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Modern Hong Kong

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Abstract and Keywords

Hong Kong entered its modern era when it became a British overseas territory in 1841. In its early years as a Crown Colony, it suffered from corruption and racial segregation but grew rapidly as a free port that supported trade with China. It took about two decades before Hong Kong established a genuinely independent judiciary and introduced the Cadet Scheme to select and train senior officials, which dramatically improved the quality of governance. Until the Pacific War (1941–1945), the colonial government focused its attention and resources on the small expatriate community and largely left the overwhelming majority of the population, the Chinese community, to manage themselves, through voluntary organizations such as the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals.

The 1940s was a watershed decade in Hong Kong's history. The fall of Hong Kong and other European colonies to the Japanese at the start of the Pacific War shattered the myth of the superiority of white men and the invincibility of the British Empire. When the war ended the British realized that they could not restore the *status quo ante*. They thus put an end to racial segregation, removed the glass ceiling that prevented a Chinese person from becoming a Cadet or Administrative Officer or rising to become the Senior Member of the Legislative or the Executive Council, and looked into the possibility of introducing municipal self-government. The exploration into limited democratization ended as the second landmark event unfolded—the success of the Chinese Communist Party in taking control of China. This resulted in Hong Kong closing its borders with China on a long-term basis and the local Chinese population settling down in the colony, where it took on a direction of development distinctly different from that of mainland China.

The large influx of refugees to Hong Kong in the late 1940s was transformed by a pragmatic colonial administration into a demographic bonus, as all were allowed to work freely and become part of the community. Those refugees, particularly from Shanghai, who arrived with capital, management knowhow and skills gave some industries, such as textile and shipping, a big boost. With the entrepreneurial spirit of the Chinese

community unleashed and the colonial administration now devoting most of its resources to support them, Hong Kong became an industrial colony and developed increasingly strong servicing sectors. By the 1980s, local entrepreneurs had become so successful that they took over some of the well-established major British companies that had been pillars of the local economy for a century. As Hong Kong developed, it looked to the wider world—something originally necessitated by the imposition of trade embargos on China by the United States and the United Nations after the start of the Korean War in 1950—and eventually transformed itself into a global metropolis. In this process, the younger generations who grew up after the Sino-British border was closed developed a common identity that made them proud citizens of Hong Kong, and they became agents of change in reshaping how their parents' generation felt about Hong Kong and China.

The great transformation of postwar Hong Kong happened in the shadow of a dark cloud over its long-term future, which is a legacy from history. Hong Kong in fact consists of three parts: the island of Hong Kong, the tip of the Kowloon peninsula, and the New Territories, which amounts to 90 percent of the overall territory. The first two were ceded by China to Britain in perpetuity, but the New Territories was only leased in 1898 for a period of 99 years. As the three parts developed organically they could not be separated. During the Pacific War the nationalist government of China successfully secured an agreement from the British government that the future of the New Territories would be open to negotiation after the defeat of Japan. When victory came, the British recovered Hong Kong, and the Chinese government was distracted by the challenges posed by the Communist Party. After it won control of mainland China in 1949 the Communist government left Hong Kong alone, as it was a highly valuable opening for China to reach out beyond the Communist bloc during the Cold War.

In 1979 the British raised the issue of the New Territories lease, as the remainder of the lease was getting too short for comfort. Formal negotiations started in 1982, and it took two years for an agreement to be reached. The British government ultimately agreed to hand over the entirety of Hong Kong as a going concern to China, which undertook to maintain the system and way of life there unchanged for fifty years. The transitional period saw controversies over democratic developments in Hong Kong, which were limited at China's insistence.

The formal handover went smoothly in 1997, and the colony became a Chinese Special Administrative Region. At first it appeared that Hong Kong enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, as promised by the Chinese government, but the scope for its autonomy was eroded gradually. The increase in interactions between the local people and the mainland Chinese, as well as the Chinese authorities' refusal to let Hong Kong develop genuine democracy, nurtured a strong sense of Hong Kong identity, which started to transform

into a kind of national identity that is different and distinct from that of China. By the mid-2010s this gave rise to a small but vocal movement that advocates independence.

Keywords: Anglo-Chinese relations, anti-corruption, Chinese irredentism, colonialism, democratization, development, governance, identity, one country two systems, post-colonial development

Early Years as a British Colony

Modern Hong Kong was the product of the First Anglo-Chinese War (1839–1842), popularly known as the "First Opium War." While dispute over British export of Indian opium to China was the immediate trigger for hostilities, the war was long in the making. Having defeated Napoleon Bonaparte and emerged as the leading imperial power and economic powerhouse, Britain under Queen Victoria requested and required the Qing (or Manchu) Empire in China to receive its envoys without performing the kowtow and to trade openly, which the latter refused as it did not consider Britain or any power its equal. The Qing government's destruction of British-owned opium stored in Guangzhou (Canton) merely provided the *casus belli* for war. In the Treaty of Nanking Britain forced the Qing Empire to accept British diplomatic representation and cession of Hong Kong Island in perpetuity and thus secured one of the best natural harbors on the China coast to support its trade with China. Hong Kong was transformed from a cluster of fishing villages of several thousand people or, in the graphic though exaggerated description of Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston, a "barren island with hardly a house upon it" into a British imperial outpost, a naval station, and a free port. Hong Kong entered its modern era.

A Crown Colony system was put in place, by which the governor served as both the representative of the queen and the chief executive, supported by an appointed Legislative Council constituted by Britons, an Executive Council, and a separate judiciary.[1] While the judiciary was meant to be independent, this did not materialize until a decade later, after Hong Kong attracted sufficient lawyers to staff the judiciary without also simultaneously serving in the executive branch or practicing law commercially.[2] A Crown Colony is an authoritarian system with checks applied largely through the British Parliament, until it starts a process to introduce representative government that usually ends in independence.

