a yellow camp economic circle is "not feasible" and criticised purchasing products based on politics and not quality as an act to "further polarise the Hong Kong society" with no economic benefits to come.

These concerns are certainly not unwarranted, given that the Hong Kong government could be facing its first deficit in 15 years due the US-China trade war and the anti-government protests, both which deterred investment and caused sharp drop in retail, catering and tourism industries. The Hong Kong Retail Management Association have urged

landlords to halve their rents and expect some retailers to go out of business, while Financial Secretary Paul Chan Mo-po estimated the budget deficit would amount to HK\$80 billion. Under this pessimistic economic outlook that has now been exacerbated by the coronavirus outbreak, the future for blue camp companies could be grim if the yellow camp can mobilise enough people to join the boycott.

Back in the night market, Ms. Ip and her children eventually decided to buy that calendar.

"It would have been even more perfect if important dates for this movement can be highlighted on here," she said as she handed cash to the stall owner, who beamed in agreement and thanked her for providing design ideas. "I don't want these dates to be forgotten, like how China likes to pretend June 4th doesn't exist."



An elderly who attended the protests to show support to young protestors.



平反四公義必勝
「六四」30周年民主大遊行
March 30th Democracy In China
愛國民主運動


第七屆
全港運動會

The 7th
Hong Kong
Games
28/4 -
2/6
Fr
文



人民會忘記

The June 4th march in 2019, marking the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Massacre. "The people will not forget," reads the banner.

A photograph of a protest scene. In the foreground, there are red and white plastic water-filled barriers. Behind them, several people are visible, some wearing helmets and gas masks, holding umbrellas. The background is hazy, suggesting a large gathering or a smoky atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

AS ROILING PROTESTS DIVIDE FAMILIES, NEW BONDS ARE FORMED

THE "PEACEFUL" PRO-DEMOCRACY
FACTION FINDS ALTERNATIVE WAYS
TO SHOW UNITY



On the night of Mid-Autumn Festival – a traditional night reserved for family reunion – Nam Kwan, a charity worker in her forties who lives in Tuen Mun, received a concerning message. She just got off work and was prepared to go out for dinner with her husband after a warm shower, yet the words on her screen stopped her in her tracks.

“I have just been thrown out of the house for the third time,” the message read, “I feel like an orphan, and this isolation and loneliness is agonising. I don’t want to go on like this anymore.”

This message came from an 18 year-old who has been actively involved in the anti-extradition protests, which has roiled this normally peaceful and orderly city for months with no sign of ceasing. Allegations of police brutality, a shocking triad attack on civilians and an escalating level of violence on both sides have politically divided friends and families. This young protestor is only one of many who have been outcasted by their more pro-Beijing or more conservative family members for their involvement in the protests.

Upon his message, Ms. Kwan quickly shifted dinner plans, called him a taxi, and invited four other youngsters who face similar situations to have dinner in her home. Having no time to cook, she eventually ordered in, and there under the full moon, this alternative family that is not related by blood had their reunion dinner.

Ever since the conflicts grew more intense, Ms. Kwan has been constantly on the lookout for young protestors who need help and has formed a support group. She knew very well that she does not have the capability to be on the frontline, so she decided to fall back and provide aid in the only way she knows how.

“It started with giving out protective gear against tear gas and police batons, but then the issue snowballed,” she said. “Seeing young kids being forced out of their homes and deprived of food after spending all their money on purchasing gas masks really broke my heart.”

Taking money from her own savings, she has already helped more than a hundred protestors find accommodation, obtain sufficient food and reach legal assistance. Many of these protestors have come to place immense confidence in her, often entrusting her with their identity cards, locations and even letters containing their last will, just in case if an arrest or a fatal incident befalls them. “I now keep my phone on 24 hours a day because the last thing I want is for them to hear the sound of voicemail when they need help,” Kwan said.



A peace-keeping protestor during the first siege of the Police Headquarters

Her experiences with these young protestors are also dramatic under many instances. Once she walked a protestor home, only to open the door to his angry father who emerged with a rattan in hand. She had instinctively placed herself between them when the father lashed out, so a few hits inevitably landed on her before the father resorted to shutting the door in their face. Another time, she drove out at 3 AM upon the discovery that a boy has been sleeping on a nearby estate platform. The stoney benches he laid on was hard, and he was wearing thin with a nearly empty backpack as his only belonging. He is only 15 years-old, and was locked out on purpose when he tried to return home after a protest.

