

Power and Control in the HKSAR: The CCP does what it can, and Hongkongers suffer what they must

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ABSTRACT

Hong Kong has long been a success story. Under British rule it became one of the Asian Tigers, that group that were the first to successfully develop in the post-WWII era. They became models for others to emulate. For the Chinese Communist Party, however, Hong Kong has always been a symbol of all that it despised. Regardless of that, the CCP planned to both exploit and replicate Hong Kong's success. In this way, Hong Kong was vital to China's later success at economic development. While this paradox was tolerable, the CCP cannot accept continuation of the 'one state, two systems' that it agreed to in the 1980s. The ideology of the CCP is entirely incompatible with liberal democracy. In fact, the CCP recognises that liberal democracy is a threat to its rule. This is the primary lesson that the CCP took from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the PRC is a totalitarian dictatorship, with fragile legitimacy. Its legitimacy comes from its form of nationalism, and from its success at economic development. Its legitimacy is therefore incumbent upon its continued growth as an expansionist state. Likewise, it cannot allow Chinese to enjoy both a higher income as well as individual freedoms protected by the rule of law.

Keywords: *Hong Kong, Chinese Communist Party, democracy, totalitarianism*

Introduction

For most people in the world, the year 2020 has been extraordinary. In 2019, no-one could have imagined how our lives would be impacted by COVID-19. Over a million people have died from the disease that originated in China. Many governments have implemented draconian lockdowns, forcing their citizens to stay in their homes. On top of the death toll from the virus itself, the human cost has been enormous. The economic impact of the lockdowns is immense and will probably last much longer than the virus itself. In essence, for the first time in modern history, many governments around the world have deliberately forced their national economies into recession. Many once liberal democracies have displayed decidedly totalitarian tendencies. The impact on those millions of workers who cannot work from home, and do not have safe, secure incomes has been devastating. It is difficult to know the extent to which things could have been different if governments and organizations had acted differently. Certainly, the pandemic has sharpened the focus of governments around the world on the way in which the Chinese government interacts with other states. It is almost universally recognized that the Chinese government at the very least misled the international community. The Australian government for example, in April 2020 called for an independent investigation of the causes and spread of the virus (Probyn, 2020). French President, Emmanuel Macron was another prominent world leader who questioned China's transparency regarding the crisis (BBC News, 2020a). Before the world was hit by COVID-19, former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, stated that we were "in the foothills of a Cold War" (Bloomberg, 2019). Because of COVID-19, there has been a sharp spike in the number of policymakers who now accept that we are in a New Cold War. This is probably reflected in the opinions of most populations. The people of Hong Kong, however, knew what was coming. This is not in reference to the pandemic, or the related lockdowns. The people of Hong Kong have for a long time been expecting a far more serious lockdown of a different type. Reflecting this, according to a survey carried out by the University of Hong Kong, 71 percent of Hongkongers do not feel proud about being Chinese. Young Hongkongers especially, have a negative view of the PRC government (Cheng, 2019). They have known for some time that the Chinese Communist Party did not intend to keep their promise of 'one country, two systems' for the stipulated period. Whilst they hoped for the best, back in 1997, many no doubt expected the worst, and some did perhaps plan for what was indeed to come.

This paper shows how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has little choice but to end Hong Kong's relative autonomy as soon it possibly can. It begins with a brief background to Hong Kong's position vis-à-vis the mainland. Firstly, there is British colonial rule and the negotiations for its return to Chinese control. These negotiations essentially laid the legal foundation for what would be a transition period from colonial rule to full integration with mainland China. Second, there are the burgeoning economic transactions between the mainland and Hong Kong, that grew after the opening up of China in the early 1980s. This section will include an examination of the key role Hong Kong played in realizing the CCP's plan to modernize their economy. Third, there is an outline of the political crisis that triggered enormous protests in 2019, which continued into 2020. The second part of this paper will break down the rationale for the CCP's premature take-over of Hong Kong. This is therefore an analysis of the CCP worldview, highlighting the incompatibility between this worldview and the continuation of Hong Kong's special status. We will show that it is inevitable. This inevitability stems not just from the nature of the current leadership, but also from the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party itself, as well as from the institutional manifestation of that ideology in the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). This is the reason for the title of this paper which is a slight adaptation of, "The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Thucydides, p. 236). This famous phrase from Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, is the most appropriate way to summarize the mindset of the CCP, and the actions of the PRC.

