

A New Documentary History of Hong Kong, 1945–1997

Edited by Florence Mok and Fung Chi Keung Charles

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Foreword by John M. Carroll

Why a new documentary history of Hong Kong? As each of the fourteen chapters in this pioneering book shows, it is not only Hong Kong that changed from 1945 to 1997; it is also how we *study* Hong Kong's history over this period that has changed, especially in the past few decades. This is partly because of sources that have become available or easier to access, but it is also because historians have asked different questions and approached their topics in new ways. The chapters here are by twelve young scholars who are all conducting cutting-edge research on Hong Kong history.

A key theme in the book is politics. Florence Mok and Fung Chi Keung Charles's chapter on governance and Matthew Hurst's on constitutional change show how, despite minor adjustments, Hong Kong's non-democratic political structure remained remarkably similar – 'largely and stubbornly unchanged' as Hurst puts it – with little resulting from the sweeping reforms proposed in the 1940s. Challenging notions of Hong Kong's supposed political apathy, Mok's chapter on political culture reveals how the colonial government responded and adapted to pressures from civil society to introduce reforms. As the chapter by Fung on fiscal and budgetary policy shows, both were always political and help us understand how state and society interacted. Jack Greatrex's chapter on environment and natural disasters demonstrates how environmental issues were never separate from politics, including efforts to protect dolphins and green space.

Allan T. F. Pang's first chapter shows how education became a key element in Hong Kong's Cold War politics and its gradual decolonisation – a process that for education began shortly after the Sino-British negotiations over Hong Kong's post-1997 future. Pang's second chapter, on policies for popular culture, reveals how they could be a way to attract public support. These policies involved both censorship and control, but also collaboration and appropriation. The arts, Reynold K. W. Tsang's chapter shows, played an important role in Hong Kong's post-war recovery and in its politics. More support for the arts was one of the many demands made by the Reform Club, one of the colony's oldest political groups. The documents in this chapter cover both official initiatives such as the Arts Festival and unofficial ones

such as those by the colourful impresario Harry Odell. And if cultural policies could be political, so too could medicine and healthcare. Kelvin Chan expands these to include mental health, drug addiction, and disability. Moreover, he illustrates how traditional Chinese medicine thrived in Hong Kong, partly because it was unregulated by the colonial regime, and partly because of Hong Kong's geopolitical position, which helped it circulate among Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and North America.

Hong Kong was a colony in flux, affected always by changes in mainland China and across the region. The 'China factor' looms large in almost every chapter, but particularly in James Fellows's chapter on economy and trade. Even while showing the importance of colonial and regional connections, this chapter reveals how so much of Hong Kong's economic history was shaped by developments across the border. In Adonis M. Y. Li's chapter on transport and communication, we see not only a 'city constantly on the move' but also one where transport and mobility became part of local identity and Hong Kong's relationship with the outside world. Mobility is also the theme of Doris Y. S. Chan's chapter on migration, both inward and outward. The chapter shows how fears of a 'brain drain' emerged well before the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 and reminds us that concerns about migration were not always directly related to China, as seen in the influx of Vietnamese refugees after 1975.

The documents analysed here often take us into the minds of Hong Kong's colonial administrators, but they also reveal how local people reacted to and challenged colonial governance. Carol C. L. Tsang's chapter on the politics of gender and family shows how the two interacted, sometimes in complementary ways but also in opposition. Here we see not only efforts by the government and NGOs, but also by ordinary people, who had their own ideas about family, and how notions of gender equality were challenged in both cultural and political terms. And whereas most scholars have approached race and racism mainly through laws and regulations, Vivian Kong's chapter demonstrates how race shaped social hierarchies, but also how these hierarchies could be challenged at the personal level (through autobiographies and other writings, for example) and by groups such as the Sino-British Club. Moreover, while racial divides and boundaries could be rigid, they could also be porous.

This book is far more than a collection of historical documents; it is a new history of Hong Kong from 1945 to 1997. As useful as these sources are for telling the history of Hong Kong during this period, just as valuable are the introductions and commentaries by the contributors. For while these sources tell us much about Hong Kong, this book is a powerful testament to the fact that it is historians who make historical documents speak and who give them meaning.

