

A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF HONG KONG

SOCIETY

Edited by David Faure



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INTRODUCTION

HONG KONG, COLONIAL SOCIETY

Hong Kong was a China coast city. It was by and large a Chinese city. It was a metropolis. But above all, it was a colony.

Hong Kong became a British colony from 1842. It outlasted most British colonies. Post-Second World War Britain lost its world power status and gave up most of its colonies; in the pursuit of an open door into Europe, it gave up even the British Commonwealth. But colonial status lingered on in Hong Kong because, as it was said in the 1960s, China tolerated it, Britain saw no alternative to continuing and the Hong Kong people wanted it. By the 1980s, that situation changed.

Even at its mightiest, Britain had no social policy on Hong Kong as such. It applied British justice and periodically enforced standards that had been tried in Britain, whether or not they had succeeded in Britain or were suited to Hong Kong. It is hard to understand why the Hong Kong government would have promoted a Housing Society together with a Resettlement Department in the 1950s unless one realizes that the British home government sought to provide housing in Britain through the combined efforts of building societies and local councils. It is also hard to understand why in the 1970s Hong Kong should have adopted a sudden spate of labour legislation until one sees that a Labour government had come to power in London and that British Members of Parliament and the British press in the 1960s had been painting Hong Kong as a sweatshop. Hong Kong people did not demand housing, social welfare, legislation, police, not even universal education; but, in post-war Hong Kong, they had been granted by acts of benevolent government. Once granted, however, many Hong Kong people delighted in having these provisions. In this way, the benevolent provisions of the Hong Kong government, together with other provisions that were less benevolent, wove their way into Hong Kong society.

A superimposed government was the mark of the colonial status. But there must have been a society on which it was superimposed.

Society and the Realm of Politics

To describe Hong Kong society, one must return to the fundamentals of the concept. The concept 'society' was a creation of the European Enlightenment, created to represent a movement that informed kings that their subjects should suitably be governed by the laws of nature rather than their will. Subsequent to the Enlightenment, the concept went through a strange history. Because no government was willing to acknowledge that its will had been imposed in total ignorance of the demands of nature, governments have taken various means to ensure that nature and policy might meet. Dictators argue that their theories tell them what nature might demand; democrats say that they would ask the people. The theory of benevolent government to which both subscribe argues that the test of the theory lies ultimately in whether it works.

Nature being a silent partner to this relationship between governments and their people, whether governments and their policies work can only be discussed in relation to ends that are held to be worthwhile in themselves and that are vocalized. Such ends as justice, nationhood, equality, liberation, fairplay, liberty and now human rights have dominated political discourse at various times in recent history. Where society is not looked upon as a mere recipient of benevolence but an active participant in the generation of these aims, public debates concern themselves with the matching of policies to aims. However, in Hong Kong, until the 1980s, few fundamental ends of government were ever the subject of public debate. Hong Kong's commentators were not idealists but pragmatists, and there was neither the arena for nor the interest in a public discourse on the rights and wrongs of social policies on fundamental principles. After the Cultural Revolution in China, in which Hong Kong's vociferous left-wing lost, first its principles, then its nerves, not even communism provided an ideological threat. The very few champions of the needy and the powerless, among whom one must include the indefatigable Mrs Elsie Elliot (now Mrs Tu), made their mark in the 1960s and the early 1970s. They were superceded when by the 1980s even the poor took off into economic growth.

The Hong Kong government was a very successful government. It was successful because it did not bulldoze its way in social policies. It listened to the voice of the Hong Kong people, but it also selected the mouthpiece. Sir Murray Macle hose (now Lord Macle hose) might well have congratulated himself when he recruited 'grassroots' communal organizations into the vast advisory network that the Hong Kong government built up in the 1970s, much of it on his personal initiative. His Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Denis Bray, put his finger on the communal pulse when he said in the Legislative Council on 29 November, 1973:

But it has only recently become clear that the most important change in society is not its increasing wealth nor its increasing expectations of Government performance but its new sense of purpose. The new society no longer expects everything to be done for it by a paternalistic government. It is a society on the

move, prepared to act on social issues with the same vigour that the old refugee society displayed in the pursuit of private prosperity.

