

# Hong Kong's Democratic Movement: A "Country" in Turmoil

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background: "One Country, Two Systems"

During the 1840s, the British Empire and the Qing Dynasty (China) engaged in a series of conflicts known as the Opium Wars. Both wars concluded with British victories, resulting in the cession of Hong Kong in 1842 (Max Media Asia 2014). As a result, Hong Kong developed as a British colony, heavily influenced by European powers and foreign ideologies until 1997.

On July 1, 1997, Hong Kong was returned to China under the state policy "One country, two systems." This policy on paper is meant to facilitate the "reunification of China" while allowing Hong Kong to maintain its capitalist systems and enjoy a high degree of autonomy and is set to naturally expire in 2047 (Information Office of the State Council 2014).

### Background: Contemporary Events

The Hong Kong pro-democratic protests of 2019 marked the highest levels of turnout to date. Unlike previous protests, the events that took place in 2019 devolved into widespread, long-term violence which disrupted the city for many months. The protests' momentum was arguably only slowed due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The catalyst for this shift was the proposal of an extradition bill between Hong Kong and Taiwan. Given Taiwan's contested status, the bill would actually be between Hong Kong and Mainland China. Many Hong Kongers feared that this new law could be exploited by Beijing as a way to carry out political persecution of the opposition beyond their borders (Luu et al. 2020).

### 2019 Hong Kong Anti-extradition Bill Protest



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### Research Question:

What factors—political, social, economic, cultural and environmental—are contributing to the conflict of the pro-democratic movement in Hong Kong? In what ways are these factors exacerbating or alleviating tensions in the region?

### Purpose:

To present a conflict analysis of the pro-democratic movement in Hong Kong, in which I synthesize the various political, social, economic, cultural and environmental factors that are driving this movement towards guiding U.S. foreign policy.

### Methods:

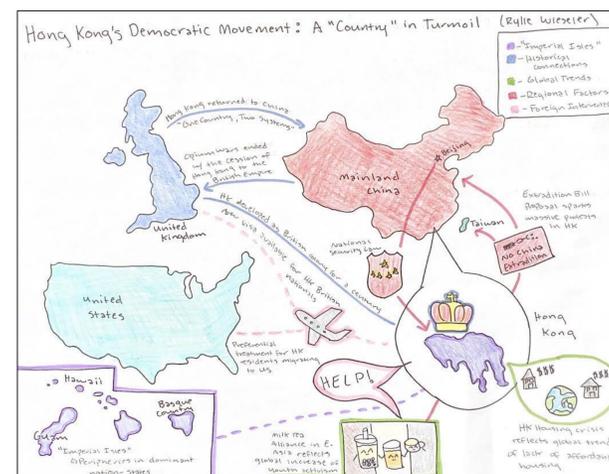
For this crisis analysis, I used the qualitative methodology of a desk review that follows the approach taken in the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2019) report. When reviewing documentaries, news articles, immigration reports and peer-reviewed research, I used a content analysis. I also conducted a policy and discourse analysis when examining official documents from both the Hong Kong and Chinese governments.

## RESULTS

In analyzing the pro-democratic movement in Hong Kong, we can see several forces contributing to and exacerbating this conflict. At the root of the tensions is the historical relationship between the British Empire and Qing dynasty and the subsequent "One country, two systems" agreement that was forged between them in 1997. An additional political factor driving tensions is Hong Kong's governmental structure, upon which Mainland China exercises heavy influence, as well as the interdependent nature of the two countries in terms of waterway economics and management. Beyond politics, civil unrest as a result of the affordable housing crisis is augmenting dissatisfaction with the government, particularly among youth.

Taking a broader analytical approach, foreign actors such as the United Kingdom and the United States can be seen adjusting their respective immigration policies in an attempt to alleviate tensions within the region. Additionally, the case of Hong Kong can be seen as reflecting larger global trends of manipulated narratives concerning periphery regions within dominant nation-states and increased youth activism.

### Critical Cartography



## IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this crisis analysis suggest that Hong Kong and Mainland China are inextricably linked on several dimensions, thus making Hong Kong sovereignty an unsustainable, immediate solution. Failure to acknowledge these complexities when directing U.S. foreign policy in East Asia could lead to infeasible, inapt solutions that only exacerbate tensions in the region.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Lam administration should initiate an independent, impartial investigation of the alleged brutality on the part of the Hong Kong police.
2. Established democracies, most notably the United States of America and the United Kingdom, should make public statements condemning the actions taken by Beijing and hold them accountable to the "One Country, Two Systems" agreement that was made on July 1, 1997.

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### Citations:

Information Office of the State Council, People's Republic of China. (2014, June 10). "The Practice of the 'One Country, Two Systems' Policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region." Embassy of the People's Republic of China. <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/c/ceesal/eng/wwdt/P0201406111517913609802.pdf>.

Luu, Chieu, Mantal Chow, Chris Healy, Mat Booth, and Yonden Lhatoo. (2020, December 7). China's Rebel City: The Hong Kong Protests [Film]. YouTube. South China Morning Post. <https://youtu.be/YgYUR66AA>.

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