Foreword by Tai-lok Lui

The idea of editing a volume of documentary history is admirable. Firstly, the outcome is most unlikely to please its readers. Many of them, especially those who are new to archival research, would find it more of a 'tasting menu', only allowing them to have an initial glimpse of what would be a long and tiring process of submerging themselves in the sea of documentary materials, than really a start of the serious business of mining of archival sources. For those who know enough about historical research, what is shown in front of them is merely a selection of some relevant pieces of archival material. In the case of either group of readers, they would ask for more.

Secondly, no matter how voluminous the documentary history text is, it cannot be exhaustive. Perhaps no readers would ask for a thorough collection of documents. Archival search is, by definition, an unending quest, with the researcher always looking for new sources and/or previously unavailable pieces. In this regard, some kind of disappointment is almost a built-in feature of a documentary history sourcebook. Many readers would find the selection not enough – not enough in the sense that the set of selected documents does not quite suit their own research purpose. Almost inevitably, there would be questions about the selection decisions made by editors and contributors.

I want to make the point that editing a documentary history is probably the least appreciated effort in our contemporary academic world. As stated above, it would not easily please its readers. Furthermore, nowadays, the role of editorship is rapidly depreciated, seen as minimally pertinent, if not outright negligible, in the evaluation of academic contributions. Against such a backdrop, I find a commitment to academic sharing and altruism among the editors and contributors of this sourcebook. They shared with us the documents they covered in their own research. They identified those that were most relevant to capturing the essential features of Hong Kong society in their chosen areas of study. They started their chapters with a brief introduction, informing the readers about how those selected documents would enable them to grasp the main issues of the topic of discussion. To some extent,

what the contributors have offered is more than giving us their selection of relevant documents. They also provide their own interpretation of what constitutes the main themes and/or the critical issues in the respective domain of enquiry. They bring us closer to Hong Kong society in a particular historical context.

While most history students would probably find an emphasis on the historical context, social processes leading to historical change, and the historical configuration of social institutions as something they have long taken for granted, this is not necessarily so for students and researchers practising sociology. Many sociologists take variable-based analysis as the starting point of their sociological analysis. Though most of them would not write off the pertinence of historical context, their analysis often shows limited sensitivity to the effects of historical change on the social fabric. The social setting is treated as if it is abstracted from historical changes. The meanings of social variables are assumed to be constant, leaving little room for imagining how social life is historically constituted. It is, therefore, important to recognise the significance and implications of connecting sociology and history to enrich the complexities of our sociological analysis.

In fact, sociological studies of Hong Kong society have a long-established intellectual linkage, though increasingly unduly neglected, with a historical perspective. H. J. Lethbridge's *Hong Kong: Stability and Change*, a collection of articles published between 1970 and 1975, alerts younger sociologists of a need to grapple with the historical configuration of the political and social institutions in pre-1941 Hong Kong, shaping the interface between the colonial governance on the one side and the Chinese community on the other, that promoted social stability.¹ Janet W. Salaff, based on her ethnographic fieldwork from 1971 to 1976, examined why and how Hong Kong's working daughters, despite their participation in economic activity and growing contributions to their family economy, continued to see themselves subordinated to the patriarchal Chinese family tradition.² Industrialisation enabled a new generation of young women to earn and gain more control over some aspects of their social lives. Yet their family obligations and the need to pool family resources significantly restricted the independence of the working daughters in a period when Hong Kong's industry and economy took off. W. K. Chan took up the concept of social class and analysed the making of Hong Kong society between 1841 and 1922 in the light of the formation of the British merchant class, the Chinese merchant class, and Chinese labourers.³ Just to quote a few examples. Sociological studies of

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1. H. J. Lethbridge, *Hong Kong: Stability and Change* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1978).
 2. Janet W. Salaff, *Working Daughters of Hong Kong: Filial Piety or Power in the Family?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
 3. W. K. Chan, *The Making of Hong Kong Society: Three Studies of Class Formation in Early Hong Kong* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

Hong Kong society need a good sense of historical sensitivity in order to show how the sociological question is embedded in a particular historical context.

This volume of a documentary history of Hong Kong covers fourteen areas of study. As I said earlier, readers would not find the coverage and the selection of documentary materials enough for their research interests. But they would be given the pointers and handles for further explorations. They will learn to navigate Hong Kong studies with an awareness of the richness of documentary sources and the pathways of social and political developments in different historical periods. Sociology students will benefit from their exposure to archival materials. A stronger sense of historical sensitivity will enable them to debunk some of the established analyses and to look for fresh perspectives and interpretations.

