

# A Violation of “One Country, Two Systems”: Chinese Encroachment on Hong Kong’s Democratic Autonomy

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## ABSTRACT

Since 1997 Hong Kong has operated as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People’s Republic of China under a policy known as “One Country, Two Systems.” An analysis of the critical period of 1997-2020 (which came to a close with the 2020 National Security Law) demonstrates the ways in which the People’s Republic of China has used its influence to limit the democratic autonomy and ideological independence of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. By breaking down China’s actions into three distinct sections of politics, media, and education this review addresses the many layers and facets of Chinese encroachment on the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong. In the political sector, China has worked to limit democratic representation in Hong Kong via interference in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of Hong Kong’s government. In the field of media, China has used direct and indirect editorial action as well as economic influence to limit negative perceptions of Beijing. In the education system, China has taken a top-down approach to instill Chinese patriotism in Hong Kong’s curriculum to expand the support for China in Hong Kong’s youth. Tracking these violations of Hong Kong’s autonomy, and also the people’s response, demonstrates that although China continues to push the “One Country” aspect of the “One Country, Two Systems” policy, the people of Hong Kong will continue to fight for their freedoms as long as they have a voice.

## **Introduction**

On a hot June day in 2019, hundreds of thousands of citizens of Hong Kong took to the city’s streets to protest a proposed extradition bill and, in a larger sense, fight to protect their freedoms. Since the 1997 handover from British colonial control to the Chinese state, Hong Kong has been playing a tug-of-war with Beijing and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over the freedom to a separate and distinct way of life from the mainland. Under the agreement that currently governs China and Hong Kong, commonly known as the “One Country, Two Systems” policy, Hong Kong is legally a part of China, but has the right (at least until the year 2047) to have separate societal systems for politics, media, and education. However, since 1997 China has chipped away at Hong Kong’s autonomy, slowly bringing the region under Chinese authoritarian control. In the political arena, China has been working to limit the power of the popular vote and reserve authority for CCP members and pro-Chinese politicians. In the context of the media and press in Hong Kong, Beijing has been using direct and indirect influence to limit anti-Chinese sentiments in Hong Kong’s media. Finally, in the education sector, China has been pushing to curb localist pride and instill pro-China nationalist sentiment in Hong Kong’s youth. Ultimately, China has been using its influence over politics, media, and education in the region to support its interpretation of “One Country, Two Systems,” to promote state stability, and to truly limit the autonomy and ideological independence of Hong Kong.

## Historical Context

To properly examine the ongoing conflicts between the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and the People's Republic of China (PRC), one must first understand the complex history that the two share. For thousands of years (~221 BC-1842 CE), Hong Kong had been loosely a part of Imperial China as a port and fishing center. This ancient ownership of Hong Kong by the Chinese Empire often inspires mainland sentiment that Hong Kong must "return" to Chinese sovereignty. However, following the first Opium War (1839-1842), China was forced to cede Hong Kong to Great Britain under the 1842 Treaty of Nanking. In 1898, following the second Opium War (1856-1860) and more land cessions to Great Britain, including the Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories, Great Britain had solidified its colonial claim in South East Asia and would hold on to the Hong Kong territories for a 99-year lease.

For the next 99 years (1898-1997), Great Britain worked to develop the Hong Kong colony and transform it into a center of international business and trade. It was also during this period that Hong Kong and China began to develop in dramatically different directions, with China becoming an authoritarian communist state under the leadership of the CCP in 1949 and Hong Kong following the colonial path to western capitalism. Hong Kong watched closely as China underwent Mao's "Great Leap Forward" and its debilitating effects on the lower-class citizens of China. In fact, many Chinese citizens fled from starvation and violence in the mainland and took refuge in Hong Kong. These immigrants and their stories of persecution and oppression by the Chinese state caused Hongkongers to become increasingly wary of China's authoritarian government. As discussions about the future of Hong Kong's sovereignty arose near the end of Britain's 99-year lease, these perceptions of China within Hong Kong inspired fear that China would drastically change Hong Kong's way of life.

