



**Hong Kong Transform itself from a 'Shoppers' and Capitalists' Paradise' into a 'City of Protests' at the Frontline of a Global Anti-China Backlash: Changes in Psychology, Economics, Well-Being and Family Perspective**

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A letter of Gratitude: Thank You for supporting the Release of my New Book of article.

Thank you for joining the movement

I am grateful for the bumps and stumbles and the scrapes that I've experienced as a clinician and psychotherapist and wounded healer. Without my family and my daughter Jess to support, I honestly could not have made this dream come true. I hope my daughter would feel proud of mom's hardworking and passionate to her work.

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*At the core of her work lies the therapeutic relationship, which allows for a corrective interpersonal experience due to its non-judgmental, gentle, and containing nature. Helen uses an integrative approach in therapy, tailored to her clients' needs. She combines Creative Art Therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and third wave CBT such as Schema Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) with elements of Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT), and Trauma Therapy. San has worked extensively with people with mild to moderate problems (e.g. ADHD, autism, Gifted, anxiety, depression, sexual difficulties, OCD, social phobia, health worries, work performance, anger management, sleep problems, relationship difficulties) and with severe mental health problems, such as personality disorders. She has a specialist interest in psychological trauma, including complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD). San 's approach is often non-directive but collaborative in nature; she works with the client not only towards understanding the roots of their difficulties but also in learning practical skills helping them cope better.*

## **Introduction**

China pledged to preserve much of what makes Hong Kong unique when the former British colony was handed over more than two decades ago. Beijing said it would give Hong Kong fifty years to keep its capitalist system and enjoy many freedoms not found in mainland Chinese cities.

But in recent years, Beijing has taken increasingly brazen steps to encroach on Hong Kong's political system and crackdown on dissent. In 2020, Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong. Since then, authorities have arrested dozens of pro-democracy activists, lawmakers, professional and journalists; curbed voting rights; and limited freedoms of the press and speech. These moves have not only drawn international condemnation but have also raised questions about Hong Kong's status as a global financial hub and dimmed hopes that the city will ever become a full-fledged democracy. And is Hong Kongers proud of themselves and claim themselves as Chinese or Hong Kongers. My article will share how this affect Hong Konger's identity, psychological, economic, philosophy and wellbeing development and impact.

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## **Is Hong Kong part of China?**

Hong Kong is a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China that has, until recently, largely been free to manage its own affairs based on “one country, two systems” a national unification policy developed by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s. The concept was intended to help integrate Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau with sovereign China while preserving their unique political and economic systems. After more than a century and a half of colonial rule, the British government returned Hong Kong in 1997. (Qing Dynasty leaders ceded Hong Kong Island to the British Crown in 1842 after China's defeat in the First Opium War.) Portugal returned Macau in 1999.

The Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 dictated the terms under which Hong Kong was returned to China. The declaration and Hong Kong's Basic Law, the city's constitutional document, enshrine the city's “capitalist system and way of life” and grant it “a high degree of autonomy,” including executive, legislative, and independent judicial powers for fifty years (until 2047).

Chinese Communist Party officials do not preside over Hong Kong as they do over mainland provinces and municipalities, but Beijing still exerts considerable influence through loyalists who dominate the region's political sphere. Beijing also maintains the authority to interpret Hong Kong's Basic Law, a power that it had rarely used until recently. All changes to political processes are supposed to be approved by the Hong Kong government and China's top legislative body, the National People's Congress, or its Standing Committee. Hong Kong is allowed to forge external relations in certain areas—including trade, communications, tourism, and culture—but Beijing maintains control over the region's diplomacy and defence. Under the Basic Law, Hong Kongers are supposed to be guaranteed freedoms of the press, expression, assembly, and religion, as well as protections under international law. But in practice, Beijing has curtailed some of these rights.

## **Was Hong Kong ever a democracy?**

Although Hong Kong has certain freedoms, it has never been rated a full democracy [PDF] by international standards. China is a one-party state and is reluctant to allow Hong Kong to hold free and fair elections. Experts say that ambiguity in the Basic Law heightens this fundamental tension. The document states that the “ultimate aim” is to have Hong Kong's leader elected by a popular vote, but it does not give a deadline for this to occur.

Since the handover, there have been no free votes by universal suffrage for the chief executive, who is the head of the Hong Kong government. The chief executive is instead chosen by an election committee composed of representatives from Hong Kong's dominant professional sectors and business elite. Hong Kong residents were previously allowed to vote for members of the legislature, known as the Legislative Council, or LegCo, as well as for members of their local district councils, which handle day-to-day community concerns.

