

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection

Hong Kong's Thwarted Democracy

The seeds of the protests shaking the city were planted in 1997, when Britain handed the territory back to China

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Why did Britain rule Hong Kong?

It took over the territory following a drug war. In 1839, Beijing cracked down on the rampant illegal opium trade in southern China, destroying huge stockpiles of the drug owned by British merchants. A furious London retaliated by sending the Royal Navy to smash the Imperial Chinese and demand, at war's end in 1842, that China cede control of Hong Kong Island — then just a cluster of fishing villages on a barren rock. Hong Kong became a thriving port, and in 1898 the weak Chinese government was pressured to lease the island and surrounding territory to London for 99 years. The British colony's population boomed in the mid-20th century, when Chinese merchants fearful of the impending communist takeover fled en masse for Hong Kong. Their business savvy helped fuel the city's economic success, and by the 1980s, when Britain and China began discussing the approaching handoff to Chinese rule, Hong Kong was the quintessential Asian Tiger: a financial hub with low taxes, low regulation, and high growth.

What was supposed to happen after the handover?

In 1984, Beijing and London signed a treaty agreeing that China would administer Hong Kong under a policy of "one country, two systems" for 50 years after the 1997 transfer. That meant that the Beijing system of communist authoritarian control would apply only to the mainland, while Hong Kong would retain its own system of capitalism, limited democracy, and extensive civil liberties. "How Hong Kong develops its democracy in the future is completely within the sphere of the autonomy of Hong Kong," Lu Ping, China's then top official on Hong Kong, said in 1993.

How did the city change after the transfer?

Hong Kong's elected legislature was immediately replaced by a handpicked council of pro-Beijing politicians and businessmen. But most aspects of life remained the same. Hong Kong continued to thrive as an international financial center. The justice system remained based on British common law, with chances for appeal, and judges were independent. Hong Kong remains the only place in China with a memorial to victims of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Yet as the years wore on, media self-censorship became more and more noticeable, and Beijing's attempts to stifle dissent became more overt.

What happened?

News outlets that criticized Beijing saw their funding withdrawn. Last year, two banks with business interests in China — HSBC and Standard Chartered — abruptly stopped advertising in *Apple Daily*, a newspaper that took a tough line on Beijing. (The banks said their decisions were commercially based.) Outspoken Hong Kong radio host Li Wei-ling was abruptly fired in February, apparently because the territory's chief executive, Leung Chun-ying, disapproved of her on-air support for pro-democracy activists. Education came under pressure, too. In 2012, the Hong Kong executive tried to introduce "moral and national education" into the school curricula. Course materials praised one-party rule as "progressive, selfless, and united" and called multiparty systems like those in the West democratic failures. Some 90,000 students and citizens demonstrated against what they called "brainwashing." The government backed down and scrapped the new courses.

What sparked the latest protests?

Hong Kong's constitution, the Basic Law — drawn up before the handover and agreed to by Beijing —

calls for eventual universal suffrage, but that has yet to be achieved. The 2017 election of Hong Kong's chief executive is supposed to be the city's first direct ballot with one person, one vote. But many residents are skeptical that Beijing will deliver. Last year, Hong Kong University professor Benny Tai started the Occupy Central With Love and Peace movement to press for full suffrage, including the right to nominate candidates. Beijing was not amused. In June, it released a white paper saying candidates would be vetted and approved by a committee stacked with mainlanders. A few weeks later, university students began boycotting classes and demonstrating, and the Occupy movement quickly joined them on the streets.

Why does Beijing want to screen candidates?

Li Fei, a senior Chinese official, argued that opening up nominations would cause a "chaotic society" and that the chief executive must "love the country and love the Party." Officials also insist that Beijing never promised that Hong Kongers would be allowed to freely pick candidates. "Universal suffrage, under the international covenant, means that there are express rights to elect or be elected," said Alan Hoo, a pro-Beijing lawyer in Hong Kong. "There is no express right to nominate." But pro-democracy campaigners argue that universal suffrage is meaningless if all candidates are selected by the state — the same electoral system used by autocracies around the world. "Are we going to be like Iran or North Korea?" asked Emily Lau, chairwoman of the city's Democratic Party. "No, we are Hong Kong. We want to go by international standards."

The man protesters hate

Hong Kong's pro-democracy demonstrators have directed most of their anger at one man: the city's chief executive, Leung Chun-ying. "People call him Wolf; he's seen as unprincipled and rapacious," said Louisa Lim, a Hong Kong native and author of *The People's Republic of Amnesia*, a book about the 1989 Tiananmen protests. Elected by Hong Kong's elite in 2012, Leung is blamed for authorizing riot police to use tear gas on peaceful demonstrators and is widely seen as a Communist Party loyalist. Though he refuses to say whether he is a party member, Beijing mouthpiece *People's Daily* welcomed his election by referring to him as "comrade" — a title not given to any previous Hong Kong executive. China watchers are waiting to see if the party sacrifices Leung and holds him responsible for the chaos in an attempt to placate protesters. His removal, said Nicholas Bequelin, a Hong Kong expert at Yale University, would be "a very expedient way for [Chinese president] Xi Jinping not to be seen as responsible for not handling Hong Kong correctly."

Possible Response Questions:

- Predict what will happen in Hong Kong. Explain.
- Should Americans care what happens in Hong Kong? Why? Why not? Explain.
- Select any passage and respond to it.