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Master's Thesis of International Studies

# End of Hong Kong protests

- Xi Jinping's 2020 National Security Law -

홍콩 시위의 종결: 시진핑의 2020년도  
홍콩국가보안법의 통과를 바탕으로

August 2021

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- Xi Jinping's 2020 National Security Law -

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# Abstract

In June 2020, Xi Jinping finally put an end to the two decades of constant Hong Kong protests by passing the Hong Kong National Security Law. This research will study the international narrative that the central governments used to justify and rationalize the passage of the law to the public. This will be achieved by utilizing the Copenhagen School's securitization theory focusing on the speech acts of political actors. The research mainly argues that first, at the initiation of the 2019 Hong Kong demonstrations, the speech acts aimed at securitization through the vilification of the protesters, but the target changed when international interference increased; second, the passage of the Hong Kong National Security Law can be seen as a mechanism taken to put a full stop to foreign interference and be able to move on to other issues that are in need of addressing; third, several legislative measures taken by other states in regard to China's handling of the Hong Kong affairs have given an incentive to Chinese authorities to pass the law.

**Keywords:** Hong Kong, China, CCP, HKSAR, democracy, anti-government protests, Xi Jinping, National Security Law, sovereignty

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# 1. Introduction

Mainland China and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) have not had an easy cohabitation history and consist of a one-of-a-kind relationship. This relationship could be compared to that of relatives that grew up in different cultural backgrounds and came back together as adults. They are unconditionally connected but disagree in many fundamental ideological and cultural principles. This has been the case since they have been exposed to complete opposite socioeconomic backgrounds for such a long time, specifically for 156 years. These dynamics of confrontation have been exacerbated since 1997, when the city was handed over back to China from the British and became a Special Administrative Region under the power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Even since, Hong Kong citizens have demonstrated their objections toward the local and central governments, and how their democratic way of life is being modified and their sovereignty blocked under the narrative of “rule of law”.

Incompatibility with the “mainland” is not limited to Hong Kong. Ever since China’s ‘Century of Humiliation’, the state has had to deal with the internal challenges of achieving and maintaining unified control over a country so vast, with such a big population of diverse ethnicities coexisting in one geographical mass of land (Roy, 1998). It has continuously throughout history dealt with internal insurgencies threatening separatisms, which constitute a risk to its

national interests of territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Roy (1998) mentions the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64) as an example of a serious organized rebellion that destabilized the central government. This phenomenon that has been going on for centuries indeed has not yet disappeared and seems to be becoming a more serious threat for the Chinese government as time passes.

Taiwan, Tibet, and Mongolia have constituted, ever since the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s establishment, a constant element of concern for the Chinese government. However, the relatively new democratic movement that is catching the most attention worldwide, especially since 2019 has been Hong Kong, partly for how organized and influential it is, as well as the media attention and coverage it is getting in a global scale, not to mention its size, intensity and frequency.

Hong Kong's handover from the British back to China in 1997 happened relatively smoothly, but there was still a continued fear of pro-democracy protests by those who were opposed to China's intent to control political and civil liberties after the CCP became the sovereign ruler of the region. Despite its promise of a high degree of autonomy for the HKSAR even after becoming part of China, Beijing has played a prominent role behind the scenes in deciding the line-up of its political structure and influencing its policies, particularly those related to political freedoms and public order (Cheung, 1998).

Even with strict political measures taken by Beijing with the goal of controlling and suppressing Hong Kong's dissatisfaction,

protests from citizens claiming democracy and autonomy have continued for over 2 decades, from 1997 to 2020. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July of 2003, there was a demonstration against National Security reform with more than 500,000 participants opposing such reform. Also, on June 16<sup>th</sup> 2019, there was an estimate of 2 million Hong Kong residents showing up, according to data from the Congressional Research Service (CRS)<sup>1</sup>. Finally, on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 2020, the draft decision concerning the national security law was passed at the 13th National People's Congress of the PRC, and the CCP passed the National Security Law<sup>2</sup> on the 30th of June 2020, surrounded by controversy, criticism, and surprise to the majority of citizens, and ending the flow of protests against the central government.

Article 23 of the Hong Kong Basic Constitution, which was created simultaneously with the handover, established that a National Security Law had to be passed. However, it had been pushed back for 13 years until it was finally passed under Xi Jinping last year. The Hong Kong National Security Law gives Beijing more power to shape Hong Kong's political and legislative policies. Critics say it

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, M. F. (Oct 18, 2019). Hong Kong' s protests of 2019. *Congressional Research Service*. Retrieved from <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>

<sup>2</sup> The Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security is a national security legislation concerning Hong Kong, which stipulates that a security law should be enacted by the HKSAR. However, in June 2020, a partially equivalent law was enacted by the Chinese Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and not by the Hong Kong Legislative Council. This definition is narrated in the following reference: Lam, Carrie (June 30, 2020). Promulgation of National Law 2020. *The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Gazette*. Retrieved from <https://www.gld.gov.hk/egazette/pdf/20202444e/es220202444136.pdf>

effectively blocks further protest and freedom of speech, against the Chinese government's opinion, which states that because of this law, China will eventually return to stability through a long-term process. The new law's key provisions include that "crimes of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces are punishable by a maximum sentence of life in prison".<sup>3</sup>

Then the question that arises is: what is the narrative that the central and Hong Kong SAR governments used to justify and rationalize the passage of the law to the international community? In a world so interconnected, the internal decisions taken by nation-states have inevitable repercussions in the reactions of other nation-states. This will be achieved through the use of the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School of International Relations to discover how through mechanisms of narrative or speech, the Hong Kong issue was slowly acknowledged as a threat to national security until the CCP and the HKSAR governments could finally use legislation to end the apparent threat on their favor, at the expense of the public, the citizens and the protesters.

The research mainly argues that: first, when the 2019 Hong Kong process commenced, the speech act and narrative of the Chinese government press conferences were aiming at securitizing the protests through the vilification of the protesters themselves, but the route took a drastic turn when international interference started

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<sup>3</sup> (Feb 5, 2021). Hong Kong: Children to be taught about national security law. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://morokbarok.ru/news/world-asia-55948773>

to pose a serious problem and it began to target foreign forces; second, the passage of the National Security Law has indirectly worked for the Chinese central authority as a mechanism to put a full stop to foreign interference and be able to move on to other issues that were in need of addressing, such as COVID-19, the Taiwan-Strait and South China Sea disputes, or trade talks with the US; and third, several legislative measures taken by other states in regard to China's handling of the Hong Kong affairs have given the Chinese authorities an reasonable excuse to use in regards to the passage of the National Security Law, and an external actor to blame this drastic passage of the legislation.

This article is organized as follows: first, some background information is narrated for the purpose of mentioning the situation that characterized Beijing-Hong Kong relations at the time that could have been contributed to the passage of the law. This is aimed at clarifying that there is no one answer to why the law was passed, but a number of events and trends that surrounded the political atmosphere of China played their part in making in happen. Second, the main aspects of the securitization theory relevant to the China and Hong Kong case are introduced and basic concepts related to this approach are explained. Third, after a contextualization of the Hong Kong protests through Baldwin's seven criteria on security issues, the reasoning of the securitization theory organized in the previous section is applied to our case study on the rationalization of the termination of Hong Kong protests.

## 2. Literature review

As narrated previously in the introduction section, the goal of this research is to find how the passage of the law was rationalized to the international public through the speech act used by the Chinese government. This approach has been selected due to the lack of research in terms of how the central government explained their decision-making toward the Hong Kong protests to other international actors continuously asked for explanations and warned about possible interference in Chinese affairs. After finally passing the law, the central government needed a logical-sounding reasoning for the passage of the National Security Law, regardless of what their real motives behind it were. The interest behind the mode of rationalization is due to the fact that the causes for the protesters to take the streets or even the causes for the Chinese government to decide to pass a law are more available for research. They are mostly existing factors that can be observed and analyzed. However, what the government says and how they try to explain their behavior is a more abstract topic that needs careful and deep examination.

Some scholars have previously provided the causes for the protests, which can be useful to know before we go deeper into this research. Dieter (2020) concludes that a high level of inequality, a housing shortage as a social issue, land management from the colonial period, and a twin legitimacy crisis were the main socio-economic factors responsible for the continuous fights of the Hong

Kongese protesters.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Min (2021) successfully gathers the different political, economic and social causes of Hong Kong protests, which is summarized into the ambiguous institutional framework of the “One Country, Two Systems” principle; people’s lack of confidence in the central and local governments; and the dissatisfaction towards Mainland control and Mainland Chinese who challenge locals for jobs, properties and resources. In short, the reasons for the Hong Kong citizens’ will and desire to protest against the local and central governments are internal and personal against the governments. Furthermore, specific economic causes such as the housing crisis, the widening wealth gap, and the wage and living condition problems are also mentioned as reasons behind the continuous protests.

Other scholars have different opinions as to the reasons behind the incessant Hong Kong protests. Yew Chiew Ping and Kwong Kin-ming (2014) conclude that the “mainlandization” of Hong Kong starting in 2003 has been the principal cause for resistance among protesters, who opposed the central government’s top-down assimilation of the region.<sup>5</sup> However, the direct reasons behind the ending of the protests this year are clearly internal. The passage of the National Security Law has been talked about and decided internally years ago, and they just had to decide when to announce it.

