

These Hongkongers Are Not 'a Few Violent Thugs'

One major reason why the Hong Kong protests have been so successful at capturing international attention is because they are having a huge impact on the tiny island nation's thriving economy – whether through 11 weeks of massive street demonstrations, the sit-ins at the main airport, or widespread worker strikes throughout the city.

What this shows, really, is that the protests are hardly the passing whim of a few troublemakers. They have the potential to enjoin and affect all corners of Hong Kong life, if not markets abroad. But the more impact they have, the more chance there is of a crackdown by China. When that might happen, nobody knows.

The first sign of how committed the movement is to thwarting business as usual came on August 9, when demonstrators occupied Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) for five days, resulting in mass cancelations and delays worldwide. Losses due to those sit-ins have been estimated at \$76 million.

The airport protests were notable not only for their financial disruption. At one point, as tensions escalated inside HKIA, a panicked police officer [pointed his gun at protesters](#) and journalists after he was beaten with his own baton, the same baton he was moments earlier using to bludgeon unarmed demonstrators.

One of China's major air carriers, Cathay Pacific Airways, ended up stranding roughly 55,000 of its global passengers, canceling about 600 flights in Hong Kong alone. Due to the prolonged protests at HKIA, Cathay Pacific has seen their shares plunge to lows not seen since [June 2009](#).

Following the turmoil between the protest-stricken Cathay

Pacific and the Chinese government, two of the airport staff and two pilots were fired, while CEO Rupert Hogg and his deputy Paul Loo, who was the chief customer and commercial officer, [have resigned](#). The layoffs and resignations reportedly came after internal disputes concerning the personal freedoms and speech rights of Cathay Pacific's employees in Hong Kong, with many in the city hearing rumors that Rupert Hogg [refused to hand over employee lists](#) at Beijing's request and quit (or was forced to resign) over his handling of the situation.

Chinese national Tang Kin-wing [will replace Hogg](#), a Briton, in an attempt to further appease the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC), which has openly rebuked and sanctioned the airline and its staff as a result of the protests at HKIA. Air China Limited – and its parent organization, China National Aviation Holding Co., which is 100 percent owned by the Chinese Central Government – holds a 29.99 percent stake in Cathay Pacific Airways. And Swire Group, through Swire Pacific Limited, holds 45 percent of the airline's shares – a total of nearly 75 percent control between the two.

More banners, though, have been appearing in and around tourist hot spots, including the HKIA, with the message: "Sorry for the inconvenience. We are fighting for the future of our home."

Now in its third month, the Hong Kong crisis has deteriorated to the point that even lawyers have turned against the Hong Kong Police Force and the Department of Justice. On August 7, 2019, outside the Court of Final Appeal, [thousands of lawyers marched for a second time to protest](#) selective prosecutions and the politically focused persecutions sweeping across the city.

With a majority of government prosecutors being hired from private firms (like [Paul Wang](#) from [Haldanes](#) and [Arthur](#)

[Wong](#) from [Gilt Chambers](#), raising concerns of a conflict of interest between the public and the government), a show of force by lawyers to stand with the demonstrators and against the Department of Justice speaks volumes about the intensity of the circumstances in Hong Kong today.

A few days before that, thousands of civil servants [took to the streets in support of the protesters](#) and against police tactics that have resulted in violent confrontations with civilians. They followed another peaceful demonstration on similar grounds by medical workers. In addition, strikes by financial, construction, transportation, and aviation workers have all been conducted since the beginning of the month.

Just across the border in Shenzhen, though, thousands of Chinese paramilitary troops, called the People's Armed Police Force (PAP), stand ready to squash the unrest in Hong Kong, which has surpassed in scale and violence the [riots by pro-communist forces in 1967](#). China seems poised to strike: Facebook and Twitter have recently shut down over 200,000 accounts associated [with a state-directed disinformation campaign](#) against the protesters. That campaign has likened the dissidents to cockroaches and ISIS, thus developing the rationale for a future crackdown.

Many Hongkongers believe that some of the 6,000 Chinese soldiers who are already legally stationed in Hong Kong have secretly infiltrated the riot police. The United Nations and Amnesty International have condemned the violence by police.

After 11 weeks of protests, there seems to be no end in sight – not even with the beginning of the school term in the fall, or the stringent tariffs imposed by the United States on China, or China's upcoming 70th anniversary on October 1. The movement has been labeled by Chinese state media as a "Color Revolution," and is viewed by most mainland Chinese as a disgraceful and shameful stain on China's image and sovereignty.

Until Carrie Lam, chief executive of Hong Kong, concedes to all of the protesters' demands, however, secondary school students have agreed to start boycotting classes every Monday.

Meanwhile, last Saturday, thousands of black-clad teachers [took to the streets](#) in the pouring rain as a thunderstorm struck to demand greater democratic reforms and support the students who comprise the bulk of protesters. With more than 22,000 joining the teachers' rally organized by the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, the educators marched on Carrie Lam's residence at the Government House and chanted slogans denouncing the violent and illegal tactics used by the police.

The Hong Kong government isn't likely to agree to the movement's [five major demands](#), which include universal suffrage, the withdrawal of the extradition bill, and an inquiry into police brutality. But the demonstrators don't appear willing to abandon those demands either, even if the Chinese army and PAP march across their border and declare martial law. They seem to have accepted that their autonomy is at stake. The ideological rift only widens as it becomes more public.

Scholars, business professionals, and pundits alike say that Chinese tanks and soldiers occupying Asia's economic hub would be the end of the "one country, two systems" promise that has kept Hongkongers' freedoms, personal and financial, mostly intact since the British handover of rule to China in 1997. Yet even that promise has a shelf life: China only agreed to guarantee it for 50 years, until 2047.

For these demonstrators, there is no better time to test it.

"Be water!" is the protesters' chant, a mantra they have adopted from Hong Kong martial arts legend Bruce Lee. To "be water" means to adapt to one's surroundings, to flow and be

flexible in the most rigid and difficult of environments. And even the most powerful rocks can be worn down over time.

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