"When my parents made it clear that they no longer want anything to do with me, I was so heartbroken and scared that I seriously considered throwing myself at the train tracks and letting that be the end," said Kwok, an 18 year-old frontline protestor currently in an associate degree program.

Her pro-Beijing parents who were once immigrants from mainland China had given her an ultimatum: admit that she made a mistake and stop protesting, or leave the family permanently. Like most local students, she resides with her parents and largely relies on their economic support. But still, she adamantly chose the latter option.

With only a suitcase full of essentials and almost no savings, Kwok who had never even spent a week away from home departed with no known destination. For a month, she bounced between the McDonald's and her friends' apartments before running into a member of a support group in the church she frequents, who spent a week persuading her to move in and eventually succeeded.

"Seeing how callous my parents are is the last straw for me," said Kwok, who later found out that her parents have been lying to friends and relatives in regards to her whereabouts. In one of their tales, she went overseas to pursue a degree. "Ironically, a stranger has shown me more kindness over the past two months than my parents did my whole life."



The woman who took her in, Cassie Cheung, is a 38 year-old office worker in the business sector who said that she has participated in almost every peaceful protest, including those done in flash-mob style during lunch hour. Unlike when Kwok was living with her parents, there is now warm soup and a meal waiting for her every time she returns from a protest. And even when Cheung was out of town for a business trip, she still received a dozen messages during a protest from Cheung who worried about her safety.

"The past year really made me rethink my relationship with friends and my remaining family members," said Cheung, "I used to be such a workaholic, but now I feel this sense of imminence like if I don't spend time on those whom I care for, I might not get the chance to. Because what if they get hit on the head with a police projectile, or run into stick-wielding triads?"

Cheung's parents reside in Wong Tai Sing, an area that has recently grown more well known for being a protest hotspot rather than for its traditional temples, and this elderly couple has experienced tear gassed more than once. As a safety measure, she created a group chat consisting of her parents, other pro-democracy relatives, and Kwok. Each day, every member needs check in at least once and report their location if there is a protest in the area.



"Rescue Hong Kong, resist the CCP together," read a popular protest poster. The collective grievances against the CCP seems to have united ideological differences within the pro-democracy camp.

"My favourite word in this social movement has always been **'sau zuk'**," said Kwok, proudly displaying the sticker on the back of her phone with these two Chinese characters featured in bold. In Cantonese, this phrase can be literally translated into "hands and feet", which means "siblings". Protestors and pro-democracy supporters have been addressing each other with this endearing appellation to foster a sense of solidarity.

"My parents would still be my parents even if they commit a terrible crime, but unfortunately that is not how they feel about me," said Kwok. Since the day she left more than five months ago, her parents have not called or texted. "It's ultimately a life lesson to be learned. Those who love and accept me for who I am are my family and my 'siblings', and I think I have found them."

Back in Tuen Mun, Nam Kwan is already on the final stages of establishing a youth hostel for teenagers who have lost their homes for participating in the protests. She is hoping to provide them with a secure and peaceful long-term residence so they can recover from emotional wounds and complete their education.

"Hong Kong people have really stepped up during this time of crisis to be there for each other like family would, so I am just one of many," she said, "I know that I have never given birth, but these kids I've helped are all like my children."

*An orderly and
coordinated evacuation
led by protestors on the
night of July 1st.*



