



## The buildup to the National Security Law in Hong Kong: From Structural Contradictions to Direct Violence

Ali Hamza \*

Humayun Javed †

**Abstract:** *The political scene of Hong Kong both before and after the transition from British to Chinese authority was one of negative calm – the absence of violence. Sino-British Joint Declaration (1984), for instance, & a mini-constitution (i.e., Basic Law) picturing the city's future under the People's Republic of China were to guarantee the public's autonomy in politics and social rights. Nevertheless, Hong Kong's political context evolved from poor peace (with the Joint Declaration providing a foundation for positive peace) to indirect and ultimately direct violence. The writings that envisioned "a substantial amount of autonomy" and "democratization" were riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions. The rise of the National Security Act continued this aggressive trajectory, in which underlying conflicts created cycles of continual violence that were originally entrenched in structure but became explicitly evident at a level of mindset and subsequently conduct after 2014.*

**Key Words:** Hong Kong, Structural Contradictions, Direct Violence, Indirect Violence, Negative Peace, and Positive Peace

### Introduction

Following the British turnover of the territory of Hong Kong to the Chinese in 1997, the papers anticipating the eventual return of the municipality (Sino-British Joint Declaration, 1984 and Basic Law, 1990) aimed for a "high degree of autonomy" and "gradual democratization" of the city. This meant that the parties to the documents that drew a future roadmap for Hong Kong envisaged a transformation from a hard peace to a positive peace, eliminating all kinds of violence embedded in the political structure and government institutions. However, instead of moving from an environment of negative peace (mere absence of violence) to positive peace (institutionalized integration with democratic participation), Hong Kong experienced a backsliding on the credentials of democracy and human rights. (Brain, [n.d.](#)) Episodes of violence began to be seen as direct instances of violence in behavior that were perpetrated frequently by the authorities after 2014.

Deep-rooted contradictions evident in the documents at the latent level undermined the prospects of thwarting violent attitudes and behaviors at the manifest level. The framework to realize positive peace through greater autonomy and democratization could not eliminate indirect violence due to the deeper incompatibility of goals underlying in terms of the British handover. The deep-seated contradictions in the documents of handover appeared clearly when Hong Kong experienced cycles of direct violence after 2014. Frequent episodes of direct violent behavior and discriminatory attitudes reached their peak in the year 2020, when Beijing enacted the National Security Act. How these contradictions generated the environment for direct violence is the main theme of this study.

There is a need to investigate how the buildup of violence and actual violence at the manifest level followed the deep inherent contradictions that generated violent attitudes and behavior. The study aims to understand how the political environment in Hong Kong shifted from negative peace (with a

\* BS, Political Science, Quaid-I-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan.

† BS, International Relations, National Defense University Islamabad, Pakistan.

framework for positive peace provided by the Joint Declaration) to indirect and then direct violence. Moreover, National Security Law and the buildup to it needs to be comprehended while discussing the latent and manifest factors involved.

This research develops our understanding of how contemporary domestic politics in Hong Kong is shaped by deep-rooted contradictions that emerged in the last decades. The study informs about the rapid, violent episodes that have occurred in Hong Kong after 2014. Moreover, it helps us to comprehend how different dimensions of peace and In Hong Kong's sociopolitical scene, violence asserted itself. Recognizing these developments is critical to the corporate belonging, academia, and politicians involved in the city's economic and political realms. The study is equally significant for students of China's political system and policymaking. The study is important for institutions and states that are intended to comprehend the future of democracy around the world.

The main research questions this paper aims to answer are:

"How is the violent buildup to the National Security Law reflected in the behavior of China at the manifest level when analyzed via conflict triangle?"

The hypothesis this study tests is:

"The buildup to the National Security Law followed the shift from unaddressed latent contradictions and attitudes towards direct and manifest violent behavior as guided by the conflict triangle."

The paper uses Johan Galtung's conception of a comprehensive approach (discussed in the third section as well) toward peace to grasp the implications of violence in Hong Kong City. To appreciate elements of violence, positive as well as negative peace frameworks are applied, as witnessed over the last decades in Hong Kong. The study incorporates Johan Galtung's ABC model (Attitudes, Behaviors, and Contradictions) to trace the instances of direct violence and attitudes at the manifest level driven by deep-rooted contradictions. It is a descriptive study that uses a historical perspective and an exploratory approach. It is a qualitative study involving a case study research design to collect data. Secondary data is used in the study, which is analyzed via content analysis techniques.

The initial portion discusses Hong Kong's history and its tumultuous relationship with mainland China. It also aims to debate the significance of various publications imagining Hong Kong's future in shaping the city's political and violent destiny. The second

section comprehensively analyzes the buildup to the National Security Law coincided with growing levels of violence due to the underlying contradictions present at the latent level. The third section outlines the broader theoretical ground in light of which episodes of violence in Hong Kong are comprehended. The last section, followed by the conclusion, establishes the relation between deep-rooted structural contradictions in the roadmap for Hong Kong and the escalating levels of violence experienced in the last decade.

## Hong Kong: A Troubled Past

Before 1997, Hong Kong remained a British colony due to several "unequal treaties, it was forced on the country. Following the outbreak of the First Opium War, the Agreement of Nanking forced China's governing Qing Dynasty to relinquish the territory of Hong Kong to the British in 1842 (Doug, 2019). Thus started the "century of humiliation" for China; foreign interventions, imperialist wars, and colonial subjugation by outside powers started with Hong Kong being The British Empire founded as a colony. Following the 2nd Opium War, the Peninsula relinquished to the British became a significant consequence of the Convention of Peking in 1860. (Hughes, 2019) Then, the second Convention of Peking in 1898 enabled the British to further extend the British territory in Hong Kong for another 99 years. The rent-free leasing, according to the convention, included "New Territories" and encompassing desert islands. (Erin & Taryn 2021) The "unequal treaties" ruptured China's territorial integrity, fueling deep resentment against a period of Western imperialism – termed a "hundred years of national humiliation" in China's historiography.

