

# Rival Securitising Attempts in the Democratisation of Hong Kong

Written by Neville Chi Hang Li

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

## Rival Securitising Attempts in the Democratisation of Hong Kong

<https://www.e-ir.info/2019/03/29/rival-securitising-attempts-in-the-democratisation-of-hong-kong/>

NEVILLE CHI HANG LI, MAR 29 2019

**This is an excerpt from *New Perspectives on China's Relations with the World: National, Transnational and International*. Get your free copy here.**

The principle of “one country, two systems” is in grave political danger. According to the Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong signed in 1984, and as later specified in Article 5 of the Basic Law, i.e. the mini-constitution of Hong Kong, the capitalist system and way of life in Hong Kong should remain unchanged for 50 years. This promise not only settled the doubts of the Hong Kong people in the 1980s, but also resolved the confidence crisis of the international community due to the differences in the political and economic systems between Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China (PRC). As stated in the record of a meeting between Thatcher and Deng in 1982, the Prime Minister regarded the question of Hong Kong as an ‘immediate issue’ as ‘money and skill would immediately begin to leave’ if such political differences were not addressed (Margaret Thatcher Foundation 1982).

Although “one country, two systems” was designed as a political buffer to avoid a direct clash between two political units, this chapter argues that the principle is politically threatened by two emerging securitising attempts throughout the democratisation of Hong Kong. The pro-self-determination camp (???) regards Hong Kong as the *only* referent object and suggests referenda on political reform (from a liberal perspective) or on independence (from a nationalist perspective) as emergency measures to securitise the democratisation of the city-state. Their securitising moves hit the nerves of the pro-establishment camp (???). The Hong Kong government and pro-Beijing lawmakers condemn the pro-self-determination camp as “separatists” – they seek to set up laws in Hong Kong to prohibit treason against the PRC. Their counter-securitising moves have shifted the referent object from Hong Kong to the PRC, blurring the political separation that has existed up until now and endangering the organisational stability of both Hong Kong and the PRC.

### Background

The “one country, two systems” principle serves as the solution to prevent a clash between two political units that have significant differences. Hong Kong owes its prosperity to a capitalist system, which it inherited during 156 years of British rule, while, since 1949, the PRC has been built upon socialism with Chinese characteristics. In addition to political and ideological differences, both political units do not share the same language, currency, degree of freedom and legal system. As a result, it would be politically irresponsible to forcefully put two political units together – this could bring catastrophic political instability to both Hong Kong and the PRC.

The mini-constitution of Hong Kong has various articles that reflect the principle of “one country, two systems.” For example, Article 2 grants Hong Kong the right to ‘exercise a high degree of autonomy and enjoy executive, legislative and independent judicial power.’ Further, Article 9 certifies English as one of the official languages. A win-win situation was established; Hong Kong operates on its own terms and Beijing also has Hong Kong back under the umbrella of “one country, two systems” without causing a direct political and organisational collision – in addition to gaining economic prosperity from the Pearl of the Orient.

# Rival Securitising Attempts in the Democratisation of Hong Kong

Written by Neville Chi Hang Li

However, this political balance is being undermined due to the ambiguity of the Basic Law. Article 15 promises the democratisation of Hong Kong stating that 'the ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive (CE) by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures.' Nevertheless, on 31 August 2014 the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) issued a white paper that interpreted the meaning of the "broadly representative nominating committee" as a 1,200 member strong committee with a heavily pro-Beijing bias (Flowerdew and Jones 2016, 520–521). It was such an interpretation from Beijing that blurred the distinctions between Hong Kong and the PRC, hitting the nerves of Hongkongers and leading to the massive Occupy Movement in 2014. The NPCSC decision is one of the greatest political threats against various referent objects – such as Hongkongers' identity, political autonomy and democratisation. Hongkongers occupied three major urban areas for 79 days, hoping to overturn the NPCSC's decision. The internal and external legitimacy of both Hong Kong and the PRC has been eroded, not only because of the NPCSC's decision but also due to numerous incidents of police misconduct in the suppression of peaceful protesters – such as the firing of 87 rounds of teargas and the clandestine beating of a handcuffed protester (Bhatia 2016; Jones and Li 2016).