But hear the next sentence:

How else can one explain the public response to the two campaigns of social awakening — Clean Hong Kong and Fight Violent Crime?¹

In the 1970s, Hong Kong did not see any major extension to electoral politics.² Government benevolence depended on a choice of policies that the government would find practical and society would be willing to accept. When the formula worked, as it often did, there would have been participation. Cleaning Hong Kong and fighting violent crime would have been issues that members of the public might willingly participate in.

Nevertheless, the advisory network of communal organizations that might lend the Hong Kong government administrative support was genuine. The Hong Kong government needed a buffer between itself and the British home government. The Hong Kong government had to be able to report to the home government that there were laws of nature that even the home government should not upset. For this reason, society in Hong Kong was created in the same fashion as it was created in Enlightenment Europe.

To see this line of thinking evolve, one returns to 1869. Sir Rutherford Alcock, British Minister in Beijing, had suggested that the Chinese government appoint a consul in Hong Kong and it seemed that he might receive the support of the Foreign Office. The Governor of Hong Kong, Sir R.G. MacDonnell found no merit whatsoever to the proposal and decided there were disadvantages to the interests of the Chinese people who were resident in Hong Kong. He could not put the case more eloquently than a memorial from the inhabitants of Hong Kong to the Foreign Secretary:

In this colony there are upwards of 120,000 Chinese residents, all of whom are colonists, subject to our laws, the great majority of them tax-payers, and a very large number of them landholders, and entitled as such to Colonial Registers for vessels (owned by them) flying the British Flag, who have been for many years peaceable, well-conducted citizens, with a considerable stake in the welfare of the colony, and who, by being promoters and managers of the large emigration to the United States and Australian colonies, the principal exporters and traders, shareholders in our banks, steam, insurance and other public companies, and eager adventurers in new manufacturing projects, under our rule and are free, at present, from the extortions and squeezes to which they would indubitably be subjected, through their families or relatives living in China, if a Chinese consul were placed here.³

This was the first occasion, but not the only occasion, when as defender of the Chinese in Hong Kong the Governor presented his case to the home government.

A Chinese person was represented on Hong Kong's governing machinery only from 1880, when Ng Choy was made a member of the Legislative Council followed soon by the appointment of Ho Kai (later Sir Kai Ho Kai) to the Sanitary Board.⁴ The decisions institutionalized the process whereby Chinese people were represented in Hong Kong politics, and for that reason, became an estate (or, to borrow a term from Hong Kong's political reforms of the 1980s, a 'functional constituency'). The politics of appointment was particularly suited to the workings of interested estates: the government itself and the Western commercial interest were the estates that the Legislative Council began with, to which was added the Chinese representation. The issue of sanitation control highlighted the other reason for bringing it into existence. After all, as Ho Kai observed when houses had to be demolished as a measure of plague prevention, it was the Chinese people's houses that were to be demolished.⁵ The Sanitary Board and the Legislative Council, with the occasional knighthood, created the upper class of Chinese people in Hong Kong society.

The small Chinese upper class stood by the Hong Kong government. Ho Kai supported the advance into the New Territories. When he defected to the Chinese Revolution in 1911, he soon lost his seat on the Legislative Council.⁶ It went to Mr Lau Chu Pak, who held steadfastly to the government of Hong Kong in the intricacies of the four-cornered politics between London, Hong Kong, Guangdong province (that was becoming increasingly independent in its actions after the 1911 Revolution) and Beijing. In the 1922 seamen's strike, the Hong Kong government drew on the prestige of Lau Chu Pak, Robert Hotung and R.H. Kotewall (who was Eurasian) to intervene on behalf of the Hong Kong community, and in the 1925-26 general strike, it had the support also of Chow Shou-shan. After the Second World War, Sir Man-kam Lo stood up against widening the electorate.⁷ In 1971 over the very sensitive issue of the adoption of Chinese as an official language, itself a rare outburst of nationalist sentiments in Hong Kong, Sir Kenneth Fung Ping-fan wrote the very mild report that pleased all parties.⁸ The rise of the Chinese upper class might be traced to the 1870s and its replacement in the 1970s. By the 1970s, the Shanghainese financier, the grassroots representatives, and more recent upstarts representing Western or Chinese interests, found their hearing in the Legislative Council. The new-comers might have created another Hong Kong upper class, but time ran out.

