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## A Weapon of Legitimacy: China's Integrative Power and its Impact on its Reactions on Domestic Conflicts

Kwok Chung Wong

Waseda University, sunriseinnovator@ruri.waseda.jp

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### Abstract

The rise of China has provided a plethora of different powers it can use to its advantage, continues its rise, or punish noncompliance. Throughout the years of China's rising, it has been accumulating considerable hard power in its military and economic capabilities, while also trying to improve on its soft power of cultural values. However one often overlooked, and under-appreciated power of China is the integrative power of Chinese nationalism. This integrative power that comes from China's acute usage of nationalism to support the legitimacy of its one-party system. This study argues that China has an excess of integrative power and that China has skillfully used it to turn unfavorable events and threats, such as the Hong Kong protests of 2019, back to their advantage; even if this would mean that China is a primary facilitator of conflict and also at times an inhibitor to the de-escalation of conflict.

**Keywords:** *Rise of China, Integrative Power, Nationalism*

### Author Bio(s)

*Kwok Chung Wong*, PhD Student, Graduate School of International Culture and Communication Studies, Waseda University; China, Chinese policies and Peacebuilding. *China's Participation in Regional Conflict Resolution* with Guanhui Jin and Fujian Li in Yanjun Guo and Fujian Li (eds.). *Preventive Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific, The ASEAN Regional Forum's Action-Oriented Preventive Diplomacy Mechanisms in the Rohingya Crisis: Perspectives of ASEAN, China and Japan* with Yuji Uesugi and Lady Mahendra in Yanjun Guo and Lin Wu (eds.) *Case Studies on Preventive Diplomacy in Asia-Pacific*. Visiting scholar at the School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University.

## **A Weapon of Legitimacy: China's Integrative Power and its Impact on its Reactions to Domestic Conflicts**

**Kwok Chung Wong**

On July 1, 1997, when Hong Kong was to be returned to China after 99 years of British rule, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) promised an unchanging 50 years of autonomy and Hong Kong became the Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. Thirteen years prior to reunification, Deng Xiaoping made remarks saying that the issue of Hong Kong was as difficult as is the problem with Taiwan, which would require new means to solve new problems, yet “a patriot is one who respects the Chinese nation, sincerely supports the motherland’s resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong and wishes not to impair Hong Kong's prosperity and stability” (Deng, 1984, para. 8). Interestingly enough, to this day Taiwan has rejected the notion of one country, two systems, that governs Hong Kong and refused to become part of China, with some even calling for independence. On the other hand, Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997 under the Sino-British Joint Declaration that was signed in 1984, which effectively ended over 150 years of British rule over the peninsula. During the handover, despite being promised autonomy by the CCP, HongKongers have been skeptical whether one country, two systems can last the full 50 years.

It was the events of Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989 that worried the HongKongers back then. The Tiananmen Incident made China lose the support of many members of international community. Worried for what would become of Hong Kong after reunification, many people back then in 1989 began scrambling for immigration fearing for the day of July 1, 1997 of Hong Kong’s handover. The *New York Times* back then stated that HongKongers are “trapped between a looming Chinese motherland they cannot change and a departing imperial motherland – Britain” (Scott, 1989, para. 7). It is important to note that Hong Kong did not enjoy the benefits of a liberal democracy under British rule, though HongKongers back then would be expecting China along with Hong Kong to become freer and more liberal as time passes. Unfortunately, the promised 50 years of autonomy under the one country, two systems was met with pessimism when HongKongers saw the tragic events of June 4 when a group of pro-democracy students was put down by lethal force under the command of the CCP (Blakemore, 2020).

This study focuses on answering the question of how China uses integrative power containing its two pillars of legitimacy in nationalism and economics to punish noncompliance in smaller domestic powers such as Hong Kong. Under this topic, the case of Hong Kong is seen as a case of domestic noncompliance, when they do not act in the interest of the CCP party in Beijing. The objective of this study is to determine how China reacts to domestic noncompliance, as in the case of democratizing Hong Kong to challenge the CCP's one-party rule in Beijing. China's handling of domestic conflicts deserves more attention by the international community, especially since the CCP has begun to use other means of power, such as integrative power to replace direct destructive power such as that of Tiananmen 30 years ago. The underlying message behind CCP power, is to use any means necessary to maintain the legitimacy of the party. Thus, this is a study that seeks to uncover a style of Beijing punishment that it may employ when domestic actors, such as Hong Kong takes a move not in the party's interest such as demanding the CCP for more democracy.

