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Claremont McKenna College

Nearly Halfway There: The Future of Hong Kong, China, and One
Country Two Systems

Submitted to

Professor Jennifer Taw

By

Lery Hiciano-Gomez

For

Senior Thesis

Spring 2020

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Abstract

The 2019 Hong Kong Protests mark a critical juncture in the history of Hong Kong. Although they started due to an extradition bill, the demonstrations are deeply rooted in larger concerns regarding Hong Kong's place within China and its future. The global responses to the protest, from Beijing to London, reveal a complex web of relationships and interests. As the Chinese Communist Party continues to expand its global footprint, the bridge between domestic and international concerns will widen. Ultimately, that makes the Hong Kong situation a balancing act, one that observers can use as a litmus test for the Chinese government's attitude towards democracy, sovereignty, and social stability. This thesis looks at how China's economic transformation over the past 30 years fundamentally altered its relationship with Hong Kong, and the national and international factors that continue to present challenges.

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Introduction

In June 2019, the Hong Kong Legislative Committee, led by Chief Executive Carrie Lam, proposed an extradition bill in response to the criminal case of a Hong Kong resident committing murder in Taiwan. However, Taiwan, officially named the Republic of China (ROC), is *de jure* a Chinese province, rather than an independent nation, meaning that the extradition bill's actual nature was an extradition treaty with the People's Republic of China (PRC). The bill set off a series of protests that, unlike the Umbrella Movement, Occupy Central, or the protests of 2003, did not fade away as time went on. Throughout the summer the protests intensified, even as Lam declared the bill "dead," and morphed into a protest movement in which many Hong Kongers aired out their grievances towards the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government, as well as the Central Government in Beijing. If one is unfamiliar with Hong Kong's complex legal status, it would not be out of line to ask the question, how can an extradition treaty even exist within the *same* state?

The current basis of Hong Kong's autonomy is under a simple, yet increasingly inadequate framework, "One Country, Two Systems" (OCTS). As per the Joint Declaration of 1984, the People's Republic of China would "resume" sovereignty of Hong Kong in 1997, while guaranteeing the territory "high autonomy" to govern its own affairs and maintain its way of life for 50 years. The "high autonomy" specified in the original Joint Declaration was later codified through Basic Law, the super-constitution that establishes Hong Kong's rights and autonomy from China. Through OCTS, Hong Kong has maintained its standing as a global financial center, its official languages (English and Cantonese, rather than *Putonghua*/Mandarin), and its status as a separate entity that requires visas for Mainland citizens to visit and vice-versa. Hong Kong residents travel on Hong Kong passports, are barred from serving in the Chinese People's

Liberation Army, and are treated as foreign students in Chinese universities.¹ Hong Kong retains its own customs, airline registry, international agreements, and more. Relations between Hong Kong and Beijing are handled through several channels, including the Hong Kong Liaison Office, the Hong Kong Macau Affairs Office, and Hong Kong's representative office in Beijing. In return for promising Hong Kong autonomy, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) peacefully attained one of world's foremost financial centers. Hong Kong's developed capital markets, world-leading firms, global connections, and liberal institutions would all play a part in helping continue China's rapid modernization process. In order to ensure the CCP would continue to respect Hong Kong's autonomy, in 1992 U.S Congress passed the Hong Kong Relations act, promising that Hong Kong would be treated as separate from the PRC as long as OCTS remained in effect.

However, despite the guarantees and assurances within the Joint Declaration and Basic Law, neither the residents of Hong Kong nor the politicians in the Central Government seem particularly satisfied with the arrangement as presently constructed. The deterioration of Sino-Hong Kong ties is mostly a recent phenomenon. Although Deng's infamous response to student protestors during the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 1989 led to a mass migration movement of some white-collar Hong Kongers to the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, the overall within Hong Kong was vastly different than it was today. Jiang, a pro-establishment, CCP-affiliated, intellectual, writes, "At that time, the wide divergence of opinion was not on whether "universal suffrage" should be adopted, but rather how quickly it shall be materialized. On this issue, the disagreement between the mainland drafters and Hong Kong drafters was less intense than [currently] Hong Kong's business sector and its "pro-

¹ Shigong Jiang, *China's Hong Kong: A Political and Cultural Perspective* (Singapore: Springer, 2017) 114.

democracy camp.”² What is now the most divisive issue in Hong Kong, the pace (or lack thereof) of democratic reforms, was originally not something the CCP contested. However, despite Tiananmen, the initial years following the Handover did not portend the tensions of the 2010’s.

When looking for the chief cause of social unrest regarding Hong Kong and Mainland China’s relationship, it is relatively easy to point the finger at specific CCP policies that have greatly angered the city’s residents. Wan Man-Lam, a political scientist working at the University of Hong Kong described Hong Kong’s evolving political scene as such:

In Hong Kong, the polity’s highly unique political and institutional circumstances have meant that the processes of rupture with the existing political landscape has not taken the form of deepening left-right polarization, but instead concern different conceptions of Hong Kong’s relationship to the Mainland and how political actors should relate to Beijing.³

The CCP policies that seek to emphasize the “one country” aspect of OCTS often do so at Hong Kong’s expense. Not only are the promises within Basic Law not kept, but in their place is a reduction in Hong Kong residents’ civil liberties and quality of life. Very public examples, such as the illegal extradition of Hong Kong residents to China and to middle-of-the-night legal interpretations, point to a single goal: Hong Kong’s integration within the PRC. Albert Chen, a foremost Hong Kong legal scholar, specifically highlights that political *unification* was achieved in 1997, while integration is an ongoing process by which the CCP hopes to better control Hong Kong.⁴ That process can only happen by erasing the distinctions between the two polities, not only legally, but also economically, politically, and culturally.

² Ibid, 145.

³ Wai-man Lam and Luke Cooper, eds., *Citizenship, Identity and Social Movements in the New Hong Kong: Localism After the Umbrella Movement*, Routledge Contemporary China Series (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 8.

⁴ Albert H.Y Chen, “The Law and Politics of Constitutional Reform and Democratization in Hong Kong,” in *Law and Politics of the Taiwan Sunflower and Hong Kong Umbrella Movements* (London: Routledge, 2017), 70.

Despite this over-arching goal, and evidence pointing to consistent interference within Hong Kong's affairs, the OCTS has succeeded somewhat in checking Mainland influence. Look no further than Beijing's response to Tiananmen protestors compared to Hong Kongers. It is no doubt painful for the CCP to see strident protests condemning its actions while having limited ability to respond. Dissent within Mainland China is not just swiftly punished, but preemptively snuffed out, as the CCP controls and monitors every aspect of its citizens' lives. Under OCTS, in contrast, the CCP agrees to act with extraordinary restraint towards the city. For a political organization *obsessed* with ideas about national sovereignty, an agreement to limit Beijing's ability to operate within its own borders is a large compromise. Considering the importance of their largest differences, such as political systems and residents' personal freedoms, the Party's decisions to breach Basic Law take on even greater importance. The CCP has little interest in meeting its obligations within Basic Law, yet it must refrain from completely ignoring the agreement. The protest movements are the most high-profile examples of the careful balancing act that the CCP must consider with regard to Hong Kong and OCTS. Thus, this dichotomy leads to a second question, how far will China's government be willing to go in its defense of Chinese sovereignty?

The creation of OCTS reflected to a fundamental challenge the CCP faces, it is hard to have a universally resonant message or policy. Domestic audiences, either regular citizens or elites, will have different demands and expectations than observers in Western countries. From the perspective of the CCP propaganda machine, the initial return of China's stolen territory greatly boosted party legitimacy. However, international audiences - to say nothing of many of the residents in Hong Kong, not least the British living there- would have balked at the prospect of the city losing its nascent democracy, free press, independent judiciary, and other liberal

institutions. Convergence would have meant significant compromise. The OCTS solution temporarily allowed democratic institutions to continue developing in Hong Kong while providing no expectation for the same to happen within the PRC, saving face in the short term and giving the CCP international credibility as long as it abided by the agreement. CCP tolerance towards Hong Kong since then shows that its system can guarantee the same personal liberties, human rights, and economic prosperity that is found in Western states. The spirit of the Joint Declaration and Hong Kong Basic Law make it clear; the Hong Kong SAR is to be governed independently of Beijing until their termination. This dynamic means that, unlike in China, where popular dissent is effectively silenced and accepted as part and parcel of CCP policy, Hong Kong residents' rights are closely monitored by the international community. And the widespread international news coverage of the 2003 protests, the Occupy Central and Umbrella movements, and the 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement, all demonstrate that Hong Kong is vital to China's international image and legitimacy.

Treating one group of citizens with a different set of laws, rights, and obligations than the vast majority of the country is only a temporary solution, however. Immediately upon Hong Kong's return to China, the countdown timer began on Hong Kong's eventually full-fledged integration within the PRC. It is not that integration between Hong Kong and China is inherently negative, nor is integration something that negotiators in the 80's and 90's were unable to predict. What is new, however, is the massive increase in China's national strength and wealth. That wealth and power have transformed the fabric of Chinese society and the CCP. The international considerations for a rising power seeking to prolong its growth and an established power seeking to maximize the utility of its resources are very different.

Nowhere is China's newfound economic success more visible than in Hong Kong. What was originally envisioned as a relationship in which Hong Kong would assist China's modernization by leading from the front, with its advanced financial markets and legal institutions, has instead led to a Hong Kong that is increasingly on the periphery of domestic Chinese economic policy. In the past two decades, Hong Kong's GDP relative to that of the mainland has tumbled from 16% at the time of the handover to less than 3%, a number that will only continue to shrink as other Chinese cities become global financial and manufacturing centers.⁵ Shenzhen, right on the Chinese border with Hong Kong and declared a "Special Economic Zone" in 1980, has gone from a light manufacturing hub to one of the world's most dynamic cities. It now has districts where the per capita income is higher than in Hong Kong, as well as a vibrant technology industry that competes with Silicon Valley. Shanghai's continued rise as China's preeminent financial city further threatens Hong Kong's standing in the region.

The decision to absorb Hong Kong, while accepting the city's capitalist, democratic structure, pointed, at the negotiation of the handover, to a CCP that was both flexible and pragmatic. Now, more than 20 years removed, the CCP's foreign policy, attitude towards reform, and tolerance have all taken a turn. China's foreign policy is much more assertive, its domestic reforms have stagnated, and Hong Kong's democratic impulses are viewed as threats to national security. So far, in the face of major protests in 2003, 2012, 2014, and 2019, China has refrained from overt interference in the social unrest within Hong Kong. However, mainland reactions, which implicitly (or explicitly, depending on who you ask) guide the HKSAR government, have varied drastically with each movement. China's costs, not just in terms of the international prestige that would be lost with an armed intervention, but the loss of international prestige that

⁵ Yun-Wing Sung, "Becoming Part of One National Economy," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Hong Kong* (London ; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 70.

would accompany continuing suppression, are a critical factor within the decision-making process. Increasingly, it can be seen that the considerations are not necessarily economic in nature, despite the CCP having spent the past four decades prioritizing economic advancement at all costs, including human right abuses, environmental damage, societal inequality, and suppression of demonstrations of international power.

The same way that economic strength has allowed the CCP to disregard certain aspects of Basic Law, it has also led to drastic changes in the international community. China's foreign policy for the final quarter of the 20th century was marked by a quiet presence. The CCP allowed Japanese administration of disputed islands, and even accepted the placement of US forces a one-hour plane ride away from Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi, despite fears of US forces on its Northeast border with Korea driving much of China's support for the pariah nation. However, since [year], CCP aggression towards Taiwan, the militarization of the South China Sea, and massive foreign policy projects all show that a new era of CCP global leadership has started. The CCP's simultaneous emphasis on a prominent international presence brings it more into conflict with the United States. Not only that, but it opens the CCP up to further scrutiny in international contexts regarding domestic policy.

The 2019-2020 Hong Kong Protests point to a complex web of interests that push and pull CCP policy towards Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a microcosm of a larger, global debate regarding development, personal liberties, and political systems. The city's legal status requires the recognition of international actors, and those international actors increasingly find themselves at odds with CCP decisionmakers. At the same time, CCP leadership must balance the potential punishments those international actors can mete out against the benefits that come with ignoring Basic Law and further integrating the city. Economic considerations for firms and localities that

depend on Hong Kong, combined with Party politics and ideological debates are forced to contend with international actors. Throughout the 2019-2020 protest movement, the question remained: how far would the CCP be willing to go to end the demonstrations? The movement tapered off due to the COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020, yet those questions will continue to be asked.

Chapter 2: Local Tensions

To put it bluntly, the situation in Hong Kong is not going according to plan. The increasing intensity of the protests, both as singular movements but also as a collective, show that freedoms and autonomy promised within Basic Law and OCTS have not given way to a greater degree of mutual understanding. The economic transformation of Hong Kong and China's relationship, although not solely responsible for increases in tension, creates a domino effect that exacerbates the deficiencies within the Basic Law and the inherent tension within it. Closer economic participation with China has played a role in the widening economic inequality within the territory, which in turn has negative effects on social cohesion and political unity. Most importantly, however, are the ways that China's economic influence then allow the central government to infringe upon the autonomy promised to the SAR. In Hong Kong, the goal of the CCP is to blur the border separating Hong Kong from the Mainland. From economic free trade agreements, visa schemes, infrastructure projects, investment vehicles, and more, the CCP hopes to seamlessly integrate Hong Kong into China.

*Economic*⁶

In simplified terms, the expectations for economic cooperation were as such: Hong Kong could leverage its advanced services industry, its international standing as a trading hub and its massive port in return for the autonomy as laid out in the Basic Law. As China continued its period of “catching up” with the rest of the world, Hong Kong capital would assist it through financial expertise, managerial innovation, and Western rule of law. Furthermore, its financial global ties are mostly mediated through Hong Kong’s networks, with foreign commercial and investment banks still using the city as a base from which to serve clients in China’s richest region.⁷ Hong Kong makes up 22% of Guangdong’s international trade value and 36% of its export value despite Guangzhou and Shenzhen’s rapid rise as international cities on their own merit.⁸ This increasing interconnectedness has led to massive Chinese infrastructure projects promoting one large “super-region,” spanning Hong Kong and Macau SARs as well as the municipalities of Zhuhai and Shenzhen on the mainland. However, almost immediately upon Hong Kong’s return to China, this picture was demonstrated to be more complex than previously imagined.

Before formal reversion to China, the proportion of the Hong Kong labor force involved in manufacturing from 47% in 1971 to just 14% in 1996 as most of it relocated to Guangdong.⁹ At the moment, this percentage is less than 10%.¹⁰ This period of outsourcing was to be

⁶ The author of this thesis' final paper for another class covering Hong Kong and China’s economic integration. Therefore, the sources and main conclusions overlap significantly.

Lery Hiciano, “The Consequences of Economic Integration Between Hong Kong and China” (Claremont, Claremont McKenna College, 2019).

⁷ David R. Meyer, “Hong Kong: China’s Global City,” in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Hong Kong*, 423.

⁸ Xiangming Chen, “Lost in Competition: Rethinking Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Shenzhen as a New Triangle of China’s Global Cities and Regional Hubs,” in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Hong Kong*, 519.

⁹ Alvin Y. So, “Hong Kong’s Integration with Mainland China in Historical Perspective,” in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Hong Kong*, 499.

¹⁰ Chen, “Lost in Competition,” p. 514.

expected, the removal of trade barriers opened up China's relatively educated, yet extremely cheap and large labor force to foreign investment from firms either based in Hong Kong or with operations within the territory. However economic integration was more than just the uprooting of Hong Kong's industry. Hong Kong's port at the time was the largest in the world, and the territory dominated Chinese offshore and entrepot trade: rising from 4.3% of total trade in 1979 to over 40% by the 1990's.¹¹ When offshore and entrepot trade are combined, Hong Kong's share peaked at over 60% at the time of the handover.¹²

Almost immediately upon reversion, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis mired the Hong Kong economy in a recession from which it did not recover until 2003. In that year, two significant changes that boosted the Hong Kong economy by making it more dependent on China's: the passage of CEPA as well as the beginning of the Individual Traveler's Scheme. Simultaneously, China, due to its massive growth potential, tightly controlled economy, and the "benefits of economic backwardness," was partly shielded from the Crisis and continued its growth functionally unabated while most other regional economies struggled. The weakening of the Hong Kong economy, dovetailed with the continued growth of the PRC's, almost immediately revised expectations for economic cooperation between the two entities.

2003's Closer Economic Partnership Agreement, opening a free trade area between Hong Kong as the PRC, was the first sign that economic integration would occur differently than previously anticipated. Apart from CEPA, 2003 serves as a pivotal year in the dynamic between Hong Kong and the PRC, as Hong Kong's lagging economy coincided with the political crisis following the July Demonstrations regarding the passage of the National Security Law. According to China expert Richard C. Bush, the year serves as the beginning for "state-led

¹¹ Sung, "Becoming Part of One National Economy." 74.

¹² Ibid.

intervention” as the Chinese Communist Party sought to bring Hong Kong closer, both legally and economically in hopes that both would eventually bring Hong Kongers closer in their sentiments, as well.¹³ CEPA provided 1,087 Hong Kong-made products with tariff-free entry into China, accounting for roughly 67% of all manufactured goods exported from Hong Kong to the Mainland. A further update, 2005’s CEPA II, expanded the agreement to include Hong Kong services, such as law, accountancy, medicine, banking, insurance, transportation, tourism, education, and social welfare services.

Even though China has become more vital to Hong Kong’s economy, Hong Kong has become significantly less important for continued Chinese economic growth. Despite controlling 60% of the mainland’s international trade in 1997, Hong Kong’s share plummeted to 22.6% in 2014. At the same time, entrepot trade dropped as offshore trade became more important in the mid-2000s, showing China’s increasing self-reliance and Hong Kong’s marginalization to a service hub.¹⁴ Entrepot trade is “re-exporting,” as Chinese-manufactured goods are exported to Hong Kong before being exported again to a third nation, while offshore trading is to invest in global markets from an offshore location. Offshore trading overtaking entrepot trade means that Chinese firms are using Hong Kong’s financial channels to invest in foreign goods or services more often than firms use Hong Kong’s customs union to import or export goods. In other words, more firms can import and export directly from the Mainland and more Mainland Chinese firms use Hong Kong’s financial channels to make up for the PRC’s relatively underdeveloped capital markets.

¹³ Richard C. Bush, *Hong Kong in the Shadow of China: Living with the Leviathan* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2016). 210

¹⁴ Sung, “Becoming Part of One National Economy,” 73.

Hong Kong's decline as China's main trading center meant Hong Kong became a less important market for Chinese goods. In 1995 Hong Kong was the destination for 26% of Chinese exports, while in 2016 it was only the destination for 12%. The services trade between Hong Kong and China tripled from 1995 to 2014, from \$24 billion USD to \$71 billion USD, an increase from HK\$279 billion to HK\$781 billion in exports, and HK\$184 billion to HK\$570 billion in imports from China.¹⁵¹⁶ The ratio of service exports to service imports dropped from 1.51 to 1.37, demonstrating one of two things: either that Hong Kong firms and citizens are beginning to seek out mainland services more frequently as they become more advanced, while keeping their cost advantage over Hong Kong firms, or Mainland firms and citizens are increasingly finding their needs met by local firms. Both options show a closing gap between Hong Kong and Mainland firms. Furthermore, FDI outflows and inflows between Hong Kong and China tripled between 2007 and 2014 alone.¹⁷

Although not as overtly visible, the dominance of Mainland enterprises, both public and private, on the Stock Exchange of Hong Kong (SEHK) is an equally important metric with which to observe increasing economic convergence. Red-chips, Mainland corporations headquartered in China but traded on the SEHK, as well as H-shares, HKD-denominated stocks for Mainland enterprises, are two of the most popular investments on the SEHK. H-share companies such as the China Construction Bank, or Ping An Insurance Group, rank among the top ten firms in terms of market capitalization, joined by red chips such as China Mobile or China National Offshore Oil Corporation Limited, the subsidiary of China's third largest state-owned oil

¹⁵ Ibid, 76.

¹⁶ David R. Meyer, "Hong Kong: China's Global City," 422.

¹⁷ Chien-Huei Wu, "Dancing with the Dragon Closer Economic Integration with China and Deteriorating Democracy and Rule of Law in Taiwan and Hong Kong?," in *Law and Politics of the Taiwan Sunflower and Hong Kong Umbrella Movements*, 155.

company. In total, at the end of 2018, there were 267 H-share companies, and 164 red chips listed on the SEHK.¹⁸ Their importance is clear, of the seven different indexes used to measure the performance of the SEHK, four of them primarily focus on Mainland enterprises. From before the handover, Chinese companies have continued to gain in importance and market share on the SEHK. In 1993, the market proportion of China-related stocks, both red-chips and H-shares, stood at 4.78%.¹⁹ By 1997, the proportion had climbed to 16%, a nearly four-fold increase in just four years. This continued to grow, peaking at over 54% in 2008. As of 2018, it stood at 38%, a significant decrease from its peak at the height of the financial crisis, but still a significant share.²⁰ However, these numbers undersell the prominence of Mainland capital on the SEHK. This does not take into account Chinese companies such as Alibaba and Tencent, which are legally incorporated in the Cayman Islands. These firms, despite being traded on the SEHK as its two most valuable companies and having headquarters in Hong Kong, do not qualify as either an H-Share or a red-chip. In reality, the 431 H-share and red-chip companies only represent a fraction of the 715 mainland enterprises present on the SEHK, which all together make up 67.5% of the total market.²¹

The traditional migration of mainlanders to Hong Kong, the foundation of the city's population, is no longer just a historical tie but also a sign of economic integration. Every day, up to 150 Mainlanders are approved for visas to move to Hong Kong, adding up to more than 550,000 immigrants per decade.²² This is a fairly large number relative to Hong Kong's total population. Indeed, Mainland migrants account for the majority of Hong Kong's population

¹⁸ "HKEX Monthly Market Highlights," accessed December 15, 2019, <https://www.hkex.com.hk/Market-Data/Statistics/Consolidated-Reports/HKEX-Monthly-Market-Highlights>.

¹⁹ "China Dimension," accessed December 15, 2019, <https://www.hkex.com.hk/Market-Data/Statistics/Consolidated-Reports/China-Dimension>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "HKEX Monthly Market Highlights."