But more recently, Beijing has worked to curb Hong Kong residents' already limited voting rights. It overhauled the electoral system in 2021 to make it easier for pro-Beijing candidates to be appointed as chief executive and as LegCo members. Beijing ruled that only "patriots" who "respect" the Chinese Communist Party can run in elections. Only one candidate was allowed to run in the 2022 chief executive election: John Lee, a hard-line former deputy chief of the city's police force. For the LegCo, prior to 2021, half of the body's seventy members were elected by direct voting, while the rest were chosen by groups representing different industries and professions. Now, just twenty members are directly elected and seventy are chosen. In response to these changes, pro-democracy groups boycotted the 2021 LegCo elections, and all ninety seats went to pro-Beijing individuals.

Unlike China, Hong Kong has numerous political parties. They have traditionally split between two factions: pan-democrats, who call for incremental democratic reforms, and pro-establishment groups, who are by and large pro-business supporters of Beijing. The latter have typically been more dominant in Hong Kong politics. (Historically, only a small minority of Hong Kongers have favoured outright independence.) Since 2014, student protesters demanding a more democratic system have formed several political groups, including more radical, anti-Beijing parties such as Youngspiration, Hong Kong Indigenous, and Demosisto. But the power of these groups and pro-democracy parties have weakened significantly as Beijing has cracked down on political opposition, including via the national security law. Several parties have disbanded, and members have been forbidden from running in elections or jailed.

### **How has Beijing eroded Hong Kong's freedoms?**

Beijing has been chipping away at Hong Kong's freedoms since the handover, experts say. Over the years, its attempts to impose more control over the city have sparked mass protests, which have in turn led the Chinese government to crack down further.

“In the fifteen years after the handover, there was a series of official initiatives aimed at enhancing Beijing’s control in ways that would undermine both the autonomy and the rule of law,” Michael C. Davis writes in his book *Making Hong Kong China*.

For instance, in 2003, the Hong Kong government proposed national security legislation that would have prohibited treason, secession, sedition, and subversion against the Chinese government. In 2012, it tried to amend Hong Kong schools’ curricula to foster Chinese national identity, which many residents saw as Chinese propaganda. And in 2014, Beijing proposed a framework for universal suffrage, allowing Hong Kongers to vote for the city’s chief executive but only from a Beijing-approved short list of candidates. Protesters organized massive rallies, known as the Umbrella Movement, to call for true democracy.

In the years following the 2014 protests, Beijing and the Hong Kong government stepped up efforts to rein in dissent, including by prosecuting protest leaders, expelling several new legislators, and increasing media censorship.

In the summer of 2019, Hong Kong saw its largest protests ever. For months, people demonstrated against a Beijing-endorsed legislative proposal that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China. Many protesters believed Beijing had eroded Hong Kong’s freedoms to such an extent that they thought, “either we stop it now, or it’s just basically going to be hell,” says Victoria Tin-bor Hui, a political science professor at the University of Notre Dame. Reports of police brutality, including the excessive use of tear gas and rubber bullets, exacerbated tensions. Chief Executive Carrie Lam withdrew the bill in September, but the protests, which garnered international attention, continued until the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020.

### **What is the national security law Beijing imposed on Hong Kong?**

Beijing took its most assertive action yet on June 30, 2020, when it bypassed the Hong Kong legislature and imposed a national security law [PDF] on the city. The legislation effectively criminalizes any dissent and adopts extremely broad definitions for crimes such as terrorism, subversion, secession, and collusion with foreign powers. It also allows Beijing to establish a security force in Hong Kong and influence the selection of judges who hear national security cases. Pro-democracy activists and lawmakers decried the move and expressed fears that it could be “the end of Hong Kong.” Meanwhile, Chinese officials and pro-Beijing lawmakers said it was necessary to restore stability following the massive protests.

Police have arrested at least 170 people under the law, many of them prominent pro-democracy activists, former lawmakers, and journalists. Thousands more people have been arrested for participating in the 2019 protests. Beijing and the Hong Kong government have also curbed media freedoms, with pro-democracy publications such as the Apple Daily newspaper closing after journalists were harassed and jailed. Moreover, groups that organized protests disbanded. The Hong Kong government's efforts to transform the public education system by introducing so-called patriotic programs have also troubled many parents and students.

### **What has been the international response to Beijing's actions?**

Several countries have condemned Beijing's moves and taken retaliatory measures. Under President Donald Trump, the United States imposed sanctions on Chinese officials it alleged were undermining Hong Kong's autonomy, restricted exports of defense equipment to Hong Kong, and revoked its special trade status. It also joined a handful of countries, including Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, that suspended their extradition treaties with Hong Kong because of the national security law. President Joe Biden has maintained the sanctions, voiced concerns about Beijing's crackdown in conversations with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and warned U.S. companies of the "growing risks" [PDF] of doing business in Hong Kong. In August 2021, the Biden administration deferred deportations of the several thousand Hong Kong residents in the United States.

The United Kingdom (UK), which also ended its extradition agreement with the region, said it would allow three million Hong Kong residents to settle in the country and apply for citizenship. Canada announced measures to make it easier for Hong Kong youth to study and work in the country, creating pathways for permanent residency. The European Union, which expressed "grave concern" about the national security law, limited exports of equipment that China could use for repression.