Early colonial Hong Kong suffered from racial segregation and discrimination, as well as corruption and incompetent governance as very few well educated individuals settled there. Nevertheless, stability, order, and opportunities in this British enclave attracted Chinese immigrants who fled abusive governance, disorder caused by massive rebellions,

and limited economic opportunities at home. Even as the British expatriate community doubled in size repeatedly, Chinese immigrants constituted over 95 percent of the population and contributed more to growth and government revenue than the expanding British expatriate community. Reflecting the bias and practice in the British Empire at the time, the colonial government devoted its attention and resources overwhelmingly to the tiny expatriate community and largely left the Chinese or "native" population to manage themselves through voluntary organizations such as the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. This continued through the 19th century as both communities preferred to minimize inter-communal exchanges. The Chinese did not find British racial discrimination particularly objectionable as most of them hardly ever came into contact with a Caucasian, and their homeland, China, was itself under the rule of the alien Manchus until 1912.

Major improvements to governance happened in the 1860s, after the colonial government introduced the Hong Kong Cadetship, a scheme for recruiting "young graduates from Britain to receive intensive training in Cantonese [the local lingua franca] and written Chinese for two years, before deploying them on a fast track in the civil service."[3] Its success "effectively laid the foundation for a modern civil service based on merit" and put an end to corruption at the senior level.[4] The size of the government and its elite corps of Cadet Officers remained small as the administration continued to take a light touch approach to governance. In the postwar period Cadet Officers became Administrative Officers, but they continued to constitute the elite and occupy top offices.

After a haphazard start colonial Hong Kong flourished, but it was overshadowed by Shanghai as the latter developed at a much faster pace in the late 19th and early 20th century. Hong Kong only became a more modern and sophisticated metropolis than Shanghai after the Communists came to power in China in 1949. Until then the population of Hong Kong was constituted more by sojourners than settlers, as few Britons settled there on a permanent basis, and the Chinese immigrants moved freely across the border with China. The most settled population tended to be Eurasians, Macanese (Portuguese from neighboring Macau), a small number of British subjects from other parts of the Empire, and an unknown percentage of Cantonese who did not seek to retire to their home villages in China. Among the last group, traders, shop owners, and investors were generally more settled than laborers. A distinctive Hong Kong identity in the sense of one that can underpin nationhood did not develop until toward the end of British rule. But the Chinese community that was settled, and in particular its well-off elements, did develop a sense that they were a special category of Chinese, one that distinguished them from their compatriots in China.[5]

Cradle of Chinese Progressive or Revolutionary Movements

For all the shortcomings of colonial life, Hong Kong developed a relatively efficient, effective, honest, and fair administration, particularly in contrast to what prevailed in neighboring China in its "century of humiliation." It was a small British enclave, albeit one populated mostly by Chinese, and its everyday life had a predominantly Chinese flavor. British administration, rule of law, municipal services, and individual freedom were there for all to see and enjoy. This made Hong Kong an inspiration for those Chinese interested to learn about alternative political models and ideas to that prevailing in their home country. From the first generation of republican revolutionaries to dissidents in the People's Republic of China (PRC), they have found Hong Kong a source of inspiration. Sun Yat-sen, leader of China's republican revolution of 1911, admitted that he first developed the idea for the revolution when he studied at the Medical College, predecessor to the University of Hong Kong.[6]

As a British colony, Hong Kong was outside Chinese jurisdiction and thus served as a safe haven for revolutionaries and other critics of the government of China. In general terms the British authorities turned a blind eye to Chinese intellectuals and activists defying the government of the day in China as long as British laws were not broken. But the colonial administration did not allow Chinese activists to use Hong Kong to subvert the government of China, from the Qing through the Republican to the Communist period.[7] In practice the republican revolutionaries used Hong Kong as they surreptitiously plotted against the Qing government, the Communists used it against the Republican government, and many who escaped Communist rule sought sanctuary and safety in Hong Kong after 1949. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) notably maintained a major communication and control center there to coordinate activities in southern China before it seized control of China.[8] It continued to maintain a secret party branch in Hong Kong even after 1949, under the public guise of the New China News Agency. The party branch's existence was known to the Hong Kong government, which tolerated it and only acted against specific members of the CCP when they broke the law, as some did after the Maoist Cultural Revolution spilled over and became what was known locally as "the confrontation" of 1967.

What colonial Hong Kong offered Chinese dissidents and progressive intellectuals was ready access to Western ideas and scope to debate them freely, witness a British administration in action, and benefit from the rule of law without traveling to Europe. Hong Kong did not support revolutionary activities directed against the Chinese

government, but it provided safety and inspiration to Chinese dissidents pondering what alternative political systems might suit China.

Expansion and the Beginning of the End

Hong Kong consists of three parts: the main island that formed the original colony, the tip of the Kowloon peninsula on the northern side of the Victoria Harbour opposite the main island, and the much larger landmass north of Kowloon, up to the Shenzhen River in Guangdong province, known as the New Territories. Britain acquired Kowloon in perpetuity in 1860 after defeating the Qing government a second time. The New Territories, about 90 percent of the total territory, was leased for 99 years in the Convention of Peking (1898). The British took out a lease against the background of a "scramble for concessions" in China by the great powers following Qing's defeat by Japan over Korea in 1895, which raised the prospect that China could be carved up by the imperialist powers. Since Britain held the lion's share of trade and investments in China, its access to the whole country would suffer should China be partitioned. Thus, when France seized control of the port of Guangzhouwan (now Zhanjiang), about 210 miles from Hong Kong, Britain enlarged the colony to make it defensible against a long-standing European competitor. However, it was weary of setting off a scramble for territorial cession and thus only leased the New Territories for a limited duration. With Victorian Britain at the zenith of its power, little thought was given to the long-term implications, such as the eventual expiration of the lease.[9]

