

Flame of liberty

How Hong Kong's riots burned through the city's economy

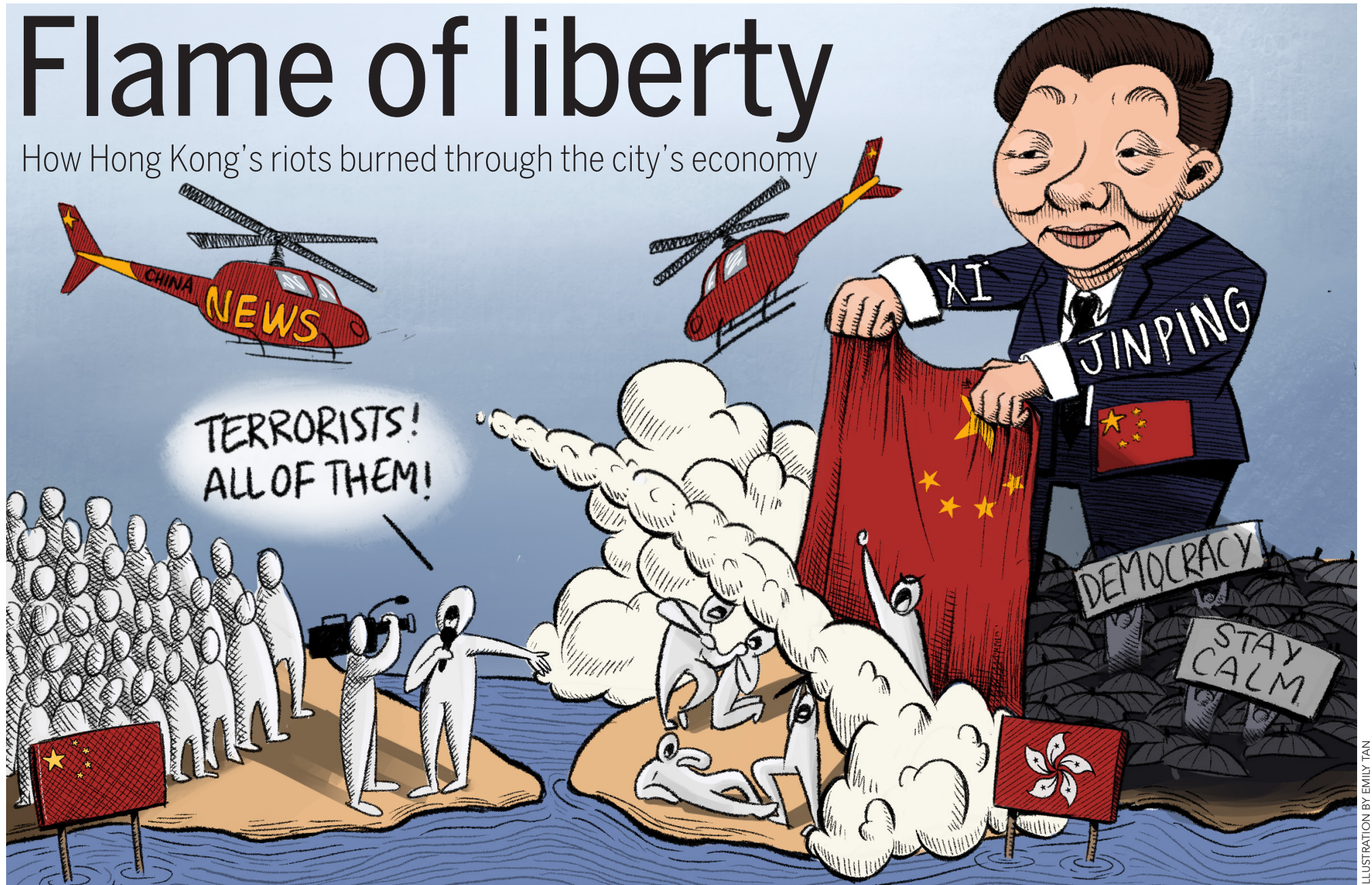


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It started off peaceful: hundreds of thousands of people marching the streets of Hong Kong, fighting for their right to a due democratic process and for the identity of a nation. And then, suddenly, it took a turn for the worst. Spirits clashed, fires flew, the streets filled with tear gas and rubber bullets were unleashed on citizens. What had begun as a peaceful protest for the right to remain autonomous had become a full on riot: a near declaration of war against one of the most influential countries.