British Colony

As a result of the First Opium War, Hong Kong Island was 'given' to the United Kingdom in the 1842 Treaty of Nanking. According to this treaty, Hong Kong was to become "possessed in perpetuity" by Great Britain (Article III, Treaty of Nanking, 1843). In 1898, the territory of Hong Kong got larger when Britain got a 99-year lease for the New Territories. This was the era of Gunboat Diplomacy and Imperialism, in which the "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." Thankfully, such behavior by states is (mostly) long gone. The Chinese government calls treaties of this era 'unequal treaties' because they were forced to sign

the treaty by a much stronger power. In essence the Chinese side had no choice and so the treaty was not an agreement. Recognizing this injustice, the British government agreed to return all of the territory of Hong Kong when the 99-year lease (for the New territories) ended in 1997. For the CCP, Hong Kong was the final lingering relic of the Century of Humiliation, that period of foreign domination and national degeneration, from the mid-19th Century to the mid-20th Century.

Some have argued that Hong Kong is an example of how the consequences of colonization are not uniformly negative. Hong Kong was one of the Asian Tigers, that group of four states that successfully developed after the 1960s. In 1965, GDP per capita in Hong Kong was \$7,064.¹ With a modern transport infrastructure, manufacturing developed. However, Hong Kong really developed into a financial and trading hub. The importance of cultural factors in explaining the relative success of Hong Kong should not be underestimated, nor should the significance of international structural factors. Nevertheless, it seems incongruous to ignore the role of the colonial government in such a success story. By 1980, GDP per capita was \$16,216. By the end of British colonial rule in 1997, it had risen to \$35,327².

On the mainland, meanwhile, the CCP was going through its own home-grown national degeneration. A series of radical ideological policies resulted in millions of deaths. This culminated in the self-destruction that was the 10-year Cultural Revolution. After the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping began his programs to modernize China at the end of the 1970s. The programs were titled, *Boluan Fanzheng*, or 'eliminating chaos and returning to normal.' However, Deng Xiaoping's plans were much more than merely returning to normal. He planned to move China away from the endless revolution and class conflict of Maoism/Marxism, and towards modernization and economic development. Hong Kong was to play a key role in this. A number of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) were established, the primary one being the Shenzhen SEZ just north of Hong Kong. This was a way to harness the economic expertise of Hong Kong and use it as the gateway to the world economy. These SEZs would be regulated in a way to attract foreign direct investment, which would then export to global markets. In terms of industrialization and economic development, Shenzhen was an enormous success, and provided the evidence needed to initiate Deng Xiaoping's *Socialism with Chinese characteristics* on a national scale.

Negotiations for return

Deng Xiaoping was also instrumental in negotiations with the British government over the return of Hong Kong. It seems that the British Prime Minister of the time, Margaret Thatcher had hoped to maintain British control over Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, which were not included in the 99-year lease that was to expire in 1997 (Wall Street Journal, 2013). However, Deng Xiaoping would not accept this. He famously told the British Prime Minister, "I could walk in and take the whole lot this afternoon." To which, Thatcher replied, "There is nothing I could do to stop you, but the eyes of the world would now know what China is like" (Gittings, 1993). In fact, the PRC did have an invasion plan, and it seems that Deng seriously considered taking Hong Kong by force (Sheridan, 2007). Clearly, the PRC of the 1980s did not yet feel empowered enough to ignore the norms of international society.

In 1984, the British and Chinese government signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration, an international treaty in which both sides agreed to the return of Hong Kong to China. This treaty became Hong Kong's Basic Law, which would take effect in 1997 when Hong Kong became the Hong Kong Special Administration Region (HKSAR), and part of China again. The Joint Declaration is the law that clarifies the framework of 'one country, two systems.' It states that two-systems means, "the current social and economic systems in Hong Kong will remain unchanged." Furthermore, "rights and freedoms, including those of the person, of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association..." will be protected. Essentially, the PRC was stating that it would allow Hongkongers to live within a liberal democracy, according to the rule of law that protects citizens. A final important point is that the Basic Law "will remain unchanged for 50 years", until 2047. In essence, there was to be a 50-year transition period. The Joint Declaration was ratified by both sides, becoming international law. As such, it was registered with the United Nations in 1985 (UN Treaty Series, 1985).