Undermining the "one country, two systems" disrupts the organisational stability of all involved political units and their citizens' well-being. In the rhetorical construction of Hongkongers, not only is their autonomy being existentially threatened, their way of life that has been guaranteed by the "one country, two systems" principle is also under siege. One of the central notions of the Occupy Movement – "I want true universal suffrage" – was aimed at reclaiming the democratisation promised by the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law (Li 2014). The array of incidents involving police misconduct also demonstrates how Hong Kong's law-enforcement system has been corrupted due to political reasons. All these discourses are centred on the rhetoric that Hong Kong's autonomy is politically threatened by influences from another political unit that undermines the principle of "one country, two systems".

During these securitising attempts, the discussion has moved towards autonomy, self-determination and even independence. Pro-establishment politicians and the Hong Kong government have attempted to counter-securitise the pro-democracy rhetoric by discursively framing the localism as "separatism" that threatens the PRC's national security. They have raised various emergency measures such as the legislation of Article 23 to prohibit treason against the PRC. This chapter engages with both securitising discourses and concludes that it does not matter which side successfully securitises the political security of Hong Kong in the future – it will be a lose-lose situation for both political units. This is because the political equilibrium established by the "one country, two systems" will inevitably be undermined.

## Political Security and the Securitisation Framework

According to Buzan, political security refers to the organisational stability of a political unit, including its ideology, identity and institutions (Buzan 1991, 118). It clearly advocates a state-centrist perspective; indeed, the referent object of political security is the political unit itself – not the individuals. States are defined as organisations that 'exercise clear priority in some aspects over all other organisations with substantial territories. The term therefore includes city-states... and other forms of government...' (Tilly 1990, 1–2). Buzan *et al.* expand upon Tilly's definition by arguing that organisations, such as churches, also take on a political capacity; therefore it would be more appropriate to use the term 'political unit' to represent 'a collectivity that has gained a separate existence distinct from its subjects' (Buzan *et al.* 1998, 143).

In human security, the referent object of political security is regarded as the individual – the goal is to protect human rights from political repression (United Nations Development Project 1994, 32–33). Regarding the difference between the two approaches, Thomas and Tow pointed out that state-centric and people-centric securities are intertwined, and that political units can be a critical determining factor to either human security or human insecurity (Thomas and Tow 2002, 380). At the heart of security studies the following questions are continually asked: security for whom – for the general population? For state power itself? For dominant domestic constituencies? (Chomsky 2015).

The Copenhagen School has forged its own approach to provide an answer to these questions, namely the

# Rival Securitising Attempts in the Democratisation of Hong Kong

Written by Neville Chi Hang Li

securitisation framework. The school argues that, in order for an issue to be considered as a threat, it is necessary to undergo a process of threat construction – i.e. to frame a non-politicised issue into a politicised one, and eventually a securitised one. To put it simply, securitisation refers to the process whereby a public issue is constructed into a threat (Buzan *et al.* 1998, 23–25). Non-politicised issues refer to matters that are not included in public discussion; therefore a state does not utilise its capacity to deal with it. An issue is politicised when it is included as a part of public policy. To successfully securitise an issue and construct it as a security threat requires: 1) the declaration of an existential threat towards a particular referent object; 2) the acceptance of relevant audiences; and 3) rights to be granted by the public to the securitising actors stating that they are able to break normal political procedures and carry out emergency measures in order to deal with the threat.

The Copenhagen School's framework studies how various securitising actors rhetorically present something as an existential threat towards a particular referent object; this chapter examines two rival discursive securitising attempts related to the democratisation of Hong Kong. On the one hand, the pro-self-determination camp has attempted to securitise Hong Kong as the only referent object; on the other hand, the pro-establishment camp has attempted to securitise PRC as the only referent object. Both securitising attempts are endangering the “one country, two systems”; currently, Hong Kong and the PRC are politically threatened, which will inevitably lead to a lose-lose situation.

Prior to the discursive analysis of these rival securitising attempts in Hong Kong, it is important to note that the securitisation framework is criticised by various scholars for its state-centric perspective (Eriksson 1999; Huysmans 1998; McSweeney 1996). In fact, Buzan *et al.* have specified political threats as threats against: 1) the internal legitimacy of a political unit, and 2) external legitimacy from other political units (Buzan *et al.* 1998, 144) – both are undeniably state-centric. Waever addresses these criticisms by emphasising how the analytical framework itself is open to various securitising actors to rhetorically present something as an existential threat (Waever 1999, 335). He further states that it is up to the relevant audiences to decide whether they are convinced by the state-centric rhetoric or not. Therefore, the securitisation framework is not inherently state-centric or people-centric; it is up to the relevant audiences to decide which security rhetoric they find most convincing. Indeed, it just so happens that, most of the time, states are the most influential securitising actors, which leads to a perception that the securitisation framework is a state-centric one.