²² Chen, "Lost in Competition" 505.

growth. They also are necessary, as Hong Kong's population continues to age, which is happening fairly quickly, as Hong Kong has one of the world's lowest fertility rates.

Just as closer economic partnership has coincided with a dramatic increase in China's own financial independence and ability to trade, it has also meant an increase in quality of life for many Chinese citizens. Despite the financial ties between the two entities, perhaps the single most important boost to Hong Kong's economy from China has been the massive influx of tourists due to the proliferation of the Individual Traveler's Scheme, or IVS. These are one-day entry visas issued to Chinese citizens to allow entry into Hong Kong. The number of tourists using these visas increased from 4.3 million Chinese tourists in 2003, the year it was instituted, to over 47 million in 2014.²³ From 2004 to 2013, the increase in IVS visitors alone accounted for nearly 20% of all new employment generated in Hong Kong, while generating 2.7% of total employment and 1.6% of GDP.²⁴ If this is expanded to include *all* visitors from the Mainland, the numbers increase to 4.5% of total employment and 2.6 of GDP.²⁵ In the decade following IVS, those visitors' expenditures made up 24.3%, nearly a quarter, of the increase in Hong Kong's total employment.²⁶ These newly created job opportunities were primarily in the hospitality industry, cross-border tourist services, or retail jobs. The economic impact of these tourists continuously grew in importance. Overnight IVS visitors spend 72.9% of all their expenses on just retail shopping. In 2013, IVS visitors accounted for 22.2% of all shopping expenditures in the territory, roughly five times the share when compared to 2004.²⁷ Even non-IVS Mainland visitors played a significant role, as a 33% increase in expenditures from that

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Sung, "Becoming Part of One National Economy," 74.

²⁵ Ibid, 69.

²⁶ Ibid, 82.

²⁷ Research Office, "Individual Visit Scheme"

group contributed to Hong Kong residents' share of total retail sales dropping from 79.7% to 61.7%.²⁸ The influx in tourism dollars directly led to retail rents rising by nearly 70%, meaning that many stores could no longer afford to stay open and in turn either went out of business or changed to better appeal to tourists.²⁹

It is clear then, that Hong Kong is financially dependent on China- either through favorable legislation that allow the territory's firms access to the Chinese market, an influx of tourism dollars. Yet, despite these ties, Hong Kong residents, or at least some segments of the population, are increasingly agitated under Chinese rule. The *quality* of the economic growth, its equity across different groups within Hong Kong, has considerably declined since the Handover. The focus on FIRE (finance, investment, real estate) industries, which naturally promote unequal growth, as well as an increase in demand for low-wage jobs, has economically stratified Hong Kong.

This lower quality of economic growth can directly be tied to Hong Kong's transition from a self-sufficient, globally competitive economy, to primarily a service hub. Since the Handover, the largest increases in employment were recorded in industries with the most to gain from Chinese penetration of Hong Kong's service sector: financing, insurance, and real estate.³⁰ The increase in job opportunities within those industries led to a massive boom in interest in tertiary education, with the territory witnessing a 20% rise in undergraduate enrollment in the decade from 2001 to 2011.³¹ However, this increase in levels of education did not pay dividends for many who sought it out, as studies have demonstrated that, by the mid-2000s, only halfway

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Chung Yan Ip, "Youth and Changing Opportunity Structure," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Hong Kong*, 290.

³¹ Ibid, 295.

through the decade, a college diploma was no longer sufficient to climb through the socio-economic ranks. The number of diplomas awarded outpaced the number of new positions, meaning that many graduates no longer had the same ease of access to the high level positions as past generations.³² Not only that, but those high-paying jobs became increasingly necessary to one day buy a home or own property as real estate prices rose. However, the limited nature of the opportunity combined with the increase in lower-wage retail jobs meant that despite GDP per capita increasing from HKD\$211,592 in 1997 to HKD\$328,114 in 2015, median household income only rose from HKD\$19,000 to HKD\$25,000. This growing inequality is reflected by a rise in Hong Kong's Gini coefficient, currently stands at .539, considered high by international bodies that use the metric. As Hong Kong's economy grows increasingly tied to the Mainland's, it paints a picture of an economic system divorced from the reality of the people who live in it. Hong Kong's renowned, vibrant, free marketplace has been coopted by a government that not only lacks those own qualities within its borders but is hostile to the other aspects of civil society that make such an idea possible. One might imagine the psychological impact that such a dichotomy brings. For example, during the 2019-2020 Anti-Extradition Movement, despite the Hong Kong economy falling into recession, Chinese enterprises listed on the HKEX performed as well as ever. The two indexes most weighted towards Mainland firms were the only two to demonstrate year over year growth, and the number of Mainland enterprises grew from 715 at the end of 2018 to 774 by the end of 2019.

Cultural

³² Ibid, 298.

Beijing has traditionally succeeded in leaning on conservative, pro-establishment elements of Hong Kong society. Not coincidentally, these sectors are those that have seen great success due to greater economic integration with China, most prominently the service industry constituencies like real estate magnates. On a local level, economic integration is not just stock market capitalization- it is the creation of jobs across a broad swath of society. The willingness to cede political or civil liberties in return for economic returns is not unheard of, as according to many observers, that very bargain is the implicit one made between the CCP and Mainland citizens. The CCP's failure was in not upholding their end of the bargain. For residents to forego civil liberties, either explicitly or implicitly, the economic benefits must have outweighed the negatives. However, Luke Cooper states, "The benefits of Sino-Hong Kong economic integration have been far from universally shared."³³ If the economic benefits are not universal, it is no surprise then that political approval of such a process is far from universal as well. However, not only are economic benefits far from universally shared, but for many the future has little hope of economic relief.

In turn, every infringement upon Hong Kong's autonomy creates sense that Hong Kong's distinctive identity is under threat from China, through economic, social, or political means.³⁴ Jefferey Wasserstrom, an expert in Hong Kong, stated that four years after the failures of the Umbrella Movement to secure political reform, "Hong Kong is not just in its death throes, but is imagined by some to have already died."³⁵ Wai-Man Lam states the population's rapid politization is most visible in the following four ways: an increase in general awareness of political values and rights in-step with an increase in readiness to uphold those values; an

³³ Luke Cooper, "You Have to Fight on Your Own: Self-Alienation and the New Hong Kong Nationalism," in *Citizenship, Identity and Social Movements in the New Hong Kong: Localism after the Umbrella Movement*, 102.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 104.

³⁵ Jefferey Wasserstrom, "The Death of Democracy in Hong Kong," *The Atlantic*, December 9, 2018.

increased willingness to challenge political authority, proactive challenges to mainstream socio-political values, and the increasing use of radical tactics.³⁶

One of the clearest ways in which this sense has emerged is the assertion that Hong Kong is a Chinese colony. Following the Umbrella Movement, and throughout the 2019 protest movement, several news sources reported activists using the slogan, in addition to think-pieces and academic works.³⁷ It is an explosive assertion, especially as the CCP historically holds the mantle of a staunch nationalist, anti-colonial force. As Cooper makes the case, “the contradictory nature of the Chinese national imagination, as both a historical victim of Western colonialism- with the handover of Hong Kong seen as the key to remedying these past wrongs- and aspiring “Great Power” in its own right, willing to deny self-government to polities on the periphery of its national domain.”³⁸ The “re-colonization” of Hong Kong therefore provides a degree of insight into how some residents perceive not only the political relationship between the two, but also how institutions should function within it.

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* is the seminal work on the emergence of new nationalisms as a response to outside rule. From Indonesia to Eastern Europe, the 20th century saw dozens of new nations emerge as former subjects began to coalesce around new, or re-created identities, using language learned through colonial interactions. In Anderson’s view, all nations are “imagined” because no citizen can know all their fellow citizens yet feel as though they are a part of the same entity.³⁹ In his view, all nations had three things in common: they have some geographic limits, they are ideally sovereign, and they are “conceived of as a deep

³⁶ Wai-man Lam, “Hong Kong’s Fragmented Soul: Exploring Brands of Localism,” in *Citizen Identity and Social Movements in the New Hong Kong*, 77.

³⁷ Elson Tong, “‘Hong Kong Is a Chinese Colony’: Pro-Independence Party to Hold Vigil on Eve of Handover Anniversary,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, June 19, 2017.

³⁸ Cooper, “You Have to Fight on Your Own: Self-Alienation and the New Hong Kong Nationalism,” 101.

³⁹ Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London New York: Verso, 2016), 8.

horizontal comradeship.”⁴⁰ Not every nation that has emerged has ascended to statehood, meaning that within countries, several national identities may exist in competition or in parallel. Hong Kong is one of these subnational nations. It has clear boundaries, with nations lying beyond it, ideals of sovereignty, and a sense of a collective identity. However, Hong Kong is not only politically a part of China, but many of its citizens identify as Chinese along cultural, ethnic, or racial lines. Although there is significant overlap between the two nationalities, there are by no means interchangeable.

Although Anderson’s theories are effective in determining what unites many different forms of nationalism, Luke Cooper correctly points out that he fails to incorporate how conflicting societies factor into the development of a national consciousness. This is especially relevant in a place such as Hong Kong where many consider the emergence of a Hong Kong identity to come at the expense of the residents’ Chinese one.⁴¹ Every year, the National University of Hong Kong publishes a survey which measures the percent of residents that identify as one of the following labels: Hong Konger, Chinese, Hong Konger in China, or Chinese in Hong Kong. In the first decade following Handover, the proportion of residents identifying as “Chinese” steadily grew, until a spike in those identifying as “Hong Konger” occurred in 2008, and every year since then has grown.⁴² Stark differences exist across age groups, older respondents are more likely to identify as either Chinese or as a mix of Hong Konger and Chinese, while younger correspondents are more like to identify exclusively with the territory.⁴³

⁴⁰ Cooper, “You Have to Fight on Your Own: Self-Alienation and the New Hong Kong Nationalism,” 7.

⁴¹Yongshun Cai, *The Occupy Movement in Hong Kong: Sustaining Decentralized Protests* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 157.

⁴² Bill Chou, “State, Market Force and National Identity,” in *Hong Kong Under Chinese Rule: Economic Integration and Political Gridlock* (New Jersey: World Scientific Publishing, 2013), 124.

⁴³ Cai, *The Occupy Movement in Hong Kong: Sustaining Decentralized Protests*, 156.

The divergent localist groups, over 45 of which emerged in response to the problems the 2014 movement failed to resolve, also force both participants and observers to grapple with the question of what a Hong Kong identity encompasses.⁴⁴ There exists a diverse array of groups, in size, composition, goals, ideals. Some groups focus on a community, others center on a profession, or a university student body. Some groups advocate for Hong Kong remaining as a bastion of traditional Chinese culture, others coalesce around cosmopolitan ideals that reinforce the city's multicultural heritage. Some groups advocate for political autonomy while others call for total independence under international protection.⁴⁵ Regardless, all these groups must contend with China as it forms an “ever-present relational construct” that by nature defines them.⁴⁶ However, while the diversity of these groups is a strength as it shows broad support across several different cross-sections of Hong Kong society, it also a weakness as it makes it difficult to determine what residents actually *want* going forward. One pro-activist source states, “Can Hong Kong’s democratic impulses, as amplified in the OCM, be best explained by the desire to maintain Hong Kong’s way of life, rather than be indicative of an ambitious pursuit of a distant political goal?”⁴⁷

There are theories that post-Handover conditions led to the emergence of these groups, as their participants are mostly youth that have little, if any, memory of Hong Kong under British rule. As Cooper states, “For these [younger residents] lived experience of Chinese sovereignty thus appears to have had the opposite impact to that envisaged by the ‘one country’ element of the historic compromise; the creation of social pressures inclining a section of the young to reject

⁴⁴ Lam, “Hong Kong’s Fragmented Soul: Exploring Brands of Localism,” 77.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Cooper, “You Have to Fight on Your Own: Self-Alienation and the New Hong Kong Nationalism,” 99.

⁴⁷ Hualing, “Political Protest in High-Income Societies,” 88.

a Chinese element to their identity.”⁴⁸ **The social pressures, either economic or political in nature, are primarily a reflection of not just internal dynamics, but the consequences of various Chinese official policies that either hurt individuals’ quality of life or go against the promises contained with Basic Law.** The emergence of this identity is, at least in part, a reaction to pressures emanating from the Mainland, either directly or indirectly. From Tiananmen onwards, these pressures have resulted in a shift of what it means to be a Hong Konger, a label that that over time has become outwardly less Chinese, more democratic, and less enamored with the trappings of capitalism.⁴⁹

The growing conception of a Hong Kong identity, one that is distinct from a Mainland one, also then turns Mainlanders into “outsiders” within Hong Kong society. The influx in tourism, although economically vital, also brings with it complaints from residents regarding “anti-social” behavior, congestion on public transportation, or accusations of economic migrants benefitting at the expense of Hong Kongers.⁵⁰ These criticisms, or the use of terms such as “locusts” with regard to tourists or IVS visitors, only further fan the flames of localism and xenophobia, or at the very least desires for economic autonomy.⁵¹ This is not only restricted to tourists; it is especially prevalent towards immigrants from Mainland China. These immigrants often report discrimination, even from government offices, and agree that Hong Kong residents are generally biased towards recent arrivals. Those most impacted by the negative effects of economic integration, such as those closest to the border, unemployed from lost manufacturing opportunities, or sidelined to low-wage retail jobs, often “express the strongest discontent and

⁴⁸ Cooper, “You Have to Fight on Your Own: Self-Alienation and the New Hong Kong Nationalism,” 95.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 120.

⁵⁰ Lam, “Hong Kong’s Fragmented Soul: Exploring Brands of Localism,” 72.

⁵¹ Ibid, 88.

discriminatory attitudes towards new immigrants.”⁵² This, despite the fact that both groups are of a similar class, and are spatially trapped in economically disadvantageous situations.⁵³ This, despite the fact that these immigrants are increasingly similar to Hong Kongers, at least outwardly.

Despite fears that integration would lead to a decline in the use of Cantonese, Cantonese-speaking immigrants increased from 50% in 1991 to 80% by 2006. However, even if these migrants may linguistically align closer with Hong Kongers, the deeper issues with their arrival take primacy. According to James Downes, “The formation of anti-immigrant sentiment amongst Hong Kong citizens towards Mainland Chinese immigrants appears to be driven by a dual mechanism of “fear” and “resentment” towards the Beijing government, rather than being due to the classic ethnic competition model of economic factors or the social identity theory.”⁵⁴ It does not help that immigrant communities more often vote for pro-Beijing candidates in local elections.

Hong Kong’s privileged status as the most advanced, western-facing city relative to the rest of China has no doubt played a part in how popular conceptions of economic integration influence society. It is a difficult road to navigate. China’s rise not only made Hong Kong relatively less prosperous, but the politics of integration only further deteriorated the social aspects that make the city unique within China. People often use the term “just another Chinese city” to describe this fall from grace.⁵⁵ And during 2019’s Movement, some protestors shouted “Not the Bay Area!” in reference to the Central Government’s plan for an economically

⁵² Si-Ming Li and Pu Hao, “Socio-Spatial Differentiation of Permanent Hong Kong Residents and New Immigrants from Mainland China,” in *Migration in Post-Colonial Hong Kong*, 53.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 40.

⁵⁴ Downes, “Mainland Chinese Immigration in Hong Kong: Analyzing Anti-Immigrant Sentiment,” 67.

⁵⁵ John Keane, “‘We Fear Hong Kong Will Become Just Another Chinese City’: An Interview with Martin Lee, Grandfather of Democracy,” *The Conversation*, October 3, 2019.

integrated super-region, including both SARs as well as Mainland municipalities like Shenzhen and Zhuhai.⁵⁶ This is not the first time that attempts to economically integrate Hong Kong and China came hand-in-hand with political integration as well. For example, in 2003, as CEPA I was passed and IVS was instituted, the government's decision to pass an Anti-Sedition Bill resulted in 500,000 residents peacefully opposing its decision.

In hindsight, it is clear that these two acts are intertwined- economic integration and prosperity at the cost of a certain degree of autonomy or civil liberties. This realization has no doubt played a role in how the definition of politics has expanded to include all aspects of day to day life and laid the groundwork for a more politically conscious populace, especially younger segments of it, to interpret outwardly apolitical actions as carrying political messaging. In other words, "The bargains that were struck by generations before them, including the OCTS as enshrined in the Basic Law, were simply not acceptable. The Younger generation demanded to exercise the power to decide what constitutional law meant to them."⁵⁷ Much of the transformation in Hong Kong civic society has been led by the youth, a part of the ever-expanding definition of "politics" that makes up a generational shift. While before, "politics was widely seen as potentially dangerous to society and as the exclusive domain of left-wing activists and radicals,"⁵⁸ now all parts of Hong Kong's relationship with China are politicized within Hong Kong society.

All aspects of Hong Kong's relationship with China are under debate, even its basic premise. Therefore, the attempts to use more China-focused textbooks in schools, delay the

⁵⁶ Stuart Heaver, "Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area: A Political Manifesto Masquerading as a Business Plan?" *Hong Kong Free Press HKFP*, March 1, 2020.

⁵⁷ Hualing, "Political Protest in High-Income Societies," 91.

⁵⁸ Wai-man Lam, *Understanding the Political Culture of Hong Kong: The Paradox of Activism and Depoliticization: The Paradox of Activism and Depoliticization (Hong Kong Becoming China)* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 217.

passage of universal suffrage, or attempt to pass an extradition bill, have each been met with intensifying reactions from the populace. The ire towards CCP officials is clear and well-documented, however that ire has expanded to include the immigrants or tourists that have little say in the matter, but who, for many, represent these broader struggles. If these frustrations can explain anti-Mainlander sentiment, then it is clear how the sharp decrease in Hong Kongers identifying as Chinese, witnessed since the mid-2010s, also reflects these same issues.⁵⁹ Through this, it is clear how the aftereffects of greater economic integration included social polarization, democratic movements, or social instability.

Increasing polarization of Hong Kong society has made it difficult to separate where political and social reactions to China become distinct. It is no coincidence that the most recent protest movements of 2014 and 2019 were led by those who have gained the least economically from participation. Not only that, but it seems it is now too late. Whereas many during the Umbrella movement cited economic despair as a reason why they protested, the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement focused almost entirely on broad social and political discontent. None of the protestors' five demands were economic in nature, and they participated despite mounting evidence that the disruptions were responsible for the subsequent economic downturn.⁶⁰ However, the significant overlap between those who are economically disadvantaged, identify more strongly with a Hong Kong identity, and reject many pro-Beijing policies cannot be ignored. It is not a question as to whether China's continued development and Hong Kong's economic dependence on the mainland can undermine residents' leverage in objecting to what

⁵⁹ Cai, *The Occupy Movement in Hong Kong: Sustaining Decentralized Protests*, 156.

⁶⁰ Andrew Jacobs, "With No End to Unrest in Sight, Hong Kong's Economic Pain Deepens - The New York Times," *New York Times*, October 13, 2019.

they feel is overt Chinese intervention, rather the question is how much the participants of these movements are willing to sacrifice economically.

There is no way to truly measure the extent to which the effects of economic integration are directly responsible for the tensions within Hong Kong. The portrayal of the Hong Kong populace as historically obedient, if not totally ignorant of politics and the issue of governance, is at best a half-truth, used by British onlookers to lessen, if not justify, the negative aspects of their colonial ventures. Writers, especially British onlookers, viewed Hong Kong as a place where the government truly did the bare minimum- its purpose was to provide a stable environment for the people within its borders to engage in whatever capitalist behavior they liked; with relatively low taxes, regulations, and corruption. This of course ignores the efforts made by the Hong Kong government to solve the territory's ever-present housing crisis, as well as local activist's colonial-era attempts to secure more rights for Hong Kong. However, the territory's post-handover history of political agitation deserves closer inspection.

Political & Legal

It is difficult to divide the cultural from the political or legal. Chen Zuo Er, a former deputy director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office of the State Council once stated that:

This is a battle over the right of governance in Hong Kong. Its importance is not next to the handover of sovereignty. It is even more complicated... In the future, the people in Hong Kong not only need to face the legacies of the Occupy Movement, but they also have to deal with the forces that harm Hong Kong. Those forces may turn away from the streets to the court, the legislature, the media, and universities or even high schools. That will be a long battle.⁶¹

⁶¹ Cai, *The Occupy Movement in Hong Kong: Sustaining Decentralized Protests*, 157.

Another said that Hong Kong residents needed to be “re-enlightened” about the OCTS policy.⁶² In other words, Hong Kong’s autonomy is only going to be further challenged not only economically, but also culturally, legally, and politically.

The challenges facing Hong Kong’s autonomy are both large and small. For example, the infamous decision by the Chinese government to kidnap five Hong Kong booksellers and extract forced confessions in Mainland prisons, clearly went against provisions within Basic Law. Although two of the booksellers were in China at the time of their detainment, two were in Hong Kong and another was in Thailand. The bookseller kidnapped from Bangkok, Gui Minhai, also held a Swedish passport.⁶³ Whereas the Swedish embassy was able to lobby on his behalf, albeit unsuccessfully, Hong Kong residents had no way of politically voicing disagreeing or punishing those responsible. The high-profile disappearances dealt a death blow to Hong Kong’s vibrant, independent, book-publishing industry.⁶⁴ The CCP has yet to reveal what specific books resulted in the group’s detainment, however. Although that was the most notable example of breaches in the Basic Law, it is far from the only one. Hong Kong’s press freedom has declined from 18th in the world in 2002, to 69th by 2016.⁶⁵ In the new Express Rail Link, a high-speed train that connects Hong Kong to Shenzhen and Guangzhou, opened a new terminal in Hong Kong in 2018. Not only does it literally shorten the transit time between Hong Kong and the mainland, further blurring the distinction, but the terminal is functionally an enclave of the PRC. Security is managed by Mainland employees and travelers follow Mainland laws.⁶⁶ This small, but symbolic, action serves as a reminder of the ever-present risk to Hong Kong’s autonomy.

⁶² Ibid, p. 158

⁶³ Austin Ramzy, “China Sentences Hong Kong Bookseller Gui Minhai to 10 Years in Prison,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 2020.