THE POST-
ANTI-EXTRADITION
PROTEST MEDIA
LANDSCAPE



.....THE RISE OF ONLINE MEDIA;
LIVE STREAMING, AND
JOURNALISTS WHO BECAME
PUBLIC FIGURES



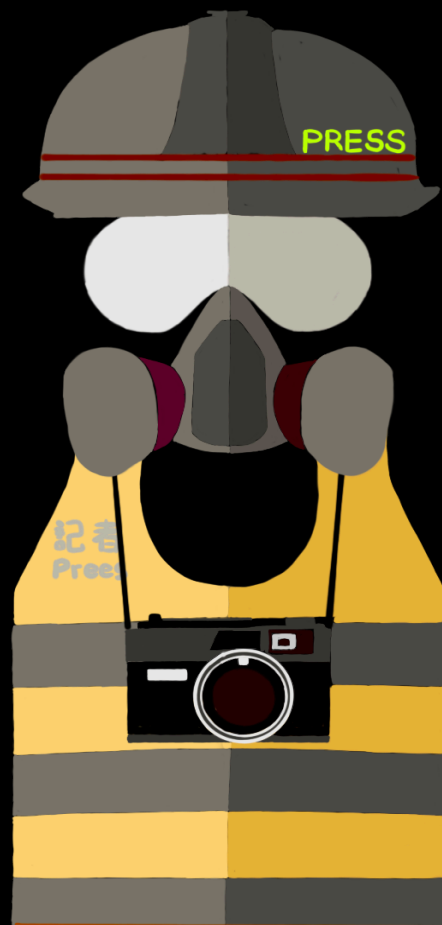
Dressed in florescent vests, gas masks, helmets and cameras, the bearer of news themselves are becoming increasingly visible to the public every since the anti-extradition movement begun a year ago due to a heightened public news awareness brought on by social unrest. During these times of intense conflict, not only has the local media landscape shifted, but it also became a new point of contention for people of different political leanings.

Instead of waiting for the regular morning or evening news, the guerrilla nature of the protest made instant online updates and live stream essential for staying informed and safe, giving online media a huge boost in audience. Stand News and Apple Daily, the two largest pro-democracy leaning news platform accessible online, altogether has more than 4 million followers on Facebook at present, contributing to the city's anti-extradition movement becoming the world's most live streamed protests.

"I remember what it felt like on the night of June 9th when the first conflicts begun and we suddenly had around 3,500 eager live audience for the very first time," said Ronson Chan, deputy assignment editor of the free and crowded funded Stand News who later became one the most recognisable local journalists for his well-loved live stream broadcasts. "We were exhausted and blocked by the riot police that night, but we simply could not cut off the video because people were paying more attention than ever."

Before the anti-extradition movement, Chan became rather exasperated that the most real time audience of a Stand News live stream, even a well produced one with entertaining topics like the Art Basel, only stood at around 600. A year later, it is common for any live stream relevant to the protests to reach more than 10,000 live audiences, a number that he still often find to be surreal.

"It is clear that people are no longer capable of ignoring the present issues. How can anyone not pay attention when common residents are smelling tear gas from their windows and feeling



A typical set of gear local journalists bring on field for protest coverage

Over the past year, Chan has experienced and persisted through almost every kind of imaginable danger on field, including police projectiles, pepper spray, and most recently – a policeman who decided to expose his identity card in front of his live stream camera during a stop and search session. Emotional and traumatic moments were also experienced by his colleagues such as Gwyneth Ho, who famously wept over a moving display of solidarity on the July 1st LegCo break in and was injured while covering the Yuen Long triad attack. Their determination and broadcast narratives added a more human and realistic touch to news, and as a result won over a huge fanbase for themselves and for Stand News.

However, with more attention also came increased scrutiny. Stand News, Apple Daily and Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) and many other pro-democracy leaning media have been publicly reprimanded by politicians and people of the pro-Beijing camp for “not being objective”, while reporters from pro-Beijing leaning media like TVB and Ta Kung Pao are frequently heckled by protestors while attempting to cover demonstrations. A boycott movement rose against TVB and gathered more than ten thousand petition signatures, an off-duty female Apple Daily reporter was attacked by masked men who voice discontent over her profession, and RTHK is both under fire and praised for broadcasting a satirical talk show which the police chief commissioner finds offensive. These incidents roused concern that the society will be further divided by the no-longer-neutral media with both sides driven into their respective echo chambers.

In response to criticism, Chan is candid about his pro-democracy stance and is also in full support of Stand News’s company value. He believes that while there is no complete neutrality in media, their platform seeks to provide a voice for the voiceless using a fair and accurate reporting methodology.

“I let my camera speak for itself and I choose my words professionally during a live stream so as to not be reactionary,” he explained. “When I filmed shots of the riot police beating a non-resisting and bleeding arrestee, I told the audience that the police baton is moving rapidly and the protestor is bleeding and not moving. I will not criticise, nor will I even use the word ‘beat’.”




Regarding the current social polarisation, Chan sighed and mused about growing up during the 1990s, a time he considers as the golden age of Hong Kong, when the economy was booming and when the young had faith in their future in the hands of those who run the city. That distant memory now lays in stark contrast against the bleak moment when a desperate young frontline protestor told him during the June 12th conflict that they won’t have a future anyways if the city is no longer free, which is why they are fighting back with their lives.