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<sup>4</sup> Heribert Dieter. (2020). Inequality and social problems in Hong Kong: the reasons for the broad support of the unrest, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 74:4, 341–347, DOI: [10.1080/10357718.2019.1705756](https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2019.1705756)

<sup>5</sup> Ping, Y., & Kin-ming, K. (2014). Hong Kong Identity on the Rise. *Asian Survey*, 54(6), 1088–1112. doi:10.1525/as.2014.54.6.1088

The reason for the timing to pass the law was in reality for domestic socio-political reasons, more specifically due to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July of 2021 and the upcoming 2022 Olympics in China. According to the Washington Post, China is “still bent on centralizing power and protecting its political interests above all else”.<sup>6</sup> The government was not willing to let any forces obstruct these critical events that had the potential to reinforce Xi Jinping’s power. This left them with the sole option of passing a law that could end all complications at once, one day before the anniversary of the Communist Party in China.

Furthermore, Ruhlig (2020) attempts to explain the situation left behind by the abrupt suppression and end of the protests. In his argument, the National Security Law has had some impactful consequences. It has not only politically restricted Hong Kong citizens’ civil liberties but will weaken the city economically as a financial hub and will further act as a tool for mainlandization.<sup>7</sup>

The theoretical approach of this research –securitization theory– has also been widely utilized by other scholars previously. However, concerning previous research in line with this article, due to the fact that the passing of the Hong Kong National Security Law

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<sup>6</sup> Rogin, J. (July 1, 2021). The Chinese Communist Party’ s anniversary is Hong Kong’ s funeral. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/07/01/chinese-communist-party-hong-kong-taiwan/>

<sup>7</sup> Ruhlig, T. N. (2020). Hong kong: The end of the city of protest? *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations*, 6(3), 993–1038,XI. Retrieved from <http://lps3.www.proquest.com.libproxy.snu.ac.kr/scholarly-journals/hong-kong-end-city-protest/docview/2506467766/se-2?accountid=6802>

is so recent and the history of the Hong Kong protests since the year of the handover have been an annual occurrence, there are no studies available on the securitization of the 2019–2020 protests. Hui (2019) carried out a research on the securitization of the entire period since Hong Kong was handed over back to the CCP in 1997 up to the present and divides the whole period into three stages: non-intervention from 1997 to 2003, intervention from 2004 to 2014, and securitization from that year up to 2019 when the research was done. The book argues that the Umbrella Movement of 2014 was actually a result of the premature use of hard repression before the use of speech act to convince the public of the movement as a threat. The fact that the securitization of the Umbrella Movement was successful securitization implies that there was a spread acceptance of the protests' threatening nature and a general agreement with the need for crackdown (Hui, 2019).

Moreover, Garrett (2017) conducts a study on the securitization of the entire “One Country, Two Systems” arrangement that China imposed on Hong Kong after the handover. This scholar argues that the Chinese and Hong Kong governments have tried to use the securitization of the “One Country, Two Systems” process to construct state enemies for their political advantage, mainly their political competitors such as democrats, localists and separatists. Through this method, they have succeeded at eliminating certain politicized issues from public debate (mainlandization, national education and identity, patriotism, mainland

tourism and universal suffrage). This study therefore is more general, and covers the periods between January of 2010 and June of 2016, which according to Garrett is “a critical period in the deterioration of China-Hong Kong relations and the system that characterizes their relations” (Garrett, 2017).

### 3. Background

The next section consists of background information about the factors leading to the passage of the National Security Law, that might contribute to the further understanding of the purpose of this research. By understanding the internal background for which the National Security Law was passed, we can shed light to other feasible factors that have not been brought up in previous research that are worth mentioning for the purpose of a complete understanding on the need for the central government to rationalize the passage of this new law.

The economic and political background of the Xi Jinping era is crucial information to take into account as the underlying atmosphere that guided Xi Jinping, together with its supporting small leader group to make the decision to pass the National Security Law. When looking at the chronology to policies taken by the Chinese authority when dealing with the Hong Kong protests, there is a pattern of gradual increase since the handover, culminating in the harshest ever in the term of Xi Jinping. On the contrary, economically there has been a decrease in Hong Kong's importance for the Chinese economy as a whole, mainly because of China's own economic growth and rise of power in a global scale, even to the point of being labelled as the United States' main rival.

In sum, the underlying situation can be organized as follows: first, Beijing's policies have gradually become stricter as pro-

democracy protests have in a parallel manner become more and more organized and intense, leading unavoidably to a drastic ending; second, Hong Kong's economic importance to Beijing has downgraded with China's increasing global economic position; and third, loyalty to the party has been emphasized, especially toward minority regions, and censorship and deterioration of media freedom has become apparent.

## *Strengthening CCP policies*

It is important to understand the path Beijing took, gradually hardening the policies regarding Hong Kong protests, in order to have a broad overview of the events leading to the present situation and relation between the mainland and the HKSAR. Then, we can better understand the reasoning for which Xi Jinping decided to finally implement this controversial new law that ended the protests once and for all.

Under British rule, a law under the name of “Public Order Ordinance”, which outlawed any gatherings of three or more people without police permission, was enacted in 1967 with the aim of maintaining public order, regulating meetings and controlling organization gatherings suspected of planning riots against the government. Later in 1995, there was a alleviation of rules with the introduction of the reversed enactment of the “Bill of Rights Ordinance” based on the United Nations’ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Accordingly, since 1997, public gatherings of more than 50 people or marches with more than 30 protesters can take place, as long as it is notified to the police at least seven days in advance and the protesters receive a “notice of no objection”.<sup>8</sup> Ever since this development, the Hong Kong public has utilized protests

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<sup>8</sup> See History of Hong Kong protests: riots, rallies and brollies. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <https://multimedia.scmp.com/infographics/news/hong-kong/article/3016815/hong-kong-protest-city/index.html>

and social demonstrations toward the central government as their main way of expressing complaint and dissatisfaction.

Annual marches have been organized since 2003 every 1<sup>st</sup> of July to commemorate the Tiananmen Square crisis of 1989 and the handover of Hong Kong. These events have been used as an annual opportunity to show disagreement and dissatisfaction toward the government and call for increased democracy.<sup>9</sup> The demonstrators have shown particularly active stances when it comes to laws of national security that undermine their own sovereignty and democratic values. Therefore, this law has been maintained and has since allowed protests to occur, although we cannot cross out the existence of violent oppression from part of the police and government.

Following the Hong Kong handover back to China from the British, the former presidents that ruled China, namely Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, took a softer and more pragmatic stance when handling the Hong Kong annual protests and their discontent toward the Chinese authority. Generally, they chose the direction of “concession” rather than “repression” toward the Hong Kong public, distinction made by Yuen and Chung (2017) and allowed them a greater degree of autonomy. After promising a high degree of autonomy of the HKSAR, Jiang and Hu did adopt a hands-off policy of no interference in Hong Kong’s internal affairs and giving Tung

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<sup>9</sup> See History of Hong Kong protests: riots, rallies and brollies. *South China Morning Post*. <https://multimedia.scmp.com/infographics/news/hong-kong/article/3016815/hong-kong-protest-city/index.html>

Chee-hwa, the first chief executive, liberty in governing Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup>

Jiang Zemin was president of the CCP at the time the handover occurred, which was then followed by Hu Jintao who also took a similar stance on the matter, bringing back order and stability in Hong Kong after the 2003 protests. According to Rezvani (2019) in the *South China Morning Post*, “instead of hardline tactics and threats of military intervention, Hu’s administration defused the crisis by collecting public opinion directly from Hong Kong, holding local leaders accountable and increasing economic reassurances”.<sup>11</sup> This approach taken by Hu succeeded in ceasing the demonstrations, and a poll showed favorable local opinion of the central government’s handling of “one country, two systems” surged to nearly 60 per cent, its highest since the handover.

With Xi Jinping’s inauguration as leader, him and his colleagues seem to have shifted this pattern and decided to take authoritarian and repressive initiatives. Since his arrival, Xi has made some key structural changes in the government that have given him a monopoly of power, in other words, a one-man ruling system. He has strategically removed political rivals while giving his supporters key government positions; created key new organizations, most

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<sup>10</sup> Ching, F. How Beijing plays its hand: as seen from Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Journal Archive*. Retrieved from [https://carnegieendowment.org/hkjournal/archive/2009\\_fall/2.htm](https://carnegieendowment.org/hkjournal/archive/2009_fall/2.htm)

<sup>11</sup> Rezvani, D. A. (September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2019). Has China forgotten how order was restored to Hong Kong after the 2003 Article 23 national security protests? *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3025171/has-china-forgotten-how-order-was-restored-hong-kong-after-2003>

importantly the small leadership groups which he has full control over; and he even led the Chinese constitution “to drop the two-term limit for president, allowing him to extend his rule beyond 2023”.<sup>12</sup> He definitely seems more willing compared to his predecessors to trade away economic growth for the sake of more national stability and control, when taking into account his harder-line approach of Beijing’s dealings with the HKSAR.

