How does Hong Kong Protest Form Public Opinion and Disinformation?

[Name of the Writer]

[Name of the Institution]

How does Hong Kong Protest Form Public Opinion and Disinformation?

**Abstract**

Hong Kong Protests are a hot topic in China and America. Both economic giants and superpowers discuss these protests with different and opposite concerns whereas the protestors seek help from the USA to achieve their vague goal. It is vague because many protestors do not agree with the idea of freedom from China, then why should they fight against the pro-China regime? Popular demand of the protestors is perhaps civil rights like free-speech, independent suffrage, and independent parliament that are denied to them by the Communist regime in Beijing. Nevertheless, the protests form public opinion differently in the different parts of the world and China. The Hong Kongers are in streets to protest and the Hong Kongers are there to contain them. Both groups manipulate pictures and videos to run propaganda against each other. This paper explores how the Hong Kong protests form a mixed opinion among the masses and how the media groups spread misinformation in the guise of reporting that sometimes causes mass destruction in the city. The paper also attempts to explore why the Hong Kongers are not supported equally by the communities living in the different parts of the world.

**I. Introduction**

*This movement has shown how many Hong Kongers want Fundamental Changes* (Suki, A student activist). Hong Kong is regarded as a country with two systems. The people in Hong Kong have a Western psyche and mentality being colonized by the British Crown for a long time until 1997 when the UK and China signed a treaty of British surrendering Hong Kong to China. The Hong Kongers’ view about democracy is also similar to Western thought for perhaps the same reason. They believe in independent suffrage rights and accuse Beijing of governing China under undemocratic principles although China disregards such accusations and claims to be a real democratic country. A large number of people came out for a peaceful protest after the Hong Kong government proposed a bill that would allow extraditions to mainland China in March 2019. Approximately two million peaceful protestors hit the streets of Hong Kong who were dealt harshly. This conflict between China and those protestors is well known all over the world, but the protests have got mixed responses from the world since the media have reported on the issue differently. Hong Kong issue appears as a domestic issue of China to many, but it has got a shape where it looks like a conflict between China and the USA. The Hong Kong protests are in news since March as that appears as a major crisis of China and Hong Kong, but the protestors have no such a strong ground where they can prove that their struggle would come out fruitful. It is because the only support they look for is the American government, but the sentiments in the White House look less supportive of their struggle and more supportive of American National Interest. Despite these facts, the movement is discussed worldwide and in America as a mass protest against the Chinese autocratic system. Many US stakeholders like Mike Pompeo and Donald Trump have given statements on the issue. Moreover, many scholars have written on the issue including media persons and bloggers. The Chinese government has also issued statements on these protests and accused the protestors of toys in the foreign hands. This importance of the issue encouraged me to research the topic.

**I.I. Background**

Hong Kong is a [special administrative region](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_administrative_regions_of_China) on the eastern side of the [Pearl River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pearl_River_(China)) [estuary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estuary) in [southern China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_China). The current official name of Hong Kong is the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (HKSAR) that has always been part of China except the period from 1842 to 1997. China lost Hong Kong to the United Kingdom after the famous Opium wars. Currently, it is home to approximately 4.7 million people of different origins, and it is one of the densest regions of the world. No major movement appeared in Hong Kong until 1997 when the British Crown returned its authority to China through a controversial agreement. The British Crown returned it in an obligation to end 99 years lease of the New Territories. The British left the country, but their values and norms did not. The Communist government in China considered this factor and agreed to introduce its new system in Hong Kong in steps. Therefore, they announced that a diarchal system will rule Hong Kong at least till 2047. The system introduced in Hong Kong was called The Basic Law which gave some liberties to the Hong Kongers which were not given to the mainland Chinese like the right to vote independently and to elect the parliamentarians of choice (Constable, N. 2009). The Hong Kongers expressed their concerns over this announcement, but no violent protest appeared until March 2019 when the pro-Chinese government in Hong Kong proposed a bill that would allow extraditions to China. The Hong Kongers expressed that this was a conspiracy to seize their civil rights. The protests started and enjoyed international media coverage which encouraged scholars and analysts to write on the issue. Media covered the protests with fix narratives and attempted to form public opinion in their favored propaganda. It led to the misinformation of many facts about the incidents. The issue is still a hot topic of discussion among media persons, Sino-America stakeholders, and scholars. This is the reason that I planned my research on the subject.

**I.II. Research Objectives**

The purpose of this research is to study the Hong Kong protests to learn how they form the reform the public opinions within and beyond the borders of China and to trace the loopholes in the reporting of those protests that cause misinformation proliferation.

**I.III. Research Questions**

1. How does Hong Kong protest form public opinion? What is the role of the media?

2. How do different segments of media break news stories that are the ideal examples of "Fake News"?

**I.IV. Thesis Statement**

The Hong Kong protests have enjoyed global media coverage and its effects upon the public opinion are different in America than that are in China. Moreover, these protests have created a great opportunity for the “Fake News” media groups being a controversial issue worldwide.

