

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

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Transcript

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MODERATOR

Up next, we have our very last presentation this morning, with Rylie Wieseler from Global Studies, with a talk titled, "Hong Kong's Democratic Movement: A 'Country' in Turmoil." Rylie, take it away.

RYLIE WIESELER

Thank you. My first exposure to Hong Kong's democratic movement was through a high school friend. She would tell me about her childhood growing up in Hong Kong, and often emphasized that her and her family both were and were not Chinese.

Back then, the nuances between ethnicity and nationality flew completely over my head, so the topic was pushed to the back of my mind. I never asked about it, and it was forgotten. My second exposure to the conflict was a news article. More specifically, an image of the Hong Kong police throwing tear gas canisters into a crowd of protesters.

Unlike, in high school this image of Hong Kong stuck with me, resulting in a rabbit hole that has led me to where I am today, presenting to all of you. Discontent in Hong Kong has been rising over the years, and in 2019, violence levels within the territory peaked.

With this in mind, the purpose of my research was to answer the question of why this was happening, and as an extension, what the U.S. specifically could do about it. My research approach was a qualitative crisis analysis.

Essentially, I read a lot, and from there, synthesized together everything I had learned into a final paper that discussed the local, national, regional, and global dimensions of the conflict surrounding Hong Kong's pro-democratic movement.

And although COVID has drastically slowed the protest momentum, their desire for democracy has not disappeared, making the likelihood for future confrontation high, and conflict resolution paramount for ensuring regional stability. But what is the big-picture message of my research?

First and foremost, conflict is complex. Like a pile of tangled rope, if we only focus on undoing a single knot, we may fail to realize that we are creating more. In the same sense, conflict in our globalized world does not call for a single perfect solution, but synthesizing solutions that target several drivers of conflict.

Secondly, it urges us to consider our relative position of power within the international community, and the validity of foreign intervention in conflicts like Hong Kong that are asymmetrical in nature.

Hong Kong is very small, and the findings of my research show that the former colony is intrinsically tied to mainland China on several dimensions, politically, economically, and environmentally. The implications of this are that, one, a clean break from the mainland is not as easy as achieving universal suffrage or being recognized by the U.N. as a sovereign nation.

And two, foreign intervention is absolutely necessary if the protesters want to achieve any sort of favorable outcome in this conflict. They themselves seem to be very aware of this reality, exemplified by the airport sit-ins that characterized much of 2019. Notably, American flags were not an unusual site at these events.

Hong Kong is trying to get our attention. As an international superpower, it's important that we listen, and although none of us are calling the shots on U.S. foreign policy, public awareness is a crucial step in shifting any political climate.

We don't have to be experts by any means, but being informed is a good first step, and it can be as easy as asking what it means to both be and not be Chinese. If you'd like to know more, please stop by my poster. I'm number 59 in group B. Thank you.

END OF TRANSCRIPT.