British jurisdiction over the New Territories was established by a Royal Order in Council, which was scheduled to expire three days prior to the end of the lease on June 30, 1997. It unwittingly laid down a termination date to Hong Kong's existence as a British colony. The future of Hong Kong proper and the New Territories became inseparable as the whole territory developed and integrated organically. By the early 20th century the old boundary had become two sides of a main road (the Boundary Street) with indistinguishable shops and residential dwellings on both sides. As time went on, with basic infrastructures like the airport and major reservoirs in the leased territory, it became increasingly unrealistic for Britain to hold on to Hong Kong and Kowloon without the New Territories, even though the British Crown held title to the former two in perpetuity.[10]

A small number of British officials started to query the wisdom of not converting the lease into permanent cession a decade after the event, but the British Government did not see a challenge to the lease for half a century. It was during the course of the Second World War that this became an issue. As Britain and China became allies, China's wartime

leader Chiang Kai-shek asked for the return of the New Territories as part of a deal to end extraterritorial rights Britain had secured in China in the 19th century.[11] Although Chiang only asked for the early termination of the lease, Britain had no illusion that what was at stake was the future of Hong Kong as a whole. The pressure Britain faced was considerable, as Hong Kong fell to the Japanese in 1941 and was geographically within the China Theater for which the allied commander was Chiang. The outcome of the wartime negotiations was that the Chinese government reserved the right to raise with Britain the lease of the New Territories after the defeat of Japan.[12]

The British government calculated that if Hong Kong should be liberated by Chinese forces at the end of the war, the prospect of getting the Chinese units to leave and return Hong Kong to British jurisdiction would be very poor. Consequently, a British fleet raced against a Chinese army and restored British sovereignty over Hong Kong when Japan surrendered in August 1945.[13]

Impact of Japanese Occupation

Hong Kong came under Japanese occupation in December 1941, after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and various Western colonies in Asia. Japan's humbling of European imperial power in Southeast Asia was a historical turning point. It destroyed the myth of the invincibility of the white men and their empires. Much as the brutality of Japanese occupation provoked resentment in colonial Asia, initial Japanese military successes fundamentally changed the relationship between the colonial people of Asia and their Western imperial masters. The clock could not be turned back. A wind of change blew across colonial Asia at the end of the war. For the first time in Hong Kong's history, the local Chinese residents no longer tolerated racial discrimination unquestioningly.

Senior officials restoring British rule to Hong Kong were conscious of the changed environment and tried to deliver a new deal, partly to pre-empt local support for an expected demand from Chiang to end the New Territories lease.[14] The pre-war legislation that prohibited Chinese from residing in designated areas was quickly repealed. Having been imprisoned by the Japanese, the pre-war governor Mark Young, a progressive and reflective official, took the lead to make changes after he resumed office in 1946. Young sought to engage the local population in a step-by-step program to introduce representative government. He drew up a plan to introduce a super municipal council with elective elements to develop a sense of local identity and loyalty to British Hong Kong. Ironically, London's recognition of the need for change meant it only gave "old-timer" Young one year to restore the honor of the British military and replaced him by a younger and "more forward looking" successor before he could put his plan into action.

Young's successor was former cadet Alexander Grantham, who left Hong Kong a decade earlier and rose rapidly in Jamaica, Nigeria, and Fuji. Not having experienced firsthand Japan's triumph over the British Empire in Asia and how this raised expectations among the local Chinese, Grantham did not agree with Young's priorities. Assuming the governorship in 1947 he focused on the changing relationship between Hong Kong and China, where a civil war raged. As the Communists won control of mainland China in 1949, Hong Kong was swamped with refugees escaping Communist rule. Grantham seized the moment when the local people were thus distracted and ended Young's promise of reform. He did so because he considered Young misguided in thinking his reforms could convert Chinese sojourners into loyal British subjects.[15] Grantham's priority was to deliver good governance to all residents, and he worked on the assumption that Hong Kong would be reintegrated into the Chinese province of Guangdong eventually.[16]

Making of a Global Metropolis

Postwar Hong Kong developed at a pace and in a direction unimaginable before the Japanese invasion. The coming to power of the Communists in China brought about fundamental changes. Previously Hong Kong's population fluctuated as Chinese people freely moved in and out, depending on stability and order in China on the one hand and the availability of opportunities in Hong Kong on the other. The population in the 1930s generally hovered between nine hundred thousand and a million, but it increased significantly after Japan invaded China in 1937 and pushed the total to over 1.6 million before the Japanese attack in 1941.[17] During their occupation, the Japanese forcefully pushed the population out and reduced it to less than six hundred thousand in 1945. While much of the prewar population returned after the restoration of British rule, an influx of refugees pushed Hong Kong's population to nearly 2.3 million in 1950.[18] As the British realized that Communist rule would become entrenched in China and the flood of refugees would continue, they closed the border with China. From this point onward, the Chinese population of Hong Kong became a settled one. It also grew exponentially, rising by a million in each of the following three decades and reaching 7.3 million in 2015. This required the government and the population to adjust in ways not attempted before.

The slow but steady erosion of the inward-looking colonial establishment that hitherto discouraged the local Chinese from making the most of Hong Kong's facilities in government and banking services helped Hong Kong to turn a refugee crisis into a demographic bonus. Apart from starting massive programs to house the refugees and provide basic health care and education, the colonial government gave free rein to Chinese entrepreneurship and allowed all refugees to work. The government also

engaged with the local Chinese and reduced bureaucracy for securing government approval for industrial or business purposes. What emerged gradually was a "positive non-intervention" policy, by which the government encouraged and nurtured entrepreneurship without interfering directly into the market, providing subsidy, or picking champions.

Hong Kong did have significant manufacturing and other industries before the Japanese invasion, but the influx of refugees from Shanghai brought capital and technical and management knowhow that speeded up industrialization, particularly in the textile sector.[19] From around 1950 to the 1970s, Hong Kong transformed itself into a vibrant manufacturing center with light industries contributing to an increasing share of growth and employment.[20] What really drove the process was the entrepreneurial spirit and acumen of Chinese industrialists. Many adeptly shifted into completely different lines of manufacturing as demands, almost all external, changed over the years. The transformation of Li Ka-shing from plastic flower manufacturer to real estate tycoon to the all-around most successful local entrepreneur shows how this worked at its best.