### **Methodology**

This study is a qualitative review of the current development of the protests, or riots as in the CCP perspective, of Hong Kong, and based on this identify the means that the CCP employs to punish domestic noncompliance. This will hopefully identify a trend where the CCP clearly demonstrating that nationalism and economic power, the two pillars of Chinese legitimacy, are integrative powers helping China justify its use of more robust and assertive means to punish noncompliance domestically. The author believes it is important to understand what is at stake for China and CCP leadership to behave in a way that preferences the use of integrative power to shut down noncompliance.

Since this study will look at what has prompted the use of Chinese integrative power, a historical review of how China or the CCP manages to gain that power and tries to maintain that power is a prerequisite to further discussion. This will be followed by a literature review of Kenneth Boulding's (1990) book, *Three Faces of Power*, as this is the piece of literature that would be most relevant to the discussion of this study and also supported by other scholars that relate themselves to integrative power. This will attempt to show that China does not always rely on its economic or military might to deal with domestic noncompliance; instead, they first look to the integrative power of the Chinese race under the CCP and attempt to punish using nationalism instead.

This method is not without its limitations. Since the main case study is a recent, on-going conflict in Hong Kong, most articles related to the conflict will be news articles that could potentially exhibit a certain amount of bias and subjectivity. In order to address this potential distortion, media sources from both Hong Kong and Chinese state media will be used to provide a broader perspective from all parties. This would also include Western media to incorporate how the rest of the world view the circumstances from which protests arise. The US perspective is important as they have also played a part in the emerging conflict.

By so doing, this study investigates mainly how the CCP justifies the use of violence against protestors and how Hong Kong and the Mainland condemns each other for escalated violence. Another problem in researching this topic is the sensitivity of the conflict in both the Mainland and Hong Kong.

Sources utilized in the background and literature review include publications like academic texts, journal articles and reliable media websites that address the matter of concern. To understand China's power, it is important to see where China gains its power in the first place. Existing literature and theories such as the theory of hegemonic war and the China Threat Theory should also be taken into consideration to show the rise of China is generally viewed in a negative light in the West, where media outlets have been the most critical of China's handling of the protests in Hong Kong. This literature review on power should explain how scholars identify different types of power. The author will attempt to identify the type of power from a variety of different types of power that are most likely to compel China to use violence when its core interests of one-party rule is threatened.

Finally, the reason that Hong Kong is chosen as the case to represent China's integrative power is because it is the most recent case that shows this power is in fact, being used rather effectively, in putting down protests. This is seen in the case where Chinese citizens, at home and abroad, rally behind China in support of it suppressing protests in Hong Kong despite the somewhat questionable means used by the pro-Beijing Hong Kong government. The following section examines how China has risen to power and what it has learned during this period.

### **The Trajectory of China's Rise: Origins of Chinese Power**

This section reviews the rise of China and discusses where China obtains its power in the first place. This is important because later, one can see that the CCP's integrative power of nationalism and economics is derived from the process of the rise of China. Through its peaceful

rise—now revised into the Peaceful Development of China (Xinhua, 2018) because rise sounded too assertive—has managed to accumulate considerable hard power in its economy and military capabilities. This concerns some scholars in the West. Neorealist scholars such as John Mearsheimer states that, under offensive realism, all states will try to achieve regional hegemony, so that it is so strong in the region that no other state will ever think about challenging it (Mearsheimer, 2001). As Mearsheimer's China Threat Theory was gaining momentum, the Chinese resisted it with counterarguments. Zheng Bijian (2005), a CCP advisor to the former president Hu Jintao, argued in *China's Peaceful Rise to Great Power Status* that China will always be a developing country, seeking peaceful ways to gain resources, and not challenge the US hegemony. Even so, people were skeptical of how long China could stay peaceful and whether the so-called peaceful rise was just simple rhetoric for the CCP, buying time to catch up with the rest of the world, while the Chinese economy was still on the rise.

In addition to the perceived military threat that international relations scholars warn of, there are also more immediate potential economic threats coming from a strong China. For example, Chinese goods from the textile industry are quickly displacing local goods in Latin America (Jenkins & Barbosa, 2012). Critics have also accused China of unfair trade practices, dumping, and exploiting gray areas of trade regulations around the world, with US President Donald Trump being the primary figure assaulting the same trade practices (Hass, 2018).

Despite all of that, China's rise on the international stage has been mostly peaceful in the absence of war, but Buzan and Cox has said that this rise is cold because there is no mutual trust between China and other powers like the US, and China may at times expand at the expense of others (Buzan & Cox, 2017). Shambaugh (2013) adds that China is a lonely power, having no real allies it can trust nor any allies that completely trust it, despite warm surface relations with Russia, Pakistan and North Korea.

