Chantilly High School Model United Nations Conference

CHMUN XVII

February 25th and 26th, 2022

Hong Kong Independence 2047

CHMUN XVII Background Guide

Committee Background

This committee will take place in 2047, when the agreement made in 1997 between Britain and China expires.

In the 1800s, Britain seized the territory of Hong Kong after several wars with China. A treaty was signed between the two parties that stated Hong Kong would remain a British colony for 99 years, and once the treaty expired, Hong Kong would become part of China once again. Those 99 years expired in 1997, and during that year British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and China's Communist Party Leader, Deng Xiaoping, signed another agreement, which created the "One Country, Two Systems" model. This agreement respected Britain's promise to return Hong Kong to China, however under the condition that Hong Kong would be allowed 50 years to remain independent from mainland China, maintain its own governing and economic system, and that the people's freedoms would be respected. The territory would become known as the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region during that period. It also created the Basic Law, Hong Kong's temporary constitution. Thus, Hong Kong became a semi-autonomous region of China. These 50 years were supposed to help Hongkongers adjust to Chinese rule. However, 50 years later, Hongkongers have realized that they value their current lifestyle, and don't want to become a part of China.

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQyxG4vTyZ8

Topic 1: Securing Hong Kong's Independence and Autonomy

Shortly after Hong Kong became a British colony, it experienced massive economic success and its population boomed. Under British rule, it developed a much different culture than China, which was undergoing a communist revolution. Hong Kong's economic success incentivized China to follow the agreements made in 1997, and for the first decade the government allowed Hong Kong to be completely autonomous. At the time, Hong Kong accounted for 27% of China's entire GDP, making it an invaluable asset. However, China's small towns such as Shenzhen (the city bordering Hong Kong) exploded in population, and their own economies far surpassed that of Hong Kong's, diluting in economical importance to China. Currently, Hong Kong only accounts for 3% of China's GDP, as opposed to the quarter it once was.

Seeing that Hong Kong is no longer the economic center of China, the mainland isn't as incentivized to respect Hong Kong's independence. In recent years, China has been encroaching on their land and projecting their values and power. Although the border that separates Hong Kong from mainland China officially dissolves on July 1st, 2047, there have been numerous examples of China's attempt to erase the border more quickly. China has constructed the largest sea-crossing bridge that connects Macau—a city on mainland China—to Hong Kong. In addition, the Chinese barracks located in the center of Hong Kong stand as a reminder that Hong Kong is and has been a part of China since 1997.

The citizens of Hong Kong are fighting for the rights and freedoms granted to them through the Basic Law, as their autonomy, government, and lifestyle are being invaded. In 2014, protests that would become known as the "Umbrella Movement" brought the political struggle between Hong Kong and China to light, both on the international scale and to previously politically inactive Hongkongers. These protests were attempts at fighting against China's growing influence over Hong Kong's elections. Protestors raised alarm as the Chinese government attempted to restrict candidates for public office in order to secure only pro-China seats in the legislature.

Later, in 2019, thousands of Hongkongers flocked to the streets in protest of an extradition bill that would allow Hong Kong residents to be extradited to mainland China to be tried for their crimes.

Initially, the goal of the bill was to put a Hongkonger accused of murder in Taiwan on trial, but it created another opening for China to secure more influence over Hong Kong. In addition, many pro-democracy activists have been arrested and silenced, and others have gone missing for selling scandalous news about Chinese government officials. In 2003, Hongkongers stopped a bill that would prevent them from speaking out against China from being passed, and the extradition bill protests have been successful in suspending the bill indefinitely. Hongkongers aren't only fighting against China's attempts at invasion, but to protect their basic rights of speech. These demonstrations are enacting change, showing the world and China that Hong Kong has a voice, and they aren't going to stand down. As China becomes increasingly aggressive, the freedoms and rights of Hongkongers, who have grown culturally different from mainland China, are at risk.

