

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection.

The Struggle for Hong Kong

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For centuries, the city has been a cultural and economic crossroads between East and West — and a flash point for conflict. Here's everything you need to know:

Why are people protesting?

Most of Hong Kong's population wants to continue to operate under the political freedoms it enjoyed during a century of British rule. The protests began when Hong Kong's chief executive, Carrie Lam, appointed by Beijing, offered legislation allowing extraditions to mainland China, where kangaroo courts operate in secret and 99 percent of the cases end in conviction. Protesters believed that the repressive Communist government in Beijing would utilize the law as a means of prosecuting Hong Kongers for political dissent. But what began as peaceful demonstration with a single objective has mushroomed into a violent, six-month struggle over the future of the island. Hong Kong is often described as the city where "East meets West," with its Chinese culture strongly influenced by a long-standing British occupation. It's a tension that has been simmering for centuries, or since shortly after the first Europeans arrived in the area at the start of the 16th century.

Which country arrived first?

Portuguese explorers sailed into the area in 1513, and by 1557, Portugal had established a leasehold in Macao, about 40 miles from Hong Kong. Trading was brisk, albeit one-sided. Europeans eagerly bought Chinese silks, tea, and porcelain, but China was interested mostly in Europe's bullion, not its manufactured goods. In the 18th century, the Portuguese began trading a product that did interest the Chinese: opium imported from India. By 1729, addiction had become so rampant that the Chinese Emperor Yongzheng banned its sale and consumption. The ban failed, and by the end of the 19th century, nearly one-third of China's 300 million people were hooked. In 1838, the Daoguang Emperor appointed a viceroy, Lin Zexu, to solve the problem.

What did Lin Zexu do?

He wrote an open letter to Queen Victoria — a florid, rambling 2,700-word missive that demanded the British sovereign put a stop to the opium trade that had "caused every province of the land to overflow with that poison." The letter was not answered. Lin then sacked the European merchants' hub in the city of Canton (modern-day Guangzhou, located about 100 miles from Hong Kong). In all, Lin's troops seized and destroyed about 21,000 chests of opium, or 1,400 tons.

How did Britain respond?

At first, Charles Elliot, chief superintendent of British trade in China, ordered British opium runners to avoid Chinese ports; then he blockaded the Pearl River leading to Canton to ensure they obeyed his edict. When a rogue British ship tried to evade the blockade, a naval battle between British and Chinese ships triggered the First Opium War. The superior Royal Navy inflicted a series of defeats on the Chinese forces, eventually sailing up the Pearl River and

occupying Canton. On Aug. 29, 1842, the Chinese ceded Hong Kong Island as part of the Treaty of Nanjing. Eighteen years later, the British won Kowloon Peninsula after the Second Opium War. In 1898, with Western powers carving up a weakened China, the British secured a rent-free, 99-year lease on the third region of Hong Kong, an area known as the "New Territories" that comprises 86 percent of the city's 426 square miles and more than half of its current population.

How did Hong Kong fare?

It grew and eventually flourished under British rule. The New Territories became integrated with the rest of Hong Kong, and through a series of public infrastructure projects during the 1970s, the city blossomed into a world financial center. Hong Kong attracted banks and international corporations through a combination of low taxes, a stable currency backed by sterling, independent judiciary, low levels of corruption, and a world-class harbor, and as a gateway for foreign investment into China's vast market. That gateway became even more important as China began liberalizing its economy, which grew at a rapid pace.

How did the Chinese take over?

As the end of the 99-year lease approached, China and Britain negotiated the city's future. On Dec. 19, 1984, the two nations agreed that Britain would hand over Hong Kong to the People's Republic on July 1, 1997, and that Hong Kong would continue as a capitalist entity with guarantees of free speech and a free press under a version of English Common Law until 2047. China, however, insisted that the city would be governed by a chief executive appointed by Beijing. Hong Kong has since operated under a "one country, two systems" principle by which China controls its foreign affairs and defense but the city is otherwise independent. This has left Hong Kong in a kind of political limbo — half Western, half Chinese — with no easy resolution in sight. "On the current trajectory, another confrontation is inevitable," said Steve Tsang, director of the University of London's SOAS China Institute. China's rulers, he said, "just don't get it. Their default is to use repression, which will only breed more protest."

When two systems become one

No one knows what will happen when the deal negotiated with Britain expires and full control of Hong Kong reverts to the Chinese Communist Party in 2047. Chinese President Xi Jinping has made no commitments, although he did tell his party in 2017 that "maintaining lasting prosperity and stability in Hong Kong and Macao and achieving China's full reunification are essential to realizing national rejuvenation.... We should ensure that the principle of 'one country, two systems' remains unchanged, is unwaveringly upheld, and in practice is not bent or distorted." Some have interpreted his words to suggest an openness to leaving the current arrangement in place past the deadline, but he does have options. He could, for instance, allow the city to possess a version of the enhanced freedoms granted to other dynamic areas of the country — such as the special economic zone that includes the nearby city of Shenzhen. But those freedoms primarily concern business, not politics. As China's Communist Party moves deeper into authoritarian control of its population, it's hard to imagine it will continue to tolerate Hong Kongers' dissent and political independence.

Possible Response Questions:

- What are your thoughts about the protests in Hong Kong? Explain.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a "move" made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.