“Political opinions have actually always been divided because people feared the Chinese Communist Party after the what happened in 1989, but the majority of the population only cared about building their livelihood back then,” he said.

“ The fact that many more are suddenly concerned about politics right now means they feel threatened and unsafe. Curtailing the media like we are the problem is going to further legitimise these fears.

According to ongoing research done by CUHK later in 2019, the public favour currently lies with pro-democracy leaning medias. The trend clearly shows a decreasing amount of public trust in more pro-establishment leaning media and a increasing amount of faith in pro-democracy leaning media, especially those with high online accessibility. Stand News saw a nearly 30% increase in public trust in comparison to 2018, while perceived pro-establishment leaning TVB, Ta Kung Po and Weng Wei Po saw their lowest level of public trust ever since the research started in 1997.

These perceptions and preferences mainly stem from media ownership and the framing of the protests. Aside from having a vice chairman, Li Ruigang, as a media mogul from mainland China and a former senior Communist Party official in



The police blocked off journalist access to a scene of arrest with cordon lines.

Shanghai, TVB irked the public when their narrative focused more on disruptive behaviour of the protestors rather than the demands, and more so when Carrie Lam chose to accept an interview from TVB where she famously compared dealing with the protestors to her own experience as a mother with a wilful child. Papers like Ta Kung Pao and Wen Wei Po never hold back their criticism, dubbing almost all protests “riots” and the black clad demonstrators “thugs”, which is not always seen as accurate. The relatively neutral SCMP’s reputation among locals also seems to have taken a hit after Alibaba, one of China’s most prominent e-commerce companies, acquired it back in 2016.

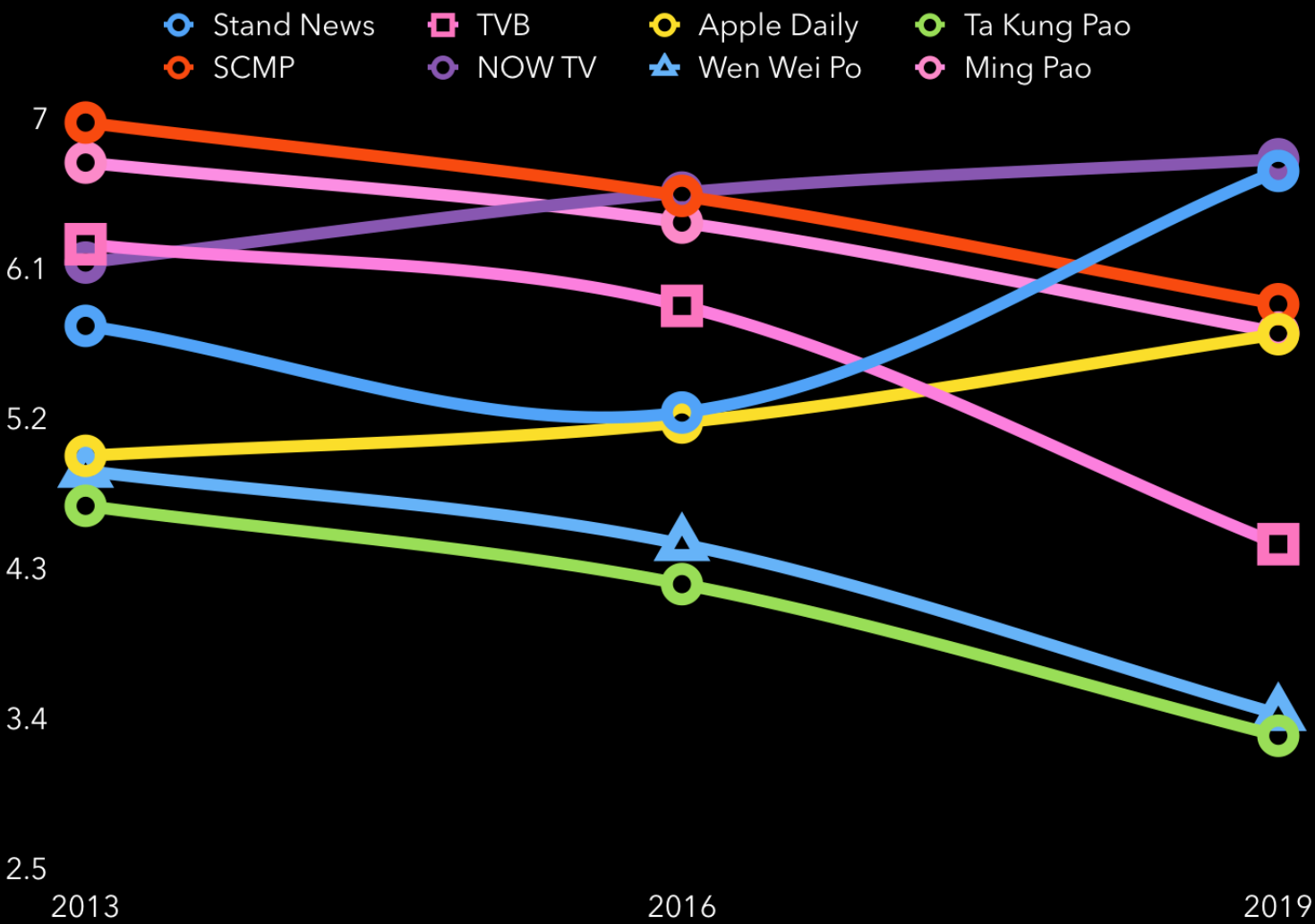
Meanwhile, the press freedom index of the city has also plunged by seven places within a year according to a ranking done by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), citing “cases of violence against the media, mainly by the police and pro-Beijing criminal gangs during the pro-democracy demonstrations”. The mainland part of China is being ranked

