

A Concise History of Hong Kong

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Introduction

Hong Kong in History

On January 25, 1841, a British naval party landed and raised the British flag on the northern shore of Hong Kong, a small island located in the Pearl River Delta in southern China. The next day, the commander of the British expeditionary force took formal possession of the island in the name of the British Crown. Except for three and a half years during World War II when Hong Kong was part of the short-lived Japanese Empire, the British occupation would last until midnight on July 1, 1997, whereupon Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. As newspapers throughout China proudly declared, Hong Kong was "home at last."

Technically speaking, the name "Hong Kong" (which means "Fragrant Harbor" in Chinese) refers to Hong Kong Island, ceded by the Qing dynasty to Great Britain "in perpetuity" in 1842 under the Treaty of Nanking. Located about 80 miles southeast of the city of Canton (known today as Guangzhou), this tiny island is only 11 miles from east to west and 2 to 5 miles from north to south. The name "Hong Kong," however, is generally used to cover a larger area with three main parts: Hong Kong Island; Kowloon Peninsula, consisting of 8 square miles and ceded to Britain in 1860 under the Convention of Peking; and the New Territories, an area of 365 square miles leased to Britain for ninety-nine years in 1898 that includes approximately 230 outlying islands. Although Hong Kong has no natural resources to speak of, its harbor, deep and sheltered by steep granite hills, is one of the best in the world. With a population of around seven million and very little good land for building, Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated places on earth. Hot and humid for much of the year, it is hardly surprising that some early British colonists wondered why their government ever took Hong Kong Island in the first place.

Over time, Hong Kong would become a booming port and thriving metropolis. Until recently, however, historians paid little attention to Hong Kong. Scholars of British colonialism concentrated mainly on Africa and India, while a handful of locally based British historians focused primarily on Hong Kong's colonial administration—especially the roles played by various British governors and civil servants—practically overlooking the Chinese who comprised around 98 percent of the colony's population. And until the years leading up to the transfer to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, mainland Chinese historians all but ignored Hong Kong. Only one university in China had a research institute dedicated to studying Hong Kong. Even for the few scholars on the mainland who studied Hong Kong, the colony had little intrinsic importance beyond its significance as the fruit of British imperialism and colonialism and as a base for the Western imperialists' invasion of China in the 1800s.

In the past twenty years, scholars—mostly based in Hong Kong—have reconstructed a much more complex and nuanced history that considers both Hong Kong's colonial features and the contributions of local Chinese to its historical development. Why have historians outside of Hong Kong taken so long to take Hong Kong seriously? The answer says less about Hong Kong than about the way historians approach their subjects. In the United States, the call for a China-centered history of China has led to a tendency to downplay the international aspects of China's history. In China, one reason for this neglect is the bias against acknowledging foreign influences, except for negative ones. Another reason is the shame of colonization and Hong Kong's commercial success: like Taiwan, capitalist Hong Kong until recently served as an embarrassing counterpoint to Communist China. The traditional Chinese disdain for emigrants, who were often seen as either criminals or unfilial scoundrels for leaving the motherland and abandoning their families, is another reason. Finally, people in northern China, where political power has traditionally been centered, have often looked down on southern China and its inhabitants.

Compared to cities such as Beijing, China's capital, Hong Kong may seem politically peripheral. Compared to cities such as Shanghai, the bustling metropolis once considered the "Paris of the Orient," Hong Kong may seem commercially peripheral. Hong Kong was arguably the most important place in China for more than 150 years, however, precisely because it was not politically part of China. Sun Yat-sen, the man who led the revolution that toppled the last Chinese dynasty in 1911, was educated in colonial Hong Kong. The father of modern Chinese law, Wu Tingfang, was raised and educated in Hong Kong, where he was better known as Ng Choy. From its early colonial days, Hong Kong served as a haven for Chinese refugees: during the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), after the republican revolution of 1911 and throughout the turbulent 1920s, after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, and after the Communist revolution of 1949.

Hong Kong has been China's most critical link to the rest of the world since the Silk Road and the Mongols. Until recent decades, about 90 percent of all Chinese emigrants went through Hong Kong. From the 1960s until the 1980s, Hong Kong exported goods throughout the world. More recently, it has attained worldwide acclaim for its innovative cinema. To people in China, Hong Kong is even more significant for its imports. The Chinese who returned to China from North America or Southeast Asia almost always came through Hong Kong. Money from overseas Chinese was remitted through Hong Kong. After the Communist revolution of 1949, capitalist Hong Kong played an important and ironic role in building China's Socialist economy: as a window to the outside world, as a center for remittances from overseas Chinese that provided valuable foreign exchange, and as a base for importing goods that China could not produce. Hong Kong was of particular use to the Chinese during the Korean War, as scarce goods such as gas, kerosene, and penicillin were smuggled in during the American and United Nations embargoes. Hong Kong investors were also partly responsible for China's dramatic economic transformation that began in the late 1970s and continues to this day.

