

ABFE Condemns the Arrest of Hong Kong booksellers

The American Booksellers for Free Expression (ABFE) unequivocally condemns the arrest this week of Book Punch bookstore owner Pong Yat-ming and three shopkeepers by Hong Kong authorities for allegedly “knowingly selling a publication that has a seditious intention.” This erosion of the right to read anywhere threatens the right to read everywhere.

According to *The Guardian*, Hong Kong police arrested the bookstore owner and three shopkeepers on Tuesday for “seditious” publications, including *The Troublemaker*, a biography of jailed media tycoon Jimmy Lai. The owner of the Book Punch store, Pong Yat-ming, and three staff were accused of selling the book, which was written by Lai’s former business director, Mark Clifford.

Lai was accused of using *Apple Daily* and political connections, particularly in the US, to advocate for foreign governments to impose sanctions on China and Hong Kong in the wake of the 2019 and 2020 crackdown on pro-democracy protests. He was found guilty in December 2025. Lai was sentenced alongside eight co-defendants — two activists and six former executives from his media company — in the national security trial.

“The arrest of Pong Yat-ming and the three booksellers is a clear violation of international human rights standards and a serious threat to free expression,” said David Grogan, Director of ABFE, Advocacy & Public Policy at the American Booksellers Association. “ABFE urges the Hong Kong police to immediately discontinue prosecution of Pong Yat-ming and the shopkeepers. We will continue to monitor this case and stand in solidarity with the free expression rights of booksellers around the world.”