



Chinese Semi-Autonomous Territories & Special Administrative Regions

China is a one-party state, with nearly absolute power lying with the Communist Party of China. The country is governed under the constitution of 1982, as amended in 1993, the fifth since the accession of the Communists in 1949. The single legislative chamber belongs to the National People's Congress (NPC), consisting of deputies elected to terms of five years. The NPC decides on national economic strategy, elects or removes high officeholders, and can change China's constitution; it typically follows the directives of the Communist Party itself. In the executive branch are a premier, who is head of government, and a president, who is head of state. Despite the concentration of power in the Communist Party, the central government's control over the provinces and local governments is limited, and they are often able to act with relative impunity in considerably large areas. China began to build a modern legal system in the late 1970s, after opening itself economically to the rest of the world. Since then it has developed legal codes in the areas of criminal, civil, administrative, and commercial law.

China has two established Special Administrative Regions (SARS) in Hong Kong and Macao. As per the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong, China resumed its exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong on July 1, 1997, and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China was formally established. Similarly, the Sino-Portugal Joint Declaration on the Question of Macao was signed in 1987, and China resumed its sovereignty over Macao on December 20, 1999, forming Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR). The establishment of a SAR allows these two regions to operate with a significant degree of autonomy over judicial, administrative, and legal matters; under British and Portuguese rule, respectively, Hong Kong and Macao were left with an entrenched capitalist economy and growing Western cultural influence.

Hong Kong has been subject to greater controversy over recent Chinese involvement in the parliamentary and democratic structure of the region, breaching Hong Kong's 'Basic Law' - a form of simple constitution that seeks to 'safeguard the rights and freedoms of the residents of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and of other persons in the Region in accordance with law,' similar to the civil liberties expected in Western society. The demonstrations in Hong Kong over the last few months stem from the proposal of an extradition bill that would allow criminal suspects to be extradited to mainland China, wherein they would be tried under the mainland's legal system. Lynette Ong, a professor at the University of Toronto, summarises it in simple terms; 'The bill, if passed, would give Beijing legal and legitimate reasons to extradite dissidents, protesters or anyone they like, back to Beijing.' This would both undermine the legal system's independence as a SAR and threaten Hong Kong's international reputation as one of the most significant financial centres of Asia.

The issue of semi-autonomous regions in China has had less international media attention recently, but has remained an ongoing issues since the 1940s. The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region was



established in 1947; Xinjiang was made autonomous in 1955; Guangxi and Ningxia in 1958. Tibet was conquered by China in the 1950s and was named a Chinese Autonomous Zone in 1965. Every region has had, at some point in the last 70 years, conflict arise with the central, Communist government; this largely revolves around inter-ethnic issues, economic freedoms, unjust policing, taxation, and the expected desire for independence from China itself - this has been seen most notably in Tibet.