Especially because Hong Kong has reverted recently to Chinese sovereignty, scholars today usually emphasize the Chineseness of Hong Kong. To be sure, Hong Kong's geographical location meant that its history was affected primarily by events in China, especially in Guangdong province just across the border. Hong Kong's population was always overwhelmingly Chinese, while the proximity to China meant that Chinese affairs mattered more than British affairs to most residents. But Hong Kong had a particularly complex relationship with mainland China. As a popular Chinese saying went, "when there's trouble in Hong Kong, go to China; when there's trouble in China, go back to Hong Kong." For most of Hong Kong's colonial history, however, the trouble was almost always in China, which meant that Hong Kong was often at the receiving end of a massive wave of immigrants from China. Hong Kong depended on these immigrants for their labor and capital, yet colonial Hong Kong contributed so much to China's nation-building that many observers in the early 1990s predicted that Hong Kong would continue to change China after the handover in 1997, rather than vice versa.

Not only is Hong Kong an important part of modern Chinese history, it is also part of British colonial history. Despite Hong Kong's Chinese influences, we should not underestimate the effect of British colonial rule. Colonialism transformed Hong Kong's historical development, shaped the form of the encounters between the Chinese and British, and determined power relations between them. Simply put, Hong Kong would not have become the place it did had it not been a British colony for over 150 years. Chinese criminals were often transported to other British colonies, such as the Straits Settlements in

Malaya and the island of Labuan off the coast of Borneo. British colonists always kept abreast of affairs in other colonies, particularly in India where many had family ties or business relations. Especially in the mid-1800s, Hong Kong was tightly connected to India—through trade, primarily cotton and opium, and by a regular passenger ship service between the two colonies. In the early days, troops in the British garrison were paid in rupees, which were widely used in the colony until the 1860s. Until the establishment of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in 1864, most of the Western banks in Hong Kong and China were branch offices of Anglo-Indian banks. Indigenous Chinese architecture was the norm in rural areas of the region until the twentieth century, but the ubiquitous “Chinese” architectural style that characterized early urban Hong Kong—the shop with living quarters upstairs and a verandah—was imported to Hong Kong from another British colony, Singapore, which in turn was affected by older colonial cities in India, such as Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras.

Hong Kong’s history was also greatly influenced by its colonial administrators. Until the early 1970s, governors were selected from the British colonial service and had served in other colonies before coming to Hong Kong. Alexander Grantham, governor from 1947 to 1957, had worked for the Hong Kong government in the 1920s and 1930s and had served in Bermuda, Jamaica, Nigeria, Fiji, and the South Pacific before returning to Hong Kong. These governors’ experiences in other colonies often shaped their attitudes toward Hong Kong. In the 1950s and 1960s, Hong Kong received a group of colonial “retreads,” second-generation colonial servants transferred from the recently independent British colonies and dependencies in Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. From top to bottom, Hong Kong’s government was a colonial one. For example, as late as the 1960s, the Hong Kong police force was organized along traditional colonial lines. Most of its senior officers were expatriate veterans from Africa, Malaya, and Palestine, while junior officers were generally Chinese.

Hong Kong is also important for understanding comparative colonial history. Many scholars argue that much of the world is still colonial, or neo-colonial, in that the Euro-American nations have historically derived much of their wealth and power at the expense of the less fortunate African, Asian, and Latin American nations. Much of Africa, carved up by the European powers in the late 1800s, remains impoverished and torn by ethnic violence. India, once Britain’s “Jewel in the Crown” and now second in population only to China, is also plagued by poverty and by religious and ethnic violence. But any generalizations about colonialism must consider how Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States—all formerly British settler colonies—enjoy a higher standard of living than Britain (although living standards for much of these nations’ indigenous populations remain very low). Living standards in Hong Kong and Singapore, also once

a British colony, are also generally higher than in Britain, just as living conditions in Taiwan and South Korea, both formerly Japanese colonies, are also very high. Indian, Pakistani, and West Indian teams frequently beat the British at cricket, a sport bequeathed to them by the British, while Australians, New Zealanders, and South Africans often defeat them in rugby, another British legacy.

Whereas historians used to focus mainly on either the beneficial or the damaging aspects of colonialism, today they offer a much more nuanced view. We realize, for example, that precolonial societies were not always the peaceful and harmonious societies that anticolonial nationalists have often made them out to be. We understand that colonialism was made possible with collaboration from local peoples, as it was throughout Hong Kong's colonial history. Whereas colonialism was once seen as a traumatic experience for native peoples, it is now understood more as a layer of encounters, some based on bewilderment but others based on mutual understanding. Repressive and racist as it was, colonialism in Hong Kong was not always confusing or disruptive for the local Chinese population. Mutual fear of the chaos that engulfed China for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as shared commitment to economic freedom and political stability often provided an idiom that both the British colonialists and their Chinese subjects could understand. Colonialism in Hong Kong was thus based as much on similarities and affinities as on otherness and difference.