However, the opposition has not been unanimous. Fifty-three countries—most of which are participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative—signed a statement read before the UN Human Rights Council in July 2020 supporting the national security law, while twenty-seven countries signed a statement criticizing it.

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## **Impairment of Quality of Life and Well-Being**

Obviously, quality of life has been much hampered in the social movement. First, the economy has slowed down because of the social unrest. For example, the number of tourists has dropped by 56% (Cheng 2019) and the unemployment rate has been climbing in the past few months. Lots of people are unemployed in Hong Kong, and lots of professional immigrant into another new country. Second, protests have created much disturbance to the ordinary lives of people. For example, during the occupation of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the East Railway system service was much disturbed and the main highway joining the eastern part of the New Territories was blocked. The Cross-Harbor Tunnel was also out of service during the occupation of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University by the protesters. As a result, workers had to take leave involuntarily or spent much longer traveling time. Third, the social movement has been divisive and polarized for people with different political views. For those who support the protesters and five demands, they are called “yellow ribbons”. On the other hand, those who do not support the protesters, they are called “blue ribbons”. In many families, social groups, and work settings, people have become alienated and have conflicts with each other (Chow 2019). Many families separated and going through divorce or very difficult moments because of different value on viewing this political incidence. Some women escaped to another new country because of the stress and fear under social environment in Hong Kong cause the result of long-term separation and destroy their marriage. Some women brought their kids escaped to another country to build up the foundation with the children and the husband finally join or not reunion later. There are lots of tragedy family stories reflect the evidence how this effect on human’s health of psychology and well-being.

### **What does Beijing’s crackdown mean for Hong Kong’s financial and economic status?**

Hong Kong is still a global financial hub, but Beijing’s actions could jeopardize its standing. Relatively low taxes, a highly developed financial system, light regulation, and other capitalist features have made Hong Kong one of the world’s most attractive markets and set it apart from mainland financial hubs such as Shanghai and Shenzhen. Multinational firms and banks—many of which maintain regional headquarters in Hong Kong—have historically used the city as a gateway to do business in the mainland, owing in part to its proximity to the world’s second-largest economy and its legal system based on British common law.

However, executives of some companies with large footprints in Hong Kong have voiced concerns about the national security law, criticizing the broad powers given to mainland authorities. The Biden



administration has cautioned that companies could violate the vague national security law without realizing it. “Beijing’s ideal scenario is to keep Hong Kong as a financial center without all the freedom. But it seems that you really cannot maintain Hong Kong’s international financial standing while stifling its freedom,” Hui says.

Meanwhile, nearly half of European firms are considering fully or partially moving out of the city by 2023, according to a survey by the European Chamber of Commerce [PDF]. Social media companies, in particular, have expressed unease about a part of the law that requires them to surrender requested user data to the Hong Kong government. TikTok, an app owned by mainland-based company Byte Dance, suspended operations in the city.

Also to blame for the exodus are Hong Kong’s COVID-19 restrictions, including a lengthy quarantine requirement and other strict measures imposed in an attempt to align with Beijing’s zero-COVID policy. Authorities banned flights from several countries, including the United States and the UK, as well as restricted gatherings. These moves have led economists to lower predictions for the city’s growth and warn of brain drain. “Hong Kong is facing an exodus of educated workers on a scale not seen since the early 1990s,” said a Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce report.

Other experts believe that Hong Kong can maintain its commercial status despite its democratic decline. In recent years, Beijing has moved to connect Hong Kong more to the mainland, creating the Greater Bay Area project, an ambitious plan to integrate Hong Kong and cities in neighboring Guangdong Province into a more cohesive economic region. Many firms and investors are betting that this increased connectivity will boost the amount of wealth flowing from the mainland into Hong Kong.

“This dramatic transformation will not be the end of Hong Kong as a global financial hub, as it has already begun to boost economic integration with mainland China. But it is surely the death of the democratic hopes of most of its 7.5 million people,” CFR’s Jerome A. Cohen writes. The economic change and the house market keep dropping. Not so many global investors would like to input the money in Hong Kong like previous year.

### **What does Beijing’s crackdown mean for Hong Kong’s psychological status?**

The social movement has created well-being problems in people of Hong Kong. Based on a large community sample, Ni et al. (2020) reported that the prevalence of probable depression was 11.2% in 2019

which was much higher than that during 2009–14 (1.9%) and 6.5% after the Occupy Central Movement in 2017. Besides, the estimated PTSD prevalence rate was 12.8%. Mogul (2019) also pointed out that PTSD symptoms were common in the protesters. Ng (2020) used the term “mental health tsunami” to describe the situation which was brought forth by the repeated and direct involvement in violent conflicts between protesters and police, exposure to violence, disintegration of families and friends, and the declining economic conditions.