The transition of the territory of Hong Kong under British colonial control to Chinese control occurred in 1997, bringing an end to an era and a half of British governance. Under the "one nation, two systems" concept, the Communist Party of China (PRC) included Hong Kong, China as its territory. ("One Country, Two Systems," 1984). The foundational framework of "one country, two systems" established the basis for Beijing's control of Hong Kong; it extended limited autonomy to the colonized regions in exchange for their acceptance of "one China".(Derek, 2020) The negotiations in 1984 between the UK & China concerning the future of Hong Kong were conducted under the guidance of this particular approach. The negotiations – which culminated in 1984 as a Sino-British Joint Announcement – adopted the formula for getting Beijing's guarantee for allowing Hong Kong a semi-autonomous status with no change

in Hong Kong's "capitalist economic system" & "partially democratic political system".(Louisa, 2019)

Consequently, The Sino-British Joint Agreement of 1984 stated that the British would hand up the territory to the Chinese in 1997. The plan envisioned Hong Kong residents having a "high level of autonomy." for the next fifty years": till 2047. The city's rights, freedoms, and uniqueness of political and economic systems existed under British colonial rule. That "one country, two systems" representation promised to guard them for Hong Kongers. For Chinese Premier Deng Xiaoping, the principle was never intended to allow Hong Kong to exist independently of China's exclusive control indefinitely. According to Andrew J. Nathan, an instructor of dogmatic philosophy at the University of Columbia, Deng's method provided adequate time for the Hong Kong inhabitants to adjust to the Chinese political system."(Nathan, 2023) However, the 1984 Sino-British Allied Testimony did not promise any change. In consideration of the aforementioned document, the Chinese government officially designated Hong Kong as a special governmental province, granting it significant intensity of sovereignty. It stipulated:

Rights and freedoms, including those of the person, of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of travel, of movement, of correspondence, of strike, of choice of occupation, of academic research, and religious belief, will be ensured by law in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Private property, ownership of enterprises, legitimate right of inheritance, and foreign investment will be protected by law. (Louisa Brooke-Holland, 2019)

The joint declaration called on China to create a local structure, the Fundamental rule of the Hong Kong Particular Administered Zone after the handover. (Gary, 2019) Furthermore, it explicitly stated that The city's top official would be nominated by the main administration following election contests or discussions in Hong Kong. Between contracting the United States in 1984 and the turnover to the U.K. in the year 1997, two important developments took place: the Tiananmen massacre in 1989 and the passing of Basic Law in 1990. When protests swept across the PRC in 1989, Hong Kong's public community got to the streets. They carried a march in unison, uniting behind the iconic slogan "Today's Tiananmen, Tomorrow's Hong Kong," in a display of solidarity with their counterparts in the mainland. (Hui, 2019) However, after the bloody repression at Tiananmen Square, people in Hong Kong feared a similar crackdown in case of dissent and mobilization for rights, freedoms, and full democratization.

In such a tense environment, Hong Kong's post-handover mini-constitution – The major legislative instrument intended to protect the city's interests. "capitalist system" & "a high degree of autonomy" (managerial, judicial & legal powers) up until 2047. Article two of the mini-constitution states: "The National People's Congress authorizes the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to exercise a high degree of autonomy and enjoy executive, legislative and independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication, by the provisions of this Law." However, fundamental law did not specify what it means to be a citizen, "high degree of autonomy".(THE BASIC LAW OF THE HONG KONG SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, n.d.) The Necessary Ruling happened in 1997 after the return of Hong Kong. It retracted crucial commitments that were explicitly outlined in the Joint Declaration; several discrepancies between the two documents existed as the mini-constitution undermined the prospects of full democratization. The law granted powers to the 900-member Election Committee (which later expanded to 1200 and then 1500 members in 2021) to name the chief executive, who would govern the city. (Hong Kong: The fundamental legislation of Hong Kong People's Republic of China Special Administrative Region, 1997) Corresponding to Article 15, an appointment for chief executive is made by The Government of China, via a commission that makes recommendations. The Ballot Vote Commission comprised delegates from four different groups representing important areas of Hong Kong society: the business community; professional sector; social services, labor & holy groups; and Chinese and Hong Kong officials. The Basic Law provided the chief executive with the authority to introduce legislation or push bills through the main legislative body, the Legislative Council (LegCo). (Basic Law, n.d.) The chairman of the board is required by law to wield extensive powers of appointment, along with funding and licensing authorities that allow the chief executive to have a strong influence over nongovernmental sectors. Moreover, the law granted Beijing the authority to render the ultimate interpretation of the Basic Law.

Furthermore, Beijing was empowered by the law to decide when could Public of Hong Kong directly designate the city's governance with an electoral system based on universal suffrage. The Legislative Council initially consisted of two groups of constituencies – geographical constituencies and functional constituencies – with a later introduction of Election Committee constituencies in 2021. The latter two (functional and Election Committee constituencies) elect mostly politicians favorable to the

regime. The percentage of directly elected representatives has dropped recently as well. As instructed in Article 68 of the Essential Act, "the ultimate aim is the selection of the chief executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee by democratic procedures." ("Hong Kong: How Is It Run, and What Is the Basic Law?" 2019) Ambiguity in law is that the timing and nature of electoral reforms towards a full-fledged democracy with universal suffrage are unclear. The mini-constitution stipulates methodical and systematic advancement towards the objective of completing universal proposition suffrage in the direct appointment of the Chief. The democratic aspirations are delayed as Michael Martin, an Asian affairs specialist, maintains that when Beijing envisages universal suffrage, it uses the word "*keyi*," which translates into "can", "may", "possible", or "able to". (Eleanor, 2014) This, according to Martin, makes it difficult to discern the exact period to expect or foresee a democratic transition intended in the joint declaration.