Historians rarely pay much attention to this aspect of either Hong Kong history or American history, but America has also had a special interest in Hong Kong since the early 1800s. American opium traders had a significant presence in early colonial Hong Kong, and the colony was a major terminus for America's transpacific trade in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, importing goods such as ginseng, flour, lumber, and kerosene and exporting commodities such as silk, tea, rattan, and human labor. Although many Americans, especially during and after World War II, viewed the idea of empire with distaste, they became less critical during the Cold War, when colonialism appeared preferable to the spread of Communism. Hong Kong thus became of great use to the United States as a listening post on China, a base for anti-Communist propaganda, and a popular destination for rest and recreation for American servicemen during the Korean War and the Vietnam War. After the Korean War, Hong Kong supplied the American consumer market with manufactured goods such as clothing, plastic flowers, and wigs, many produced in factories funded by American capital. The establishment of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in 1969 demonstrated America's increasing involvement in Hong Kong's economy, and by the late 1970s the number of Americans in Hong Kong had begun to surpass the number of British expatriates. Even though the economic reforms in mainland China have enabled American firms to expand their operations there,

many of these firms still have a large presence in Hong Kong, while the American government is determined to ensure that the Chinese government keeps its promise to abide by the one country, two systems model that has governed Hong Kong since its reversion to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Hong Kong's reputation as a free port with low taxes and minimal government intervention in its economy has also drawn the praise of free-market economists and conservatives such as noted economist Milton Friedman.

Lying at the strategic intersection of Chinese and British imperial history, Hong Kong also has its own history and identity, replete with contradictions, problems, and idiosyncrasies that have shaped its present. Some of the contradictions and problems are endemic to any capitalist society. For example, although Hong Kong has some extraordinarily rich people, they make up a tiny percentage of the population. Other contradictions are legacies of colonialism. Despite a relatively high degree of personal freedom, for example, until the late 1980s and early 1990s Hong Kong had no political representation or political parties. Some of the idiosyncrasies result from Hong Kong as an encounter between China and Britain, creating what is arguably the most cosmopolitan city in Asia. (Some would say that the honor goes to Shanghai, as it would have in the 1920s and 1930s.) Small Chinese shops sit comfortably on streets named after British royalty and colonial administrators, while British law, Christianity, and modern Western medicine coexist happily with traditional Chinese medicine, several hundred Chinese temples, a plethora of religious festivals and ceremonies, and a fervent belief in feng shui (geomancy, or the balance between humans and nature) applied in even the most modern Western-style buildings and in the new Disneyland that opened in 2005. Especially noticeable in a region with so little open space is another British legacy and Hong Kong's most popular pastime: horse racing in Happy Valley on Hong Kong Island and Sha Tin in the New Territories, eagerly embraced by the local population and protected under the one country, two systems model.

Hong Kong's historical relationship with China and Britain also has its human legacies. This relationship produced a community of Chinese residents who have often distinguished themselves as a special group of Chinese and as different from their counterparts on the mainland. Although many scholars have seen this sense of Hong Kong identity as a relatively recent phenomenon, it took root in the late 1800s when the Chinese in Hong Kong contrasted the order and prosperity there against the political chaos and economic backwardness of China. The Chinese and expatriate communities of Hong Kong still live largely separate lives as they have for more than 150 years, with most expatriates rarely bothering to learn how to speak Chinese. All expatriates come into frequent contact with Chinese people at work, but it is still not uncommon for Chinese to have never met any Westerners, to whom they frequently refer as "foreign devils."

Just as Hong Kong's history between China and Britain had its own unique characteristics, so did its decolonization in 1997. Hardly a colonial embarrassment, the region had become more economically advanced than most independent countries. Apart from being a major financial center, by the end of British rule Hong Kong held the world's seventh-largest foreign reserves and was the world's third-largest exporter of clothing—no mean feat given the region's small size. It had the second-highest per capita gross domestic product in Asia (after Japan), having passed that of Australia, Britain, and Canada. Rather than being granted independence, Hong Kong was turned over to a considerably more authoritarian government than the colonial one that had ruled for so long, a point that became glaringly obvious after the brutal crackdown in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in June 1989. Nor did the Communist government of China, dedicated though it was to ending imperialism around the globe, ever try to liberate Hong Kong. The main cause for the termination of colonial rule was also very different than in most colonies. The impetus was neither internal demand (far from it, for most Hong Kong residents preferred British colonial rule to Chinese rule) nor international pressure. Rather, the decision came from the Chinese government, which in 1972 had declared Hong Kong's future a purely internal Chinese matter to be resolved when the government decided the time was right. By the time the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong's future was signed in 1984, the British Empire, over which the sun never set, had long faded into the imperial sunset. China, however, was on its way to becoming a world power.