Questions to Consider

1. Technically, Hong Kong has been a part of China since 1997 under an agreement signed by both China and Britain, so what is Hong Kong's defense to be independent?
2. How can Hongkongers peacefully secure their independence?
    a. If peaceful means fail, what should be done?
3. Should Hong Kong become an independent nation, or work to continue their status as a semi-autonomous region of China? What are other options?

Helpful Links

1. Investopedia- "Hong Kong vs. Mainland China: Understanding the Differences"
    a. https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/121814/hong-kong-vs-china-understand-differences.asp
2. Council on Foreign Relations- "Is Hong Kong Still Autonomous? What to Know About China's New Laws"
    a. https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/hong-kong-still-autonomous-what-know-about-chinas-new-laws

3. Bloomberg- “Hong Kong’s Autonomy”
    a. https://www.bloomberg.com/quicktake/hong-kongs-autonomy

Topic 2: Reforming Hong Kong's Governing Bodies

The Legislative Council, or LegCo, serves as Hong Kong's legislative organ. Up until the seventh term of the LegCo, the council held 70 seats, half of which were elected by "geographical constituencies" (directly by the people), and the other half by "functional constituencies" (corporations and industries), such as the medical, insurance, and finance industries. This meant that even though the popular vote favored pro-democracy parties, pro-China parties always controlled the council, since the general public only voted for half of the LegCo. The representatives that make up the other half of the legislative body are chosen by industries that have incentives to be pro-China, therefore the majority of these seats are taken up by pro-China representatives. Furthering China's influence on a territory that is supposed to retain its autonomy until 2047, a bill that was passed on May 27th of 2021 changes the makeup of the Legislative Council, as well as how representatives are chosen. Starting from the seventh term of the LegCo, there are 90 seats in the council, 40 of which are elected by the Election Committee, 30 elected by functional constituencies, and only 20 seats directly elected by the people. This means that Hongkongers are voting for fewer seats, as well as a much lower percentage of the entirety of their Legislative Council than before. Now, mainland China has a much easier time pushing through and passing unpopular bills and laws that encroach on Hongkongers' freedoms, rights, lifestyle, and culture. Under the "One Country, Two Systems" agreement, Hong Kong was eventually supposed to elect all of their political leaders directly by the people, however in reality, the opposite happened.

Hong Kong's Executive Council is led by the Chief Executive, a position chosen by China's government. Currently, Carrie Lam occupies this position. Its purpose is to serve the Chief Executive in submitting bills to the LegCo, establishing regulations, calling the LegCo into session and dissolving it, as well as carrying out the law. There are 16 principal officials that are appointed by the Chief Executive and may be removed by the Chief Executive as well.

Questions to Consider

1. How can Hong Kong's governing bodies better serve and represent the actual Hongkongers that are impacted by their government's decisions?
2. What needs to be done in order to get to a point where the government can even be reformed?

Helpful Links

1. Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau- "The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China"
    a. An adapted and translated version; for in-depth reading/knowledge
    b. https://www.rightofassembly.info/assets/downloads/Hong_Kong_Basic_Law.pdf
2. Britannica- "Hong Kong- Government and Society"
    a. https://www.britannica.com/place/Hong-Kong/Government-and-society
3. BBC- "Hong Kong: What is the Basic Law and How Does it Work?"
    a. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49633862

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(www.gov.hk), GovHK. “GovHK: Government Structure.” *GovHK* 香港政府一站通, 30 Aug. 2020, https://www.gov.hk/en/about/govdirectory/govstructure.htm.

“Executive Council.” 行政會議, https://www.ceo.gov.hk/exco/chi/index.html.

“Hong Kong-China Extradition Plans Explained.” *BBC News*, BBC, 13 Dec. 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-47810723.

“LegCo Today.” *Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*, https://www.legco.gov.hk/general/english/intro/about_lc.htm.

Vox. “China Is Erasing Its Border with Hong Kong.” *Youtube*, 25 July 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQyxG4vTyZ8.

Vox. “Hong Kong's Huge Protests, Explained.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 22 June 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_RdnVtfZPY.