Introduction

Hong Kong's History Redux: Recent Trends and New Departures¹

Florence Mok and Fung Chi Keung Charles

The 'Hong Kong Story' Exhibition

In Hong Kong recently, there has been a revival of interest in history. Not only have activists and politicians invoked historical narratives to justify their political agendas, but ordinary people have also demonstrated increased interest in Hong Kong's colonial past.² Some of us may still remember the unusually long queues outside the Hong Kong Museum of History in October 2020. Those people were there to visit the permanent 'Hong Kong Story' exhibition, which displayed Hong Kong's development from the prehistoric period up to its handover in 1997. Because the Leisure and Cultural Services Department of the HKSAR Government had decided to undertake a revamp to update the 'Hong Kong Story', there were widespread anxieties that 'controversial' parts of its history would be removed and that the information presented in the new exhibition would be biased and fragmentary. This popular concern could be explained by the prevailing notion that the Beijing government was increasingly trying to interfere in Hong Kong's politics, education, and media. There was therefore a pervasive fear that historical narratives would be revised and misrepresented in the new exhibition. In particular, there were suspicions that the government would suppress colonial nostalgia by downplaying the role of the British in Hong Kong history. Letters to the editor, for example in the *South China Morning Post*, condemned the revamp as 'pointless' and 'unacceptable'

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1. Both authors would like to express their gratitude to John Carroll as well as the two anonymous reviewers for their detailed comments on the earlier versions of this Introduction. All errors remain the authors' responsibility.
 2. Mark Hampton and Florence Mok, 'Remembering British Rule: The Use of Colonial Memory in Hong Kong Protest Movements, 1997–2019', in *Memory and Modern British Politics: Commemoration, Tradition, Legacy*, ed. Matthew Roberts (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 257–73.

as it would only ‘hide the truth’.³ Parents brought their children to the exhibition hoping that the next generation could witness the ‘genuine Hong Kong story’ before the exhibition was closed.⁴ Many tried to preserve the ‘original exhibition’ with photographs. This sense of uneasiness caused by the ongoing developments facilitated the reinvention of the discourse of historical memories.

However, history is different from memories. Historical memories often affect the cultural process of identity formation in a society and play an important role in shaping the general political culture. As John Tosh has rightly argued, even our political judgements are ‘permeated by a sense of the past’.⁵ However, the way memories are formed is often related to people’s current consciousness and needs. In other words, collective memories can be fluid and fallible. Even in public discourse, popular memories constantly shift in response to contemporary political developments. In the words of Geoffrey Cubitt, it is ‘the present that produces the past, through an effort of the creative and analytical imagination’.⁶

This phenomenon is particularly common in today’s Hong Kong – historical narratives are revised and bent to serve present political, economic, and social needs.⁷ This misuse of history can range from presenting inaccurate and partial information and misrepresenting historical accounts to neglecting the context and selecting primary sources in a biased manner. One notable example is how some activists painted a rosy picture of British colonialism in Hong Kong, describing the colonial regime as enlightened and progressive without demonstrating a thorough historical understanding of the situation.⁸ In fact, the colonial state was not always benevolent and hands-off but was sometimes repressive, as we will discuss in the following section. In contrast, former Chief Executive Carrie Lam made a statement in September 2020 suggesting that ‘separation of power’ had never existed in

3. ‘Revamp of Hong Kong Story in History Museum Must Not Be a Rewrite’, *South China Morning Post*, 23 October 2020.

4. “‘Story’ to Add New Chapters after a Break’, *The Standard*, 19 October 2020.

5. John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (London: Longman, 1984), 2.

6. Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 31.

7. See Hampton and Mok, ‘Remembering British Rule.’

8. This misuse of history does not only happen in Hong Kong. A most recent example outside Hong Kong that happened in the social science field is the ‘Bruce Gilley Controversy’. The controversy began when a political scientist published an article titled ‘The Case for Colonialism’ in the journal *Third World Quarterly* in 2017, arguing colonisation also has good sides. The publication of the article soon attracted global attention and widespread criticism as Gilley had ignored the fact that colonisation was based on brutal force and unequal power relations. The article was subsequently retracted. For a critical discussion and review of the controversy, see Pepijn Brandon and Aditya Sarkar, ‘Labour History and the Case against Colonialism’, *International Review of Social History* 64, no. 1 (2019): 73–109. For British imperialism and colonisation as a global/coercive phenomenon, see Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (London: Bodley Head, 2022).