Mercantile Community

The Hong Kong Chinese upper class was always uncomfortable with its position. It was too small to make an impact on the Chinese community's lifestyle, and too

weak to show itself as Hong Kong's communal leaders. In the absence of an upper class, the merchant and the civil servant took over leadership of the community.⁹ Understandably, the Hong Kong government supported trade and the merchant stability.

The Hong Kong mercantile community was an anachronism by the 1950s. To find its parallel, one has to go to the treaty ports on the China coast, none of which survived the Second World War. The treaty ports were founded to facilitate trade. Unlike Hong Kong, they were not colonies, and there the merchants and rate-payers had a stronger say in the running of their own affairs than the foreign governments. The treaty port mercantile community as such declared no stakes in Chinese politics: the rising tide of nationalism in China through the 1920s and 1930s was at odds with its continuation as a community. The China coast mercantile communities survived, therefore, not by affiliating themselves with the national government but by dissociating themselves from it. But they lost their battle with Chinese nationalism. In 1927, foreigners were driven out of Hankou, by the end of the Second World War, all foreign rights to Shanghai were renounced, while Chinese merchants were absorbed more and more into the state's economic orbit. By the 1950s, the Hong Kong mercantile community stood alone on the China coast, in support of the free market as all of China came under economic control. Through ingenuity, hard work, luck and connections, it created the economic miracle of the 1970s and then 1980s. When it came to the crunch, it compromised. When the Hong Kong government decided that it had to provide low-cost housing for the poor, on a scale that by the 1990s was to make available housing for 40 percent of the population, Hong Kong private land-developers acquiesced. In effect Hong Kong land-developers divided the housing market with the Hong Kong government: private business managed the upper end of the market while government provided public housing for the needy, the same needy being workers in commerce and industry and the housing subsidy making up for the low wages of the 1950s and 1960s. Civil servants and the merchants managed Hong Kong with a strong business sense.

From early days, the mercantile community developed a social hierarchy whereupon power and privilege might merge. Standing in Government House, one might place at the top of the hierarchy the established merchant or civil servant who had 'come out' from Great Britain, and who would 'go home' upon retirement. The merchants and civil servants who came to Hong Kong for life-long residence recreated in Hong Kong respectable society as they might know it: St John's Cathedral on Garden Road, built to look like the church that one might find in most parts of Britain, the clubs and the annual balls, residences on the Peak (kept until the Second World War by law as a reservation for Western-style houses). Most did not learn to speak Chinese and an aversion to inter-marriage with Chinese people was common until the 1950s. A rung down the social ladder one might find the Westernized Chinese. Many wore Western suits, even before the Second World War — Ho Kai appears in photographs dressed in the Western

suit, but Sir Robert Hotung, whose features betrayed his part-Western origins, was fond of appearing in Chinese dress. The Westernized Chinese might be mercantile or professional, but the less Westernized Chinese who mingled with this community would have been mercantile. Those who aspired to community leadership involved themselves in charitable institutions. Since 1870 the Tung Wah Hospital directors stood at the top of its hierarchy.

To say that Hong Kong was a mercantile community that was not dominated by an upper class, one acknowledges that while the rich were obviously distinct from the poor, the mercantile community was not divided socially from the rest of the population. Trade permeated the whole of Hong Kong society and social fluidity followed from the rapid economic development that Hong Kong experienced. Hong Kong abounds with stories of the self-made man (and woman) with every economic boom, in real estate at the end of the nineteenth century or the early years of the twentieth century, in industry in the 1920s and 1930s, in industry again in the 1950s and 1960s, and in finance and real estate in the 1980s and 1990s. The ideology of the really successful Chinese merchant in the harsh competitiveness of Hong Kong went beyond self-help; there was also a strong sense of comradeship and responsibility to his fellow men. Mr Fung Ping-shan, himself an exemplar of this tradition, described it as *lipin* (*laap-ban* in Cantonese) which may be loosely translated as 'establishing one's character'.¹⁰ Mr Fung was a philanthropist, not only in Hong Kong, which he made his home, but also to his home village and county in China where he was born. The character *pin* in Mr Fung's term incorporates a hidden agenda which can be understood in the light of the Confucian classics: the Chinese gentleman subscribes to the principle that social harmony can be achieved only by putting one's character and then one's household in order, and putting them in order means behaving in propriety to one's social station. The importance of this maxim rests not in how much one is paid, but in whether one is paid as an employee. To be the free man, one's objective in life is to be the free agent. High and low in Hong Kong, the working man would have wanted to be the director of his own company. This is not the ideology of the yuppie of the 1980s, but the ideology of traditional Chinese entrepreneurship.