Epilogue

Beyond 1997

The burning question surrounding Hong Kong's reversion to Chinese sovereignty has been how this former British colony will survive under the one country, two systems arrangement. "Time of Certainty Begins: Will Beijing Honor Vows?" asked the front page of the *New York Times* on July 1, 1997. Two years later, political scientist James Hsiung noted that most predictions about Hong Kong's future after the handover had been "dismal and downright pessimistic. The worst scenario saw Beijing meddling in Hong Kong's politics and economic life, and trampling upon its freedoms, including freedom of the press, judicial freedom, academic freedom, and free elections. There would be corruption, nepotism, cronyism, and related plagues, brought in by the Mainland Chinese."¹

As journalist Frank Ching argued in 1999, these doom-and-gloom predictions overlook how People's Republic of China (PRC) policy toward Hong Kong has always been "dictated by self-interest." China could have recovered Hong Kong much earlier if it had wanted to—in 1949 when People's Liberation Army troops stopped at the Hong Kong border, or during the Cultural Revolution when the central government stopped the Red Guards from crossing into Hong Kong—but the PRC government had good reasons for not wanting to bother Hong Kong. The colony served as a window to the outside world and a base for trade with non-Communist countries, provided a supply of smuggled goods during the American and United Nations embargoes in the 1950s, and aided the PRC's economic development in the 1970s. Still, Ching acknowledged concerns that the PRC government might interfere in Hong Kong to protect its monopoly on power: "China's promise not to interfere in Hong Kong's internal affairs is similar to a left-handed person promising only to use his right hand. The promise may very well be sincere but, in

the absence of restraints, the left-handed person will sooner or later forget and, without even realizing it, start using his left hand."²

The most pressing challenges to the new Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) had little to do with the reversion to Chinese sovereignty. From early 1997 to early 1998, for example, the chicken flu (the H5N1 bird flu virus) killed six people and prompted the HKSAR government to order the slaughter of almost 1.5 million chickens. The Asian financial crisis, caused by currency devaluation in Thailand only one day after the end of British rule in Hong Kong, precipitated a decline in the Hong Kong stock market and property values, unemployment, and a recession from which the HKSAR did not fully recover until 2004. In March 2003, Hong Kong was hit by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), an extremely contagious and potentially deadly form of pneumonia. When the disease was finally controlled in June, some eighteen hundred people had been diagnosed with SARS, almost three hundred of whom died. Hong Kong's tourist industry suffered, which further harmed the region's economy. The HKSAR government has also faced the problem of keeping Hong Kong economically competitive in a rapidly globalizing world and in the face of increased competition from mainland China, especially since China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 has diminished Hong Kong's traditional position as a doorway to China.

Hong Kong has not only survived the reversion to Chinese sovereignty, but observers also frequently express surprise at how little the region seems to have changed since 1997. Many senior government officials have remained in place. English continues to be the language of success in business and government. Hong Kong's expatriate community still comprises 2–3 percent of Hong Kong's population. Most Western expatriates never learn Chinese, still live in better housing and have higher salaries than most local Chinese, and do not plan to stay in Hong Kong for long. British expatriates, some with family ties to Hong Kong dating back to the late 1800s, continue to make more money than they ever could in Britain. Although in 1996 the British government granted the seven thousand South Asians (mostly Indians) in Hong Kong the right of entry and abode in Britain, there is still a sizable Indian community. The Gurkhas, the Nepalese warriors who once fought so proudly for the British Army, no longer serve their colonial masters, but they are now seen throughout Hong Kong as security guards at apartment complexes, office buildings, and shopping malls. (The majority of expatriates, however, have no historical connections to British colonialism: they are the Filipino and Thai women who work as domestic servants for middle- and upper-class Chinese and expatriate families.) Horse racing, protected under the one country, two systems arrangement, enjoys a fanatical popularity almost inexplicable to visitors. The main leisure activities in Hong Kong are still eating and shopping, with restaurants and shopping malls galore. "Despite the change of guards, and of the emblems," James Hsiung concluded in 1999, "little seemed to have changed for the people in the street."³

Even while drawing attention to Hong Kong's uncertain future, the reversion to Chinese sovereignty put the region in the international spotlight in a way that further enhanced its global reputation as a vibrant, cosmopolitan society. In July 2004, a record number of almost two million tourists came to Hong Kong, more than half of them from the mainland. Western tourists also come to Hong Kong in large numbers, although their purpose for coming has changed. Whereas Europeans and Americans used to travel to Hong Kong to catch a glimpse of Communist China across the border, they also came to see traditional China, preserved in the New Territories and seemingly unchanged by the Communist revolution across the border. Now, Western newspapers and magazines brim with articles about Hong Kong, its efforts to promote its heritage, and the dynamic, hybrid flair reflected in its cinema, cuisine, and architecture. The common view of Hong Kong—held mainly by local expatriates—as a cultural desert is not true. Orchestras visit from all over the world (especially during the annual Hong Kong Arts Festival), and Hong Kong has its own orchestra, philharmonic, and dance companies as well as a plethora of new museums. Organizations such as the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, founded in 1847 by Governor John Davis, continue to promote interest in Hong Kong's history and culture.