After 1997, against the commitment to a "high degree" of self-rule, Beijing established a Liaison Office under the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HKMAO). The organization garnered backing for pro-Beijing candidates in diverse electoral contests, coordinated their activities, and provided material support for election campaigns. (Sony, 2008). Furthermore, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) attempted to introduce a Public Protection Law in 2003 – anti-subversion legislation that sparked controversy and heated debate. People feared that civil liberties and freedoms would be severely affected by legislation after enforcement of Article 23 of the Rudimentary Commandment which requires the implementation of legislation aimed at proscribing acts of "treason, secession, sedition, and subversion against the Central People's Government.". It asserts:

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies. (The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, n.d.)

The heated public debate after the tabling of the new legislation led to massive protests in July 2003; an estimated 500,00 people protested against the bill, forcing the government to withdraw the legislation. (Jeffie, 2021) Meanwhile, the PRC kept on denying the

democratic aspirations of the Hong Kongers for universal suffrage and full democratization. In 2007, Beijing, while postponing any changes for the next ten years, declared that it would enable the citizens of Hong Kong to participate in the direct election of their leader in 2017. (Suzanne, 2022) As the pro-democracy campaigners were disappointed by the protracted timescale, pressure on the Hong Kong authorities for political reforms increased. However, to drag its feet on reforms indefinitely, China repeated its 2007 decision to not allow a direct vote for Hong Kong's leader in 2014 as well. In August 2014, the Standing Committee of People's National Congress (China's legislature) in Beijing decreed that only candidates who would be approved by the PRC-dominated nominating committee would be allowed to run for Chief Executive in 2017. (South, 2014) In response, people in Hong Kong organized mass protests and sit-ins under the Occupy Central Movement. The people, while opposing the PRC's move for vetted elections, demanded genuine universal suffrage. (Doug, 2020) The Occupy Central (dubbed by many as the "Umbrella Movement") forced the authorities to take back the decision to limit voters' choices in 2017.

After two years, in 2016, the high court disqualified six pro-independence candidates and legislators before and after the elections. ("Hong Kong Pro-Independence Lawmakers Disqualified from Office," 2016) Hundreds of protestors rallied against the move. Mass protests returned in 2019 when the government proposed amendments to the extradition law, seeking to enable the transfer of criminal suspects to mainland China for trial. (Liu, 2022) Sparking great unrest for months, the proposal plunged the city into the largest protests witnessed since 1997. As the largely peaceful demonstrations continued after the suspension of the bill, violent clashes between the protestors and police also erupted. The government eventually withdrew the proposal (one of the five demands of protestors) to amend the bill. (Larry, 2020)

## **The buildup to the National Security Law**

Following a year of violent unrest in Hong Kong, China imposed a National Security Law in Hong Kong in 2020. The law outlawed acts of "secession, the secession of state power, foreign collusion and terrorism". ("NATIONAL SECURITY HONG KONG," 2021) Beijing insisted that the law was introduced to foster stability within the city, while critics and human rights activists deemed the law to be "draconian with devastating consequences for human rights." During a press conference in May 2020, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, while discussing the National Security Law,

said, "The decision adopted at the NPC Session to safeguard national security is designed for the steady implementation of 'One Country, Two Systems' and Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability." (Jazeera, [2020](#)) Human Rights Watch, on the other hand, declared the National Security Law as "an integral part of Beijing's larger effort to reshape Hong Kong's institutions and society, transforming a mostly free city into one dominated by Chinese Communist Party oppression." (*Dismantling a Free Society*, [2021](#)) The law was drafted behind closed doors in Beijing without public consultation or serious input from Hong Kong authorities. Introduced by the Communist Party Standing Committee, the law was introduced sixty minutes before the commemoration of the British handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997. According to a veteran activist and former legislator Lee Cheuk-yan: "Overnight, Hong Kong has gone from the rule of law to the rule of fear." (Laignee, [2020](#))

The law criminalizes dissent and introduces punishments starting from three years of imprisonment to even lifetime prison for "grave" offenses. It considers the sabotaging of transport as a "terrorist activity" and characterizes the destruction of government buildings as an "act of subversion" – both "grave" offenses punishable by life imprisonment. ("Hong Kong Security Law: What Is It and Is It Worrying?," 2020) The crimes mentioned in the National Security Law are vaguely defined; the authority for legal interpretation rests with the central PRC government. (Javier, [2020](#)) The law (with 66 articles and more than 7,000 words) has a broad language and introduces significant changes in Hong Kong's legal system. With the introduction of a national security office and a security committee that includes Beijing's top representative and Hong Kong's chief executive, the law – for the first time – allows Chinese security officials to operate in the city. (Austin, [2021](#)) It allows Beijing to exercise greater influence in Hong Kong's legal matters while maintaining immunity from the examination of local courts. The central government in China has been granted the authority by the law to intervene directly in 'national security' cases. Beijing can now directly influence the selection of judges in cases of 'national security'. (Kirby, [2021](#))