¹ International dollars, at 2011 prices, and adjusted for inflation (Our World in Data website).

² Ibid.

Exploit and Replicate

Following the ratification of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the CCP planned to take advantage of the position of Hong Kong in the world economy. We should say though, that the CCP intended to not just exploit Hong Kong, they also planned to replicate it. It is indeed ironic that the CCP planned to emulate that which it also condemned. Under colonial rule, Hong Kong had developed as a trading hub, and it was this role that the CCP wanted to exploit. In 1998, one year after the take-over, Hong Kong's trade to GDP ratio was 259 percent (Singapore had a trade to GDP ratio of 269 percent). Hong Kong had long performed the role of an East Asian *entrepôt*. Hong Kong became important to the Chinese economy for three reasons: as a consumer of Chinese exports, as an *entrepôt*, and as a facilitator. The *entrepôt* has two functions: the first is re-exports, which count as part of Hong Kong's trade. The second is trans-shipment, which is not included as part of Hong Kong's trade. The goods that are re-exported may be repackaged or further manufactured in some way and thereby become Hong Kong products. The importance of Hong Kong to the industrialization of mainland China in the early 1980s can be understood through examining a breakdown of Chinese exports. While China's total direct world exports increased from US\$20 billion in 1982 to US\$21 billion in 1984, the total amount of indirect (via Hong Kong) world exports increased from US\$2.4 billion in 1982 to US\$3.6 billion in 1984. Over this short period, China's total world exports increased by about 10 percent, while indirect exports, through Hong Kong increased by about 50 percent (Sung, 1986, p. 85). Alternatively, we can say that the increase in the value of China's exports (indirect) that went through one place—Hong Kong—was greater than the increase in the total value of China's exports. In 1985, 10 percent of China's exports were consumed in Hong Kong (making it the second largest market after Japan). In addition to this, 17 percent of China's total exports were re-exported through Hong Kong (Sung, 1986, p. 83). It has been estimated that about the same amount was trans-shipped through Hong Kong. So, perhaps close to 40 percent of China's exports went through Hong Kong in the mid-1980s (Sung, 1986, p. 83). By 1985, 62 percent of Hong Kong's imports from China were re-exported, which allows these goods to be classified as Hong Kong goods. In this way, goods from mainland China could get privileged access to global markets. For the period 1988-1998, 53 percent of Chinese exports were shipped through Hong Kong. The re-exports accounted for 10 percent of HKs GDP (Sung, 1986, p. 88).

Of course, Hong Kong also got a huge benefit from this. Its per capita GDP rose from \$18,897 at the time of the negotiations with the UK in 1984 to \$47,043 in 2016. Using the same measure, UK per capita GDP was \$39,162 in 2016. Importantly, the composition of the Hong Kong economy changed because of its changing relationship with the mainland. For example, in 1980, manufacturing employed 45.9 percent of workers in Hong Kong. By 1997, just 9.8 percent of workers were employed in manufacturing (Tao and Wong, 2002, p. 2345). In essence, the businesses of Hong Kong had done what many others around the world would later do, they shifted their manufacturing to the mainland. This was the way in which the CCP would be able to replicate the success of Hong Kong on the mainland. To get a clearer understanding of the increasing integration of the two economies, we can look at an example of the institutionalization of this relationship.

Economic Integration

Even though the CCP had promised to maintain two political and social systems, economic integration was another thing entirely. While we have outlined the critical role played by Hong Kong in the mainland's economic development prior to 1997, after the handover, economic forces on both sides pushed for more formal economic integration.

In 2003, HKSAR and the PRC signed the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA), which is essentially a bilateral free trade agreement. One of the purposes of the CEPA was to further facilitate, and prioritize, commercial trade between Hong Kong and the mainland. Following this, the Outward Processing Arrangement (OPA) became effective in 2005 (Trade and Industry Department, HKSAR, 2005). This agreement specifically concerns the textile industry. The textile industry is often regarded as crucial to early industrialization, and this was certainly true in the cases of both Hong Kong and the PRC. Reflecting this, in 1998, outward processing of textiles accounted for 48 percent of Hong Kong exports to China and 83 percent of Hong Kong imports from China (Feenstra and Hanson, 2004, p. 5). Outward Processing basically means that some part of the manufacturing process can be subcontracted to a foreign producer. This means that some part of the process can be done in another country, while the product itself is classified as being produced in the home country. This is a very common feature of production in the global economy. For example, in the case of

the OPA, Hong Kong manufacturers can subcontract subsidiary and finishing processes to mainland factories, as long as the ‘major transformation’ of the garment takes place in Hong Kong. According to the OPA, any products exported to China for outward processing must be reimported to Hong Kong within 2 months. However, importantly, ‘major transformation’ needs to amount to just 10 percent of total cloth processing. Such outward processing can also obviously be done tariff-free because of the CEPA. The OPA is therefore, the framework for shifting manufacturing from Hong Kong the mainland.