With concerns over the future of Hong Kong building throughout the late 20th century, the colonial leaders in Hong Kong, representatives from the British government, and CCP members came together in 1984 seeking to resolve the issue of Hong Kong's sovereignty. The resulting agreement, which was signed by Premier Zhao Ziyang of the People's Republic of China and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom (UK), is commonly referred to as the Sino-British Joint Declaration (SBJD). The SBJD declared that the UK would revoke all claims to the Hong Kong region and that Hong Kong would return to Chinese sovereignty on July 1st, 1997. However, this transfer came with many important stipulations and guidelines. The SBJD decreed that Hong Kong would become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China and that "current social and economic systems [including Hong Kong's] life-style, ...will remain unchanged for 50 years."

Since Hong Kong was to become a SAR of China, it needed to have its own separate constitution that set up its distinct political and legal system. This regional constitution came to be known as the "Basic Law" of the HKSAR (1997). The Basic Law was not written by Hong Kong, but rather by a Basic Law Drafting Committee (BLDC) led by the National People's Congress (NPC) members, pro-Beijing business sector leaders, and others whom the CCP trusted, with only minimal direct Hong Kong representatives. What resulted from the drafting process was a document that outlined exactly how Hong Kong would function as a SAR of the PRC. Although being a SAR came with many freedoms from direct rule of the Chinese state, such as freedom of speech, it is also critical to note that Article One of the Basic Law serves as a constant reminder that Hong Kong is an "inalienable part of the People's Republic of China."

## Influence in Politics

Since the 1997 handover of Hong Kong, China has been demonstrating little intention of making good on promises to give Hong Kong independent "executive, legislative and [...] judicial power." In fact, Beijing has been using its interpretation of the Basic Law, the very document that promises such powers, to limit Hong Kong's autonomy and legitimacy in those three governmental fields. Through the manipulation of Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Legislative Council, and constitutional interpretation, China has been solidifying its immense control over Hong Kong's political sector. Ultimately, China has been using its influence, grounded in the Basic Law, to deny the people of Hong Kong

fair representation and power in their own government. These efforts demonstrate China's violation of Hong Kong's democracy to further its own political agenda: a complete Hong Kong-China reintegration.

Despite the promises in the Basic Law for universal suffrage in electing the Chief Executive, Hong Kong's Chief Executive is currently elected by a selection committee of business elites and pro-CCP members who make sure the leader of Hong Kong is not a representative of the people, but rather a pawn of the central government. Although Article 45 of the Basic Law of Hong Kong states that "the ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures," the current system, outlined in Annex 1 of the Basic Law, is an Election Committee of 1200 (originally 800) members divided into 4 sections. These 4 sections, and 38 sub-sections, include members of the industrial and sector, Legislative Council members, other politicians in Hong Kong, and members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). While some of these groups are responsible for representing the people of Hong Kong, the majority are not. Because of this, the nomination and election of the Chief Executive of Hong Kong is controlled by special interest groups and Beijing loyalists. In fact, in 2016 when ostensibly furthering the goal of universal suffrage by altering how the Chief Executive is elected, the CCP failed to give true democratic reform. The details of Instrument 24 of the Basic Law revealed that the new system would only allow the people of Hong Kong to vote on "two to three candidates" that were pre-approved and pre-nominated by a "broadly representative nominating committee" directly under Beijing's control. This instrument also stated that the "Chief Executive had to be a person who loves [China]." Through inaction and misguided action regarding the election of the Chief Executive, China is demonstrating that it will likely never allow Hongkongers to democratically elect a leader that represents their interests rather than those of the CCP.

In the legislative branch of Hong Kong's government, China maintains the colonial system of functional constituencies, ultimately limiting Hongkongers' ability to democratically elect their leaders, and furthering the CCP's goal of expanded influence in Hong Kong's government. In Hong Kong's Legislative Council, each of the 70 available seats belong to a voting constituency, with 35 assigned to Geographical Constituencies (GC) and 35 to Functional Constituencies (FC). There are 5 geographical regions (Hong Kong Island, Kowloon West, Kowloon East, New Territories West, New Territories East) that split their 35 Legislative Council seats by population. The seats reserved for geographical constituencies are democratically elected by popular vote from the people who live in that region. On the other hand, the FCs represent various sectors of Hong Kong's economy and society including medicine, finance, and tourism. For each of the 35 functional constituency seats, only registered voters or corporations can elect the representative. This creates a system where FC seat holders have equal voting power to a GC seat holder, but almost no incentive to appeal to the general public. Going further, despite the two constituencies having a nearly equal influence in the Legislative Council, in the 2004 elections there were 3.207 million registered voters in the GC's but only 199,539 registered voters in the FCs. These FCs often vote purely by economic interest related to their own sector. In fact, when Functional Representatives (FRs) vote on social issues, they tend to vote antagonistically toward the Geographical Representatives (GRs). For example, from 1998 to 2004, in 21 out of 29 proposed amendments and bills, the majority of FRs and GRs voted oppositely. Because of the "Split Voting" system, which requires a majority of both FRs and GRs to vote yes, none of these 21 proposed bills passed. The contents of these 29 bills and amendments explicitly pertained to social policy issues such as labor rights and welfare. Functional Constituencies are anti-democratic in nature and decrease the value of an individual's vote in Hong Kong by giving disproportionate voting power to businesses and industrial elites. The system of FCs is one that exists with the goal of prioritizing the elite pro-Chinese minority over the majority of the people in Hong Kong. Because FCs are used to overpower the wishes of the people, China has recognized how important they can be in passing pro-Chinese legislation, and, it is for this reason that China has continually supported FCs and their members.

