



Centers of Progress, Part 27: Hong Kong (Non-Interventionism)

Featured article: [*"Centers of Progress, Pt. 27: Hong Kong \(Non-Interventionism\)"*](#) by Chelsea Follett

In this article, Chelsea Follett recounts the words of Sir John James Cowperthwaite, a British financial secretary of Hong Kong, "In the long run, the aggregate of decisions of individual businessmen, exercising individual judgment in a free economy, even if often mistaken, is less likely to do harm than the centralized decisions of a government, and certainly the harm is likely to be counteracted faster." This idea is based on respect for human rights, including the right to make economic decisions.

In this article, Follett describes Hong Kong's evolution from an impoverished colonial backwater to one of the hypermodern Asian "Tigers." In this lesson, students will learn how a hands-off economic approach led to Hong Kong's status as one of the wealthiest societies on the planet.

Warm-Up

INTRODUCING HONG KONG

Hong Kong is one of the world's most dynamic, diverse, and cosmopolitan cities. It has an intriguing and complex history as a British colony and gateway to the now-booming Chinese mainland economy.

Watch this short [video from Vox](#) to learn more about the British impact on Hong Kong. Answer these questions as you watch:

- What is one specific example of the British colonial legacy on the geographic names or infrastructure of Hong Kong?
- What three Chinese products were in high demand in Europe during the Early Modern Period (circa 1450–1750)?
- What was the sole form of payment the Qing Dynasty government allowed its merchants to accept from European merchants?
- How did the British solve their balance of payments problem with China?
- When did Hong Kong first become a British colony?
- When did Hong Kong revert to Chinese sovereignty?

Note: The *Vox* reporter made an error regarding the 99-year lease. The lease did not apply to Hong Kong Island but the New Territories. Since Hong Kong Island could not survive without the New Territories, Britain returned the entire colony to China.

Questions for Reading, Writing, and Discussion

[Read the article](#) and then answer the following questions:

- How did China's loss in the First Opium War affect Hong Kong?
- What was the impact of the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong during World War II?
- Consider international power politics in the context of the Cold War and make inferences.
 - Why could Great Britain retake Hong Kong after World War II?
 - After the communists established the People's Republic of China in 1949, why didn't they attempt to take Hong Kong?
- Define "entrepot." In addition to Hong Kong, what are some other famous entrepots in world history?
- Referring to the British colonial administrator of Hong Kong, Follett writes, "Cowperthwaite trusted in the capabilities of ordinary people to run their own lives and businesses."
 - What were the four conditions that Cowperthwaite provided to the people of Hong Kong, eventually resulting in untold riches for many citizens?

- What is the relationship between capitalism and prosperity? In other words, how do most people's lives change in a free-market (capitalist) economy?
- What has been Hong Kong's record on human rights since 1945 compared to the People's Republic of China?
- Using your knowledge of world history, how did Hong Kong's example influence the society and economy of mainland China in the late 20th century?
- What lessons can other countries learn from Hong Kong's success?

Extension Activities/Homework

WRITE A CAUSE-AND-EFFECT ESSAY ABOUT THE 19TH-CENTURY OPIUM TRADE

Opium was the most widely traded good in the 19th century. The large-scale cultivation and sale of opium in Asia began in the early 1800s and lasted until just before World War I. Western merchants and imperialists, including some prominent American businessmen, made fortunes selling opium in China, where the drug was in high demand. Opium has had far-reaching effects on world history that are still felt today.

Write a cause-and-effect essay about the 19th-century opium trade by responding to this prompt:

- Evaluate the extent to which the causes and effects of the opium trade in Asia during the 19th century influenced world history.

A cause-and-effect essay explores why historical events occurred and the consequences that followed. This type of essay will help you understand how different historical events and processes influence each other. It is good practice in historical-thinking skills and allows you to make novel connections between seemingly unrelated events.

Follow this format for your essay:

