

# Hong Kong: Can Two Million Marchers Be Wrong?

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*In February 2003, protest organizers [estimated](#) that nearly 2 million people took to the streets of London in opposition to going to war against Iraq. United States president George W. Bush came across as dismissive of the protestors, likening them to a “focus group.” [1] The number of protestors did not deter Bush and United Kingdom prime minister Tony Blair from their path.*

The aftermath was that the US, UK, and other allies initiated a lopsided war based on “intelligence and facts [that] were being fixed around the policy” of military action. [2] Iraq did not possess weapons-of-mass destruction; it was as United Nations weapons inspector had warned beforehand that Iraq was “fundamentally disarmed.” What transpired was an act of aggression — which the Nuremberg Tribunal described thusly:

To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.

Furthermore, the US-led debacle against a sanctions-weakened Iraq is compellingly argued, by lawyers Abdul Haq al-Ani and Tarik al-Ani, as an act of genocide by the US, UK, allies, and the UN Security Council. [3]

## Two Million Demonstrators Take to the Streets of Hong Kong

On 27 June, the *Hong Kong Free Press* [reported](#) about 200 people protesting outside secretary for justice Teresa Cheng’s office. On the following day, a [counter demonstration](#) of around 200 people made the rounds of 19 foreign consulates demanding that foreign countries not interfere in the internal affairs of Hong Kong

Just days earlier, however, crowds estimated at one and two million people took to the streets to protest in Hong Kong. Protest against what?

Fingers point to a [gruesome incident](#) that occurred between a Hong Kong couple while on vacation in Taiwan. A young, pregnant woman was murdered, allegedly by her boyfriend. The boyfriend was jailed for the theft of her money and personal effects, but a trial for the killing outside of Hong Kong’s jurisdiction is prevented. And there is no extradition agreement between Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The possibility of a release as early as October of 2019 has been provided as a reason for the expedited passing of an extradition bill.

What was unexpected was that so many Hong Kongers would oppose it.

The protests have been effective in first having amendments made to the bill, and subsequently sidelining the bill, but it may be resurrected for a vote at a later date. The Hong Kong government amended the extradition law to serious criminal offenses only, those carrying a minimum sentence of 7 years' jail time, for those who committed a crime elsewhere and returned to Hong Kong. A person who commits an offense in Hong Kong would not be extradited to mainland China.

## The Boogeyman of Fear

Why the hullabaloo over an extradition bill when Hong Kong already has extradition agreements with 20 countries, including the UK and US?

Why should an extradition agreement with other countries cause such a ruckus? If one peruses the corporate-state media, a clear answer emerges: *fear*; it is a perceived fear of what China may do to a person extradited to the mainland. Is this a rational or justifiable fear?

The *South China Morning Post* [states](#), “[C]ritics fear Beijing may abuse the new arrangement to target political activists.”

Germany’s DW [cites](#) critics who say China “has a poor legal and human rights record.”

“Protests have been raging in Hong Kong against a controversial extradition bill, which, if approved, would allow suspects to be sent to mainland China for trial.”

*Al Jazeera* [writes](#) that people in Hong Kong fear China’s encroachment on their rights.

The *Guardian* [highlights](#) a Hong Konger who was “waving a large Union Jack flag, a tribute to the British colonial era before the city was handed back to China’s rule, and implicit attack on Beijing.”

The *Guardian* article claims, “The alarm over the bill underscores many Hong Kong residents’ rising anxiety and frustration over the erosion of civil liberties that have set the city apart from the rest of China.”

The *New York Times* [downplayed](#) Chinese sovereignty over the semi-autonomous Hong Kong by pointing to a large, white banner which read, “This is Hong Kong, not China.”

The *Financial Times* [writes](#), “Critics fear the law would allow Beijing to seize anyone it likes who sets foot in the territory — from a normal resident to the chief executive of a multinational in transit — and whisk them off to mainland China on trumped up charges.”

What about Edward Snowden?

Back in 2013, ex-CIA employee Edward Snowden left the US for Hong Kong with a thumb-drive stash of secret NSA documents, which he turned over to some hand-picked journalists. Snowden was not beyond the reach of the US in Hong Kong, and the American government sought his extradition. Snowden, however, was allowed to depart Hong Kong for Moscow. Apparently, [the Americans](#) “had mucked up the legal paperwork.”

Hong Kong had no choice but to let the 30-year-old leave for “a third country through a lawful and normal channel.”

Those refugees in Hong Kong who helped Snowden elude apprehension have not fared as well as Snowden. Human-rights lawyer Robert Tibbo [described](#) the situation bluntly: “Refugees are marginalized to such an extent, that they are Hong Kong’s own version of Untouchables.”

Yet, despite what is transpiring in their own backyard, Hong Kongers are in the streets saying they fear what might happen to those who might be extradited to mainland China.

What about Julian Assange?

Hong Kongers and the state-corporate media are expressing fear about what China may do. But what about two countries that Hong Kong has an extradition agreement with — the US and the UK? One only need point to the current egregious abuses [meted out to Julian Assange](#) to dispel any notion of justice. And why is Assange’s extradition being sought? For exposing US war crimes!

