

# **Hongkong: After the disappearances of five booksellers pro-democracy activists warn of a crackdown against dissent**

Monday 18 January 2016, by [PHILLIPS Tom](#) (Date first published: 4 January 2016).

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## **Hong Kong activist hits out at Beijing in video over missing booksellers**

**After fifth disappearance, umbrella movement's Agnes Chow criticises China regime in video that has gone viral.**

A young pro-democracy activist in Hong Kong has released a video, which has gone viral, attacking Beijing's campaign of "political suppression" following the disappearances of five booksellers.

Agnes Chow, a 19-year-old student who was a prominent figure during the former colony's 2014 "umbrella movement" protests, posted the five-minute video on Facebook on Saturday, three days after a bookshop owner, Lee Bo, became the latest member of Hong Kong's publishing community to vanish.

By Monday lunchtime Chow's video – titled "An urgent cry from Hong Kong" and filmed in English – had been viewed more than 820,000 times.

In her video message, Chow, a second-year student at Hong Kong's Baptist University, hit out at Chinese authorities over the apparent abductions of five booksellers who specialised in tabloid-style tomes about the private lives of Communist party officials.

"I have an important message that I hope to spread to the world," says Chow, who is also a prominent member of the student protest group Scholarism.

"Unlike mainland China, Hong Kong does not adopt authoritarian governance. Citizens who sell politically sensitive books are not supposed to be suppressed by any threats of disappearance and imprisonment, with the existence of freedom of press and speech."

Chow recorded the video message after Lee, 65, went missing in Hong Kong last Wednesday.

One of the others who have gone missing, Gui Minhai, 51, was apparently abducted from his beachfront holiday home in Thailand. Supporters suspect Chinese security officials, possibly angered by the publishers' books, have spirited them into custody in the mainland.

An editorial in the Communist party-controlled *Global Times* newspaper on Monday lashed out at the booksellers, who, it claimed, “relied on causing trouble in mainland China to survive”. It made no comment on the whereabouts of the missing publishers but said their books were filled with “vicious fabrication”.

Chow said the apparent abduction of Lee Bo called into question the “one country, two systems” formula that guarantees citizens of Hong Kong far greater freedoms than their counterparts in mainland China.

“In the past we were safe because we lived in Hong Kong instead of mainland China,” she said. “However, the circumstances have changed with the abduction.”

Speaking to the Guardian on Monday, Chow said she had made the English-language video in order to raise global awareness of the apparent abductions and what she said was Beijing’s increasing meddling in Hong Kong’s affairs.

“I am really surprised by the huge numbers of views,” she said. “I didn’t really expect so many people to watch my video but I think that it shows [how much] Hong Kong people [care] about this issue.”

She added: “We feel like Hong Kong is becoming more dangerous – more and more dangerous – and [we feel] the erosion of the ‘one country, two systems’ [when] even something like cross-border abduction can happen in Hong Kong.

“Political suppression in Hong Kong didn’t start today but we feel like more and more political suppression will happen after this cross-border abduction.”

At the end of her video, Chow says the disappearance of the five Hong Kong booksellers reminded her of the words of Martin Niemöller, the German pastor who opposed the Nazis.

“First they came for the activists, and I did not speak out because I was not an activist,” Chow says. “Then they came for the journalists, and I did not speak out because I was not a journalist. Then they came for the bookseller, and I did not speak out because I was not a bookseller. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me.”

Beijing has not commented so far about the missing publishers. But Hong Kong’s pro-Beijing chief executive, CY Leung, was forced to speak out against Lee Bo’s apparent abduction on Monday amid growing anger from pro-democracy groups.

Leung said it would be “unacceptable and unconstitutional” for mainland security officials to operate in Hong Kong, the South China Morning Post reported. “No other law enforcement agencies, outside of Hong Kong, has such authority,” he said.

Writing in the same newspaper, the columnist Alex Lo said answers were needed. “The midnight knock on the door is not something we have had to worry about in Hong Kong. But if we do now, that would be the end of our way of life,” he said.