Both the HKSAR government and the PRC were exploiting Hong Kong’s status as a trustworthy member of the global economy. Through these agreements, economic actors on both sides were taking advantage of the perception that ‘Made in Hong Kong’ meant certain standards, and hence a certain level of quality (Wordie, 2020). At the same time, they were exploiting the relatively cheap cost of labor on the mainland. Importantly too, these official public agreements enabled private actors to bypass the import quotas that were being initiated in the EU and the US to counter the massive inflow of textiles from the PRC.

Political Integration

In the first few years after the handover of Hong Kong, the CCP had ‘done what it could,’ focusing merely on increasing economic integration, and allowing Hongkongers to live as if in a liberal democracy. However, it became increasingly clear that the CCP had much more in mind, and Hongkongers began to realize that they would likely have to ‘suffer what they must.’ Just twenty years after the handover, in 2017, a spokesman for China’s foreign ministry alluded to what the CCP planned for Hong Kong. The spokesman stated that the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration was “a historical document” that had no “practical significance” (Reuters, 2017). Furthermore, the spokesman claimed that the law “is not at all binding for the central government’s management over Hong Kong...” This was despite the stipulation that the ‘one country, two systems’ framework would be preserved until 2047. This is a clear indication that the PRC does not view international law as being in any way binding. We could postulate that the PRC thinks of international treaties made in the late-20th century as being similar to those made in the mid-19th century. In this way, the CCP view them as equally ‘unequal treaties.’

In February 2019, the Hong Kong government proposed the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill (Legco, 2019). It would have created a mechanism to allow extradition from Hong Kong to Taiwan, and to Macau and mainland China. Ostensibly, it was proposed in response to the inability of Hong Kong authorities to extradite a criminal who had confessed in Hong Kong to a crime committed in Taiwan. However, a pro-Beijing party had proposed the Bill, and this, in combination with heightened public concerns about PRC security forces’ activities in Hong Kong, caused a public outcry against the proposed legislation. It was what many Hongkongers had feared. The PRC would be able to expand its judicial system to cover Hong Kong, and the freedoms of speech, expression, association, etc. would be gone. For many citizens of Hong Kong, this was confirmed in the summer of 2019 when PRC officials expressed support for the new legislation. Parliamentary discussions and negotiations over the Bill highlighted the seemingly irreconcilable differences between the pro-Beijing parties and the pro-democracy parties. Public demonstrations grew in scale, from March through to June. Hundreds of thousands, possibly over a million, citizens joined these protests (Purbrick, 2019, p. 465). On 4 September, after 13 weeks of protests, HKSAR Chief Executive Carrie Lam officially promised to withdraw the bill upon the resumption of the legislative session from its summer recess. On 23 October, Secretary for Security John Lee announced the government’s formal withdrawal of the bill.

The results of the November 2019 district council elections were indisputable. On November 24th, 2.9 million people (71 percent of the electorate) voted for their representatives in all 18 District Councils of Hong Kong (Feng, 2019). Political parties belonging to the pro-democracy camp won control of 17 of the 18 district councils. All pro-Beijing parties lost considerable numbers of seats. Regardless of whether such an assertion is even necessary, it was irrefutable evidence of the desire of the citizens of Hong Kong for democracy, and the freedoms and protections it provides.

