



## **Citizenship in the Streets: Popular Protests in 2019 Hong Kong and 1919 Shanghai**

**SPEAKER:** Dr. Mark W. Frazier

**CHAIR:** Dr. P. K. Anand

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**VENUE:** Seminar Room, ICS

The speaker began by generally going over the topic of the talk and drawing attention towards questions of what concepts and ideas would have arisen from the Shanghai protests in 1919 that may have affected the Hong Kong protests in 2019. There is a global protest wave where citizenship seems to be at the centre, along with the question of who is or not a citizen? Dr. Frazier opined that protests around the world are happening due to some form of inequality. Hong Kong is a hybrid regime of a kind and the protests in 2019 were protests of the liberal elements against the domination of the authoritarian elements. The Shanghai protests in 1919 were due to the rise of nationalism after the First World War and the idea that who will or not be a part of the nation.

The speaker then talks briefly about the perspectives in the larger contexts of protests. One perspective is that large historical transformations have a large structural change, but the actors of this structural change are not aware of the result when it is set in motion. However, the literature on protests indicates that protests lead to overthrow of governments, but the flip side is counter-mobilisation by the government.

The speaker then talks about the specificities of the protests in 1919 and 2019. In Shanghai 1919, protests did not rise out of a vacuum. There were grievances dating back to 20 years before the

protests, from 1874-1919 there were gradual events which culminated in the mass protests today. In 7 May 1919, the first protests began, resulting in a snowball effect which led to a general break out of strikes and shut down (triple strike). Some of the legacies of the protests include the emergence of 'new media', cross-class linkages, the 1925 massacre and the founding of the Nationalist Party in 1928 among other effects. The society in Shanghai was a highly fragmented one with three systems in place within one city. During the protests, there was not one organisation which was responsible for leading the protests, but instead they were leaderless protests, where protests created organisations instead. The use of public spaces for protests was imperative in these protests.

Coming to the Hong Kong protests in 2019, the speaker listed out various events over the years which led up to the protests. These events include disaffection with political institutions, fear of being 'colonised', demands for self-rule and autonomy, absence of core leadership and police violence among others. The Hong Kong protesters strategically used civic and public spaces as their areas of action, which is a similarity with the Shanghai protests. The Hong Kong protests were the highest on days which were monumental due to certain events. For instance, 1 July as the date signifies the day Hong Kong went back to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and 1 October, which is the National Day of the PRC.

The similarities between the two protests can be noticed in several cases. Like Shanghai, there is a sequential process which led to protests in Hong Kong as well, and these events in Hong Kong did not always result from the actions of PRC, but due to other reasons as well. The protesters in both Shanghai and Hong Kong, in their respective time periods were always driven by the fact that people did not or do not have universal suffrage. Also, the speaker pointed out that, both protests were aided by media influencers; Shi Liangcai in Shanghai, Jimmy Lai in Hong Kong.

Towards the end of the talk, the speaker brought back the idea of citizenship. He argued that the extradition bill protests was because the people had realised that the circumstances of violating a vague state security law would result in being extradited to the PRC and face trial in the PRC courts. In this way, the PRC would give equal citizenship status to the people of Hong Kong as a PRC citizen, even though it is a degraded citizenship.

In the concluding section of the talk, the speaker talked about certain points which make the understanding of the protests in 1919 and 2019 clearer. Firstly, during such protests, the idea of a citizen is not just driven from a legal document, but it is derived from the protest cycle majorly. This protest culture is very important in creating various kinds of citizens. Secondly, cities play a very important role as the crucible of citizenship formation. Thirdly, when it comes to regimes, it is hybrid regimes that are associated with high levels of protests. Regimes more tilted towards the liberal side have grievance redressal mechanisms and other institutional arrangements which can take care of people's issue. In authoritarian regimes, protests are risky and prohibited, and infrequent as a result. Therefore, this makes hybrid regimes suitable for protests of high intensity as can be seen in Hong Kong in 2019 and Shanghai in 1919. Fourthly, the structural and historical contexts of the two citizenship protests are important to understand their nature. In Shanghai, the status and legitimacy of imperialism was being questioned and the protests were more on the offense side. In the case of Hong Kong, protests are taking place as a defense against a growing global power, an authoritarian power less tolerant of liberal enclave within its borders.

While concluding, the speaker briefly mentioned about the year 2047, which is a crucial year for Hong Kong and its sovereignty. This concern is embedded in the minds of the people and are driven by it to try and continue to save their identity as people of Hong Kong. Towards the end, the speaker's session was followed by discussions from the audience which encompassed a variety of themes and issues.

*This report was prepared by Sanjana Dhar, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi.*

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