The main worry of the US and the West is where China is going to spend its hard power accumulated in the rise. If there would be a reason for China to engage the US in a hegemonic war, the reason could be as Robert Gilpin (1988) writes in the *Theory of Hegemonic War*, that most wars happen not because of structural features of the international system, but the distrust and uncertainty of the other side. Graham Allison (2017) draws the link between the China-US hegemonic struggle to the Peloponnesian War where the rising power of Athens and the hegemony of Sparta went to war against each other because Athens threatened a vital alliance

with Corinth that kept the Spartan homelands safe for centuries. This analogy is not unlike the expansion of Chinese investments such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that has gained momentum in Asia that could potentially disrupt traditional alliances in Asia, drawing former US allies towards Beijing's economic gravity. Allison (2017) adds that both China and the US must make painful sacrifices to avoid a hegemonic war.

On the other hand, China's endeavor in turning itself from the poorest country at the end of the 1970s, to the second largest economy in the world today, is indeed impressive. Though, there are also a few cracks in the seemingly impenetrable Chinese armor of materialistic strength. China has problems with food security having sacrificed much of its fertile land in exchange for rapid urbanization (Chen, 2007). Another problem China faces is its increasingly imbalanced demographics where the male population greatly outnumbers females as an aftermath of its One Child Policy established in the 1980s (Chen & Powell, 2012). For CCP and policy makers in Beijing, the US encirclement has always been something to worry about as China has attempted a wide variety of strategies to attempt to break free of encirclement such as befriending Japan and punishing India (Garver & Wang, 2010), both US allies. China attempts to use economic incentives such as the BRI for neighboring developing countries, creating a path through these countries to break free of encirclement and gaining access to resources in the Middle East and Africa.

That said, although the previous problems are headaches for the leaders in the CCP, they do not directly endanger the party's power or jeopardize its one-party rule. Food security and a slowing economy would trouble the CCP in the long term, but China is already trying to remedy this through diversifying its trade routes with the BRI. With this in mind, the discussion becomes how China is going to deal with these cracks in the armor of its materialistic strength. The Communist Party does this by rallying nationalism from the people. The next section looks more specifically on how China has dealt with Hong Kong in the past.

### **Hong Kong's Relationship with China**

Hong Kong has always had a difficult time in managing its relationship with China. As mentioned above, the Tiananmen Incident was a worrying sign for Hong Kong as China violently crushed a movement for democracy. Although the 2019 protests were for democracy, one must also remember that Hong Kong has never been a full democracy under British rule. Democratic reforms only happened under the last appointed governor of Hong Kong, Chris

Patten, who claimed in an interview, that HongKongers were always good at being able to “get things done” and “make a change” saying that he wanted electoral reforms to become a catalyst of democratic change for China (Ibrahim, 2017). In another interview, Patten mentioned that undermining Hong Kong’s rule of law will jeopardize its position as the financial center of the world (Wintour, 2019), taking away one of the most prestigious symbols of pride for HongKongers.

When these electoral reforms were introduced by Patten, the Basic Law served as the guidelines of how Hong Kong should be governed by China after the handover. One of its lines states the following:

The method for selecting the Chief Executive shall be specified in the light of the actual situation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress. 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. (*Full texts of the Constitution and the Basic Law-chapter (4)*, 2017)

In the early years of handover, it appears that Hong Kong would be much more free than mainland China, as CCP officials do not preside in Hong Kong; despite the considerable amounts of influence that Beijing does exert (Albert, 2019). HongKongers became increasingly concerned about the growing influence of the CCP as time passed, and very critical of the pro-Beijing government undermining Hong Kong’s autonomy by the protests of 2019.

The first record of large-scale protests post-unification was in 2003 (*Research on Article 23*, 2013). Smaller scale pro-democracy protests have occurred on an annual basis on July 1, the anniversary of the Hong Kong handover, paying homage to the Tiananmen Incident (Bush, 2014), but none were nearly as big as the protests of 2003. These protests were prompted by the government’s attempt to implement Article 23, which prohibits treason, sedition, subversion or stealing state secrets of the Chinese government (*Research on Article 23*, 2013). For HongKongers, Article 23 is an attack on the freedom of the domestic press in Hong Kong making it difficult for the Hong Kong press to cover problems with the Mainland (Fu et al., 2005).

The decade between 2003 and 2014 has been relatively quiet with no real large-scale protests, but it is clear that during this period of relative quietness, Hong Kong’s autonomy was

being eroded at a fast pace. By 2014, elections only allowed HongKongers to vote for 2 or 3 candidates all from pro-Beijing business groups (Lahiri, 2019). Lai Tung-kwok (2014), from the Hong Kong Security Bureau, warned that protestors must be aware of the consequences that would arise from any action that would break the law, even if it is under the name of democracy and freedom of speech. Yet, the consequences protestors faced in the Occupy Central movement was a brutal police response with tear gas, dispersing crowds without achieving concrete results, unlike the 2003 protests that resulted in the retraction of Article 23's implementation.

