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Asia - Hongkong

Hong Kong - Self-censorship

Foreign media censor own coverage of Hong Kong protests

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GreatFire reports that the Chinese-language versions of Wall Street Journal and Reuters initially ignored the protests

As mainland China steps up its efforts to suppress information about the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, the online censorship monitoring website GreatFire.org has reported that several international media censored their own coverage in the initial stages at least.

[The protests](#) began on 28 September, when thousands of Hong Kong residents demonstrated peacefully outside the central government's headquarters in the territory to demand more democratic freedoms and Hong Kong chief executive C. Y. Leung's resignation.

The protests were one of the lead stories on the English-language websites of Reuters and the Wall Street Journal on 28 September, but their Chinese versions did not mention them. The Wall Street Journal's Chinese version [began covering](#) them after 24 hours while Reuters' Chinese version did not cover them for at least 48 hours.

When GreatFire.org pointed this out, Wall Street Journal editor [Gerard Baker](#) and the editor of its Chinese service, [Li Yuan](#), responded with tweets denying any self-censorship and listing articles about China that it had published in September. GreatFire.org received no response from Reuters.

"We are very disturbed by the increasing tendency of certain foreign media to censor their coverage of Hong Kong because it reflects an increase in the regime's grip on an information channel that one would have supposed to be less vulnerable to interference by the local authorities," said Benjamin Ismail, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk.

"This is a trend that has been seen for some years. In addition to descriptions by Hong Kong journalists of the self-censorship prevailing within their own news organizations, there has been a growing number of editorial decisions by foreign media that are, to say the least, surprising and are usually the result of constant pressure from the government in Beijing."

Ismail added: *"The foreign media must not submit to blackmail by the Chinese authorities and, on the contrary, should spearhead the resistance against censorship."*

Photos of the "Occupy Central" movement have reached the mainland although the Chinese [authorities have blocked](#) the photo-sharing website Instagram and certain key-words on Weibo, and have deleted many posts, comments and blogs.

At the same time, a completely different take has been given on the events. The demonstrations were either portrayed as a handful of extremists disturbing public order, or as simply a gathering in anticipation of the Chinese national holiday on 1 October.

Activists have been inventive in their efforts to circumvent the censorship, using alternative words such as "Umbrella Revolution" to replace those blocked by Beijing. The FireChat app was reportedly downloaded more than 100,000 times in 24 hours because of its decentralized system that prevents any censorship.

Hong Kong's special administrative status allows the Chinese government to maintain a degree of control. The universal suffrage which Hong Kong had been promised and which was supposed to end Chinese interference in its internal politics seems increasingly out of reach. The [decline in media freedom](#) in Hong Kong is part of the regime's [increasing repression](#).

Hong Kong is ranked 61st out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press](#)

