

### Who Has The Power? - 2019 Hong Kong Protest

Currently, numbers of protesters are rising and violence is escalating in Hong Kong. Demonstrations started in April 2019 over a proposed extradition law which would enable authorities to arrest Hong Kongers and send them to mainland China. Hong Kong was previously ruled by Britain but was returned to China in 1997 as a Special Administrative Region, "one country, two systems", Hong Kong having a democratic system of law and China having communism.

Having lived my whole life in New Zealand, a democratically run country, means that I have grown up expecting to have choices and opinions on how my life will develop. In 2011, my family and I travelled to China to visit and stay with my relatives who live in a small rural village outside Guangzhou (old Canton). At the time, I was only eight years old so I did not really appreciate why my cousins lived such different lives to me. Now, I am older and having discussed this with my dad, I now understand that culture and politics explain this difference. My life is full of things that I have choices about, schools, interests, food, friends, communication and clothes, to name a few. In contrast to my life, my cousins, some of whom are a similar age to me, seemed to live very controlled lives and I am told that includes how many children are allowed in one household. For some time now, my family and I have been trying to arrange for my cousins to come and stay in New Zealand, this has proved very difficult to arrange as often communication has been censored or controlled by officials in China and in the past getting permission to leave the country is tricky. My relations do not have political opinions about China and generally, just follow the rules of the government without ever questioning. Although they are quietly inquisitive about my life in New Zealand, they are very reluctant to have any meaningful discussion on the issues in their country.

In 1839, the First Opium War began, between China and Britain. The war lasted until 1842 with the result that Britain was victorious. China was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanking (Nanjing) which allowed Britain to take Hong Kong away from China. There was soon another Opium War that lasted from 1856 - 1860. Again, Britain won that War, forcing the Qing Empire to hand over Kowloon in 1860, while leasing the New Territories (a region of wetlands, parks, and mountains) for 99 years from 1898. During World War 2, Japan occupied Hong Kong, but luckily, Hong Kong was freed by joint Chinese and British troops, Hong Kong soon returned to the British rule. In 1949, China became communist, led by their leader Mao Zedong. Communism is defined as a system of social organisation in which all

property is owned by the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs. The country is governed by the communist party which is not elected by the people. As the deadline of the New Territories treaty loomed closer (1997), China and Britain began to discuss Hong Kong's future in the late 1970s. After negotiations, China and Britain came up with a "one country, two systems" policy for 50 years starting in 1997. That will lead them up to 2047 when Hong Kong is fully handed back to China.

Social media sites, like Facebook and Instagram, have been an essential tool in bringing people together in the current protest. Protesters have been sending out messages to gather people from all around Hong Kong to organize demonstrations such as raiding the Legislative building, bringing the airport to a halt and marching in the streets. It appears that there are no particular leaders who the police can target and it is reported that the protesters' phones have been encrypted so that police cannot locate their contacts. The protesters endeavour to have:

- the extradition bill fully withdrawn
- Carrie Lam, a Hong Kong politician serving as the 4th Chief Executive of Hong Kong since 2017 to step down from her job
- an apology from the police and an inquiry into their brutality
- democratic reforms to the Hong Kong government
- an amnesty for protesters.

Who is actually leading the protests? Surprisingly, it is university students such as Joshua Wong who have taken over from the 2014 umbrella movement protesters. Young people are concerned for their future. In 2047, when they are well into their adult life, they might be living under the restrictions of Communism. My cousins, who live in China, are in the same position. They do not have the freedom to travel anywhere, or even to just communicate freely. Up to two million people have been protesting on the streets for their democratic rights at one time. Creative ideas, such as crisscrossing bamboo sticks and detergent on the road have been used to delay the police from chasing them. Other forms of protests have been to withdraw Hong Kong currency from the banks and to form a 40-kilometre chain around the streets of Hong Kong to halt traffic. Protesters say that the use of violence is the only way to protect their democratic rights. In response, The Hong Kong police have been beating protesters with batons, firing rubber bullets, firing tear gas and firing pepper spray. The Hong Kong government has now declared all demonstrations illegal.

China has said that the United States of America is behind these protests and is accusing the protesters of acting like terrorists. It seems that China has used fake social media accounts to spread their message causing Facebook and Google to shut them down. Recently, China has also started to spy on the Hong Kongers. China has made “smart lamp posts” that can spy and see everything and have used spies to infiltrate the protesters' ranks.

To understand the problems facing Hong Kong, you must first understand the different mindsets of the Chinese people in China and the Chinese people in Hong Kong. Although all are citizens of China, they have different cultural and political beliefs. China holds great ambitions to become the most powerful nation on earth. To do this, they believe that strict control and discipline for their people is necessary. On the other hand, Hong Kong Chinese people, until 1997, lived under a democratic and capitalist British system which allows elections, freedom of speech, the right to own property, have opinions, and choice of how to live and work. This is similar to how we live in New Zealand. However, as Hong Kong is a prosperous world trading hub and very important to China, and as China itself is becoming more open to the Western world, it is possible that the protests may lead to change.

It is quite hard to see how both sides can resolve their differences. Up until now, Hong Kong's transition from British rule to full Chinese rule has been relatively peaceful but it is now escalating into a more violent situation. How this protest will be settled without China “losing face” or the Hong Kong protesters losing their current lifestyle as 2047 looms is anyone's guess. Recently, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam withdrew the bill, making it now dead which asks the question of why the protests had to take place at all. I fear that it is a little too late.

In the long term, it is hard to believe that the protesters will be satisfied with the transition of living under China's control which takes place in 2047. Having researched the issues facing the Hong Kong people, I question whether the British government who colonised Hong Kong could have done more for its Hong Kong citizens in 1997 by granting all Hong Kongers residency to live in Britain if they wished. Personally, I am very proud of my Chinese heritage and am inspired by how China has managed to lift their country from poverty to a world superpower that it is today. For me, although I am very proud of China and what they have achieved through communism, because of my Western world democratic upbringing, I have concerns for their methods used (human rights, copying intellectual property) to achieve their goals.

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