That said, the story continues with the aftermath of this pro-democracy movement. Hong Kong's chief executive is elected by 1200-member Election Committee, and Carrie Lam won the majority with 777 votes from the committee, defeating her runner up, John Tsang that was more popular with the public by over twice the number of votes (Chung, 2017). Lam's victory was seen by the West as a clear erosion of Hong Kong's democracy and autonomy. For example, US Senator Marco Rubio and Representative Christopher Smith claims there is clear interference from Beijing in Hong Kong's elections, which former chief executive Leung defended the elections with criticisms against pan-democrats that voted for Tsang instead of putting up their own candidate (Ibid.). This being said, Lam was the preferred candidate of the CCP in Beijing.

Fast-forwarding to 2019, the current Hong Kong protests, in many ways, are a direct sequel to the Umbrella Movement (BBC, 2019) that failed to achieve much five years ago, triggered by the controversial Carrie Lam's extradition bill. The first case that invoked the extradition bill was when a Hong Kong man murdered his girlfriend in Taiwan (Sun, 2019, para. 6). The Hong Kong government justified that the extradition bill intends to close a legislative loophole and prevent criminals from using Hong Kong as a safe haven to escape crimes. At the same time this would also allow fugitives from the Mainland to be sent back to China where they may not be fairly tried (Sun, 2019).

Like the Umbrella Movement, the 2019 protests started out peaceful but escalated in violence as protesters clashed with the police and vandalized government properties. Like the Umbrella Movement, the police attempted to disperse the protestors through the same means; tear gas as protests started to escalate in violence. The problem with this, as later reported, was that tear gas used against protestors may have cancer-causing chemicals extra harmful to children, pregnant women and the elderly (*Is Tear Gas in Hong Kong Making Polluted City a Toxic Turn?*, 2019). While the original intent of protestors in June was a withdrawal of the

extradition bill, Carrie Lam announcing its withdrawal in July was “too little, too late” according to some critics (Pomfret & Jim, 2019). In response to police brutality, protestors have proposed the Five Demands (Wong, 2019) as well. According to a report by a former officer at the Royal Hong Kong Police Martin Purbrick (2019), the Yuen Long attacks on July 21 by men in white t-shirts against protestors were local villagers and Hong Kong mafia gangs, which led to a widespread belief that the Hong Kong police were collaborating with criminals that may have connections to the mainland. When the Communist Party celebrated its 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Founding on October 1, 2019, an 18-year-old protestor was shot in the shoulder by the police (2019-2020 *Hong Kong Protests Timeline*, 2020). Violence continued to escalate between June, when the protests started, and November, when both civilians and police were using force against each other.

### **Integrative Power of China and Hong Kong**

To understand the nature of the conflict between China and Hong Kong one must understand the different types of power operating behind the scenes. One explanation of power is the physical, material or symbolic means that can make the adversary comply where otherwise they would not (Etzioni, 1975). However, that alone would be insufficient to understand the situation in Hong Kong, where China could have suppressed the 2019 protests by military means as they did in Tiananmen Square three decades ago.

In 1989, economist Kenneth Boulding wrote an influential book on the topic of power. In this book, *Three Faces of Power*, Boulding identifies three types of power that can be used to understand conflicts: destructive; productive; and integrative (Boulding, 1990). Paying special attention to integrative power, Boulding (1990) makes the following remarks: “Integrative power may be thought of perhaps as an aspect of productive power that involves the capacity to build organizations, to create families and groups, to inspire loyalty, to bind people together, to develop legitimacy” (p.25). In other words, integrative power is the ability for people to bond and relate to each other and create a sense of legitimacy for their belonging within a community. Integrative power is a strong source of CCP power under Boulding’s definition. The CCP does not solely rely on its perceived military or economic power, but also has a set of integrative power that it prefers to use when dealing with domestic noncompliance such as Hong Kong. Of course, while integrative power is most relevant to the discussion of the conflict in Hong Kong, the other two faces of power, destructive and productive, also play an important role underneath

the CCP's integrative power. For Boulding (1990), conflict arises when one side begins increasing power at the expense of their adversary. For Hong Kong, integrative power is definitely lost, along with its destructive and productive power, as the CCP increases their own, the means of which will be explored in the following section.

Before going into further detail, a more comprehensive definition of integrative power is needed, especially since Boulding never clearly defined what integrative power was. One of Boulding's definitions was love, but if love was too strong of a word then respect could be another potential definition (Boulding, 1990). To clarify, Dugan (2003) says that since concepts such as love, loyalty and respect are insufficient to explain large group behaviors, a more accurate understanding of integrative power should be the sense of belonging to a certain group. For example, in *Black Power* (1992), Hamilton and Ture say that empowering Black people was not just about putting Black faces in office, but empowering their community, allowing them to have their own goals and forming their own organizations.