After the passing of the law, the authorities have restricted pro-democracy candidates from participating in the elections for the Legislative Council (subsequently postponed in 2020). (Lindsay, [2022](#)) In addition, the law has enabled authorities to curb and criminalize dissent with several arrests of democracy activists and lawmakers. Thomas Kellogg, a legal expert from Georgetown University delineates three distinct ways in which the law has been employed: "It

has been used to limit certain forms of political speech; to limit foreign contacts, and in particular to break ties between Hong Kong activists and the international community; and to target opposition politicians and activists, many of whom are longtime pillars of Hong Kong's political scene." (Doug, [2021](#)) Dissenting voices have been prosecuted as many have fled the city. (Pak & Marius, [2020](#)) This silencing of critics is coupled with arrests of professors and media personnel. For instance, Jimmy Lai, owner of the pro-democracy newspaper *Apple Daily*, was sentenced to 14 months of prison for organizing and participating in 2020 an unsanctioned vigil to commemorate the victims of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. (Lindberg & Tam, [2021](#)) Already, the media tycoon was serving a 20-month prison sentence for his role in the 2019 protests. Moreover, Lai is also facing a charge of "seditious publications" under the stringent National Security Law. ("Hong Kong: Jimmy Lai Faces Fresh Sedition Charge," n.d.)

## Peace and Violence: A Comprehensive Theoretical Approach

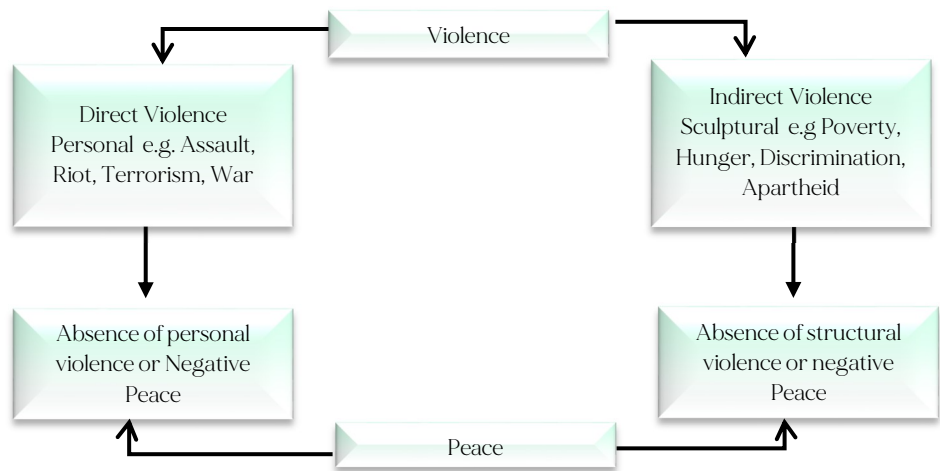
Scholars working in the field of peace research are familiar with an expanded conception of peace involving a distinction between 'positive' and 'negative' peace. Johan Galtung, an eminent peace researcher and a founding figure in the field, argued back in 1964 that negative peace refers to the "absence of violence, absence of war," and it is not the only way to look at peace and violence. ("An Editorial," [1964](#)) As per Galtung's perspective, positive peace is defined as "the integration of human society" with institutions, attitudes, and structures that sustain peaceful societies and eliminate all kinds of violence. To explain this, a health analogy is used; health can be viewed as a mere absence of disease, or it can mean something more positive – developing immunity to resist diseases. (Galtung, [1985](#)) Similarly, peace can be comprehended as a negative concept defined by the absence of war, violence, torture, or other direct forms of violence. It can also incorporate a broader and more expanded conception of a positive meaning with the restoration of relationships, constructive resolution of conflicts, and more sustainable conditions to avoid conflict.

Such distinction primarily originated due to the expanded conception of violence, which was again put forward by Johan Galtung, who expanded the causes of conflict and its manifestation in more than one form. Galtung found the negative conception of peace to be insufficient since it does not take into account the deep-rooted causes of conflict as well as less obvious or indirect forms of violence. Focusing on a more

expanded view of violence, Galtung distinguished between two forms of violence: direct violence (war and physical acts of violence like torture and rape perpetrated directly with explicit and open manifestations) and indirect violence (structural violence with less obvious forms but embedded in systems and institutions that forge inequality and

oppression).(Galtung, [1990](#)) Negative peace, therefore, is the absence of direct violence. Whereas positive peace entails the elimination of direct as well as indirect and structural forms of violence. To establish positive peace, we not only need to stop explicit violence, but we need to reform institutions, address inequalities, and eliminate the deep-rooted structural causes of conflict.