The same situation occurs in the case of Hong Kong – the rival securitising actors do not start securitisation on a level playing field; for example, the pro-establishment camp is in a more advantageous position as they are the majority in the legislative council (LegCo) in Hong Kong. They take a pro-Beijing stance along with the Hong Kong government. They have more resources and propaganda channels to promote the securitising attempt to make the PRC as the referent object in Hong Kong. In contrast, pan-democrats are the minority in the LegCo; compared to the pro-establishment, they are in a less advantageous position to declare and convince the majority of Hongkongers about an existential threat to Hong Kong's autonomy and that the “one country, two systems” is being eroded. Although both camps are concerned with political security, and each securitising rhetoric is mainly about the organisational stability of a political unit, the major difference between them is that the pro-establishment camp and the Hong Kong government regard the PRC as the only referent object. In comparison, the pro-self-determination camp postulate that Hong Kong is the only referent object. The struggle and the rivalry between these securitising actors will now be examined.

## **From PRC Liberal to Hongkongers: Transformation of Securitising Attempts in the Pro-democracy Camp**

Political security is about dealing with ‘threats to the legitimacy or recognition either of political units or of the essential patterns (structures, processes or institution) among them’ (Buzan *et al.* 1998, 144). In the securitisation framework, political units are regarded as the major referent object of the political sector, yet there are two main questions in the case of Hong Kong: what is the referent object and who are the securitising actors?

The government will usually be the securitising actor that presents their security argument when their organisational stability is being threatened. Nonetheless, this is not the case in Hong Kong. From the perspective of Hongkongers, the political insecurity that exists is due to the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy. Conventionally, the Hong Kong

# Rival Securitising Attempts in the Democratisation of Hong Kong

Written by Neville Chi Hang Li

government should declare themselves politically threatened, as there will be organisational instability if the issue is left unsettled. Yet, the Hong Kong government did not carry out any securitising move in relation to its autonomy with regard to the intervention from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), such as the NPCSC's decision. This could be mainly due to the fact that the "one country, two systems" policy expires in 2047; there is the high possibility that the Hong Kong government will lose its autonomy and will eventually be controlled by Beijing. The responsibility then falls to pan-democrats and ordinary Hongkongers; this is why 1.2 million people rallied and occupied the streets in 2014. Indeed, their rhetoric in the occupy movement has been further developed as the localist rhetoric that regards Hong Kong as the referent object.

The development of security arguments among pro-democratic Hongkongers has been through a transformation. It has changed from leveraging Hong Kong's democratisation as an emergency measure to securitise the PRC's political reform (or democratisation), to regarding Hong Kong as a referent object and upholding the systemic referent object, i.e. "one country, two systems", in order to avoid political clashes. Despite progress, pro-self-determination politicians are not satisfied with the political equilibrium and "one country, two systems" theoretically means that Hong Kong is controlled by the CCP. They radicalise the localist rhetoric by pushing it towards the direction of self-determination and independence, constructing Hong Kong as the only referent object and eroding the political equilibrium that has been established by the "one country, two systems" policy.

## *Old Democrats: Leveraging the Democratisation of Hong Kong for China*

While reviewing Hong Kong's socio-political transformation, Flowerdew lists Chris Patten's promotional discourse on the British legacy to Hong Kong as: 1) a capitalist economic system; 2) freedom of individuals; 3) independent judicial system; and 4) democratic political institutions (Flowerdew 1998; Flowerdew 2012). These elements serve as the ideological pillars that set Hong Kong apart from the PRC; therefore, "one country, two systems" is necessary to prevent clashes with regard to political ideology, political structure, the economic system and the judicial system. Regretfully, there are multiple incidents indicating that this political buffer is being eroded – the NPCSC's decision mentioned earlier serves as an example of this. Facing the erosion of the "one country, two systems" principle, Hongkongers keep protesting; various scholars have argued that such political participation contributes to building political awareness and localism within Hong Kong (Kaeding 2011; Lee 2015). The securitising attempts, putting Hong Kong as the referent object, are rooted within the development of localism in the city-state.