Another definition of integrative power can be found in Hannah Arendt's (1970) text, *On Violence*. Arendt says that power is people's ability to act together, which also means that individuals do not hold power and a leader in power is only because that person is empowered by others (Arendt, 1970). Arendt's definition adds to our understanding of integrative power by adding a cooperative element. Therefore, if we combine the above definitions, we can say that integrative power is a type of legitimacy that empowers the leaders of governments, groups or ethnicities, which in return forms a sense of community in a society, bonding people together through concepts such as love and respect on the individual level. In addition, Boulding (1990) mentions that economic power also has a certain amount of integrative power as well.

In the context of Hong Kong and its integrative power, it is not just about putting Hong Kong citizens in office for them to act in Beijing's interest. Instead, it should be allowing HongKongers interested in working towards universal suffrage under the Basic Law, even if this may not be in Beijing's interests. This could potentially be the integrative power that creates legitimacy in Hong Kong's government that the people would be willing to empower through love and respect. However, as Boulding (1990) said, each of the three faces of power has both a positive and negative use, and in the case of integrative power, there is always the danger of it being used to create enemies and alienate people. While not going as far as to marginalize HongKongers or create enemies in Hong Kong, the CCP's use of integrative power have signs of

gaining power at the expense of their adversary, in this case, Hong Kong. The CCP does so with its two pillars of power that supports its legitimacy, and hence its integrative power. At the same time, Hong Kong is losing integrative power with more people becoming less faithful in the increasingly pro-Beijing government.

### **Two Pillars of Chinese Integrative Power**

The CCP's legitimacy is supported by its two pillars of economic power and nationalism. The CCP maintains its one-party rule of China through the use of these two powers to maintain legitimacy, and therefore their integrative power in China.

First of all, in terms of economic power, during the transition from the rule of Chairman Mao to Deng, China has turned from a revolutionary state to a more pragmatic economic, and development-focused, industrial state. Back in the late 70s, the CCP built its reputation on its ability to bring continued prosperity to the people and economic development to China where Deng realized that China cannot afford further chaos after a decade of turmoil (Baum, 1996). Chu (2013) discovers that, contrary to Western beliefs that the CCP is losing support from widespread protests and discontent across the country, the Party is incredibly effective in responding to popular demands, steering policies towards economic development, and restoring China's influence on the global stage. Chu (2013) adds that a majority of Chinese people agree that despite the faults of the CCP, it is still the best governing system for China. Therefore, one aspect of the CCP's legitimacy, one of the pillars of its integrative power, is based on its economic might. One of China's state media, the China Global Television Network (CGTN) has reported that the Xi Jinping mentioned the phrase *meihaoshenghuo*, which is translated into "better life" or "happy life" a total of 14 times in the opening and closing paragraph of the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (*Opening session of 19th CPC National Congress*, 2017) though Xi has introduced several sweeping reforms in the party after his inauguration as President and made the Chinese economic pillar a lot more brittle than it appears. Elizabeth Economy (2019) says that despite the strong improvements China has made in recent years, there are certain factors including too much party control of economic affairs, and the Trump administration's tariffs from the trade war, that have stagnated the Chinese economy. As a result, this forces the CCP to find new resolutions for its stagnating economy.

The second, much stronger pillar of Chinese integrative power is nationalism, seeming to even subordinate the economic pillar. The CCP is very effective at building, and actively rallies,

nationalism for the people to support their one-party rule (Holbig & Gilley, 2010), even especially effective when attempting to suppress movements that are against party ideals, such as the Hong Kong protests.

The origins of Chinese nationalism can be traced back to the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement in 1919, this student uprising against imperialism is still widely celebrated today by the CCP today (Buckley & Qin, 2019). While both the May 4<sup>th</sup> movement and Tiananmen Incident on June 4<sup>th</sup> were student movements, May 4<sup>th</sup> of 1919 is commemorated in China while June 4<sup>th</sup> of 1989 is a heavily censored topic. On May 4<sup>th</sup> of 1919, university students marched into Tiananmen Square to protest against the unfair ruling of the Treaty of Versailles (Babones, 2019). Despite the fact that China was on the side of the 32 victorious nations of the First World War, the Treaty of Versailles was in favor of Japan occupying the Shandong province (Qingdao) after German retreat, instead of returning it to China (Babones, 2019). This carries a grim reminder for the Chinese of its position within international society at the time and reminds them of the many unequal treaties the Qing dynasty was forced to sign.

