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## ANALYSIS OF ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS: CASE STUDY OF CHINA AND HONK KONG

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### Introduction

One Country, Two systems, a model that was signed in 1997 when Britain handed over Hong Kong back to China after holding it as their colony for 99 years due to winning wars against China in the 1800s. This model declared Hong Kong a semi-autonomous region for the next 50 years with rights such as freedom of speech, press, association, and many more, along with democracy in place. China promised to conform to the terms of this agreement, i.e., by not interfering with Hong Kong so that the transition process to mainland china can be done smoothly and is not forced upon the people of Hong Kong.

But soon after, China made its first move by introducing the fourth legislation, which made it a punishable offense to speak against China; this was met with a lot of resistance by the citizens of Hong Kong and led to the first major protest against China (Bradsher, 2003). Then in 2014, China directly influenced the elections in Hong Kong to make sure pro-China candidates win; this decision was seen as a direct violation of the democracy in Hong Kong and led to The Umbrella Revolution; this name came about as people used umbrella to defend themselves from tear gas attacks (Kaiman, 2014). Although the Hong Kong people managed to push back, for the time being, a bizarre incident took place; five staff members of a book store in Hong Kong that used to sell books banned in Mainland China disappeared overnight. (Elizabeth Joseph, 2016). The 2019's extradition bill proposed in Hong Kong saw the citizens' biggest protest as it was seen as a clear encroachment by China on Hong Kong's autonomy. Although the bill was eventually withdrawn, the protests didn't stop as people demanded full democracy (BBC, The Hong Kong protests explained in 100 and 500 words, 2019).

Apart from all these legislative changes, China has already taken passive efforts to ensure that Hong Kong is reminded of its true identity. China created the world's longest sea-crossing bridge between mainland China and Hong Kong (BBC, World's longest sea crossing: Hong Kong-Zhuhai bridge opens, 2018), playing the Chinese national anthem before broadcasting the news (Chang, 2020) and slowly transitioning the news to mandarin language but Hong Kong's official tongue is Cantonese (Bielicki, 2019).

All these incidents point out that China doesn't want to wait until 2047 to make Hong Kong a part of the mainland. They have gone above and beyond to make sure that China can merge with Hong Kong as soon as possible by making legislative changes and in many other passive ways.

## Research Questions

The primary purpose of this research would be to analyze whether the One Country, Two Systems governance model was bound to fail

Apart from that, the other research questions are as follows:

1. Why did China become so impatient with Hong Kong?
2. Is China respecting the terms of the treaty?
3. Will Hong Kong peacefully merge with China even when it's 2047?

## Literature Review

### "One Country, Two Systems": A Theoretical Analysis

**Source: Chao, C. (1987). "One Country, Two Systems": A Theoretical Analysis. *Asian Affairs*, 14(2), 107-124. Retrieved April 3, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30172037>**

This research critically analyzes the entire agreement of "One Country, Two Systems" and the fact that it was written in the year 1987, i.e., before the implementation in Hong Kong took place; hence, this paper raises valid questions on the fundamental practicality of this policy without any form of bias.

The first topic the paper sheds light on is the very origin of this policy, this model of "peaceful reunification" was first discussed in December 1978 at the third session of the Chinese Communist Party Congress, but during that discussion, it was announced with the idea of reuniting with Taiwan and not Hong Kong. China also expressed that this idea might even apply to Hong Kong. After this idea of using it for Hong Kong, China and Britain issued a Joint Declaration on 26 September 1984.

The next part of the paper discusses the theoretical implications of this model, the first biggest flaw being the unevenness between Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China; China and the other two countries have differences not based on ideology but also the other crucial topics such as political, economic and social opinions, the disparity can be observed by the difference in per capita income, in 1982, the per capita income of Taiwan was \$2,600, for Hong Kong it was \$5,390 while for China it was a meager \$300. The second flaw is that socialism isn't attractive to people from a non-socialist background; in this case, the people of Taiwan and Hong Kong are highly capitalist. The third big issue is the transition, the model says that the two systems will be merged after the transition period, Hong Kong has 50 years while for Taiwan, no such period was decided, and it was left up to the people, this makes the entire policy very ambiguous; however, the main reason for the waiting period of 50 years was so that China could be modernized hence making it on par with the likes of Hong Kong. Still, China did not address the gap or rather differences in the political and social stance.