In fact, the securitising discourse that maintains Hong Kong as the referent object, which is regarded as localism, could be traced back earlier in 2012, when Hung noticed a British Hong Kong flag was raised during a protest for the first time to signify the British legacy to Hong Kong (Hung 2014). He further reviews the development of different rhetoric of local consciousness in Hong Kong; under his categorisation, the pro-democracy rhetoric is divided into 'seeing Hong Kong as a PRC liberal' and 'seeing Hong Kong as a Hongkonger.' Old democrats (老左) in Hong Kong consider themselves as PRC liberals (not Hong Kong liberals) that regard China as the referent object and attempt to use the democratisation of Hong Kong as an emergency measure to leverage the democratisation of the PRC (Chan 2012). They believe that Hong Kong has both a role and responsibility to promote the PRC's political reform; they argue that Hong Kong is the only place in the PRC that could possibly have democracy due to the assurance of "one country, two systems".

Interestingly, from the CCP regime's perspective, leveraging Hong Kong's democratisation for PRC political reform is actually a political threat – not an attempt for political security. Old democrats failed to recognise the distinction between state and government. Although their securitising moves declared the Chinese nation as under threat and the government as requiring democratisation, this is still considered a threat to the sovereignty of the PRC. Indeed, Buzan argues that sovereignty grants the right for the political unit to decide the form of government – even if it adopts an authoritarian one (Buzan *et al.* 1998, 152). These old democrats failed to realise that the PRC regards their securitising moves a threat, rather than an attempt to achieve security within the Chinese regime; this perspective will be discussed in the section about the securitising attempt by the pro-Beijing camp. In relation to Hong Kong, these old democrats view the PRC as the referent object of political threat, whereas the democratisation of Hong Kong is simply an emergency measure to leverage political reforms in China.

# Rival Securitising Attempts in the Democratisation of Hong Kong

Written by Neville Chi Hang Li

## *Localising Democratisation: Hong Kong and “One Country, Two Systems” as the Referent Object*

In contrast to ‘seeing Hong Kong as a PRC liberal,’ Chin has written a book called *On Hong Kong as a City-State*. It is regarded as the inspiration that has ignited the rising localism in Hong Kong, in other words ‘seeing Hong Kong as Hongkongers’ (Hung 2014). To put it simply, Chin argues that the rapid integration of Hong Kong and the PRC poses a prominent threat as it erodes the sociopolitical, economic and judicial system established during British rule in the city-state. Therefore, it is logical to declare Hong Kong as the major referent object and, for the purposes of political stability, to uphold the fading “one country, two systems” principle. Chin declares Hong Kong’s ideology, identity and institutions as under an existential threat due to increasing Chinese interventions in the form of demographical, political, economic and cultural assimilation (Chin 2011). The emergency measure he suggests is to defend “one country, two systems” in order to draw a clear separation between the two political units and to maintain the political equilibrium. The major justification raised by Chin is that the PRC needs Hong Kong more than Hong Kong needs the PRC. His logic could be applied in various aspects – for example, Hong Kong as an international political unit can support the PRC in international organisations like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in terms of funding and internationalising the Chinese currency. Therefore, it would be both in Hong Kong’s and the PRC’s interest to maintain “one country, two systems”.

However, in order to sustain the interests of both political units, Hong Kong needs to maintain its autonomy. This is so it can preserve the confidence of the international community in the same manner the Joint Declaration helped it do in the 1980s. Thus, for the sake of both Hongkongers and the Chinese, “one country, two systems” must be securitised. This new perspective, which refers to Hong Kong as the referent object, ignited the flame of localism in Hong Kong. Simply put, the localisation of Hong Kong emerged by moving away from treating the PRC as the referent object.

As stated above, securitising actors are not placed on a level playing field. The rise of localism has motivated a new pro-democracy generation in the city-state; the occupy movement in 2014 is certainly one of the blossoms. Yet, the movement was suppressed by the Hong Kong government and the hope of upholding “one country, two systems” (and the democratisation of Hong Kong) was put into a deep freeze. In order to seize a more advantageous position and to persuade the relevant audiences, Chin joined the 2016 election of the LegCo in Hong Kong with local activist organisations, i.e. the Civic Passion and Proletariat Political Institute. As the leader of this election campaign, Wong Yeung-Tat raises the notion of a *de facto* referendum on constitutional reform of the Basic Law. He and Chin share the same view in maintaining Hong Kong as the major referent object and they argue that in order to survive the surging political clashes between the two political units, the only emergency measure is to launch a constitutional reform on the Basic Law to sustain “one country, two systems” (Li 2016).