On September 21, 1949, at the dawn of the People's Republic of China, Chairman Mao gave a lengthy speech about how the "Chinese have stood up" from national humiliation (Mao, 1949). In 2019, President Xi commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of May 4<sup>th</sup> and said that the movement was an anti-imperialistic and patriotic campaign to encourage the Chinese youth of today to study the spirit of May 4<sup>th</sup> and devote themselves to the Chinese dream (Xinhua, 2019c); 2019 also commemorates the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the People's Republic of China. Youths under Chinese patriotic education are constantly reminded of China's sufferings under Western imperialism and are encouraged to teach them to the next generation (Callahan, 2004).

Other than textbooks for youths, the CCP also has acute control over the media. Susan Shirk (2007) in her book *China: Fragile Superpower*, says that the Propaganda Department in the party is sacred and that they have been trying to bolster the CCP's legitimacy and promote nationalism ever since they were put in charge of the patriotic education campaign (p.84). In China, stories about Japan, Taiwan and the US sell and "national myths" are reinforced by propaganda (p.85). For example, in 2012, when Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintaro announced that the Tokyo Metropolitan government would purchase the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (*Ishihara Seeking to Buy Senkaku Islands*, 2012), it agitated a wide group of Chinese as they targeted Japanese shopping malls and vandalized Japanese products to protest against Japan.

Looking towards Hong Kong, there is evidence that Chinese nationalism is used to attack Hong Kong and its protestors as well. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of China spokeswoman, Hua Chunying (2019), began blaming the US for the conflict in China when China sanctioned American nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), saying that these NGOs trying to support the Hong Kong protests are to blame for the chaos in Hong Kong and sanctions on them are “rightly imposed.” Likewise, China’s state media, Xinhua (2019a) also made a similar remark when it condemned the US House bill, Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, saying that the US is attempting to contain the development of China with the “Hong Kong card.” The way that the Chinese propaganda machine is manipulating the public opinion in the case of Hong Kong is when state media begin calling protestors, rioters, and framing these people as “radicals” and “thugs” (Kuo, 2019a). As stories related to the US—hence foreign intervention—sells in China, the CCP’s propaganda machine effectively manipulates the public opinions of the Chinese to be against the Hong Kong protests.

Recall once again, Boulding (1990) says that conflict can arise when two or more parties see changes in the power of one that will benefit or increase their welfare at the expense of another. The case of Hong Kong trying to become more democratic is an act of defiance against Beijing’s one-party rule, as allowing Hong Kong to become more democratic would mean China is no longer under one-party rule, despite being promised two systems, one country. An act against the CCP’s power within one-party rule would prompt a violent response from the Party in Beijing. The CCP will attempt to defend themselves through the use of their integrative power, like nationalism, to prevent their loss of power. This in turn diminishes the potential integrative power of Hong Kong and Hong Kong sees Beijing eroding its autonomy prompting a violent grassroots response.

### **Decline of Hong Kong’s Integrative Power**

Hong Kong has lost integrative power through constant attacks on its autonomy by the CCP. While the CCP can enhance its integrative power in dealing with Hong Kong through nationalism, the integrative power of Hong Kong is diminishing at a rapid pace. This has also caused Hong Kong to view CCP erosion as more and more of a threat.

Early evidence of this loss of Hong Kong integrative power is seen in Lo Shiu-hing’s (2001) book *Governing Hong Kong: Legitimacy, Communication and Political Decay*. In this, Lo argues that Hong Kong’s political decay is a serious issue now that Hong Kong is taking on a

much more personal style of governance, a “chaotic implementation of public politics,” and insensitivity of the government to public opinions (p.13). A succession of protests has occurred since Lo’s book published in 2001. First were the large-scale protests in 2003 against the implementation of Article 23, then Umbrella Movement of 2014, and now the protests against the extradition law in 2019. These show that HongKongers have constantly been aware of the erosion of their political autonomy by the CCP’s encroachment into Hong Kong.

Further evidence of this decay can be seen in how the police treated protestors and reporters alike during the protests. The Hong Kong police’s brutality soon became a widely known fact across the globe. In a letter, the *South China Morning Post* attempts to explain police brutality with Sigmund Freud’s three parts of the mind theory, saying that Hong Kong police’s riot gear conceals their identity and empowers them to act in a way that they will not be held accountable afterwards (Jeong, 2019). Police brutality in itself is insufficient to erode HongKonger’s faith in the government. The problem was when Carrie Lam defended police brutality as an “appropriate force of weapon” (Chan & Ko, 2019). Retired police senior superintendent Henry Ho said that Hong Kong was one of the safest cities in the world because it had the best police (McCarthy, 2019). This faith has been betrayed by the brutality of police and the pro-Beijing government that endorses such action. To make matters worse, Lam has rejected an independent inquiry into police brutality, saying that there is no need to subject the Hong Kong police that works day and night against “criminal offenses” to such charges (Reid, 2020). This shows an active attempt from Lam’s pro-Beijing administration to defend the police, reinforcing the fact that the police were able to act without consequences against protestors and reporters alike.