Compared with many other former colonies, Hong Kong's postcolonial experience has been remarkably successful. Still, many people in Hong Kong have been disappointed by the region's brief post-1997 history. Prodemocracy activists and legislators frequently criticize Beijing for slowing Hong Kong's road to democratization. Some scholars fault Chris Patten's last-minute reforms that, however well intentioned, appointed a bureaucratic elite that was committed to promoting democracy but unable to handle Hong Kong's transition from colony to HKSAR. Others blame Hong Kong's colonial legacies for its current problems. All former colonies have suffered from adjustment problems, but Hong Kong's unique status—decolonization without independence—has made it a particularly difficult place to manage. Unlike Hong Kong's colonial administrators, who by the 1960s enjoyed considerable autonomy from the British government and until then generally paid little attention to public opinion, the HKSAR's new rulers have the unenviable challenge of satisfying not only the central government in Beijing but also the powerful business interests and the local population within Hong Kong, which, partly because of the changes in the years leading up to 1997, now expect and demand more of their government.

DISSATISFACTION WITH THE HKSAR GOVERNMENT

In the summer of 2002, the HKSAR celebrated its fifth anniversary. Sponsored by the Leisure and Culture Services Department, the celebrations included the Reunification Cup, a series of soccer matches among teams from Hong Kong,

Scotland, South Africa, and Turkey. The fireworks display over Victoria Harbour was said to be even more expensive than the one in 1997, which had been the most expensive in history. At "The Music of the Dragons," a concert at Hong Kong Coliseum, more than ten thousand young people from Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, and Macau set a Guinness World Record for the largest percussion performance. A rock concert at Queen Elizabeth Stadium featured bands from Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, and Australia. The visiting military band of the People's Liberation Army provided a dance, musical, and marching performance.

Rather than a celebration, for many Hong Kong people the anniversary of the reversion to Chinese sovereignty has been a yearly occasion to express their dissatisfaction with the HKSAR government. On June 30, 1999, the eve of the second anniversary of the reversion, some two hundred people held a candlelight vigil to commemorate the so-called dark days under the HKSAR. Legislative Council member and union leader Lee Cheuk-yan argued that Hong Kong needed a new chief executive. Members of The Frontier, a prodemocracy party, criticized the "hegemony" of the new administration. On July 1, political groups and the Hong Kong Federation of Students staged a march to government headquarters in Central District. Wearing black armbands that symbolized "the demise of the rule of law" in Hong Kong and bearing pictures of Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa, Secretary for Justice Elsie Leung, and Security Secretary Regina Ip, the protesters accused the government of "betraying Hong Kong people" and "ruining the rule of law." Lau Ka-yee of Democracy 2000, another prodemocracy group, called the one country, two systems concept "a lie." The protesters ended their march by reading a list of the government's numerous "sins." Democratic Party chairman Martin Lee explained in a press conference that "the honeymoon is over and the 'two systems' are being blurred." Lee accused Elsie Leung of "leading the water of mainland law into the common-law well water" and "assaulting the common-law system and the rule of law." On July 1, 2001, the fourth anniversary of the handover, thousands of prodemocracy activists in several different demonstrations protested against the erosion of democracy since 1997. One group of protesters carried a mock tomb symbolizing "the death of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law" in Hong Kong. Another group demanded direct elections for the chief executive, chanting "one person, one vote."

Some expatriate former colonial officials have been frustrated with the direction that Hong Kong has taken since the late 1990s. Patrick Hase, who started working in Hong Kong in 1972 and retired as assistant director for social welfare in 1996, believes that morale in the civil service is "very poor" and that the ideal of cooperation between government and people "is disappearing or has perhaps already gone." Hase contrasts this with the 1970s and early 1980s, which he considers "by far the best administered period in Hong Kong's history, one where the actions of Government were closer to the real

wishes of the people than at any date before or since." The government was "in closer contact with the real public opinion than either before or after." Morale was high and relations between government and people were "excellent," while among the government "the ideals of dedication to an efficient, honest, intelligent and hardworking service imbued with a genuine commitment to the people of Hong Kong were real and keenly felt."⁴ James Hayes, who retired as regional secretary of the New Territories in 1987, laments a "retreat from innocence" that began in the 1970s as government expanded and become more specialized. Hayes is particularly critical of how the interests of the traditional family and lineage in the New Territories have been increasingly under siege since 1997. Whereas the British policy of governing through a few officials meant that many customary practices were recognized and even protected, the Sino-British Joint Agreement and the Basic Law threaten customary law and the rights and privileges of indigenous residents.⁵