Trade expanded as Hong Kong made the most of its geographical location and free port status. Its future as an *entrepôt* for trade with China was threatened when the United Nations and the United States of America imposed embargoes against the PRC after the latter militarily intervened in the Korean War in 1950. The colonial government met this challenge and maintained the *entrepôt* trade for non-strategic goods between the PRC and the world outside of the socialist bloc by issuing certificates of origin for locally manufactured goods made from imported Chinese raw material, and promoted trade by setting up a trade development council. The China trade expanded exponentially after the PRC opened up in the post-Mao era.[21] Ultimately it was the local Chinese business people who took risks and responded adroitly to opportunities that made Hong Kong a manufacturing and trading power house. By 1980 local Chinese entrepreneurs had managed to outcompete and in some cases even take over old British trading houses that had been pillars of Hong Kong's economy in the previous century.[22]

The expansion of the servicing sector benefited from the economic take-off following rapid industrialization, which increased the need for shipping, financial, and professional services, as well as from the emergence of a consumer society as disposable income rose. The shipping industry benefited from the influx of Shanghainese refugees whose investments eventually ended the long-established British domination and made the industry more competitive. By taking advantage of its stability, good order, independent judiciary, and welcoming environment to international investment, Hong Kong developed a modern and well-connected financial services sector. It also welcomed newer financial services such as fund management.[23] Since the 1970s, expansion of the servicing sector enabled it to compete and surpass the industrial sector as a driver for growth. This partly

reflected an increase in local consumption, as the refugees of the past had mostly become economically active workers and consumers. The opening up of China after 1978 led to local entrepreneurs making the most of the comparative advantages by transferring labor-intensive industries to China and focusing on the servicing industries. Increasing investments in infrastructure further improved Hong Kong's capacity to integrate with the global economy. Collectively they enabled Hong Kong to become a global financial center behind New York and London, making it a global metropolis.

Best Possible Government in the Chinese Tradition

By the early 1980s, Hong Kong reached a landmark. It delivered the best possible government in the Chinese tradition—"one which is efficient, fair, honest and paternalistic, but at the same time non-intrusive into the lives of the ordinary people."[24] The meeting of these criteria has to be assessed against the context by which the people of Hong Kong measured local governance—what happened in China.

The requirement of efficient government has arguably been met by the Hong Kong government since the end of the 19th century, as local expectation was low in an era when governance in China was poor and ineffective. Although the colonial government did not provide excellent municipal services, they exceeded the expectation of the local Chinese. The key demands of the local residents were the maintenance of stability and good order, which the colonial government provided efficiently. The context changed after the Second World War. The near-totalitarian rule of the CCP in China under Mao Zedong undoubtedly surpassed the colonial government in efficiency. But it also brought about disasters such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. In contrast, the Hong Kong government steadily increased and improved the provision of municipal services, from public sanitation to health services to educational provisions. It also made itself accessible and responsive to the general public by introducing City District Officers and other consultative mechanisms. Notwithstanding many shortcomings from which the government still suffered, by the end of the 1970s it consistently enjoyed very high public approval which indicated it had met the criterion.

The meeting of the fairness criterion relied heavily on the establishment of the independence of the judiciary, which was dramatically demonstrated in the "poisoned bread case" of 1857. In the course of hostilities between Britain and China that eventually resulted in the cession of Kowloon in 1860, a local bakery supplied the expatriate community with bread laced with arsenic, which poisoned most members of

this community, including the wife of the governor, though no fatality resulted. The bakery owner Cheong Ahlum was put on trial. Even though all members of the jury were victims of the poisoning, Cheong was acquitted.[25] This was an unusual case, but what was on trial was not just Cheong but the reputation of British justice. Such a case did not remove racial discrimination, but it dramatically highlighted how much fairer British justice was compared to what prevailed in China. The end of legal segregation after the Second World War, and the steady removal of the color bar, demonstrated by the appointment of Chau Tsun-nin as the Senior Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council in 1950 and of the Executive Council in 1953, started the process to enable Hong Kong to meet the fairness requirement.

The honesty requirement was only met after the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) successfully ended syndicated corruption in the 1970s. Bureaucratic corruption bedeviled the government, but it was largely kept to the junior ranks between the early 1860s and the immediate postwar period. This happened because the upper and the lower echelons of the government were separated by the British class barrier, with the upper echelon drawn from the middle classes and above, well remunerated, and beyond the reach of the poorly paid functionaries. After the class barrier was removed as part of the progressive postwar reforms, corrupt junior officers did not cease to take bribes after they rose to senior positions. Corruption creeped upward. This applied not exclusively but most spectacularly to the police. When Commander of the Kowloon District Peter Godber, among the first who broke the class barrier, escaped to Britain after he came under investigation for corruption, it provoked a huge public uproar. Governor Murray MacLehose responded by establishing the ICAC in 1974, which successfully extradited Godber to face trail and a jail sentence. This started the process by which the government successfully persuaded the general public that it would not tolerate corruption and established an honest reputation by the end of the 1970s.

The last criterion—non-intrusive paternalism—was also met around the same time. The colonial government was non-intrusive to its Chinese residents most of the time even in the 19th century, as it largely left the Chinese to their own devices. This neglect gradually developed into a practice of the government minimizing intrusion into the everyday life of the general public. Paternalism implies a government that looks after its citizens. This criterion was met slowly in the postwar era. Even though the government had a policy of not providing a social safety net, as revenue rose it increasingly provided support for those in need, first by building low-cost housing and nearly free universal health care. The public commitment, again during MacLehose's governorship (1971–1982), to a ten-year housing scheme, free universal education, and the Public Assistance Scheme finally enabled the government to meet the non-intrusive paternalism criterion.

The meeting of these criteria did not make Hong Kong a democracy. The authoritarian Crown Colony system continued until the end of the British rule in 1997, but by the 1980s the government had made itself responsive to public opinion without the formal institutional structure of a responsible government. As Hong Kong residents came to desire democracy, eventually meeting the criteria of the best possible government in the Chinese tradition was no longer sufficient.