Covering the protests in Hong Kong was not difficult for the CCP propaganda machine. While initially the Hong Kong protests received little Mainland media attention, the state media quickly began to denounce protestors as rioters as soon as they tarnished the Chinese flag and vandalized the national emblem (Xinhua, 2019b). The vandalizing of the Chinese national emblem is actually symbolic for the HongKongers who wish to gain more autonomy, and distance themselves from the grips of the CCP. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs also made sharp comments against central figures of the protests. For example, spokesman Geng Shuang said student leader Joshua Wong (a central figure in both the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and 2019 Protests) had evil plots for Hong Kong independence and that Hong Kong is an internal

affair and foreign actors should not interfere (Geng, 2019). As usual, China shifted blame to foreign forces for the various domestic uprising that China experiences. MOFA spokeswoman, Hua Chunying (2019), consistently blames the US for sowing discord amongst Chinese groups such as in Xinjiang, as well as trying to contain China's growth (para. 5). For Hong Kong, state media Xinhua, has several articles that blame the US for using the "Cold War mentality," fanning the flames of tension in Hong Kong (Xinhua, 2019, para. 3).

### **The Other Faces of Power in the Hong Kong Conflict**

The above section has elaborated how China increased its integrative power while Hong Kong was losing its own integrative power. However, it would be inadequate to discuss Boulding's (1990) *Three Faces of Power* without touching on the other two types of power that exist through the presence of integrative power, and how these have an impact on the escalation or de-escalation of conflict.

The first is the destructive power of the CCP that could also be exercised in Hong Kong. That said, it is not in Beijing's interest to rely purely on military might to bring Hong Kong to submission. Therefore, the CCP limits its destructive power to threats. Under Boulding's (1990) definition, destructive power can also correspond to threat power in which there are several patterns. If applied to the case of Hong Kong, the CCP must decide whether to carry out the threat of punishing Hong Kong for its defiance against the party or not. This threat actually came two years prior to the protests during President Xi's visit to Hong Kong on Carrie Lam's inauguration. In 2017, President Xi said in Hong Kong that "any attempt to endanger China's sovereignty and security, challenge the power of the central government...is an act that crosses the red line, and is absolutely impermissible" (Lau, 2017, para. 10). In an act of defiance, HongKongers took to the streets to protest the pro-Beijing government's extradition law. If Beijing were to carry out its red-line threat, then it can even mean military intervention in Hong Kong. The People's Liberation Army's Hong Kong garrison is amongst the most elite and disciplined of PLA troops, and the fact that these soldiers have been seen on the streets of Hong Kong after the protests indicates there is always a possibility of military intervention (Kuo, 2019b). If the CCP chooses not to carry out the threat, it either means that they do not have the necessary destructive power, which is unlikely, or it can mean that the costs are too high to bear. In the case of the Hong Kong protests, the latter seems to be true.

The cost of a military intervention, in other words the exercise of destructive power in Hong Kong, would be too high for the CCP to bear. Economically, although Hong Kong today only constitutes to 2.7% of China's GDP, its world class financial and legal system gives people overseas the confidence to invest (Sin, 2019). As such, the West such as the US treats Hong Kong as a separate entity to China when it comes to trade and investments. This enables Hong Kong to keep being China's hub of foreign direct investments, a role that not even Shanghai can replace. (Sin, 2019). Military intervention in Hong Kong would make investors lose confidence in its formerly unique style of governance and legal system, likely to reduce Hong Kong to just another port city of China. Thus, there is a low possibility of CCP threats being carried out even with Beijing's "red-line".

There are two reasons for this, the first being that the situation today is unlike that of 1989. Back then, the Tiananmen Incident corresponded with the 1989 Poland legislative election that would potentially allow Poland to appoint its first non-Communist prime minister and allow opposition parties to sit together with their former oppressors for the first time since the Second World War. Chinese leaders were unnerved that the Polish "disease" would eventually spread to China protests in Tiananmen (Bartkowski, 2014, para 1). These elections were supposed to happen on June 4, 1989, the day when the military crackdown happened at dawn in Tiananmen Square.