Additionally, the Basic Law of Hong Kong gives China's National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) final interpretation of all laws in Hong Kong, ultimately, de-legitimizing Hong Kong's political autonomy. The NPCSC is a powerful group of Chinese officials elected by members of China's unicameral parliament, the Na-

tional People's Congress (NPC). One of the main powers and responsibilities of the NPCSC is to "annul local regulations or decisions of [...] autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government that contravene the Constitution, other laws, or administrative regulations." In fact, this very responsibility is reaffirmed and extended in Article 158 of Hong Kong's Basic Law. Article 158 of the Basic Law establishes the NPCSC as having final jurisdiction over interpretations of the Basic Law. Since the enactment of the Basic Law in 1997, the NPCSC has used its right of interpretation in reactionary instances to suppress the will of the people of Hong Kong and define autonomy as Beijing sees fit.

One such instance where China used interpretation to silence the voices of the people is the interpretation of Article 7 of Annex I and Article 3 of Annex II of the Basic Law. This interpretation of two articles that lay out how lawmakers are elected came in response to protests in Hong Kong calling for a more open and democratic election process by 2007. The interpretation halted all demands for immediate changes to governmental systems in Hong Kong, including the election of Hong Kong's Chief Executive, or its highest governing figure (similar to a prime minister or a president). Regarding any amendments to the Basic Law and any changes in the manner of electing officials in Hong Kong, the NPCSC decided that, "an amendment may take effect only if it has gone through the said process, including the approval or recording ultimately given or made by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress." This requires that any proposed changes to Hong Kong's government structure must be screened and approved by the NPCSC and, consequently, Beijing as well. This interpretation makes clear the power the NPCSC has over the Basic Law. It eliminates any question of who has final say over amendments and changes to the Basic Law. While this interpretation may not have inspired much tangible change, it serves as a reminder to the people of Hong Kong that, in many ways, Beijing retains significant influence over Hong Kong's political systems.

Another landmark case in which China used interpretation to limit pro-democracy legislators came in 2016 with the interpretation of *Article 104*. This interpretation led to two elected legislators from the localist Youngspiration party being barred admission to Hong Kong's Legislative Council because they failed to properly swear the Legislative Council's required oath. These two young lawmakers, Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching, were pro-independence candidates who were considered quite radical. When mentioning "The People's Republic of China" in the oath, Leung and Wai-ching used the derogatory term "Chee-na" (a racial slur historically used by the Japanese to refer to China) with Yau going even further, referring to China as "the People's Refucking of Chee-na." In response to this incident, China's NPCSC gave an official interpretation of Basic Law Article 104 which mandated that incoming lawmakers must "lawfully and validly take the oath." This includes "[bearing] allegiance to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China." In the end, the NPCSC's ability to bar certain legislators from taking office sets a precedent that prevents the growth of true democracy in Hong Kong. China and many pro-Beijing members of Hong Kong's government have used this right of interpretation to exclude politicians believed likely to undermine Chinese control in Hong Kong. This violates the rights of the citizens of Hong Kong that voted for Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching to represent them.

In the creation and maintenance of the HKSAR, China has continuously influenced and manipulated Hong Kong's government. Examining the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of Hong Kong's political system demonstrates Beijing's overinvolvement and disregard for the "One Country, Two Systems" arrangement. Ultimately, China's actions to achieve increased control over the political trajectory of Hong Kong illustrate the CCP's larger goals of removing true democracy from the region long prior to 2047.