Criticizing new postcolonial regimes is a common pattern among former colonial servants (many ex-colonials still insist that India was better off under the British), but some of the same prodemocracy leaders who campaigned for political reforms under the British have also compared the HKSAR government unfavorably with the colonial government. In an interview on July 1, 1999, the second anniversary of the handover, Martin Lee argued that whereas "when the British were here it was a society under the rule of law, now it is the rule of man." Emily Lau of *The Frontier* noted that many Hong Kong people believed that Governor Patten had done a better job than Tung Chee-hwa. And even if they do not compare it with the colonial government, people from all walks of life have regularly expressed their dissatisfaction with the new government. Surveys in the first few years of the HKSAR showed that many people felt that Tung was more interested in helping big business and ingratiating himself than in providing the medical services, care and housing for the elderly, and better housing for the general population that he had promised. On July 1, 1999, a delegation of senior citizens petitioned Tung to honor the vows he had made during his campaign in 1996 to provide better services for the elderly. An opinion poll conducted to mark the anniversary of the reversion found that even while public perceptions of the PRC government had improved, one-third of respondents felt either "quite negative" or "very negative" about Tung's government. Less than 20 percent were "quite positive" or "very positive," while less than 8 percent felt "positive" about the anniversary.

THE ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS CONCEPT AND HONG KONG'S AUTONOMY

Under the one country, two systems arrangement, the PRC government has promised Hong Kong a "high degree of autonomy" for fifty years. Surveys

in 1998, a year after the handover, showed that a rising public confidence in the HKSAR's political future, even with the economic recession, was based on satisfaction with Beijing's noninterference in HKSAR affairs. Even observers in the United States and Taiwan, the two countries that had predicted the bleakest future for Hong Kong, conceded that Beijing had stayed out of Hong Kong affairs.

Both PRC and HKSAR leaders understand that mishandling Hong Kong's reintegration with the mainland could have disastrous local and international results. It could lead to mass emigration from the HKSAR, which would hurt international investment. Hong Kong is vital to the PRC's economic development and political stability. Having played up the recovery of Hong Kong into an event of huge national importance, Beijing can hardly afford to ruin it. Not only would a failed Hong Kong be an international embarrassment, but it could even hurt the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) itself (although some scholars have suggested that the end of colonial Hong Kong also threatens the CCP's legitimacy since the party is now no longer a vanguard in the struggle against imperialism and oppression). Botching Hong Kong's reversion would also harm the PRC's relations with Britain, the United States, Japan, and other Asian nations. Considering that the one country, two systems model was originally designed for Taiwan, ensuring a smooth reversion is also crucial for reunification with Taiwan: a failed reversion would both hurt economic relations with Taiwan and lead to stronger demands for independence there.

Many Hong Kong people, however, believe that the PRC government has intervened far too regularly in the HKSAR's political affairs. A major concern is Hong Kong's legal and political autonomy under the one country, two systems arrangement. The Basic Law stipulates that Hong Kong residents of Chinese descent qualify for right of abode (permanent residency) in Hong Kong, provided that at the time of birth at least one parent was a Chinese citizen holding Hong Kong right-of-abode status. In 1997, however, the Provisional Legislative Council passed ordinances restricting the procedures for proving right of abode, which led to court challenges. When the Court of Final Appeal supported the legal challenges in January 1999, the HKSAR government warned that the court's ruling would extend right-of-abode eligibility to some 1.67 million potential new Chinese immigrants and strain Hong Kong's resources. (The government claimed that housing and educating the new immigrants would cost more than HK\$710 billion, equivalent to around US\$91 billion.) The HKSAR government then took its case to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), prompting an outcry from the Hong Kong legal establishment. Martin Lee accused the government of "giving away" Hong Kong's autonomy. On June 30, the eve of the HKSAR's third anniversary, six hundred lawyers dressed in black held a silent protest against the interpretation.

The NPC Standing Committee, which is empowered to interpret the Basic Law, sided with the HKSAR government. This led to a massive legal challenge on behalf of more than five thousand applicants for right-of-abode status, who argued that the NPC decision deprived them of the benefits of the Court of Final Appeal ruling. Critics accused the HKSAR government of manipulating figures and exaggerating strains on housing, employment, and public health to create a climate of fear and encourage public sentiment against immigrants. Pro-Beijing newspapers supported the Standing Committee's decision, however, insisting that the Court of Final Appeal had made a mistake. The chairman of the pro-Beijing Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong, Tsang Yok Sing, argued that the HKSAR government should find the "best possible way" to keep the 1.67 million potential immigrants from coming to Hong Kong. Furthermore, although opinion polls after the Standing Committee's interpretation showed a drop in confidence in the government, they also showed that more than 80 percent of the respondents—concerned about increasing immigration from the mainland—were critical of the court's decision, while 65 percent supported government action to keep immigrants out. The overwhelming majority, it seemed, preferred the overall welfare of society to the preservation of the law. Accepting the ultimate authority of the Standing Committee to interpret the Basic Law, in January 2002 the Court of Final Appeal reversed its earlier decision by ruling against some claimants on the right-of-abode issue.