From an individual perspective, quality of life is a multi-dimensional construct. According to Felce and Perry (1995), overall quality of life is a function of three factors, including objective life conditions, including physical well-being (e.g., personal safety), material wellbeing (e.g., security), social well-being (e.g., acceptance and support), emotional well-being (e.g., respect) and development and activity (e.g., choice and control), subjective feelings of the objective life conditions and personal values and aspirations. Obviously, threats to quality of life in these domains would arouse fear and distress for an individual. From a societal perspective, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2011) proposed the following indicators of human well-being: health status, work and life balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security, and subjective well-being. Again, threats in well-being in these domains, particularly in the areas of governance and personal security, would lead to strong reactions from people in the society.

According to the ecological perspective, there are different ecological systems governing human development where individuals experience well-being (or ill-being) in different systems. These include the personal system (e.g., threat to freedom and finding life meaning through involvement in a “revolution”), interpersonal system (e.g., peer influence and bonding amongst peer protesters), family system (e.g., lack of family warmth), social system (e.g., sensational social media influence), and political system (e.g., lack of trust in the Government and support for protesters from bodies outside Hong Kong). By examining the quality of life and well-being in different systems, we can get some clues on the related deficiencies and threats in quality of life which have shaped the development of the social event in Hong Kong in 2019X–2020.

In the below discussion, I would like to use the metaphor of The Fire Triangle to let you understand the interaction and effect on psychology, economics, wellbeing perspective: Fuels, Heat, and Oxygen. According to the Fire Triangle, there are three basic elements of fire - fuels, heat, and oxygen. In this paper, we treat the quality of life and well-being issues as “fuels”, the Extradition Bill as “heat”, and some

contextual influences (such as support from the general public for young people's involvement in protests) as "oxygen".

There are ten pre-existing fuels and two new fuels for the "fire" as follows: **Pre-existing Fuel No. 1:** Distrust in the Central Government Hong Kong had been a British Colony from 1841 to June 30, 1997. Although Hong Kong physically returned to China on July 1, 1997, it has been difficult for Hong Kong people to develop a high level of trust in the Beijing Government for two reasons. First, people tend to fixate on the unfortunate history of the Cultural Revolution and June 4th incident of 1989. Second, as corruption in Mainland China has been a thorny problem since the opening of China in the late 1970s, governance in China has been seen in a negative light by Hong Kong people. Empirically, studies showed that the level of trust in the Beijing Government has been fluctuating with roughly 47.7% of the respondents having no trust in the first 6 months of 2019 (Public Opinion Poll, The University of Hong Kong 2019b). Lack of trust in the Central Government clearly suggests political uncertainty which constitutes a threat to the political well-being of Hong Kong people.

**Pre-existing Fuel No.2:** Weak identification with the Chinese national identity Studies have shown that 75% of the young respondents regarded themselves as "Hongkonger" rather than "Chinese" (Public Opinion Poll, The University of Hong Kong 2019a). The weak national identity can be attributed to the vast differences in cultural and social background between Hong Kong and Mainland China, such as views on individual freedom and governance. The negative stereotypes formed for Mainland Chinese people (e.g., poor hygiene and snobbishness) also constitute blocks to identify with the Chinese national identity. As national identity is an important aspect of self-identity, a blurred national identity is a threat to personal well-being, which suggests a sense of rootlessness.

**Pre-existing Fuel No. 3:** Dissatisfaction with the political system in Hong Kong.

Under the British Colonial rule, the Governor was not elected but appointed by the British Government (i.e., Hong Kong people had no say). Until the last decade before the handover, the Colonial Government began to introduce some political reform initiatives. The Basic Law also stipulates that there would be a progressive change in the election systems of the Chief Executive and Legislative Council members. Although the political system can be regarded as more "open" after 1997, Hong Kong people (particularly the youngsters) are not satisfied for two reasons. First, the current political system gives heavier weight to the businessmen who have been blamed to create economic and social inequalities in Hong Kong. Second, as the Government of the SAR has not been working effectively after the handover, people generally want

to have more say in important decisions for Hong Kong. Obviously, dissatisfaction with the political system is a threat to political well-being (OECD 2011). One related factor that should be considered is the ideals of young people. In the good old days, the formula for youth development is to motivate young people to succeed in academic study (entrance to a Government-funded university and study in a professional programme), get a job with a handsome salary and establish a happy family. However, for the Generation Z (i.e., commonly refers to young people born in the late 1990s and early 2000s), they are more autonomous, technology-oriented and more concerned about social issues (Dolot 2018; Gaidhani et al. 2019). In other words, putting the material good life as the “carrot” does not really work for students of Generation Z because material possession may not be their primary concern.