Figure 1  
*Dimensions of Peace and Violence*



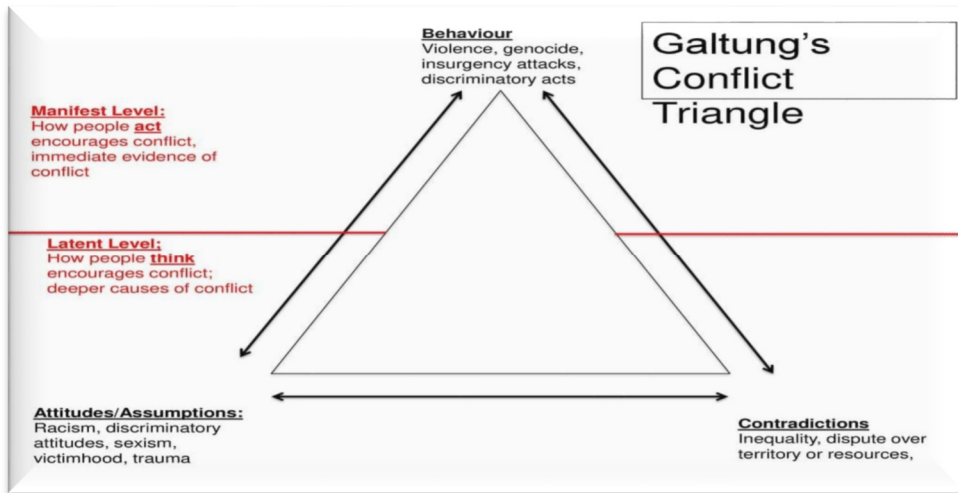
Galtung's work, therefore, created a shift of central concern in peace research from eliminating direct forms of violence (negative peace) to getting rid of indirect forms of violence as well – viewed from the perspective of positive peace as well. (Weber, [1999](#)) Galtung's research on direct and indirect forms of violence and peace paved the way for the peace researcher to formulate a conflict triangle discussing three dimensions of conflict. Galtung's conflict triangle established three different types and dimensions of violence exhibited in a conflict. According to his ABC conflict model, violence is manifested in three different

forms: Attitudes (A), Behaviors (B), and Contradictions (C).(Galtung, [2009](#)) The conflict includes actual or perceived contradictions defined as the "incompatibility of goals" between the competing parties in a conflict. According to Galtung's view of conflict, contradictions are the deep causes of conflict present at the latent or structural level. When they are not addressed properly, they turn into violent attitudes that make way for the manifestation of violent behaviors at the manifest, explicit, or direct level.(Charles & Johan [2007](#))

Figure 2



*Galtung's Conflict Triangle; Source: Chapman Peace Studies*



Attitudes are perceptions of parties in a conflict about themselves and others that can be strongly negative when conflict escalates. They can include humiliating stereotypes, cognitive biases, discriminatory assumptions, coercive labels, and racist speeches. Both these dimensions (contradiction and attitudes) are present at the latent level and are not expressed explicitly or directly. They account for indirect or structural forms of violence. However, when they are not addressed at the system or structural level, they turn into violent behavior that is explicitly observed at the manifest level. This is when a conflict takes a direct form where direct violence is perpetrated in the form of physical attacks, torture, terrorism, or coercion. The sole presence of unaddressed contradictions and discriminatory attitudes means negative peace due to mere structural or indirect violence. When the conflict demonstrates violent behavior, it means that violence is manifested at the direct level with the absence of even negative peace. Hence, for Galtung,  $\text{Conflict} = \text{Contradictions} + \text{Attitudes} + \text{Behavior}$ .

### From Structural Contradictions to Direct Violence

Hong Kong has followed this trajectory from negative peace with structural violence to direct violent attitudes and behaviors. The manifestation of direct violence after 2014 at the manifest level occurred due to the deep inherent contradictions at the latent level. These contradictions were present in the initial documents that ensured the transfer of the city to the central Chinese government. The contradictions and discrepancies could not turn an environment of negative peace into one with positive peace; instead,

the structural violence remained embedded in the institutions for the next 20 years and turned into a wave of direct violence witnessed after 2014.

As discussed above, the "one country, two systems" The Sino-British Joint Agreement of 1984 envisioned a formula that would keep the territory of Hong Kong remains a special administrative zone under the direct jurisdiction of the Central People's Administration of the People's Republic of China, granting the area a "high degree of autonomy." (Alix Culbertson, 2020) Though the concept of a "high degree of autonomy" was reiterated in the Basic Law 1990 ("mini-constitution"), it was never clearly defined – and is debated even today. Secondly, another contradiction lies in the incompatibility of goals present in the constitutions of the federal government and the municipality. According to the fifth article of the Fundamental legislation, "the socialist system and policies shall not be practiced in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years." According to Article 6 of the Republic of China Constitution, "The basis of the socialist economic system of the People's Republic of China is socialist public ownership of the means of production, namely, ownership by the whole people and collective ownership by the working people." (The Constitution of the Chinese Republic, n.d.)

However ultimate objective, stipulated in the Fundamental Principle, involves the electing CEO through universal suffrage—a demand that the people of Hong Kong have advocated for over an extended period. This election process is intended to adhere to

democratic principles and procedures. However, another discrepancy is present in the nature and timing of electoral reform, which is unclear. The mini-constitution has empowered Beijing to make the final interpretation of the law as well. It has granted powers to the central government to veto any law passed by the Legislative Council. Beijing has kept on delaying these reforms with the prospects for a democratic transition shrinking day by day. Moreover, the Fundamental principle added that the Government of Hong Kong can be administered directly by a Chief Executive appointed through a Committee that is supposed to elect & the central Government should make the appointments. Beijing has always maintained great influence in the Election Committee through its friends and loyalists. As mentioned before, the overwhelming powers of the CEO to push legislation through the Statutory Council have enabled Beijing to directly interfere in legislative matters as well.

Another evidence of the contradiction prevalent between the notion of a "high degree of autonomy" and the central government's involvement in China's Relations Office in Hong Kong, which is part of the official Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office. Established in 1997, the office – was dubbed by many as a 'second administration'. The Liaison Office has mobilized support for pro-democracy candidates against the opposition, undermining the promise of the "high degree of self-rule".(Russell, 2019) In addition, the contradictions at the latent level have been aggravated by China's policies in the city. In 2007, Beijing postponed democratic transformation for ten years. Such a move was seen in contradiction with the earlier commitments made under the Basic Law. The

incompatibility of goals again surfaced in 2014 when Beijing announced that it would vet the candidates running to appoint CE. PRC's Standing Committee announced that any candidate for the Chief Executive would have to get backed by the Election Committee stacked with pro-Beijing loyalists. The central government aimed to select the Chief Executive through a direct appointment, although this plan was impeded by the 79-day protest commonly referred to as the "Occupy Central" movement.