Hong Kong, showing only a partial understanding of Hong Kong's colonial past.⁹ Although there might not have been a 'separation of power in the Western sense', 'checks and balances between three branches of government are a reality', as journalist Gary Cheung has pointed out.¹⁰ The misuse of history can be particularly dangerous when it is used to justify unethical practices, provoke popular sentiment, and encourage radicalism. It is therefore crucial for us to understand history as a 'systematic discipline' that relies on specific 'mechanisms and controls';¹¹ and one important 'control' is the meticulous examination of empirical evidence and close analysis of context when constructing historical narratives.

This documentary history seeks to produce both original and revised historical knowledge for Hong Kong studies. Since the late 1990s, academics have made huge efforts to provide a substantially revised understanding of Hong Kong's history. These revisions are essential: they not only shed light on how complex Hong Kong history is in terms of economic development, the Cold War, and decolonisation, but they also raise important questions vis-à-vis our established understanding of Hong Kong, opening new realms for researchers. In this book, we contribute to the existing historical discourse by revisiting some of the familiar topics using newly uncovered or underexplored primary sources and examining previously under-researched areas in Hong Kong's historiography. With improved technologies and increased digitalisation of primary sources, researchers, students, and teachers can now access both official and unofficial data online. For example, Gale has recently developed two archival databases that focus on Hong Kong: 'China and the Modern World: Hong Kong, Britain, and China, Part I: 1841–1951' and 'Part II: 1965–1993'; Proquest's Historical Collections provide important primary sources on global history from both national and international governments and agencies, which sometimes touch upon Hong Kong; and the Multimedia Information Service and Hong Kong Memory are both useful websites that contain relevant unofficial data, such as old newspapers clippings and oral testimonies.

As Hong Kong studies have become increasingly globalised, these latest developments undoubtedly benefit historical research, especially for researchers and learners who are not located near archives which have abundant Hong Kong records. Indeed, since the mid-2010s, we have witnessed a surge in Hong Kong studies networks and centres across the world, such as the Hong Kong Studies Initiatives at the University of British Columbia (Canada), Hong Kong History Centre at the University of Bristol (United Kingdom), Hong Kong Research Hub

9. 'Why Escalating Row over Whether Hong Kong Has "Separation of Powers" in Its Political System Is Not Just a Fight over Words', *South China Morning Post*, 3 September 2020.

10. 'Escalating Row', *South China Morning Post*.

11. Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (London: Routledge 1999), 155.

at Nanyang Technological University (Singapore), and Global Hong Kong Studies at the University of California (United States). And we will probably see even more initiatives in future years.

However, these online databases also have their drawbacks. Databases such as Gale and Proquest are extremely expensive. Taking the new Hong Kong series created by Gale as an example, it can cost up to US\$49,000, which is unaffordable to many small to medium-sized humanities departments. More importantly, while the online catalogues are easy to navigate (one can enter keywords and specify the time period/years using a search engine), all these databases provide no or little contextual information which helps users read the sources against the grain or in appropriate context. Since large quantities of information are included, users must go through all the records with the same keywords in a time-consuming and laborious manner before they can get a sense of how history developed and select the more important sources as empirical evidence. In addition, these materials themselves provide no explanation of how they engage with the existing literature.

This sourcebook therefore seeks to fill the voids in these research and teaching aids, providing users in different geographical locations with a relatively affordable and accessible option that is easy to navigate, even for researchers who are beginners in Hong Kong studies. It provides readers with useful primary materials, both official and unofficial, and maps them with key moments in Hong Kong history and the evolving historiography. Many of these primary sources were released in the 2010s and 2020s, decades after the publication of the three documentaries by Hong Kong University Press in the 1990s and early 2000s.¹² These sources will stimulate new discussions and debates and advance the study of Hong Kong history.