**Pre-existing Fuel No. 4:** Economic strains (poverty, high housing price and high cost of living) Although Hong Kong enjoyed almost full employment as well as high GDP per capita in early 2019, wealth distribution has been a persistent problem: roughly one in four adolescents grow up in poor families; the Gini coefficient is disturbingly high (Oxfam 2018); there were around 1.4 million poor people with 612,900 poor households in 2018 (Government of the Hong Kong SAR 2019). Assuming 1% of the poor people were dissatisfied young people, it means around 14,000 young people were on the street protesting against the Government. Research has showed that poverty is a risk factor affecting the quality of family life and individual well-being, which would in turn undermine the healthy development of adolescents and cause problems such as the development of externalizing behavior. It also impairs the quality of life of the Hong Kong society. Historically speaking, housing has been a thorny problem in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, the problem has been much aggravated after the handover back to China.

According to some surveys, the housing price in Hong Kong and the cost of living were the highest in the world (Arcibal 2020). There are three consequences of this situation. First, young people would find it difficult to get married, hence creating much frustration in youngsters. For some of the married young couples or theology students or low privileged youth, they may be forced to stay in sub-divided flats that have security and hygiene problems. Second, parents are expected to help children (as reflected in the saying of “the success of young people depends on the hard work of the father”) which creates much intergenerational conflict in the family. Finally, the rocket high housing price creates a sense of hopelessness in young people because it would be a heavy burden even for young professionals to buy a decent flat. The high housing price obviously triggers much negative emotions in young people.

With the Extradition Bill, it is a good opportunity for them to air out their anger and hopelessness as well as a desire for “mutual destruction” (i.e., let us have nothing together). The high housing price is an obvious threat to physical well-being (shelter), psychological well-being (hopelessness), family well-being (conflict and tension within the family), social well-being (rich-poor divide), and political wellbeing (hatred for the Government for its ineffective housing policies).

**Pre-existing Fuel No. 5:** Lack of upward mobility Although there was almost full employment in 2018, youth employment has been an issue of concern for many years (Government of the Hong Kong SAR 2019). With the introduction of more self-financed sub-degree and degree programs, many graduates are not able to move up the social ladder because the real income for university graduates has been quite stagnant since the handover (New Century Forum and New Youth Forum 2015).

Again, lack of upward social mobility triggers negative emotions in young people which eventually promotes a sense of hopelessness in young people (Shek and Siu 2019b). This also explains why young people have psychological resistance to return to China because their lives have not improved much after the handover. It is also why some young people waved the British flag during demonstrations which are clearly a sign of remembering the “good old days” for university students under the British rule. Obviously, the lack of opportunity for Hong Kong young people to have upward mobility is a serious threat to individual well-being and societal quality of life. Nevertheless, young people are commonly not aware of the fact that the lack of social mobility also exists in many developed countries in the world and there was also much inequality under the British rule.

**Pre-Existing Fuel No. 6:** Morbid emphasis on academic excellence Under the influence of the Chinese culture, Hong Kong emphasizes strongly on academic excellence and achievement, with success commonly defined in terms of good grades in public examinations and earning a lot of money. Such social mentalities have three consequences. First, striving for academic excellence can be very stressful for young people which impairs their personal well-being. One consequence is that young people are prone to develop internalizing behavior such as depression and suicide. In fact, the appeal for “mutual destruction” can be regarded as a manifestation of mass internalizing behavior. Second, the exam-oriented system naturally creates “losers” in young people. As only 18% of high school graduates can get Government funded university places, the number of “losers” created every year is quite substantial. Third, it would be difficult for students to find authentic life meaning in study except “getting good grades”.

Most of the time, young people in Hong Kong have “foreclosure” identity according to the psychosocial

theory of Erik Erikson (i.e., commitment without crisis). Hence, when young people face the slogan of “Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of the time”, the social movement gives them a noble and romantic life meaning which can be easily incorporated in their identity. In short, the morbid emphasis on academic excellence undermines the academic and personal well-being of students which can be easily filled by some heroic and grand ideals such as revolutionize Hong Kong to make the tomorrow better.

**Pre-Existing Fuel No. 7:** Psychosocial stressors and mental health issues Young people in Hong Kong face many psychosocial stresses, including academic stress, low income, high property price, long working hours, and a small living environment. Shek and Siu (2019b) argued that the developmental context for Hong Kong adolescents is “unhappy”, including unhealthy values, de-emphasis of holistic youth development, rise in hopelessness but drop in life satisfaction, emphasis on academic excellence but de-emphasis on academic quality of life, poverty, parenting issues, and drop in family well-being. Obviously, stresses and risk factors in adolescent development can easily be translated into poor mental health and suicidal tendency amongst young people. There are research findings showing that adolescent hopelessness rises but life satisfaction drops in adolescent years (Shek and Liang 2018). At the same time, their academic stress increases but their perceived support from school decreases (Shek and Chai 2019). In other words, the well-being of adolescents in Hong Kong is at risk. In the special issue edited by Shek and Siu (2019b), the papers show that mental health is a growing concern in young people studied in local government schools in Hong Kong. There are also findings suggesting that mental health problems in university students are prevalent (Lo et al. 2018, 2019).