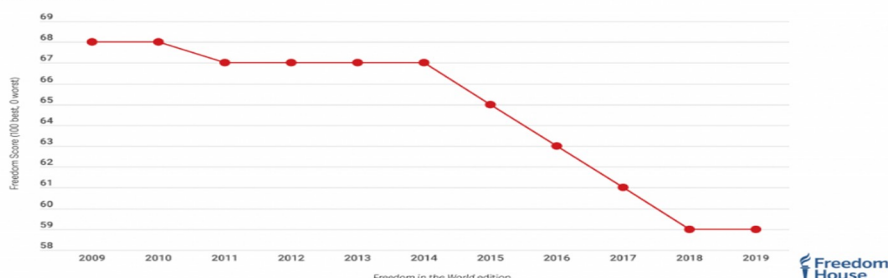
These contradictions hindered the democratic transition from an environment of negative peace toward positive peace. Furthermore, structural impediments generated instances of indirect violence, which culminated in more frequent episodes of direct violence after 2014. Dee-rooted contradictions pervasive in the initial documents and then evident in the central government's behavior at the latent level produced violent behaviors and attitudes after 2014. Protests after 2014 reached record levels in the next six years. Episodes of direct violence at the manifest level increased after 2014 because contradictions and incompatibilities of goals did not get addressed. Therefore, instead of moving from a period of negative peace in 1997 with limited democratic freedoms towards positive peace, Hong Kong experienced a backsliding on the credentials of peace and democracy; Over the past decade, Hong Kong's democratization and rights for humans have regressed, according to Freedom House, a human rights organization.(Annie , et al., n.d.) Negative peace further deteriorated into indirect and then direct violence after 2014 when inherent contradictions did not get addressed at the latent level.

**Figure 3**

*Hong Kong Democratic Decline; Source: Freedom House*

### Hong Kong's Democratic Decline

In the last decade, Hong Kong's score in *Freedom in the World*, Freedom House's annual study of global political rights and civil liberties, declined from 68 to 59 (100 best, 0 worst), reflecting persistent attacks on free expression, assembly, and the rule of law. Much of Hong Kong's democratic erosion is the result of growing encroachment from the mainland Chinese government, which seeks to curtail Hong Kong's autonomy. Hong Kong is among only 30 countries and territories of the 209 examined by *Freedom in the World* to see such a drastic decline since 2009.



During the 2014 protests (also known as the "Occupy Central"), close to 1.2 million gathered in the protests at

various times and in different forms. The movement was termed the "Umbrella Movement" as the



protestors used umbrellas to fend off police pepper spray, batons, and tear gas. The Chinese government initially denounced the protests for "genuine universal suffrage" and labeled them as illegal. This was followed by a turning point in people-police relations in Hong Kong as authorities and law enforcement agencies used force against the protestors. Police used tear gas against the protestors who occupied several business districts. ("Hong Kong Protests: Timeline of the Occupation," 2014) The use of pepper spray was frequent, and many accused the government of colluding with criminal gangs, called triads, who initiated violence within the ranks of protestors. (Cole, 2018) Police manhandled teenagers and arrested many. According to Martin Purbrick, these shocking scenes of police violence were "not seen since the 1976 disturbance and riots." (Purbrick, 2020) Episodes of violence from police and criminal gangs backfired as popular support for the protests multiplied enormously due to the growing public anger.

Protests returned to the city in 2019 after the government proposed the infamous Extradition Bill, due to which violent clashes erupted between the police and the protestors. Protests deteriorated into cycles of violence, with people more willing to engage in expressions of discontent. Law enforcement authorities also employed unparalleled levels of force, employing tactics such as tear gas, pepper spray, projectile rounds, and firearms as measures for riot control. ("Hong Kong: Timeline of Extradition Protests," 2019) Protestors also faced violence from mafia-like triads who attacked peaceful protestors. From June 2019 to June 2020, more than 9000 people were arrested. (Adolfo Arranz, 2020) Imprisonments of pro-democracy activists and lawmakers became a norm. Arrestees were handled with excessive force and were denied access to families and lawyers. Two protestors died in incidents related to demonstrations. (Miriam, 2019) Since 2019, the violent behavior of authorities has been coupled with violent and offensive attitudes as well. Two terms, "terrorism" and "separatism," are more often used to describe those involved in the protests. This hardening of language from officials demonstrates how deep-seated contradictions have paved for discriminatory attitudes. The police and the government have likened protestors to "rioters" and "terrorists," as evidenced in the press release concerning the law-and-order situation on 2 March 2020:

During the "anti-extradition amendment bill" incidents, the online publicity materials at first appealed to the public to join the public processions or demonstrations but later turned into "weapon-making handbooks" or even "guides to kill the police". Violent acts committed

by the protestors changed from throwing water bottles and other objects to hurling bricks and mill barriers or even petrol bombs, corrosive liquids, and shooting arrows. Some members of the public refused to condemn such behaviors, and as a result, violence escalated to genuine firearms, bullets, and explosives. To express their dissatisfaction with society and the government, rioters chose to hurt the public and cause social panic, which exactly is the behavior of home-grown terrorism. (*Law and Order Situation in 2019*, n.d.)