In 2020, as COVID-19 spread from mainland China to the rest of the world, the government of Hong Kong also took its cues from the mainland. In response to the widespread protests, and the election results, democracy activists were arrested. This included high-profile media figures such as Jimmy Lai, and the 81-year-old Martin Lee, the founder of the Democratic party and a senior barrister (BBC, 2020b). These two pro-

democracy activists were arrested following the creation of a whole new framework for dealing with such matters. More importantly even than this highly symbolic clampdown on democracy in Hong Kong, the CCP passed a new law, which made its intentions vis-à-vis Hong Kong crystal clear. In June 2020, as the world was gripped by its pandemic, the PRC passed the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. This has since become known simply as the Hong Kong National Security Law. This law is clearly designed to extend the power of the CCP's national security apparatus over Hong Kong. It severely restricts transparency and accountability of state apparatus. It weakens the autonomy of the judicial branch of government, thus also weakening the rule of law. It prohibits anyone convicted under the law from ever standing for public office. Much of the implementation of the law will be done in Beijing and not in Hong Kong. To all intents and purposes, it is the imposition of the judicial system of the PRC on Hong Kong. It was perceived by many to be 'the nail in the coffin' of Hong Kong Democracy (Howie, 2020).

The National Security Law was soon put to work. In addition to the two previously mentioned high-profile cases, on 30 July 2020, one day before the nomination period ended, 12 opposition candidates were disqualified from the 2020 Legislative Council election (Yu, 2020). This included incumbent Legislative Council members and incumbent District Councilors. Its purported justification was undermined by the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam's decision to use the Emergency Regulations Ordinance to postpone the 2020 elections for one full year. Whilst the excuse given was COVID-19, it was widely interpreted as an attempt to prevent a rerun of the 2019 District Council elections.

No choice: The rationale of the CCP

Early years of CCP rule

In order to understand how the turn of events was 'inevitable', it is necessary to understand the ideological evolution of the CCP. The Communists took control of most of China in 1949, and Mao Zedong declared the establishment of the People's Republic on 21 September. This was a considerable success for the Communists, although it was also, as with all new states, just the start of the State-Building process. The CCP had to establish control over all its territory and prove itself capable of governing. Governing here means the creation of order within the territory, as well as progress according to the communist doctrine of Mao Zedong. To this end, the CCP invaded Tibet in 1950 and soon annexed the territory. However, the CCP was unable to dislodge the Kuomintang government from their safe haven in Taiwan. Remnants of the Kuomintang also continued to fight the CCP in the South-west of China, using Burma as a base for operations. In terms of government policy with the goal of establishing a communist economic system, a key part of this was the continuation of land reform that had begun prior to 1949, in areas under communist control. As in the Soviet Union, land reform involved taking land from landlords and rich peasant farmers and redistributing it to previously landless peasants. As with the case of the Kulaks in the Soviet Union, landowners were designated as class enemies. Again, as in the Soviet Union, the result was the mass murder of millions of citizens. As a continuation of policies to pursue communist development, in 1958 the CCP initiated what it called *The Great Leap Forward*, the purpose of which was to increase agricultural production. The result of this, as with the earlier case of the Soviet Union's Collectivization, was widespread famine. Again, just as in the Soviet Union, many millions died.

Following on from these mammoth tragedies, in 1966 Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution, which was an extended political and social upheaval that was to last for ten years. It could be seen as an extended Reign of Terror, although it dwarfed the late-18th century French version in terms of both time period and carnage. It is almost impossible to know exactly how many Chinese were killed during the Cultural Revolution. However, it has been reported that one of the most senior military officials of the time, Ye Jianying, claimed that "20 million people died, 100 million were persecuted" during the Cultural Revolution (Li, 1981, p. 3).

Considering such enormous policy failures, it was not possible through these years of Communist rule to overturn the 'unequal treaties' and reverse the *Century of Humiliation* (Wang, 2013, p. 399). It would take the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping, and the resulting economic growth, to make the continuation of the communist project possible.

Communist Ideology

The 1982 Constitution states that China is a socialist state under the people's democratic dictatorship. This is the Chinese version of the Marxist, 'dictatorship of the proletariat' which, in theory, is the combination of the state's total control over the economy and society, and the working class' total control over the state. In practice, this means the Communist Party's total control on behalf of the working class. The 1982 Constitution does not specifically state that the Chinese Communist Party is the party of the state, but this is the reality. The CCP is the PRC and the PRC is the CCP. One cannot exist without the other. It is difficult to know just how many party members are 'real' communists, but the CCP has diverged from traditional Marxism-Leninism since the disasters of the pre-Deng Xiaoping era. However, the rhetoric of the CCP is still heavily flavored with Communist/Socialist rhetoric. 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics,' and the 'primary stage of socialism,' merely accept the efficiency of the free market in improving productivity, while keeping a socialist utopia as the ultimate goal, importantly under the guidance of the CCP. All leaders since Deng Xiaoping have followed the same line. The latest manifestation of this, *Xi Jinping Thought*, has 14-points, the first of which is "ensuring Chinese Communist Party leadership over all forms of work in China" (Garrick and Bennet, 2018).