In other words, young people with poor well-being are emotionally charged time bombs waiting to be detonated. Finally, students with special educational needs may be a factor that should not be overlooked. When we examine the slogans of the protesters, it is not uncommon to see that there are many incorrectly written Chinese characters. There are two possible explanations – either the protesters are poorly educated or they are dyslexic who are commonly having difficulties in writing Chinese characters. It is noteworthy that students with SEN special education needs (e.g., those with ADHD, autistic features, or dyslexic) are stubborn in their views.

**Pre-existing Fuel No. 8:** Disorganization of Hong Kong families There are several disturbing developments of families in Hong Kong, including rising divorce and remarriage rates, rising cross-border marriages, worrying child abuse rates, growing number of parents who are not Hong Kong residents, growing cross-border workers, long working hours, and aging population. These problems negatively affect children and

young people and have prolonged consequences who experience family alienation and conflicts arising from unfavourable family circumstances. Obviously, the social event constitutes an excellent opportunity for them to feel the warmth amongst the “comrades” and have deep sharing and mutual concerns amongst the participants who may not have such warm experience before. In other words, low family quality of life is a strong precursor for active and romantic participation in the social movement. Nevertheless, there are also reports saying that some parents encourage their kids to actively participate in the movement, including engaging in violent behaviour.

**Pre-existing Fuel No. 9:** Lack of life skills education for adolescents Although young people face many psychosocial stresses and challenges, there is weak systematic life skills education for adolescents. In many countries, social-emotional learning, soft skills and psychosocial competence, including the promotion of self-understanding, social understanding, interpersonal competence, responsible decision making, and self-management skills are strongly promoted. Although critical thinking is emphasized in Liberal Studies under the new high school curriculum in Hong Kong, it is argued that students learn “criticism mentality” instead of “critical thinking”.

In a series of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, Shek et al. (2019) showed that while different stakeholders endorsed the importance of life skills education in the formal curriculum, they perceived that life skills education in the formal curriculum was insufficient and life skills development in adolescents was incomplete. Without such systematic and global education horizons, the personal well-being of young people in Hong Kong cannot be adequately protected (Shek and Siu 2019a).

The neglect of soft skills education for young people in Hong Kong means that they do not possess adequate social competence skills to negotiate with other people or resolve conflicts, which are much needed. As intense anger and hatred are involved in the social event, learning how to empathize (look at things from others’ perspective), manage one’s and others’ emotion (emotional quotient), forgive (write off emotional feelings and debts), and re-conciliate (re-build new relationships and move on) are important tasks for adolescents. These life and survival skills are very important because there are studies showing that Hong Kong adolescents showed narcissistic behavior (Leung 2013) and positive youth development attributes negatively predicted the use of foul language in adolescents (Shek and Lin 2017).

**Pre-Existing Fuel No. 10:** Unsystematic and uncoordinated civic and national education Although there is an area on moral, civic and national education in the formal curriculum, the policy and scope of the national education curriculum are unsystematic and uncoordinated. In a study comparing related moral, character

and citizenship education in Chinese societies (Hong Kong, mainland China, and Taiwan) and non-Chinese societies (Singapore, UK, and USA), Shek and Leung (2018) identified several problems in this area, including absence of comprehensive planning and policy development, blurred concepts and lack of focus on holistic student development, lack of emphasis of moral and character education, problem of “penetrative” approach, absence of formal curriculum materials, problematic operational strategies, and lack of evaluation.

Besides, while national education is undertaken by the Education Bureau (formal school curriculum), the Home Affairs Bureau (Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education), and the Labor and Welfare Bureau (Youth Section in the Social Welfare Department), there is little coordinated effort amongst the different bureaus. The lack of related education suggests that the personal well-being of young people in terms of moral competence cannot develop in a healthy manner. Obviously, there are two difficulties in implementing moral education in Hong Kong. The first one is “what” should be covered.

If the coverage covers Chinese history in the past century, students can learn more about what happened in China, particularly the exploitation under Western Imperialism. However, as history is multifaceted, how to interpret historical facts is a thorny issue. The second issue is “how” to assess the outcomes. While an increase in knowledge is easy to demonstrate, positive change in attitude and behavior may not be easy to assess objectively. In view of the sensitive nature of Chinese History, some schools simply cut the subject under the new education reform. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising to note that many young people are not familiar with modern Chinese history and geography of China. Most economists view youth and adult’ mental health or problem states as unnecessary baggage except insofar as they affect choices. Thus, the traits, abilities, and narratives used by Roberts interest to most economists only if they affect choices through preferences, constraints, and effects on information processing capabilities. Motives and values are captured in part by economic preference parameters. However, in psychological perspective, “happiness,” and “aggregate utility,” as well as other subjective mental states that do not affect behaviour (choices) were considered uninteresting to most economists.