Sino-British Negotiations and Retrocession

Even though the British government prepared itself for a Chinese demand to negotiate the future of the New Territories after the defeat of Japan, such a demand did not materialize as Chiang Kai-shek was preoccupied with the Chinese Civil War. When they came to power the Communists put the matter aside, as they knew time was on their side and Hong Kong was highly valuable for access to the outside world.

The subject was finally raised by the British after a pragmatic government led by Deng Xiaoping ended the tumultuous Maoist era in China. In 1979 Governor MacLehose took advantage of an official visit to ascertain if Beijing might agree to fudge the expiration date of the New Territories lease and allow the British to continue to govern Hong Kong in return for Hong Kong's continued functioning as the goose that laid golden eggs for China.[26] Deng's view was that "a negotiated settlement of the Hong Kong question in the future should be based on the premise that the territory is part of China," adding that Beijing would "treat Hong Kong as a special region."[27] Until this British initiative the Chinese government had focused on how Hong Kong could help with Deng's reforms.[28] It finally decided at a Politburo meeting in March 1981 to recover Hong Kong in 1997 and adopted the "one country, two systems" formula for this purpose.[29]

Formal negotiations started when British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher visited China in September 1982. Thatcher's starting point was that Britain would only negotiate about the leased territory. The Chinese position was that all three parts of Hong Kong must be returned and the negotiations could only be about how to ensure Hong Kong's retention of its prosperity and stability.[30] The negotiations were difficult, and the people of Hong Kong were not allowed a direct say. It took two years to reach an agreement for Hong Kong to be made into a Chinese Special Administrative Region (SAR) in 1997. While the general framework for the Sino-British Agreement (1984) was based on the "one country, two systems" idea, the specifics for Hong Kong to enjoy "a high degree of autonomy" under Chinese sovereignty were elaborated in Annex I of the document. They reflected

the input of British negotiators who tried to secure a deal for Hong Kong to maintain the existing political system and way of life for the following fifty years.

The commitments the Chinese government had made, detailed in Annex I, were incorporated into the SAR constitution, the Hong Kong Basic Law. This document was promulgated by the Chinese National People's Congress in 1990, after an extended period of drafting and consultation that lasted nearly five years. This process paralleled a British attempt to introduce a representative government to Hong Kong. This reflected a difference in the interpretation of the commitment to uphold Hong Kong's way of life. The people of Hong Kong and the British government worked on the assumption that Hong Kong would continue to develop organically until 1997, and the status quo then would be maintained for half a century. In contrast, the PRC government insisted that it would only uphold the status quo in place as of 1984 and refused to allow Hong Kong to democratize.[31]

In reality the Chinese policy was less unyielding than its rhetoric, and it was one of exercising maximum flexibility within a rigid framework.[32] The rigid framework was about upholding the PRC's sovereignty over Hong Kong and maintaining CCP rule in China as a whole. Within this framework, the PRC was prepared to exercise as much flexibility as it deemed appropriate to ensure Hong Kong's continued flourishing and contribution to China's development. The precise meaning of this changes as circumstances evolve.

Between the signing of the Agreement in 1984 and the handover in 1997, a significant element of the Hong Kong citizenry desired as much democratization as possible, seeing democracy as a bulwark against Communist intervention post-1997. The Hong Kong government shared this view and published a green paper for developing representative government for consultation quickly. But Hong Kong significantly pulled back after Beijing publicly opposed its plans.[33] A fresh attempt to revive the democratization project modestly was made in 1992, when former Cabinet Minister Christopher Patten took on the governorship in the aftermath of "the Tiananmen Incident," the large-scale military crackdown on peaceful demonstrators in Beijing in 1989.[34] Patten sought to strike a balance between reassuring the people of Hong Kong, who had become deeply worried about their future, and not breaching Beijing's bottom line in not allowing full direct election based on universal suffrage. Beijing misunderstood and over-estimated the scale of Patten's plan and threatened to dismantle whatever reforms he might put in place.[35] In the end, Patten proceeded with his very limited reform, which did not turn Hong Kong into a democracy. Beijing reversed Patten's reforms when it took over, but it kept a small number of individuals previously appointed to the Executive Council by Patten to assuage public opinion in Hong Kong.[36] This showed the extent and the limits of "the maximum flexibility within a rigid framework" policy.

Rise of a Local Identity

The closing of the border with China in 1950 was a key development that led to the eventual rise of a national identity in Hong Kong. As free movement of Chinese persons across the border ended, the population settled down and took on a developmental path distinctly different from that of China under Mao Zedong. People born and bred in Hong Kong lacked ready access to the PRC. They developed a common identity by sharing a capitalist approach to development, a British-style education, and a way of life based on modernization of the Confucian culture. They came of age in the 1960s and considered themselves citizens of the territory. The spillover of the Cultural Revolution forced them and their parents to choose between supporting the Maoist rioters or the colonial regime that provided the sociopolitical framework for them to flourish. The younger generation led their parents to embrace the colonial administration as their government. This helped to forge an imagined community, one which the colonial government seized upon to make changes that resulted in it meeting the criteria of the best possible government in the Chinese tradition a decade later. As Hong Kong citizens put the turmoil of 1967 behind them, they developed a vibrant and lively popular culture based on the Cantonese language.[37] "The Hong Kong identity that emerged was based on a shared outlook and a common popular culture which blended traditional Chinese culture with that imported from overseas, with the influences of the USA, Britain and Japan being particularly noticeable. This shared outlook incorporated elements of the traditional Confucian moral code and emphasis on the family, as well as modern concepts like the rule of law," respect for human rights, a limited government, "a free economy, a go-getting attitude and pride in the local community's collective rejection of corruption."[38]