separately at the 177th as it achieved the status of the country with the most number of journalist behind bars and sought a “new world media order”, according to the French journalism watchdog.

Amidst these press freedom encroachments, journalists are often thrust into the spotlight to become figures of public scrutiny and reverie. Chan admitted that it is certainly undesirable for journalists to become the news themselves, but since such circumstances have arisen, he seeks to use the attention on him to educate the public about the role of the media during a time when anyone could essentially become an information spreader.

“It is important for me to interact with the audience and explain what we are publishing,” said Chan, “Our ultimate purpose is to raise questions, address suspicions and provide a platform for the discourse of all ideas, not to please any specific group of people.”

Level of Public Trust Over the Course of 6 Years (Data from CUHK Centre of Communication and Public Opinion)



Pro-democracy leaning media such as Stand News, Apple Daily and NOW TV clearly see a rise in public trust.

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TOWARDS

THE

FUTURE





BATTLE SCARRED BY
POLITICAL UNREST AND THE
CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK;
HONG KONG MOVES ON INTO
UNCERTAINTY AS
POLITICAL OPINIONS
AND PLANS DIVERGE

As universities became brutal battlefields during one of the most traumatic weeks of the ongoing pro-democracy protests, a 27 year-old private tutor was caught in the eye of the storm. It was just days before the district councillor election which he is a candidate for, and under any normal circumstances, he should have been standing next to his campaign flags in a final attempt to lobby for votes. But being a student member and a student leader of Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the city's most expansive urban campus, he watched hundreds of student protestors get besieged by the riot police as the campus roiled in flames, while he tearfully pleaded for the police force to exercise constraint during the night's press conferences.

Just like most other young pro-democracy candidates who drew inspiration from the protests during that election, Owan Li's campaign slogan includes "liberate Hong Kong, the revolution of our times", a line frequently misinterpreted as promoting separatist ideals.

Despite his opposition being an experienced pro-Beijing candidate who had ruled the district for eight consecutive years, he prevailed by a margin of more than 250 votes as a young candidate who never held political office before. The pro-democracy camp turned the tables by gained sweeping majority across the city, while few pro-Beijing were able to retain their seats.

"If there is no anti-extradition movement, I wouldn't have won the election," he candidly admitted. "The movement brought political enlightenment upon so many, and they saw that district election as a referendum. The people have spoken, and the indication is clear."

Indeed, the voting turnout rate was at its highest ever, and his opponent was indeed not the only one to take a loss. Out of the 181 candidates sent out by the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress (DAB), the largest and most influential pro-Beijing party of the city, only around one sixth of them were actually voted in. In their largest defeat, even Holden Chow who is the vice-chair of DAB has lost his seat to an unaffiliated and young pro-democracy candidate by more than a thousand votes.

The July 1st break-in and vandalism proved larger public acceptance of less peaceful acts of protest.



没有暴徒祇有暴政!