The manifesto for the localist election pact suggests reviewing various articles in the Basic Law as the emergency measure to securitise Hong Kong political security and the “one country, two systems”. One of the main focuses is a review of Article 5 as to whether the capitalist system and way of life in Hong Kong should remain unchanged *beyond* 50 years. In line with Chin’s argument, Wong suggests that, in order to maintain the political stability of Hong Kong, it is crucial to sustain the political buffer (Leung 2016). As this securitising move is not initiated by the Hong Kong government, the localist securitising actors attempted to get a mandate (support from the relevant audiences) in order to successfully securitise the political security of Hong Kong. They have planned two steps to reflect the legitimisation from the relevant audiences to put Hong Kong as the referent object. The first reflection is on all five of their candidates elected in all five electorates and, having cleared the first one, they can leverage their resignations in the LegCo to initiate a by-election *cum de facto* referendum. The question is then whether the result will reveal whether the Hong Kong people will legitimise the need for a constitutional reform as an emergency measure.

## **Disruption of ‘One country, Two systems’**

### *Radicalising a Securitising Move: Hong Kong as the Only Referent Object*

Regretfully, the localist election campaign only got about 154,000 votes and one seat in five electorates. This was mainly due to a new rising political force that advocates the right to self-determination in Hong Kong and extinguished

## Rival Securitising Attempts in the Democratisation of Hong Kong

Written by Neville Chi Hang Li

the localist rhetoric. Their notion of self-determination is widely shared among various new political parties including Youngspiration, Demosistō and the Hong Kong Lineup. In contrast to Chin and Wong's view, these political parties regard Hong Kong as the *only* referent object. They criticise that "one country, two systems" gives room for the PRC to intervene in Hong Kong's internal affairs. They seek a referendum on political reform (from a liberal perspective) or on independence (from a nationalist perspective). Yet, Hong Kong does not have a referendum law; the CCP condemns this proposal and calls it a violation of the Basic Law. The pro-self-determination camp regards their securitising move to self-determination as more effective than the localist rhetoric that attempts to sustain "one country, two systems". It turns out their radical rhetoric received more support from the people in Hong Kong than the pro-self-determination force that won six seats, roughly 240,000 votes, in the LegCo electoral college 2016.

Later, two legislators-elect of Youngspiration, Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching, raised a banner "Hong Kong is not China" during the oath-taking process in the LegCo. They took the oath to safeguard the interests of "the Hong Kong Nation" which explicitly put Hong Kong as the only referent object. This is their securitising attempt that was legitimised by their voters. Their securitising move not only offended both the pro-establishment and old pro-democracy Chinese (who see Hong Kong as a PRC liberal) but also led to the disqualification of their seats in LegCo, as the court ruled their oath as dishonest (Haas 2017a). The incident also opened a hole in the dam; the PRC reinterpreted the Basic Law and further disqualified four more pro-democracy legislators, claiming that their oaths were not "sincere and solemn" (Lau and Chung 2017). The only localist lawmaker Cheng is also being charged and facing the risk of disqualification. Regarding the serious external intervention of the PRC, Chin and localist legislator Cheng suggested all pan-democracy legislators resign and boycott the LegCo. However, both traditional pan-democracy and pro-self-determination camps heavily criticised the suggestion and claimed that they wanted to be re-elected in the LegCo – even though the PRC can disqualify legislators according to this new interpretation of Hong Kong's mini-constitution.

Localism in Hong Kong was initiated with the good will to maintain the political security equilibrium and the enduring "one country, two systems" principle. Yet, the rhetoric was radicalised by pro-self-determination politicians, which led to even more direct interventions and disruptions. There will be by-elections taking place in 2018. It could be an interesting future research piece to analysis whether the rhetoric shifts after the disqualification. Further, it will be intriguing to find out whether all the pan-democracy legislators will resign and boycott the LegCo and their re-election in order to fight and uphold "one country, two systems".