**New Fuel (No. 1):** Slow and ineffective responses of the Government The responses of the Government to the protests since June 2019 have been regarded to be slow and ineffective. Besides condemning violence and vandalism, the Government has relied primarily on the police to deal with the protests. The attempt to have dialogues with the public also does not appear to be very successful. Most important of all, although



the Bill has triggered such a huge social event, no senior Government official steps down. This is very interesting because in similar situations in other countries, some senior Government officials would have stepped down to take political responsibility. Again, this reflects the threat of political well-being in governance which intensifies public worry, anger, and frustration. Of course, in understanding the responses of the Government, two points must be noted. First, in view of the unprecedented nature and the extent of the protests, it is not easy to handle. As pointed out by the Prime Minister of Singapore (Lee Hsien Loong), Singapore would be “finished” if similar protests happened in Singapore (Sim 2019). Second, dissatisfaction with the Government has been a common theme in protests which intensifies the protests. For example, the Commission of Inquiry (1967) concluded that “a recent tendency – not only in Hong Kong – to ascribe all the failings of the community to errors by the administration and to make greater demands upon it tends not only to enhance discontent but to exaggerate their extent” (p.129).

**New Fuel (No. 2): Alleged police violence and inaction** There are numerous and serious allegations that the police used excessive force, such as in the protests held on June 12, July 14 and August 31, 2019 (Purbrick 2019). On the other hand, the police was criticized as doing nothing when people in Yuen Long were attacked by those who did not support the protesters on July 21, 2019. Obviously, such allegations are great threats to the personal well-being of the protesters and the social well-being of Hong Kong. On the one hand, some videos in the news reports and the Internet strongly suggest that excessive force might have been used by the police. While some of the related complaints are still under the investigation of the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC), the mechanism does not earn the trust of Hong Kong people for two reasons.

First, some IPCC members were appointed by the Government, which means that their independence is doubtful. Second, many protesters experiencing excessive force by the police do not complain because they have the fear that they will be prosecuted for involvement in riots. On the other hand, it should be noted that “innocence before proven guilty” is the cornerstone of the Common Law and the establishment of police violence and brutality requires evidence beyond reasonable doubt. Besides, objectivity of some videos uploaded to the Internet is not clear. In addition, it would not be objective if we ignore the fact that public perceptions of the police had been very good before the social event and the Hong Kong Police ranked very high in terms of professional service in international surveys. For example, in the Human Freedom Index (Vásquez and Porčnik 2019), Hong Kong police ranked sixth (6th) under the indicator of “reliability of police”. In the Legatum Prosperity Index (2019), Hong Kong police ranked fourth (4th) out of 167 countries

and regions under the indicator of “safety and security”. Similarly, Hong Kong police ranked fourth (4th) under “order and security” in the World Justice Project (2019).

Heat (Extradition Bill) There are several arrangements that create anxiety and threats for Hong Kong people. First, it extends the scope of extradition to cover Mainland China. With the proposed changes, Hong Kong people who have committed certain crimes in China could be transferred to Mainland China. Second, there were several rounds of revisions in the process, thus giving people a sense that the whole package has not been well-conceived, and the changes were made to address the concerns of the businesspeople only. Third, the proposed safeguards are considered not adequate by the public. Finally, the consultation period was too short. Some people queried that the consultation was too short for an issue which had not been resolved within 22 years after the handover.

At the same time, the buy-in work was not enough, and consultation was not extensive. In particular, no specific strategies were used to address the concerns of young people, particularly via social media. Besides, the publicity work of the Government was neither creative nor innovative. Finally, the Government’s non-sensitivity about the public reaction to the Bill greatly intensified the fear. Since the proposal was published, there had been numerous reservations voiced by different sectors of the society, including businessmen, lawyers, and barristers. However, the Government did not feel the pulse of the community. Also, despite the fact that many people joined the protest held on June 9, the Government still decided to move to the second reading debate on June 12, 2019.

Such insensitivity to public reaction eventually triggered the fire. The Four Strong Winds For the political fire on the Extradition Bill to take place, besides fuels (quality and life and well-being issues) and heat (worries that the Bill had created and the public sentiment it had aroused), oxygen is a very important concern. In the social movement, several sources of wind have provided much “oxygen” for the social event.