Hong Kong pro-democracy forces have reached the highest number of participants in certain years, such as the umbrella movement in 2004 and 2014 both with more than 500,000 protesters,<sup>13</sup> or last year in 2019 with nearly 2 million marchers.<sup>14</sup> However, in 2013, Xi Jinping took over and assumed the presidency, and the CCP established a Central National Security Commission (CNSC) to “perfect national security systems and strategies in order to ensure national security”, and its “status as an agency under the Central Committee makes it the most comprehensive security policy-

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<sup>12</sup> Wallace, J. (January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018). Is Xi Jinping now a ‘leader for life,’ like Mao? Here’s why this is dangerous. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/02/27/is-xi-jinping-now-a-leader-for-life-like-mao-heres-why-this-is-dangerous/>

<sup>13</sup> See data retrieved from the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies for South China Morning Post article. Retrieved from <https://multimedia.scmp.com/infographics/news/hong-kong/article/3016815/hong-kong-protest-city/index.html>. Important to take into account that these figures represent the claims of the organizers, which differ from the number of protesters that the government declare to have participated.

<sup>14</sup> See BBC News. (June 2019). Hong Kong protest: 'Nearly two million' join demonstration. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-48656471>

making body in the Chinese government”.<sup>15</sup> With the start of Xi Jinping’s administration, drastic and visible changes in policies related to Hong Kong could be observed. For instance, in June 2014, out of 800,000 people, more than 90% voted in favor of giving the public some type of decision-making right in choosing candidates for future elections of the territory’s chief executive in an unofficial referendum, but Beijing condemned the vote as illegal. A month later, tens of thousands of protesters took part in what organizers call the “Umbrella movement”, Hong Kong’s largest pro-democracy rally in a decade, against Beijing’s plans to vet candidates for elections in 2017.

The crackdown has since then continuously intensified. Although it is not possible to list all those who have been silenced by the regime, it is worth mentioning the shutdown in July 2013 of the Transition Institute, a moderately positioned think tank engaged in rights advocacy, the detention of a dozen participants of a closed-door seminar held to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of June Fourth in May 2014, and the subsequent sentencing and disbarment of one of its participants, the lawyer Pu Zhiqiang, on the basis of his sarcastic postings on social media. In July 2015, the roundup against the Beijing Fengrui law firm and lawyers supporting one of its employees, Wang Yu, represented the most systematic and coordinated crackdown ever on rights defense lawyers. Altogether, at least 319 lawyers, law firm staff, human rights activists, and family

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<sup>15</sup> United States–China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC). Report to Congress of the US–China economic and Security Review Commission. (2013).

members were “questioned, summoned, forbidden to leave the country, held under house arrest, residential surveillance, criminally detained or arrested” (Froissart, 2017).

Furthermore, since spring 2014, the Xi leadership has also forcefully cracked down on Christians, in a bid to limit the influence of “Western values” and to regain control over underground churches. The suppression also targeted official churches in the Wenzhou region. By the end of 2016, dozens of churches were bulldozed, which was in addition to the 64 churches demolished in 2014 and about 1,500 in 2015;<sup>16</sup> nearly 2,000 crosses have been torn down, church leaders and followers blocking the demolitions have been arrested and imprisoned. A crackdown on underground religious sites followed suit in 2016, while the release of a tougher version of the Regulations on Religious Affairs and other measures stress the necessity to Sinicize religions in China, change believers’ thoughts, and bring back religious sites under strict party control. The laws have become much more specific in controlling every aspect of religion, including cult and doctrine, and greatly empower local government bodies all the way down to the communities so that the latitude enjoyed till now by some communities would virtually become impossible.

Unlike the previous administrations, in which domestic and international issue delayed tasks on Hong Kong so that its image and

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<sup>16</sup> (2014). Zhejiang: list and pictures of 64 demolished Christian churches. *Asianews*. Retrieved from <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Zhejiang:-list-and-pictures-of-64-demolished-Christian-churches-31135.html>

reputation would not be affected, in the Xi Jinping time, interference in Hong Kong governance became more and more regular. With the rise of China becoming more apparent during this administration, the PRC has gained confidence both internationally and domestically that it can implement any measures that can allow more the defense of its national interests, such as territorial integrity and sovereignty without taking external actors' reactions too much into account. Moreover, with improved relations with Taiwan, China is confident that imposing policies of restriction of democracy in Hong Kong at this given timing will not affect independence ideologies too much in Taiwan. China's more assertive behavior in the South China Sea and other territorial disputes with India, has not been enough to undermine China's rise as a superpower almost at the level of the US, and this has made China believe that one more action will not cause too much harm.

In sum, looking back at the toughening of Beijing policies regarding Hong Kong with the entrance of Xi Jinping into presidency, the implementation of the new National Security Law is not a complete surprise. As soon as his administration began, Xi Jinping refuted and impeded the majority of threats to national security and economic development of China, and one of the main sources of trouble was clearly the annual protests led by pro-democracy Hong Kong citizens. Then the question that arises is the following: What socioeconomic context differed in Xi Jinping's era (2013-2020) that allowed him to finally put an end to the incessant Hong Kong

democratic protests? The main two reasons found in this research are first, the declining economic importance of this region for Beijing, and second, Xi Jinping's own background, personality, attitude, and goals that led him to make this drastic decision.

## *Declining economic importance*

The first factor for Xi Jinping's decision to adopt the legislation was unquestionably the decline of Hong Kong's economic importance for Beijing, or in other words, the increase of Mainland China's economic power and global status through other mechanisms at the expense of Hong Kong in recent years. The scale of importance that Hong Kong had for China in the past in terms of their GDP share for the CCP has gradually decreased over the years. Hong Kong's previous significance for Beijing laid in that the HKSAR port handled a significant amount of mainland export cargo; foreign businesses congregated in Hong Kong to open regional headquarters; and the Hong Kong stock exchange helped mainland businesses in gains in new capital from global investors. However, Hong Kong's relevance as a main source of external education, as a bridge to trade, and as foreign capital for Beijing has lost its previous weight, at least as perceived by the current leaders, who give more value to capturing Hong Kong's democracy even jeopardizing Hong Kong's role as a global financial capital.

First, Hong Kong's economic importance for China has deteriorated as the mainland economy has surged. In 1997, Hong Kong's economic output was nearly one-fifth the mainland's, making

it a necessary growth engine for Beijing<sup>17</sup>. Deng Xiaoping had agreed to allow the people of Hong Kong to keep their business and personal freedoms for the next decades. In contrast today, Hong Kong's output is less than 3 percent of that of the mainland's, down from more than 18 percent before the handover. Investors are becoming more and more used to carrying out business in big mainland cities such as Shanghai, where the value of the stock market is bigger than Hong Kong's.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, China's exports to Hong Kong as a proportion of total exports have also decreased vastly from 45 percent in 1990, to 20 percent in 2003, to finally 10% in 2019, according to data retrieved from Bloomberg economics.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, according to the World Bank national accounts data and the OECD National accounts data files, mainland China's economic growth far outpaces Hong Kong's, and the gap has been even larger and constantly widening since 2000.<sup>20</sup> Another data source from Noah Sin, who works in Financial communications in Shanghai, portrays how Hong

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<sup>17</sup> Why China may call the world's bluff on Hong Kong. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/03/business/china-hong-kong-damage.html>

<sup>18</sup> Stevenson, Alexandra & Vivian Wang. (2020). Why China May Call the World's Bluff on Hong Kong. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/03/business/china-hong-kong-damage.html?auth=login-google1tap&login=google1tap>

<sup>19</sup> Shrinking gateway. *Bloomberg economics*. Retrieved from <https://www.brinknews.com/does-hong-kong-still-matter-to-china-economically/>

<sup>20</sup> Mainland China's economic growth far outpaces Hong Kong. (2020). *World Bank national accounts data & OECD national accounts*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/18/these-charts-show-why-hong-kong-is-important-to-china.html>

Kong's weight is dropping in China's growing economy in a table showing their difference in GDP and share. Hong Kong's GDP has maintained relatively constant since 2000 at about 0.5 trillion USD.<sup>21</sup> Hong Kong's economic activity was rated as the freest globally from 1995 up to 2019, but the ongoing political and social disorder started to corrode the city's reputation as one of the best places to do business, reducing the inflow of investment.<sup>22</sup>

Second, the CCP is looking and finding new alternative regions to substitute the role that Hong Kong had been playing for the past decade, and it has been successful in bringing prosperity to other important regions in the country. The HKSAR is now China's fourth-largest city in terms of GDP after decades being China's top cities in prosperity. In the present, it comes behind Shanghai, Beijing and neighboring Shenzhen, in order of most prosperous. Besides, its shipping port, which used to be the busiest ports in the world, has fallen to eighth place last year, overshadowed by those in other cities. These include Shanghai, Ningbo, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Qingdao (information retrieved from a graph from the Marine Department of Hong Kong).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Sin, Noah. (2019). Explainer: How important is Hong Kong to the rest of China? *Emerging markets*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-markets-explainer-idUSKCN1VP35H>

<sup>22</sup> 2020 Index of Economic Freedom. Retrieved from <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/hongkong>