In another case that appeared to test Hong Kong's legal autonomy, in July 2001 the HKSAR government allowed Li Shaomin, a Chinese American professor at Hong Kong's City University, to return after being detained for five months in China. Although Li insisted that he had only been conducting research, he had been convicted in a secret trial for harming China's national security and spying for Taiwan and had then been expelled from China. Many observers saw Li's case as part of a wider politically motivated crackdown on academics with connections to the United States, especially since a Chinese scholar based in the United States had been similarly detained. Li's father, an advisor to CCP leader Hu Yaobang, had been imprisoned for sympathizing with the students after the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. Although the Hong Kong immigration chief denied having consulted Beijing before making his decision, it was apparent that the HKSAR government had allowed Li to return to Hong Kong because Beijing had let it do so. President George W. Bush and American congressional leaders had urged the Chinese government to release Li, and Secretary of State Colin Powell had just visited Beijing. As Martin Lee put it, "whoever made the decision knew it was important for Hong Kong and that the whole world was watching." While the case suggested proof of the HKSAR's legal autonomy, some critics cited it as yet another example of Beijing's—and Hong Kong's—willingness to use legal decisions as political bargaining chips.

Another concern is the future of freedom of expression in Hong Kong. So far, Hong Kong continues to enjoy relatively wide freedom of expression. In March 1999, the Court of Final Appeal overturned the conviction of two men who had been found guilty of desecrating the Chinese national and HKSAR flags. The court argued that their conviction violated the freedom of expression covered by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which under the Basic Law applies to Hong Kong. People in Hong Kong have also been relatively free to criticize the PRC government. When demonstrators protested President Jiang Zemin's visit on July 1, 1998, the HKSAR police responded simply by playing classical music to drown out the noise. On July 1, 1999, some sixty prodemocracy activists chanting "Down with Li Peng" and "Democracy for China" interrupted Vice President Hu Jintao's speech at the unveiling ceremony for a monument commemorating Hong Kong's reunification with China. On each anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, protesters have held peaceful demonstrations and vigils. On June 4, 2004, tens of thousands of people, among them many mainlanders, attended a rally commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the massacre.

Although freedom of the press is guaranteed by the Basic Law, the PRC government has shown since the years leading up to the handover that it has its own view of what this freedom meant. In May 1996, Lu Ping, director of the Chinese State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, told American news network CNN that news articles supporting "two Chinas" or independence for Hong Kong or Taiwan would "absolutely not" be allowed. In October of the same year, Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen promised that the Hong Kong media would enjoy complete freedom and could publish "criticism," but he warned that the media would not be allowed to publish "rumors or lies" or personal attacks on Chinese leaders. These and earlier warnings appear to have created an atmosphere of self-censorship. In January 1994, local television station TVB decided not to broadcast a BBC documentary of Mao Zedong that the PRC government had criticized as being biased. A 1996 survey by Chinese University Hong Kong's Department of Journalism and Communication found that many journalists were reluctant to criticize the PRC government. In 1997 the Hong Kong Journalists Association predicted that self-censorship, rather than direct government intervention, would be more likely to undermine freedom of expression in Hong Kong.⁶

Still, freedom of the press remains greater in Hong Kong than in many Asian societies, certainly more so than on the mainland. At the NPC annual session in Beijing in spring 1998, Xu Simin, a Hong Kong member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, criticized government-run broadcaster RTHK for broadcasting programs critical of the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. But Jiang Zemin warned Hong Kong mem-

bers of the NPC to stay out of Hong Kong government affairs. And even though Tung Chee-hwa said that while freedom of the press was important, the HKSAR government should be presented favorably, Chief Secretary Anson Chan insisted that RTHK should have its editorial freedom and that this was a local affair. Frank Ching concluded in 1999 that "freedom of the press continues to thrive, despite prophesies of gloom and doom from both the Western and local media before 1997, most of which continued to look at China through the lens of 1989 events at Tiananmen Square."⁷

The problem is that no one is sure how long this press freedom will last or how far its boundaries extend. In August 1999, Xu Simin and Wang Rudeng, assistant director of the New China News Agency local branch, criticized RTHK for giving a representative of the Taiwan regime airtime to argue that China and Taiwan were separate states. Two leaders of the pro-Beijing Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong criticized RTHK for violating the one-China policy enshrined in the Basic Law. Vice Premier Qian Qichen later insisted that support for interstate relations between Taiwan and China violated the one-China principle. In October 2000, President Jiang chided Hong Kong journalists for asking questions about his support for Tung's reelection in 2002. And after Chen Shui-bian of the proindependence Democratic Progressive Party was elected president of Taiwan in spring 2000, Wang Fengchao, deputy director of the Beijing liaison office in Hong Kong, warned the Hong Kong media not to report on proindependence activities in Taiwan. Although PRC authorities have not specified how they will deal with news groups that violate these prohibitions, there has been a distinct trend toward self-censorship in the local media. (Not all media professionals are as concerned about press freedom: the Hong Kong Federation of Journalists was founded in 1996 by journalists working in the left-wing press to counter the influence of the Hong Kong Journalists Association, which has taken a leading role in defending press freedom.)