### *Pro-Beijing Camp: The PRC's National Security as the Only Referent Object*

In response to the rise of the pro-self-determination securitising attempt, both Hong Kong and the CCP government attempted to counter-securitise the localist and pro-self-determination rhetoric by declaring the PRC's national security as being threatened. The Chief of the Chinese Liaison Office in Hong Kong, Wang, remarked that "one country, two systems" could be removed if it is leveraged to threaten the national security of the PRC (Radio Television Hong Kong 2017). This reveals that, whether traditional pan-democrats regard the democratisation of Hong Kong as a means to securitise China's political security, or pro-self-determination politicians attempt to detach themselves from "one country, two systems", both rhetorics are considered to be political threats to the PRC. The middle path is the constitutional reform proposed by Chin and Wong to sustain the "one country, two systems" principle in order to avoid clashes between the two political units. Yet, this securitising attempt did not receive sufficient endorsement from the Hong Kong people, and the PRC continues to intrude upon Hong Kong's internal business. This is because the masses in Hong Kong did not show their will to defend the political buffer.

In just a few months after the Occupy Movement, a new National Security Law of the PRC was passed in the NPCSC on 1 July 2015. There are multiple articles that counter-securitise the rhetoric of putting Hong Kong as the referent object. For example: Article 11 emphasises the preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the PRC as a 'shared obligation of all Chinese people, including compatriots from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan'; and Article 40 further specifies Hong Kong and Macao as having a responsibility in preserving the national security of the PRC. It is clear that the communist regime regards the rhetoric of securitising Hong Kong's political security as a national security threat to its sovereignty, especially when there are rising pro-independence politicians after the occupy movement (Loh 2015).

# Rival Securitising Attempts in the Democratisation of Hong Kong

Written by Neville Chi Hang Li

Nevertheless, this national security threat would not erupt if the “one country, two systems” principle was not violated multiple times by the communist government. The Hong Kong government is also responsible as pro-Beijing politicians utilise the city-state’s resources to speed up the integration of the two political units. This is due to the current “one country, two systems” only lasting for 50 years; indeed, there is no guarantee it will continue after 2047 (Li 2016). Combined with the fact that Hong Kong has not yet been democratised and the CE was elected in a pro-Beijing biased committee, localists have attempted to seek constitutional reform to extend the “one country, two systems” in order to maintain the organisational stability of the city-state. Indeed, as Article 15 of the National Security Law of the PRC clearly states, the political unit must ‘persist in the leadership of CCP, maintaining the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, developing socialist democratic politics and completing socialist rule of law...’, all these notions collide with the political, economic and legal system in Hong Kong, reminding us of the need to maintain “one country, two systems”.

In line with the PRC’s position, the pro-establishment politicians in Hong Kong also follow the rhetoric and have attempted to securitise the PRC’s national security by the legislation of Article 23 in Hong Kong that prohibits treason against the communist government. The latest CE election in Hong Kong in 2017 is the only election since 1997 where only pro-establishment candidates have entered (mainly due to the pre-screening of the pro-Beijing nomination committee that the Occupy Movement protested against). Two strong potential candidates, Carrie Lam and John Tsang, both supported the legislation of Article 23 ‘to enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People’s Government’. The proposed bill had led to half a million people protesting in 2003 due to serious concerns regarding freedom of speech. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the traditional pan-democratic politicians backed this securitising attempt, as they remained detached from the localisation of Hong Kong and continued to view the democratisation of Hong Kong as an emergency measure to securitise the democratisation of the Chinese nation.

In the manifesto of Tsang, it states that Hong Kong has a constitutional responsibility to enact local legislation to protect national security of the PRC according to Article 23 of the Basic Law. He proposed to use a ‘white bill’ to kick off the legislation and start with less controversial issues; by having this law they can ‘ensure that the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong are fully protected while safeguarding [the] national security [of the PRC].’ Tsang puts heavy emphasis on securitising the PRC’s national security; this securitising attempt shifts the referent object from Hong Kong to the PRC. Another strong CE candidate, Carrie Lam, also expresses similar views on the legislation of Article 23, putting the PRC as the only referent object. She adopts the same rhetoric to convince the election committee of the constitutional responsibility of this legislation, yet she also claimed that she noticed this is a highly controversial issue and will act cautiously. When Carrie Lam was elected by the 1,200 members of the election committee, Jasper Tsang, former LegCo president, also urged her to restart the legislation as soon as possible. The legislation of Article 23 has been a prominent issue and has been examined from legal and constitutional perspectives (Fu *et al.* 2005). It sparks questions such as whether it is reasonable for Hong Kong to be fully democratised prior to the legislation, or how the legislation would affect freedom and democratisation in Hong Kong. Yet, with the advantage of mobilising the government and public resources, the securitising attempt of the pro-Beijing camp to maintain the PRC as the referent object is clearly occupying an advantageous position. There is limited time for the people in Hong Kong to reflect their will before “one country, two systems” is completely undermined.