<sup>23</sup> Chandler, Clay & Grady McGregor. (2020). A 'golden goose' loses its luster: Why Beijing is willing to risk Hong Kong. *Fortune*. Retrieved from <https://fortune.com/2020/06/06/china-hong-kong-law-risk/>

Third, in a global scale, business and economic surge have always come back to China and even stronger after every wave of protests, as was in the case of the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, or the 1997 British handover. Therefore, Beijing has the confidence that no protests or uprisings will be able to downgrade the economic power of China anymore. The words of John L. Thornton, a former president of the Investment banking company Goldman Sachs who has ties with China's leadership clearly depicts this argument when he says that "there will be some unhappy people for some time, but the drum rolls, the dogs bark and the caravan move on. They have had a fair amount of empirical evidence that the concerns will disappear."<sup>24</sup> China's leadership have shown a pattern and the ability of solving problems in a pretty pragmatic way, putting focus in economic development before anything, since the Deng era. As we can observe from previous research, Barry Naughton (2009) noted:

the social and economic model that emerged out of the Tiananmen crisis was profoundly different from that contemplated on the eve of Tiananmen. China made a firm transition to a high-input, high investment, and high growth model of development. The broad but vague social consensus in favor of political and economic reforms that underlay the Tiananmen protests crumbled, while the economy

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<sup>24</sup> Chandler, Clay & Grady McGregor. (2020). A 'golden goose' loses its luster: Why Beijing is willing to risk Hong Kong. *Fortune*. Retrieved from <https://fortune.com/2020/06/06/china-hong-kong-law-risk/>

boomed and some people became much better off  
(Naughton, 2009).

Last but not least, Hong Kong's importance as one of the main attractions for tourism has also been disturbed by antigovernment protests since June 2019 and has led Hong Kong to further recession. The total number of visitors arriving to the city in July 2019 dropped by 4.8 percent in comparison to July 2018, and in addition, visitors coming from mainland China also decreased by 5.5 percent. This phenomenon was mainly due to the violent nature of the pro-democracy protests, which created difficulty especially concerning transportation, an important element for tourists to be able to travel freely and securely around the city.

Nearly 60 million visitors traveled to the HKSAR in 2017, generating 11.76 billion US dollars of value added, equivalent to 3.6 percent of Hong Kong's GDP in 2017. Moreover, in 2018, the city's 65 million visitors were nearly nine times its population of 7.5 million.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, since June 2019, 31 countries have issued travel restrictions or alerts on Hong Kong for the reasons stated above, and a weaker renminbi has made the city more expensive for mainland tourists.<sup>26</sup> Tourism is one of its traditionally main industries, therefore a drop on tourism has a drastic negative effect on the overall economic situation of the region.

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<sup>25</sup> Huang, T. (2019). A Drop in Tourism Is Threatening Hong Kong's Economy. *Peterson Institute for International Economics*. Retrieved from <https://www.piie.com/blogs/china-economic-watch/drop-tourism-threatening-hong-kongs-economy>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

## *Xi Jinping's political orientation*

In the search for the ultimate reasons contributing to the end of Hong Kong protests, the current president's inclinations and personality are as important as the decline of Hong Kong's economic importance for China. Xi Jinping's presidency focuses on a containment policy, driven by a sense of urgency to secure national security and stability, which leads to taking measures at all costs, even if this means sacrificing the minorities' interests. The Xi administration has enhanced and clarified the legal framework for social organizations but only to with the goal of fostering organizations that complement authoritarian rule. Except maybe in the environmental sector, the new laws make it obvious that the Party wants to guide social life and make it harder – if not impossible – for social organizations to monitor the government and promote social changes. The same drive has affected religious associations. While they enjoyed some degree of de facto autonomy under the previous leadership, they are now either being suppressed or brought under much stringent party control and ordered to serve the state's goals.

However, the central government's tendencies did not change all of a sudden with the start of Xi Jinping's term, but was a continuation of the groundwork that his predecessor Hu Jintao had laid prior. Before Jintao, Deng Xiaoping and his next selected candidate Jiang Zemin had radically reformed and opened up the

Chinese economy and society, for instance, by joining the World Trade Organization in 2001 with the help of the United States. Furthermore, Deng brought in legal and political reforms, creating a more consensus-driven elite political system, just like South Korea and Taiwan before their democratization in the 1980s (Chung, 2001). However, with the transition to Hu Jintao, the CCP's conservative neo-Marxists returned to power and the president himself had no power or influence due to factional conflicts inside the party. Hu was left with no options other than backing economic and legal reforms and adopting a policy of state-protection. They adopted an anti-Western approach in the realms of intellectual, political, and cultural influences. Hu Jintao made China a police state, introducing a carrying out an aggressive military modernization, partly due to the impact of the pro-democratic revolutions in the West and the Arab Spring in the Middle East, events that were a big concern for him. Some of Jintao's projects and policies were the Belt and Road initiative, the string of pearls strategy, the anti-satellite weapon in space, the "Beijing model" of authoritarian capitalism, and maritime expansion through oil exploration and naval exercises.

With the start of Xi Jinping's term, he has attempted to concretized what Hu Jintao began, by centralizing power and getting rid of the previously set two-term limit as a premier and assuming complete power with no tenure specification. Some of Xi Jinping's approaches that reflect Hu Jintao's initial approaches are the crackdown in Wuhan during the coronavirus pandemic, the treatment

and policies toward the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjian, the handling of Hong Kong citizens' democratic demands.<sup>27</sup>

A significant change during Xi Jinping's administration is that the Chinese government has tightened the grip on the media. Xi Jinping's tactics often implicate strict media control using monitoring systems, securing publications or websites, and jailing dissident journalists, bloggers, and activists.<sup>28</sup> In theory, China's constitution stipulate that its citizens are provided with freedom of speech and press, but the dullness of Chinese media regulations allows authorities to crack down on news stories by claiming that they expose state secrets and endanger the state, making it easy for state workers to censor of any information that authorities deem harmful to their political or economic interests.

Furthermore, Xi Jinping's background and the manner in which he grew up have also a lot to do in how his personality latter on developed. His father had been one of the important figures of the Communist revolution and a comrade of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Xi Jinping grew up enjoying the privileges of a Communist Party, and his path to success and power was easily given. But just like his father, he too suffered the consequences of the Cultural

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<sup>27</sup> Pandei, Kirti. (2020). Was China's Hu Jintao softer and more balanced than Xi Jinping? You decide who's your Frankenstein. *Times Now News*. Retrieved from <https://www.timesnownews.com/international/article/was-chinas-hu-jintao-softer-and-more-balanced-than-xi-jinping-you-decide-whos-your-frankenstein/650143>

<sup>28</sup> Xu, Beina & Albert Eleanor (2017). Media Censorship in China. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/media-censorship-china>

Revolution: exile from Beijing, an education full of obstacles, and work in the countryside. From the experiences of both the dichotomy between privilege and suffering, he developed faith in the need for a strong Communist Party to govern China, together with an aversion against chaos and social instability, and a commitment to China's economic growth based on acceptance of the role of markets, and demand for respect for China internationally. All of this past experience during his youth led to a hard stance on anything that had to do with instability in the nation, including the Hong Kong situation.

Moreover, Xi Jinping has officially reiterated on the priority he puts on stabilizing the tensions over Hong Kong and its future. Out of all the domestic and international concerns he has, it is noteworthy that the Hong Kong issue plays such a big part of his agenda. The communist ideals according to Xi Jinping's Thought, the new Chinese political doctrine which has been spread across all schools, newspapers, media, and banners,<sup>29</sup> are as follows: asserting and expanding Chinese interests overseas; coping with a slowing economy; purging corrupt officials, high and low; heightened tensions over Hong Kong's future; and ending the one-child policy.

In other words, Xi Jinping's strict and tough attitude towards Hong Kong policies came from a combination of a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons behind his decision to toughen these policies were his privileged but also hardships during his youth, the fact that

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<sup>29</sup> Buckley, C. (26<sup>th</sup> February 2018). Xi Jinping Thought Explained: A New Ideology for a New Era. *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/26/world/asia/xi-jinping-thought-explained-a-new-ideology-for-a-new-era.html>

Hu Jintao was his predecessor and he had grabbed a few ideas from his presidency before becoming president himself. These factors led to him despising instability and wanting to do everything in his hands to be able to bring economic prosperity to his country. As we have seen, one of the major ways in which he achieved this was through the restriction of everything that had to do with the new and traditional media outlets in the country.

## 4. Methodology: Securitization theory

In order to find an answer to the proposed questions, the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School (CS), developed by Ole Waever, Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde, and others, will be applied to the case of the Hong Kong protests. It will be a purely qualitative research based on political analysis of the speech act in regular press conferences carried out between May 2018 and December 2021. The main source of information observed will be the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs press conference speeches executed by the Foreign Ministry spokespersons of the Chinese central government. The thesis examines the rhetoric speech structure through a rhetoric discourse analysis. It covers selected writings from government official documents with the objective of shedding some light on the security discourse of Beijing in an effort to extend the research on securitization theory to the case of Hong Kong.

