

*House of Commons*

*MetMUNC XLIX*

*Topic: Hong Kong*

*Chairpersons: Aidan Davis and Simran Goraya*



## **The Issue of Hong Kong**



### History

#### **Early History**

Hong Kong, prior to the economic miracle it is today, was a small fishing village with a population of a few thousand people. However, the islands form a natural harbor, which soon became a base for British Merchants in 1821. The merchants used the harbor to smuggle Opium into China, and the area became an essential part of the Opium trade.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The First Opium War**

Soon after in 1839, the First Opium War broke out between the British Empire and the Qing Dynasty of China. The conflict started over the desire of the Chinese government to limit the Opium trade, in addition to the corruption that came with Opium. The First Opium War began when the British broke a Chinese blockade of the Pearl River estuary (which is where Hong Kong is located). Soon after, the British sent troops up the Pearl River in 1840, and captured Canton by 1841. Subsequent British invasions occurred, which culminated in the capture of Nanjing in 1842. In August of that year, the Treaty of Nanjing was signed, which

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Hong-Kong/Cultural-life#ref11639>

ceded Hong Kong to the British and increased the number of treaty ports Britain could operate out of.

## **The Second Opium War**

The Second Opium War was started in 1856 after Chinese officials captured a British merchant ship in order to arrest crewmembers for illegal activity, which prompted a British warship to bombard Canton. Soon after, Chinese and British troops began skirmishing, and trade between the two nations came to a standstill when the Qing started burning British-owned manufactories in Canton. By 1857, the British had captured Canton, and by 1858, captured Tianjin. The Treaty of Tianjin was signed to end hostilities, and after some conflict, the Beijing Convention occurred, which forced China to ratify the Treaty of Tianjin, as well as ceding the southern portion of the Kowloon Peninsula adjacent to Hong Kong to Britain.<sup>2</sup>

## **British expansion and economic growth**

As Britain consolidated their control over Hong Kong, it began to grow into an important business hub for trade with East Asia. The Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory in 1898 leased Hong Kong, as well as some more of the surrounding territory, to Britain for 99 years.<sup>3</sup> Hong Kong became a hub for immigration, allowing free travel between mainland China and the city. The city saw increasing pressure in later years to be returned to



British Map of Hong Kong, c. 1890<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Opium-Wars>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Convention-of-1898>

<sup>4</sup> <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C3476962>

Chinese autonomy from the various governments that took control of China, but maintained as a part of Britain even as strikes and boycotts hurt the city's economy. Hong Kong held firm as an economic center of East Asia, even as conflicts such as World War Two, the Chinese Civil War and the Korean War interrupted trade. As the deadline for Hong Kong's return loomed, the Chinese Communist Party and the British government had to decide the nature of the transfer.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Transfer/Contemporary History**

In the 1980's, talks about the specifics of the handover of Hong Kong were negotiated between Britain and China. Britain asserted that the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong territory only applied to the surrounding territories that Britain gained in this



treaty and not the Hong Kong Islands and the Kowloon Peninsula. However, Britain was adamant that Hong Kong be fully returned to China. Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang then proposed that Hong Kong be given the status of a special administrative region, and that this

The Handover of Hong Kong, 1997<sup>6</sup> would be maintained for 50 years after the official transfer of the islands occurred. Within this, Hong Kong would be able to remain capitalist and would have elections, allowing a sense of normalcy to remain. This became known as the “One Party, Two Systems” policy. On July 1st, 1997, Hong Kong was officially transferred to China in an elaborate ceremony.<sup>7</sup> The rights of Hong Kongers remained intact, but the uncertainty

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Hong-Kong/Contemporary-Hong-Kong>

<sup>6</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/International/China/anniversary-hong-kongs-return-china/story?id=56229613>

<sup>7</sup> <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0630.html#article>

regarding China's recent attempts to incorporate Hong Kong fully through election-rigging and repression of freedom of speech concerns many living in the territory.<sup>8</sup>

## Hong Kong's Impact on the International Community

### **The Citizens of Hong Kong**

Hong Kongers have made it explicitly clear that they intend on maintaining the prevalence of democracy and capitalism on their Island. Six month long protests swept across Hong Kong in Spring of 2019. Although Hong Kongers have the right to assemble, the Chinese government has

retaliated against protesters using violence and waging a war of disinformation. China has aggressively stirred up nationalist and anti-Western sentiment using state and social media, and it has manipulated the context of images and videos to undermine the protesters. Chinese officials



Aerial photos of the 2014 protests<sup>9</sup>

have begun branding the demonstrations as a prelude to terrorism.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese Government has also retaliated to protests through sending riot police, employing methods such as rubber bullets and tear gas to cause severe bodily harm to several protesters. Although pro Democracy protests have been ongoing in Hong Kong since 2014, the excessive use of force by Riot Police against protesters in addition to the spread of misinformation about the nature and intentions of protesters have added to the anger of the Citizens of Hong Kong.