The traditional ideology that provided the common language of the self-made Chinese merchant such as Mr Fung Ping-shan, and the Westernism that would provide the avenue for moving socially ahead in Hong Kong, reflected fully the ambiguity of twentieth-century Chinese culture. Sir Robert Hotung, writing about the achievements of the Chinese people in Hong Kong, emphasizes the 'progress and intellectual development' of the Chinese community rather than its obvious financial success. He refers to their making great strides in education, but qualifies it by saying 'from a Western standpoint'. He was proud of the educational achievement of the Hong Kong Chinese, particularly because some of them had succeeded 'to such centres of learning as Oxford and Cambridge Universities for the completion of the courses of studies first begun in Hong Kong'.¹¹ Fair enough,

Sir Robert was writing for a Western readership, and Mr Fung Ping-shan did not speak English and was brought up in the Chinese classical tradition. Nevertheless, the Chinese mercantile community fell precisely between those two stools when they pursued recognition from seats of learning in Britain while maintaining their Chinese cultural contact by appealing to tradition. In the new China of the 1920s, the classics were giving way to the vernacular, where literary giants such as Lu Xun made waves that were to pass Hong Kong by. Shanghai became China's literary haven, some of its merchants investing in and benefiting from the publications that flowed from the new culture. Hong Kong in the 1920s as in the post-Second World War decades until the 1980s, was cultural wasteland.

Surely, one might say, one looks to intellectuals to make culture, not the mercantile community. Hong Kong had its share of intellectuals but Hong Kong did not produce an intellectual tradition. The impact that Hong Kong society made on Chinese intellectual life was made through its public media, and its content was heavily determined by the mercantile interest. Before the Second World War, the Cantonese opera was its habitual entertainment; after the war, it was the cinema, and then television. When one looks below the surface, one sees within the media elements of a Hong Kong culture, but the Hong Kong way of life was lived rather than discussed, and when it was, it was dominated by the sense that the Hong Kong way of life was really Chinese, which was only partly true.

China, Tradition and Revolution

The Chinese person living in Hong Kong has, since the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, known two Chinas: cultural China and national China. Cultural China one sees in Hong Kong in the temples and shrines, in the annual festivals, in speech, in manners and gestures, and in ingrained habits. National China one sees in Hong Kong as elements of unwanted politics, potential threats to the colonial regime. The Hong Kong government from the 1910s has been comfortable with cultural China; it prefers to keep national China at arm's length.

It is a common misconception that Chinese culture had stood still within Hong Kong's history. Although it is true that the British government had, on the whole, honoured its pledge in 1842 to leave Chinese customs alone, there had been times when it saw fit to intervene and intervene it did. In no area did it intervene more than in the family. From the 1870s, the Hong Kong government had had to be concerned with the position of bonded women. They were found in prostitution, but when they escaped from it, they needed a home to go to. The Chinese merchants had founded a loose organization known as Po Leung Kuk to give them assistance. In 1890, the question was raised as to what this organization was and in what sort of form help was being made. A committee of enquiry was set up, and it is clear when one reads the proceedings, that the committee of

enquiry was suspicious of the Po Leung Kuk's intentions. Did the committee members of the Po Leung Kuk seek concubines among the poor women who were in its custody? Why did the Po Leung Kuk consent to these women being taken out as concubines at all; why were their weddings not given the pomp that was fitting for weddings of the first wife?¹²

Humanitarian principles do not always win in Hong Kong, but time, economic opportunities and ideologies slowly and surely bring Chinese customs into step with Western trends. Child labour was brought to an end by the labour legislation and compulsory education of the 1970s, but rising standards of living would have contributed. In the case of the *mui-tsai*, bonded women in domestic positions,¹³ pressure had been exerted from the Western quarters in Hong Kong as in Britain. By the 1920s, Britain could not condone slavery within its colonies and the practice must be banned, whatever difficulties the Hong Kong government might have to face in banning it, and however impractical it was to let loose the many bonded women domestics, mostly in their teens, onto the streets of Hong Kong. Few issues caused as much outcry within Hong Kong as the freeing of the *mui-tsai*, but it was passed into law by the Legislative Council in 1923. Nevertheless, much less public interest was aroused over removing the rights of concubine in the 1950s. By the 1950s, concubines belonged to a way of life that had passed, and the law was concerned, in any case, with the awkward question of the distribution of inheritance for persons who died intestate. The law, in any case, could not rule on the keeping of mistresses, which became more an issue as Hong Kong businessmen and factory owners set up their businesses in China as they continued to maintain their abodes, and hence families, in Hong Kong. The occasional cases of bigamy were brought to justice, but only if the second union was considered and registered as a marriage.