To begin with some definitions, in the field of international relations, security is defined as a “low probability of damage to acquired values” as stated by Baldwin (1997), and the term securitization refers to “the process by which states and their leaders determine threats to national security based on subjective rather than objective assessments of perceived danger”, as clarified by Kilroy (2018). The word “subjective” in this definition is critical in understanding this research due to the fact that the whole process of

securitization of the Hong Kong protests case is based on the intention of the Chinese government of convincing the public with subjective narratives about the seriousness of this threat.

Securitization occurs across five different sectors: military, political, economic, societal, and environmental.<sup>30</sup> Securitized issues are categorized as military when they involve the use of force, coercion, or wars; the ones in the political sector include relationships of authority, governing status and recognition; the economic sector comprises trade, production and finance; the societal sector encompass the sustainability of collective identities; and finally the environmental one involves the planetary biosphere as the support system on which human beings depend (Buzan and Little, 2000). Regarding the case of Hong Kong, its securitization lays on the political sector, since the relationship and the main issue between mainland China and the HKSAR is mainly about authority, governing status and recognition, even though economic and socio-cultural problems also have a secondary effect. By passing the National Security Law, what Beijing tackled primarily was Hong Kong people's autonomy, freedom of speech and democracy, some even calling it "the end of Hong Kong".<sup>31</sup>

Some key points of the securitization theory must be pointed out for better understanding of the analytical part. The theory claims

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<sup>30</sup> Kilroy R.J. (2018) Securitization. In: Masys A. (eds) Handbook of Security Science. *Springer, Cham*. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51761-2\\_11-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51761-2_11-1)

<sup>31</sup> Grace Tsoi and Lam Cho Wai. (30 June 2020). Hong Kong security law: What is it and is it worrying? *BBC*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52765838>

that when states consider a threat to be excessively threatening, they will “securitize” these perceived threats to national security often without taking public debate into account and forgetting about democratic processes.<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon will clearly be seen in the handling of the Hong Kong protests case by the Chinese authority, for which is repeatedly criticized by other international actors.

Securitization theory’s main premise is that national security policy is carefully designed and planned by a nation’s politicians and decision-makers, by labelling political issues as ‘dangerous’, ‘threatening’, ‘alarming’, etc., which then become identified by the public as an extreme security issue that needs to be dealt with as an urgent matter. The ‘securitizing actor’ is the agent who has the social and institutional power to move the issue beyond politics. For the Hong Kong-China issue, this actor is clearly the CCP. The following section will show how official remarks made by mainland foreign ministry politicians, suggesting the Hong Kong protests to be violent, illegal, and even a threat to national security, has shifted this issue from a low priority political concern to a high priority issue that required immediate action, ultimately passing the National Security Law, when the governments had for a period of more than two decades, coexisted and let live the annual protests.

Securitization theory challenged traditional approaches to security in International Relations by stressing that ‘issues’ cannot be

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<sup>32</sup> Kilroy R.J. (2018) Securitization. In: Masys A. (eds) Handbook of Security Science. *Springer, Cham*. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51761-2\\_11-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51761-2_11-1)

threatening by themselves, but rather, it is by calling them or referring to them as ‘security’ issues that they become threatening security problems. Central to securitization theory is studying the rhetorical or narrative structure of a state’s decision-makers and leaders when framing an issue and attempting to convince an audience to elevate the issue above politics. This is what we call a ‘speech act’ – ‘by saying the words, something is done, like betting, giving a promise, naming a ship’ (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998).

Conceptualizing securitization as a ‘speech act’ is critical because it proves that words do not just represent and describe reality, but also constitute reality, which in turn triggers certain responses. In the process of describing the reality we experience, we also interact with that world and perform an action that will contribute to seeing that reality in one way or another. Therefore, the key is in the speech act of leaders, in other words “how they exaggerate and decorate facts in order to convince the public to believe what they want them to believe” (McGlinchey, Scheinpflug,, Walters, 2017).

## 5. Securitization of protests

Before diving into the utilization of the securitization theory, some contextualization of the Hong Kong issue on the Beijing agenda will help clarify and set the basis for further exploration. Therefore, in this section, some specifications will be made through Baldwin's (1997) seven specifications that facilitate analyzing the rationality of mainland security policies when dealing with the HKSAR. These following criteria began when Wolfers (1952) emphasized the importance of specification when it comes to national security, because it can be a "dangerously ambiguous concept".<sup>33</sup> What this means is that it is necessary to understand how important it is for a state to take down a specific threat or how long they plan to take to get rid of a problem, for example, in order to comprehend the specific decision-making a government has taken. If we understand the position of Hong Kong protests as a threat to China's national security and at what cost Beijing was willing to put an end to them, we can better internalize the securitization process that ended with the passing of the National Security Law in 2020.

With this purpose, the Defense White Papers officially published by the central government of China from the periods between 1998 and 2019 have been analyzed. The Chinese

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<sup>33</sup> Wolfers, A. (1952). "National Security" as an Ambiguous Symbol. *Political Science Quarterly*, 67(4), 481–502.  
doi:10.2307/2145138

government releases them with a gap of two years between each document, and by looking at them, it has been possible to see a pattern, which is as follows:

### **1. Security for who?**

When observing the white papers, the referent objects for security are unchangeable and they are the individuals, specifically security for the Chinese people.

### **2. Security for which values?**

For the decade from 1998 to 2008, the government declares modernization, peace and development as the main values it is trying to safeguard. After that, as it rises internationally in economic importance, there is a slight change and economic development is given more weight. Territorial integrity is a value that is not named per se but is indirectly mentioned continuously throughout the documents.

### **3. How much security?**

Regarding how much security, even though it is difficult to view the idea of security as a matter of degree, since absolute security is unattainable, the Chinese government defines its quantity of desired security as the ability to have defense capability and second-strike capability.

#### **4. From what threats?**

The main threats for national security vary in small degrees throughout the years. However, the common threat that is constantly mentioned is hegemonism and power politics, which will be the basis for the securitization of the Hong Kong protests as we will see in the findings. Other threats come up in connection to the specific events that happen during the period of publishing the white papers. Common ones are terrorism and separatist forces, and information war.

#### **5. By what means?**

The main means to achieve security of a nation is probably common in most of the states, and it constitutes the modernization of military and cooperation with other states. China is no different and uses both techniques to provide enough security for its nation and its people.

#### **6. At what cost?**

As we will see in the next paragraphs, in numerous cases, human rights and morality seem to be put aside when it comes to separatist forces that threaten the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the nation. China seems to put rule of law and territorial unity above all other factors.

## 7. In what time period?

Looking at the Defense White Papers, China seems to give more importance to the long-term goals for the security of their nation-state. Even their most important security issues such as the Taiwan pro-independence movements are dealt with long-term goals of unification.<sup>34</sup>

Continuing in this section, the Hong Kong protest case will be analyzed using the securitization theory, between the periods of May 2018 to December 2020. The protests began around June 2019, escalated to a serious manner for a year, and concluded in June of 2020 with the passage of the Hong Kong National Security Law by the Hong Kong SAR government in hand with the central government of the CCP. With the purpose of making the chronology of the speech act easier to follow, I have presented a line graph with the number of days per month “Hong Kong” is mentioned at the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson’s regular press conferences. This enables a visual illustration of the analysis I will be conducting about the Hong Kong case’s securitization process. After taking a look at the CCP Foreign Ministry Spokesperson’s Regular Press Conferences which take place every working day, for the periods between May 2018 to

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<sup>34</sup> For this section, the Chinese Communist Party’s official Defense White Papers from 1998 to 2019. They were intended to be used as data for the research but did not provide any evidence that Hong Kong protests issue became increasingly a threat since the number of mentions in the White Papers did not see a significant change and was close to zero in all of them. Therefore, they are simply used as a document that can provide general background information on what the Chinese government sees as a threat to their national security.

December 2020, we can see a pattern of drastic increase in the number of days in which the press asks diplomatic questions in relation to Hong Kong, more specifically about the Hong Kong protests and all the relevant topics in carries with it –democracy, freedom of speech, human rights, sovereignty, police violence, to name some– and the amendment bills surrounding these protests (See Figure 1).

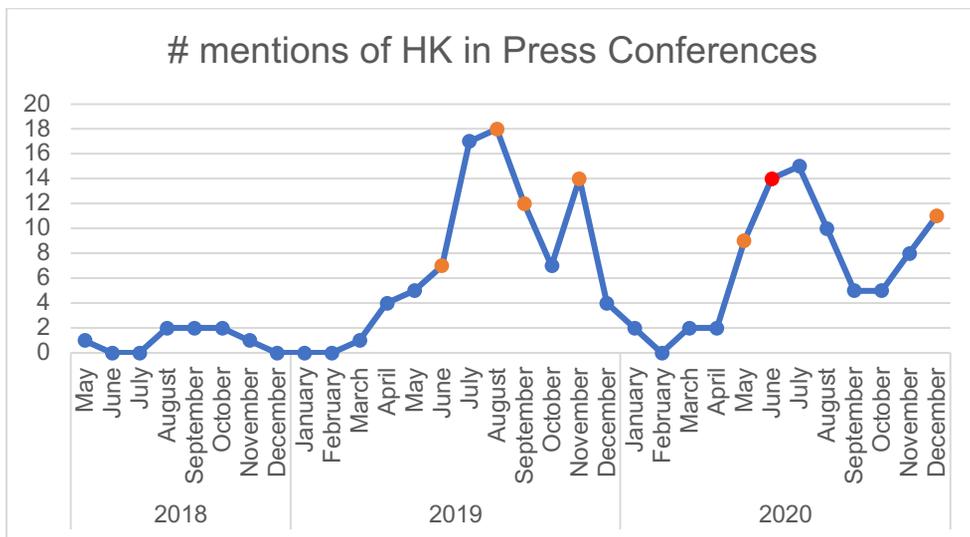


Figure 1. Number of days per month “Hong Kong” is mentioned in the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson’s Regular Press Conferences.