Even while drafting the policy, China made some moves that were immensely disturbing and, in fact, a signal of what the future might hold; firstly, China pressurized Britain during the negotiations and also announced publically that if China and Britain are unable to reach an agreement by September 1984, then a unilateral decision would be announced. However, the British government did introduce one clause, which should have transferred the powers to the people of Hong Kong eventually through elections.

Finally, the study raises a crucial question that this Joint declaration between Hong Kong and China is signed by two different international bodies, what if down the line China violates this agreement? Would the British government stand up against such a move although it no longer has any interest in Hong Kong, and even if Britain takes a stand, won't China reject it on the basis that it's an internal affair, thus making Hong Kong not qualified for protection under International Law.

### Hong Kong Identity on the Rise

**Source: Ping, Y., & Kin-ming, K. (2014). Hong Kong Identity on the Rise. *Asian Survey*, 54(6), 1088-1112. doi:10.1525/as.2014.54.6.1088**

The research talk about the phases that Hong Kong had gone through since the year 2003 because that's the year when China started encroaching on Hong Kong's autonomy. According to a survey conducted by Honk Kong University, it showed that from 2003 to 2009, the people of Hong Kong who considered themselves as Chinese

this was a result of the effort to revamp the education in Hong Kong so that the youth feels proud as Chinese, but since 2009 the trend reversed, this research tries to identify the possible reasons for this reversal.

The Chinese administration since 2003 started interfering with Hong Kong, and in 2009 the youth participation in politics raised a fundamental question that what is their home? Hong Kong is not sovereignty itself, but it has each and every characteristic of one such as their own history, economy, and culture, and the people have gotten used to staying this way, and therefore the interference by mainland is facing a lot of protests.

The paper explores the moves using which China has tried to gain a foothold in Hong Kong, which is referred to as "Mainlandization of Hong Kong." The first move is the rapid economic integration; prior to handover, Hong Kong was an economic powerhouse, it saw annual growth of 6.5% every year since 1980, but Hong Kong's economy was hit by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak and the 2008 financial crisis both these incidents had a negative impact, China implemented a the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) which increased China's economic influence in Hong Kong, at the end of 2010, China had invested \$401 Billion which is 36.7% of Hong Kong's total inward investment, and since the handover, China grew significantly in terms of the economy so much so that Shanghai a city in China outgrew Hong Kong's economy.

The second aspect of mainlandization was the political intervention from China, China has constantly tried to intervene with political activities in Hong Kong, and the people of Hong Kong have always made it a point to express their opposition against the political regime followed in China so it's apparent that they would never accept similar governance in their own country. China also invested a lot in education so that the youth of Hong Kong have respect for their Chinese identities, but in 2011 these proposals were met with a lot of resistance from teachers and school faculty and termed as CCP's brainwashing propaganda. The government's intervention even affected the freedom of the press; Hong Kong's rank in the freedom press index fell 20 places to 54 in the year 2011-12. Here have been several rumors and speculations that even the election process has been rigged.

To conclude, the paper suggests how there has been a negative outlook towards the Chinese Communist Party and how the efforts to inculcate a sense of Chinese identity amongst Hong Kongers have backfired. These tensions between Hong Kong and China cannot be resolved easily as the people have major trust issues towards the Chinese government. While trying to disregard Hong Kong's need for an independent identity China actually unknowingly contributed to the rise of Hong Kong

## Analysis

### China's Economic Growth

A big question that comes up after going through the entire scenario is that if China didn't plan on giving Hong Kong autonomy, then why did they agree to sign the agreement with Britain and after analyzing the entire history, one thing stands out in particular, and it's the China's meteoric rise to become an economic power.

So, in 1987 when the entire agreement of One Country, Two Systems has formulated, Hong Kong was an economic superpower; some even called it the global financial capital, and therefore Hong Kong was of great value to China. For some perspective, according to IMF, Hong Kong's share in China's economy was nearly 25% (Lee, 2020), which's a lot of money for such a small piece of land. Hence, it made sense for China not to disturb Hong Kong's economic well-being by reunification. But then China's economy exploded, they made great strides, and now Hong Kong contributes barely 3% to China's economy; that's not to say that Hong Kong is no longer a great asset to China, but this just means that China no longer has the incentive to give Hong Kong the privileges.