Not even in the management of temples and sacrifice therein did customs stand still. Until recent years, the Wong Tai Sin Temple and its popularity was almost wholly a Hong Kong phenomenon. Yet, religious ceremonies conducted at temples and shrines convey a sense of timelessness: the deities had been sacrificed to from time immemorial and might, for all we know, continue unto the end of time. In much the same connotation, one might say the Chinese family, despite changes to the status of women, despite changes to the style of living created by closely packed flats in tower blocks in the Hong Kong environment, did not give up entirely the basic tenets that allowed it to hold together. The predictions of some social scientists in the 1970s notwithstanding, Hong Kong people did not give up the values of the extended family. Sociologist Lee Ming-kwan summed the attitude in his study from the 1988 indicators of social development survey: '[People] expect siblings to perform obligations, but are less insistent about supporting their parents. Many believe that sons and daughters should not be treated differently, but would think twice when asked to depart from traditional sex-roles.'¹⁴ The conclusion does not call for optimism for the continuation of traditional values; it suggests that the values are passing but have far from departed.

The sluggish persistence of cultural China in its timeless continuity contrasts with the shockwaves that national China generates at every abrupt turn. The dates stand out as outstanding events in Hong Kong's history: 1912, 1927, 1949, 1967, 1982 and soon 1997. In both 1912 and 1949, when a revolution heralded a new era in China, the Hong Kong government watched with premonitions but Hong Kong society remained calm.¹⁵ The impact of the revolution came a decade later. In 1922, the seamen's strike signalled the new nationalism that would have backed what it considered a working class in Hong Kong, and in 1925-26, it was an incident that offended nationalism rather than a demand on wage or working conditions that sparked the general strike. In 1956, the riot that gripped parts of Kowloon and the New Territories began as a continuation of the Guomindang - Chinese Communist antagonism that was inherent in the revolution of 1949, and it was in 1967 that in the extremism of the Cultural Revolution China's populist movements spilled into Hong Kong. There was a riot that arose from home-grown social tension; that took place in 1966 but it was mild in comparison to the mass actions of 1925-26 or 1967. Significantly enough, no attack on the colonial presence, either in 1925-26 or in 1967, actually demanded its withdrawal. The demonstrations of strength were precisely that. The colonial regime was vulnerable because the Chineseness of its subjects provided a bond that would resonate with any nationalist appeal. Yet, when it came to the crunch, it was the Chinese government that decided if Hong Kong was to be part of China. And when it did in 1982, popular sentiments would rather colonialism stay.

It has often been said that the Hong Kong population of the 1950s and 1960s was a population of refugees. This generation had moved into Hong Kong from China in escape from war, political persecution, poverty and famine, and it had good reason to be apprehensive of the post-1949 Chinese government. The same should not be said of the generation that grew up in Hong Kong and reached adulthood in the 1970s and 1980s. This younger generation found China as it emerged from the Cultural Revolution and as Deng Xiaoping's modernization policies generated economic growth and investment opportunities on the mainland, especially across the Hong Kong border at the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. It was this generation that had to relearn and rebuild its relationship with China as a nation. The return of Hong Kong to China spelt political uncertainty but the economic opportunities, and the very high salaries that Hong Kong was to pay its administrative and executive elite in the 1980s and 1990s, were too much to turn down. The solution that was found by a substantial portion of this generation was to approach the opportunity with a foreign passport tucked away in the belief that if the very worst came to the very worst, there might be an opportunity to emigrate.¹⁶ Hong Kong had become a lifestyle that was not easily reproduced elsewhere. Some emigrated, but many more wanted the opportunity of emigration only as an insurance policy, for by choice, they would rather live in Hong Kong.