## Influence in Media

In democratic societies the media plays a vital role as a "check" designed to keep a government accountable. However, in the supposedly democratic society of Hong Kong, the media is prevented from fulfilling this essential role due to Beijing's influence. Through direct, indirect, and economic actions, China has weakened Hong Kong's media and prevented the circulation of negative press for the PRC. Therefore, although Article 27 of the Basic Law states that "Hong Kong residents shall have freedom of speech, of the press and of publication," the CCP's influence over Hong

Kong's media has allowed for limitations on those freedoms and control over the media's narrative about China within Hong Kong.

China's concentrated attack on the booksellers of the Causeway Bay Bookstore in Hong Kong illustrates direct Chinese intervention in Hong Kong's media ecosystem and points to a larger tactic used by the CCP to limit negative perceptions of China in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, the Causeway Bay Bookstore was famous for having books that were considered contraband in mainland China. This included political thrillers critical of Xi Jinping, such as "Xi Jinping: Dream to rule for 20 years" and "Xi Jinping: Seven taboos." Long established as a beacon of free and anti-CCP media in Hong Kong, Causeway Bay Books had a target on its back from the day it opened. From October to January of 2015 the Chinese government made its move against the controversial bookstore and quietly kidnapped and detained 5 of its staff members including the owner Lam Wing-kee. In October of 2015, Lam Wing-kee was stopped at the border for allegedly transporting censored books, and was illegally imprisoned in Ningbo city for 8 months without being formally charged or tried.

The Chinese treatment of Lam Wing-kee and the other booksellers goes directly against Hong Kong's commitment to "due process" (Basic Law Article 87) which protects Hongkongers with "the right to a fair trial." Going further, the arrest itself was only the first step in the larger intimidation tactic used by the CCP. While detaining Lam Wing-kee, the CCP, through the Central Investigation Team (an internal police force in China), also forced him to make a video "confession" of his crimes. Reading from a script, he was prompted to say that the books his store sold were "sensationalized" and "misleading." The Chinese officials also made Lam "admit" to turning himself in to the PRC officials. They shot several more scripted scenes including a fake court scene with a police woman acting as a witness. These videos were the CCP's way to undermine Lam's ability to go public with his detainment. Even though Hong Kong may have laws that protect freedom of the press and freedom to sell books without fear of censorship, Beijing has the power to circumvent these rights. China has used arrests and false confessions to instill the notion in all of Hong Kong's booksellers that they must stay within the bounds set by the CCP. By using fear to discourage the distribution and circulation of any other material, China has limited access to open information in Hong Kong. The strategy of arrests and forced confessions not only forced Causeway Bay Bookstore to close, but on a larger scale it effectively allowed the CCP to control the promised "free" media dialogue within Hong Kong.

By providing indirect pressure on news outlets in Hong Kong and inspiring forms of "self-censorship," China has used its influence over the media in Hong Kong to promote a positive view of the Chinese state. The practice of self-censorship is a common undertaking for many journalists and media companies when they fear adverse reactions to the content they produce. In fact, in a 2012 survey conducted by the Hong Kong Journalists Association, 36 percent of respondents reported that they or their supervisors had "practiced self-censorship in the past 12 months." In Hong Kong, self-censorship is largely inspired by fears that China will begin targeting any companies that criticize the Chinese government. This fear of Chinese reaction, along with the supposed freedom of the press in Hong Kong, has created a grey area for most of Hong Kong's media. The "choice" of self-censorship reflects on the complex relationship between Hong Kong and the mainland and how Hongkongers sometimes must "choose" between safety and standing up for their freedoms.

In Hong Kong's media companies, the chief editor and sub editors have immense control over what gets published and often end up using their position to cut articles that are critical of China. In order to appease Beijing, many media companies in Hong Kong have hired less-critical, more-conservative chief editors, such as Chong Tien Siong (*Ming Pao*), to have a less politically charged view. These editors have a strong influence on the political tone of a media company. In fact, many journalists have anonymously voiced complaints to the Hong Kong Journalists Association of top-down editorial censorship. Some examples include being unable to call out Xi Jinping directly and having articles on government corruption cut without explanation. This editorial censorship is a powerful tool to limit the freedom of journalists. Telling journalists what they can or cannot write about, in addition to being able to change what has been written, allows pro-Beijing editors to control the narrative of a story or article.