⁶⁴ Ilaria Maria Sala, “Independent Publishing in Hong Kong - a Once-Flourishing Industry Annihilated by Fear,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, February 17, 2018.

⁶⁵ Hualing, “Political Protest in High-Income Societies,” 89.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “The Divides That Make Hong Kong and West Berlin,” *The Atlantic*, February 8, 2020.

Politically, the PRC has grown increasingly adept at governing Hong Kong through legal proceedings and rulings rather than through the use of force or invocation of emergency acts. The National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) has the power of final interpretation over Basic Law, and has become "increasingly confident" in its ability to use legal arguments to strengthen its hold on the territory without resorting to more overt methods of control.⁶⁷ For example, in 2016, not only were six localist candidates disqualified from participating in LegCo races due to their support of Hong Kong's independence, but a further six elected members were disqualified for statements made during their oath-taking ceremonies.⁶⁸ As Article 104 of Basic Law stipulated the oath-taking ceremony, the NPCSC issued an interpretation of the Basic Law that made it a requirement to only say the necessary words within the oath, as well as to do so in a sincere manner. In effect, the Central Government upheld the disqualifications and prevented future pro-democracy activists from undertaking similar schemes, despite the matter being an entirely local one. The oath-taking decision, one of a string of Basic Law interpretations that attacked Hong Kong's autonomy, remind activists and observers of the increasing inadequacy of the city's legal foundation. The NPCSC is a political organ of the state, and will continue to make decisions with political calculations in mind.⁶⁹ The result is a situation in which activists struggle to legitimize their desires, as the NPCSC reserves the flexibility to reject each demand for democracy or autonomy using legalistic arguments that are increasingly divorced from the promises of the Joint Declaration.

One controversial aspect of Basic Law is Article 23. The article states:

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central

⁶⁷ Hualing, "Political Protest in High-Income Societies," 83.

⁶⁸ Chris Lau and Kimmy Chung, "Court Ruling Disqualifying Lawmakers 'a Declaration of War,'" *South China Morning Post*, July 14, 2017.

⁶⁹ Hualing, "Political Protest in High-Income Societies," 86.

People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organisations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organisations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organisations or bodies.⁷⁰

The failure of Basic Law in defining what constitutes an “act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion” has been a significant point of contention in interpretations of Article 23. In 2003, an attempt by the HKSAR Government to pass the National Security Bill, in keeping with Basic Law, was met with a protest of about 500,000 residents of the city, 10% of the population. The bill was withdrawn and has yet to be passed, however the influence of Article 23 is clear as mainland officials seek to curb Hong Kong’s independence while Hong Kong residents view it as an attempt to restrict their rights in much the same way that citizens on the mainland are restricted. Some make the argument that the reaction to an Article 23 bill, required by Basic Law, was the catalyst in Beijing’s policy towards Hong Kong. From the CCP’s perspective, the mass demonstrations only showed that residents were perhaps less accommodating than it seemed.⁷¹

Opposite the NPCSC, and the only avenue for Hong Kong residents to have their autonomy guaranteed is the Court of Final Appeals. The Court is vital in the leverage Hong Kong institutions have to maintain their autonomy within Basic Law. Therefore, early cases such as Ng Ka Ling served as landmark moments in which that autonomy was delineated. In that case, the CFA’s decision to interpret Basic Law, and in effect, void parts of it, led to the NPCSC exercising its ultimate veto power. Albert Chen referred to the CFA’s attempt to ensure Hong

⁷⁰ “Basic Law,” § Chapter II: Relationship between the Central Authorities and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

⁷¹ Ho-fung Hung, “Three Views of Local Consciousness in Hong Kong | The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 12, no. 44 (November 2, 2014).

Kong's legal separation as not only "constitutionally impossible," but also "politically offensive under the mainland system."⁷² He goes on to add:

the Hong Kong courts' power to interpret the Basic Law and to determine whether an act of any governmental authority is consistent with the Basic Law, albeit a real and important power, is nevertheless not an absolute one. It is not absolute because it is subject to the overriding power of the NPCSC.⁷³

The strong response of the Ng Ka Ling led to the emergence of "agents of anti-politics," in which "apolitical judicial identity reproduces a compliant judiciary."⁷⁴ In other words, Hong Kong judges avoid the controversial legal questions that lie at the heart of popular protest movements. In turn, the strong rule of law that permeates Hong Kong society naturally disadvantages pro-democracy groups who have weaker legal arguments in their favor.⁷⁵ As government actions avoid running afoul of Basic Law, the court's inability to issue its own interpretations of larger political questions, and the inability for Hong Kong residents to alter Basic Law, makes it difficult for residents to defend Hong Kong's autonomy.

The transformation of Hong Kong's protest culture between 2014's Umbrella Protests to 2019's Anti-Extradition Protests reflect the intensifying debate within the territory's society and the impossible ideals that participants seek out. Not only did the protest reflect a Hong Kong trying to "reconcile" its identity, it also demonstrated how in the absence of democratization, radicalization became more widespread.⁷⁶ These were not the first mass democratization movements. Those were the 2003 July 1st March as well as 2012's protests against a proposed national education curriculum. The former was the largest in the territory's history at the time, and both succeeded in their stated goals. The government both times conceded defeat to the

⁷² Hualing, "Political Protest in High-Income Societies," 86.

⁷³ Albert H.Y. Chen, "The Rule of Law under 'One Country, Two Systems': The Case of Hong Kong 1997-2010," *National Taiwan University Law Review* 6, no. 1 (2011): 275.

⁷⁴ Hualing, "Political Protest in High-Income Societies," 96.

⁷⁵ Jacques deLisle, "Democracy and Constitutionalism in China's Shadow," in *Law and Politics of the Taiwan Sunflower and Hong Kong Umbrella Movements* (London: Routledge, 2017), 212.

⁷⁶ Cooper, "You Have to Fight on Your Own: Self-Alienation and the New Hong Kong Nationalism," 104.

outpouring of support. Both protests, crucially, centered around a facet of Hong Kong's identity under threat, not merely implicitly as in economic integration, but explicit government policies. In 2003, many residents feared that the bill would infringe on their civil liberties and bring mainland encroachment into the territory. In 2012, they feared that a national curriculum would lead to students developing a more Chinese identity at the expense of a local one, not unfounded in a situation where mainland observers often lament that "we are making slow progress in winning the hearts of Hong Kongers."⁷⁷

However, 2014's Umbrella Protests, also known as The Occupy Central Movement (OCM) and 2019's Anti-Extradition Protests, also referred to as the Protest of 5 Demands, are extremely different from these earlier demonstrations. Firstly, their length; the July 1st Marches were a day, 2012's movement lasted ten days. The Umbrella Movement, by contrast, went on for 11 weeks, and 2019's has not yet ceased, 10 months after its start. Furthermore, while the previous two succeeded in their defense of Hong Kong's autonomy, both these movements failed despite the participants' efforts. Although the movements in 2014 and 2019 diverge in significant ways, it is impossible to ignore the way in which the former serves as a precursor for the latter. Both are vital expressions of Hong Kong residents' voices.

The Umbrella Movement served as a turning point in Hong Kong's history of civil disobedience. On August 31, 2014, the NPCSC passed an interpretation of Basic Law that allowed for a further delay in implementing universal suffrage in the following CE and LegCo elections. For the 2016 LegCo election and the 2017 CE election, the NPCSC would allow universal suffrage, but only for candidates that received support from at least half of the to-be-formed nominating committee. The decision meant that Beijing would be allowed to pre-screen

⁷⁷ Jiang, *China's Hong Kong: A Political and Cultural Perspective*, 115.

candidates to ensure that only pro-establishment figures would run for office of Chief Executive, while also ensuring that the LegCo would continue to be influenced by pro-government functional constituencies.

2014 was not the first time democratic reform had been a goal of Hong Kong's populace. Pan-democrats had pushed for universal suffrage in the wake of 2003's movement, however in the intervening ten years only mild reforms had occurred. Many democratic candidates and supporters correctly viewed the decision as merely allowing the people to pick between pro-Beijing candidates, rather than candidates that could accurately reflect the diversity of Hong Kong perspectives. In the Legislative Council (LegCo), pan-democrats rejected the bill, knowing that to accept it would lend legitimacy to what would be an illegitimate government.⁷⁸

Decisionmakers in Beijing were obviously aware that a further delay in democratic reform would result in some degree of unrest, however, in their eyes it was the more effective choice.

According to Albert Chen, that decision "might be best understood as the outcome of a cost-and-benefit analysis."⁷⁹ If the NPCSC had not issued its interpretation of Basic Law, a pan-democrat, or worse, a pro-independence candidate could then win election. The cost-benefit analysis that Chen refers to is simple: would it cause more unrest to further delay universal suffrage and handle the immediate political fallout, or allow universal suffrage, have a democrat win, and then disqualify the candidate and deal with the *guaranteed* protests to follow.

The 8.31 Decision, as it came to be called, was the spark. Jacques deLisle writes, "Political concerns about Beijing's recalcitrance towards Hong Kong's democratization and erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy resonated with simmering economic resentment towards the

⁷⁸ Chen, "The Law and Politics of Constitutional Reform and Democratization in Hong Kong," 78.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 72.

mainland in Hong Kong.”⁸⁰ The goal of the protests, although political in nature, went beyond addressing a singular decision. As Wai-Man Lam and Luke Cooper stated, “Popular discontent with the authorities was a *cause* of the political crisis. But a deep sense of alienation between rulers and ruled was also a *consequence* of the movement’s defeat at the hands of the uncompromising HKSAR government.”⁸¹ That “deep sense of alienation” is instrumental in understanding how the transformation of Hong Kong and China’s economic relationship led to more intense protests, polarization, and political upheaval. Outside of the Legislative Council, organizations such as Occupy Central with Love and Peace and other pro-democracy activist groups began to organize protests, boycotts, sit-ins, and other demonstrations.

However, the demonstrations, boycotts, and sit-ins began to escalate as it became clear that both protestors and the government were unwilling to negotiate. Yongshun Cai, in *The Occupy Movement in Hong Kong* writes, “but the protestors’ demands dictated that the dialogue was unlikely to satisfy the students’ expectation. While some participants believed that past protests had forced the government to make concessions, those concessions could be the very reason that the central government refused to concede anymore.”⁸² At the time, the Umbrella Movement was the longest social campaign in Hong Kong history, yet it failed where several in the past succeeded. Over the course of nearly three months, activists closed off several areas to traffic and refused to leave.

The official response, both from within Hong Kong as a well as in Mainland China, only made the gap between activists and the government wider. Mainland news reports entirely excluded the protestors’ claims of police violence, instead focusing on blaming “rioters” for the

⁸⁰ deLisle, “Democracy and Constitutionalism in China’s Shadow,” 227.

⁸¹ Lam and Cooper, *Citizenship, Identity and Social Movements in the New Hong Kong*, 6.

⁸² Cai, *The Occupy Movement in Hong Kong: Sustaining Decentralized Protests*, 122.

disruptions to the lives of law-abiding Hong Kongers. Not only that, mainland sources often blamed the unrest on “hostile foreign forces” or activists that received funds from abroad to destabilize the CCP.⁸³ The less nationalistic rhetoric still excluded protestors’ demands for democracy, instead focusing on Hong Kong’s economic issues as the reason behind the demonstrations. Reports of police violence towards activists, most infamously in Ken Tsang’s beating, reinforced fears that Hong Kong’s institutions, especially its police force, were subject to Mainland pressure. Not only that, but the government’s unwillingness to negotiate with protestors and the reports of police violence served as the second and third most common reasons as to why protestors joined the movement.⁸⁴ Fu Hualing writes, “It is highly likely that the OCM has rattled either Beijing or the Hong Kong government into dictating some operational policing matters. Police professionalism may have been sacrificed to political expediency.”⁸⁵

The radicalization of Hong Kong protest culture became an outlet for the absence of the political reforms promised under One Country Two Systems. Hong Kong residents have no ability to alter Basic Law, ensure the Central Government upholds it, or freely elect their own leaders. Relative to their counterparts in other centers of global trade, Hong Kongers are some of the wealthiest on average yet have one of the least democratic political systems. According to Cooper, the very status of OCTS is partially at fault, as it allows for alternative forms of government to be “imagined, expressed, and campaigned for” without allowing residents to achieve them.⁸⁶ Not only that, but the growing divide between what some residents demand and

⁸³ Han Zhu, “A Divided Society,” in *Law and Politics of the Taiwan Sunflower and Hong Kong Umbrella Movements* (London: Routledge, 2017), 164.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 174.

⁸⁵ Hualing, “Political Protest in High-Income Societies,” 93.

⁸⁶ Cooper, “You Have to Fight on Your Own: Self-Alienation and the New Hong Kong Nationalism,” 104.

what the government is willing to tolerate then amplifies calls for actions that are “perceived as meaningful” while ultimately changing little.⁸⁷ While this can apply to one’s participation in a movement, it can also include the abuse that some Mainlanders in Hong Kong are subject to.

The debates over Hong Kong’s rule of law, in which activists rely on naturalistic arguments rather than legal ones, took center stage throughout 2014’s protests. Eventually, a cross border bus company filed an injunction to move the protestors, which the court granted. In his decision to grant it, Justice Au wrote, “The fact that it also happens that there is political [considerations] underlying these disputes does not and should not affect the court’s role in adjudicating those legal rights. Nor should the court refrain from adjudicating those legal rights in this dispute.”⁸⁸ The court’s decision to grant the injunction broke the movement. Fu writes, “It was the authority of the court and the willingness of the people in the city to obey the rule of law that effectively suppressed citizens’ democratic impulses.”⁸⁹ Once the movement was divided on how to continue and the number of participants dropped, its defeat only hastened.

The manner in which the Umbrella Movement ended, divided and by a legal decision unrelated to the protestors’ original demands, highlights the deterioration of Hong Kong’s autonomy. A cross-border bus company, which derives its profits almost exclusively from the ease with which Mainlanders could travel to Hong Kong, used the territory’s legal system to derail the political ambitions of a vibrant protest movement. The movement’s defeat did not resolve the pre-existing tensions that allowed it to spring up. Instead, when combined with claims of a government receiving orders from Beijing, and a police force accused of abuse, it ensured that the next protest movement would be carried out with less regard for government

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Hualing, “Political Protest in High-Income Societies,” 93.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 84.

orders, more violence, and less willingness to concede. This is not hindsight determining that 2014's protest led to 2019's, even at the time it was clear that the Umbrella Movement, or its legacy, would continue to hang over Hong Kong. Cai correctly predicted that "the OCM is as much a reflection of divisive society as a catalyzer of a more radical movement, one that may spin Hong Kong out of control."⁹⁰

Although many could predict that the lack of resolution following the Umbrella Movement would result in another movement, few predicted the intensity of the 2019 Anti-Extradition protests. Similar to the Occupy Movement, the protests began in response to a political decision seen to advantage the PRC at the expense of Hong Kong's autonomy. In June, the first large scale peaceful demonstration against the bill occurred. Once again, the government was unwilling to make concessions to the activists, as Chief Executive Carrie Lam refused to withdraw the new bill. Much like 2014, the protests morphed from a reaction to a specific political motion, to one that questioned the structure that Hong Kong residents found themselves in. The first demand, the withdrawal of the extradition bill, expanded to include four more: to cease referring to participants as "rioters," to drop all charges against protestors, to conduct an independent inquiry into police behavior, and to implement universal suffrage immediately for the following LegCo and CE elections.⁹¹

The violence, both from the protestors and from the police, was a stark departure even from the events of 2014. Several horrific incidents occurred, such as an elderly man killed by a thrown brick, a police officer shooting a teenage protestor, or the several-day siege of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, that would have been inconceivable a few short months earlier. However much of the violence was a result of what occurred during the Umbrella

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Jeremy Goldkorn et al., "What Are The Five Key Demands Of Hong Kong?" SupChina, October 23, 2019.

Movement. The 2019 protests rejected all forms of leadership, as following the UM, many student leaders and activists reported official and unofficial harassment. This meant that while the government could negotiate in 2014, in 2019 it could not, as there was no figurehead or official consensus between movement members. Instead of occupying strategic areas, the protestors were spontaneous and would break up or reappear elsewhere. Although not every peaceful demonstrator became a “hardcore” member of the movement, enough did where the violence dragged on for the rest of 2019, and into 2020.

The tactical decision by protestors to use more violent methods to make their voices heard did not come without costs. Pro-democracy activism, already youthful, became even more divisive as some Hong Kong residents began to voice opposition to the movement’s increasing intensity and disruption to Hong Kong’s daily life. Protestors targeted pro-China businesses, such as Bank of China branches or shops owned by pro-establishment individuals, which only further turned away potential supporters.

Although many may have disagreed with the protestor’s violent defensive measures, many maintained their support for the ethos of the protest that focused on Hong Kong free of the CCP’s influence. The November 2019 District Council elections became an unofficial referendum on the protest movement and its level of support amongst the populace. The record-breaking turnout, especially amongst younger voters, resulted in a landslide victory for pan-democratic candidates. They won 392 seats to pro-establishment candidates’ 60, a sharp rebuke to HKSAR government.⁹² However, as a whole, it is impossible to determine the level of support the protests garnered, however, three Humans of New York post from November of 2019 can

⁹² Kimmy Chung, “Young Voters Now the Most Active in Hong Kong as Turnout for Under-35s Doubles,” *South China Morning Post*, April 4, 2020.

illustrate some variety of perspectives from residents. All three posts are written from the perspective of the subject, which in all cases remained nameless.

The first post, from November 2nd, is from a middle-aged Hong Kong man who works at a shopping mall. Due to the disruptions from protests, mainland Chinese tourism began to drop, threatening the livelihoods of the shops that depend on their patronage. The man states:

Most of the protestors are very young. Maybe I'd have joined them when I was their age. [...] It's easy to have dreams and ideals when you have no burdens. I've always believed that Hong Kong is a part of China. And stability is better than poverty. What good is democracy if you're poor? They'd probably say I've traded my ideals for money. But it isn't money. It's burdens.⁹³

He invokes both democracy as well as Hong Kong independence, showing how both goals have become increasingly intertwined despite their large difference. His fears of economic recession due to the protests were far from unfounded, Hong Kong's economy contracted throughout the second half of 2019.⁹⁴ In effect, the quote directly links Hong Kong's economic dependence on China to the city's democratic future, and places them as opposites. Hong Kongers have a choice, but for many in the city, it is one that many cannot afford to make, regardless of their politics. However, despite his disagreements for protestors and the impact of their actions, he finds himself agreeing with their ideals.

The latter two posts, one from November 11th and the other from November 13th, view the issue from a younger perspective. The first, is of a young Hong Konger who states:

Even if change seemed unlikely, I wanted to represent my values. [...] But something changed as the weeks went on. People got more desperate. The government started pulling our permits. Protests were made illegal. Police began to use violence. In the beginning we'd just run away, but at some point people began to hit back. It became an eye for an eye: using hate speech, setting fires,

⁹³ Humans of New York, Facebook, November 2, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/humansofnewyork/posts/3570865509654190>.

⁹⁴ Jeff Black and Eric Lam, "Hong Kong Expects 1st Annual Recession Since Financial Crisis - Bloomberg," *Bloomberg*, November 15, 2019.

breaking the windows of ‘pro-China’ businesses. And that’s when I stopped participating. It stopped representing my values.”⁹⁵

The sympathizer’s use of the word desperate fell in line with other sources, both within and outside of Hong Kong, that placed the “hope” of the Umbrella Movement against 2019’s “desperation.”⁹⁶ Although the speaker disavows the actions of their fellow activists, they also make sure to point out that the activists had an increasingly narrow range of options. Much like the larger issue of radicalization in the absence of political participation, the protestors found they could no longer legally protest peacefully, and not only that, but they became targets.

The final post is of a young man who participated in the Umbrella Movement and questioned whether he had an obligation to participate in 2019’s. The post goes, “I don’t want to be arrested. It’s not worth the risk. Because it’s all going to end in misery, anyway. The path is set. Our freedoms will narrow. The government will not change. The only rational decision is to leave.”⁹⁷ His decision to not participate in the protests was not rooted in a disagreement with their messaging, rather than a belief that it would all be in vain. In the absence of a more inclusive democratic system, Hong Kongers like these two examples found themselves unable to voice their support for the protest’s goals without also supporting the means to achieve those goals. Furthermore, to support those means and participate in the protest would be dangerous. There is absolutely no optimism in his words, focusing instead on what decisions he can make to avoid the fate of both his fellow protestors as well as the city itself.

The global attention both protest movements received only hurt the CCP’s legitimacy. Within western democracies, news coverage leaned in favor of the protestors, as it became one

⁹⁵ Humans of New York, Facebook, November 11, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/humansofnewyork/posts/3599385383468869>.

⁹⁶ James Griffiths, “Hong Kong’s Democracy Movement Was about Hope. These Protests Are Driven by Desperation,” CNN, July 2, 2019.

⁹⁷ Humans of New York, Facebook, November 13, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/humansofnewyork/posts/3606415369432537>.

more anti-China talking point. Hong Kong's democracy and civic life is a measurement of how willing and open the CCP is to democratic institutions as a whole, and Xi's action in Hong Kong over the past five years paint a very clear answer: *hostile*. The allegations of state-sanctioned police violence and protestors' illegal extradition to the Mainland further paint a picture of a regime willing to exercise significant amounts of control to maintain its increasingly tenuous hold on the territory.⁹⁸

However, even though the Hong Kong government, with Xi's support, has tried to silence protestors and activists, there are still clear constraints on what options China had before it. Any violent crackdown, using the People's Liberation Army or a paramilitary force, would be an irrevocable rejection of One Country Two Systems. Western democracies, especially the UK and the US, would no doubt impose sanctions, and the city's time as a center of global trade would certainly come to an end.⁹⁹ At the same time, Xi has to maximize his credibility, refusing to concede to global audiences or local pressures. The result is another situation in which the CCP finds itself constrained by the international system.

Perhaps the most important global lesson to be gleaned from the CCP's reaction to Hong Kong is to recognize the degree to which credibility and appearing resolute matter in Beijing. In 2003 and 2012, the Hong Kong government gave in to protestors. By 2014, it negotiated quite harshly and, in the end, conceded nothing. In 2019, it did not even negotiate. Over the course of a decade, the government pushed its pro-China agenda forward much more aggressively. This coincides quite well with Xi's rise to the top of the CCP hierarchy. In the same time, the CCP has put more than one million Uighurs in detention camps, influenced elections in Taiwan, and

⁹⁸ James Palmer, "Is China Detaining Hong Kong Protesters on the Mainland?," *Foreign Policy*, November 20, 2019.