**II. Literature Review**

Many scholars and news analysts have written on the subject of Hong Kong protests. Every analyst has tried to discuss the issue objectively, but the analyses show that everyone has displayed one side of the picture. The first article reviewed on the subject is *Why Are People Protesting in Hong Kong?* by [Daniel Victor](https://www.nytimes.com/by/daniel-victor) who gives an overview of the protest. He claims that the protest was a peaceful movement when it started in June 2019. The very first paragraph of the article indicates that it has less sympathy for pro-Chinese government: “What started in June with [peaceful rallies](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/09/world/asia/hong-kong-extradition-protest.html) in opposition to [contentious legislation](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/10/world/asia/hong-kong-extradition-bill.html) has devolved into a steady stream of mayhem, with some protesters embracing violent behaviors in response to [brutal police tactics](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/22/world/hong-kong-police-protests.html)” (Cai, Y. 2016). Although this first paragraph is enough to learn the stance of the writer, it is important to review what he says afterward. He says that China and Hong Kongers have many differences and the rift between them is widening. His explanation of China’s relationship with Hong Kong follows; he gives a historical overview of how Hong Kong remained under the command of the British Crown for centuries that made it a diverse city where everyone wants to live according to democratic values. He explains the demands of the protesters that are civil liberties that had been denied to the mainland Chinese earlier and now to them. He tells that the protest turned violent because the government tortured the protestors instead of listening to their demands. The final part of the article predicts the end of this unrest: he says that Peoples' Liberation Army who has a garrison in Hong Kong would intervene finally and Hong Kong will be declared a permanent part of China after a Tiananmen-style crackdown. Victor’s article brings sympathy for the protestors among the readers and when the readers are Americans, they might stress upon the government to help the demonstrators for the sake of democratic values. If we read this article from the sight of *Defining “Fake News”* one might consider it a propaganda kind of fake news. The other reviewed article is *China’s Theory of Hong Kong Protest: Secret American Meddling* by Andrew Higgins. Higgins writes a critique of pro-China media groups in Hong Kong. He argues that Hong Kong was a city famous for order and peace, but Chinese intervention has stirred the region. China is blaming foreign “Black Hands” behind this large-scale movement and wants to take strict measures against the protestors by comparing it with the famous Rose Revolution in former Soviet states. A case of news fabrication has been discussed in the article. Julie Eadeh is a woman working as a counselor in American Consulate in Hong Kong, she is under Chinese watch since her photo with Hong Kong activists got viral. China claims that she is the actual cause behind the unrest in Hong Kong. A Communist Party's newspaper Ta Kung Pao published her story with the picture. The headline of the newspaper was: "Foreign Forces Intervene, Seek to Stir 'Color Revolution". This news story was enough for China to convince its supporters in Hong Kong, China, and the other countries of the world that America is intervening in the domestic affairs of a country. The news story proved bogus when American Consulate in Hong Kong published some other pictures of the same day Julie Eadeh meeting with pro-establishment and many other people that was claimed to be a routine practice of Eadeh. One other fake news has been described in the article; a non-Chinese person's photo got viral with the title "Foreign Commander". Higgins reveals that the person in the picture was Kevin Roche an editor of the New York Times. Andrew Higgins' article has also soft corner for the Hong Kong activists and he criticizes the Chinese narrative that he believes is cruel. Denny Ho Kwok-Leong has also written a book on the changed attitude of the Hong Kongers. He writes that they were not violent kind of people, but the Chinese authorities obliged them to get violent. His book *Polite Politics: A Sociological Analysis of an Urban Protest in Hong Kong*. He discusses the liberal norms of the city which have been stirred after China started shackling them into their communist system like the other mainland Chinese*. Hong Kong’s Relations with China: The Future of “One Country, Two Systems* by Christine Loh is another important shred of literature on the subject that has been reviewed. Loh argues that Hong Kong is key to Chinese modernization and China's limited authority over Hong Kong can result in foreign presence under the nose of China. He concludes that Beijing wants Hong Kong to become a leading entity in further Chinese modernization, but liberal thoughts in Hong Kong are indigestible for the Communist party in China. That is the reason that China intends to bring it in grip ideologically before allowing it to enhance in China technologically. All the discussed shreds of literature have been written by credible writers which show that the issue of Hong Kong is an issue of grave concerns for the global community, and it is a too controversial issue that many kinds of fake news appear regarding this issue. Such a wide scope of the subject validates the credibility of my topic.

**III. Research Methodology**

*The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describes qualitative research as involving "… an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". I have used a qualitative research design for my dissertation. All the reviewed literature was analyzed qualitatively. The cultural and ideological backgrounds of the authors were taken into consideration to analyze if they were biased or not.