Hong Kong government equated violence related to protests with terrorism, subversion, and secession. Such a narrative in the chaotic times in Hong Kong made way for the National Security Law, which Beijing imposed under the pretext of deteriorating law and order situation. The law has further increased the instances of direct violence culminating due to deep inherent contradictions which are embodied in the new draconian law aimed to thwart "subversion", "secession", "terrorism", and "collusion with foreign forces". Hundreds of journalists, academics, activists, and lawmakers have been arrested in the ensuing crackdown, while many have fled the city. The law, which Amnesty International says has "decimated" Hong Kong's freedoms, has provided greater authority to the central government to intervene in the "national security affairs" of the city. ("What Does China's National Security Law for Hong Kong Say?" 2020) It has reduced the city's judicial autonomy while making it easier to punish demonstrators and activists. ("Hong Kong: How Life Has Changed under China's National Security Law," 2021) Many have been arrested, facing trials in front of judges appointed by the mainland. In short, the National Security Law has institutionalized direct violence with deep structural contradictions manifesting explicitly in the city.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that recurring episodes of direct violence in Hong Kong after 2014 have mainly occurred due to the deep-rooted contradictions present at the latent level. Several discrepancies present in the documents (Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law) that envisioned a future roadmap for the city produced unaddressed contradictions underlying the events of violence perpetrated at the level of behavior and attitudes. The incompatibility of goals evident during the formulation of these documents was further reinforced when the tensions between the central government and the populace in Hong Kong escalated. The behavior of Hong Kong authorities and the central government became more inclined towards direct violence when

structural contradictions generated widespread protests. Political inequalities embedded in the less representative electoral setup produced further contradictions, which transformed into frequent episodes of violence witnessed at the level of attitudes and behaviors.

## References

- Adolfo, A. (2020, June 11). Arrested Hong Kong protesters: How the numbers look one year on. *South China Morning Post*. <https://multimedia.scmp.com/infographics/news/hong-kong/article/3088009/one-year-protest/index.html>
- Alix, C. (2020, July 1). Hong Kong: The Sino-British joint declaration explained. Sky News. <https://news.sky.com/story/hong-kong-the-sino-british-joint-declaration-explained-12019001>
- An Editorial. (1964). *Journal of Peace Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336400100101>
- Nathan, A. J. (2023, January 17). How China sees the Hong Kong crisis: The real reasons behind Beijing's restraint. *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-09-30/how-china-sees-hong-kong-crisis>
- Annie, B., Director, A., Sarah, C., & Annie B. (n.d.). Democratic Crisis in Hong Kong: Recommendations for Policymakers. *Freedom House*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/policy-brief/2019/democratic-crisis-hong-kong-recommendations-policymakers>
- Austin, R. (2021, October 25). Student Sentenced as Hong Kong Uses Security Law to Clamp down on Speech. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/hong-kong-security-law-speech.html>
- Brain, C. F. (n.d.). Death by a thousand cuts: Democratic backsliding in Hong Kong. *Global Asia*. [https://www.globalasia.org/v15nol/cover/death-by-a-thousand-cuts-democratic-backsliding-in-hong-kong\\_brian-ch-fong](https://www.globalasia.org/v15nol/cover/death-by-a-thousand-cuts-democratic-backsliding-in-hong-kong_brian-ch-fong)
- Charles, W., & Johan., G. (2007). Introduction: Peace by Peaceful Conflict Transformation - the TRANSCEND Approach. In Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies. *Routledge*.
- Derek, G. (2020, February 13). Where Does China's "One Country, Two Systems" Stand in 2020? <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/02/where-does-chinas-one-country-two-systems-stand-in.html>
- Dismantling a Free Society. (2021). Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/feature/2021/06/25/dismantling-free-society/hong-kong-one-year-after-national-security-law>
- Doug, B. (2019, June 24). Hong Kong Profile-Timeline. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-16526765>
- Doug, B. (2020, May 18). Hong Kong Is Losing Its Freedom. CATO Institute. <https://www.cato.org/commentary/hong-kong-losing-its-freedom>
- Doug, B. (2021, September 23). Hong Kong's National Security Promises Were All Hollow. CATO Institute. <https://www.cato.org/commentary/hong-kongs-national-security-promises-were-all-hollow>
- Eleanor, A. (2014). Democracy in Hong Kong. *Council on Foreign Relations*.
- Erin, B., & Taryn, S. (2021, May 3). *The History of Hong Kong, Visualized*. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/hong-kong-history-visualized>
- Gary, C. (2019, July 4). What is the Sino-British Joint Declaration and what does it have to do with Hong Kong's extradition crisis?. *South China Morning Post*. <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3017318/explainer-what-sino-british-joint-declaration-and-what-does>
- Hong Kong: Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, (1997). <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b53d0.html>
- BBC News. (2022, July 1). Hong Kong: How is it run, and what is the Basic Law? *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49633862>
- BBC News. (2021, June 30). Hong Kong: How life has changed under China's national security law. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57649442>
- Vaid, D. (2021, December 28). HK Apple Daily founder faces new sedition charge. *dw.com*. <https://www.dw.com/en/hong-kong-jimmy-lai-faces-fresh-sedition-charge/a-60270914>
- BBC News. (2016, November 15). Hong Kong pro-independence lawmakers disqualified from office. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-37984118>
- BBC News. (2014, December 11). Hong Kong protests: Timeline of the occupation. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-30390820>
- BBC News. (2022a, June 28). Hong Kong national security law: What is it and is it worrying? *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52765838>
- BBC News. (2019, September 4). Hong Kong: Timeline of extradition protests. *BBC News*.