⁹⁹ Minxin Pei, "A Tiananmen-Style Crackdown Would Be Catastrophic for China," *South China Morning Post*, August 14, 2019.

infringed in broad ways on Hong Kong's periphery. Leaders that solve crises with violence domestically are more likely to do so internationally, and vice-versa, especially when those leaders place a high degree of priority on maintaining a certain reputation. Therefore, the situation in Hong Kong is not just a story of what happens within the city, nor is it just a cautionary tale for others within Greater China, but another sign of a much larger issue.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

It would be easiest to imagine Hong Kong as a fault line. Not only can local shifts below the surface start earthquakes, but those earthquakes have the ability to intersect with other fault lines and multiply in magnitude. The earthquake the 2019 Hong Kong Anti-Extradition protests set off then sent shockwaves that damaged the CCP's over-arching goal: *national rejuvenation*.¹⁰⁰ Although complex, with layers of Chinese history that make it a unique set of objectives, it can simply refer to the sum benefits of China's broad "core interests." These are as follows: domestic stability and security, economic development, and a more prominent role on the world stage. The connections between these goals are clear. For example, economic growth does not just bring benefit to China's citizens. It also satisfies them enough to allow the CCP to continue its 70-year long reign and allows that same government to have a more assertive foreign policy to promote the nation's interests. Willingness to pursue these goals, and the extent to which they are pursued, are then influenced by China's current international status. This not only refers to its place on the economic hierarchy, but also its relationship with the United States, the current hegemon. Normally, outside actors such as the U.S seek to limit a rising power's ability

¹⁰⁰ Xuetong Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, The Princeton-China Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 42.

to expand, lest they become a threat. However, China has risen so much that for many observers both inside and outside the country, it has crossed the threshold from rising power to an established one. Chinese export-driven economic growth complicates this matter, as it actively presents several concerns for American leadership, it has also become the largest trading partner of the U.S.

Within China, this situation presents a balancing act in which China's goals are set against the desires of the international community that can make it difficult for these goals to be met. Robert Gilpin refers to this as an integral component of a nation's "indifference curve." He states, "The individual (or state) will not seek to achieve one objective at the sacrifice of all others but will seek to find some optimum position on the set of indifference curves. Thus the state will not seek to maximize power or welfare but will endeavor to find some optimum combination of both objects and the amount sought will depend on income and cost."¹⁰¹ Between all the goals the CCP hopes to achieve, opposite the potential for international backlash, the nation has never been able to push forward on any one goal exclusively. At different moments, CCP leadership has pulled different levers at its disposal to appease different audiences, both domestically and internationally. The current situation in Hong Kong is not the first time that such tensions rose to the surface over domestic political issues. It is useful to look at what happened in Tiananmen Square to see what happens when the "optimum combination" that Gilpin refers to becomes impossible to find.

The Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 serves as a useful example of the tension described here. Even though Deng Xiaoping greatly prioritized economic and social development, his decision to send armed forces in to clear the pro-democracy protestors resulted

¹⁰¹ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 20.

in worldwide backlash and a temporary embargo from the United States. That decision clearly delineated the priorities of CCP leadership- the pace of development, especially political liberalization, would go at the state's pace. According to Wang, "the West's sanctions against Beijing served as an alarming reminder to China's leaders that internal and external troubles could easily intertwine. Over the next decade, Beijing responded to Western censure by contending that the state's sovereign rights trumped human rights. It resolutely refused to consider adopting Western-type democratic institutions."¹⁰² This through line, evidenced by human rights abuses in Xinjiang in the name of state security, still exists to this day. However, when applied to matters such as Hong Kong's democratic impulses, the narrative grows more complicated. The Tiananmen Incident occurred at a time in which Western observers had much lower expectations for Chinese democracy, when the flow of information was much easier to control, and involved activists legitimately threatening the future of the CCP. Hong Kong's democratic movements, on the other hand, do not explicitly or exclusively advocate for the end of the CCP, nor an independent Hong Kong removed from China. Furthermore, they occur in a Western city with global connections, making the costs of overt meddling and aggression far steeper. However, the Tiananmen Square Incident still casts a large shadow over how Chinese officials, Hong Kong activists, and Western observers analyze the latest protests.

The tension between a nation's domestic goals and its international ones is neither new nor unique to China. Kenneth Waltz, in *Man, the State, and War* provided a framework that divided causes of war into three categories that he refers to as "images". The first image is the individual leadership of particular states, the second the domestic situation within the states

¹⁰² Wang Jisi, "China's Search for a Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, June 7, 2018.

themselves, and finally the “anarchic structure of international politics”.¹⁰³ Although China and the United States are far from at war, and the situation in Hong Kong could not directly lead to open conflict, Waltz still provides a basis with which to analyze the decision-making process that all nations undergo. In the case of China, the first image is the role of Xi Jinping, the second would be domestic societal pressures or the structure of the CCP, and the third would be the liberal international norms. Each of those layers is vital in understanding how the situation in Hong Kong is to be resolved.

It is easiest to begin with the third image, the structure of international politics. Hedley Bull pioneered several theories of *international society*, going beyond the observation that sovereign states existed merely in a state of Hobbesian anarchy, but instead followed some series of norms and institutions in order to interact. His theories use classical European diplomacy as their foundation, modern-day international is a strain of “neo-medievalism”. In such a system, national sovereignty is vague and non-domestic institutions hold sway, much like the historic role of Catholic Church in European politics. Governments are free to act as they wish, however they are beholden to push back from other governments or super-governmental organizations such as the EU or ICC. What happened at Tiananmen Square was an entirely domestic question, but its ripples extended far from Beijing. Despite outbreaks of war, institutions such as the United Nations and the emergence of several regional political, diplomatic, or economic bodies demonstrate that foreign relations are far completely anarchical.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, Bull uses the sociology terms *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* to analyze how nations interact. *Gemeinschaft* refers to “community,” relationships that are naturally defined by

¹⁰³ Thucydides and Lowell S. Gustafson, eds., *Thucydides' Theory of International Relations: A Lasting Possession*, Political Traditions in Foreign Policy Series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 67.

¹⁰⁴ Kai Alderson and Andrew Hurrell, *Hedley Bull on International Society*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10.

an existing hierarchy, such as families. *Gesellschaft* more closely adheres to English' "society," describing how equal citizens treat each other and are governed by some sense of morals, norms, or institutions. International society is a mix of these two situations. In some ways it is clearly a hierarchy, with the U.S at the top. However, even though the U.S is the most powerful participant within the system, it cannot unilaterally compel other nations to act, and all nations are equal participants of international organizations. Within this dynamic, Bull describes each nation's specific approach to participating in the international system as either generally supportive, under terms such as "conservative," "satisfied," "status quo," or antagonistic, "dissatisfied," "revolutionary," or "revisionist." Bull's theory is far from perfect, as it not only presupposes a much broader, diverse world than that of pre-Renaissance Europe, but also in his frequent laments about the very same international society's deterioration as "the revolt against the West."¹⁰⁵ Although Bull's is biased against revisionist countries, or at least has a pro-Western viewpoint, it is useful to conceive of China as a nation dissatisfied with the status quo and committed to remaking the system.

Using Bull's theories as a foundation, Sergey Smolnikov focuses on great power politics. Within a system in which nations compete for resources and prestige, the great powers have a particular responsibility to continuously provide proof of the credibility behind their power.¹⁰⁶ Although all nations must maximize their credibility, be it their ability to meet defense commitments or economic leverage, great powers have to continuously do this as their authority within the system is always under threat. Credibility is currency in international negotiations. However, what about when situations arise in which domestic credibility and international

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 13.

¹⁰⁶ Sergey Smolnikov, *Great Power Conduct and Credibility in World Politics* (New York, NY: Springer, 2018), 176.

credibility may run counter to each other, such as in Taiwan, the South China Sea, or Xinjiang? Not only is this a consideration all nations must take into account, but China is in a unique position considering its status as an illiberal state in a liberal world- in which perhaps leadership and credibility may present themselves differently.

China's crossing from a rising regional power, a threat to American security only immediately within Asia, to a competitor on a global stage, has restarted Cold War-era discussions on the Thucydides Trap. Its named is derived from the Athenian historian who wrote of the Peloponnesian War, "It was the rise of Athens, and the fear that this inspired in Sparta, that made war inevitable."¹⁰⁷ In that war, fifty years of rapid Athenian expansion made Sparta, the traditional land-based power, nervous. Athens, as the revisionist power, sought to revise its "previous arrangement" to reflect the new power dynamic, and Sparta interpreted such a desire as an eventual threat to its own survival.¹⁰⁸ When both city states found themselves on opposite sides of a smaller conflict involving their respective allies, neither backed down. Better to go to war when the balance of power was still slightly in Sparta's favor, went the logic, before Athens grew so much as to prove too superior a foe. The war destroyed much of Greek civilization, and in the end both powers were surpassed by the growing Persian Empire.

International relations theorists have sought to explain what factors make it impossible to peacefully resolve this dilemma. Graham Allison in particular has recently emerged as an expert in answering this question. He recently led a Harvard study that reviewed the most recent five hundred years of history and identified sixteen cases in which the Thucydides Trap could be observed. Of those sixteen cases, only *four* resolved themselves peacefully.¹⁰⁹ Even one of those

¹⁰⁷ Graham Allison, "The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?," *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Allison, "The Thucydides Trap."

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

four, the economic rise of the U.S in the first half of the 20th century to surpass the United Kingdom, required the destruction of World War II to fully realize. The cases that did not resolve themselves peacefully, from Hapsburg-Ottoman wars, to Japan's rapid expansion at the expense of China and Russia at the end of the 19th century, to both World Wars, demonstrated massive wars that changed the course of world history, regardless of whether or not the rising power successfully surpassed the present hegemon. The particular causes of each war, as well as the domestic situations of their participants, were unique. However, the observed pattern is fairly clear: the rapid rise of a foreign power usually destabilizes the international system enough to result in war.

However, the fact that not every conflict between a rising power and a (relatively) declining power resulted in an actual war demonstrates the need for further study as to what factors determine the path nations take. These factors are found on both sides on the changing power dynamic and within each of Waltz's images, such as a rising power's aggressive leader, a declining power's liberal democratic institutions, or the norms that govern relations in a particular international system.

Before challenging international norms, a state must first grow to the point that it is able to challenge the hegemon. Paul Kennedy theorizes that nations grow as their economies do. Covering the same period of time as the Harvard study on Thucydides' Trap, he finds that economic surplus is the common denominator across nations that succeed in expanding, and keeping that economic advantage is vital in the event that their supremacy is challenged. Gilpin agrees with this notion that economic surplus is the most important factor in a state's ability to revise the status quo in its favor. According to him, states expand as long as it is profitable to do so. The state's advantages, either in terms of military, technology, or economic output, allow it to

grow, often at the expense of another. As the state rises, it “attempts to change the rules governing the international system, the division of the spheres of influence, and most important of all, the international distribution of territory.”¹¹⁰ Some states rise so much that they cement themselves as the hegemon. The hegemon can then use its superiority over the other states of the system to create a new international system for its benefit.

Its status as a hegemon is short-lived. Both Gilpin and Kennedy subscribe to the “Imperial Overstretch Hypothesis,” in which hegemons decline due to overexpansion or an excess of foreign commitments. First, according to Gilpin, the state will cease to grow once the limits of profitability have been reached. The marginal benefit of expansion will not only slowly deteriorate as the costs associated with maintaining the status quo rise faster than their ability to pay for it, but will eventually disappear.¹¹¹ In other words, it is difficult to maintain the competitive gap that originally allowed the rising state to expand. Their military tactics and technology can be copied, the resources that fueled its rise may run out, the casualties associated with warfare may prove too much to bear, or perhaps the nation has “overpaid” to maintain the status quo and can no longer grow fast enough to keep it up. Kennedy adds a further layer, stating that for ““number-one” countries that even as their relative economic strength is ebbing, the growing foreign challenges to their position have compelled them to allocate more and more of their resources into the military sector.”¹¹² As they allocate more to the military rather than to more productive investments, economic growth slows more, domestic audiences split on how to prioritize domestic issues or foreign challengers, and a “weakening capacity to bear the burdens

¹¹⁰ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 187.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 533.

of defense.”¹¹³ Regardless of the specific reason, the once rising power is overtaken and subsumed by powers that rose later.

Within Gilpin’s theories, as important as the rising power is the declining power and how it chooses to respond to the new threat. According to him, it has three options, “The first is to eliminate the reason for the increasing costs. The second is to expand to a more secure and less costly defensive perimeter. The third is to reduce international commitments.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, when monitoring China’s rise, it is equally prudent to discuss American perceptions of the threat posed by China. Those perceptions in turn influence which of the three options leadership would choose to follow. A preemptive war while the military advantage still tilts towards the U.S, a recommitment to Asia at the expense of other regions, or attempts to appease China are all different manifestations of the fact that the balance of power no longer overwhelmingly favors the U.S.

As the established power, successive American leaders have faced the dilemma that Gilpin and Kennedy put forward. Although it is relatively easy to paint a picture of a rising China and a rapidly weakening American government, that would be a fallacy. As Kennedy cautioned against, the United States has invested more money into military applications than any nation in the world. It has maintained operations on every continent, has bases in most of the world’s nations, and by some metrics still has the world’s largest economy. As the hegemon, the U.S has “created, maintained, defended, and expanded a liberal economic order to serve national economic and security interests...The United States has taken advantage of its privileged position within that international order to serve its own particular ends. [...] Across the bipolar and unipolar eras, the United States has been simultaneously a system maker and a privilege

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 195.

taker.”¹¹⁵ However, its global leadership is currently under questioning as President Trump distances the nation from traditional allies, launches trade wars with both competitors and friendly nations, and reevaluates the value of America’s role as the global hegemon. Similar to the Tiananmen, for example, the 2019 decision by the U.S government to pass the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act received tremendous attention, and the bill demonstrates that Beijing’s ability to interfere in the territory was subject to outside influences.

China’s dependence on the United States for its economic growth is a further complicating matter in this story. The bilateral benefits of trade for both sides made Gilpin’s first option, eliminating the reason for increasing costs, extremely unattractive. In fact, much of the rhetoric during more optimistic times did not paint it as a potential rivalry at all. On the American, or at least Western perspective, many optimistic observers believed in the “country club” hypothesis. They hoped that as the US continued to accommodate China’s entry into international institutions, the country’s domestic and foreign policy would begin to more closely resemble those of liberal democracies. The clear benefits the U.S gained from increasing trade, and the optimism from that, no doubt played a role in the theory’s popularity. Historically, outside of strategic allies, US foreign policy has very little tolerance for non-democratic regimes. That precedent has led to the historical fear of a US-led coalition that threatening to cut China off from the global economy.

This theory was so popular Bill Clinton famously quipped that China’s attempt to control the internet similarly to how they controlled print media would “be like nailing Jell-O to the wall.”¹¹⁶ In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union’s collapse, it seemed to many that

¹¹⁵ Michael Mastanduno, “System Maker and Privilege Taker: U.S. Power and the International Political Economy,” *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009): 126.

¹¹⁶ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “The Man Who Nailed Jello to the Wall,” *Foreign Policy*, June 29, 2016.

liberal democracies had “won out” and it was only a matter of time before all the nations of the world moved towards such systems. Now 20 years removed from such a statement, it is clear that despite China’s continued integration into the liberal world order, much of China’s political system remains firmly undemocratic. Not only that, but China’s internet ecosystem is functionally closed off from the rest of the world’s. From the perspective of western observers, the democratic stagnation, combined with China’s much stronger economy and clear ambition to supersede the US within East Asia, if not the world, makes China a potential geopolitical hegemon.

However perhaps Gilpin and Kennedy, by virtue of their nationalities, are implicitly biased in their analysis of hegemonic international orders. Yan Xuetong, known as “China’s Liberal Hawk,” puts forward his own interpretation of how states rise and fall.¹¹⁷ His theories focus on how leadership is the variable in how states grow at differing rates. He defines domestic leadership as the state’s capability for carrying out its duty, while interstate leadership is the leading state’s responsibility to maintain order and credibility within an international system. Leadership is also a component political capability, which is the “operational element” that provides a multiplicative effect on the states’ resources.¹¹⁸ In other words, the benefits a nation derives from its economic, cultural, or military resources and advantages are made greater (or lesser) by the ability of its leaders to utilize them. This applies, although in different contexts, to both domestic and international leadership.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Pär Nyrén, “China’s Liberal Hawk: Yan Xuetong’s Vision for Chinese Benevolent Dominance,” *The Diplomat*, June 28, 2019.

¹¹⁸ Xuetong Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, The Princeton-China Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 185.

¹¹⁹ Nyrén, “China’s Liberal Hawk.”

One can see how Yan's theories can map fairly reliably onto his own biases. It is most likely no coincidence that the deciding variable in his theory is something China has an advantage in. At several points throughout the book, he uses the Trump administration as an example of a leader with bad leadership qualities. On the other hand, the Chinese government's stronger political capability and ability to plan long-term are both inherent to good leaders. Although he withholds mentions of Xi Jinping, he is the man in charge of China and the CCP, and his specter looms large over the book. Implicitly, Yan's theories provide a legitimate basis with which to explain how Xi's personal qualities can help China close the gap with the United States. Applying his theories to the current international environment makes it clear that China's largest advantage over the United States is leadership.

Whichever option the hegemon chooses to extend its longevity will only last so long. What happens when the hegemon is replaced? Gilpin posits that there are three different types of change: systems change, systemic change, and interaction change.¹²⁰ They correspond with changes in a system's actors, power distribution, and the norms that govern interactions. Yan disagrees, stating that "his [Gilpin] approach of defining actor change as change in the character of a system, however, confuses component change with system change, in the same way as that which regards power redistribution as systems change."¹²¹ Yan instead believes that change occurs through a four-step process. First, the leadership of leading states changes, either through internal politics or when a new power emerges as a leader. Second, that new leader changes the power configuration of the system. The norms governing interstate interactions are reformed to match the new values of the leader, and the combination of all these factors then leads to system transformations. The different conclusions Gilpin and Yan arrive at lead to different ways to

¹²⁰ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 18.

¹²¹ Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, 158.

describe the international system's near future. In Gilpin's view, China as the world's leading power is a new system. In Yan's, that would not necessarily be the case.

At the same time, the theories that once dominated Chinese politics have given way to new generations of Chinese intellectuals, and new styles of leadership. While the narrative in the United States has moved towards a much more combative tone with regards to China, a similar shift has happened within China. Influential thinkers such as Wang Jisi, Qin Yaqing, and the aforementioned Yan reflect a transformation in the opinions of Chinese foreign policy elites. China's shift from a rising power to an established one means that considerations beyond purely economic growth need to be considered. They advocate for China to expand its use of alliance networks and multilateral organizations, reform the norms of the international system, and continue to grow its soft power. Now, Chinese leadership, as well as perhaps its citizens, are no longer satisfied with merely economic development. Designating national rejuvenation as the new goal was the first step.¹²²

Although economic development remains important, the costs of growth being prioritized above all else have forced a reshuffling of priorities. Internationally, this means that China has taken steps to demonstrate its ability to be a "responsible power," such as encouraging the use of its currency in global markets and financing public goods such as infrastructure projects. The 13th Five Year Plan in 2016 stated, "One of the nation's most important goals is to actively supply public goods to the international system and to enhance its structural power in the global financial and monetary governance."¹²³ This is the first time the term "structural power" has been cited in an official CCP document as something that China needed to alter.

¹²² Ibid, 42.

¹²³ Compilation and Translation Bureau, "The 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China 2016–2020" (Beijing, China: Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2015).

Furthermore, it only appeared in the Chinese version of the plan, not its English translation. However, by focusing on increasing soft power and providing the financing for public goods such as the BRI, China's newfound role has brought new responsibilities as well, such as the expectation that its military participate in joint exercises with friendly nations or commitments to combatting climate change.

In common between all the theories is that they are rooted in describing how domestic changes are reflected on the world stage. However, they fail to go far enough in describing how domestic dynamics result in the emergence of economic surplus, state reform, or cultural transformations. Jack Snyder and Fareed Zakaria both seek to find the nexus between the domestic and international spheres, in which domestic factors not only influence the international but are influenced by them. This is Waltz' second image.

Jack Snyder's *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* provides an extremely useful roadmap with which to dissect the internal pressures that outwardly manifest as expansionist policies. As a defensive realist, he believes that myths or perceptions of external insecurity lead to domestic demands to grow. He cites three different myths, that of domino theory, offensive advantages, and bandwagon effects. Snyder reveals that empires are susceptible to over-expansion, self-delusion, and self-inflicted critical mistakes because to defend by expansion is fundamentally counterintuitive. He states that it contradicts "two of the most powerful regularities in international politics: the balance of power and the rising cost of expansion."¹²⁴ As the theories of Yan, Kennedy, and Gilpin have demonstrated, expanding is only temporary and costly. If the existing hegemon does not decide to cut off a rising nation's growth before it becomes a threat, a regional coalition of smaller states can limit expansion. And

¹²⁴ Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), 6.

once the state over-expands by stretching its resources too thinly across its commitments, it loses the advantages that allowed it to rise to empire status in the first place. Examples include the U.S entry into Vietnam, Imperial Japan's decision to invade the U.S while stuck in a war with China, or pre-WW1 Germany fighting a two-front war essentially alone.

The existence of strong interest groups, oligarchies, nationalism, or other domestic variables are vital in allowing the myth to hijack the state. Snyder analyzes five different case studies: Germany from 1870-1945, pre-World War II Japan, post-Stalin USSR, Victorian England, and Cold War America, in order to find what caused each great power to make fatal errors in its foreign policy ambitions. Critically, both rising powers as well as hegemonic powers over-expanded. For the purposes of this thesis, his findings on Germany, Japan, and to a lesser extent the USSR are most relevant. In the early 2000's, during China's "peaceful rise" era, Chinese thinkers like Zheng Bijian cite the two countries as examples of how China fundamentally differs from past rising powers that sought to use warfare as a way to establish themselves in the international community.¹²⁵ However, some similarities between China and Snyder's examples exist, such as government cartelization, geographic concerns, and ideological dangers. Furthermore, a lack of democratic systems to keep potential bellicose leaders in check only further increases the possibility of potential over-expansion. In China's case, its boundaries and present conflicts present many potential zones of conflict, which combined may lead to leadership committing fatal errors.