Post-Cultural Revolution changes and the end of Maoist isolationism in China complicated the emergence of a Hong Kong national identity, however. As China opened up in the 1970s and the first "China fever" developed, Hong Kong's young people became intensely proud of their Chinese-ness. The reaching of the Sino-British agreement further required them to reconcile their new sense of identity with the reality that their future lay inside China. Thus, their sense of identity in the run-up to 1997 was a somewhat convoluted one, as they felt they were both Hong Kongese and Chinese at the same time, though they felt they were a special kind of Chinese, distinct from their compatriots in the PRC.[39]

The end of British colonial rule led many to want to identify more with a proud Chinese nation. However, as Beijing entrenched its anti-democratic consultative Leninist system and adamantly refused to let Hong Kong progress meaningfully in the direction of democratization,[40] it caused enormous disappointment and frustration. The younger generations, who grew up without living through the fear associated with the Tiananmen

massacre of 1989, came to see themselves as different from the mainland Chinese. As they saw their core values—democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—come under pressure from mainland China, they viewed the relationship with the mainland in terms of "righteous us" versus "unscrupulous them." This sentiment gradually metamorphosed into a kind of national identity, one that for the first time underpins an emerging demand for independence from the PRC.

Special Administrative Region

Hong Kong formally became a Chinese SAR on July 1, 1997. The British handed over an effective government that continued to function as previously. Since the 1950s the colonial administration had asserted so much autonomy that officials in the Colonial Office in London informally nicknamed it "the Republic of Hong Kong." This hands-off approach was reaffirmed by the British government after reaching the Sino-British Agreement in order to put Hong Kong in the best possible position to enjoy a high degree of autonomy under Chinese sovereignty.

In its early years as a SAR, Hong Kong appeared to enjoy a high degree of autonomy as Beijing tried to avoid interfering into its domestic affairs.[41] It happened despite the Leninist nature of the PRC system, as successive chief executives of the SAR routinely second-guessed and avoided policies that Beijing would not like. While this approach minimized Chinese interference, it did not maximize autonomy. Given that Hong Kong's political system is meant to protect individual freedom, human rights, and judicial independence, allowing it to enjoy a high degree of autonomy within the wider consultative Leninist system dedicated to sustaining the dominance of the CCP, tension is inherent. To maximize autonomy, it is necessary for the SAR to develop a dynamic with the Chinese state that allows the two sides to test but not cross each other's bottom lines. In reality, the chief executives' devotion to second-guessing Beijing has resulted in a steady erosion of the SAR's autonomy, as the SAR government never tests Beijing's bottom line, while Beijing gets more restrictive.

In its first decade as a SAR, the people of Hong Kong generally accepted this approach, as the erosion of autonomy was not readily noticeable, and the PRC government was very supportive of Hong Kong during the Asian financial crisis, which hit just after the handover. As the economy came under pressure the SAR government chose the easy option, which was to rely on Chinese support to ride out the crisis. This process was not reversed later, and Hong Kong's economy became increasingly dependent on the Chinese economy. As China's economy took off and became the world's second largest by the 2010s, Hong Kong's relative importance declined. When China committed itself to the

"one country, two systems" policy in the 1980s, Hong Kong was indispensable to its economic development. In the early 21st century, while the SAR remains a significant economic partner to Beijing, it is arguably no longer indispensable.

The frustration that an increasing element of Hong Kong's population, particularly its younger members, felt toward the incompetence of Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying and the constraints on democratization imposed by Beijing resulted in major social protests in 2014. The crux of the matter was that while Hong Kong, particularly its younger generations, wanted to elect its chief executive directly by 2017, the Chinese government only allowed it to elect its chief executive after candidates had been screened and approved by Beijing.[42] This conflict came to a head in autumn 2014 when a modest group of Occupy Central activists organized a demonstration, which the police met with tear gas and pepper spray. This use of force contradicted the tradition of non-violent policing established since the 1980s and provoked a large-scale public outcry, transforming a modest demonstration into a major protest movement. The protestors used umbrellas to protect themselves against tear gas and pepper spray, and the events, which lasted from September to December, came to be called the umbrella protests.

The umbrella protests reflected a wider and growing resentment in Hong Kong against the way Beijing and mainland Chinese deal with Hong Kong. As the PRC and its citizens grew rich, they subscribed to the Chinese government narrative of the superiority of the consultative Leninist system and flaunted their newfound wealth in Hong Kong, behaving as if anything and anyone has a price. This made many people in Hong Kong feel their core values—human rights, rule of law, democracy, rejection of corruption, and civility—which underpin their sense of identity were coming under attack from Beijing and the mainlanders. They have increasingly come to see their relationship with Beijing as a colonial one and to reject it. This has given rise to some activists of the younger generations agitating for independence which, in turn, has caused serious concern in Beijing. With its government under a hard-line leader, President Xi Jinping, Beijing sees "the localists" in Hong Kong as posing a challenge to the unity of China and the political dominance of the CCP, and takes a carefully calibrated but increasingly repressive approach to the SAR. While the umbrella protests lost steam by the end of 2014, the underlying tension and problems remain. A few activists built on their activism to gain election to the Legislative Council in autumn 2016. The refusal of some of them to take the oath of loyalty in accordance with the rules gave Beijing an excuse to interpret the Basic Law in a way that prevented the activists from taking office.

Discussion of the Literature

General readers looking for a well-written short introduction should start with John Carroll's *A Concise History of Hong Kong* (2007). Someone looking for more depth, detail, and insight into what shaped British Hong Kong will best be served by Steve Tsang's *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (2004). Both are balanced and solidly based.

With the end of British colonial rule, Hong Kong should have become a post-colonial society sharing many commonalities with other Asian states that emerged from European imperialism, including an attempt to de-emphasize the contributions of the colonial power and a shift in focus to the contributions of the local people. In Hong Kong the opposite happened in the first decade or so after the end of British colonialism. A number of former colonial officials published memoirs to explain their work and experience.[43] The appearance of these memoirs reflects the existence of a nostalgia for the British period and the reality that the usual process of decolonization has not happened. Hong Kong did not achieve independence, and its people were not allowed to determine their own future. As Hong Kong became a Chinese SAR, the promise that the political system and way of life it inherited from the British would be sustained for fifty years meant that its future remained beholden to its past, and the narrative of Hong Kong's history is something its new consultative Leninist sovereign feels it should control.

