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THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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CHINA
Beijing rejects free Hong Kong election
 Communist Party to maintain control over nominations for chief executive of territory, ignoring calls for democratic reform

NATHAN VANDERLIPPE BEIJING
 China has rejected demands that it allow free elections for Hong Kong's most powerful political figure, opting instead for a system that allows a broad vote for candidates selected and approved by Beijing. In a decision that underscores China's unwillingness to allow any challenge to the authority of the Communist Party, Chinese officials on Sunday said Hong Kong voters could choose their

according to a resolution made public Sunday. The decision comes as an

ple to city streets to protest in coming weeks, while youth leaders are calling for student strikes.

ence over that group, and largely of figures drawn in business communities, who



People switch on their phones as part of

EASTERN EUROPE
Putin seeks 'state for contested area'

KATYA GOLEBKOVA MOSCOW
ALEXANDAR VASOVIC KIEV, UKRAINE
 Russian President Vladimir Putin called on Sunday for immediate talks on the "status" of southern and eastern Ukraine, although his spokesman said this did not mean Moscow now endorsed rebel calls for independence for territory they have seized. The Kremlin leader's remarks, two days after a public appearance in which he compared the Kiev government with Nazis and warned the West not to "mess with us" came as Europe and the United States prepared possible

ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Thomas Fung built Richmond, B.C.'s Aberdeen Centre, which caters to the city's Chinese community. BEN NELMS FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

B.C.'s transpacific pioneer

Thomas Fung's Fairchild Group spans media, real estate and food rooted in an Asia-Canada connection

IAIN MARLOW
 ASIA-PACIFIC CORRESPONDENT
 RICHMOND, B.C.

Thomas Fung's fantastical new movie script goes something like this. A kung-fu actress is brought to Hollywood from mainland China so she can party with directors and producers at a riverside mansion. At the same time, a boxer from the Bronx is working

there as a caterer, ferrying supplies in a boat from a luxurious house across the river. Bored, she flees with him to the other side. Chased by security guards, they take shelter in a private jet on the property, and eventually take off. They crash on a desert island, and as the two navigate their cultural differences, hijinks ensue – including battling a crocodile.

"It's a love story with kung-fu and boxing," said a gleeful Mr. Fung, the founder of the Fairchild Group, over a bowl of Taiwanese beef noodle soup at Chef Hung's in the Aberdeen Centre in Richmond, B.C. If the plot sounds a bit unbelievable, consider that almost everything Mr. Fung attempted in his career seemed far-fetched in the beginning before it paid off. Now he is worth about

\$400-million, not including his real estate holdings. It's thanks to the transpacific empire that is the Fairchild Group, a conglomerate he built to span Chinese-language media, international partnerships and global retail franchises, real estate interests, a pâtisserie chain, a flight school, and import and e-commerce businesses. **Fung, Page 3**

Fung: Fairchild's founder a 'small businessman on a huge scale'

» Born in Hong Kong and now based in Vancouver, Mr. Fung has become a uniquely Canadian success story. He acts as a cultural liaison for other executives on his travels through Asia. Business is the pursuit of long-standing passions like his new script, which he is working on with a Chinese director.

"He's a small businessman on a huge scale," says Michael Francis, a businessman and chair emeritus of the Vancouver Film Festival. "He's as interested in trying it in Richmond as Hong Kong or Beijing." It was Mr. Fung who, while in Taipei, tasted Chef Hung's and became convinced it would be a global success. He's opened several restaurants in Vancouver and is now building locations in China on a seven-year plan to eventually take the noodle restaurant public. He also wants to (eventually) have a public offering for his high-end pâtisserie chain, which is expanding as Aime in China and as St. Germain in Vancouver. It has contracts with airlines' first-class service out of Vancouver and various hotels in Richmond. Mr. Fung started Chef Hung's at the Aberdeen Centre, a pioneering Asian mall he built (and then destroyed and rebuilt) in Richmond, just outside of Vancouver, a community he has helped transform since the late 1980s.



Thomas Fung predicted a surge of Chinese migrants would fuel business at the Aberdeen Centre in Richmond, B.C. BEN NELMS/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The mall has dumpling shops, a branch of the popular Japanese izakaya (casual after-work bar) Guu, Hong Kong fashion brands and a hugely popular "100 Yen" discount retailer called Daiso. It has become a laboratory of sorts for his new ventures – he said he owns 15 per cent of the mall's 200 stores – and lures locals (Richmond is roughly 50 per cent Chinese) as well as tourists from Korea, China and Japan. When Mr. Fung first tried to get tenants in the 1980s, he placed ads in San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles and Toronto, hoping for tenants to be part of his ambitious project – the first multicultural mall in North America, he

says. Six months passed, but he heard nothing. "They were not interested in Vancouver," says Mr. Fung. "They thought we were a small town." But Mr. Fung – whose father arrived in Hong Kong after fleeing the mainland and then dabbled in foreign exchange before founding a merchant bank and making a fortune – correctly predicted the large influx of Hong Kong residents who would land in Vancouver and Richmond in the tense years before the handover of the city-state from Britain back to China. "I said, sooner or later they will come," Mr. Fung says. "And that will be an opportunity for

business." But no brands wanted to take the risk along with him. He offered tenants 51-per-cent stakes, with the ability to walk away if the venture failed, or to buy back his stake – with no interest – if it succeeded. He did the legwork: hiring, renovations, operation. The Aberdeen Centre was a success, and tenants bought into Mr. Fung's dream. Western brands have so far "shied away," although Mercedes is opening up. In the early 1990s, Mr. Fung bought two money-losing Chinese-language broadcasters and began building out Fairchild's media assets – which includes Mandarin and Cantonese radio stations, two TV networks and a lifestyle magazine. He said owning media would create synergies with his retail and real estate holdings. And it has worked – so much so that one opponent in a regulatory hearing in 2009 said Mr. Fung might end up with a "monopoly" in Chinese-language broadcasting, and that Fairchild's news reports make "favourable comments with regard to (Fairchild's) businesses and does not remain neutral." Gabriel Yiu, a Hong Kong-born activist who once ran for the provincial NDP, said Mr. Fung is a "pioneer," whose mall was a "big factor in turning Richmond into the most Chinese city outside

Asia," although it has also contributed to the decline of Vancouver's Chinatown. Mr. Fung, who says he slept in stairwells as his father toiled at odd jobs in the godowns of Hong Kong harbour, says his journalists occasionally show a bit of bias against mainland China in their reports. This, he says, reflects anti-mainland views held by many ordinary Hong Kong citizens, and many Hong Kong-born people in Vancouver – but which are not generally held by members of the more "pragmatic," transpacific business class, like himself. It seems Mr. Fung earnestly wants to achieve much broader appeal. He wants his mall to be a "cosmopolitan" and "Asian/Western" establishment, but is effectively tied to Chinese by broadcast licences that prevent him from producing anything of substance in English or French. To find a challenge, he is now pushing deeper into China, pursuing his passions and philanthropy – and preparing his son Joseph to take over the business. "At my stage, I don't really push for any projects," said Mr. Fung, who is 63. "It's more for my son." His friends aren't too sure. "I don't think he'll pass it on nearly as quickly as he thinks he will," Mr. Francis said. "He loves his life."