### Changes in the Legislative Council

Looking at Hong Kong's agreement with China, there's a major takeaway, and it's the fact that China hasn't given Hong Kong a lot of privileges other than letting them have their democratic system and fundamental rights. But when China tries to modify even that fundamental privilege for its benefit, then you have to think that what does Hong Kong gets into this arrangement because that's exactly what's happening in Hong Kong right now. Up until now, Hong Kong had a 70 seat legislative council, wherein 40 were chosen by the public, and the remaining 30 seats belonged to the business or trade bodies and these bodies usually favored Beijing, but still, the people had some power over their own, but the new system proposed by China would change it to a 90 seat council, wherein 40 seats will be chosen by government's own election body, 30 will be for trade bodies while only 20 will be elected democratically (Griffiths, 2021). This obviously is unacceptable to the people of Hong Kong and is

borderline manipulation of a democracy's electoral rights. But the most alarming part is that this is not how it was supposed to be; according to the agreement, Britain made it a point that eventually, the entire 70 seats legislative council would be elected by the people, but what China has done is a polar opposite of what it agreed to initially.

### **China's disregard for the treaty**

After going through all these points, it's clear that China has made efforts in order to show how much they care about this agreement. Not only have they violated the arrangement they have even changed the existing clauses as per their will and convenience. China's foreign ministry's spokesperson Lu Kang was caught saying in the public that "the joint declaration with Britain was a historical document that no longer had any practical significance" (Staff, 2017).

Although after the recent changes in the legislative council of Hong Kong by China, UK has made it a point to announce publically that they find China to be in violation of the treaty and that they will stand up for the people of Hong Kong (AFP, 2021). Only time will tell how much of a stand UK will take for a country that it has nothing to do with anymore.

## **Outcomes**

After covering so many aspects of Hong Kong and China's relation, one thing has become crystal clear, and that is the One Country, Two Systems would have never been an ideal fit for the two countries. These two countries are fundamentally different, from a different political standing to different cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds even their official languages differ, and although China did try to be slow and gradual with the reunification process, such as changing the education system first, they eventually lost their cool and became more radical with the changes.

### **1. Was the "One Country, Two Systems" model fundamentally flawed?**

Well, from what I've understood so far, I believe yes, this system was bound to fail in Hong Kong and China's case. This model is great when you think about it. Still, to be successful in the execution, both the countries mentioned in the agreement need to have many similarities, which is undoubtedly not the case with Hong Kong and China. Another major problem with the agreement was that no clause held China accountable if they violated the treaty. Indeed, the UK made an official statement that they found China in violation of the Sino-British Joint Declaration but now what, I don't think there's anything else they can do. Even in international forums, China can easily claim that it's an internal matter, and the fact of the matter is that it is an internal matter. From where I see the people of Hong Kong are on their own.

### **2. Why did China become so impatient with Hong Kong?**

The primary reason that I can pinpoint is the economic growth of China. As discussed above, today, Hong Kong just contributes a meager 3% to China's economy, which is far less than the 25% that it used to in the 1990s. Hence, China no longer has the incentive to remain patient with Hong Kong.

### **3. Is China respecting the terms of the treaty?**

It's evident that China has constantly been interfering in Hong Kong's internal matters, and the recent changes in the legislative council reaffirm the point that not only are they violating the treaty, but they are even making several changes as per their convenience with no regard for the people of China.

### **4. Will Hong Kong peacefully merge with China even when it's 2047?**

The people of Hong Kong have a strong resistance towards the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and it's because the CCP stands for something opposite of what the people of Hong Kong want. So, I believe that the ways things are going in China won't wait till 2047, and even if they do, there will be constant protests, and the merger surely won't be peaceful.

## Conclusion

Chalmers Johnson once wrote, "One country, two systems" is one of Peking's united front tactics, which it uses to hide its real foreign policy goals (Johnson, 1984), and it just seems that he was so correct about that, under President Xi Jinping China has lost all its patience, and they are willing to do anything to expedite the process of reunification, and even if they do wait till 2047 they can't wait to get complete control over Hong Kong, which is evident by their recent maneuver to get most of the Pro-Beijing representatives in the Legislative Council.

The "One country, two systems" model would have eventually faced its deadline of 2047. Hong Kong was bound to resist this reunification with China because of democracy for the next 50 years. Then communism might have looked entirely ridiculous even back in the 1980s during the inception of this idea. But it seems that neither Britain nor China cared about the practicality of the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

Whatever happens now, one thing is for sure that the people of Hong Kong are willing to fight for what they believe is right, and it's only a matter of time that the world will see the end of this entire dispute.

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