**Wind No. 1: Misinformation and Disinformation** While misinformation refers to inaccurate information, disinformation refers to the deliberate dissemination of false information. In the social movement, there are numerous instances of misinformation. For example, for the number of protesters, it was claimed that there were 1 million and 2 million people joining the demonstrations in June 2019. However, while it cannot be denied that many Hong Kong people joined the protests, the figures quoted by the organizer were doubted by CNN (Mezzofiore 2019). Concerning the occupation of the Legislative Council Building on July 1, 2019, the police issued a warning at around 10:20 pm condemning the action of the protesters Protests in Hong Kong (2019–2020): a Perspective Based on Quality... and giving the final warning for them to disperse. H

San Wong, (2024). Hong Kong Transform itself from a 'Shoppers' and Capitalists' Paradise' into a 'City of Protests' at the Frontline of a Global Anti-China Backlash: Changes in Psychology, Economics, Well-Being and Family Perspective. *MAR Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychology (2024) 7:6*

However, the watch of the Chief Superintendent had been altered to 5 pm (Wong 2019a) in the video which suggests that the police had set a trap for the protesters. Another example is the news reported by Da Kung Pao on the assault on a Legislative Councilor (Ho Kwan Yiu). While the news was released at noon on November 6, 2019, the time of release was amended to be 19:54 on November 5, 2019 (Global Times 2019). Based on the amended news, it was claimed that the assault was self-directed by Ho.

**Wind No. 2: Anonymity** In the initial stage of the protests, many protesters wore surgical masks. In the late stage of the protests, some protesters wore gas masks and covered their whole face. While it is understandable that gas masks protect the protesters from tear gas, keeping one's identity anonymous actually intensified the scale of violence and vandalism because the fear of being identified would be minimized. Besides, communication in social media on protests is also anonymous, hence facilitating the planning and implementation of the protests and vandalism. As it is well-documented in social psychology that people with anonymous identity would be more likely to engage in violent behavior (Zimbardo 1969), anonymity has supplied much "oxygen" to the intensity and duration of the social event.

**Wind No 3: Public Support for the Protesters** Many people have shown support for the protesters (particularly the students) for several reasons. First, it is commonly believed that the public should give more allowance to students who are just "kids". Second, some adults have the fear that the Bill would break the "firewall" between Hong Kong and China. Third, some people believe that the students are doing what they have not done, such as a fight for democracy for Hong Kong. Fourth, many people are angry at the slow and nonresponsive responses of the Government. Fifth, many people support the prevailing but toxic beliefs that "disobey the law to get justice is acceptable" and "violence is sometimes necessary under certain circumstances". Finally, many people believe that violence of the protesters is justified because police have used excessive force and there is police brutality. There is also public support in terms of finance. For example, around HK\$70 million (US\$9 million) related to the Sparkle Alliance was frozen by the police (Mok et al. 2019). The public's support for the protesters (including many professional associations) and not "cutting the mattress" with the violent protesters is definitely a strong reinforcement for the protesters.

**Wind No. 4: Overseas Support** In the social event, many foreign political leaders have shown support for the protesters. Unfortunately, very few of them touch upon the issues of violence and vandalism. Such supportive gestures have created the false impression that the movement (including violence and vandalism) is reasonable, sacred and just. Material support from Taiwan in the form of gas masks was also reported (Sui 2019).

In conclusion, pre-existing and new quality of life and well-being threats and issues have shaped the development of the social event in the past one year in Hong Kong. Without understanding quality of life issues in different ecological systems (such as fear about losing freedom, lack of political well-being, growing up in a poor environment, always being a loser, living without hope, inability to forgive and rebuild), it would not be possible to find workable and meaningful solutions. Once again, the case of Hong Kong demonstrates that economic development alone is not enough to promote human well-being in a society. In the report of the Commission of Inquiry (1967) reviewing the 1966 riots, it was concluded that “we do not believe that political, economic and social frustrations were the direct cause of the 1966 riots but within the economic and social fields there are factors, to which we have drawn attention and that need to be watched, lest they provide inflammable material which would erupt into disturbance should opportunity arise in the future” (p.148).

After some 53 years, it is interesting to note that some of the deep-seated quality of life and well-being issues, such as inadequate housing, over-crowding, and limited chances in life come into the scene again. The only major difference is that many educated people are involved in the social event in 2019–2020, in contrast to the predominance of poorly educated young people in the 1966 riots. Therefore, it is concerned with the psychological basis of the economic behaviour of individuals and the impact of the economic processes on individual’s psychology. The economists define entrepreneurship from the industrial and market constructs while the psychotherapist/ psychologists define entrepreneurship from an individual and behavioural constructs. From what we discussed, Beijing deploys a bundle of power mechanisms – economic statecraft, patron-clientelism, and symbolic domination – around the world, including Hong Kong.

This Chinese power project triggers a variety of countermovement from Asia to Africa, ranging from acquiescence and adaptation to appropriation and resistance. In Hong Kong, it is sad to say that now it transforms from a shoppers and capitalists paradise into a city of protests. More than an ideological conflict between a liberal capitalist democratizing city and its Communist authoritarian sovereign, but the Hong Kong story, Hong Kong people, the spirit of Hong Kongese’ creative, hard-working, innovative, and stunning will keep as memory and lessons as a global force and influence.

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