In March 2019, the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation, also known as the Hong Kong extradition bill, was published. Hongkongers are concerned that the bill creates a loophole for the Chinese central government to legally arrest anyone they want with complete compliance with the Hong Kong government.

The conflict climaxed on June 5, when over a million protesters marched the streets calling for Chief Executive Carrie Lam's resignation. Then on July 8, the anniversary of Hong Kong's return to China, protesters broke into the Legislative Council building, smashing glass doors and vandalizing the inside of the building, according to the South China Morning

Post. It was the first act of outright violence as a form of protest.

"It was chaotic," said Catherine Tsui, a current high school student in Hong Kong. "It was not legal, for one. It was beyond what the demonstration was about at that point."

Despite the good-natured reason of fighting for a democratic process, there is a troubling undertone to the direction the protests have turned, especially when considering the slogan of one of the various protest groups: "Bring back the glory of Hong Kong."

"The tone has changed a little bit since the airport protests," said history and social science teacher Byron Stevens. "That closing [of] an airport can have so many business and personal family implications. If [protesting] continues without any kind of resolution, that economic impact will become more significant."

Furthermore, China has taken to misinformation campaigns on social media in order to destabilize the movement in Hong Kong, even going as far as to compare them to terrorist groups.

Despite the international support behind the fight against the communist regime, the protests have done significant damage to the city's economy, with over 200 flights cancelled on Aug. 12 and a 30-50 percent drop in tourists visiting stores, according to Bloomberg. These protests may also taint the city's reputation as the reliable gateway to China.

"People will start to question whether Hong Kong can guarantee that people will remain safe, whether the government will be supportive of businesses," said a Harker alum who emigrated from China before his sophomore year. "It casts a shadow upon Hong Kong's stability, which will eventually cause businesses to lose faith."

Lam has since pronounced the extradition bill "dead," with no plans to revive it, thanks to the international support this movement is receiving. The protests continue, however, in the face of the bill being shelved by the Hong Kong administration.

"[The] bill has been shelved, they got what they want[ed], but [the problem] hasn't gone away: it's still the same leaders in charge, [and the Hongkongers] see the subtle and not-so-subtle changes in the way they're being governed from Beijing," Stevens said.

For now, the city stands as an example of the power of activism and democracy in today's society, especially against a system that aims to control its people. Yet, Catherine leaves us with an ominous message about the line between the fires that fuel the creation of a new country or the destruction of one.

"[Protestors] are destroying the reputation of Hong Kong," she said. "Just damaging so many things, that when you find the democracy you're fighting for, you realize that you're left with a place that's so ruined by the process of fighting for the democracy that it's not worth it."



NICOLE TIAN/NINA GEE



NICOLE TIAN/NINA GEE

Talk around campus:

What do you think about the Hong Kong riots?



ESHA GOHIL

"It's a tricky situation. China needs Hong Kong to stay the way it is more than the rest of the world does. I think a peaceful resolution is in everybody's interest."

SHAUN JAHSHAN
MANDARIN TEACHER



ESHA GOHIL

"Their freedom is not being respected, but when they start taking over airports, I think they're going to lose the support of the world."

JONATHAN RIM
HISTORY TEACHER



PROVIDED BY AMANDA CHEUNG

"I hope it ends with the extradition bill completely being trashed; however, I don't think that's feasible given the political turmoil in the area currently."

AMANDA CHEUNG (12)
STUDENT WITH FAMILY FROM HONG KONG



NICOLE TIAN/NINA GEE

Source for statistics: Washington Post