- Introduction

- Contextualize the 19th-century opium trade in Asia. What larger historical processes were playing out during this period?
- For example, you may write about the Industrial Revolution, European intrastate rivalry and conflict, imperialism, or other topics. Refrain from addressing obscure people and events; focus on world-changing historical trends.
- Write 5–7 sentences.
- Thesis
 - Identify 2–3 causes and 2–3 effects of the 19th-century opium trade.
 - Include specific evidence and use the thesis to guide the ideas in subsequent paragraphs.
 - Write 1–2 sentences.
 - Cause Paragraphs
 - Discuss one of the specific causes or set of causes from your thesis leading to the historical event(s) related to the opium trade.
 - Explain why the event(s) happened, including underlying factors, conditions, or decisions that contributed to it. For example, one cause of the opium trade was Britain's desire to solve its balance-of-payments problem with China.
 - Write 5–7 sentences for each cause; the number of paragraphs depends on how many distinct causes you put in your thesis.
 - Effect Paragraphs
 - Describe a specific effect or set of effects from your thesis resulting from the historical event.
 - Outline the impact of the event(s) on individuals, societies, or nations and how it shaped subsequent developments. For example, one effect of the opium trade was the First Opium War and the cession of Hong Kong to the British.
 - Try to find interesting or unintended effects of the opium trade. For example, the Delano family became rich by selling opium, contributing to the wealth and power of a future US president. There are many other such obscure and unexpected effects.
 - Write 5–7 sentences for each effect; the number of paragraphs depends on how many distinct effects you include in your thesis.
- Summary/Conclusion
 - Reiterate the causes and effects of your thesis. Do not introduce new causes or effects.

- Reflect on the broader implications of the cause-and-effect relationships.
- Write 3–5 sentences.

IMPORTANT

- Use primary and secondary sources to support your claims about causes and effects. Include quotes and excerpts from documents, speeches, letters, statistics, and journal articles.
- Analyze how the evidence supports the cause-and-effect relationships. Explain how each cause led to specific effects and discuss the significance of these relationships.

PLAGUE POSTER WALK

In her article, Follett mentions the Third Plague Pandemic (1855–1945) that affected Hong Kong. In addition to the 19th-century outbreak, there have been two other plague pandemics in recorded history: the Plague of Justinian in the 6th century and the black death in the 14th century.

Plague history is still an active field of historical research. Scholars continuously make discoveries using cutting-edge science, archaeological evidence, and historical documentation. For example, in the 19th century, scientists discovered that fleas on rats spread the plague. However, recent research shows that other disease vectors, namely guinea pigs, also served as hosts to plague-infected fleas.

Many students are interested in historical plagues because they have profoundly impacted human life for generations. Work with a partner and choose an aspect of one of the plagues from the list of suggestions below. Research the question and create a poster about it using detailed evidence.

- What are the different types of plagues? (Bubonic is not the only type.)
- What are the causes of the plague?
- How are different types of plague transmitted?

- How did the Plague of Justinian directly affect Western European history?
- What was the connection between the Pax Mongolica and the black death?
- Explain the gruesome way the black death was brought to Europe, as told in traditional accounts.
- What type of macabre forms of art were associated with the black death in Europe?
- What were some of the peculiar Christian reactions to the black death?
- How did the reactions to the plague during the 1300s differ among Muslims and Christians?
- Some places were spared from the plague, such as Poland and sub-Saharan Africa. What are some possible explanations for why these places escaped the plague?
- What were some of the long-term historical consequences of the black death?
- How was the cause of the plague discovered in the 1800s?
- Why is the plague so rare today?
- What are some current treatments for the plague?
- Describe some recent case studies of plague victims.

Your poster should be educational and visually engaging. It must present key information about your topic based on reputable sources and include images such as photos, paintings, graphs, and maps.

Keep the poster's text concise. You may use bullet points, short paragraphs, and captions. Be creative and try to make a professional, attractive poster.

You will display your poster on a "Poster Walk" in your classroom. Students walk around the room, observe others' posters, and note facts or insights. Write a short reflection on what you learned from the Poster Walk and how it improved your understanding of the plague.

WRITE A BIOGRAPHY OF JIMMY LAI

The Chinese Communist government censors information and closely monitors citizens' activities, including in Hong Kong. In 2020, Beijing imposed the National Security Law on Hong Kong, severely restricting press freedom there. Pro-democracy media organizations have been shut down, and journalists face harsh controls on their freedom of expression. Watch a [PBS News video](#) to build your background knowledge on this topic.

Jimmy Lai is one of the most prominent proponents of free speech in Hong Kong. Lai, the wealthy founder of successful fashion and media brands, has been a vocal advocate for press freedom and democratic rights in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong police arrested him, and he remains imprisoned in solitary confinement in the city.

Lai is an inspiring figure who has won international recognition for his support for democracy and stance against the Chinese Communist regime. Lai, an entirely self-made man, arrived in Hong Kong as a stowaway when he was a boy. He worked in garment factories and eventually saved enough to set up his own company. Hong Kong's capitalist environment allowed Lai to become rich and influential.

Write a 250-word biography of Lai. Research his story using reputable sources and include details such as the founding and growth of his fashion company and media outlets, his support for Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, his life in politics, and his eventual arrest and imprisonment by the Chinese Communist Party. Be sure to include important events, such as his participation in mass protests and meetings with foreign leaders, and explain how his example inspires others to fight for freedom worldwide.