The second reason is CCP fears backlash from international society if they were to employ military crackdown on protests in Hong Kong. After the heavy criticisms of military crackdown in Tiananmen, the CCP leadership has become much more aware of its international image when handling "sensitive issues" such as the Hong Kong protests. In the past, China responded to the Tiananmen criticisms by starting to contribute to international peace such as participating UN peacekeeping operations, including joining the UN Transitional Authority to Cambodia (UNTAC; He, 2019). Zheng Bijian's (2005) call for China's peaceful rise was to reassure the world that China's rise would be peaceful despite the mishaps in Tiananmen. Thus, minus an event on the scale of the Polish legislative elections, it would be highly unlikely that the CCP would jeopardize its fragile image on the international stage to shut down the Hong Kong protests with robust military, destructive power. That said, the tension of conflict will be maintained as long as democratic movements in Hong Kong continue and the CCP continues to make threats.

Boulding's (1990) productive power is also closely related to exchange power under the economic power category. As shown above, although economic power is one of the pillars of CCP legitimacy, it only constitutes a portion of Chinese nationalism and CCP legitimacy as integrative power. That said, in some ways Hong Kong's one country, two systems in itself is a type of exchange power. The deal was to allow Hong Kong to remain autonomous with two systems, but in exchange they would always be one country under China. For Boulding (1990), productive power is the tools and machines that make things, but in relation to integrative power it is also the power of people coming together to form legitimacy through organizations, groups and families. Therefore, in this case, where the CCP is an inhibitor to HongKongers binding together under the flag of one country, two systems, Hong Kong's productive power is disrupted by China. Economically, Hong Kong no longer has the value it did for China, compared to the time of handover. In that case, the productive power that Hong Kong does hold is arguably the ability to produce democracy for China, which the CCP is trying to prevent. Therefore, productive power actually escalates conflict in the case of Hong Kong as the CCP does not allow any other form of unity or legitimacy to be produced within its borders that would challenge its one-party rule.

The CCP can use destructive power to make threats against Hong Kong, but it would be unlikely that it would carry these threats out to protect its image on the international stage without a major event in Hong Kong that would immediately pose a threat to their one-party rule. However, as Hong Kong's economic value diminishes for China, the remaining productive power that Hong Kong carries for the CCP is the ability to create democracy under the Chinese flag of one country. It would be unlikely that the CCP would value this productive power, and instead, increase conflict to try to curb this.

### **Conclusion**

At the time of writing, it has been 23 year since Hong Kong's handover as a British colony to China. At the time of the handover, former leader Deng Xiaoping promised 50 years of unchanging autonomy from one country, two systems. Unfortunately, this autonomy has been at a steady decay under the constant attacks on Hong Kong from the CCP, and we have barely reached the 25-year halfway mark.

The peaceful rise of China was initially seen with skepticism, but regardless of whether China's rise can stay peaceful or not, it does not change the fact that China has successfully

transformed itself from one of the poorest countries in the world to the second largest economy today. The hard military and economic might that the CCP accumulated under China's rise is now helping them create a powerful force of nationalism that becomes an integrative power that China will use to punish its smaller domestic actors such as Hong Kong when in defiance. In order to protect its fragile international image, the CCP does not usually exert this integrative power, with the exception of CCP one-party rule under threat.

The path of Hong Kong was clear. With universal suffrage as a goal written in the Basic Law, there was a succession of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong every year. The 2003 protests against the implementation of Article 23, the Umbrella Movement of 2014 calling for more democracy and the 2019 protests against the extradition bill were of particular scale and note. HongKongers become more threatened with each passing year about the CCP's encroachment on one country, two systems.

Although it is perfectly possible for the CCP to march the PLA into Hong Kong with destructive power, they have shown restraint in employing destructive power in Hong Kong as costs may be too high for the CCP's rather fragile international image. Hong Kong has the productive power to create a more democratic system under the Basic Law that would go against the CCP's one-party rule. This is a productive power that the CCP is actively trying to curb. With the CCP's skilled use of propaganda, China blames foreign forces such as the US of trying to contain China's growth and breaking the unity of the Chinese. This type of news sells and is well received in China. The CCP have also denounced the protesters in Hong Kong calling them thugs.

As a final remark, the author would like to recommend a path toward resolution of the current Hong Kong conflict. As mentioned above, Carrie Lam has prevented the establishment of an independent inquiry into the brutality of Hong Kong police during the 2019 protests. Lam's defense of police brutality has caused one of the biggest losses of Hong Kong integrative power and she needs to hold the police accountable but has not done so. The victory of pro-democracy candidates in 17 out of 18 districts in Hong Kong is a step forward for a more open and transparent Hong Kong as it shows that public opinion has not turned against Hong Kong democracy yet (McDonell, 2019). Still, the CCP is known to be uncompromising and unforgiving against movements that challenge its one-party rule. Nationalism in China will always be a force of integrative power that will be manipulated by the CCP's propaganda

machine. Therefore, if there is to be any change in Hong Kong, it may well have to begin from within China, instead.

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