Zakaria correctly points out however that Snyder's theory fails to adequately describe much of what great powers actually do. Although expansion is counter-intuitive, every great power does it at some point and derives benefit from it. He states that the logic Snyder puts

¹²⁵ Bijian, Zheng. *China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian 1997-2005*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005.

forward amounts to a convenient set of excuses, as “almost any foreign policy act, from modest measures aimed at survival to ambitious steps leading to world empire, can be (and has been) explained as a part of the search for safety.”¹²⁶ Zakaria, similar to Yan, focuses on the statesmen at the center of a nation’s policies. His theory of “state-centered realism,” instead claims that states expand not when they must, but when they can. More specifically, statesmen act when the state’s power grows.¹²⁷ In his analysis of American foreign policy’s origin, he finds that until the end of the 19th century, American foreign policy was extremely different from other Western powers. Although it had the resources to dwarf much of Europe, it had no colonial empire, a small standing army, and little interest in alliances or diplomatic conferences. He describes the state as “weak,” with a decentralized government that could not effectively intervene or rapidly respond to new crises.¹²⁸ The emergence of a strong executive branch that could harness the resources of the state then allowed the U.S to expand and intervene. Zakaria states, “The United States had grown so strong and had so many resources at its disposal that its behavior came to resemble that of other great powers.”¹²⁹ During this time period, the first time a president sent troops without Congressional approval occurred, an important precedent set for a government that increasingly consolidated power in the hands of singular executives rather than legislators. In the end, Zakaria draws similar lessons to Yan’s assertions that political capability via individual leadership is what enhances a nation’s resources. Replacing the U.S with China in the above quote would be apt in describing the transformation that China has undergone by relying on its massive population and natural resources.

¹²⁶ Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999), 26

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 28.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 167.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 182.

Zakaria's focus on a strong executive translates well to China. Unlike in the U.S, where there is a constitutional emphasis on congressional authority, CCP leadership is able to rapidly implement new policies and disseminate information down through its ranks. In other words, China is far from a weak state. The structure of the CCP concentrates decision power in the hands of a select few individuals, and its opaque nature prevents outsiders from really knowing how decisions are reached. Here is Waltz's first image. Yan and Zakaria have already established the importance of effective leadership in expansionary states, however more connections between domestic leadership and international leadership exist. However, China demonstrates a unique situation. Not only does the structure of the CCP more closely intertwine individual leaders with the nation, but the changes in domestic leadership are seen as critical junctures in the party's history.

The five leaders of the CCP, in order of Mao, Deng, Jiang, Hu and now Xi, all mark the political "eras" of the party. The CCP is an extremely adaptable organization, and each leader presided over unique domestic and international situations. However, each leader then sets a precedent for the future. Deng put forward "bide your time and hide your light," which Jiang and Hu adhered to. Now that China has emerged as a legitimate competitor to American hegemony and East Asia's traditional balance of power, the decisions its leaders make are even more consequential. Wang Jisi states that, "it will take painstaking efforts on Beijing's part to limit tensions between China's traditional political-military perspectives and its broadening socio-economic interests- efforts that effectively amount to reconciling the diverging legacies of Mao and Deng."¹³⁰ What Wang means to say with that is whereas Deng carried a quiet foreign policy, Mao was much more willing to intervene, such as in his support of North Korea or Malaysian

¹³⁰ Wang Jisi, "China's Search for a Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, June 7, 2018.

Communists. And now several decades removed from the beginning of its reforms, and several more decades removed from its status as a revolutionary state, Xi must now decide if it is no longer enough to bide time and hide their light.

The ways in which Xi Jinping acts and presents himself, both inside as well as outside of China, allows observers to derive conclusions about his credibility or resolve. Through those conclusions observers can predict future (re)actions. In *Who Fights for Reputation: The Psychology of Leaders in International Conflict*, Keren Yarhi-Milo concludes that leaders who use violence to resolve disputes domestically will also use it to resolve disputes internationally. She further divides leaders into two categories, those who are “high self-monitors” and those are who “low self-monitors.”¹³¹ The difference between the two is the extent to which an actor is willing to adjust their behavior due to the reactions of external audiences. Using Goffman’s theories on social interactions resembling theater performances in which actors use signals to project a desired image, she analyzes leaders’ public facing personas, cues, and signals to draw conclusions about what the distinction is between high self-monitoring leaders and low self-monitoring leaders. She concludes that high self-monitoring leaders are more likely to fight conflicts in order to project resolve in order to establish their own personal image, as well as that of their nation.¹³² As Hong Kong is both an international and domestic question for China, it is especially important to utilize theories that identify how they influence each other within individuals.

If it is the goal of the CCP to continue leading China, it is Xi’s goal to maintain his rule as its leader. Whereas the distinction between national interests and the interests of the party are

¹³¹ Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Who Fights for Reputation: The Psychology of Leaders in International Conflict*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 21.

¹³² *Ibid*, 27.

often blurred, Xi's brand of leadership further erases the distinction between the personal, the political, and the national. He famously used China's world-leading internet firewall to ban mentions of cartoon bear Winnie the Pooh after internet users began to mock him by saying that he resembled it.¹³³ However, Xi's book *The Governance of China*, split into two volumes, demonstrates that Xi is a stark departure from his recent predecessors. Neither Deng, Hu, or Jiang published books while actively serving as the state leader of the country. Furthermore, none of them published books explicitly seeking to promote their own personal brand of leadership and "thought". Xi also has passed legislation to allow himself to serve for life while simultaneously returning the CCP to strongman politics. Whereas the preceding years were marked by certain degrees of collective leadership, it seems that Xi has made himself the closest man China has had to Mao since the latter's death in 1978.

Xi has also demonstrated willingness to prioritize domestic nationalism and audiences in his decision-making. Since taking leadership, the nation's shift to more aggressive foreign policy has become firmer, from Taiwan to the South China Sea. However, even internally the state has become firmer. In Xinjiang, the detention of Uighur adults is the latest in a series of increasingly intrusive tactics the CCP has used in order to "resolve" the tensions in the region. This parallel increasing state authority and state-sanctioned violence both in domestic and international contexts is no coincidence, in fact they are fundamentally tied.

Chapter 4: International Factors

Modern day China is by no means a recreation of the dynastic system from centuries ago, however China's historical legitimacy weighs heavily on today's policy makers. The conception

¹³³ Stephen McDonnell, "Why China Censors Banned Winnie the Pooh," *BBC News*, July 17, 2017.

of the “Century of Humiliation,” China’s historical dominance over East Asian affairs, and attempts to use military force as a precursor to Sinicization of non-Han territories dovetail with modern goals of economic development to underpin much of its foreign policy. For example, China’s claims within the South China Sea rest upon a “nine-dash line,” a historical claim to disputed waters derived from a KMT official’s hand-drawn markings on a map of the region.¹³⁴ The official Chinese stance on the matter is that historical claims take primacy over modern-day institutions, such as UNCLOS, which both Vietnam and the Philippines have suggested would better determine sovereignty. From Hong Kong, to the South China Sea, a common thread emerges. According to Elizabeth Economy, “For some Chinese officials, the past century- in which China has been largely absent as an economic and military force- was merely a historical aberration. In their eyes, things are now returning to normalcy.”¹³⁵ The weight of China’s former predominance, and its return to hegemonic status, or at the very least regional power, undermines peaceful possibilities domestically, regionally, and perhaps internationally.¹³⁶

For decades, it has been the explicit goal of the CCP to use this motivating force, the restoration of China’s place in international society, to galvanize citizen mobilization, political reform, or prioritize national economic development. However, it has also sought to avoid the negative ramifications of such forces, such as potential political turmoil or a negative international reputation. In the early late 1990’s and early 2000’s, thinkers such as Zheng Bijian explicitly addressed this concern. In one speech he states, “In the past, the rise of a big power

¹³⁴ Li Xue, “South China Sea Disputes: Litmus Test for China’s Peaceful Rise—How US Scholars View South China Sea Issues,” in *China’s Rise and Changing Order in East Asia* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 219.

¹³⁵ Elizabeth Economy, “The Game Changer: Coping with China’s Foreign Policy Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 2009.

¹³⁶ Nien-chung Chang Liao, “Domestic Politics and China’s Assertive Foreign Policy: Why China’s Rise May Not Be Peaceful,” in *Decoding the Rise of China: Taiwanese and Japanese Perspectives* (New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2018), 103.

often involved toppling the international order and threatening peace. China breaks this rule. While seeking a peaceful international environment to ensure our development.”¹³⁷ In another speech, he added that, “in the process of its peaceful rise, China has formed a new security concept that differs from any traditional concept. With mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and cooperation as its core notions, our new paradigm firmly abandons the strategic framework in which big powers in the past vied for spheres of influence, engaged in military confrontation, or exported ideologies.”¹³⁸ With the benefit of hindsight, Zheng’s statements seem disingenuous. Although the world has so far avoided large scale military confrontation, all indications are that the United States and China are falling into great power competition, if not an outright cold war.

Although Zheng’s “Peaceful Rise” narrative has become outdated, Xi’s “China Dream” is far more ambitious than many would have predicted at the beginning of the century. Although neighboring countries, from Japan to India, harbor reservations about China’s growing military strength, Xi’s expansive multilateral initiatives make rejecting China’s role as an economic superpower increasingly difficult. China has launched history’s largest infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative, started several global financial institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure bank, and has successfully lobbied for the IMF to include its currency in the SDR basket. As China’s economic growth begins to slow, its international profile is trending upwards at increasing velocity. The driving motivation behind these goals is to increase China’s soft power, make it less reliant on the U.S, and perhaps even replace U.S power in its sphere.

¹³⁷ Bijian, *China’s Peaceful Rise*, 88.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 35.

An Illiberal State in the Liberal World Order

Hedley Bull's "neo-medievalism" highlights how overlapping international agreements, bodies, and bi-lateral relations have varying degrees of authority in overlapping spheres. Hong Kong, although definitively a part of China, is governed in part by an agreement the PRC made with the United Kingdom and is further supported by US legislation. Although China and Hong Kong's relationship is firmly *gemeinschaft*, with a clear superior and junior partner, it has wide-reaching implications within *gesellschaft*. These implications are a matter of perspective. From China's perspective, "military activities in the South and East China seas, deterrence to thwart pro-independence forces in Taiwan and suppression of political dissent in Hong Kong are all justifiable attempts to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity."¹³⁹ However, from the perspective of international audiences, all point to an increasingly tense situation in Greater China. If political repression in Hong Kong is justified using the same logic and reasoning behind the militarization of disputed islands in the South China Sea, then it is abundantly clear why external actors have a keen interest in Hong Kong's democratic reform. The tension is inherent to the underlying conditions of Hong Kong and China: the CCP derives legitimacy different in international contexts than in domestic ones, but Hong Kong straddles both. Hong Kong is also the testing ground for a Chinese attempt to re-write the world order in its own image. In *Great Power Conduct and Credibility in World Politics*, Smolnikov writes, "In the ensuing era of global social homogenization, the simultaneous co-existence and competition between the normative attributes of credibility perpetuated by different value systems in the major liberal and illiberal states is poised to determine the nature of the evolving world order."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹Wang Jisi and Hu Ran, "From Cooperative Partnership to Strategic Competition: A Review of China–U.S. Relations 2009–2019," *China International Strategy Review* 1, no. 1 (July 5, 2019): 8.

¹⁴⁰ Smolnikov, *Great Power Conduct and Credibility in World Politics*, 249.

Of course, the same logic that prevents Chinese officials from conceding any ground to pro-democratic protestors is the same logic that not only prevents pro-democratic protestors from backing down on their demands, but also prevents the United States and other Western powers from giving China a free pass in its conduct with regard to Hong Kong.

Smolnikov builds upon this by highlighting how within such a system, in which no power has clear primacy over the others and nations exist as nominal equals, credibility and power projection takes on a heightened role. He states, “There is a dichotomy in the previous and emerging types of world order- one that arose out of victory and forceful imposition of authority over others, and another that demands legitimate proof of the right to lead, and, therefore, depends upon the credibility of the claimants.”¹⁴¹ In Hong Kong, the PRC obtained “legitimate proof” of the right to lead upon the legal resumption of sovereignty in 1997. This is vital. In *the One Country Conundrum: Country Versus State* by Jiang Shigong, he states, “it is because the legal system on state-building is rooted in the “names” of modern western political philosophy. Any political entity not in line with the system will lack legitimacy in principle of law.”¹⁴² Therefore, although Hong Kong represented a “resumption” of sovereignty, and China’s alleged ancient claims to the territory, it was necessary to proceed using Western methods, philosophy, and political institutions in order to do so legitimately. On a micro-level, this means that much of China’s methods for controlling the city and their accompanying debates within Hong Kong, including the protests, take on a “distinctive legal tone.”¹⁴³ Add in a city with western liberal institutions more similar to the nations most critical of the CCP, perhaps it’s only natural for legitimacy to be derived differently between Hong Kong and the PRC.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Jiang, *China’s Hong Kong: A Political and Cultural Perspective*, 113.

¹⁴³ deLisle, “Democracy and Constitutionalism in China’s Shadow,” 212.

However, this leads to a separate question: if legitimacy was gained in 1997, is China required to continue to use those same means to keep its legitimacy? Within Hong Kong, it seems increasingly likely that further attempts to erode OCTS and bring Hong Kong further in line with mainland China will continue to produce civic backlash. Outside of Hong Kong, the situation takes on a much more symbolic role, increasingly divorced from local realities. Although aggressive actions by the Central Government delegitimize OCTS, and the United States has threatened to revoke Hong Kong's recognition as a separate customs entity if China's encroachment steps too far, the ramifications for CCP's decisions in Hong Kong have yet to expand beyond the local. Jiang continued to say that, "Today, the difficult in explaining the theory of 'one country, two systems' is how to escape being 'coerced' by the concept of *modernity*."¹⁴⁴ Although indirectly, Jiang reveals one of the underlying fears motivating CCP leadership- the fear of the West attempting to subtly push China into its own definition of "modernity"- one that does not involve the CCP. Therefore, Chinese leadership's hostility towards Hong Kong also reflects larger geopolitical struggles that Bull predicted decades ago, a debate between the East and the West as to what is the legitimate way forward and which system will eventually win out. It is also why western democracies use Hong Kong as a litmus test for the CCP's attitude towards foreign democracies.

Hong Kong's autonomy is also guaranteed by 1992's Hong Kong Policy Act, allowing the territory and its economy to be considered independent from that of China. However, too overt attempts to undermine the territory's institutions can be punished by the United States no longer recognizing it as a separate customs entity from the Chinese mainland, preventing HKD from being freely exchanged with the US Dollar, and damaging Hong Kong's most important

¹⁴⁴ Jiang, *China's Hong Kong: A Political and Cultural Perspective*, 113.

role within the PRC. The newly passed Hong Kong HRA goes further in allowing the US a degree of influence in a domestic Chinese issue. As the U.S-China Cold War intensifies, Hong Kong's continued autonomy presents a weakness within China's foreign policy that American leaders may be very willing to exploit.

The relevance of Hong Kong to issues such as the South China Sea may seem tenuous at best, two completely different debates that, at the very least, China can succeed economically without and in spite of. However, to take that line would be a fundamental misunderstanding of the role that the Hong Kong protests occupy within Chinese news media. As has been shown, Chinese state-owned media often takes two tacks with regards to Hong Kong: either influenced by "hostile foreign powers" or caused by economic issues which the CCP can ameliorate. Both explanations avoid direct criticism of the CCP, and most importantly, its potential demise at the hands of democracy.

Experts such as Minxin Pei have pointed out that a harsh PLA crackdown in Hong Kong not only makes neighbors in the region less likely to seek involvement in the BRI and more likely to seek out the security of the American nuclear umbrella, but it also cuts China off from the global capital and financing that has enabled its rise as primarily a trading nation.¹⁴⁵ Although the country has made great strides, severing the connections between China and the economies of developed nations would be a costly error for Xi to commit. In other words, to bring Hong Kong to heel by force would play into the examples of over-expansion that have plagued other nations and curtailed ambitions.

Snyder's theories within *Myths of Empire* are exceptionally useful in studying Chinese leadership's calculations with regards to Hong Kong and Taiwan. To distill Snyder's argument,

¹⁴⁵ Minxin Pei, "Xi's Plan to Tighten Grip on Hong Kong Would Kill His Chinese Dream," *South China Morning Post*, November 13, 2019.

Japan and Germany both took counter-productive actions to justify goals and demands that fundamentally illogical domestic pressures had produced. Not only that, but he demonstrates that the same underlying stoked-up nationalism survived for decades as a political force, despite the generational turnover of both German elites as well as regular citizens.¹⁴⁶ Snyder discounts German justification of antebellum aggression as the need for the German nation to expand economically in a world in which the Western powers had already “divided up the world’s spoils.” He demonstrates that Germany, rather than having its economic might limited by the pre-existing world order, had her economic might enhanced by it. Germany was the only world power to have its percentage of trade increase prior to WWI, and depended on Britain as its largest trading partner, with which it had a growing trade surplus, depended on the Royal British Navy to continuously protect sea lanes, thereby keeping British-dominated financial markets open to German goods, despite Germany’s own protectionist policies at the time.¹⁴⁷ Japan followed a similar path to war, simultaneously seeking autarky through conquest and imperial expansion, yet attempting to avoid antagonizing the United States. This is despite that in a post-Great Depression world, Japan had recovered better than many other world powers through a significant stimulus package, exports of cheap consumer goods, and repressed wages; similar to China’s modern-day ability to weather the storm of 2008’s global financial crisis.¹⁴⁸

China’s economic rise has existed almost entirely within its pivot to *stop* being a revisionist power, and instead participate within international institutions. Instead of exporting revolution it began to export consumer goods. The bellicose rhetoric, support of insurgents in Southeast Asia, and border skirmishes that marked the Mao era have been replaced with rhetoric

¹⁴⁶ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 67

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 79

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 118

such as “peaceful rise” and the “charm offensive.”¹⁴⁹ Integration into the global economic environment by ascension to the World Trade Organization, the push for China-led multilateral organizations and its own comparative advantages all depend on peace and low barriers to trade. Hong Kong’s unique financial environment that allows multinational corporations a window with which to better access the Chinese market, while also providing Chinese firms a window with which to better access the global market has been vital to this process, and will continue to be important as Shenzhen’s most important firms depend on the service hub.

Within the past four decades, a similar timespan from 1870-1914 for Germany, China has become the world’s largest trading nation, depends on the liberal world order in order to continuously fuel its economic rise, keeps its erstwhile competitor as its largest trading partner, and limits the ability for foreign investment within its own borders. China and Germany’s rises were both made possible through the advantages of economic backwardness and state mobilization of economic resources in order to hasten economic development. In addition, Otto Von Bismarck balanced German expansion by judiciously avoiding coalitions and presenting diplomatic overtures to neighboring powers in ways remarkably similar to Deng Xiaoping’s “hide your light and bid your time” policy and Chinese fears of a US-Asian “counterbalancing alliance”.¹⁵⁰ However, Bismarck’s dismissal from the German government precipitated a shift in German foreign policy to be more bellicose, thereby leading to circumstances that led to the situation Bismarck explicitly sought to avoid. In a similar vein, China’s increasingly aggressive foreign policy, resulting in disputes with Japan, ASEAN members, the United States, all may one day lead to a situation in which China finds itself increasingly isolated by hostile nations.

¹⁴⁹ Liao, “Domestic Politics and China’s Assertive Foreign Policy: Why China’s Rise May Not Be Peaceful,” 96.

¹⁵⁰ Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, 111.

These comparisons do not mean that China is destined to fall into the same trap as Wilhelm's Germany, however the similarity in circumstances demonstrate the potential pitfalls that a bellicose foreign policy may hold for a nation that rises in power relative to its neighbors while simultaneously depending on those neighbors for economic reasons. While Germany and, as an even more extreme example, pre-WWII Japan, sought economic independence as a vital national goal, their actions to achieve those goals led directly to their undoing. As Snyder described it, "overexpansion occurred when German pretensions to continental or overseas expansion provoked opposition from the great powers whose prior claims or security were threatened by German assertiveness."¹⁵¹ China finds itself in a similar situation, challenging the existing United States-led coalition of East Asia, with its goal to explicitly avoid antagonizing surrounding states enough that they would join an anti-China coalition. China's ambitions chafe against the limits imposed by outside actors, and the continued reactions of Chinese leadership to these limits remains the largest question mark in future Chinese foreign policy and the nation's place within the international community. It is quite worrying to imagine what may happen in a nation such as China, in which there are no democratic institutions to check Xi's power if he chooses to stake his, and China's, reputation on any one specific issue. Xi's personal brand of diplomacy, which has seen China no longer hiding its light or biding its time, in combination with his accumulation of authority, presents an even more interesting question.

Big Money Initiatives

Although China is far stronger, wealthier, and prominent in the year 2020 than it was at the beginning of the millennium, CCP leadership still has an interest in ensuring that China's

¹⁵¹ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 68.

growing presence on the world stage is perceived as non-threatening. Whereas in the past, this took the form of an extremely low-profile foreign policy to ensure minimal conflicts with both neighbors and established powers, Xi has transformed China's foreign policy. While it has become significantly firmer in its stance on core issues, it has also become much more generous and free-trade oriented. In order to avoid exclusion from the liberal world order, Xi's China has instead coopted it. China's new expansive financial initiatives, such as BRI, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the New Development Bank combine with the nation's newest diplomatic endeavors, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, to increase China's soft power and global presence.¹⁵² The CCP, instead of biding its time and perhaps facing pressure to reform itself, instead is attempting to reform the international system. Xi's use of China's massive foreign reserves, he has already invested \$100 billion into the Asian Infrastructure Bank (AIIB) and estimates for BRI total in the trillions, is an innovative path for the CCP to take.¹⁵³ However, there is significant risk in investing hard currency, which can be used to procure virtually anything, in hopes of gaining abstract advantages such as soft power.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a fantastic example of the newfound ability for the CCP to engage in economic diplomacy on a global level. In 2013, Xi announced that China would create an overland Silk Road as well as a Maritime Silk Road. There are over 100 countries that have expressed interest in future cooperation, from Vietnam to the United Kingdom, placing China at the center of an expanding global economy. BRI is primarily infrastructure-focused, with projects not only including railways, ports, and canals, but also industrial parks and special economic zones. There is no complete list of projects under the BRI

¹⁵² Jisi and Ran, "From Cooperative Partnership to Strategic Competition," 3.