For more concrete description about the graph, we can see that starting from April 2019, around the time the political issues began to destabilize Hong Kong, the line goes up and down in a rather unsteady manner. In the following paragraphs we will be able to see how the securitization of the Hong Kong protests has months of tightened securitization and other months were other diplomatic

issues, such as the spread of COVID-19, cover the issue of Hong Kong and the mentions decrease. Moreover, the orange dots illustrate the special remarks the spokesperson gives publicly to make a statement or a clarification about a specific topic of interest. Remarks are made by government spokesperson when a certain subject is dragged for too long and no conclusion has been reached, and therefore the government tries to make a point about the highly discussed matter (Figure 2). We can see that whenever the line reaches a high peak, which is the times the Hong Kong protests are dealt several times during a press conference, there has been a remark about the Hong Kong protests. Finally, the red dot shows the month when the National Security Law was passed, which was in June 2020.

Year	Month	Title
2019	June	Hong Kong's legislative amendment
	August	US House Nancy Pelosi's erroneous remarks on Hong Kong
		US vile Hong Kong-related remarks
		US side's vile comments relating to Hong Kong
	September	Passing of the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act in the US Congress
		Passage of the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act in the US House of Representatives
November	US Senate passing Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act	
2020	May	Hong Kong-related agenda of the National People's Congress
	June	Passage of the law on safeguarding national security in Hong Kong by the NPC Standing Committee
	December	US sanctions on leading members of the NPC Standing Committee under the pretext of Hong Kong-related issues

**Figure 2. Special remarks made separately from Foreign Ministry Regular Press Conferences.**

Before going further into details, some more clarifications have to be pointed out beforehand. First, from May 2018 until March 2019 Hong Kong is not a reiterated issue during the press conferences, even considering that Hong Kong protesters come out to the streets yearly to protests against the handover

commemoration as a manifest against the government. This is evidence of the low turnout of the July 2018 protests, and how the Beijing and Hong Kong governments together could focus their diplomacy on other noteworthy issues. During this stable period of almost a year, the Foreign Ministry only got a handful questions regarding Hong Kong, mainly about the United Kingdom and the United States submitting their habitual reports on Hong Kong, to which the spokesperson replied with the narrative of being “strongly dissatisfied” and “firmly opposed” to foreign interference, calling their remarks “irresponsible”, “presumptuous” and “unwarranted”. This is, as we will continuously see throughout the analysis of the CCP speech act, their main response and attitude towards any international request of explanation about Hong Kong. Second, between the months of January and March of 2020 there is a complete lack of mentions of Hong Kong during Foreign Ministry regular press conferences because they are mainly and almost exclusively dedicated to the Coronavirus outbreak and the international effort to contain the spread of the new virus that has had the whole international system in a panic state for more than a year now. Therefore, the critical months that this study will focus its attention on is from May to December of 2019, and from May to December of 2020.

As an additional note, the reporters who attended to the regular press conferences and will not be explicitly named because of its lack of relevance are: CCTV, Reuters, Kyodo News, AFP,

Beijing Youth Daily, The Daily Telegraph, Shenzhen TV, Bloomberg, South China Morning Post, NHK, The Paper, CRI, APP, Xinhua News Agency, China Review News, The New York Times, ITV, BBC, and Phoenix TV. Besides, the spokesperson of the CCP Foreign Ministry also alternate routinely between Zhao Lijian, Hua Chunying, Wang Wenbin and Geng Shuang.

As mentioned before, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has a model answer they repeat when they do not want to go further into details or when the question is too compromising. It simply states that Hong Kong is their internal affairs and no country other than China has the right to interfere:

Hong Kong affairs are purely China's internal affairs. No other country, organization or individual has the right to interfere. [...] Since the return of Hong Kong, policies including "one country, two systems", "Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong" and a high degree of autonomy have been earnestly implemented. Hong Kong people's rights and freedoms have been fully guaranteed (June 13th 2019 Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's regular press conference).

In addition to this method of putting a full stop to the questions asked by claiming Hong Kong affairs are entirely

domestic affairs, the Chinese government also has other methods in their sleeves. One of them is by declaring not to be aware of the issue the reporters are asking about and the other one is by claiming that the issue asked about is not a diplomatic matter that should be addressed in regular press conference. Through these three techniques, the Chinese government successfully avoids answering the reporters' questions in a specific and detailed manner. For the purpose of this study, we will omit the analysis of the questions answered with these techniques, and only focus on the replies that contain some type of information that have implications and from which we can derive some findings.

## *Analysis: May to December 2019*

In the beginning of April of 2019, the Hong Kong government introduces its ongoing legislative proceedings on the amendment of the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance and the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance. At the same time, they also go public about the decision to legally charge the organizers of the “Occupy Central” Movement that happened in 2014. As a consequence, between April and June of 2019, the press conferences were filled with questions about the implications of these legal processes on Hong Kong people’s political freedoms and democracy. As response, Beijing spokesperson numerously repeats that this 2014 movement caused “serious damage to Hong Kong’s rule of law, social order, economy and people’s life” and to its “prosperity and stability”.

Also, they use the narrative of not wanting Hong Kong to “become a safe haven for criminals”. Due to the ongoing discussions about the extradition law, protests officially escalated and turned to a full-fledged mode in mid-June, with protesters gathering in front of the Legislative Council building. The spokesperson calls these protests “a blatant, organized riot” and “illegal behaviors that damage peace and tranquility and defy the law”. The government put an effort to villainize the protesters’ actions in order to have a plot to pass the extradition bill. Then, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, Geng Shuang gives remarks on the issue saying that the government will suspend the amendments.

In July of 2019, the mentions of Hong Kong in the press conferences reach a high number due to a series of “rallies” and “violent behaviors” that culminate with a violent attack in Yuen Long Metro Station on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, in which people dressed in white attacked people indiscriminately, including anti-extradition bill protesters who wore black as their protests symbol. During this time, when a question is formulated lightly mentioning only “mass demonstrations”, the spokesperson’s general answer is simply that the Hong Kong issue is “domestic affairs”. In contrast, when “violent behavior” is also dealt with, the answer includes an aggrandizement of the violence from part of the protesters that leads to the public to focus solely on their behavior.

The political leaders also make sure they defend the same violent actions and measures taken by the police force, with narratives such as “we firmly support the police in lawfully punishing the perpetrators and safeguarding the rule of law and social order and security in Hong Kong” and “by neglecting and distorting the truth, they whitewashed violent crimes as a struggle for human rights and freedom, and deliberately misinterpreted the work of Hong Kong police as violent repression when the police were only enforcing the law fighting crimes and upholding social order”. With this, the central government carefully uses adjectives such as “lawfully” to excuse the use of force by the police, while also justifying their acts with the narrative of defending external elements including “rule of law”, “social order” and “security”.

In addition, there is an increase in foreign interference and criticism of the CCP by the UK, the US, and the E.U. Specially involved is British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, and new topics are brought to light, for instance democracy and the right to a peaceful protest. For example, on July 3rd, a reporter expresses that “the Hong Kong authorities must not use demonstrators’ vandalism as a pretext for repression”. As these direct attacks on the Hong Kong SAR and mainland governments’ way of handling the ongoing issues increase, there is a parallel change in the speech act and attitude of the Foreign Ministry spokesperson’s answers. They now include more incriminating expressions against foreign interference: “flagrant interference”, “stark double standards”, “ugly face of hypocrisy itself”, “condescendingly criticizing other countries”, “lying without remorse”, etc.

Three significant additions during this sensitive period for the SAR and central governments appear as a defense mechanism against the tense situation involving more aggressive protests against the amendment bill. First, the government actors begin calling the protesters out with a more evocative tone, suggesting that they are the main causers of disturbance in the city, using names such as “violent law breakers”, “radical protesters”, or “criminals”; and portraying their actions as negatively and aggressively possible: “wantonly vandalized”, “illegally stored dangerous goods and offensive weapons”, or “attacked the police in lethal means, beat them and even bit their fingers off”, describing them as inhumane

and uncivilized, almost animal-like.

Second, against foreign attack regarding respect for freedom of speech and assembly in favor of the protesters, the government adopts the scheme of blaming other countries for their cooperation and assistance to the disorder. For instance, as a response against attacks from the UK Minister of State for the Middle East and the US Department of State on July 23rd, China responds with “we see clear signs of foreign manipulation, orchestration and even organization in the relevant violent incidents”.