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/01/world/asia/hong-kong-china-handover.html?login=email&auth=login-email>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-30390820>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/13/world/asia/hong-kong-protests-china.html>

## Hong Kongers Potential Path to British Citizenship

A recent security law passed by the Hong Kong Legislature was condemned as in violation of the 1985 Sino-British joint declaration. The Security Law in question would punish those that undermine the authority of the Central Government through acts of subversion, including protesting or openly criticizing the Government. Additionally, the Security Law would outlaw collusion between Hong Kongers and Foreign Governments or entities to eliminate the possibility of the British or Americans legally intervening. The outlandish policies of the security bill sparked outrage in the UK, prompting Prime Minister Boris Johnson to offer British citizenship to approximately three million Hong Kong citizens. Under the government's plans, all British Overseas Nationals and their dependents will be given the right to remain in the UK, including the right to work and study, for five years. At this point, they will be able to apply for settled status, and after a further year, seek citizenship. The UK government has been raising concerns about the national security law and very publicly trying to pressure Beijing into a change of heart. That has clearly failed - so ministers are now fulfilling their promise to allow some three million British Overseas Nationals to come to the UK. This is a significant move, showing how the government wants to send a strong message.<sup>11</sup> In January



The Hong Kong Skyline<sup>12</sup>  
2021, Prime Minister Johnson reaffirmed that Hong Kong residents could apply for British citizenship through a new British National Overseas visa. Later that week, China condemned the

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-53246899>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.chinadiscovery.com/hong-kong/hong-kong-skyline.html>

new visa, claiming it turned Hong Kongers into second-class citizens. They also moved to revoke their recognition of the current special British passport.

### **The Strategic Importance of Hong Kong**

The Island of Hong Kong offers a strategic opportunity to China. Hong Kong's free and open capitalist economy allows Chinese companies the opportunity to reach out to global investors. This allows the territory to attract money from different parts of the world more efficiently than other mainland Chinese cities which are subject to capital controls. As a result, a growing number of Chinese companies are taking advantage of Hong Kong's access to global investors to raise funds.<sup>13</sup> While many people residing in mainland China support companies' investment into Hong Kong, the citizens of Hong Kong fear that the increased influence of the Chinese Government in their economy will continue to diminish the political and economic autonomy of the island. Additionally, Hong Kong's position along the South China Sea allows China to exert increased influence over the area.

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**“Hong Kong is likely to develop into a Chinese offshore center. As a national offshore center, it may have some tax benefits, leeway in terms of issuing in dollar or attracting dollar investment. But it won't be a global**

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/18/these-charts-show-why-hong-kong-is-important-to-china.html>

**financial center, where most of the players are global players.” -Alicia Garcia Herrero, chief Asia-Pacific economist at Natixis SA**

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### **Hong Kong’s Impact on the Prevalence of Democracy on the Global Stage**

Protesters in Hong Kong have often been seen waving the American Flag and playing the American National Anthem. These symbolic gestures reveal the protestors’ belief in the importance of international intervention in the Hong Kong Crisis. As two of the largest democracies in the international community, the citizens of Hong Kong believe in the



fundamental principle that America, a country in which the ideals of democracy, a free market and the right to protest the government, should protect these ideals when they are threatened overseas. In addition,

A protester waving an American Flag<sup>14</sup> protesters have argued that as a former Colony of the UK, the UK should pressure Beijing into maintaining the autonomy of the Island. Hundreds of Hong Kong Citizens protested outside the British Consulate waving Union Jacks and singing God Save the Queen. These symbolic gestures begs the question, **to what extent does the UK and other supporters of democratic principles owe support to the Hong Kong Protesters?**

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<sup>14</sup><https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/09/hong-kong-protesters-wave-the-american-flag-but-is-it-too-late/>

## The Current State of Hong Kong

### **Recent Hong Kong Protests**

In the Spring of 2019, six month long protests swept across the Island of Hong Kong. Although this wasn't the first; and certainly not the last time protests have dominated the political atmosphere of Hong Kong. The protests were particularly notable in the fact that they were able to maintain a hold on international headlines for the entirety of the six months in which they were ongoing. This phenomenon is extremely uncommon, especially in a society in which we mourn tragedies for a week then divert our attention to the hurricane of headlines our fast paced news cycle produces. The protesters have maintained five demands of the Chinese government. They are the full withdrawal of the extradition bill from the legislative process, retraction of the characterisation of the 12 June 2019 protests as "riots", release and exoneration of arrested protesters, establishment of an independent commission of inquiry into police behaviour, and universal suffrage for the Legislative Council and the chief executive elections. Although the Extradition Bill has been retracted, the recent Security Bill shows that the fight for Hong Kong's autonomy is hardly over.<sup>16</sup>



Police Brutality during a 2019 protest<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup><https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3074887/hong-kong-hits-back-us-report-police-brutality-saying-city>

<sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019-20\\_Hong\\_Kong\\_protests](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019-20_Hong_Kong_protests)



## **The Significance of Youth Involvement in Protests**

Perhaps one of the most notable parts of the recent Hong Kong Protests is the overwhelming amount of young people involved in the pro-democracy movement. The age of protesters range from those as young as 12 years old to those as old as 70 years old. Chinese Officials said as of 5 December, of the 5,980 people arrested since the movement started in June, 2,383 or 40% were students and 367 of them have been charged. Among them, 939 were under 18, with the youngest being only 11<sup>17</sup>. The remarkable bravery of these young people poses two questions. First, how far could protesters be willing to go to secure democratic principles in the Hong Kong government and Second, will Hong Kong Protesters be able to maintain their grip on international headlines similar to how they maintained a grip on the media during last year's six month long protests?

