

~Demonstrations of democracy~

The Hong Kong protests and their legacy

Politics/ Current Affairs

By Zari Jones

Edited by Eliza Kashif



Pro- Democracy protesters in 2019 march through the streets of Hong Kong (ABC News)

Origins of Hong Kong protests:

In 1997, the British Empire ceded its occupation over the city of Hong Kong, declaring “*Hong Kong people are to run Hong Kong*”. After more than 150 years of British rule, the Chinese government once again had power over the coastal city.

To help integrate Hong Kong back into the country, the ‘**One country, Two party**’ system was put in place until the proposed year of 2047. Hong Kong would have a separate justice system from mainland China and enjoy the same rights as it had under British rule.

In 2003, the Chinese government proposed the introduction of the **Extradition Bill**. The package known as *Article 23* would be added to Hong Kong's mini constitution and work in concert with the existing national security law, which was introduced by China (WION News). The bill suggested outlawing terrorism, subversion, secession, and collusion with foreign powers. This raises the eyebrows of many citizens as they come to realize that this affects their freedoms and right to protest. China was beginning their take over, and many did not want it. As a result, around two million Hong Kongers took to the streets. Many among them will be middle-aged by the time Hong Kong is officially a part of China.

"What China is doing, it's kind of imperialism."

Says Pro-Independence activist Baggio Leung,

"Whether we want or not, we are now at the front line between the free world and the greatest dictatorship right now in the world."



A Pro-Democracy poster references the zombie video game 'The Last of Us' to demonstrate the decay of Hong Kong culture and quality of life. The silhouettes show the protesters preserving the last of the Hong Kong way of life. (CNNStyle)

Protest methods and tactics:

The Hong Kong protests first started with mass marches through the streets. Citizens held signs shouting for a free press and preservation of democracy. Pro- democracy graffiti, posters and art statements were a key factor used to spread the message, along with sharing images through social media sites.

The pro- democracy protesters' tactics weren't always peaceful, though. When police became brutal, the protesters resorted to harsh tactics in the form of improvised petrol bombs and slingshots. But not all people are in favour of independence, like Jenny, whose sons were protesting.

"I was really happy about the handover. I could finally tell people that I was Chinese...Before the protests, before the movement, we were actually a very close family."



Walls of sticky notes called 'Lennon Walls' displayed messages such as 'Save Hong Kong! (CNNStyle)

The media:

News outlets have played a part in the movement. TV aired the events to the entire world, creating more traction and giving them a voice to speak up. Social media was used as an undercover communication tool to help organize pro- democracy protests. Social media was a powerful tool to spread footage of what was really happening during the protests as independent Hong Kong media outlets started to be shut down by the government, and strict regulations were enforced regarding any new ones. Any press that was left painted the protesters as irresponsible young people who should be in school and participate in society without complaint about the environment they are in. Asylum seekers in other countries continued to spread the message about what was, and still is, happening in Hong Kong.

[Inside Hong Kong's Fight for Freedom | Faceless \(Full Film\) | The Short List - YouTube](#)

Government response:

The government's response to the protests was ridicule and violence. Police used excessive force in Hong Kong, and tried their best to single out persons to arrest. Tear gas, rubber bullets, pepper spray and bean bag

rounds were used on protesters who had little to defend themselves with. Protests were classed as illegal. Surveillance began to increase. Full face coverings and gas masks became a common sight.

“The police will try to find you if you don't cover all of your face. Even your ears will be evidence to arrest you” - 2019 Protester

Laser pointers were used to confuse security cameras. The authorities would later deem laser pointers as ‘offensive weapons’ along with the umbrellas used to repel pepper spray. Authorities weeded out leaders of the movement and charged them with years of jail time. Over 1500 people who had protested in 2019 and 2020 were rounded up and arrested. Many young protesters have been sent to mandatory rehabilitation programs taking place in mainland China, where the judicial system is ruthless. Others fled abroad. One of these people includes Ted Hiu, a lawyer and former politician now living in Adelaide after seeking asylum from the \$200,000 bounty placed on his head.

“You know, authoritarian regimes; they just don't enjoy criticisms...They want silent you because you're in the way and you're a pain.”

What have they achieved?

The Hong Kong protests have exposed the Chinese Government for the power-hungry organization they are, lowering public trust in it. The Hong Kong protests highlighted how much China wants control and the measures it will take to achieve that. The protests are ongoing today with former street protesters speaking out in asylum.

The protest didn't achieve independence... but it achieved awareness.

Sources:

Cultural Gallery. Australia, Hong Kong Cultural Association of SA.
<https://hkcasa.org.au/hongkong-cultural-gallery/>

Cheung, 2026. *Hong Kong's Fight For Freedom Is Not Over*. Switzerland, Geneva Summit.
[Chloe Cheung – Hong Kong's Fight for Freedom Is Not Over | Geneva Summit 2026 - YouTube](#)

2023. *Inside Hong Kong's fight for freedom- Faceless (Full film)*. VICE
[Inside Hong Kong's Fight for Freedom | Faceless \(Full Film\) | The Short List - YouTube](#)

2024. *Anti-China dissidents "pursued for life" with a \$200,000 bounty*. 60 Minutes Australia.
[Anti-China dissidents "pursued for life" with a \\$200,000 bounty | 60 Minutes Australia - YouTube](#)

2019. *China anniversary: Hong Kong protester shot by a live round*. BBC.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49891403>

Fong, 2026. *Hong Kong's Freedoms: What China Promised and How It's Cracking Down*. Washington: Council On Foreign Relations.
<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/hong-kong-freedoms-democracy-protests-china-crackdown>

Wright, 2019. *'Be water': Hong Kong protest mantra influences how art is designed and distributed*. Hong Kong: CNN.
<https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/protest-art-hong-kong-intl-hnk>

March/April 2026