A New Documentary History

For these reasons, a new documentary sourcebook is needed to provide an updated and improved understanding of the city and its history. Through analysing either sources that have been ‘newly’ released, that is, since the publication of the previous three sourcebooks (since the 2000s), or underexplored archival records from the Hong Kong Public Records Office, the National Archives in London, and other overseas archives, and unofficial records, such as newspapers and private papers, this sourcebook fills a long-standing void in the existing scholarship by providing an expanded understanding of the history of post-war Hong Kong. It highlights how

12. The documentary histories are Steve Tsang, ed., *A Documentary History of Hong Kong: Government and Politics* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1995); David Faure, ed., *A Documentary History of Hong Kong: Society* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997); David Faure and Lee Pui-tak, eds, *A Documentary History of Hong Kong: Economy* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).

a reformist colonial administration governed Hong Kong while being influenced by factors such as widespread decolonisation across the globe, increased economic development, changing Sino-British relations, and Cold War dynamics. It also explores how Hong Kong's society, culture, infrastructures, and landscapes shifted in response to these internal and external changes. It does not only address familiar topics but, more importantly, investigates topics that are original and underexplored. It addresses the immediate post-war period, which has been studied extensively by scholars, but also investigates the late colonial period, from the 1970s to 1990s – precursors of important changes in post-colonial Hong Kong. Each contributor briefly sketches what has been done with respect to the chapter's topic and then contextualises the primary sources through short abstracts. This arrangement enables us to delve into the relationship between sources and methods, and demonstrate why historians would interpret a primary source in a particular way.

Nonetheless, readers must bear in mind a cautionary note. The sourcebook includes more official sources (notably government reports and declassified archival records) than unofficial sources (private papers, diaries, internal company records, amateur photography, newspaper clippings, and oral histories). The contributors tried to incorporate more unofficial sources into the documentary. However, in the course of preparing this documentary, due to copyright issues, we were unable to include some of the privately owned sources. This may not affect chapters such as those on governance and fiscal policy, which are 'official in nature'. However, it is with regret that the volume is unable to present some of the unofficial sources, which we must acknowledge is a practical limitation.

Historiographical Methods

This documentary aims to provide original knowledge on new topics and a revised understanding of the existing historical discourse through primary sources. The use of formerly classified archival documents and private personal records enables readers to gain new and comprehensive insights into the study of Hong Kong history. To apply these records appropriately in our research, we must understand the historiographical methods used by professional historians to revise and generate knowledge. Very often, historians' research builds upon existing work and is revisionist. In other words, scholars usually start by engaging with the accepted understanding, conventional interpretation, and orthodox views of the past.¹³ This often takes place

13. See, for example, Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *Revisionist Histories* (London, Routledge: 2013), 9–13; Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 137–46; Gabrielle Spiegel, 'Revising the Past/Revisiting the Present: How Change Happens in Historiography', *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 4; James M. Banner, *The Ever-Changing Past: Why All History Is Revisionist History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), chapter 4.

in the form of debates, disputes, and disagreements among historians.¹⁴ As James Banner has pointed out, there are a number of ‘varieties of revisionist history’, such as ‘transformative’, ‘philosophical’, ‘conceptual’, ‘evidence-based’, ‘method-driven’, and ‘normal’ revisionism.¹⁵

This part of the method is demonstrated and explained in the introduction in each chapter that analyses the existing debates and revisionist work. The author then explains how the primary sources presented in the chapter responded to these debates. This is especially the case in chapters that revisit familiar topics, such as ‘Governance’, ‘Constitutional Change’, and ‘Political Culture’, which refine our historical understanding by examining previously underexplored sources and informing us about the limitations of the existing scholarship. Constant revisions are important because, as Banner and Lucy Salmon have argued, only in this way can newly discovered/underutilised materials be considered.¹⁶ In doing so, existing beliefs that are false, biased, or partial can be scrutinised and rectified. New historical interpretations can also be generated, taking the less articulated voices into consideration.¹⁷ This process often involves moving away from orthodox historical studies that centred around a particular power bloc, race, gender, or class and creates new focuses,¹⁸ such as marginalised historical actors, who also made a significant impact on the development of history, and under-researched themes, such as the chapters on medicine and healthcare, environment and natural disasters, gender and family, and race and diasporas in this book.