## Conclusion

This chapter has engaged with the rival securitising attempts in Hong Kong. While the localism of Hong Kong has been radicalised by pro-self-determination politicians who support a full departure from the one country, two systems, pro-Beijing politicians are counter-securitising it by placing the PRC as the only referent object and are attempting to legislate Article 23 to suppress ‘separatism’ in Hong Kong. The rival securitising attempts have already shaken international confidence in Hong Kong; this will eventually hurt both Hong Kong and the PRC’s national interests. The chairman of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China of America warns the new CE, Carrie Lam, that if Hong Kong is to become just another Chinese city under her leadership, America will reassess whether Hong Kong warrants special status under American law (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2017). In line with concerns over the rapidly eroding autonomy, Moody’s Investors Service has downgraded Hong Kong’s local and foreign currency issuer rating from Aa1 to Aa2. This is specifically due to concerns over the legal and institutional

# Rival Securitising Attempts in the Democratisation of Hong Kong

Written by Neville Chi Hang Li

arrangements that will be in place when one country, two systems expires (Moody's Investors Service 2017).

The Hong Kong government has also recently announced a plan to lease part of its new high-speed railway station to the PRC and to allow the Chinese Public Security to enforce Chinese laws, including national security laws and other laws that restrict freedom of speech (Haas 2017b). This would be a serious violation of the one country, two systems principle and brings political instability to Hong Kong and the PRC. It appears that the political equilibrium will inevitably be undermined; this will be a lose-lose situation for both political units. Although localists like Cheng, Chin and Wong are continuously deepening the securitising rhetoric of upholding one country, two systems to counter-balance the pro-Beijing and pro-self-determination camps (Cheng 2016; Cheng and Kan 2017; Chin 2011), there is not much time left for Hongkongers to make up their minds and decide which securitising rhetoric is most convincing for them. The by-elections will take place soon and it is critical for the public to urge all pan-democracy legislators to resign and boycott the LegCo and the re-election. This is the only way to take a firm stance against the violation of the one country, two systems principle by the PRC.

## References

- Bhatia, A. 2016. "Discursive Construction of the 'key' Moment in the Umbrella Movement." *Journal of Language and Politics* 15 (5): 551–568.
- Buzan, B. 1991. *People, States & Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester.
- Buzan, B., O. Waever, and J. de Wilde, 1998. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Chan, K. 2012. *China's Heavenly Doctrine and Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Cheng, C. T. 2016. *Civic Nationalism and State Formation*. Hong Kong: Passion Times.
- Cheng, C. T. and J. Kan. 2017. *Ji ben fa gai liang zou yi* [Proposed Amendments to the Basic Law], Hong Kong: Passion Times.
- Chin, W. 2011. *On Hong Kong as a City State*. Hong Kong: Enrich Publishing.
- Chomsky, N. 2015. *Because We Say So*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 2017. "Statement on Hong Kong's Chief Executive Election." <http://www.cecc.gov/media-center/press-releases/statement-on-hong-kongs-chief-executive-election>
- Eriksson, J. 1993. "Observers or Advocates? On the Political Role of Security Analysts." *Cooperation and Conflict* 34 (3): 311–330.
- Flowerdew, J. 1998. *The Final Years of British Hong Kong: The Discourse of Colonial Withdrawal*. London, New York: Macmillan and St. Martin's Press.
- Flowerdew, J. 2012. *Critical Discourse Analysis in Historiography: The Case of Hong Kong's Evolving Political Identity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Flowerdew, J. and R. Jones. 2016. "'Occupy Hong Kong'." *Journal of Language and Politics* 15 (5): 521–528.
- Fu, H., C. J. Petersen, and S. N. M. Young, eds. 2005. *National Security and Fundamental Freedoms: Hong Kong's Article 23 Under Scrutiny*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Haas, B. 2017a. "Hong Kong Charges pro-Independence Activists over China Protest." *The Guardian*, April 26,