Additionally, when prominent media figures begin to clash with Beijing and the CCP, the companies and their executives have a choice of standing by their employees or bending to the political will of those in power. Media

companies in Hong Kong often choose the latter option and fire their controversial employees to protect themselves from the CCP. In the case of controversial Commercial Radio host Li Wei-ling, Commercial Radio prioritized appeasing Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying and ultimately fired the pro-democratic Ms. Li. Commercial Radio stated that the reason for Ms. Li's removal was "the basis of trust and co-operation with Li had been destroyed." This unjustified firing mimics the removal of Kevin Lau as chief editor of Ming Pao. Under Mr. Lau, Ming Pao was heavily critical of the SAR government and Beijing. As these examples show, the priority of media companies in Hong Kong has been increasingly linked to appeasing the CCP and pro-Beijing politicians. For these companies it has been easier to remove long-standing employees who begin to take an opposing view rather than stand up for journalistic integrity. Because this dynamic erodes Hongkongers' trust in their traditional media, outlets have continued to be submissive towards Chinese interests. Ultimately, silencing critics of Beijing has led to a culture where Hong Kong's media is sometimes little more than a tool for the Chinese state.

China is using its influence over business in Hong Kong and the mainland to limit Hong Kong's media in order to prevent the circulation of a critical image of China. Just before the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from colonial control to Chinese sovereignty, Chinese business tycoons began heavily investing in and buying Hong Kong's media companies. These business people were not necessarily interested in the potential economic gains from owning these companies, but rather they were interested in the "symbolic capital" that came with owning a media company in Hong Kong. One example of this foreign ownership is the purchase of *Ming Pao* by Chinese-Malaysian magnate Tiong Hiew King. Tiong Hiew King's main goal has not been to protect the integrity of free speech in Hong Kong but rather to expand his timber and media empire into mainland China. To further these economic goals, he has worked to bolster relations between Hong Kong and China by supporting a pro-Beijing narrative in his media company. Because China is such a large economic market that can be hard to penetrate for those who oppose the Chinese state, business magnates have been incentivized to work with the CCP. China has married its economic influence with the goal of controlling the media in Hong Kong to achieve greater state stability. By crafting a singularly pro-Chinese message throughout the region, China can minimize alternative opinions and voices, especially those that are pro-democracy and anti-CCP.

Another method of economic action undertaken by China to gain control over Hong Kong's media has been its influence over advertisers in Hong Kong to limit dissenting voices. Currently in Hong Kong, media companies' profit largely comes from online advertisement from state-backed Chinese companies. For example, liberal Hong Kong media company *Next Media* reported that it lost nearly HK\$ 3.6 million in advertising revenue from two global banks (HSBC and Standard Chartered). Later Mark Simon, employee of *Next Media*, told the *New York Times* that a representative from HSBC informed him that the "decision to stop advertising came after the deputy director of the Central Government's Liaison Office (the office that serves as the bridge between Beijing and Hong Kong) in Hong Kong, Yang Jian, told the bank to end its advertising relationship." Although *Next Media* could handle that loss in revenue, for smaller media companies the loss of advertisers can mean the end of publication. In 2014, mainland advertisers, without explanation, began suddenly pulling advertisements from liberal Hong Kong media company am730. Had am730 failed to secure funding from its other advertisers, it would have closed down. In the long term, these companies may have to work to alter their stances to be more attractive to mainland-based advertisers. And, as China and Hong Kong have become increasingly interconnected through their economies, China has gained more power over the media in Hong Kong. While many larger, more established media companies in Hong Kong might be able to circumvent the loss of advertisers that smaller media companies cannot, they are still heavily driven by their need to secure advertisers. In this regard, China's ability to influence profits of media companies in Hong Kong has given it the power to weaken or destroy companies that promote "undesirable" content.

On mainland China, dissent and overt criticism of the Central People's Government is not only restricted and censored, but also heavily punished. Unsatisfied with its limited amount of control over the media and information flow in the HKSAR, China, since 1997, has taken actions to boost its influence and presence in the media of the region. Attempting to limit negative press and perceptions of the Chinese state, China has taken direct, indirect, and

economic action to inspire such changes. In this regard, limitation of the media is another important sector that China has been leveraging to ensure more complete control over Hong Kong.