- <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49340717>
- Cole, J. M. (2018, June 18). Nice Democracy You've Got There. Be a Shame If Something Happened to It. *Foreign Policy*.  
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/06/18/nice-democracy-youve-got-there-be-a-shame-if-something-happened-to-it/>
- Javier., C. H. (2020, July 1). Harsh Penalties, Vaguely Defined Crimes: Hong Kong's Security Law Explained. *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/world/asia/hong-kong-security-law-explain.html>.
- Jeffie, L. (2021, January 28). National security: What is Article 23 in Hong Kong and why is the issue back in the spotlight?. *South China Morning Post*.  
<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3138956/national-security-what-article-23-hong-kong-and-why-issue>
- Kirby, J. (2021, July 1). China's national security legislation is destroying Hong Kong's rule of law. *Vox*.  
<https://www.vox.com/22554120/hong-kong-national-security-law-tong-ying-kit-trial>
- Galtung, J. (1985). Twenty-Five years of Peace Research: Ten challenges and some responses. *Journal of Peace Research*, 22(2), 141-158.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002234338502200205>
- Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), 291-305.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005>
- Galtung, J. (2009). Theories of Conflict: Definitions, Dimensions, Negations, Formations. *Transcend*.  
[https://www.transcend.org/files/Galtung\\_Book\\_Theories\\_Of\\_Conflict\\_single.pdf](https://www.transcend.org/files/Galtung_Book_Theories_Of_Conflict_single.pdf)
- Lindberg, K. S., & Tam, O. (2021, December 9). Hong Kong court hands tycoon Jimmy Lai another guilty ruling. *Bloomberg.com*.  
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-09/hong-kong-court-hands-tycoon-jimmy-lai-another-guilty-verdict#xj4y7vzkg>
- Liu, K. (2020). Hong Kong: Inevitably irrelevant to China? *Economic Affairs*, 40(1), 2-23.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ecaf.12391>
- Laignee, B. (2020, July 23). "It's So Much Worse Than Anyone Expected." Why Hong Kong's National Security Law Is Having Such a Chilling Effect. *TIME*.  
<https://time.com/5867000/hong-kong-china-national-security-law-effect/>
- Larry, D. (2020, May 26). The End of Hong Kong As We Knew It. *The American Interest*.  
<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2020/05/26/the-end-of-hong-kong-as-we-knew-it/>
- The Government of Hong Kong and Special Administrative Region. (2022). *Law and order situation in 2019*.  
<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202003/02/P2020030200619.htm>
- Lindsay, M. (2022, May 19). Hong Kong's Freedoms: What China Promised and How It's Cracking Down,. *Council on Foreign Relations*.  
<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/hong-kong-freedoms-democracy-protests-china-crackdown>
- Louisa, B. H. (2019). Hong Kong: The Joint Declaration (No. 08616). *House of Commons Library*.  
<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8616/CBP-8616.pdf>.
- Purbrick, M. (2020). HONG KONG: THE TORN CITY. *Asian Affairs*, 51(3), 463-484.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2020.1791528>
- Miriam, B. (2019, November 15). A breakdown of the death tolls in some of the more-high-profile protests around the world. *The Washington Post*.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/11/15/breakdown-death-tolls-some-more-high-profile-protests-around-world/>
- NATIONAL SECURITY HONG KONG. (2021, November 27). Hong Kong Free Press.  
<https://hongkongfp.com/hong-kong-national-security-law/>
- One Country, Two Systems. (1984, June 22). China Through A Lens.  
[http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/deng\\_xiaoping/103372.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/deng_xiaoping/103372.htm)
- Pak, Y., & Marius, Z. (2020). Leaving Hong Kong As China cracks down, a family makes a wrenching decision. *Reuters*.  
<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/hongkong-security-emigration/>
- Russell, H. (2019, July 31). A Preliminary Survey of CCP Influence Efforts in Hong Kong. *The Jamestown Foundation*.  
<https://jamestown.org/program/a-preliminary-survey-of-ccp-influence-efforts-in-hong-kong/>
- Sony, S. H. L. (2008). The Dynamics of Beijing-Hong Kong Relations: A Model for Taiwan? *Hong Kong University Press*.
- South, C. M. P. (2014, August 31). Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Issues Relating to the Selection of the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region by 482 HONG KONG: THE TORN CITY Universal Suffrage and on the Method for Forming the Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

- South China Morning Post*.  
<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1582245/full-text-npcstanding-committee-decision-hong-kong-2017-election>
- Suzanne, P. (2022, January 9). Beijing's White Paper on Hong Kong democracy – a pledge renewed or a promise betrayed? *Hong Kong Free Press*.  
<https://hongkongfp.com/2022/01/09/beijings-white-paper-on-hong-kong-democracy-a-pledge-renewed-or-a-promise-betrayed/>
- The Constitution of the People's Republic of China. (January 18, 2022)  
<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4c3lea082.pdf>
- The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, § Chapter II – Relationship between the Central Authorities and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region., January 18, 2022,  
<https://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclaw/chapter2.html>.
- Weber, T. A. (1999). Gandhi, Deep Ecology, Peace Research and Buddhist Economics. *Journal of Peace Research*, 36(3), 349–361.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343399036003007>
- Hughes, T. (2019). *A Timeline of Hong Kong's History*. History Hit. <https://www.historyhit.com/a-timeline-of-hong-kongs-history/>
- Hui, V. T. (2019, December 7). Hong Kong's protests: Look beyond Tiananmen 2.0. *The Diplomat*.  
<https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/hong-kongs-protests-look-beyond-tiananmen-2-0/>
- Jazeera, A. (2020, July 1). What does China's national security law for Hong Kong say? *Al Jazeera*.  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/1/what-does-chinas-national-security-law-for-hong-kong-say>