Clearly, the PRC does not follow the principles of government, or state-society relations of political liberalism, which is the political and philosophical foundation of Liberal Democracy. The CCP do not believe in the concept of the separation of state powers. They do not believe in multiparty democracy, and indeed see it as antithetical to Communism. We can see this from the party itself. In a 2013 article entitled, "A Comparative Study of Constitutional Governance and the People's Democratic Regime", Yang Xiaoqing asserts that Socialism and constitutional governance are mutually exclusive (Creemers, 2013). This is reiterated through the classic Marxist position that liberal democracy merely serves the interests of the capitalist class. Also, in 2013, a "Communique on the Current State of the ideological Sphere" was approved by the central leadership of the CCP and circulated to all party organizations. It gives a clear insight into the CCP's view of liberal democracy. Section 1 of the document is entitled "Promoting Western Constitutional Democracy: An attempt to undermine the current leadership and the socialism with Chinese characteristics system of governance". The last part of this section states that enemies of the CCP want to "use Western constitutional democracy to undermine the Party's leadership, abolish the People's Democracy, negate our country's constitution as well as our established system and principles...". There can be no doubt that liberal democracy, and all its component elements are seen as direct threats to the CCP. There can be no way for the CCP to allow such elements to exist, let alone flourish in Hong Kong. There can be no way for citizens of the PRC to be allowed to visit Hong Kong and experience first-hand what life is like for Chinese living in a liberal democracy.

Actually, when we say that the CCP are communists, what we really mean is that they are totalitarians, since communism cannot be implemented without a totalitarian state. However, looking at the recruitment methods of the CCP, we can see a clear process of targeting the elites. In fact, as argued by Gang Guo, universities have become the main venue for recruitment (Gang Guo, 2005). In 2010, college students made up 40 percent of new recruits. This is compared to farmers (19 percent) and workers (6 percent). This type of focus on 'the educated' is paralleled in left-wing political parties of Liberal Democracies too. The CCP is by no means a political party of the proletariat, a party of the people. It is a party of the elite. It is, in reality, a party of *the bourgeoisie*, dominated by highly educated professionals. This is also a feature of left-wing parties in most liberal democracies around the world. However, the Party is also akin to a hereditary patriarchy, whereby an important factor in recruitment is a father's Party membership. As a condition of submission into the Party, new members must take one year's worth of courses in Party ideology. Finally, it is true that the Party controls the top positions in society (state, education, SOEs, banking, etc.), and this is despite the veneer of the free market economy (Dickens, 2014). In this way, Party membership provides opportunities for advancement.

Expansionism

Given that the Communists were the victors of an extended civil war, and considering also that the Communists had spent a decade fighting Japanese imperialist forces, it is no wonder they have a strong nationalist element to their political identity. Upon declaring nationhood in October 1949, an important element of the state-building efforts of the CCP was territorial. While continuing to fight the remnants of Nationalist forces in Southwest China, the CCP turned their attention to Tibet and what is now Xinjiang. In its early years, the PRC had border wars with India, and later with Vietnam. The Cultural Revolution considerably weakened the forces

available for such efforts, but the successful economic development of China since the 1980s has revived them. The PRC has expanded dramatically into the South China Sea, building artificial islands on what were once merely reefs (CFR, 2021). Such expansionism is reminiscent of the colonial period that saw Hong Kong become a British colony. In this way, we can see that the CCP is pursuing those exact same policies that resulted in its own *Century of Humiliation*; it is most guilty of that which it criticizes others for.