¹⁵³ Jingdong Yuan, "Remapping Asia's Geopolitical Landscape: China's Rise, US Pivot, and Security Challenges for a Region in Power Transition," in *China's Rise and Changing Order in East Asia* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 50.

label, nor is there a standard template. Each project is agreed to bilaterally between China and the host nation, mostly financed with loans from China's state-owned banks. From 2014 to 2016, China invested about \$40 billion dollars in BRI countries, averaging around \$13 billion a year. By 2018, this number had increased to \$15.64 billion in outbound direct investment, before dropping in consecutive years due to the pressures from the U.S trade war and subsequent COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan.¹⁵⁴ In total, Xi has already spent \$200 billion on the various project under the BRI umbrella, though that dwarfs in comparison to estimates as high as \$1.2 trillion.¹⁵⁵

BRI is an integral part of Xi's "China Dream" that presents China's economic rise as a win-win scenario for both China as well as partnering nations. Chinese investment through BRI assuredly benefits not just the host country, but also neighboring nations as well as third party trading partners. Projects, especially those on sea routes, generate gains away from the host nation, and can enhance both a nation's inputs as well as its outputs.¹⁵⁶ This makes sense, the beneficiaries of increasing the number of public goods is the public as a whole, even nations such as Japan and the United States that do not directly participate within BRI. The benefits that China can derive from financing such projects are bountiful. Not only can Xi continue with his plans of displacing the U.S as the center of the global economy, but the nation can secure its energy needs, open new markets export excess industrial capacity, and entice nations to side with it in diplomatic disputes.¹⁵⁷ Many times, the projects require the use of Chinese firms, ensuring employment for Chinese citizens, but robbing the host country of a significant source of

¹⁵⁴ Michael Lelyveld, "China's Investment in Belt and Road Initiative Cools," Radio Free Asia, January 17, 2020.

¹⁵⁵ James McBride and Andrew Chatzky, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," Council on Foreign Relations, January 28, 2020.

¹⁵⁶ Paulo S. R. Bastos, "Exposure of Belt and Road Economies to China Trade Shocks" (The World Bank, June 29, 2018).

¹⁵⁷ McBride and Chatzky, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative."

economic growth.¹⁵⁸ As China's economic growth slows, the nation's massive foreign reserves and capital base can be invested abroad in hopes of higher returns than could have been secured domestically.

The clearest danger to host nations within BRI is China's use of "debt-trap" diplomacy to gain strategically advantageous offshore bases. The most high-profile example is the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka. Originally agreed to between China and President Mahinda Rajapaksa, widespread public eventually outcry led to his replacement. Reports showed that Chinese firms had paid millions of dollars into campaign funds and bank accounts owned by Rajapaksa or allies.¹⁵⁹ The port was so unprofitable that the Sri Lankan government was unable to meet its obligations on the loan and leased the port to China for 99 years.¹⁶⁰ The port has yet to be profitable, yet its ability to station military vessels, including submarines, has brought about fears that the CCP had ulterior motives behind financing it. The deep-water port is next to some of the world's busiest shipping lanes, and is opposite China's largest BRI project, the Gwadar Economic Corridor in Pakistan. In the eyes of the CCP, the Hambantota project is one of the "string of pearls" that will connect better China to some of its most important trading partners in the Middle East, Europe, and Africa.¹⁶¹

As China increasingly becomes a global leader, the CCP is finding that its actions are under significantly more scrutiny. Debt-trap diplomacy and loss of economic sovereignty are quickly becoming issues within BRI. The public pushback towards projects, even those in non-democratic countries, was unexpected. For example, one article in the Atlantic focused on the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Maria Abi-Habib, "How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port," *The New York Times*, June 25, 2018.

¹⁶⁰ Lauren Frayer, "In Sri Lanka, China's Building Spree Is Raising Questions About Sovereignty," NPR.org, December 13, 2019..

¹⁶¹ Sarwar A. Kashmeri, *China's Grand Strategy: Weaving a New Silk Road to Global Primacy* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2019), 85.

effects of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Cambodia, but contained this line: "Taiwan says no to China, Hong Kong says no to China, but Hun Sen [Cambodia's authoritarian Prime Minister] only says yes to China."¹⁶² The speaker drew a comparison between his own leader's willingness to accept such large amounts of FDI from China and how clearly the benefits of closer economic participation come at a cost that many reject. Anti-Chinese protests in Russia and Kazakhstan towards the end of 2019 threatened Chinese FDI towards both countries, despite both nations' leaders committing to further cooperation with China.¹⁶³ Complaints of the influx in Chinese tourists, illegal developments, increases in crime are not uncommon in other BRI sites. Historic Sinophobia played a role in the demonstrations, but they are just some of the many examples of local populations finding issue with the influx of development that BRI can bring. This is a concern outside of BRI contexts as well. In strategically important Kiribati, President Maamau lost his party's majority in parliament after switching the nation's diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in an effort to secure more FDI.¹⁶⁴

Apart from debt-trap diplomacy, China's use of BRI funds presents several challenges to established international precedent. Scott Morris, a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development, testified to Congress:

Ethiopia is a case where we see a mix of Chinese projects and investments—some that may not be sustainable or productive alongside others that are clearly delivering an economic benefit to the country. So long as this is the case, as it very well may be in a wide range of countries, then dire warnings from the United States are unlikely to find receptive audiences in the developing world.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Chris Horton, "The Risks of China's Expansionism - The Atlantic," *The Atlantic*, January 9, 2020.

¹⁶³ Oyuna Baldakova, "Protests along the BRI: China's Prestige Project Meets Growing Resistance | Mercator Institute for China Studies," *MERICCS Blog- European Voices on China*, December 10, 2019.

Neil MacFarquhar, "As Chinese Flock to Siberia's Lake Baikal, Local Russians Growl," *The New York Times*, May 2, 2019.

¹⁶⁴ Christopher Pala, "Pro-China Kiribati President Loses Majority over Switch from Taiwan," *The Guardian*, April 24, 2020.

¹⁶⁵ Scott Morris, "China in Africa: The New Colonialism?" § Committee on Foreign Affairs (2018).

From the perspective of U.S security interests, there is a clear motivation to ensure that allies reject Xi's advances. Szu-Yin Ho writes, "China has built international institutions with itself as the epicenter in parallel to the conventional international institutions that center around the United States."¹⁶⁶ In the event of a conflict between the U.S and China, it is obviously in the American's benefit to ensure that China is diplomatically isolated and geographically vulnerable.

The same fears exist within the European Union, as China gains importance in Eastern Europe. Not only has it invested massively in projects such as the port of Piraeus in Greece, but the effects of its influence on European solidarity are clear.¹⁶⁷ When the EU banned the export of medical supplies to non-member states, Serbian President Vucic stated "By now, you all understood, that great international solidarity, actually, does not exist. European solidarity does not exist." Shortly afterward, he followed it up with "I believe in my friend and my brother, Xi Jinping, and I believe in Chinese help. The only country that can help us is China."¹⁶⁸ Serbia, although not an EU member, is adjacent to the bloc, and the president's statements were the loudest proclamation of a trend that had been gaining momentum in the 2010's. Within Eastern Europe, including Hungary and Greece, which are EU member states, China is successfully providing alternatives to regional powers.¹⁶⁹

Although the benefits of BRI are abundant, risks still exist for China. The use of state-owned banks, already subject to significant political meddling, increases the risk of underperforming investments. The Hambantota Port has yet to turn a profit, alongside Sri Lanka's Chinese-funded Mattala Rajapaksa Airport.¹⁷⁰ In the example of the Great Stone Industrial Park in Minsk,

¹⁶⁶ Szu-yin Ho, "Understanding the Internationalization of the Renminbi," in *Decoding the Rise of China* (New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2018), 134.

¹⁶⁷ Kashmeri, *China's Grand Strategy*, 64.

¹⁶⁸ Vuk Vuksanovic, "China Has Its Eyes on Serbia," *Foreign Policy*, April 8, 2020.

¹⁶⁹ Philippe le Corre and Erik Brattberg, "The EU and China in 2020: More Competition Ahead," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 19, 2020.

¹⁷⁰ Kashmeri, *China's Grand Strategy*, 58.

Belarus, the impetus behind the project was President Lushenko's affinity for the project and his desire to increase China's influence within the country.¹⁷¹ In the event of an economic downturn, exactly what occurred in the 2020 Coronavirus Epidemic, it remains to be seen how these investments can be absorbed by the banks.

Apart from the multilateral initiatives, one of China's most ambitious foreign policy goals: the internationalization of the renminbi (RMB), or Chinese yuan. From the CCP's perspective, to be a great power, a nation must also have a "great" currency.¹⁷² This process began in earnest following the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, which for many within China "was the culmination of thirty years of economic growth and of China's rise to great power status."¹⁷³ In the aftermath of 2008, many financial experts believed that the US Dollar's illiquidity and the world's reliance on one currency were at the root of the crisis. China's initiative reduces its dependency on US fiscal and monetary policy, allows Chinese firms to reduce transaction costs and exchange rate risks, and gives the CCP more clout in international financial matters. Hong Kong, as China's offshore financial center, has played an integral role in encouraging more use of the RMB. Between 2012 and 2015, the percentage of Chinese trade settled in RMB rose from 5-10% to 20-25%, with Hong Kong settling over *seventy* percent of all offshore RMB payments conducted via Mainland China.¹⁷⁴

In 2016, the International Monetary Fund formally added the renminbi to the basket of SDRs, special drawing rights that act as a supplementary international reserve asset allocated by the IMF. The SDR is not a currency, rather IMF members can exchange SDRs for their own

¹⁷¹ Jacob Mardell, "Big, Empty, but Full of Promise? The Great Stone Industrial Park in Minsk | Mercator Institute for China Studies," *MERICCS Blog- European Voices on China*, April 29, 2019.

¹⁷² Yongding Yu, "Revisiting the Internationalization of the Yuan," in *The World in 2020 According to China: Chinese Foreign Policy Elites Discuss Emerging Trends in International Politics*, ed. Binhong Shao and Allen Carlson, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 235.

¹⁷³ Liao, "Domestic Politics and China's Assertive Foreign Policy: Why China's Rise May Not Be Peaceful," 102

¹⁷⁴ Meyer, "Hong Kong: China's Global City," 419

currencies. In reality, SDRs are not vital to the international economy, only about \$291 billion USD, or SDR 204.2 billion, have been allocated across all members.¹⁷⁵ Currently, the basket is made up on the US dollar, the Euro, the Japanese yen, the British pound, and the newest addition, the RMB. In the past, additional currencies such as the Australian and Canadian dollars, South African rand, and the Swiss franc have also been included, not exactly a list of global great powers. However, the inclusion of the renminbi within the basket became a significant goal for Chinese policy makers that began to publicly call for alternatives to the dollar-dominated international system that they blamed for the global financial crisis. Many expressed doubt at the goal, as the RMB failed to meet the IMF's criteria for inclusion.

According to the IMF, currencies must meet two criteria for inclusion in the SDR basket; first, the currency in question must be issued by an IMF member or monetary union that is one of the top five exporters in the world, and secondly, it must be determined to be “freely usable,” defined as “widely used to make payments for international transactions and widely traded in the principal exchange markets.”¹⁷⁶ A currency's liquidity, despite not being named as an official metric, is also an important factor in determining its inclusion within the basket. However, the yuan, at least by traditional standards, is far from “freely usable.” China imposes currency controls on its citizens and firms and limits foreign investment. The CCP also uses the RMB as another tool to exert control, the close nature of the Chinese economy and government means political and economic cycles often coincide.¹⁷⁷ CCP officials often direct local bank managers to give low-interest, or even negative-interest loans, to favorite state-owned enterprises, artificially increase the local money supply in order to secure political favors and promotions,

¹⁷⁵ “Special Drawing Right (SDR),” IMF, accessed December 15, 2019, <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2016/08/01/14/51/Special-Drawing-Right-SDR>.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ho, “Understanding the Internationalization of the Renminbi,” 140.

and manipulate the financial system to ensure that the party is ultimately making decisions, rather than market forces. Outside of China, it is no surprise that the currency is unattractive for firms, investors, or institutions such as central banks. Considering only 2.45% of international trade is conducted in RMB, the IMF's decision to weigh the yuan at 10.92% of the SDR basket, more than the Japanese yen and British pound sterling, that much more interesting. Clearly, China's only partially liberalized domestic financial environment alone failed to meet traditional metrics for the other currencies within the basket. According to sources, without Hong Kong's ability to handle transactions in RMB, China's lobbying efforts to the IMF fall on deaf ears.¹⁷⁸

Overall, Xi's bold decision to seek leadership in a system naturally hostile to his presence makes him many enemies. Not only that, but his gamble exposes him to domestic political vulnerabilities. Economy writes:

In just the past year, widespread protests against Chinese investments have erupted in Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Kenya, and Sri Lanka. As China presses forward with its more ambitious foreign policy, more such instances will undoubtedly crop up, raising the prospect that Xi will be seen as failing abroad, thus undermining his authority at home.¹⁷⁹

At the same time, successful centralization of power at home would give Xi the confidence and ability to expand China's efforts on the international stage. In other words, Xi's strategy is high-risk, high reward. It may be China's biggest risk since Deng's original decision to reverse decades of precedent and open the country up to the world. For all the value soft power has, or the importance of power projection and the value in dominating a foreign country's trade, investments elsewhere can also be channeled for productive domestic uses. When local populations reject Xi's advances, then that spent money went to individuals who even failed to appreciate it.

¹⁷⁸ Yu, "Revisiting the Internationalization of the Yuan," 238.

¹⁷⁹ Elizabeth Economy, "China's New Revolution: The Reign of Xi Jinping," *Foreign Affairs*, June 2018.

Chapter 5: Domestic Legitimacy, The CCP, and Xi Jinping

Today, Hong Kong's democratic movements pose even less risk than before to China's economic growth. In fact, 2019's protest shows that an actively rebellious Hong Kong can still meet the requirements for China's domestic market. With the 2047 date looming ever closer, the Central Government likely feels assured of eventual economic integration. The seriousness with which Beijing treats Hong Kong protest movements, as well as other offenses to China's territorial integrity, are driven not by economic concerns, but more foundationally by concern about the CCP's ability to survive into the future. Mainland reactions to the protests of 2003 and 2012 compared to the protests of 2014 and 2019 demonstrate China's policymakers have become significantly less tolerant of Hong Kong demands for democracy, autonomy, and personal freedoms. The balancing act between Beijing's credibility, China's domestic security, and defense of its territorial sovereignty on one hand, and the need for a prosperous, placated Hong Kong on the other, is the central issue in Beijing's calculations regarding the territory.

The CCP betrays its anti-colonial roots when it suppresses local autonomy in the name of unification. China is not the first nation that disregarded its revolutionary origins. Zakaria's theories are founded in the fact that the U.S underwent a similar process when it went from advocating a European-free hemisphere to seeking its own colonies. Within China, the same fears of Hong Kong secessionism and pro-independence ring even louder as Chinese officials view Hong Kong as merely an arena for Chinese nationalism to compete with local elements. As one expert put it, "Hong Kong's resilient struggle for autonomy is seen as presenting similar challenges already apparent in China's peripheries: terror attacks in Xinjiang, self-immolations in Tibet, and political agitation in Taiwan."¹⁸⁰ Xinjiang and Tibet, although different due to the

¹⁸⁰ Political Protest in High-Income Societies

role ethnicity has played in both region's resistance to Chinese rule and subsequent Chinese tactics of repression, are fundamentally related to the issue of Hong Kong and stages on which the CCP can demonstrate its commitment to territorial integrity no matter the cost.

Snyder's most relevant observation is that states' adherence to the myth of domino theory – “losses in the empire's periphery can easily bring a collapse of power at the imperial core” – can lead to strategic blunders and over-expansion.¹⁸¹ He cites this as, additionally, a product of the myth of the “turbulent frontier,” the belief that the best defensive strategy is one that continuously expands into the periphery in order to tame anarchic forces seeking to undermine the state in those same territories. Some of the first moves made by the newly founded PRC were on shoring up periphery, on the national front invading Tibet and forcing the Dalai Lama into exile, reintegrating the nascent second East Turkestan Republic into Xinjiang (literally translated to “new frontier”), and the First Taiwan Crisis.

Within China, the concept of untamed, peripheral, frontiers is central to the nation's creation myth. *Zhongguo*, or China, most accurately translates to “middle country,” a designation derived from the old imperial system in which the Chinese emperor not only governed China, but in fact, invested legitimacy in other monarchs. Confucian maps from pre-modern China show a world in which the emperor is at the center, with each concentric ring radiating out, signifying not just physical distance, but also cultural distance, or *civilizational* distance. Cartographers placed Korea in the second ring, since Koreans adopted Confucianism and used Chinese characters. Semi-nomadic, semi-Confucian barbarians in areas under nominal Chinese authority made up the third ring. Beyond them, untamed nomadic settlers made up the fourth.

¹⁸¹ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 3.

Centralized, Chinese authorities delegating autonomy to frontier, non-Chinese groups is part of a wider web of narratives that nationalist groups promote as an integral part of China's legacy. The PRC, deriving legitimacy from this historical tradition, no doubt was inspired by dynastic precedent. The original basis for OCTS, even before Deng offered it to Taiwan, has its roots in a 17-point proposal from 1951 to allow Tibet to maintain autonomy. That proposal itself derived from Qing imperial policy that encouraged border areas to maintain local autonomy for a short period of time, before eventual integration within China. As Ho-fung Hung states, "The "one country, two systems" formula for Hong Kong is just a tactical and transitional arrangement. What awaits Hong Kong is what Tibet has seen since 1959: forced assimilation and tight direct control by Beijing."¹⁸²

Part of the CCP's suppression of Hong Kong's autonomy is the use of very paternal language. Xi himself stated in a 2017 speech, "It has been 20 years since Hong Kong's return. According to China's tradition, a man enters adulthood at the age of 20. So today, we are celebrating the coming of age of the Hong Kong Special Administration Region (HKSAR), which has grown with the vigor of a bamboo or pine tree."¹⁸³ His language is obviously patronizing, and by specifying that the HKSAR had not yet entered "adulthood," he reduces the conflicts of the Umbrella Movement to adolescent rebelliousness. Xi's words speak to a larger trend of thought within the ranks of the CCP. Another official once stated that Hong Kong residents' different understanding of OCTS necessitated not just "serious attention," but that "the people of Hong Kong should be re-enlightened about the 'one country, two systems' policy."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Hung, "Three Views of Local Consciousness in Hong Kong | The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus."

¹⁸³ Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China II* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2015), 471.

¹⁸⁴ Cai, *The Occupy Movement in Hong Kong: Sustaining Decentralized Protests*, 157.

Behind this rhetoric, it is clear that there is growing tension within the PRC to how to resolve the issues within Hong Kong.

Ultimately, the CCP finds itself at a critical juncture. Its core interests, and the lengths it goes to in order to protect them from slights, betray an inherent insecurity within the CCP apparatus. It has been abundantly clear for much of the decade that the way forward for the CCP and China looks very different from the path it has taken so far. The same methods of economic growth are no longer possible, the demographics of the nation are different, the global stage is changed, and institutional ossification within the CCP has only further set in. The 2019 Hong Kong protests touched on various sensitive nerves within a party that is increasingly wary of threats, however real or imaginary, to its rule. Simultaneously, the CCP is currently led by Xi Jinping, who is the first leader since Mao to abandon the party's practices of ruling-by-committee.

The CCP

Within a State-Party system such as China, the fundamental goal of the party is to survive. Following Mao, the CCP staked its legitimacy on economic progress, with its nationalist defense of Chinese honor in close second.¹⁸⁵ To describe nationalism as natural, or to assume Chinese people are inherently more nationalistic than others, would be a mistake. The CCP has made it an explicit goal to foster nationalism within China through educational means and state-controlled media. The Taiwan issue became the third rail of Chinese politics because of years of propaganda initiatives. It is such a problem that many within China, from officials to military generals to average citizens, remain convinced that “No regime could survive the loss of

¹⁸⁵ Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower; How China's Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise* (New York Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 186.

Taiwan.”¹⁸⁶ There is no way for any observer to know if this is true, but Shirk states, “...the myth linking the political survival of the CCP regime to Taiwan is so pervasive that it creates its own political reality, especially in Communist Party headquarters.”¹⁸⁷ If Taiwanese independence, something that has been the de-facto reality for seven decades, is a threat to the CCP’s survival, then Hong Kong’s moving away from China through democracy would assuredly be a setback. Hong Kong’s independence, the first time China would have lost territory following the Century of Shame, would be such a disaster for the party’s ability to rule that it is not mentioned as a potential possibility. The question of regime survival in the aftermath of Taiwanese, or worse, Hong Kong secession, is a question Chinese leadership is keen to avoid, hence the tension around the lack of any law in the territory supporting Article 23.

The CCP’s Propaganda Ministry is ultimately responsible for the wellspring of domestic pressure that a Chinese official has termed a “hostage” situation, in which Chinese citizens, taught to care about Taiwan and Hong Kong as integral territories of China cut off by foreign powers, refuse to allow government acquiescence. The Chinese Communist Party depends on its nationalist image: the party fought off Japanese invasion in World War II, won the Civil War despite the KMT receiving significant amounts of foreign aid, and eventually negotiated the peaceful return of Hong Kong and Macau back to Chinese sovereignty.