**Tom Phillips** in Beijing

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<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/04/hong-kong-activist-agnes-chow-beijing-missing-book-sellers-viral-video>

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## **Hong Kong politicians call for Beijing to explain booksellers' 'abductions'**

**Legislators say suspected snatching of Lee Bo in Hong Kong, after four colleagues vanished in China and Thailand, violates 'one country, two systems' rule.**

Politicians in Hong Kong are demanding answers from Beijing over the mysterious disappearance of a group of booksellers who specialised in tabloid-style exposés about China's communist leaders.

Five men linked to Sage Communications – a Hong Kong publisher known for its salacious tomes on the private lives of mainland politicians – have apparently been abducted since October, in what some suspect is a Beijing-backed bid to silence the company.

The missing include Gui Minhai, the company's 51-year-old owner, who vanished from his beachfront apartment in Thailand on 17 October, and three employees who were last seen at around the same time in the Chinese cities of Dongguan and Shenzhen.

On Friday, it emerged that Gui's business partner, 65-year-old Lee Bo, had also disappeared.

Lee's wife, Sophie Choi, told reporters her husband appeared to have been snatched on Wednesday afternoon after being lured to a warehouse in Hong Kong where his company stored its sensational tomes on communist party chieftains.

Claudia Mo, an outspoken member of Hong Kong's legislative council for the Civic party, said Lee's apparent abduction – which many suspect is the work of mainland security agents – was a violation of the "one country, two systems" formula under which Hong Kong has operated since its return to Chinese control in 1997.

Under that formula, mainland police are forbidden from operating in the former British colony.

"It seems like the public security people from the mainland have come down to Hong Kong to literally kidnap this missing person," Mo, who has written to security officials in the former colony demanding an explanation, told the Guardian on Sunday.

"It is a huge attack on Hong Kong's 'one country, two systems'. What they have done is completely unthinkable and this is giving people cold chills. If that can happen to the booksellers today it is going to happen to you and me tomorrow and it is going to happen to the whole of Hong Kong the day after. It is just more than scary. Hong Kong is becoming increasingly mainlandised, meaning Chinese communist-ised."

Dennis Kwok, also a Civic party lawmaker, said he would file an urgent question over the case at a session of Hong Kong's parliament on Monday.

"A lot of Hong Kong people are extremely concerned about this. This kind of stuff is not supposed to happen in Hong Kong. We are naturally very concerned – especially with the political background of this case that he is the publisher of books that are banned in [mainland] China," he said. "I am trying to get some answers from the Hong Kong government and I believe that they are making contacts with [Chinese] authorities to see what is happening."

In a letter to the Hong Kong official responsible for mainland affairs, Kwok wrote: "If proven, the incident would deal a fatal blow to 'one country, two systems' and Hong Kong's judicial independence."

Choi told reporters her husband had been spooked by his colleagues' apparent abductions and had been avoiding trips to mainland China in recent weeks.

"He thought it was quite safe in Hong Kong," she was quoted as saying by the *Apple Daily* newspaper.

Choi said her husband had failed to return home on Wednesday and later called from a mainland number asking her to "be careful" and to take care of the couple's 25-year-old son.

"He said he wouldn't be back so soon and he was assisting in an investigation," she told local television.

Choi said she believed her husband had been calling from Shenzhen, a city in southern China, but a Hong Kong police source told the South China Morning Post there was no record of Lee having left the former colony.

The disappearances in Thailand, and now Hong Kong, which is supposed to enjoy judicial independence from the mainland, have stoked fears about Beijing's growing willingness to track down its opponents overseas.

Kwok said the whereabouts of the five missing booksellers remained a mystery. "There are a lot of questions at the moment. Where is Mr Lee? What happened to him and his colleagues? Where is his location? How [did he] apparently get to Shenzhen ... without any exit record in Hong Kong immigration?" he said.

Kwok dismissed speculation that a criminal gang might be responsible for the disappearances, noting that Lee had told his wife he was "assisting" an investigation.

"It seems like authorities are the ones who are holding him and not anyone else," he said. "If you were taken by triads you wouldn't say you were assisting an investigation. It seems he is being held by the authorities in mainland China."

In an interview with the *Guardian* just weeks before he went missing, Lee Bo said his colleagues' suspected abductions had sent shockwaves through Hong Kong's publishing community.