Since Owan Li took office, he has been working to build his political base within the community, starting with dealing with the coronavirus outbreak. Free masks are being distributed to the needy residents whenever possible, and after receiving multiple confirmed cases within the constituency, he spent an entire night making rounds in the buildings to make sure everyone has the necessary information to remain safe. He aims to build community confidence in the pro-democracy camp starting from the grassroots level by communicating words and ideas to them while giving essential assistance.

“We have to have the empathy to understand the concerns of the community,” he said. “I can encourage them to sign up to vote, connect them with technology update them on current events. This provide momentum for the movement.”

However, as the larger Legislative Council elections are fast approaching within five months, the future still holds uncertainly for both the young politicians and the pro-democracy camp as a whole. Theoretically, the pro-democracy camp does have a chance to win majority in LegCo, but whispers of Beijing’s intention to tighten its political grip on Hong Kong and the possibility that it can disqualify pro-democracy candidates to give the pro-establishment an advantage still largely remains.

The most recent legislator to be made an example of is Legislator Dennis Kwok, who now faces the likelihood of disqualification after harsh condemnation from Beijing. The Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HKMAO) accused him of abusing his power to deliberately stall the election of the House Committee chairperson against the interest of citizens, saying that Kwok has violated his sworn oath. They also questioned Kwok’s loyalty to the Basic Law, pointing out his opposition to the enactment of the national anthem law – a controversial law which will criminalise insulting the China national anthem.

Furthermore, there is a shift in pro-democracy camp political landscape brought on not just by young politicians, but by the environment as a whole. As more traditional members of the camp became more willing to be frontline mediators during conflicts and also more accepting of the protestors’ use of force against police brutality, the question of what is acceptable conduct for younger politicians arises.

On one hand, the newly elected members will likely take more high profile action if the government attempts to dish out any law that can be seen as an infringement upon the city’s freedom. But on flip side, acting out and high profile conduct could make it easier for the Standing Committee to make an interpretation to disqualify them for alleged misconduct. Aside from the practical concern of funding and resource investment, this is a predicament yet to be solved.

“If the peaceful way is not useful, then I would be more aggressive in the LegCo chamber, and there is yet to be a consensus on whether or not I can do that,” he concluded regarding his own future. “If there is no consensus, then there is no point in running.”

The Rise of Unions

Before the anti-extradition movement, Hong Kong remained relatively low in the percentage of unionised workforce despite being a very modernised international financial hub. However, dozens of new pro-democracy leaning unions have sprouted during the anti-extradition movement to bring their political aims into work space, which has since then created an indirect pressure on the government outside of the LegCo chambers.

“Labour rights and democracy have always been inseparable. We believe that there should be a new front of a more sustainable form of protest, a new means to further pressurise our government in upholding the principles of democracy and justice,” said Sammy Ip, organising officer of the Hospital Authority Employee Alliance (HAEA), which was formed half a year ago to protect medical professionals from political persecution.

The HAEA union strike



The HAEA has since then attracted immense media attention and controversy after they organised a 7,000 strong strike to urge the government to fully close the border with mainland China upon a coronavirus pandemic that people feared would be as detrimental to the city as the SARS outbreak in 2003, which had claimed the lives of medical professionals back then. Their strike has impeded hospital operations for days, especially in the emergency room and the paediatrics. While most pro-democracy leaning people viewed their strike as a justified protest aimed at keeping the city safe, others saw this as medical workers shirking their responsibilities to their patients.

But the HAEA is not one to shy away from being vocal, for they believe that everything is political. Ip elaborated that over 90% of funding of the Hospital Authority comes from the government, while local medical schools also receive significant fundings from the government to train up the medical professionals. It is for those reasons that she believes that the healthcare system is intrinsically entangled with politics.

"After our strike in February, our management has made themselves very clear in stating that there will be consequences for those who were on strike. They have yet to take any collective actions against all of us, but we suspect this is only because of the COVID-19 pandemic right now," said Ip, in reference to a leaked document reported by local media in which the Chief Executive Carrie Lam has stated that those who were on strike "should not be allowed to work in hospitals".

Similar suspected cases or threat of political persecution in the work force has also been witnessed in other labour sectors and received pushback from relevant unions and the public. Notable incidents include Cathay Pacific allegedly firing members of the cabin crew after questioning them on their private social media activity, and the secretary of education threatening to cancel the headmaster status of school principals if they do not cooperate when the education bureau decides to investigate teachers who have made political insinuations online.