Relations with Mainland China

China’s chairman Xi Jinping is unrelenting in his battle against corruption, but also his political platform includes “promot[ing] social fairness and justice as core values.” [4] Is this something to fear?



There is the case of the [disappearance of Hong Kong booksellers](#). There is also concern about the [arrest of human rights lawyers](#) in China. I am not about to state that the application of the law in China is perfect. But where is justice perfect? China does practice censorship, but freedom to speak has limits. One instance of when censorship is justified: to prevent the dissemination and spread of [disinformation](#). Consider the image at left, while the actual size of the demonstrations were massive, the image was “heavily edited — cropped and mirrored — to multiply the size of the crowd.” It has gone viral with subsequent republications [failing to mention](#) the editing and cropping.

Then there is the omission of information, such as the purported [funding of the protests](#) in Hong Kong by the US government and a notorious CIA-affiliated NGO, the [National Endowment for Democracy](#). This is backed by various western governments expressing sympathy for the Hong Kong protestors.

The often bandied-about criticisms concerning China are of authoritarianism, lack of democracy, and lack of freedom.

Is China authoritarian? China, through the Communist Party of China, defines itself as a state practicing socialism with Chinese characteristics. It promotes as its core values: prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendliness. China practices utilitarianism aiming its policies at what best benefits the majority of its citizens. China promotes peace and harmony; it emphasizes diplomacy and avoidance of war.

To allay fears, Xi said in a speech in Berlin:

As China continues to grow, some people start to worry. Some take a dark view of China and assume that it will inevitably become a threat as it develops further. They even portray China as being the terrifying Mephisto who will someday suck the soul of the world. Such absurdity couldn't be more ridiculous, yet some people, regrettably, never tire of preaching it. This shows prejudice is indeed hard to overcome....

The pursuit of peace, amity and harmony is an integral part of the Chinese character which runs deep in the blood of the Chinese people. This can be evidenced by axioms from ancient China such as: "A warlike state, however big it may be, will eventually perish." [5]

Democracy? Wei Ling Chua in his book, *Democracy: What the West Can Learn from China*, sought to compare and contrast the effectiveness of western and Chinese political systems scientifically. The assumption is that the well-being of the citizenry is the *raison d'être* of a government. To determine this, Chua gauged government responsiveness to the needs of the people during a disaster. The response of the Australian and American governments compared unfavorably with the Chinese government's response to disasters. Chua writes this is because "... the culture and beliefs of the Communist Party in China is more people-oriented than those of the capitalist elites in the West." [6] Besides, what democracy did Hong Kong enjoy under British until the time of a handover approached? Is not the imposition of colonial status through war to facilitate opium exports a total abnegation of democracy and freedom? [7]

I have lived in China for a number of years, and I feel just as free here as anywhere. Of course, I wouldn't stand on a soapbox with a megaphone and shout anti-China slogans, but I wouldn't do that anywhere about that country's government. The right to peaceful protest, however, should be respected. The Chinese people around me do not complain of feeling unfree. As already stated, there is censorship. Very few people here are aware of the protests taking place in Hong Kong. But freedom is not just about speech. What about freedom from poverty? One in five Hong Kongers [live in poverty](#), a number that is on the increase in Hong Kong. Contrariwise, the year 2020 is targeted as the year that poverty is eliminated in China.

Etiology

Charles Chow (pseudonym for an American who lives on and off in Hong Kong) gave his perspective:

The big issue isn't the [extradition] bill at all or even the relative lack of democracy in Hong Kong.... It's two fundamental issues that have existed since the colonial era, but worsened since the handover: a growing wealth gap and the lack of affordable housing. The government hasn't done much to resolve them and neither has China. Their failure to tackle these problems has made Hong Kongers less trustful of them and more irritable overall. Therefore, even small controversies will point back to these bigger issues.

I agree with Chow's identification of two fundamental issues. However, I fail to see why in a one country, two systems situation that Beijing should be held responsible for the resolution of problems associated with the Hong Kong system of governance. Moreover, the yawning chasm in the percentage of those living in poverty under the system in Hong Kong versus the system in mainland China (under 1%, for a much larger territory with a huge population, therefore, posing greater challenges for effective governance) suggests the Hong Kong system is majorly flawed in at least one important aspect.

Now it's 22 years after the handover—an entire generation has passed. The legacy of colonialism will linger for a while, but the current government has had two decades to resolve any problem the British left behind. Hong Kong's economy is still robust, but its gains have been unequally distributed. [8]

Chow continues:

Its housing prices are just obscene—especially given the size and build quality of the properties they represent. Neither problem shows any sign of abating and both are, in fact, getting worse. Thus, even some Hong Kongers who are pro-Beijing have expressed concern over both problems because they know neither discriminates by political affiliation. Where they differ from the pro-democracy crowd is how to resolve them.