# Rival Securitising Attempts in the Democratisation of Hong Kong

Written by Neville Chi Hang Li

2017. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/26/hong-kong-police-detain-pro-independence-lawmakers-after-china-protest>
- Haas, B. 2017b. "Anger at Plan to Let Chinese Police Patrol in Hong Kong." *The Guardian*, July 26, 2017. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/26/anger-at-plan-to-let-chinese-police-patrol-in-hong-kong>
- Hung, H. 2014. "Three Views of Local Consciousness in Hong Kong." *Asia-Pacific Journal* 12 (1): 1-10.
- Huysmans, J. 1998. "Revisiting Copenhagen: Or, On the Creative Development of a Security Studies Agenda in Europe." *European Journal of International Relations* 4 (4): 479-505.
- Jones, R. H. and N. C. H. Li. 2016. "Evidentiary Video and 'Professional Vision' in the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement." *Journal of Language and Politics* 15 (5): 569-591.
- Kaeding, M. P. 2011. "Identity Formation in Taiwan and Hong Kong – How Much Difference, How Many Similarities?" in *Taiwanese Identity in the 21st Century: Domestic, Regional and Global Perspectives*, edited by G. Schubert and J. Damm, 258-79. London: Routledge.
- Lau, C. and K. Chung. 2017. "Court Ruling Disqualifying Lawmakers 'a Declaration of War'." *South China Morning Post*, July 14, 2017. <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/2102609/four-more-hong-kong-lawmakers-disqualified-over-oath-taking>
- Lee, F. L. F. 2015. "Social Movement as Civic Education: Communication Activities and Understanding of Civil Disobedience in the Umbrella Movement." *Chinese Journal of Communication* 8 (4): 393-411.
- Leung, S. K. 2016. "Wong Yeung-Tat: Constitutional Referendum Is the Most Realistic Election Promise." *Passion Times*, March 24, 2016. <http://www.passiontimes.hk/article/03-24-2016/29566>
- Li, N. C. H. 2014. "The Growing Significance of New Media in Hong Kong's Social Movements." Paper presented at Global Insecurities International Conference, Bristol.
- Li, N. C. H. 2016. "Demands for Constitutional Reform: One Year after Occupy Hong Kong." In *Changing World, Changing Lives Conference*, Bath.
- Loh, D. 2015. *Hong Kong's Political Future After the 'Umbrella Revolution'*. Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.
- Margaret Thatcher Foundation. 1982[Released 2013]. "China: Record of Conversation (MT-Vice Chairman Deng Xiaoping of China) [Future of Hong Kong] [MT's Annotated Copy]." <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122696>
- McSweeney, B. 1996. "Identity and Security: Buzan and the Copenhagen School." *Review of International Studies* 22 (1): 81-93.
- Moody's Investors Service. 2017. "Moody's Downgrades Hong Kong's Rating to Aa2 from Aa1 and Changes Outlook to Stable from Negative." [https://www.moody's.com/research/Moodys-downgrades-Hong-Kongs-rating-to-Aa2-from-Aa1-and-PR\\_366144](https://www.moody's.com/research/Moodys-downgrades-Hong-Kongs-rating-to-Aa2-from-Aa1-and-PR_366144)
- Radio Television Hong Kong. 2017. "'One Country, Two Systems' could Go: Wang Zhenmin." *Radio Television Hong Kong*, April 29, 2017. <http://news.rthk.hk/rthk/en/component/k2/1327827-20170429.htm>
- Thomas, N. and W. T. Tow. 2002. "Gaining Security by Trashing the State? A Reply to Bellamy and McDonald." *Security Dialogue* 33 (3): 379-382.

# Rival Securitising Attempts in the Democratisation of Hong Kong

Written by Neville Chi Hang Li

Tilly, C. 1990. *Coercion, Capital and European States, A.D. 990-1990*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

United Nations Development Project. 1994. *Human Development Report*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Waever, O. 1999. "Securitizing Sectors? Reply to Eriksson." *Cooperation and Conflict* 34 (3): 334-340.

---

## About the author:

**Neville Chi Hang Li** is a Teaching Assistant at the University of Bath. His previous appointment was at City University of Hong Kong, serving as a Senior Research Associate. He received his PhD in Politics, Languages and International Studies from the University of Bath. His research interests focus on Politics and International Relations in Asia-Pacific, Critical Security Studies, Political Demography and New Media and Political Communication. His PhD dissertation entitled *Securitization of Population Dynamics in the People's Republic of China*, examines the ideational relationship between security and demography with both the Copenhagen School and the Paris School approaches.