Thus, Ip states that HAEA does anticipate disciplinary actions in retaliation from government once the COVID-19 pandemic is under control, but remains adamant that the union will do everything in its power to protect their members when the time comes because their strike is legal and protected by the Basic Law of Hong Kong.

"We will liaison with other unions and parties and we will extend our fight beyond the healthcare sector," she said, "Like the old Chinese proverb says, 'the best healers heal the nation, the mediocre ones heal the people, and the worst healers only heal the disease'".

A demonstrator symbolically protesting on Oct 1st, China's National Day



A Question of Compromise

After nearly a year of political turmoil that is exacerbated by the global coronavirus pandemic, the overall mood in Hong Kong between different political sides remains confrontational. Any anniversary days of tragic events puts the city on edge for possible conflict, while frequent peaceful demonstrations inside shopping malls would still lead to the riot police barging in and disrupting all businesses. As pro-democracy people start to gain more power in more areas than just politics which will make ruling more difficult for the government, scholars are beginning to worry what would become of Hong Kong if such state of conflict is here to stay.

"Even without the COVID-19 pandemic, Hong Kong is headed for a recession. We are not only going to have political turmoil, we are also going to have a livelihood crisis of industry and companies," said Anthony Cheung, professor of public administration at the Education University of Hong Kong and former Secretary for Transport and Housing.

As an experienced politician who has experienced the colonial times and was formerly the vice-chairman of the Democratic party before quitting in 2004, he is most concerned that neither the pro-democracy camp nor Beijing will be willing to compromise, and if that is the case, he believes that both Hong Kong and China will suffer.

Analysing the original design for the “one country two system” framework, he said that for a constitutional one party state to co-exist with a semi-autonomous but subordinate region with a very different political system is a contradictory idea to begin with. The reason why Beijing accepted this system is because it was their only option to retrieve Hong Kong without it becoming independent or for it to remain under British rule. This arrangement itself is a compromise, and for two antagonistic ideas to work together would require even more mutual compromise – something he believes to be lacking these days.

“The extradition bill was poorly handled and the government did make a grave mistake by underestimating public sentiment and being too arrogant to listen, but right now we have to consider what is going to be the likely result if it becomes clear to Beijing that Hong Kong is in open revolt,” said Cheung.

In his words, if the current chaos continues, the result would be “a self fulfilling prophecy and a one country one system”; if the army eventually has to step in and put an end to the protests, that would be the end of “one country two systems”, and that outcome would be in the interest of neither Hong Kong nor Beijing.

“Right now we are stuck in a vicious cycle that only mutual trust can fix,” he said. “We all need to stop feeling like the other side only wants to destroy us.”

A clash of ideology ▼



From Beijing’s point of view, they are worried about Hong Kong and they could not fathom why local people seem to care little about national security. While Hong Kong people are frustrated by the slow or lack of progress in democratisation, Beijing has been backtracking the democratisation process out of the belief that once a pan-democrat is elected to rule, then there will be a regime change and a large counter revolutionary conspiracy. However, since there are economic affairs that cannot be done in Shanghai and Beijing but can be achieved in Hong Kong, the incentive to retain the “one country two systems” still remains.

“The ‘one country two systems’ is subjected to interpretation, meaning it can be tightened and can be relaxed. What we need is a mutually beneficial deal, said Cheung. ”

He suggests that Beijing should start by addressing the anxieties that has always been there even back in the 1980s. Many migrated back then out of fear of the Communist Party and pessimism was pervasive. So if Beijing wants to implement legislations like the Article 23 national security law, they have to give Hong Kong people some reassurance, such as simultaneously granting genuine universal suffrage.

Meanwhile, he also emphasised that the Hong Kong government cannot solve political problems by recklessly handing out money and jeopardising their economic balance. The pro-democracy camp by theory could gain majority during the upcoming legislative election, and that would make them a formidable force which whatever government financial attempts to win back the people’s favour might not be able to salvage.

“Anything is possible at this point,” Cheung concluded, “But if the pro-democracy camp does gain majority, there are other pressing issues to be solved and I hope they will do much more than shout for the ‘five demands’ in the LegCo chamber.”

*A prayer gathering for those
who have been injured or
might have lost their lives
during the protests.*





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