This book also seeks to show the deep connections between sources and historiographical methods. Primary sources are often considered by historians to be the ‘holy grail’ of history writing,¹⁹ not only because they exert evidentiary weight to adjudicate competing interpretations of historical events,²⁰ but also because they constitute the basis of historical knowledge and historical method.²¹ In particular, outside academia, it is commonly viewed that historical records, such as internal correspondence between bureaucrats and political intelligence reports, are ‘facts’

14. Maza, *Thinking about History*, 142.

15. Banner, *The Ever-Changing Past*, 144, 150, 162, 171.

16. Banner, *The Ever-Changing Past*, 7; Lucy M. Salmon, ‘Why Is History Rewritten?’, *The North American Review* 195, no. 675 (1912): 225–37, 255.

17. Robert Carlton Clark, ‘Why History Needs to Be Rewritten’, *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1932): 295–310.

18. Spiegel, ‘Revising the Past/Revisiting the Present’; Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

19. Banner, *The Ever-Changing Past*, 162.

20. Carl N. Degler, ‘Why Historians Change Their Minds’, *Pacific Historical Review* 45, no. 2 (1976): 167–84; Jonathan Gorman, ‘The Commonplaces of “Revision” and Their Implications for Historiographical Understanding’, *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 20–44.

21. See, for example, Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

that can speak for themselves. This, however, is certainly not an accurate description of historiographical methods.

By providing adequate contextual understanding, this book aims to aid researchers, students, and teachers to select their sources carefully based on their reliability and credibility and draw accurate analytical and descriptive inferences. It supports the consensus that is commonly shared by historians: records, no matter how factual they are, do not speak for themselves.²² Therefore, it is crucial to situate history in the appropriate context; historians must put the primary sources within a ‘framework’, which may be a particular theoretical/empirical understanding of a specific historical dynamic, or a cluster of archival findings from which one can derive knowledge to explain the situation of a society within a given time period. This framework can give meanings to the content of the records and helps us construct accurate, coherent, and unbiased narratives of the past. In short, the research context has significant ramifications in shaping how the sources should be approached and analysed. It also influences how research question(s) should be formed and determines what counts as ‘relevant’ evidence. In sum, sources and historiographical methods are closely intertwined with each other, shaping how historical narrative is constructed and revised, producing ‘novel’ historical knowledge.

Revised Understanding of Colonial Power in Hong Kong History

Similar to many other fields, Hong Kong historiography has undergone revisions in recent decades. Christopher Munn has called this revisionist wave the ‘Hong Kong school of history’ which ‘takes Hong Kong and its people as its central subject of study’.²³ He regards scholars such as Henry Lethbridge, Carl Smith, Elizabeth Sinn, Chan Wai Kwan, and Jung-fang Tsai as the pioneering revisionists. To Munn, this revisionist scholarship tries to study ‘the dynamics of society and politics within Hong Kong’ by bringing in the problems of ‘race, class, and gender difference’ to the discussion.

This revisionist scholarship is remarkable because it departs from the predominant historiographies that tended to neglect developments within and the roles played by the Hong Kong society.²⁴ For instance, the colonial narrative that dominated the discourse is largely a linear story, focusing on British colonial efforts to modernise Hong Kong society and depicting how Hong Kong developed from a

22. Maza, *Thinking about History*, 199.

23. Christopher Munn, *Chinese People and British Rule in Hong Kong, 1841–1880* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 8–9.

24. See, for example, Jung-Fang Tsai, *Hong Kong in Chinese History: Community and Social Unrest in the British Colony, 1842–1913* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 3.

Race and Diasporas

Vivian Kong¹

Hong Kong has always been a multiracial city. Despite the popular belief that the city was a barren rock before 1841, the reality was that it already had a diverse population at the time, with villages inhabited by Puntis, Hakkas, and Hoklos. Living around Hong Kong waters were also the Tankas, often referred to as the 'boat people' in earlier records.² When the British occupied Hong Kong Island in 1841, they estimated that the island housed 7,450 Chinese, of which 2,000 were the 'boat population.'³ Despite being grouped under the umbrella category of 'Chinese', they had distinct cultural practices and spoke vastly different dialects. And Hong Kong's population further diversified as British colonisation began there. To build, rule, and make money, white Britons ranging from government officials and military officers to missionaries, traders, sailors, intermediaries, and engineers for the dockyards arrived. Many others also came to work and develop the colony. Among the earliest 'British settlers' were Portuguese from Macau (now more commonly termed 'Macanese') who worked as interpreters and clerks. The British also brought over several military regiments from India and recruited Sikh, Punjabi, and Muslim police. Alongside the Parsi and Bohra Muslim merchants drawn by the British trading network in South China, a sizeable Indian population established roots in the colony. From the social interactions that arose in such a multiracial port, a Eurasian community – a community of individuals of European and Asian ancestry – naturally emerged.