In the 1990s, in the aftermath of Tiananmen Square, the breakup of the Soviet Union, the impending return of Hong Kong, and the Taiwan Strait Crisis, the Propaganda Ministry led the “patriotic education campaign” to improve CCP legitimacy, a strategy that now severely distorts rhetoric with regards to Hong Kong democratic movements or Taiwanese elections. The Chinese professor who said that China can afford to let Taiwan go dared not voice this opinion even in a

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 183.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

time of “soft politics” and the current domestic political situation in Mainland China is far from the softer politics that dominated pre-2008 and especially pre-Xi Jinping.¹⁸⁸ In describing the CCP’s crisis of nationalism, Snyder states, “it may nonetheless become politically entrapped in its own rhetoric. Insofar as the elite’s power and policies are based on society’s acceptance of imperial myths, its rule would be jeopardized by renouncing the myths when their side effects become costly. To stay in power and to keep central policy objectives intact, elites may have to accept some unintended consequences of their imperial sales pitch.”¹⁸⁹ In this case, the unintended consequences include political upheaval and the potential dissolution of the state-party apparatus. Conventional logic dictates Chinese political survival is staked upon satisfying not the opinion of the “silent majority,” Chinese citizens who mostly likely could do without Taiwan or Hong Kong if it guaranteed continued economic growth, but instead those citizens who feel so strongly and buy into nationalist rhetoric so much that they may participate in mass protests against the government.¹⁹⁰

This had led to a growing problem within Chinese policy-making: the country’s military power continues to increase relative to the United States and Taiwan, yet the party has lost control of the narrative of Taiwan’s flirtation with independence or US undermining of strategic interests.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, this nationalist juggernaut occurred nearly simultaneously with Taiwan’s switch from authoritarian, Chinese-facing and mainlander-dominated rule, to a democratic system in which younger generations of Taiwanese lack the romantic ideals of a reunified China.¹⁹² Ergo, the “unintended consequences” originally conceived decades ago have

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 174.

¹⁸⁹ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 42.

¹⁹⁰ Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, 103.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 183.

¹⁹² Maehara Shiho, “Lee Teng-Hui and the Formation of Taiwanese Identity,” in *Changing Taiwanese Identities* (London; New York: Routledge, 2018), 89.

continuously increased in volatility. An earlier example of this would be the anti-American protests following the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.¹⁹³ If such an accident were to happen today, with higher tensions, more modern weapons, and current leadership, the ensuing crisis could quickly spiral into conflict.

In *China's Hong Kong, A Political and Cultural Perspective*, Jiang Shigong attempts to reflect on Hong Kong's role within China. Throughout the work, he uses the word "empire" with positive connotations, actively encouraging the CCP to incorporate elements of dynastic legitimacy and justifying the CCP's decisions in Hong Kong by saying it ensured "patriotic people ruled Hong Kong."¹⁹⁴ According to him, "The return of Hong Kong was legitimate in political philosophy. Its legitimacy came from historical traditions- 'Hong Kong as a part of China since ancient times.'¹⁹⁵ The emphasis on history goes hand in hand with his earlier quote on "coercion" via modernity. Modernity inconveniences the government because Basic Law, the Sino-British Joint Declaration, and OCTS are not agreements that can easily be ignored. Ideally for him, the CCP could pick and choose when 'one country' or 'two systems' takes priority. However, his main thesis is that China must transform the identity of Hong Kong residents into people who first and foremost identify with the Chinese nation, or the arrangement of OCTS will never be sufficient. This is an opinion that is not unique to him, but that has circulated within policy-making circles.¹⁹⁶ Jiang is not a harmless intellectual- he served as a researcher within the Hong Kong and Macau Liaison office, where he published several books.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, 145.

¹⁹⁴ Jiang, *China's Hong Kong: A Political and Cultural Perspective*, p.152.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 115

¹⁹⁶ Hung, "Three Views of Local Consciousness in Hong Kong | The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus."

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

Throughout Jiang's work, as well as in state media coverage of the city, the city's history and independent culture is often reduced. Wai-Man Lam writes, "Hong Kong is re-emphasised, and in fact minimalised by Chinese officials as an economic city."¹⁹⁸ To briefly return to Anderson's theories on nationalism and national identities, the goal of this language is to ensure that the imagined community of Hong Kong not only stays on the sub-national level, but that its existence is reduced to the imagination of just a few. Acknowledgement of democratic demands, or infractions against Basic Law, would implicitly not just support protestors, but also implicitly support the other imagined communities that the CCP hopes to erase. Even Xi himself stated, "China's continuous and rapid development over the years provides an invaluable opportunity, an inexhaustible source of strength, and a broad space for Hong Kong's development. As a saying in Hong Kong goes, "After leaving Suzhou, a traveler will find it hard to get a ride on a boat," meaning an opportunity missed is an opportunity lost."¹⁹⁹

Hong Kong protestors waving British or American flags, Western media outlets' favorable depiction of democratic movements, and increasing mutual suspicion all play a part in mainland depictions of the protests. News stories for *The People's Daily*, all throughout the Umbrella Movement, as well as the Anti-Extradition Protests, cite "hostile foreign forces" as attempting to undermine Chinese sovereignty.²⁰⁰ The Simon Cheng incident during the 2019 protest illustrates how protests strike at the heart of the CCP's PR problem, and how the divergent international and domestic audiences conflict. In August, Chinese security forces detained, interrogated, and tortured Simon Cheng, a Hong Kong resident and British consulate

¹⁹⁸ Wai-man Lam, "Hong Kong's Fragmented Soul: Exploring Brands of Localism," in *Citizen Identity and Social Movements in the New Hong Kong*, 76.

¹⁹⁹ Xi, *The Governance of China*, 473.

²⁰⁰ 魏忠杰, "香港应尽快止暴制乱," *People's Daily 人民日报*, November 17, 2017.

The article uses the term "外部势力的煽动 (*waibu shili de shandong*) Instigation by outside forces

worker. At the Hong Kong-Shenzhen high-speed rail link, Chinese police stopped Cheng and placed him on a train going back to Shenzhen, reinforcing the increasing blurriness of the legal boundaries between Hong Kong and the Mainland.²⁰¹ During interrogation, police mostly focused on his role as an agent for the British government to incite unrest in Hong Kong. UK government sources found his claims credible, and Chinese police later released a tape of Cheng confessing to soliciting prostitutes, a common tactic used to shame political prisoners. The incident greatly inflamed China-UK relations, whose officials increasingly took a pro-protector position, and it also further incited anger in the city as Cheng alleged that with him in prison were several Hong Kong protestors.²⁰²

However, domestically, it is effective for the CCP to kidnap a consular worker as it allows them to continue to cite outside enemies. This tactic not only perpetuates myths about a hostile Western world, when the reality is a much murkier situation of aggression on both sides, but also undermines the legitimate complaints of the Hong Kong population. In one small study about news coverage of the Hong Kong protests, the writers found that there was a negative correlation between nationalism and attitudes toward democracy or pro-democratic movements.²⁰³ The same study also showed that people who were against the protests were more likely to read state news media in China. Overseas Chinese who had access to outside sources were more likely to support protestors, and less likely to cite reasons such as “foreign forces” as arguments behind the protests. However, like many other propaganda tactics, this narrative severely limits the government’s ability to bargain with protestors. To acquiesce in Hong Kong is not to listen to fellow Chinese citizens, it is to be misled by the West once again attempting to

²⁰¹ John Sudworth, “Former UK Consulate Worker Says China Tortured Him,” *BBC News*, November 20, 2019.

²⁰² Palmer, “Is China Detaining Hong Kong Protestors on the Mainland?”

²⁰³ Zhu, “A Divided Society,” 169.

transform China into a liberal democracy. Therefore, the protests, Hong Kong, and democracy are inextricable from the tension in China's relationship with the United States.

Snyder's relevant observations do not end at merely describing domino theory. His analysis of the domestic situations within Japan and Germany that led both countries down a path of world war and eventual destruction has several parallels within modern day China. He finds that late industrialization, including "large government role in mobilizing and allocating investment, centralized financial institutions, relatively low levels of mass consumption, and economic concentration in the hands of a few giant cartels," played a massive role in the expansion undertaken by both nations, as the melding of government and financial institutions led to a feedback loop with little space for democratic intervention.²⁰⁴ China's economic rise demonstrates all of these issues: state-owned enterprises dominate the economy and a political banking sector secures cheap lines of credit for favorite firms. Successful Chinese enterprises often work in tandem with the state on matters such as trade policy and the development of technologies considered essential for the CCP's larger goals. The limited levels of consumption in turn limit firm's abilities to expand within China's domestic market, and contribute to severe wealth stratification and income inequality that threatens cohesion as economic progress is confined to select urban areas primarily located on the eastern seaboard.²⁰⁵

The byzantine nature of the CCP, with its many councils, committees, and massive membership adds more complications with regard to China's policy aims. As Snyder explains, a cartelized government, in which various different factions pull policy in different ways may lead to a situation in which the end result is an unintended consequence by all parties involved. In

²⁰⁴ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 43.

²⁰⁵ Yukon Huang, "Opinion | China's Economy Is Not Normal. It Doesn't Have to Be," *The New York Times*, March 13, 2018.

China, this is reflected in the complex process by which CCP leadership is chosen, a process that over the years has increasingly played out in the public sphere. For example, during the campaigns by Bo Xilai and Xi Jinping, both publicly criticized each other in the media, previously unheard of within internal CCP politics.²⁰⁶ Nien-Ching Chang Liao states, “China’s provocative behavior is driven by the dysfunctional internal dynamics of the government’s decision-making process. Certain ministries or agencies- the military, the fishing industry, the oil industry, various maritime agencies, provincial governments, and other local actors- might harbor parochial objectives of increasing their budget, promoting trade, or ensuring adequate supplies of energy.”²⁰⁷ The different goals of various government actors, either local officials, leaders of state-owned enterprises, or institutional actors, reflects inconsistency and unreliability.

How does this relate to Hong Kong? Due to the autonomy promised within Basic Law, the Liaison Office in Hong Kong, the Office of the HKSAR in Beijing, and the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region all influence policy with regards to Hong Kong. Some believe that the Hong Kong government’s initial missteps during the early stages of 2019’s crisis were caused in part by the conflicting instructions received from different offices.²⁰⁸ Therefore, not only does cartelization make China’s domestic and foreign policy unwieldy, it also played a direct role in how the situation in Hong Kong deteriorated further.

Core Interests

²⁰⁶ Cheng Li, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era: Reassessing Collective Leadership* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 5.

²⁰⁷ Liao, “Domestic Politics and China’s Assertive Foreign Policy: Why China’s Rise May Not Be Peaceful,” 101.

²⁰⁸ Tammy Tam, “How Lam and Beijing Adjust to New Chain of Command Is Critical to Hong Kong,” *South China Morning Post*, February 16, 2020.

In Mainland criticisms and observations of Hong Kong's status, several sources present a focus on the definition of "one country." In another speech contained within *The Governance of China*, Xi highlights that for OCTS to function, there must be a "strong sense of one country." He further adds that sovereignty is not for negotiation, and that it is China's "red line."²⁰⁹ The mythmaking around China's history: the imperial system that placed Han civilization at the center of the world, which was then erased in "The Century of Shame," in turn defines the CCP's core interests. The nationalist core of CCP legitimacy and mythmaking is that the party will be the vanguard to lead China out of the ruins of that horrible period. Starting with the First Opium War and continuing until the CCP's victory over the communists, China was the scene of some of history's most tragic stories. The First Opium War was followed by the Second Opium War, the Taiping Rebellion, Dungan Rebellion, Boxer Rebellion, the First Sino-Japanese War, the Warlord Period, the First Chinese Civil War, and the Second World War. In one century, China suffered tens of millions of deaths inflicted by combat, disease, famine, and natural disasters. Following the CCP's victory in 1949, Chinese leaders across different eras have all explicitly made reference to the goal of returning the nation to its previous heights. Despite the party's missteps in the 20th century, it has succeeded in rapidly moving China up in the global hierarchy.

In a country such as China, a framework like OCTS is particularly groundbreaking because it is an agreement between the CCP and the people of Hong Kong. Not only that, it is also an agreement with the people of China, as it forever alters the contract between rulers and subjects by creating distinctions between the rights of different subnational entities. At the same time, it drastically widens the purview of "politics," as the individual distinctions between subnational entities are negotiated. To do this between the PRC, a nominally communist

²⁰⁹ Xi, *The Governance of China*, 473.

authoritarian state, and one of the world's most free-market cities required a significant amount of compromise to ensure a smooth transition. One writer states, "By casting reunification as an *uncompromisable* issue of national sovereignty, the Chinese government made this a default justification for all political, economic, social, and cultural changes. That is, reunification with Hong Kong demanded the supreme power of sovereignty to act ethically by not abiding by existing (Maoist) socialist norms and laws." Now that the initial transition is complete, the justifications used to drive reform and originally put forward the concept of OCTS can now be used to harshly respond to the city's democratic impulses. As the matter of reunification is "uncompromisable" to the extent that socialism is no longer at the core of the CCP, at the very least in one area, then any attempts to damage that relationship strike at the heart of the CCP's authority.

Since 2009, the CCP has given the general policies associated with this goal the name "core interests."²¹⁰ Starting with the territorial claims in Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang, they have now expanded to include regime stability, and continued economic development. The CCP is unwilling to negotiate on these issues. However, the full list of core interests as defined by the CCP has never been published or revealed. One army advisor stated, "as China becomes stronger, we can publicize by installments those core interests that our country can effectively safeguard"²¹¹ That quote is a clear admission that as China gains strength, the core interests will expand. In other words, there is no effective route of appeasement or clear stopping point for China's potential expansion.

²¹⁰ Liao, "Domestic Politics and China's Assertive Foreign Policy: Why China's Rise May Not Be Peaceful." 92.

²¹¹ Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping: Renaissance, Reform, or Retrogression?* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 194.

However, the CCP is not only unwilling to negotiate on this vague list of issues, it also has a tendency to force others to acknowledge its position. For external audiences, the punishment for failing to follow the CCP agenda could come in the form of economic sanctions or corporate espionage. H.R McMaster, a former White House national security advisor, stated that the CCP's tactics were "successful in part because the party is able to induce cooperation, wittingly or unwittingly, from individuals, companies, and political leaders."²¹² In 2010, the CCP sanctioned Norway for the decision to award a Nobel Prize to dissident Liu Xiaobo. In another episode, Marriot International Hotels had to apologize for "violating national laws and hurting the feelings of the Chinese people" after perhaps insinuating that Tibet, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan are independent from China.²¹³ When Daryl Morey, General Manager of the Houston Rockets, tweeted his support for the 2019 Hong Kong Protests, the Houston Rockets had all their games banned from Chinese television, with threats that the same would happen to other NBA franchises. Other international firms consistently face the same pressure to conform to these narratives.

Internal audiences, subject to actual enforcement of these policies, have no ability to dissent. The CCP's track record regarding human rights and civil liberties is well-known to be abysmal. Human rights activists accurately compare it to a 21st century *1984*, complete with mass surveillance, censored news & media, advanced facial recognition software, and much more. The personal costs of disagreeing can be extraordinarily high, even for something as apparently innocuous as a social media post. This also obscures whatever the true opinions of Chinese citizens may be. During the 2019 Hong Kong protests, many famous Chinese celebrities

²¹² Story by H. R. McMaster, "How China Sees the World," *The Atlantic*, May 2020.

²¹³ Benjamin Haas, "Marriott Apologises to China over Tibet and Taiwan Error," *The Guardian*, January 12, 2018.

posted messages in support of the police or of the CCP.²¹⁴ However, could any celebrity realistically have posted any message in support of the protestors? In a recent Athenaeum speech at Claremont McKenna College, a Chinese human rights lawyer questioned if the “resistance” had the ability to resist, if the state had made it impossible to do so. Hong Kong residents, through cases such as the disappearances of the booksellers, have already seen what awaits them under the CCP’s human rights regime.

The CCP has succeeded in lasting this long by continuously adapting, however it is approaching the longest rule ever by a single party government. Minxin Pei, a foremost China expert, writes about how the CCP has survived by fueling mass consumerism, nationalism, and learning how to “fine tune” its repression tactics.²¹⁵ However, with slowing economic growth and contentious power politics in the Asia-Pacific, it remains to be seen if increased repression is an effective tool with which to ensure regime survival. In South Korea and Taiwan, the authoritarian, economically focused, developmental states eventually gave way to democratic transitions. China is now nearing the point at which middle class citizens would call for democracy and greater participation in government (\$10,000 per capita GDP).²¹⁶ It remains to be seen whether in the face of growing potential crises, the CCP once again faces internal calls for democracy.

Xi Jinping

Much like the transition from Kaiser Wilhelm I to Wilhelm II had a dramatic effect on German foreign policy, the importance of Xi’s shift away from previous Chinese leaders, Jiang,

²¹⁴ “What Do Celebrities Say about Hong Kong’s Protests?” *South China Morning Post*, August 6, 2019.

²¹⁵ Minxin Pei, “The Communist Party Survived Tiananmen, but Does It Have the Tools to Last Another 25 Years?” *South China Morning Post*, May 29, 2014.

²¹⁶ Larry Diamond, “Why East Asia—Including China—Will Turn Democratic Within a Generation,” *The Atlantic*, January 24, 2012.

Hu, and Xiao, is worthy of exploration with regards to Chinese policy in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other areas of potential dispute. Although the CCP claims proletariat roots, Xi has more in common with monarchy than he would like to admit. Within CCP politics, he and many of his closest allies are referred to as *princelings*, due to their parent's involvement within the party.²¹⁷ His "revolutionary bloodline" appears often within his own narratives of personal excellence, and how it helps him lead China forward.²¹⁸ Xi's father gained national acclaim for leading Guangzhou, which in turn was China's leading province, during Deng's reforms. His rise, and the CCP's coalescing around his brand of personality politics, underscores the existential concerns some within the party had. In an increasingly insecure time for the party's future, it turned to someone *especially* committed to upholding the party's status within China.

The structure of the CCP, as a unitary party-state, means that all government employees and officials are members of the party. In an organization the size of the CCP, 87 million members, it is naturally a struggle to ensure that all levels of officials follow directives.²¹⁹ An inability to follow directives, in addition to rent-seeking, undermines party leadership from the top-down. Since Deng's reforms, CCP officials are judged based on economic performance, turning the entire nation into a competition between rivals. Provinces and cities compete to attract investment, encourage innovation, and produce economic growth. This process, as a secondary priority, also succeeded in delegating a lot of power away from Beijing to the provinces and cities. However, rent-seeking and corruption routinely appeared as an issue. It can take many forms. At lower levels, rural officials can charge parents undue expenses or fees for tuition. At higher levels, officials responsible for economic growth receive kickbacks through

²¹⁷ Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping*, xv.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 89.

²¹⁹ Xiangwei Wang, "Why Xi Jinping's Bid to Put 'Power in a Cage' Must Go to the Very Top," *South China Morning Post*, August 27, 2016.

favorable business dealings or turning the other way for environmental abuse. Others use familial connections to form networks of firms that receive cheap credit, government contracts, and other political favors.²²⁰ It has led to a situation where China's top 1% control over 41% of the country's wealth, and several high-profile political leaders are on Forbes' billionaire list. Others use employment and connections within state-owned firms to make their wealth.

A central tactic of Xi's success in centralizing power has been a massive anti-corruption campaign. In *Governance of China*, Xi specifically takes the time to discuss the party's need to improve its leadership, which includes removing corrupt officials, winning over both state media as well as social media influencers, and increasing the efficiency of its economic programs. The motivations behind the anti-corruption campaign are varied and multi-faceted: Xi is able to remove political rivals, bring himself "closer to the people," ensure a more efficient economy, and maintain the CCP's mandate to rule. Although the program has been wildly popular within China, where low-level graft was seen as a mark of deepening income inequality, it has also been criticized for its political motivations. In just its first three years, 150 officials with the title of vice minister, vice governor, or above, were arrested. That average of 50 a year is *double* the number of officials arrested in any year leading up to the anti-corruption campaign. From 2012 to 2018, 1.5 million government officials were found guilty of corruption, a staggeringly high number.²²¹ High profile rivals such as Bo Xilai and Zhang Youkang saw themselves receive life sentences. However, despite the massive arrest numbers, China's place on the Transparency International Corruption Index has not moved. On the 0-100 scale, with 100 being a nation

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Alexandra Fiol-Mahon, "Xi Jinping's Anti-Corruption Campaign: The Hidden Motives of a Modern-Day Mao - Foreign Policy Research Institute," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, August 17, 2018.

completely lacking corruption, China received 41 points, good for 80th place.²²² Since 2012, China has received between 39 and 41 points every year, underscoring minimal progress. Although the TIC Index is far from a perfect statistic, it stands to reason that 1.5 million arrested government officials would produce some measurable results beyond their prison sentences. If corruption has not improved despite the campaign, then the campaign's true purpose is something else entirely, which is why it has been called China's largest purge since the Cultural Revolution.²²³

Xi has demonstrated extremely strong resilience in the face of international pressure. Milo states, "reputations for resolve establish patterns of deference. Indeed, reputation for resolve and status are intimately linked in the consequences of international crises: a reputation for greater or lesser resolve will influence a state's position in a deference hierarchy." No leader is keen on repeating Jiang's deference to external powers during the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996, which remains firmly in the mind of Chinese leadership as a failure. Another example of pre-Xi Jinping acquiescence to outside pressure would be Hong Kong's 2003 Anti-Sedition demonstrations that resulted in the government abandon its attempt to pass the bill. Despite China's growing assertiveness in the years leading to his ascension, Xi has escalated tensions at a rapid pace. This resoluteness was on display during the trade war with the United States and with continuing the campaign to persecute Uighurs in Xinjiang despite international outcry. In fact, no Chinese leader since Mao has made toughness as much a part of his image, nor intertwined that image as successfully with that of China's. For example, the CCP's motivation behind kidnapping the five Hong Kong booksellers was their publishing of several books attacking CCP

²²² Dan Hough, "Just How Successful Has Xi Jinping's Anti-Corruption Campaign Been?" *South China Morning Post*, January 25, 2020.

²²³ Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping*, 96.

officials, including one about Xi's mistresses. In the aftermath, one observer noted that ubiquitous on many bookshelves was Xi's own book, *Governance of China*.²²⁴ His book is also the first example of a Chinese leader publishing his own manual on how to rule while still acting as premier. Xi has consolidated power through his newly founded political committees, passed legislation that will functionally let him rule for life.