## Influence in Education

Since the resumption of Chinese sovereignty in Hong Kong, Chinese officials have not seen an immense growth in support or patriotism for the Chinese government or the Chinese way of life. Believing this stems from a lack of national pride in Hong Kong's youth education system, Chinese leaders have called for increased "patriotic" and "moral" education in Hong Kong. Following these top-down instructions, pro-Beijing officials in Hong Kong's Education Bureau have started implementing such elements in Hong Kong's education system. While not all the proposed implementations have passed due to mass protests and other demonstrations, these efforts point to the CCP's determination for making such shifts. In its attempts to unify the Hong Kong identity with that of mainland China and limit Hongkongers' freedom to a unique perspective, the Chinese government has been working to reform education in the SAR and instill Chinese patriotism and morals into Hong Kong's youth.

In order to realize their goal of making Hong Kong's education system more nationalistic and patriotic, China's past two presidents, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, outlined and mandated the implementation of a national approach to education. On the 10th anniversary of the 1997 handover, Chinese president Hu Jintao came to Hong Kong to swear in new Chief Executive Donald Tsang and also speak on the status of the "One Country, Two Systems" relationship. Hu Jintao covered many topics, including the need to foster a strong sense of national identity among the young people in Hong Kong." He also cited the importance of "[upholding] social harmony and stability." Following this speech, the government of Hong Kong increased spending on national education efforts by HK\$30.3 million between 2006 and 2007. Through Hu Jintao's mention of the importance of national education in Hong Kong, he highlighted the commitment of China and the CCP to building nationalism in Hong Kong. In order to fulfill China's view of "One Country, Two Systems," Hongkongers must embrace the "One Country" aspect. In the eyes of Hu Jintao, other CCP members, and pro-Beijing Hongkongers, the best way to inspire such a sentiment is by targeting the youth. In fact, ten years later, on the 20th anniversary of the 1997 handover, Chinese president Xi Jinping echoed Hu Jintao's calls for national education and more patriotic teaching in Hong Kong's schools. Xi called for "[enhancing] education and [raising] public awareness of the history and culture of the Chinese nation," in addition to "[stepping] up patriotic education of the young people." Xi Jinping's speech demonstrated that China was committed to education reform in Hong Kong from the highest level. This shared focus between Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping demonstrates the importance of "winning over" the youth of Hong Kong. To avoid conflict in future encroachments on China, the CCP must work to eradicate localist sentiment. However, this becomes complicated when their actions often lead Hongkongers to fear China's authoritarian powers.

Following instruction to promote elements of National Education in Hong Kong, the Education Bureau has worked to unify Hong Kong and Mainland education in order to boost Chinese nationalism. An initial way in which pro-Beijing legislators tried to implement the CCP's wishes came through the Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide of 2012 (MNE). Although it was never implemented, the MNE guide, with goals of spreading traditional Chinese values, inspiring Chinese national identity, and promoting Chinese patriotism, was a prime example of Chinese attempts to unify Hong Kong and China. Even though the MNE guide was never enacted, the sentiments behind it can be seen in other successful initiatives by the Education Bureau. One such initiative was the expansion of the mainland exchange program. From 2012-2017 the Education Bureau of Hong Kong spent HK\$312 million on exchange tours to send students from Hong Kong to mainland China. Additionally, from 2012 to 2017 spending per year on exchange trips rose from HK\$50 million to HK\$70 million. As a result, more than 35,000 students in Hong Kong were subsidized for exchange programs. The notion of Hong Kong schools having "sister-schools" in China has been an attempt to further unify the experiences of students in Mainland China and students in Hong Kong and build connections between the two communities. The Education Bureau of Hong Kong has been attempting to dissolve the independence of the education system in Hong Kong by merging it with that of China. These trips would be used to

show the positives of Mainland experience and promote in the students' eyes a positive view of the People's Republic of China. While this is not inherently negative, it has come at the cost of giving the students a balanced and critical perspective of the censored education in the PRC. Although Hong Kong has developed into a unique society with its own values and identities, Beijing only chooses to recognize that it is an inalienable part of the PRC and continues to push nationalism and a falsified identity onto the youth of Hong Kong.

By targeting the sector of education in Hong Kong, Beijing has used its influence to shift the way the city's youth understands and views the People's Republic of China. Since the upcoming generations will be coming of age around the year 2047, it has been imperative for China to replace the growing unique identity in the region with one that is more pro-China. If Hongkongers maintain the belief that they are truly separate and distinct from their compatriots in the mainland, China will face great opposition to further reintegration of the two societies. For that reason, the CCP has taken many invasive steps to influence education in Hong Kong.

