Hong Kong bookseller defies orders, leads protest

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Lam Wing-kei, center, participates in a protest march with pro-democracy lawmakers and supporters in Hong Kong yesterday.

Photo: Reuters

A Hong Kong bookseller who said he was blindfolded, interrogated and detained in China led a protest march yesterday defying Beijing as pressure grows for authorities to answer questions over the case.

Lam Wing-kei ([] [] []) is one of five booksellers who went missing last year — all worked for a publisher known for salacious titles about leading Chinese politicians.

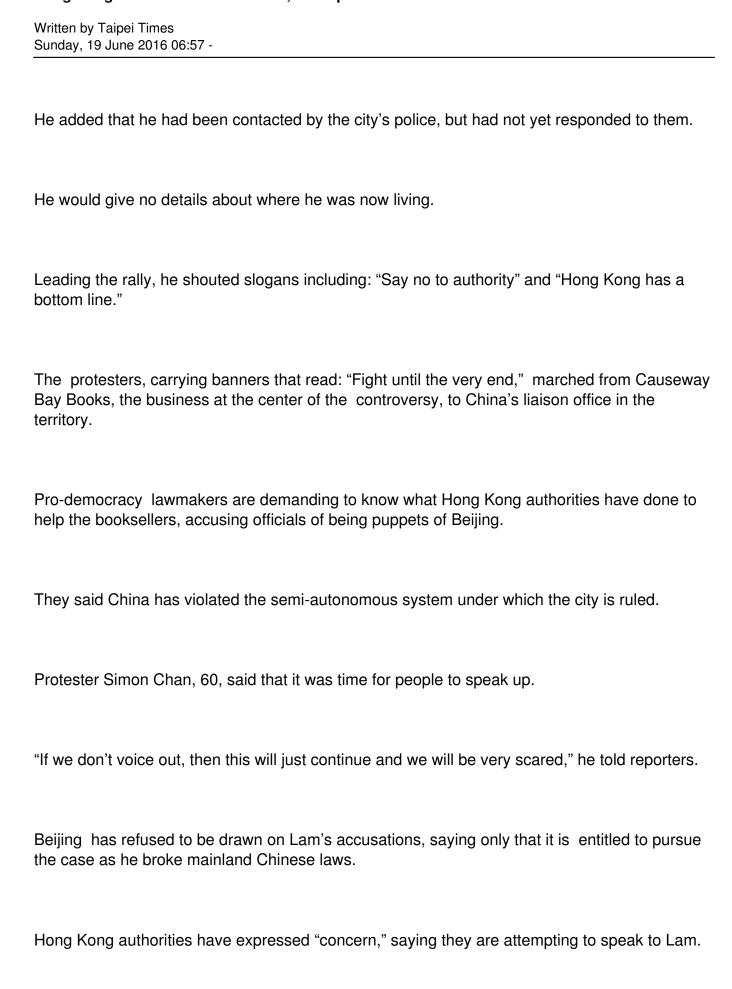
The case heightened fears that Beijing was tightening its grip on semi-autonomous Hong Kong, with Lam's explosive revelations earlier this week about how he had been detained in China further fanning many residents' concerns.

Lam yesterday told reporters that he did not feel afraid after breaking bail, refusing to return to the mainland and breaking silence on his detention.

"I don't feel scared, because there are so many people here," said Lam, surrounded by more than 1,000 supporters who had gathered in Hong Kong to protest against his detention and to demand answers from the city's authorities over the booksellers' case.

"I'm happy to be back in Hong Kong," he said.

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Pro-democracy lawmakers are urging the Hong Kong government to admit what it knows about the case.

"I request that the government clearly explain what they have done to help Lam or the other Causeway Bay bookstore workers in these past eight months. If they don't, then they're not our government," Hong Kong Legislator Frederick Fung (□□□) said.

In an editorial yesterday, the *South China Morning Post*, which has recently been criticized for being too Beijing-friendly, also demanded that both sides "come clean."

Lam said he was allowed to return to Hong Kong on Tuesday last week on condition that he go back over the border on Thursday, bringing with him a hard disk listing the bookstore's clients.

He said he did not want to hand over the records and decided to speak out instead.

Lam is one of four Hong Kong booksellers under investigation in mainland China for trading books banned by Beijing.

The fifth, Lee Bo ($\square \square$), the only bookseller to disappear on Hong Kong soil, has said he is simply helping with inquiries and is currently back in the city.

He has rejected Lam's claims that Lee told him he had been taken to the mainland against his will.

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