The pro-democracy folks believe giving more people a say in how Hong Kong operates (in other words, more democracy) is the solution. The pro-Beijing folks think the current government, along with China, should be able to do something. But this government, beholden as it is to the tycoons and China (such an odd couple), isn't going to tackle these problems. Because it won't, it has created a growing body of restless Hong Kongers, many of whom were once apolitical and probably even opposed Occupy in 2014.

It didn't have to be this way. In a fairer world, Hong Kong would have a manageable wealth gap and be able to provide affordable housing for most of its people. In such a scenario, even most people who aren't crazy about China would accept its sovereignty and foreign attempts to get them to protest Chinese rule would go nowhere.

Even if an extradition bill were proposed, there'd be fewer people showing a concern over it.

## Epilogue

Imagine if a country were to invade and occupy Hawai'i for the next century, [9] after which Hawai'i would be semi-liberated from occupation. Would Hawaiians wish to rejoin the US? Might not new systems, cultures, and languages have been injected during the occupation/colonization have affected the mindset of the later generations?

The roots of the opposition that many Hong Kongers feel toward the extradition bill arguably lies further back in history. Clear-minded logic leads to the realization that if Britain had not started the Opium Wars (a crime of aggression) and occupied Hong Kong, thus severing Hong Kong from Beijing's rule, there never would have been a need for the difficulties that arise from the one country, two systems currently in place. A *de facto* city-state would never have been able to become a haven for fugitives from the central government. Hong Kong would have remained a part of China. The same logic holds true in the case of Taiwan. If Japan had not occupied Taiwan, and if the US had not intervened to protect the *Guomindang* remnants that fled across the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan would likeliest have remained a part of China to this day.

The source of the current tensions in Hong Kong did not originate in Beijing (unless one blames Beijing for being too militarily weak to protect its territorial integrity and prevent its citizens from being transformed into drug addicts).

This is missing from much of the western corporate-state media news. While China seeks to safeguard sovereignty over its landmass, Britain holds fast to its enclave in Northern Ireland. It ignores justice and maintains an ethnic cleansing that it and the US imposed on the [people of the Chagos archipelago](#). The US itself is a nation erected through the denationalization of Indigenous nations. [10]

How is it then that western nations and their western media have a moral leg to stand on when criticizing other nations, such as China, for fear of criminality that pale in comparison to those crimes that the western nations have committed?

Can two million marchers be wrong? They are not wrong about the right to march or the right to protest. Are they wrong to oppose the extradition of persons for serious offenses to China? Are they wrong to fear China? Do they genuinely fear China? This fear of mainland China is seemingly so negligible that 6.9 million of the 7.4 million Hong Kongers hold a Homeland Return Permit to ease travel to and from China. Is it sensible for people to travel to a jurisdiction that they fear?

The comparison is stark.

Compare protesting the launching of a war wherein upwards of 600,000 people were killed [11] (now being killed that is something that most people fear) to protesting the upholding of law to ensure murderers should face justice. If, indeed, China is governed by a scofflaw government, then there is a justification for having fear. But before casting final judgement, western countries ought to look deeply into the mirror, the mirror that reflects the not-so-long-ago devastations of Palestine, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and other lands. China's last battles were with India and Viet Nam many decades ago. The Communist Party of China (CPC) states an abhorrence of wars and promotes peaceful resolution of differences. [5]

The CPC acknowledges that it is dependent on the support of the people; without it the party will fall. The CPC's *raison d'être* is the well-being of the people, what is called the Chinese Dream.

It would be foolish and contradictory for Beijing to upset Hong Kongers. Harmony is, after all, a core value of socialism. The one country, two systems is due to expire in 2047. Likewise, Hong Kong has nothing to gain from irritating Beijing. However, should Hong Kong integrate into the economic system of China, it stands to see the elimination of poverty in



the former British colony.

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## Notes

1. Said Bush, "First of all, you know, size of protests—it's like deciding, 'Well, I'm going to decide policy based upon a focus group.' The role of a leader is to decide policy based upon, in this case, the security of the people."
2. As revealed in the Downing Street Memo. The [website](#), however, no longer is accessible. The page reads: This Account has been suspended. The memo is available at this [pdf](#).
3. See Abdul Haq al-Ani and Tarik al-Ani, *Genocide in Iraq: The Case Against the UN Security Council and Member States*. [Review](#).
4. "We should address the people's proper and lawful demands on matters affecting their interests, and improve the institutions that are important for safeguarding their vital interests." Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014): 35%.
5. Xi Jinping, "China's Commitment to Peaceful Development" in *The Governance of China*: 35%.
6. Wei Ling Chua, *Democracy: What the West Can Learn from China* (2013): location 1214. [Review](#).
7. See Samuel Merwin, [Drugging a Nation: The Story of China and the Opium Curse](#) (Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Co, 1908).
8. The [income distribution in Hong Kong](#) has become extraordinarily high. — KP
9. Never mind that this is what happened so that the US mainland could depose the Hawaiian monarchy.
10. See Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* (Beacon Press, 2015). [Review](#).
11. Burnham G, Lafta R, Doocy S, and Roberts L, "Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey," *Lancet*: 368(9545), 21 October 2006: 1421-8.

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