Terms such as the "Chinese Dream," the massive military parades, and the return of Cultural Revolution-era songs to Chinese state television all point to Xi's reverence for Mao's legend. Deng, as the first part of his reforms in 1978, repudiated Mao's legacy. For the first time in decades, under Deng it was openly admitted that Mao had made some mistakes, and that some suffering of the Chinese people had been prolonged through his actions. Of course, such a drastic reversal of government policy as Deng proposed needed an accompanying explanation, one that could help guarantee the party's survival in the aftermath of the disastrous Cultural Revolution. Deng delegated power to the provinces, exercised term limits, promoted collective leadership so that the whims of one individual could no longer hijack the state, and encouraged reform. Pei writes, "Under Xi, the party has abandoned the pragmatism, ideological flexibility, and collective leadership that served it so well in the past. With the party's neo-Maoist turn – including strict ideological conformity, rigid organizational discipline, and fear-based strongman rule – the risks of catastrophic policy mistakes are rising."²²⁵ Xi has even gone beyond guaranteeing his own life-long rule, having also taken care to appoint proteges in key positions to ensure their future promotions.²²⁶ To put it simply, Xi has rejected Deng's legacy at every turn- from China's role on the global stage to domestic institutions.

²²⁴ Ilaria Maria Sala, "Independent Publishing in Hong Kong - a Once-Flourishing Industry Annihilated by Fear," *Hong Kong Free Press*, February 17, 2018.

²²⁵ Minxin Pei, "Xi Silences Dissent, and China May Pay the Price," *South China Morning Post*, April 18, 2019.

²²⁶ Li, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era*, 3.

Xi's return to Maoist norms is far from accidental and is a clear method to shore up legitimacy for the party as other avenues of legitimacy are increasingly difficult to come by. The party uses historical narratives to justify its rule, then refers to those historic leaders to command respect for current leaders. When Xi states, "we must never give up Marxism," or he extolls the virtues of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," he specifically is referring to CCP political-economic leadership.²²⁷ Little of modern-day China is Marxist or even socialist. However, the CCP's role as final arbiter across economic, political, and social situations remains unchanged. In the aftermath of Tiananmen, the party focused on guaranteeing economic growth in order to ensure *wenwei*- social stability. Today, not only are the traditional avenues of economic growth exhausted, but China is facing institutional ossification. The inefficient state-owned firms that hold the economy back still receive support, whereas in the 90's many were closed. They are not open now to keep Chinese citizens employed. As Pei writes, "the state-owned sector forms the economic foundation of one-party rule, the prospect that party leaders will suddenly embrace radical economic reform is dim."²²⁸ Thus, the only tried and tested method for ensuring the CCP retains the people's consent to rule is nationalist rhetoric. The anti-corruption campaign, the massive investment in the PLA, and the surveillance state that has been erected are all effective tools to further ensure power centralization and limit dissent.

The consequence of concentrating the power of the most powerful political organization in the hands of one individual are already visible. Snyder's examples of Germany and the USSR showed the dangers of how a single person can lead a nation astray. Within China's history, Mao's mistakes are stark reminders of the dangers of totalitarianism. However, in a society in

²²⁷ Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping*, 86.

²²⁸ Minxin Pei, "The Beginning of the End for China's Communist Party Rule?" *South China Morning Post*, September 22, 2019.

which the party's past crimes, such as the Great Leap Forward or the Tiananmen Square Massacre, are stricken from the historical record or blamed on foreign actors, writing and rewriting history, Xi's focus on ideological leadership is especially important. In an interview for his new book on CCP princelings, Kerry Brown stated, "Ideology is all important in China, as a forger of consensus, and as a means of created support for specific policies [...]The Chinese system continues to privilege politics over all other areas, because in many ways it is remarkably vulnerable to fracture and division, and the Party's most important function is to deliver this consensus before the government goes and implements policy."²²⁹ He said this in 2014, as the effects of Xi's rise to power were beginning to emerge but not yet completely clear. However, with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that Xi has continued to privilege politics "over all other areas." Xi is able to do this due to the inherent structure and weaknesses within the CCP. The party *must* survive, and Xi's efforts in controlling Hong Kong, detaining Uighurs in Xinjiang, or militarizing the South China Sea are methods to ensure that survival. Furthermore, if consensus, like Brown put forward, is vital in determining the path forward, then Xi's ability to survive coup attempts and assassinations demonstrates that his actions are so divisive that at least some within the party are willing to take significant risks to remove him.²³⁰ Going forward, as the party and the nation face increasingly important questions, Xi's priorities- economic growth, ideological purity, power projection, will decide what form those answers will take.

Taiwan

Outside of Hong Kong, the tensions and pressures present within One Country Two Systems are most acutely felt in Taiwan. Hong Kong and Taiwan's linkages perpetually present

²²⁹ Kerry Brown, "China's Princelings and the CCP," *The Diplomat*, July 7, 2014.

²³⁰ "Chinese Officials 'Plotted against Xi,'" *BBC News*, October 20, 2017.

a thorn in the side of Chinese policy makers that insist both territory's populaces desire re-integration into China. Historically, as the Chinese Civil War wound down to a close, business elites, government-affiliated workers, families of KMT soldiers, and "other elements of society wary of Communist rule" often fled to Hong Kong and Macau once Communist victory became increasingly assured. In much the same way that Hong Kong's refugee population eventually coalesced to form a collective Hong Konger identity, the *waishengren*, those who fled to Taiwan from Mainland following the war, eventually gave way to generations of Taiwanese who had no conception of Mainland China as their motherland.

As one Beijing professor put it, "China could afford to let Taiwan go independent."²³¹ The island poses no risk, strategic or economic, to China, yet the professor continued, "you can't talk like this in China even during the time when soft politics dominate."²³² Taiwan is the last remaining vestigial limb of Chinese territory under control of a foreign power. As Hong Kong and Macau have been returned to the fold under the auspices of OCTS, Taiwan has actually moved further away from Chinese control as democratically elected politicians inch closer to independence. Furthermore, the Taiwanese population's democratic leanings lead to a natural inclination to support the democratic struggles of Hong Kong residents. Tsai Ing-Wen, the Taiwanese president, went as far as to suggest that those fleeing Hong Kong in the face of Chinese repression would be considered for asylum on humanitarian grounds. Even the KMT, Chiang Kai-Shek's nationalists and the party historically supportive of eventual reunification

²³¹ Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower; How China's Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise* (New York Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 188.

²³² *Ibid*, 187.

with a base of support made up *waishengren* and their descendants, has extended its support for the democratic movements of Hong Kong.²³³

While Hong Kong has undergone political unification and is now in the process of integration with China, Taiwan as of now has not completed either. In times of limited repression, Chinese rule in Hong Kong has been effective in forcing Taiwanese officials to negotiate with Beijing. In no sphere has this been so successful as with regards to the success of CEPA inducing Taiwan to sign the Cross-Straits Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) in 2010.²³⁴ This agreement was long sought after by Chinese officials as a way to increase China's soft power, making Taiwan more economically dependent on China as a way to induce reintegration by peaceful means. The CCP strategy with regards to Taiwan is fundamentally the same strategy it uses not just in relation to Hong Kong, but also with regard to its own populace, a promise of economic growth to legitimize limits on personal freedoms. However, as China, "tainted" the concept of OCTS with suppressive actions in Hong Kong, the promise of economic growth, similar to the situation in Hong Kong, has a countervailing effect.²³⁵

Taiwan is not just a domestic issue, but an international one, as agreements severely limit Chinese sovereignty in what is nominally Chinese territory. The Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), passed by the US Congress in 1979, compels the US president to come to the defense of the island in the face of aggressive Chinese provocations, going as far as to include not just military action but also economic embargoes as justification for US involvement.²³⁶ Since the TRA,

²³³ Lev Nachman and Brian Hioe, "Friends from Hong Kong: Taiwan's Refugee Problem," *The Diplomat*, October 23, 2019.

²³⁴ Yun-Wing Sun, 73.

²³⁵ Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, 198.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 180.

Taiwan's continued independence has been guaranteed by the United States with several public statements and actions: routine naval patrols in the area, arm sales, and unofficial state visits, despite the United States also publicly proclaiming its belief in the "One China" policy, the difference being American demand that the reunification be a peaceful one. The 1995-1996 Taiwan Crisis demonstrated that despite, at the time, a thawing of US-China relations, the US has made a credible commitment to defending Taiwan's sovereignty. Jiang Zemin, embarrassed at the Chinese navy's de-escalation in the face of a potential US-China war, unilaterally included this "ominous new threat. China would use force 'if the Taiwan authorities refuse, sine die, the peaceful settlement of cross-Straits reunification through negotiations."

Beijing's insistence on all discussions with Taiwan needing to be conducted on the fundamental basis of "One China" (Taiwan and the Mainland are two parts of the same nation, ROC or PRC) means that hostile, repressive, or controversial actions by the Central Government towards Hong Kong make Taiwan's peaceful acceptance of reunification under OCTS that much more difficult to obtain.²³⁷ Susan Shirk even went as far as to suggest that Chinese decision makers adopt a "one country, three systems" stance to restart peaceful reunification negotiations, but reports that due to OCTS and Deng's "sacrosanct" formula, Chinese officials are limited in the options they can present to their Taiwanese counterparts, who in turn have little motivation to concede to "one China." The inflexibility of the negotiations, when they do occur, not only limits the options Chinese officials have available, but it also directly leads to an increase in Taiwanese nationalism, further pushing the island away.

At the same time that the Umbrella Movement protests gripped Hong Kong and demonstrated residents' wariness with regards to China, Taiwanese students led protests labeled

²³⁷ Ibid, 198.

“the Sunflower Movement” against the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA). Much like CEPA II building off of CEPA I, 2013’s CSSTA was a follow up to the ECFA that focused on liberalizing the service trade between the two nations. However, the agreement was never ratified, as protestors occupied the Legislative Yuan in order to protest what they felt was an undermining of Taiwan’s sovereignty in return for economic prosperity. Whether or not the protestors’ claims were accurate is irrelevant, as the CCP’s previous hostile actions to its own citizens in Tiananmen, or to protestors in Hong Kong, had made further economic cooperation anathema to many.

The links between Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement and Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement are beyond just a coincidence of timing. They both served as a rebuke to mounting CCP pressure. Jacques deLisle writes, “the relevant narrative in Taiwan was shifting from one in which the principal question was the familiar one of whether the benefits of economic integration with the mainland were worth the political risks towards a more economics-focused question of whether economic integration with the mainland was providing the promised economic benefits to Taiwan.”²³⁸ Beijing often tries to influence local Taiwanese elections in order to undermine the nation’s democracy and make reunification more palatable.²³⁹ It uses economic leverage to achieve political goals. Chien-Heui Wu found that despite prevailing economic theory, which is that finding that merchandise trade, even with an undemocratic country lacking solid rule of law, has a positive effect on a nation’s “good governance indicators,” penetration of China’s service

²³⁸ Jacques deLisle, “Democracy and Constitutionalism in China’s Shadow,” in *Law and Politics of the Taiwan Sunflower and Hong Kong Umbrella Movements* (London: Routledge, 2017), 223.

²³⁹ Joshua Kurlantzick, “How China Is Interfering in Taiwan’s Election,” Council on Foreign Relations, November 7, 2019.

sector into both Taiwan and Hong Kong have been detrimental economically, legally, and politically.²⁴⁰

In a similar case to the detainment of Simon Cheng, the Hong Kong British Consular employee, Chinese police detained a Taiwanese citizen for engaging in “anti-China” activities.²⁴¹ The protests also occurred during Taiwan’s election season, which the CCP attempted to influence. In the months leading up to the January election date, Xi and the CCP sought to pressure the Taiwanese electorate into choosing a candidate more amenable to Beijing’s rapprochement policies. Once election day came, the result was a landslide victory for the Tsai, the liberal, independence-leaning candidate.²⁴²

The way in which the international and domestic pressures feed into each other to make the Taiwan issue especially volatile make it the closest parallel to Hong Kong. Considering the ways China’s behavior towards either informs reactions in both, it is reasonable to use the Hong Kong precedent to predict the lengths the CCP will go to address its concerns. It is also the closest parallel to Hong Kong, and China’s behavior towards either informs reactions in both. The story Zheng cites, of faraway Sichuan natives bursting into tears, is possibly true, possibly false, as it fits into a larger pattern of Chinese scholars and officials citing domestic pressures, the “will of the people,” and the “Chinese dream,” in explaining international actions. The American decision to defend the Taiwan straits, the passage of the TRA, and the defense of the island during the Straits Crisis increase the Chinese government’s domestic pressures to eventually respond in kind. In a similar vein, the damage to the Communist Party’s domestic

²⁴⁰ Chien-Huei Wu, “Dancing with the Dragon Closer Economic Integration with China and Deteriorating Democracy and Rule of Law in Taiwan and Hong Kong?,” in *Law and Politics of the Taiwan Sunflower and Hong Kong Umbrella Movements* (London ; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 158.

²⁴¹ Yawen Chen and Blen Blanchard, “China Arrests Belizean, Taiwanese Citizens over Alleged Meddling in Hong Kong Affairs,” *Reuters*, November 30, 2019.

²⁴² “Taiwan’s Tsai Wins Second Presidential Term,” *BBC News*, January 11, 2020 .

credibility to have its global city act as a hot bed of secession, but groups that actively seek to return to the colonial era; makes potential concessions to protestors far too costly within the propaganda machine.

Conclusion

Locally, although the 2019 Protest Movement has tapered off, the future of Hong Kong's democratic reform looks increasingly bleak. In February of 2020 Xi appointed Xiao Baolong, the former party secretary of Zhejiang province, to head the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office. The move came as a larger series of shake-ups for CCP officials in charge of Sino-Hong Kong ties, unsurprising considering the large-scale protests that rocked the SAR. In April, 15 pro-democracy leaders and figures were arrested for their alleged role in the protests the year prior, which was met with widespread skepticism by democracy activists and Western governments.²⁴³ Later that same week, the ability for Beijing to abide by Basic Law was again brought into question when the NPCSC issued an interpretation of Basic Law that exempted the Hong Kong Liaison Office from Article 22.²⁴⁴ Article 22 of Basic Law states that "no department of the Central People's Government and no province, autonomous region, or municipality directly under the Central Government may interfere in the affairs which the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region administers on its own in accordance with this Law," yet it arrived at a contrived interpretation that grants the CCP further sway in the city's affairs.²⁴⁵ Finally, it seems

²⁴³ Elaine Yu and Austin Ramzy, "Amid Pandemic, Hong Kong Arrests Major pro-Democracy Figures - The Boston Globe," *Boston Globe*, April 18, 2020.

Natalie Wong, "Beijing Foreign Affairs Office in Hong Kong Hits Back at Governments for Criticising Arrests of Pro-Democracy Figures," *South China Morning Post*, April 19, 2020.

²⁴⁴ Sum Lok-kei, "Article 22 'Does Not Apply' to Beijing's Liaison Office, Justice Secretary Says," *South China Morning Post*, April 27, 2020.

²⁴⁵ Johannes Chan, "A Strained Interpretation of the Basic Law - Johannes Chan Comments on Article 22 and Non-Intervention in Hong Kong Affairs," *HKU Legal Scholarship Blog*, April 20, 2020.

increasingly unlikely that protestors arrested during the demonstrations will receive leniency or pardon from the government, leading many to assume that future tension will remain strong.²⁴⁶

The lack of Article 23 bills remains a flashpoint in relations, and observers predict that a still pro-CCP LegCo can pass a bill before the Autumn elections threaten to sweep pan-democrats into office.²⁴⁷ Although residents do have the ability to act, the nature of Hong Kong's undemocratic system makes it difficult for even majority sentiment to cause actual change. The upcoming LegCo elections provide an avenue for some change, however regardless of the outcome it is likely that Hong Kong's institutions will remain under attack from the CCP.

A defining feature of long-term protest movements is that all sides: participants, the establishment, and residents who find themselves impacted by demonstrations, will take lessons from previous encounters into future ones.²⁴⁸ Take the evolution of protests from 2014 and 2019 as an example. The participants in 2019 avoided leadership, organized groups, and stationary demonstrations because of how those vulnerabilities were exposed in 2014. On the opposite side, the HKSAR moved quickly to declare the movement illegal- which succeeded in fracturing the protests of 2014. That failed to work because participants had become more desperate for reform in the intervening five years, which both the HKSAR and Central Government should have moved forward with following 2014 in order to avoid 2019's situation. The recent push for an Article 23 pursuant bill reflects another tactical innovation- protest participants facing justice in Mainland China for alleged acts of sedition or rebellion. While any move towards passing such a

²⁴⁶ Alice Su, "China's New 'rule of Law' in Hong Kong Sets Stage for New Protests," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 2020.

²⁴⁷ "Risk Watch: What the CCP's Push for Article 23 in Hong Kong Entails | SinoInsider," Sino Insider, April 19, 2020.

²⁴⁸ Cai, *The Occupy Movement in Hong Kong: Sustaining Decentralized Protests*, 153.

bill would assuredly cause more protests, actions already taken in the early part of 2020 demonstrate that the CCP may move towards a rapid clampdown on Hong Kong.

A new potential dynamic is a renewed U.S interest in Hong Kong and China's relationship. As China continues to try and push the U.S out of its traditional sphere of influence, there is bipartisan American support for a firmer China policy. In April, U.S Department of Justice claimed that Google's underwater Pacific Light cable between Hong Kong and California "would seriously jeopardize the national-security and law enforcement interests of the United States."²⁴⁹ Instead, the cable would begin in Taiwan. If the U.S were to formally revoke Hong Kong's status as a separate customs union from China, it would deal a potentially fatal blow to OCTS. The EU is certainly able to provide leverage, but only if it succeeds in providing a united front. Even steps before a formal revocation would cause significant damage to Hong Kong's economic viability. For example, if the multinational corporations that call Hong Kong home relocate offices and headquarters to cities such as Singapore, the city could lose its role as a financial hub. Although many predict that this is an inevitability, further undermining of Hong Kong's rule of law will certainly accelerate this process.

Similar to Yan Xuetong's theories, the CCP seeks to rewrite the status quo. In economic diplomacy, it seeks to become nations' largest trading partner, lender, and source of investment. One in a leadership role, according to Yan's theories, it could then continue to reform the norms that govern the international system. However, "seeking to rewrite the status quo" is not an action without teeth. It looks like banning the NBA to ensure that other organizations know not to speak out against the CCP, buying respected news sources like the South China Morning Post to ensure favorable coverage, or ending the movie *Wolf Warrior 2* with a promise to all Chinese

²⁴⁹ Drew Fitzgerald and Kate O'Keeffe, "U.S. Allows Google Internet Project to Advance Only If Hong Kong Is Cut Out - WSJ," *Wall Street Journal*, April 8, 2020.

citizens that if they are in danger, the PLA will rescue them regardless of location.²⁵⁰ It can also look like allowing high-ranking government officials to use Twitter to engage with Western audiences, despite the fact that most Chinese citizens have no access to the app. Within China, the CCP has monopolistic control of much more than just the economy, and it seeks to exert that same control elsewhere.

The largest unknown, of course, is what the post-COVID 19 world looks like. Assuming the balance of power remains relatively unchanged, the tensions will also remain unchanged. In fact, the global pandemic only accelerated concerns international actors had regarding China. Although China's early recovery gives it an advantage, global supply chains originating in the country may be permanently altered. Although, if the process of economic decoupling continues under the next presidential administration in 2021, the damage to China's role as a global exporter may outweigh the benefits from a quick recovery. In addition, the reputational damage the CCP received in early 2020 for its role in obscuring the origins of the outbreak, followed by threats to foreign governments that criticized it, may also continue to dampen the positive effects of the recovery.

A slow recovery is deeply concerning to Xi and CCP leadership. Economies everywhere contracted, meaning that one (or even two) years of slowed growth due to the aftereffects of the pandemic will most likely do little to damage CCP legitimacy. However, continued economic stagnation will only make the concerns of the dreaded Middle-Income Trap (MIT) louder. Regarding China's slowing growth, Xi stated, "First, the new normal is not an event, so it cannot be judged as being good or bad. [...] Second, the new normal is not a basket that can hold everything. It is mainly economic. It should not be misused as a concept; there should not be a

²⁵⁰ Wu Jing, *Wolf Warrior II*, 2017.

host of “new normal” such as cultural new normal, tourism new normal, and urban management new normal. Further, negative phenomena should not be denounced as the new normal”²⁵¹ His concern regarding negative phenomena’s association with his “new normal” terminology reveals that it is a pre-existing concern. It is a concern rooted in logic- for decades China experienced 10% annual GDP growth depending on its vast labor pool, ability to mobilize resources, and rapidly catch up to Western competitors. However, labor costs within China are rising, its population is ageing, and is at the technological frontier, where innovation is much more difficult to come by. Furthermore, the world market is no longer as accepting of Chinese exports, meaning that future growth must come from increasing domestic consumption. In the first quarter of 2020, China not only posted slowing growth, the country’s GDP shrank 6.8%- its first contraction *ever*.²⁵² In the event that the CCP, like 90% of its predecessors, cannot climb out of the MIT, the Xi and CCP will face existential questions regarding its ability to lead China in the future.

In the event Hong Kong does once again become a flashpoint, too many variables regarding local, national, and international variables currently exist to make a determined prediction as to the outcome. However, from all indications it seems that the CCP will not fold to international pressure regarding its integration of the city. Of course, before the 2047 deadline the CCP may cease to exist, and in that case, there is no predicting what the future holds for Hong Kong.²⁵³ Unfortunately, all the aforementioned scenarios move the center of debate away from Hong Kong and to Beijing or elsewhere. Xi’s most recent moves make clear that he plans on creating little space for Hong Kong’s autonomy, regardless of the international reaction. His

²⁵¹ Xi, *The Governance of China*, 272.

²⁵² Jonathan Cheng, “China Records First Ever Contraction in Quarterly GDP on Coronavirus,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 2020.

²⁵³ Pei, “The Communist Party Survived Tiananmen, but Does It Have the Tools to Last Another 25 Years?”

transformation of China's global leadership capabilities minimizes the consequences for the continued suppression of Hong Kong. As tensions grow between China and the U.S and Europe, every move to expand the CCP's interests will only bring further scrutiny and criticism, which will only heighten Hong Kong's symbolic importance. Whatever forces win out, however, will echo far beyond Hong Kong.

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