

Chinese Takeout



Pillar of Shame by Jens Galaschiot, Hong Kong

It's the story of very unfortunate people who were and are persecuted in old Hong Kong. For many years, privilege has been taken away from them when they called for civil rights.

It is a sad feature of contemporary affairs that chapters of history are being erased and human rights groups and people are being eliminated in increasing degree and freedom of expression and freedom of speech is limited.

It comes as little surprise that the Russian Supreme Court on December 27, 2021 ordered the closure of the human rights group Memorial, the most prominent rights group in post-Stalinist Russia, and that the country has imposed more censorship of independent media, and arrests of supporters of Alexei Navalny. On the following day, a Moscow court also said the Memorial Human Rights Center would have to close after

failing to declare itself as a "foreign agent." The court ruled the Center had justified extremism, by giving legal aid to opposition figures and to those who "build a negative attitude towards Russia's legal system."

Memorial, founded in 1989 by political dissidents including Andrei Sakharov, was accused of failing to mark its publications with the label of "foreign agent," and of denigrating the memory of the Soviet Union. Memorial was the group that every year organized a memorial for the thousand killed by Stalinist repression, with protestors gathering around a large stone in central Moscow brought from a Soviet gulag, in the Solovky islands. Russian authorities regard it as a focal point for criticism by Russians and foreign governments to deny pride in the achievements of the Soviet Union.

These court decisions come at a moment when a revival of praise of Stalin is taking place, with erection of statues and busts of him, when there is removal of information about Soviet crimes of the past, and of NKVD officers who signed deportation and execution orders during the years of the great terror, 1937-1938, and were responsible for the deaths of more than 18 million from hunger, cold, illness, forced labor in the Gulags. The cult of a desirable Stalin has been exhibited in public opinion polls, especially of younger people who vote for Stalin as the person in history who best represents Russia. It borders on the mysterious that the cruel tyrant is most heralded as the wise leader who won the Great Patriotic war.

The assertion of Chinese aggressiveness and control over people in Hong Kong is less mysterious but increasingly disturbing now that it has imposed a new national security law on the area, giving authorities power to deal with acts of secession, subversion, terrorism, or collusion with foreign or external forces. Supposedly an action to return stability to Hong Kong, it is in essence an imposition of

stricter authoritarianism. The reality is that Beijing does not want Hong Kong to be a model for any Chinese city.

Hong Kong, with its valuable deep harbor, became a British colony in 1841 after the first Opium War and remained that except during World War II, until July 1, 1997 when at a peaceful ceremony the colony was handed to the People's Republic of China. Hong Kong became a special administrative region of China.

In 1984 the Sino-British joint declaration signed in Beijing stated that the UK would agree to China exercising sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997. It agreed the social and economic system and legal system would remain basically unchanged, and that it would retain its status as a free port, and international trade and financial center. The two nations agreed on a policy of "one country, two systems," this was a concept devised by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. The People's Republic of China would remain a socialist system, while Hong Kong and Taiwan would continue under the capitalist system. Hong Kong was supposed to retain its legislative, executive, and independent judicial powers system and people's rights for 50 years, and China would control foreign affairs as well as interpretation of Hong Kong basic law. Britain accepted the one country formula, believing that Hong Kong would supposedly enjoy a high degree of autonomy for 50 years, making its own laws with its own legal system. But China has been exercising more control over Hong Kong policy and authorities.

It is protests about the basic law, and proposed changes in the electoral system, that led to street protests, especially with the Umbrella Movement in September-December 2014, which was opposed by police use of tear gas and pepper spray. In summer 2019 large protests occurred with the introduction of a China endorsed legislative proposal that would have allowed extradition to mainland China.

On June 4, 1989 Tiananmen Square became the token place for large scale protests calling for more political freedom. Thousands of people occupied the space until military, troops and tanks, moved in and fired on the crowd. Estimates vary, officially the number of killed was given of 200 civilians and some security officials, but more realistic estimates vary up to 10,000. As a memorial, a statue was created by Danish architect Jens Galaschiot in 1997, a 26 foot pillar of human figures in agony and twisted bodies pressed together. Called the Pillar of Shame, it has an inscription, "the old cannot kill the young forever," reminder of a shameful event that must never recur.

In subsequent years an annual candlelight vigil commemorating the incident had been allowed, and students in an annual ceremony demonstrated around the statue, until Hong Kong authorities banned this in 2020, citing restrictions due to Covid-19. On December 22, 2021 this statue at the University of Hong Kong was removed as a result of Chinese pressure because of political dissent.

The relationship of parties is uncertain, Chinese officials do not directly control Hong Kong as they do in the mainland, but they exert influence through those loyal to China who control political affairs. All political changes need approval of the Chinese National People's Congress as well as by the Hong Kong government. Charges of terrorism and sedition or "incitement to subversion" are being improperly used by China to limit Hong Kong rights.

On July 1, 2020, Hong Kong authorities introduced a national security law that was devised by Beijing. It makes any dissent criminal, and gives authorities broad power to deal with "acts of secession' subversion, terrorism, or collusion with foreign or external forces." it provides for China to establish a security force in HK, and ability to influence the choice of judges who hear national security cases. Hong Kong authorities prevented critical candidates

from running in the 2020 legislative elections, which was postponed. Police arrested pro -democracy activists. The educational system has introduced so called "patriotic" programs.

The increasing controls over Hong Kong are new examples of China's aggressive policy in projecting its power in the world, a policy which is a major issue for President Joe Biden and both political parties. New American policies are necessary to deal with those increasing assertions: China's claims to own the waters in the South China Sea, where it is building new islands on existing reefs, and transforming them into military bases; the ambitious Belt and Road initiative plans to build transport and infrastructure projects from homeland to Rotterdam, Africa and Latin America. China has the world's largest navy, 355 ships and submarines , compared with the U.S. 296 warships, the UK 69, and Russia 295, and it is preparing a new high technological aircraft carrier. On Christmas Eve 2021, China launched three warships in one day. Economically, China accounts for almost 20% of the world's GDP, and its economy, which has recovered well from the pandemic, is growing at about a 6% level. Ironically, though is interfering politically and legally in Hong Kong, it does not appear to interfere in economic transactions, from which Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs benefit.

Will the West responds by providing safe havens for HK residents in their countries, by offering visas for those who want to become Western citizens, imposing sanctions on China, and suspending extradition treaties?.