Congressional-Executive Commission on China

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“Hollowing Out Hong Kong As a Global Information Hub”

**Testimony of Yin-ting Mak, Press Freedom Advocate, Correspondent of Radio France International, and leader, Hong Kong Journalists Association**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the commission, for your concern about Hong Kong.

Hong Kong has long been a beacon for press freedom and publishing in Asia, and especially in relation to China, where there is no free media and the state controls all journalists.

I have been a working journalist for thirty-five years, and have headed the Hong Kong Journalists Association for nine different terms. I am the co-author for the annual report on freedom of expression in Hong Kong for the last two decades. I initiated the annual Press Freedom Index in Hong Kong as well.

According to the government, there are 68 daily newspapers, 607 periodicals, and six electronic media—television, radio and cable. There are nearly 3000 local and international journalists. Many international media such as The New York Times, CNN, The Wall Street Journal, Reuters, and Bloomberg make Hong Kong their regional hub.

But our media freedom is not as healthy as those numbers would suggest.

Freedom of expression and of the press have taken a sharp downward turn in Hong Kong, with the dive particularly apparent since President Xi Jinping took power in 2012.

An annual press freedom survey conducted by Reporters Without Borders shows that Hong Kong has dropped from being ranked 54th in 2012 to 73rd this year, out of some 180 countries in the world.

Self-censorship is on the rise as China’s influence increases—whether it is through the co-option of media workers or the buyout of media outlets.

Sometimes, mere public statements by Chinese officials are enough to influence the reporting by the Hong Kong media, without the need to issue direct instructions.

According to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Journalists Association earlier this year, *70 percent* of media workers who responded said they felt uneasy when they reported opinions that deviated from the stance of central government in Beijing.

And 22 percent of journalists said they had come under pressure from supervisors while reporting on issues related to Hong Kong independence. The figures carry even more weight when we consider that political reporters – who would report on these issues - make up only a small percentage of the total number of respondents.

Adding to these existing pressures, the changes to Hong Kong's extradition law will threaten journalists because it will chill reporting, make reporters and editors vulnerable to pressure from Beijing, and hollow out Hong Kong’s status as a global information hub.

With incitement of any crime listed in the schedule of the bill and therefore an extraditable offence, the media—whose nature is report on things that have impact—can easily fall foul of it.

What is more, Chinese government officials are notorious for making up offences to stop media from reporting.

The legal changes will mean Hong Kong can no longer be a “safe harbour” for reporters covering sensitive news in mainland China because the proposed amendment allows the Chinese government to request the return of the targeted reporters.

The natural consequence will be either a decrease in the quantity and quality of news on China—or the exodus of valuable news workers to other places where China cannot request extradition. Or both.

These outcomes will devastate Hong Kong as an information and financial center for the region.

It is therefore in the interest of Hong Kong, the US, as well as other parts of the world to urge the Hong Kong government to withdraw the bill.

Thank you for your support of press freedom in Hong Kong.