The second part of the research was interaction with the general public in America and a few online social media surveys. People in New York were questioned how much they know about the Hong Kong protests and which party is justified according to them. Some scholars were approached for short interviews (Chan, J. M., & Lee, F. L. 2010). They have presented some shreds of news about Hong Kong and then they were asked the questions although some others were asked without presenting them news pieces. Presenting them the newspapers, etc. was Independent Variable (IV) whereas their views were taken as Dependent Variables (DV). People in China and America were approached online through Twitter and Facebook with some questions whereas they were free to answer subjectively. The questions were taken as Independent Variables (IV) whereas the social contexts (America, China, Hong Kong) were taken as Dependent Variables (DP).

**III.I. Results**

The results comply with our thesis statement that the Hong Kong protests form public opinion differently in the different parts of the world. Christine Loh’s book *Hong Kong’s Relations with China: The Future of One Country* *Two Systems* attempts to demonize China by arguing that Hong Kong is the key actor in booming China's techno-industry, but China, in turn, is buckling up to bring it fully under the autocratic governing system. It can create a feeling of sympathy for the protestors among Americans and Europeans, but the public in China might consider it a deliberate attempt of the Western powers to demonize their governing system. News articles published in the New York Times have one thing in common that they all sympathize with the protestors. They all claim that the Hong Kongers were always peaceful, but it is China which brought them to the streets by introducing unjustifiable laws. Edward Wong's article reveals that the protestors already have won a great amount of support in America, but this factor is taken differently in China. When the American public was interviewed the majority of them supported free-speech, civil liberty, and right to vote and elect assembly independently (Zhu, Q., Skoric, M., & Shen, F. 2017). When scholars were asked how the protests form public opinions, the majority of the scholars agreed that people are influenced by their media and ideologies are formed through loyalties. Daniel Victor's article revealed that the end of these protests could be a catastrophic crackdown by the Chinese Army already present in Hong Kong. This factor was taken as an unethical issue by the respondent in America and Hong Kong, but pro-China Hong Kongers and the Chinese took it as a strong side of the Chinese authorities who have more cruel options to suppress the movement. The protests' followers are not static rather dynamic in Hong Kong, they vary from time to time after they watch media. Some incidents pump the masses to rise against the authorities, for instance, an incident when a police person named Chan Cheuk-hin killed a protestor lad in Hong Kong, the incident was discussed worldwide and a large number of Hong Kongers came out to fight against the police guards. They turned violent and burnt alive a policeman. This incident was followed by a police crackdown they suppressed the protestors with iron hand.

The other question was about how these protests cause the proliferation of fake news and disinformation. American and Chinese officials use pictures and videos after modification for their own purposes and propagandas, it was the argument of the majority of Americans especially the scholars. A scholar named John McCain argued that Hong Kongers or their demands are as insignificant in Washington as in Beijing. He claimed that the governments are engaged in power politics and everyone is interested in one’s “National Interest” whereas the protestors believe wrongly they have some place except China to go towards. He stated that the same pictures appear at American news channels with the description that America is helping suppressed groups to demand their just rights whereas Chinese news channels portray those pictures as the proofs of American involvement in the domestic affairs of China.

**III.II. Conclusion**

Hong Kong protests are one of the popular news topics in the current times. Such a large coverage of those protests is in fact because the place where they take place is a passive battlefield of two superpowers: The United States of America, and the Peoples Republic of China. The US accuses China of oppressing the protestors who are demanding their just rights. On the other side, China accuses the US of unjustifiable involvement in the domestic affairs of China. Amid these claims and disclaims, a mixed narrative prevails among the masses of Hong Kong. The other factor is that this rivalry has paved the way for much ill propaganda among nations. Media exploit this opportunity and spread fake news and misinformation. This argument is supported by the majority of masses in America and Europe as suggested by the online surveys. This paper has reviewed a variety of literature on the issue of Hong Kong protests, and it has attempted to point out the loopholes that help the media to spread misinformation. The factors that form public opinion have also been analyzed. The problem with this research was that we could not directly approach the Chinese masses who could have shown us a true picture of their minds. Chinese were approached online and since everyone knows that Chinese are watched 24/7 by the Communist authorities, they were reluctant to talk subjectively on the questions, rather they made objective arguments that are injected by the authorities. The future researchers will have better results if they manage to approach a few Chinese who could express their actual subjective thoughts about the protests.

**References**

Constable, N. (2009). Migrant workers and the many states of protest in Hong Kong. *Critical Asian Studies*, *41*(1), 143-164.

Chan, J. M., & Lee, F. L. (2010). *Media, social mobilization and mass protests in post-colonial Hong Kong: The power of a critical event*. Routledge.

Zhu, Q., Skoric, M., & Shen, F. (2017). I shield myself from thee: Selective avoidance on social media during political protests. *Political Communication*, *34*(1), 112-131.

Cai, Y. (2016). *The Occupy movement in Hong Kong: Sustaining decentralized protest*. Routledge.