Totalitarian Dictatorship

According to Marxism-Leninism, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat is the form of government in which the proletariat, the workers, hold political power. This is done through the Communist Party. The previous discussion outlining the membership of the CCP makes it clear that the CCP is not dominated by workers and farmers, the proletariat. Mao Zedong was indeed a dictator, but the 1982 Constitution of the PRC, put a two-term (10 year) limit on all key leadership posts. Deng Xiaoping was a key architect of this new constitution, and he obviously saw the danger of dictatorship. He experienced firsthand the chaos that resulted from the accumulation of too much power in the hands of one man. All Party General Secretary's since Deng have followed this term limit. That is until Xi Jinping. Coming to power in 2012, Xi Jinping immediately initiated a seemingly comprehensive anti-corruption campaign. This campaign gained popular support due to the widespread public perception of systemic corruption within the CCP. It also allowed Xi to consolidate personal power within the Party. We can see this in the official naming of the Central Committee of the CCP. Between 2012 and 2016, it was referred to as "CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as General Secretary". However, after 2016, it was referred to as "CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core" (People's Daily Online, 2018). Xi had been elevated to the heights of status previously held only by Mao and Deng. The culmination of this consolidation was the March 2018 amendment of the 1982 constitution to allow Xi to remain in power beyond 2022. To all intents and purposes, Xi Jinping is now a dictator comparable to Mao and Stalin, far more powerful even than Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China's modernization. Given that Communism can only be implemented with a one-party totalitarian state, it is inevitable that there is a tendency towards dictatorship. Just as there always exists a propensity towards oligarchy within all social institutions, there is always a propensity towards dictatorship within all oligarchical social institutions. Claude Lefort had another explanation for this phenomenon, which he referred to as a general paradox within the ideology of modernity (Yurchak, 2005, p.10). There is a fundamental paradox between the ideological enunciations, or rhetoric of the Party, and actual ideological rule (this is manifest in the practical concerns of the modern state's political authority). This paradox can be overcome with an actual dictator. In reference to Stalin and the Soviet Union, Alexei Yurchak argues that to overcome this paradox 'a master' is necessary. The master, who stands outside or above political discourse, is the embodiment of the ideology. In this way, the objective truth of the ideology appears through the master (Yurchak, 2005, p. 13). Therefore, a dictator is always and everywhere the only way to implement Communist rule. The dangers of dictatorial rule must therefore be accepted as a necessary cost which must be borne.

The lesson from the Collapse of Soviet Union

It seems likely that the leadership of the CCP are fully aware of the fragility of their hold on power, and that this is why they have accepted Xi Jinping as dictator. Leaders before Xi had called for continued reform and liberalization. However, many leading CCP officials, probably including Xi himself, blame the collapse of the Soviet Union on one man, Mikhail Gorbachev. He was referred to as a 'revisionist' (Waldron, 2009). This is part of the CCP narrative that saw nothing intrinsically wrong with the Soviet system itself, but explains the collapse of the Soviet Union as being caused by failures within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The CCP see the collapse of the Soviet Union as being caused by the abandonment of Marxism/Leninism by the CPSU (Waldron, 2009). According to this argument, it was the political reforms initiated by the CPSU itself that caused its own collapse. In this way, it was a kind of collective suicide. The CCP will never allow itself to make the same mistake.

The Soviet Union provides a good example not only for the members of the CCP, but also for anyone wishing to understand the collective mentality of the CCP and its resulting policies and actions. However, far more importantly, life in the Soviet Union also provides an insight into life in Communist China. Life under Totalitarianism can be succinctly summarized with the following quote from the famous Soviet dissident, Natan

Sharansky, “I was a loyal Soviet citizen until the age of 20. What it meant to be a loyal citizen is to say what you are supposed to say, to read what you are permitted to read, to vote the way you are told to vote and, at the same time, to know that all this is a lie” (Wharton, 2013). As the previous quote implies, everyday life under totalitarianism involves complete and total acceptance and adherence to the Party line, whilst at the same time knowing that it is all a lie. Yurchak calls this an example of *hypernormalization*, a condition in which the language of the Party ideology becomes unhinged from reality (Yurchak, 2005, p. 50). Under such conditions, it is inevitable that citizens understand that they are lies but feel that they have no choice but to utter them. Yurchak shows how, even after the initiation of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in 1985, many people still thought nothing would change. In fact, as we all know, the Soviet Union collapsed just six years later. It must be the case that the CCP are very aware and fearful of this condition of hypernormalization. However, there is no other option for them. The contradictions inherent within Communist Totalitarianism make hypernormalization the inevitable outcome. A simple manifestation of this is the CCP order to use ‘comrade’ to refer to all senior Party officials. However, it seems to be the widely held perception that it would be political suicide to call any senior Party official ‘comrade’. In the words of one cadre, “In present-day official circles, [even if you] beat me to death, I would still not dare to address any leader as ‘comrade’” (Kohlenberg, 2017). Regardless of the reality, the ideology of Communism is built on the lie of equality between all Party members, and this stipulates the official use of ‘comrade’.