Immigrant Society and Its Lifestyle

To discuss Hong Kong's lifestyle, one can really never be far from the fact that throughout its history, Hong Kong was an immigrant society. Many Hong Kong people were first-generation settlers; but at various times in its history, such as the 1980s and 1990s, many more were into the second generation in Hong Kong. Because of the disruption of the Japanese occupation, only a minority had roots that went three or more generations back.

First-generation settlers remember the experience of settling down in a new and unfamiliar surrounding. A vivid illustration of the opportunities that open up with length of stay may be found in the report of the Hong Kong government's first Labour Officer, H.R. Butters, which appeared in 1939. Possibly frustrated by the lack of opportunities to come into direct personal contact with Hong Kong's workers as people, it seems that Butters went into the street and interviewed workers whom he came across. A man who had come to Hong Kong at age 16 had after nine years' stay become a joiner at the Taikoo Dockyard. He also rented a flat where he lived with a wife and a son, and he sub-let two rooms to tenants. Another man, 'found buying cigarettes from a stall in Hing Lung Street after carrying vegetables', had stayed in Hong Kong for only a year and a half, worked as a coolie, lived in a cockloft which he shared with two other men, kept his wife back in the village and regularly sent her half his income.¹⁷ Such vivid descriptions of the lives of working men in the 1930s are rare in Hong Kong records. They show that the extra resources that the longer-term resident could muster made the difference between maintaining a family in Hong Kong and living apart from the family.

It goes without saying that wealth and income made a great deal of difference to lifestyle. Nevertheless, despite the difference in material comfort, the sense of precarious achievement pervaded the mentality of the first-generation migrant. One sees it in the lifestyle of these working men and women as in the war diary of the unknown shop-owner who in the midst of the fighting over Hong Kong Island in 1941 felt most saddened by the thought that his life-time savings would, in a literal sense, go up in flames.¹⁸ But one sees it also in the Shanghainese industrialists starting out afresh in Hong Kong in the 1950s, who like the self-made men who had succeeded before them, who drew upon for support the ideology of self-help and in a very conscious way practised the Hong Kong ethos of keeping clear of issues that might seem political.¹⁹ It is possible that the roots for this tendency of the first-generation settler to look inwards for the resources that might change his economic and social status were part of traditional Chinese culture, as the Chinese imperial state (but not the post-1911 Chinese nation) had long advocated personal introspection and family control as the cornerstones of its social policies. However, the inward-looking character of the first-generation resident in Hong Kong contrasts sharply with his agility in seeking out opportunities outside the family. The much vaunted Chinese dependence on the family in the

social science literature is probably no more than a short-hand for the discrepancy between the traditional ideology which encourages the family to withdraw from the state, and the nationalist ideology of the Chinese nation which wants to draw the family in.

It makes sense, therefore, to speak in terms of a family strategy, in those Hong Kong families that, as anthropologist Janet Salaff found out in the 1970s, would have a daughter start early in her factory work career so that her income might supplement family resources to support a son through education.²⁰ The description agrees with the findings of economist H.A. Turner in the same period that Hong Kong workers had only limited aspirations for themselves but they wanted their sons to do very much better, by which they meant that they should qualify for professional or managerial jobs.²¹ It also agrees with the conclusion that sociologist Thomas W.P. Wong, arrived at by re-examining the survey findings of the 1970s and 1980s, that while Hong Kong people believed in the openness of and the opportunities available in Hong Kong society, they also felt pessimistic and powerless in relation to their work.²²

No-one would dispute that Hong Kong had made great material progress in the decades from the 1930s to 1990s. In no other area would progress be as evident as in housing. One needs only compare reports on housing conditions of the poor in the 1950s with Osbert Chadwick's report in 1882 to see how a rapid increase in population without adequate sanitation enforcement could create slums. The suggestion that government should concern itself with the provision of housing for the poor was made in the Housing Report of 1935; it developed into enforceable policy in the 1950s in spite of objections from the local Chinese leadership, and it was pushed to its extreme by an energetic governor in the 1970s.²³ The net result was that 40 percent of Hong Kong's population by 1980 lived in some form of public housing. But the aspiration to upward mobility, and the actual opportunities available, meant that the public housing population was never really cut off from the rest of society. Entry into public housing, for the majority, was entry into the dream of upward mobility.