"All my authors are a bit scared now. They are all afraid the same thing will happen to them," he said.

Lee said he could not explain what was happening but suspected it was connected to a mysterious book that Gui had been preparing to publish. Asked what the book was about, Lee said: "Nobody knows."

Speaking on Sunday, Mo said: "I wish the Hong Kong security officials, including the police, would speak up and speak out and tell the entire population what exactly they knew about this case and ultimately, of course, Lee Bo should be allowed to come back home soonest."

Beijing has so far refused to comment on the growing scandal.

In early December a foreign ministry official declined to respond to a question from the *Guardian*

about suspicions that Chinese authorities had been involved in Gui's disappearance.

"I'm not aware of the specific case that you mentioned," spokesperson Hua Chunying said.

Bei Ling, a Chinese poet and dissident who has known Lee's wife since the 90s, said Choi had last heard from her husband when he called at about 11am on Saturday morning.

"He said everything was OK," Bei said.

Choi then asked her husband where he was. "He hung up the phone."

**Tom Phillips** in Beijing

\* The Guardian. Sunday 3 January 2016 12.58 GMT Last modified on Monday 4 January 2016 16.21 GMT:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/03/hong-kong-politicians-call-beijing-comment-lee-po-editor-abduction>

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### **Missing Hong Kong bookseller 'assisting in investigation': wife**

A missing Hong Kong employee from a publisher of books critical of China was "assisting in an investigation", his wife said Saturday, as police also probe the disappearance of his colleagues.

Lee Bo went missing Wednesday night and is the fifth employee of Hong Kong-based publisher Mighty Current to disappear.

The incident adds to growing unease that freedoms in the semi-autonomous Chinese city are being eroded, with fears the five men may have been detained by Chinese authorities.

"He said he wouldn't be back so soon and he was assisting in an investigation," Lee's wife Sophie Choi told Hong Kong's Cable Television, describing a call she had with Lee the night he failed to return home.

It was not clear what investigation Lee was referring to.

"I asked him if it was related to the case before. He said 'yes', regarding that case where a few others had gone missing," Choi said.

Police said in a statement they were investigating the disappearance of Lee and three of the other missing men.

It made no comment on the fifth man.

Deputy leader Carrie Lam tried to reassure the public.

"The Hong Kong government cares about its people's wellbeing... police are working on this case," she told reporters.

Choi previously told AFP she started looking for Lee on Wednesday night after he failed to return home for dinner and she reported him missing to police on Friday.

He later called to say “everything was alright” from a number that did not belong to him and originated from the neighbouring mainland Chinese city of Shenzhen, Choi had said.

Another source told AFP that Lee, 65, was last seen in Hong Kong on Wednesday at the publisher’s warehouse, which he is in charge of.

### **‘Concern and anxiety’**

Hong Kong was handed back to China by Britain in 1997 and enjoys liberties not seen on the mainland, but there are fears these are under threat.

The publishing company’s general manager Lui Bo, an employee Cheung Jiping and bookstore manager Lam Wing-kei are also apparently missing after disappearing in southern China in October.

Local media said Gui Minhai, a Swedish national and co-owner of Mighty Current, failed to return from a holiday in Thailand in October.

Hong Kong police are investigating the disappearance of Lui, Cheung, Lam and Lee — they gave no information on Gui.

Sweden’s embassies in Bangkok and Beijing are reportedly investigating Gui’s disappearance.

The Hong Kong Journalists Association sent a letter to the Chinese Liaison Office — Beijing’s representative office in the city — urging authorities to reveal whether the men are in the mainland.

“The incident has caused a high degree of concern and anxiety to Hong Kong residents,” the statement said.

Hong Kong publisher Yao Wentian, who was due to release a dissident’s book about Chinese President Xi Jinping, was reported to have been detained for almost three months in January 2014.

The following May, Yao, then 73, was sentenced by a Chinese court to 10 years in jail for smuggling.

### **AFP**

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<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2016/01/03/missing-hong-kong-bookseller-assisting-in-investigation-wife/>

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### **P.S.**

\* HK Free Press. 3 January 2016 12:44:

<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2016/01/03/missing-hong-kong-bookseller-assisting-in-investigation-wife/>