

'One Country...Two Points of View'
By LINDA WRIGHT
Washington, D.C., correspondent

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— David Shambaugh

One country, two systems. That is the unique structure Hong Kong now operates under following its return to Chinese sovereignty at midnight on June 30, under brilliant bursts of fireworks lighting the sky during the celebrations at the handover ceremony.

And when it comes to how the changeover is being perceived, "one country, two points of view" seems like an apt description. Much of the Western press has focused on the potential threat China's rule poses for the citizens of Hong Kong, expressing fears about the loss of civil rights and the possible danger posed by incoming Chinese troops, often recalling the massacre in Tianamen Square.

Yet most polls in Hong Kong indicate a majority of residents are optimistic about the future. And in China, news reports have described the reunion as historic, symbolically marking the end of an era of oppression by colonialists and imperialists, referred to by the Chinese as "the century of shame." The capture of Hong Kong by the British during the Opium Wars in the 1800s, when British troops fought to force the Chinese to buy opium, was a case in point.

David Shambaugh, the director of Asian studies at George Washington University, who has visited China more than 20 times in the past 20 years, thinks dire predictions by the media have been exaggerated.

"I think American media coverage of China is highly distorted, frankly, and exceedingly negative," he says. "That's not to say that there are not negative things to report in China: the abuse of human rights, slave labor, female infanticide and other issues. But China has undergone a remarkable transformation in the last 15 or 20 years. Anyone like myself who has been going there with regularity over the years can hardly fail to note it."

He goes on to say that the American media is missing the mark by failing to report that China is undergoing the most significant economic revolution and modernization the world has ever seen.

"We ought not to be focusing so much on the Chinese control of Hong Kong as the Hong Kongization of China — that's the big picture," he says.

If journalists, who provide most people a window to the outside world, cannot find ways to instill a deeper understanding of different cultures, it will be difficult for people to develop the type of empathy that is necessary to foster peace.

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