The Chinese government also tries to incriminate the US as being the mastermind behind the Hong Kong protests: “The US has been making various Hong Kong-related accusations that are wanton, fact-distorting and inflammatory”, “they are somehow the work of the US”, “we saw some American faces among the violent demonstrators in Hong Kong”, and “we even saw the national flag of the US on some occasions”. They even give them indirect warnings to be careful with what they say and do about China: “We advise the US to withdraw its dirty hands from Hong Kong as soon as possible”; and even throw rhetorical questions to the foreign governments through the reporters at the press conferences: “what are you really up to? What is your true intention behind the Hong Kong issue?”

Third, Beijing spokesperson begin to involve the public more into sympathizing with their position, using convincing sentences as to what the majority and the right people should think and do. For example, “I believe the majority of Hong Kong residents have a

sober understanding of the damage and nature of the violent illegal behaviors of a small number of radicals”, “I believe the majority of Hong Kong residents want to make concerted efforts to safeguard Hong Kong”, “I believe those who truly love Hong Kong must be heartbroken”, “All Hong Kong-loving people with a sense of justice should stand together to safeguard security and order in Hong Kong”, and “I believe this is the shared aspiration of every Hong Kong resident. Am I right?”. This is a clear technique to subconsciously lead the public to believe that the group that are fighting against the government are only few in number while the majority is in favor of their decisions, and that those people that are protesting against the government do not love their region and do not want the best for it. Also, it leads people to think that if they support their ideas, you are also damaging and putting the city in danger.

August reaches the highest number of mentions ever about Hong Kong in Chinese Foreign Ministry press conferences during the period of research. From August to November, the situation with the Hong Kong protests gets even more serious and more external actors begin to get involved and speak out their standpoints, and the protests commence to have an international impact in other states. For the first time, reporters start to mention pro-Beijing counter-protests and conflicts between supporters of the protesters and supporters of the Hong Kong and mainland governments and the police. Especially noticeable are the clashes between Chinese university students studying abroad. There are mentions of this

phenomenon happening in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom among others. From this point on, other states aside from the US and the UK who were already tangled, start to become interested in China's affairs. To this, China's method of speech involves talking negatively about those who side on the anti-Chinese government side and talking highly about those that support the Chinese decision-making. When German Foreign Minister Maas meets with Joshua Wong, one of the main pro-democracy activists and main characters leading the Hong Kong protest, China blames them for "brown-nosing Western forces for separatist purposes", and for "putting on a political show by newsjacking". On the contrary, they use Russia's support to justify and rationalize their behavior: "I just saw many high-resolution photos released by some Russian media, depicting demonstrators' weapons like umbrellas with knives and barbs hidden inside and gasoline bombs". This argument has more validity thanks to the fact that they count on Russian support.

Additionally, not only new states begin to show their position regarding this topic, but social media networks -Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp-, and technology companies -Apple- also start to show their perspective about the protests. Some of these are reflected in their allegations about accounts being backed by the Chinese government with the purpose of spreading "disinformation", in other words "organized dissemination of false information on the Hong Kong demonstrations", in turn banning advertisements from state-run media and blocking certain accounts that seem suspicious.

Moreover, individual actors that play a significant part in the protests, such as democracy activist Joshua Wong or singer and actress Denise Ho begin to get special attention and mention during the press conferences. These activists get portrayed as evil characters by the Chinese Foreign Ministry: “this person’s evil plotting for “Hong Kong Independence” and “this individual is a plotter for “Hong Kong Independence” in and out”. They go as far as not even bothering to pronounce their names, calling them “this person” or “this individual”, with the aim of strengthening the effect of belittling their influence in the democratic protests.

Furthermore, perhaps the most significant event during this month is the passage by the US Senate of the Hong Kong Human rights and democracy Act at the end of September, aiming at calling on China to protect Hong Kong’s freedom, legal system and democratic ways of life. The first attempt is carried out on the 25th of September, then on the 19th of November it is officially passed, and on the 27th of the same month President Trump signs the bill and it is legally concluded. Against this, the Chinese government defends itself with the following narratives criticizing the nature of the US: “disregarding and distorting facts by referring to serious criminal offenses [...] as an issue of human rights and democracy” or “it fully exposes the shocking hypocrisy of some in the US on human rights and democracy and their malicious intention to undermine Hong Kong’s prosperity and stability to contain China’s development”. With this, China succeeds in trying to make the US the antagonist of

the story. As a response against this act, the Chinese government issues three special remarks on the topic expressing their disagreement toward their decision and calling on the US to stop advancing the bill in order to avoid further damaging the relation between the two countries: “The US House of Representatives is disregarding and distorting facts by referring to serious criminal offenses such as arson, smashing of shops and violence against police officers as an issue of human rights and democracy. [...] it fully exposes the shocking hypocrisy of some in the US” and “immediately stop pushing the Hong Kong-related act [...] before falling off the edge of the cliff”.

Lastly, when confronted with questions about the violent nature of the protests and international concern is raised about the developments in Hong Kong, the Chinese government once again begins to use more extreme adjectives to describe these protesters’ tendencies: “they are radical, violent activities that severely undermine Hong Kong’s rule of law and social order, gravely threaten the life and property of Hong Kong citizens, and seriously challenge the basic principle of “one country, two systems”, “flagrantly disrupted social order, vandalized public facilities, attacked the police and left a trail of smashed or burned items all over the city”, “they trampled on the bottom line of morality, crossed the bottom line of rule of law, and challenged the bottom line of “one country, two systems”, and “the mobsters [...] assaulted police officers, including by extremely cruel life-threatening means such as

acid attacks and slashing of throats”.

Starting from the end of November to beginning of December of 2019, there is a clear change of attitude in the Chinese government responses because of ongoing trade talks with the US. Their speech act avoids directly attacking President Trump or the US government, and the spokesperson limits himself to repeating the memorized neutral narrative previously cited without giving many details or suggestive remarks. For example, they continuously reiterate the fact that if the US continues with the process of legalizing this act, China will “take strong countermeasures” but does not go further into details of what does countermeasures are, even when asked directly several times by reporters: “Please stay tuned to see what our countermeasures will be and when they will be rolled out. What should come, will come”.

On December 2<sup>nd</sup>, finally the countermeasures that had been talked about for the past couple of months are exposed: to suspend reviewing requests of US military vessels and aircraft to visit Hong Kong; and to impose sanctions on NGOs that played a role in the disturbance related to an amendment bill in Hong Kong. As we can see, China begins to include more actors to the problematic of Hong Kong protests, now blaming US-based NGOs such as the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the International Republican Institute, Human Rights Watch, and Freedom House. This blame is hidden under the pretext that these NGOs played a part by “aiding and abetting [Hong

Kong protests] in extreme violent criminal acts and inciting “Hong Kong independence” separatist activities”.

## *Analysis: May to December 2020*

After several months of dealing solely with issues regarding the Coronavirus during press conferences and a calmer situation with the Hong Kong protests, in May, there is a return to instability in this topic. Starting in May, US Secretary of State Pompeo attacks China's decision-makings and political systems multiple times, including their interference with the work of American journalists in Hong Kong. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2020, the Chinese government issues remarks about their "draft decision to establish and improve a legal framework and enforcement mechanism for safeguarding national security in the HKSAR, which was submitted to the third session of the 13<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress for deliberation". China's narrative to justify the implementation of the possible law are that it will only affect a small number of people that can be considered criminals, and that it will have long-term benefits for every citizen in the country: "the NPC decision targets a very small number of people who are splitting the country, subverting state power, organizing and carrying out terrorist activities, and foreign and external forces that are interfering in the affairs of the HKSAR" and "it will be more conducive to Hong Kong's long-term stability and tranquility". They even make the contrast between the "overwhelming majority of people" versus "only a very small number of perpetrators" to show how small the number of people affected will be. Again, China gets revenge on the US for interfering in its affairs by stating "what on earth does the

declaration have to do with the US?”, “the US side has no legal basis or right”, and “if the US is bent on harming China’s interests, China will have to take all necessary measures to fight back”.

A new element is added to China’s technique, which is to try to involve other states in the speech act to drive others to take its side: “China and all member states upholding justice will not allow the US to take the Security Council hostage for its own political purposes”. By calling them “states upholding justice”, it calls on states that believe to be just and lawful to support China’s decision.

In June 2020, the UK and the US once again strengthen their position on China’s intention to pass the National Security Law of Hong Kong. The British government warns China that they will provide privileges for Hong Kong residents holding the British National Overseas Passport (BNO), and the US President Trump notifies about intentions of eliminating policy exemptions that give Hong Kong different and special treatment, suspend the entry of certain Chinese students and researchers to America, and study Chinese companies listed on the US financial markets. As defense, China refutes by bringing up historical factors to their narrative, specifically the “Cold-War mentality” of the US and “invasion, colonialism and unequal treaties” of the UK. Additionally, China once again returns to the method of changing the responses to reporters’ questions to indirect questions to the external governments. These are some questions thrown by spokesperson Hua Chunying to Pompeo during the regular press conference on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June: “did

Hong Kong ever enjoy any democracy of freedom during the 156 years under British colonial rule? Was any of the former 28 Hong Kong governors elected by the Hong Kong residents? Did the Hong Kong residents then enjoy the freedom to take to the street for demonstration?”