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**“ It just feels like we’re abandoned. We’ve always been. I used to think that I could build a family here, and maybe my kids could have a future here. I can grow old in Hong Kong. But I don’t think I can still do that because it wouldn’t be the Hong Kong I used to know. It wouldn’t be the Hong Kong I love. I don’t think I can stay here. A lot of people I know, they’re thinking the same way. Whenever I tell people I’m studying in England soon, they’ll be**

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<sup>17</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/15/children-of-the-revolution-the-hong-kong-youths-ready-to-sacrifice-everything>

**like, “Oh, good for you, you should leave as soon as you can.” Everyone says that.”- Chloe, 19 Waitress and Hong Kong Pro-Democracy Protester**

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### **The effect of Covid-19 on the Hong Kong Protests**

The Coronavirus Pandemic has impacted almost every aspect of our normal lives, with the Hong Kong protests being no exception. Although the Coronavirus cases halted protests, as Covid-19 cases have declined significantly in China the Hong Kong Protests have started again. Still, many Hong Kong Citizens are worried that the Covid-19 has stifled the international attention that the Hong Kong Protesters desperately need in order to continue to prompt the international community to intervene in the crisis. In addition, the Global Economy has taken a major hit from the Coronavirus Pandemic but as Chinese produced PPE are in increased Global Demand, many Hong Kongers fear that the Chinese government’s need to rebuild its own and the Global Economy will lead to further Chinese intervention in Hong Kong’s economy stripping Hong Kong even further of its autonomy.

### **Action by the G7 and the Citizenship Controversy**

On March 12th, 2021, the Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and the High Representative of the European Union met to reaffirm their condemnation of China's actions in Hong Kong. In their joint statement, they said “The package of changes approved by the National People’s Congress, combined with mass arrests of pro-democracy activists and politicians, undermines Hong Kong’s

high degree of autonomy under the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ principle.”<sup>18</sup> As expressed by Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, “The U.K. government said China is in ‘a state of ongoing non-compliance’ with the Sino-British Joint Declaration”<sup>19</sup>

### **The Goal of Committee**

The goal of the Committee is for you to determine whether or not the UK should extend the terms of the one country two systems policy agreed upon in the Sino-British Joint Declaration. As a MP, the potential economic and diplomatic implications of intervening in the Hong Kong Crisis as well as the UK’s history as the colonizer of Hong Kong should shape your decision on whether or not to extend the Sino-British Joint Declaration beyond 2047. Delegates should also consider how, or if, they want to further hold China accountable for their various human rights violations in regards to Hong Kong By the end of committee the goal is to have written and voted upon a resolution to determine whether or not Hong Kong’s autonomy should be extended beyond 2047, and whether the UK should have a large role in that process.

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### Questions to Consider:

1. To what extent does the UK and other supporters of democratic principles owe support to the Hong Kong Protesters?
2. Should the UK prioritize its economic ties with China over helping Hong Kong?
3. How could the UK employ further economic sanctions against China to pressure them into granting Hong Kong autonomy?

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hong-kong-g7-statement-on-hong-kong-electoral-changes>

<sup>19</sup><https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertolsen/2021/03/14/uk-says-china-breached-hong-kong-handover-treaty-for-third-time/?sh=96a5b4d2cb4e>

4. Why would China resist giving Hong Kong autonomy beyond 2047?
5. How long can Hong Kong Protesters maintain a successful Pro-Democracy movement when all international headlines are dominated by news of the Coronavirus Pandemic?
6. To what extent does social media and news control the public perception of the Hong Kong Protesters?
7. Should the UK get the support of the International Community and its allies before intervening in the Hong Kong Crisis or is the UK solely responsible for intervening as Hong Kong's former colonizer?

### Helpful Links:

Britannica article on Hong Kong:

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Hong-Kong/Cultural-life#ref11638>

BBC Hong Kong Profile: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-16526765>

New York Times Hong Kong Handover:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/01/world/asia/hong-kong-china-handover.html?login=email&auth=login-email>

Hong Kong protests explained: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49317695>

[Why did Britain Handover Hong Kong to China? \(Short Animated Documentary\)](#)

Six First Hand Accounts of Hong Kong Protesters

<https://www.vox.com/2019/8/28/20799049/hong-kong-protests-first-person>

Hong Kong's pro-democracy lawmakers to resign en masse

<https://apnews.com/article/hong-kong-pro-democracy-resign-en-masse-7434a6f1ac28a059827b51d02987f71c>

Hong Kong: G7 statement on Hong Kong electoral changes

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hong-kong-g7-statement-on-hong-kong-electoral-changes>