The fragility of CCP legitimacy

Hong Kong highlights the fragility inherent in the hypernormalization of totalitarian communism. For the CCP, it is a danger equivalent to that of *perestroika* and *glasnost* to the CPSU. Hong Kong is the reality that vividly shows the paradox inherent to communist ideology and CCP rule. It has often been proposed that the legitimacy of the CCP comes from its success at economic development (Chu, 2013). It is indeed true that the share of the Chinese population living in extreme poverty³ has been reduced from 66 percent in 1990 to less than one percent in 2015 (Our World in Data). Using the national poverty line, the percentage of people living in poverty has been reduced from 17 percent in 2010 to 3 percent in 2017 (China Power). While GDP per capita rose just \$757 in 1950 to \$1384 in 1976, the year of Mao’s death, it had risen to \$12,320 by 2016 (Our World in Data). According to this perspective, the dramatic increase in living standards, and the recognition that the CCP has been the manager of this underpins public loyalty to the Party. Certainly, this is a discourse encouraged by the Party. However, it has also been argued that support for the CCP among the population is not dependent on the success of economic development. In fact, levels of support and trust in the Party decline as prosperity rises (Dickson, 2014). It surely must be the case that the CCP are aware of this contradiction, and if we assume that they are, then we can see that the example of Chinese living successfully under a liberal democratic government, provides a potentially dangerous alternative to CCP rule. The CCP cannot allow such a situation on its border. We can again use the Athenian argument against leniency towards the Melians that would encourage “subjects smarting under the yoke, who would be the most likely to take a rash step and lead themselves and us into obvious danger” (Thucydides, p.237). In this way, the Melians are the Hongkongers, and Athenian leniency would be the CCP allowing the autonomy of Hong Kong to continue. It would encourage citizens in the mainland “smarting under the yoke” of CCP rule to “take a rash step” such as at Tiananmen Square in 1989. This would “lead themselves (citizens of the PRC) and us (the CCP) into obvious danger”.

Concluding Inferences

We have shown how the CCP have no choice but to end Hong Kong’s relative autonomy under ‘one-state, two-systems’. It is a national security issue of the highest priority. For the CCP, international law is irrelevant, and for a totalitarian state, this is even more so with regards to issues of national security. The state building efforts, combined with CCP nationalism, also provide a powerful incentive. This incentive is further justified by the need to overcome the national grievance that remains from the Century of Humiliation. Of course, we could state that this is likely merely an excuse, although it may equally be the case that the CCP is seeking revenge for past grievances. We could then postulate the question of what better revenge than to inflict pain

³ Extreme poverty is defined as living with less than 1.90\$ per day (in 2011 International Dollars).

on a symbol of that grievance? Of perhaps equal importance in incentivizing CCP policy towards Hong Kong is the direct danger of having a far more prosperous state of Chinese living next door in a liberal democracy. Nothing highlights the paradox of CCP rule more than this. It is quite simply the overwhelming and irrefutable evidence that ‘the grass is indeed greener on the other side’.

Beyond doubt, the CCP is behaving as the colonial powers once did. It is a spectacular irony that the PRC behaves in the same manner as those states that the CCP claims were responsible for inflicting on China the Century of Humiliation. It is of equally spectacular irony that the CCP regard an International Treaty between itself and Britain signed in the 1980s, in the same manner in which it regards the ‘unequal treaties’ of the 19th Century. This would seem to indicate that the CCP still function according to the norms of that era. These norms can be best summarized by, “The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must”. The danger for the international community is that such behavior by states was one of the primary factors that caused World War One.

Finally, we can infer from CCP policy towards Hong Kong, that the CCP are prepared to bear the cost of such actions. It cannot be the case that the CCP are ignorant to the potentially negative impact of their actions on the peoples and the economy of Hong Kong. The CCP used Hong Kong as a boost for its own industrialization. We could perhaps postulate that China’s enormous success at industrialization would have been substantially more difficult had it not been able to exploit and replicate Hong Kong. This means that we should also say that Hong Kong was a necessary component of China’s success, since Hong Kong and its people, enabled the economic development of the PRC. Regardless of this, we must conclude that the CCP no longer needs Hong Kong, and are therefore prepared to destroy it, if that is necessary to maintain CCP rule over the PRC.

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