When describing the possibility of the national security legislation, China describes it as positively as possible, calling it “reasonable, lawful, necessary and urgently needed”. Also, China uses the rationalization technique of being able to do it because the UK also did it in the past: “Britain has also passed multiple pieces of national security legislation in recent years. During the British colonial rule of Hong Kong, the British Treason Act was applied in Hong Kong with special enforcement agencies. There is no reason for the UK to apply double standards on the matter”. Against the US however, China adopts rougher reactions, using adjective clauses such as “vicious denigration”, “grave interference”, and “egregious conduct” when describing the US behaviors toward the legislation. After all these giving and receiving during the month of June between the US and UK team against China, the Hong Kong National Security Law is finally officially passed on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June of 2020.

To finish this analysis, the aftermath of the passage of the law has to be discussed, since the speech act of the Chinese government continues to have intriguing elements to it. First, the Chinese government begins to increasingly include the word “all” in order to make it feel like their position is everyone’s shared opinion,

for example when they state that the National Security Law “reflects the shared will of all Chinese people including Hong Kong compatriots”, or that the legislation is “unanimously supported and endorsed by all the Chinese people including the people in Hong Kong”. Second, they start to give specific data with exact numbers to make the information given more credible for the public. For instance, when talking about the countries that support the passage of the law, they say that “on behalf of 53 countries, Cuba made a joint statement” supporting the law, or that “over 70 countries including Laos and Vietnam voiced their support for China’s legislation”. The Foreign Ministry also adds data about the public supporting the passage of the legislation with the same purpose: “nearly three million Hong Kong residents signed up in support of the law” and that “an online signing campaign against external interference garnered support from 1.5 million people”.

## *Findings*

Through the analysis of the chronology of securitization of the Foreign Ministry of mainland China, several findings have been exposed, that push us closer to understanding the method of rationalization behind the passage of the Hong Kong National Security Law. First, in the beginning stage of the protests against the extradition bill, the central government does in fact use negative narrative toward the protesters, aiming at vilifying them through the addition of adjectives that portray a more exaggerated violent and aggressive mannerism. This is the central government's main procedure from May to December of 2019. Foreign interference has inevitably always been a part of the Hong Kong sovereignty issue because it had been ruled by the British before being handed over back to China.

However, through this research, it has been found that starting from August of 2019, the issue gradually becomes more complex and foreign interference increases, shifting the route of securitization more to the external forces rather than the protesters themselves. Starting from this point forward, there is a visible increase of President Trump's involvement in protecting Hong Kong; of the protests' influence in non-related matters such as ongoing China-US trade talks; of other influential individual's outspoken criticisms of China's decision-makings most notably US Secretary of State Pompeo's constant supervision and opinions; and of other

Western states' support of the US and the UK, and their consequent involvement in Hong Kong affairs, such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and even Japan.

The CCP tried numerous times to apply other methods to stop or lessen foreign forces intervening in their Hong Kong affairs. Some of these methods were repeatedly claiming to be domestic affairs, warning about taking countermeasures and putting sanctions against states and individuals who interfere in their internal affairs and breaking international law or trying to explain with credible arguments and even comparisons and examples from other countries' situation to get foreign forces to understand better their situation. However, not even a year of effort worked out and they found themselves with no other alternative than pass a law that would completely cease these blockages of sovereignty on a land that they genuinely consider domestic affairs. From these significant developments we can deduce that more than a securitization of the protesters themselves, the National Security Law addressed to Hong Kong was in fact passed as a statement against external interference. The international "meddling" as the Chinese authorities call external interference in several instances increases to a point where the government has to increasingly deal with reporters' questions asking about foreign forces making such and such comments about the CCP's political decisions regarding Hong Kong.

Second, several official statements and documents passed by other states have given China a push to implement the Hong Kong

National Security Law more urgently than they might have planned. Between November of 2019 and December of 2020, in the span of one year, there have been multiple Acts and Declarations executed mainly by the United Kingdom and the United States, and also collectively by the G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK and US): the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act by the US in November 2019; the Foreign Ministers' Statement on Hong Kong by the Group of Seven in June of 2019; the Hong Kong Autonomy Act by the US also in June of 2019; the UK changing the law so that the Chinese citizens holding BNO passports to be able to apply for UK citizenship; the Hong Kong People's Freedom and Choice Act by the US in December of 2020; and lastly, the Sino-British Joint Declaration established in 1997 is brought up numerous times even to this day during the press conferences to dispute whether China is breaking human rights laws. Therefore, when considering the number of times the central government mentions all of these laws implemented by other states confronting China, it is clear that China would use this reasoning in their speech act in order to rationalize their passage of the law.

## 6. Conclusion

The Hong Kong issue has been a concern for mainland China since its handover, and after 23 years of letting protests happen and threaten the stability of the central government, Xi Jinping has finally implemented a National Security Law in 2020 putting a full stop to the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests. Just a few weeks after China's imposition of the new National Security Law on Hong Kong, its effects have already been visible: it emboldened the CCP to suppress dissent, punish activism, and create fear within the city's democracy movement. All of these have been evident with the imprisonments of several people in the arena of law, teaching, and activism during the past couple of months. Beijing's move to exert increased control over the city reflects several factors, first and foremost among them the rise of Xi Jinping. Xi has attempted to strengthen the CCP's control of China and his control of the CCP, and after tightening his grip on the mainland, he naturally sought to inflict the same fate on Hong Kong.

The reasons behind the ending of the protests are clearly internal, such as the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party and the 2022 Olympics in China, which can reinforce Xi Jinping's power. The government was not willing to let any forces obstruct these critical events, which left them with the sole option of passing a law that could end all complications at once. However, the Chinese government's action to pass the National Security Law

aiming at stabilizing the citizens before the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics has in reality taken the opposite route of what they expected. The European Union Parliament has urged officials to skip the Olympics because they consider the new security law to be posing a threat to human rights in Hong Kong.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Beijing's effort to block any sign of hostility from part of social groups toward the central government have not ended with the approval of the National Security Law discussed in this paper. After the passing of this law that ceased anti-government protests in Hong Kong once and for all, Xi Jinping made sure not to leave any open doors that could lead back to the previous situation. Him and the central government further strengthened their power under the reform plan that was approved by the National People's Congress Standing Committee. According to this plan, the Election Committee, which is responsible for choosing Hong Kong's leader was granted the right to send 40 representatives to the Legislative Council, expanding the number of seats from 70 to 90.<sup>36</sup> This in turn means that the central government's control over Hong Kong's ruling will increase.

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<sup>35</sup> AFP. (July 9, 2021). EU parliament says Hong Kong under security law a 'human rights emergency,' urges officials to skip Beijing Olympics. *Hong Kong Free Press*. Retrieved from <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/07/09/eu-parliament-says-hong-kong-under-security-law-a-human-rights-emergency-urges-officials-to-skip-beijing-olympics/>

<sup>36</sup> (March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021). Sweeping changes to Hong Kong's electoral system approved unanimously in Beijing. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3127563/sweeping-changes-hong-kongs-electoral-system-approved>

Through this study on the Foreign Ministry of the CCP's Regular Press Conferences, it has been able to reach to some conclusions. First, when the 2019 Hong Kong process commenced, the speech act and narrative of the Chinese government press conferences were aiming at securitizing the protests through the vilification of the protesters themselves, but the route had a drastic change when international interference started to pose a serious problem. Second, the passage of the Hong Kong National Security Law can be seen as a mechanism taken by the central authorities to be able to put a full stop to foreign interference and be able to move on to other issues that are in need of addressing, such as the Coronavirus, the Taiwan–Strait and South China Sea disputes, or trade talks with the US. Third, several legislative measures taken by other states in regard to China's handling of the Hong Kong affairs have given an incentive and a push for the Chinese authorities to pass the National Security Law more unexpectedly and drastically than expected by the public.

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## Abstract

2020년 6월 시진핑 중국 주석은 홍콩 국가 보안법을 통과시켜 20년 동안 계속된 홍콩 시위에 대해 결론을 내렸다. 이 연구는 중앙 및 홍콩 정부가 법의 통과를 정당화하기 위해 사용한 연설을 연구한다. 이것은 정치 행위자의 연설 행위에 초점을 맞춘 코펜하겐 학교의 증권화 이론을 활용함으로써 달성될 것이다. 이 연구는 다음을 주장한다. 첫째, 2019년 홍콩 절차가 시작될 때 중국 정부의 기자 회견 연설은 시위대의 비방을 통해 시위를 확보하는 것을 목표로 했지만 국제 간섭이 시작하면서 목표가 바뀌었다. 둘째, 홍콩 국가 보안법의 통과는 외국의 간섭을 완전히 중단하고 해결이 필요한 다른 문제에 집중을 할 수 있기 위한 메커니즘으로 볼 수 있습니다. 셋째, 중국의 홍콩 문제 처리와 관련하여 다른 국가가 취한 여러 입법 조치는 중국 당국이 국가 보안법을 통과하도록 동기를 부여했다.