Given the aspiration and the mobility, should one speak of the working class in Hong Kong? Was the Hong Kong population more aptly described as a pool of refugees, coming from varied backgrounds but all being caught up in the upward ladder afforded by economic growth where only the handicapped and the aged found little room to stand? Surely, this was not a society that cherished equality and just as surely, some outsiders, such as Filipino domestics and Vietnamese refugees (renamed 'migrants' because many were said to have left Vietnam for economic and not political reasons), were not to advance beyond the lowest rung.²⁴

Hong Kong society produces no diplomat, no military general, no international civil servant, no ideology and therefore no ideologue. That is as it should be for being a colony. Successful Hong Kong people aspire to be what they would be best at, the mercantile princes of the twentieth-century international scene. Those

Hong Kong people who are not successful are contented with a low-key existence. But that is not unique to Hong Kong's history. Being low-key has been the style of the common man (and woman) of all ages. Shred off its colonial past, Hong Kong will be a city, where surely people mix only anonymously among the crowds.

The Selection of Documents

A social history of Hong Kong has to be an account of the common people as much as the elite. But, of course, the elite is everywhere more evident in the historical sources. I try to strike a balance in this compilation, and it has not always been easy. In bringing to the fore the historical experience of what I think would have been the majority of Hong Kong people, I have probably not given enough weight to the minority. Ethnicity in Hong Kong will eventually have to be a subject of research in its own right, so that the experience of the European, Indian, Filipino, Chaozhou, Shanghainese communities may be recorded. I have also probably not given enough weight to the changing conditions of work, a complex subject because the term 'work' itself is value-loaded and any discussion will have to bring into the concept the difference between whether the worker is paid or unpaid, whether work is conducted legally or illegally, and whether indeed, the nature of the work is such that it is 'work'. Subsequent volumes in this series may be able to remedy some of these shortcomings, but they should be borne in mind by anyone who searches in this volume for a view that even remotely resembles a complete social history. Ultimately, this volume represents the bias of an age: a concern for economic success, social mobility and integration. Rapid movement of population into and out of Hong Kong keeps alive the image of Hong Kong as a success story, but one has to be constantly reminded that the same image leaves out much of consequence in the lives of common people.

In this volume, beyond the luxury of this 'Introduction', the compiler tries to keep his own voice to the minimum. The documents selected will be read if they are found engaging. Where he interrupts the flow of the sources, usually by way of introduction or explanation, his comments are either consigned to the footnotes or indicated by a vertical line in the left-hand margin. No compilation of sources can be free of the compiler's biases; the compiler of this volume will be happy enough if, despite his own biases, the voices of Hong Kong people are heard through this volume.

¹ Document VII.d2 below.

² It would, however, be fair to say that government policies in the 1970s led up to the White Paper on District Administration in 1981, although the reforms proposed therein took quite a different turn when by 1982 the Sino-British negotiation on Hong Kong's future became the driving force in the evolution of electoral politics. On the White Paper, see Volume 1, Document V.c7.

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- ³ Correspondence Relating to the Proposed Appointment of a Chinese Consul at Hong Kong, 1908, p. 15.
- ⁴ Volume 1, Document II.b1-4, V.a3.
- ⁵ Document II.c1 below.
- ⁶ Volume 1, Document V.a4.
- ⁷ Volume 1, Document II.d2.
- ⁸ Document VII.b2 below.
- ⁹ See in particular Volume 1, pp. 72-81.
- ¹⁰ Document III.8 below.
- ¹¹ Document II.c3 below.
- ¹² Document II.b1 below.
- ¹³ Document IV.c1 below.
- ¹⁴ Document VIII.d1 below, see also Document VII.f1.
- ¹⁵ See Documents II.c2, IV.b1, IV.b2, VII.a1 and VII.a2 below for these incidents.
- ¹⁶ Documents VIII.c1 and VIII.c2 below.
- ¹⁷ Document IV.d2 below.
- ¹⁸ Document V.a below.
- ¹⁹ Document VI.d below.
- ²⁰ Document VII.e2 below.
- ²¹ Document VII.e1 below.
- ²² Document VIII.e below.
- ²³ Documents IV.d6, VI.b2 and VI.b3, and VII.d1 below.
- ²⁴ Documents VIII.b4-6 below.

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