Looking at Hong Kong's change of status in 1997 dispassionately, an obvious interpretation is that the British colony of Hong Kong was transformed into a PRC colony. This would explain the nostalgia for the British period. Be that as it may, describing the SAR as a Chinese colony is politically incorrect—indeed, it is unacceptable to the PRC government. This affects how Hong Kong is treated in the literature. No academic work written originally in Chinese takes such an interpretation. Even works in the English language generally avoid addressing such a reading of the situation.

The political sensitivity of Hong Kong's status as a Chinese SAR also affects how its democracy and democratization are examined in the literature, even in English. While most works follow the standard definition of democracy and democratization and conclude that Hong Kong faces severe challenges, an alternative approach has emerged. Sonny Lo, a long-standing specialist on Hong Kong politics, now describes Hong Kong's political system as a kind of "indigenous democracy."[44] This is an interesting and potentially significant development, as the interpretation of "indigenous democracy" resembles closely the Chinese establishment's view of itself as having met Hong Kong's democratic aspiration. There is a rising demand in Hong Kong for its citizens to elect the chief executive democratically by 2017. Lo dismisses this demand and essentially agrees

with the Chinese government that it has fulfilled its promise of democratization by letting the people of Hong Kong elect the chief executive from among candidates already vetted and approved by the PRC.[45] An important question is whether Lo's book, *Hong Kong's Indigenous Democracy: Origins, Evolution and Contentions* (2015) is an outlier or a harbinger of a new body of literature that will fall in line with the views of the Chinese authorities.

The unusual status of Hong Kong since 1997 also poses a problem for dealing with the issue of identity. Is Hong Kong Chinese? What does Chinese-ness mean in the context of Hong Kong, in the British period and the SAR period? If being Chinese in Hong Kong means something different from being Chinese in the rest of the PRC, will it make better sense to use a different term to describe it, for the sake of intellectual clarity? David Faure has reflected insightfully on the meaning of being Chinese in Hong Kong,[46] but whether the special characteristics of the Hong Kong identity are sufficient to justify it being described otherwise than as Chinese is a politically charged issue. A Hong Kong scholar who argues that Hong Kong is too distinct from mainland China to be deemed Chinese is at risk of being labeled a traitor.

Primary Sources

The most important primary sources for the study of Hong Kong are the archives of the Hong Kong government and of the British government. While all the archives at the Public Records Office in Hong Kong are obviously relevant, there are several collections at the British National Archives which are particularly important. The most basic are the records of the Colonial Office, particularly series CO19, CO129, CO131, CO537, CO825, CO882, and CO1030. The Foreign Office archives are also exceptionally rich in material relevant to Hong Kong's history, most notably FO17, FO228, FO371, and FCO40. The other departmental series of archival sources that are most valuable are CAB23, CAB65, CAB128, and CAB129 of the Cabinet Office; and DEFE6 and HS1 of the Ministry of Defence. The listing of the National Archives series is selective rather than exhaustive.

Apart from the official archives, there are important collections of primary sources and research collections on Hong Kong. Among them, the Hung On-To Memorial Library at the University of Hong Kong Library houses the largest collection of research material, including some private papers of individuals who made significant contribution to Hong Kong. The archives of the Tung Wah Hospitals, available through the Tung Wah Hospital Group in Hong Kong, are highly valuable in shedding light on how the local Chinese community managed its own affairs during the British colonial period.

Another major depository of private papers and oral archives of individuals who served in the Hong Kong government and the public sector is the Weston Library at Oxford University. The collections there were built up mainly as the manuscript collections of the Rhodes House Library, which has been merged into the Weston Library. They include substantial collections of papers of individuals such as former governors Frederick Lugard and Cecil Clementi, former Colonial Secretary Franklin Gimson, and former Secretary of State for the Colonies Arthur Creech-Jones, as well as the papers of the Fabian Society. In addition, there is a significant body of oral records (generally available in transcript if no longer subject to time-bans) of senior officials and non-official leaders, such as governors Murray MacLehose, David Trench, and Robert Black; Chief Justice Denys Roberts; and Senior Member of the Executive Council Sze-yuen Chung. They also include many lesser senior officials in many different departments of the Hong Kong government. The longest of the transcripts, at 967 pages, is that of David Jordan, former director of commerce and industry. This collection of interview records is particularly useful for insights on how Hong Kong was governed in the postwar period and on the early 1980s negotiations for the future of Hong Kong. Before they were transferred to the Weston Library in 2014, the records were housed as the Hong Kong Collection at the Rhodes House Library.

For those unable to access the archives, there is the series *Documentary History of Hong Kong* published by the Hong Kong University Press. It consists of three volumes and provides annotated introductions to the most important documents on the politics, economy, and society of Hong Kong. The three volumes are *Government and Politics* (edited by Steve Tsang); *Society* (edited by David Faure); and *Economy* (edited by David Faure and Lee Pui-tak). There are also memoirs of colonial officials and critics that give personal accounts of their experiences, including Alexander Grantham, *Via Ports: From Hong Kong to Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012); Trevor Clark, *Good Second Class* (Stanhope, UK: The Memoir Club, 2004); and Eric Peter Ho, *Times of Change: A Memoir of Hong Kong's Governance 1950–1991* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005). Elsie Tu's *Colonial Hong Kong in the Eyes of Elsie Tu* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003) gives the perspective of a long-standing critic of the colonial administration.

Further Reading

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Notes:

(1.) Steve Tsang, ed., *A Documentary History of Hong Kong: Government and Politics* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1995), 18–30.

(2.) Christopher Munn, *Anglo-China: Chinese People and British Rule in Hong Kong, 1841–1880* (Richmond, U.K.: Curzon, 2001), 209–216.

(3.) Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 25.