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1. The author would like to thank Michael Ng for his generous advice and Steven Hon and the *South China Morning Post* for granting us the permission to reproduce the letters to editor included in this chapter, as well as Document 14.21, written by Jane Moir and published in *The Post*.
 2. James Hayes, 'Hong Kong Island before 1841', *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 24 (1984): 105–42.
 3. *Hongkong Gazette*, 1841, 289.

Racism played an instrumental role in structuring social hierarchies in this multiracial colony. Because the premise of colonialism lies in an imagined racial superiority of the ruling class, colonial authorities were anxious to create and consolidate racial categories to distinguish themselves from the colonised others and assert their commanding power. Existing literature has therefore discussed the laws, policies, and social practices that were in place in Hong Kong to construct and enforce divisions, and more importantly to sustain a racial hierarchy that benefited the white British.⁴ But underneath the pervasive racial division and distinctions were also subtle interactions between various segments of the colonial society. While earlier works tended more to dwell on the divides and divisions in colonial Hong Kong, today we are as likely to see the city as a place of complex, diverse cross-cultural interactions.⁵ Of course we should not take these interactions at face value. Sometimes these interactions brought understanding and friendships. But at other times, as recent literature has also uncovered, they brought bitterness, tensions, and disappointment, as systemic racism prevented people of colour from receiving just treatment and protection.⁶

The sources presented in this chapter include official publications (such as census reports and minutes of Legislative Council meetings), news reports, and personal accounts, such as letters to the editor published in local newspapers and retrospective life writings. They convey the perspectives of state officials and several diasporic groups that called the city home. These accounts touch upon various topics of scholarly discussion on race and diasporas in colonial Hong Kong, including the prevalence of racial perceptions in colonial governance, the diversity of the colony's population, the role of the Second World War in disrupting racial hierarchies, and the enduring impact of systemic racism in late colonial Hong Kong.

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4. Historians have, for instance, explored how and why residential segregation was enforced in certain areas of Hong Kong – most notably on the Victoria Peak. On this, see John M. Carroll, 'The Peak: Residential Segregation in Colonial Hong Kong', in *Twentieth-Century Colonialism and China: Localities, the Everyday and the World*, ed. Bryna Goodman and David S. Goodman (London: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 81–91. Carroll has also written about how social segregation was also practised in the European-style gentlemen's club. See John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), especially chapter 4.
 5. Elizabeth Sinn and Christopher Munn, eds, *Meeting Place: Encounters Across Cultures in Hong Kong, 1841–1984* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017).
 6. Vivian Kong, 'Exclusivity and Cosmopolitanism: Multi-ethnic Civil Society in Interwar Hong Kong', *Historical Journal* 63, no. 5 (2020): 1281–302.

Section 1. Census Reports and Official Perceptions of ‘Races’ in Hong Kong

To understand how racial hierarchies came about in post-war Hong Kong, we need to look further back to the years before the Second World War. The following excerpts from the 1901 and 1911 census reports provide us with not only demographic data on the multi-racial population in early twentieth-century Hong Kong, but also enlightening material on the prevalence of racial thinking in British colonial rule. In placing the population into different groups, racial categorisations of census work allowed officials to create and reinforce racial identities by engendering, altering, and strengthening traits of communities to distinguish one ‘race’ from another. At first glance, comments made in the 1901 census report tell us about the non-Chinese population in the colony. But a closer look reveals the underlying racial perceptions that officials had about the colonial population, and more importantly, their eagerness in highlighting the perceived racial differences between the people of colour and the white population there (as we can see in the comment on the Portuguese community in Document 14.1).

Of course, colonial officials could not always hold to the neat racial categorisation between the colonisers and the colonised. The ways in which Eurasians were presented in Document 14.2 under the overarching category of ‘non-Chinese’, but as a separate column after that for the total number of the non-Chinese population, gives us a solid example of how much Hong Kong officials struggled to classify the Eurasian community.

Furthermore, although the Chinese were always presented as one umbrella category in all census reports, a closer look at the tables listing their birthplace and dialect spoken at home (such as those selected in Document 14.3) also reveals the diversity of this community. The numbers of those born in Hong Kong and other British territories (including Australia, Penang, and Singapore) are also notable.