## Conclusion

Since Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, the People's Central Government of China has worked tirelessly to find ways to limit and circumvent Hong Kong's autonomy. Although the "One Country, Two Systems" agreement was supposed to protect Hong Kong from such encroachments until at least 2047, China's ability to twist this policy has allowed it to chip away at Hong Kong's independence under the guise of building state stability. As demonstrated in the various examples and case studies discussed, China has been exerting its authoritarian influence over Hong Kong in the sectors of politics, media, and education. Politically, China has worked to weaken the strength of democracy in Hong Kong's government. China and pro-Beijing politicians in Hong Kong have pushed Basic Law interpretations and promoted anti-democratic electoral systems to limit the power of the popular vote. By reducing the influence citizens of Hong Kong can have in their own government, China has shaped the future of Hong Kong's government and its relationship with the National People's Congress. In the field of media, China has been instilling fear in Hong Kong's journalists and media companies that criticising the mainland will lead to reduced profits, loss of jobs, and even jail time. Even though Hong Kong is free from direct censorship, China's ever-present influence over all aspects of media in Hong Kong works to limit the criticism and negative press the central government receives. Finally, in the aspect of education, China is using its influence to implement pieces of a national education and instill Chinese nationalism in Hong Kong's youth. By indoctrinating the youth of Hong Kong to be pro-China, the CCP has sought to make further encroachments acceptable to this new generation of Hong Kong's citizens. Ultimately, China has taken direct and indirect action in all aspects of life in Hong Kong with the goals of increasing Chinese influence and promoting state stability.

However, China's actions to solidify its power and control over Hong Kong often have an adverse reaction. Over the past two decades Hongkongers have fostered their own new sense of identity. Because they were under colonial control for the majority of their modern history, the excitement of autonomy that came with the "One Country, Two Systems" policy caused them to form an identity largely independent from Great Britain or China. In this aspect, many citizens of Hong Kong, especially the youth, have become hyper-perceptive of Chinese attempts to limit their freedoms. In fact, since the handover of 1997, many in Hong Kong have actively worked to protest China's actions to gain more control in Hong Kong. This continued back and forth between the CCP and the localists of Hong Kong has heavily complicated the future of the city. As China takes action against the rising Hong Kong identity, Hongkongers appear to become more and more radical. Much of this conflict and sentiment came to a head in the summer of 2019 when protests over a proposed extradition bill to China brought hundreds of thousands to the streets of Hong Kong. These protests brought out many other grievances that the people of Hong Kong have felt and soon the rallying cry of the protests became true universal suffrage and complete freedom from Chinese encroachment. As the back and forth between the people of Hong Kong and the CCP continues, Hong Kong's future under the "One Country, Two Systems" policy becomes very uncertain. While China has recently taken further steps to limit the region's autonomy, it conversely seems that such moves may simply embolden the will of the people of Hong Kong to resist. Although the



public nature of the conflict sends a message to the entire world, it is up to other sovereign nations to receive and act upon that message. Countries like the United States must make decisions about if and how they will push against this Chinese encroachment and truly be a driving force for democratic freedoms around the world. Ultimately though, in order for Hongkongers to withstand the perpetual waves of Chinese encroachment, they must never give up advocating for their freedoms and protecting their unique culture and identity.

## Afterword

The writing and research for this paper was completed prior to the enactment of the 2020 National Security Law in Hong Kong. This new law, imposed upon the people of Hong Kong by the government of China, is a major marker of the Chinese action to limit Hong Kong's democratic autonomy. Even though the law is ostensibly designed to protect joint Hong Kong and Chinese safety interests, its components actually target protesters and anti-CCP Hongkongers. While this paper's scope does not include detailed analysis of the new security law, the statute will undoubtedly entail further Chinese encroachment on Hong Kong's systems of politics, media, and education. This development also shows how volatile the relationship between China and the HKSAR truly is. While it is uncertain at this point the extent to which the National Security Law will alter Hong Kong's way of life, it is clearly a step backward in Hongkongers' fight to maintain and expand upon their current freedoms. As new developments target the people of Hong Kong, it becomes increasingly important for those outside of Hong Kong and China to take notice and work to limit such oppressive and anti-democratic moves.

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