(4.) Steve Tsang, *Governing Hong Kong: Administrative Officers from the Nineteenth Century to the Handover to China, 1862–1997* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 23.

(5.) John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 5–14.

(6.) "Sun Yat-sen's Address at the University of Hong Kong 'Why I Became a Revolutionist,'" in *The Historical Giant Returns to HKU*, 11.

(7.) Steve Tsang, "Strategy for Survival: The Cold War and Hong Kong's Policy towards Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Activities in the 1950s," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25.2 (2005): 298–299.

(8.) Lau Kit-ching Chan, *From Nothing to Nothing: The Chinese Communist Movement and Hong Kong, 1921–1936* (London: Hurst, 1999), 192.

(9.) Steve Tsang, *Hong Kong: An Appointment with China* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 8–11.

(10.) CO129/503/2, Minutes by Gent, 3 July 1928.

(11.) Lau Kit-ching Chan, *China, Britain and Hong Kong, 1895–1945* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990), 305–309.

(12.) Tsang, *Hong Kong: An Appointment with China*, 27–33.

(13.) Philip Snow, *The Fall of Hong Kong: Britain, China and the Japanese Occupation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 240–260.

(14.) Steve Tsang, *Democracy Shelved: Great Britain, China and Attempts at Constitutional Reform in Hong Kong, 1945–1952* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988), 27–28.

(15.) Alexander Grantham, *Via Ports: From Hong Kong to Hong Kong*, rev. ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 111–112. (Originally published 1965.)

(16.) Tsang, *Democracy Shelved*, 187–190.

(17.) G. B. Endacott, *A History of Hong Kong*, 2d ed. (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1964), 289–290.

(18.) Hong Kong Government, *The Government and the People* (Hong Kong: Government Press, 1962), 133.

(19.) For a detailed study, see Siu-lun Wong, *Emigrant Entrepreneurs: Shanghai Industrialists in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988).

(20.) Sze-yuen Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey to Reunification: Memoirs of Sze-yuen Chung* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2001), 17.

(21.) David R. Meyer, *Hong Kong as a Global Metropolis* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 187–188.

(22.) Anthony B. Chan, *Li Ka-shing: Hong Kong's Elusive Billionaire* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1996), 79–90.

(23.) M. J. Enright, E. E. Scott, and D. Dodwell, *The Hong Kong Advantage* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997), 146–147.

(24.) Steve Tsang, "Government and Politics in Hong Kong: A Colonial Paradox," in *Hong Kong's Transitions, 1842–1997*, eds. J. M. Brown and Rosemary Foot (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1997), 63. The rest of this section borrows heavily from this book chapter.

(25.) Tsang, *Modern History*, 53.

(26.) Tsang, *Modern History*, 212–214.

(27.) Nianlong Han, ed., *Diplomacy of Contemporary China* (Hong Kong: New Horizon Press, 1990), 464.

(28.) Percy Cradock, *Experiences of China* (London: John Murray, 1994), 163.

(29.) Tsang, *Modern History*, 216–217.

(30.) Cradock, *Experiences of China*, 178–182.

(31.) Xu Jiatun, *Xu Jiatun Xiangkang Huiyilu* (Taipei: Lianjing Chubanshe, 1993), 169–174.

(32.) Steve Tsang, "Maximum Flexibility, Rigid Framework: China's Policy Towards Hong Kong and its Implications," *Journal of International Affairs* 49.2 (1996): 413–433.

(33.) Shiu-hing Lo, *The Politics of Democratization in Hong Kong* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1997), 90–91.

(34.) Jonathan Dimbleby, *The Last Governor* (London: Warner, 1997), 137–166.

(35.) Alvin Y. So, *Hong Kong's Embattled Democracy: A Societal Analysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 183–216.

(36.) Chris Patten, *East and West* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 80–81.

(37.) This section is based substantially on Tsang, *Modern History*, 180–195.

(38.) Tsang, *Modern History*, 194–195.

(39.) David Faure, "Reflections on Being Chinese in Hong Kong," in *Hong Kong's Transitions, 1842–1997*, eds. J. M. Brown and R. Foot, 110–118 (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1997).

(40.) For the entrenchment of consultative Leninism under Xi Jinping, see Steve Tsang, "Consolidating Political and Governance Strength," in *China in the Xi Jinping Era*, eds. Steve Tsang and Hunghua Meng (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 17–40.

(41.) Steve Tsang, "Commitment to the Rule of Law and Judicial Independence," in *Judicial Independence and the Rule of Law in Hong Kong*, ed. Steve Tsang (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 2.

(42.) Sonny Shiu-hing Lo, *Hong Kong's Indigenous Democracy: Origins, Evolution and Contentions* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 38–58.

(43.) David Akers-Jones, *Feeling the Stones: Reminiscences by David Akers-Jones* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004); Trevor Clark, *Good Second Class* (Stanhope, U.K.: The Memoir Club, 2004); Brian Wilson, *Hong Kong Then* (Edinburgh: Pentland, 2000); Eric Peter Ho, *Times of Change: A Memoir of Hong Kong's Governance, 1950–1991* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005); Patrick Shuk-siu Yu, *A Seventh Child and the Law* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998); Sally Blyth and Ian Wotherspoon, eds., *Hong Kong Remembers* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Sze-yuan Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey to Reunification: Memoirs of Sze-yuen Chung* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2001). A notable exception was Leo F. Goodstadt, who had lived and worked in Hong Kong as a journalist and private-sector economist for a long time before joining the government at a very senior level. He has provided a critical reflective account, *Uneasy Partners: The Conflict Between Public Interest and Private Profit in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005) that shows little colonial nostalgia.

(44.) Lo, *Hong Kong's Indigenous Democracy*.

(45.) Steve Tsang, review of *Hong Kong's Indigenous Democracy: Origins, Evolution and Contentions*, by Sonny Shiu-hing Lo, *China Journal* 76 (2016): 196–198.

(46.) Faure, "Reflections on Being Chinese"; and David Faure, *Colonialism and the Hong Kong Mentality* (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2003).

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