The first population census produced after the Second World War was conducted in 1961. Unlike those taken before the war, the 1961 census did not include a question on ‘race’ per se. Documents 14.4–14.6 include explanations for this decision as well as numbers recorded on local births, dialects spoken, and ‘transients’, offering us insights in understanding the city’s diverse population.

Document 14.1: 1901 Census Officer’s Remarks on the ‘Non-Chinese Races’ in Hong Kong.⁷

The European and American resident civil population numbers 5,808 as compared with 5,532 in 1897, and 4,555 in 1891. These figures include Portuguese. The

7. A. W. Brewin, ‘Report on the Census of the Colony for 1901’, *Sessional Papers Laid Before the Legislative Council*, 15 August 1901.

numbers of the latter community tend to decrease, and it is now composed of 1,948 persons as compared with 2,263 in 1897 and 2,089 in 1891.

The rest of the European and American population has increased by 591 since 1897 and by 1,394 since 1891. An accurate comparison cannot, however, be made with 1891 as the figures for that year do not include the European Police, some “temporary residents,” or the inmates of the Gaol.

The British resident civil population numbers 2,708 as compared with 2,213 in 1897 and 1,448 in 1891. The larger number of military families, due to the strengthening of the British troops in garrison, the Naval Yard Extension works and those of Messrs. Butterfield and Swire at Quarry Bay, and other large undertakings are factors in this increase.

The Americans have increased from 93 in 1891 to 198, the Germans from 208 to 337, and the French from 89 to 103. The Spanish number 126 as compared with 88 in 1891. The cosmopolitan nature of the community can be realized from the fact that there is hardly a nationality on the face of the globe which is not represented.

The Portuguese population has again, for the reasons stated by Mr. Brewin in his Census Report for 1897, been separated in most of the Tables from the rest of the Europeans and Americans. It is mainly recruited from Macao, and only ten members of the community were born in Portugal. 1,095 or more than one-half were born in Hongkong, 746 in Macao and 60 in various ports in Portugal. Several members of this community described themselves as being of Asiatic race [*sic*]. The great majority of the Portuguese have returned themselves as Portuguese subjects. British nationality is claimed by a very few.

Of the British population of 3,007 (inclusive of those on board the shipping in the harbour) 1,777 claim to be English, 655 are Scotch, and 251 Irish. 2,053 were born in the British Isles, 574 in Hongkong, 140 in Australia, and 74 in India. The percentage of adult females to males is 55, taking all those over 15 years of age as adults. The percentage in 1891 was 38 and in 1897, 48.

The Non-Chinese races, other than European and American, number 2,607 as compared with 2,502 in 1897 and 1,439 in 1891. No separate return was made of the various races in 1891, so the present figures can only be compared with those of 1897. The Indians number 1,453, the increase over 1897 being 60. 345 or 24 per cent of this number are females. There are 484 Japanese as compared with 335 in 1897, and 266 Philippine Islanders as compared with 216 in the last Census. Of the remainder the Malays number only 66, there being 141 fewer than in 1897.

Document 14.3: Diversity of Chinese Diasporas in Hong Kong, as shown in the Tables of the 1911 Census.⁸

Table VII

*The Birth Places of the Chinese Population
(other than inhabitants of the New Territories)*

Provinces and Countries	Males	Females	Total
Provinces of China:—			
Chehkiang	209	79	288
Chihli	34	44	78
Fukien	1,021	281	1,302
Honam	10	4	14
Hunan	159	28	187
Hupeh	11	10	21
Kiangsi	57	39	96
Kiangsu	242	365	697
Kwangsi	406	304	710
Kwangtung	194,442	77,297	271,739
Nganhwui	16	14	30
Shansi	8	3	11
Shangtung	231	13	244
Shensi	10	4	14
Szchuen	8	7	15
Yunnan	32	6	38
Kweichau	11	12	23
Pekin	16	29	45
Kansu	1	...	1
Tibet	1	...	1
Hak Lung Kong	2	2	4
Total	196,927	78,541	275,468

8. P. P. J. Wodehouse, 'Report on the Census of the Colony for 1911', *Sessional Papers Laid Before the Legislative Council*, 23 November 1911.

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