A particularly sensitive issue has been the PRC and HKSAR governments' concerns about seditious and subversive activities in Hong Kong. Beijing has insisted that Hong Kong must not become a base for subversive activities against China, and in early 2001 Security Secretary Regina Ip declared that her government was keeping a "close eye" on the Falun Gong (Practice of the Wheel of Law). A quasi-religious organization that combines Buddhist meditation with traditional Chinese *qigong* (breathing and movement exercise) techniques, the Falun Gong has been banned in mainland China since 1999 as an "evil cult." But the Falun Gong is legal in Hong Kong, where it is registered with the Societies Ordinance and its members often hold peaceful demonstrations against the widespread suppression of the movement on the mainland. Over the course of 2001, Tung Chee-hwa shifted from calling the Falun Gong "more or less" to "without a doubt" an "evil cult." Executive Council member Nellie Fong encouraged the government to pass an antiseditious

law to monitor the Falun Gong. In May 2001, the HKSAR government formally announced its intention to draft an anticult law, the presumed target being the Falun Gong. The announcement provoked a controversy in the local media. In late June, Chief Secretary Donald Tsang (who had recently replaced Anson Chan) abruptly withdrew the anticult proposal, insisting that the HKSAR administration would pursue the matter in "the Hong Kong way."

In March 2002, eight Falun Gong followers were arrested in a March demonstration outside the PRC central government's local liaison office; the eight were later convicted for assaulting and obstructing police. In September, during his second term, Tung Chee-hwa tried to introduce an antisedition and antisubversion bill, at the insistence of Beijing and as stipulated in Article 23 of the Basic Law, which gives the HKSAR government the right to "prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government" and to prohibit local political organizations from having any contact with foreign political organizations. As the colonial government had in the late 1980s, the HKSAR government published a public consultation paper listing the main provisions of the proposed legislation. One provision allowed the government to ban any organizations that were illegal on the mainland (such as the Falun Gong). After large public demonstrations both for and against the proposed legislation, in early 2003 the HKSAR government announced that the Legislative Council would vote on the bill in July before the current legislative session ended.

In the meantime, in March 2003 Hong Kong was struck by SARS. Even while facing a barrage of criticism for not recognizing the disease earlier and for downplaying reports that the infection was coming from the mainland, the HKSAR government decided to go ahead with the controversial security bill. With confidence in the government plummeting, the timing for reintroducing the bill could not have been worse. On July 1, the sixth anniversary of Hong Kong's transition to Chinese sovereignty, more than five hundred thousand people staged the largest public demonstration in the young HKSAR's history. Even more embarrassing for the government, new premier Wen Jiabao was in town for the anniversary and to witness the signing of a new free trade agreement between China and Hong Kong.

Although Tung agreed to withdraw the provision enabling the HKSAR government to ban organizations that were illegal on the mainland, he stuck to his guns on the rest of the security bill. When critics of the bill called for his resignation, Tung agreed to defer the vote. After a meeting in Beijing with Wen Jiabao, new president and CCP general secretary Hu Jintao, and Vice President Zeng Qinghong in Beijing, in August Tung announced that the government would reintroduce a modified version of the security bill for public consultation. However, after pressure from critics of the bill and even from his own supporters, Tung withdrew the bill in early September. The fallout from the security bill controversy also affected the November 2003 District Coun-

cil elections. Although the mainland and local pro-Beijing media condemned them as unpatriotic, many prodemocracy candidates won election, and candidates supportive of the security bill were defeated.

In early May 2005, the Court of Final Appeal overturned criminal convictions against the eight Falun Gong followers accused of assaulting and obstructing police in the 2002 protest. In its summary, the court declared that "the freedom to demonstrate peacefully is a constitutional right" and that freedom of expression is "at the heart of Hong Kong's system and the courts should give them a generous interpretation." Still, local human rights advocates worry that Hong Kong's judicial system is being undercut by the PRC government's power to interpret the Basic Law in ways that might preempt decisions by Hong Kong courts (as it did, for example, by blocking rapid democratic reforms and limiting eligibility for right of abode). Law Yuk-kai, director of the Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor, warned after the May 2005 ruling that Hong Kong's courts could be "completely sidelined." And many people worry that the Falung Gong case will cause Beijing to take a tougher stance toward less subversive activities in Hong Kong.

Despite its promise of a "high degree of autonomy," the Beijing government has already taken several measures to limit the growth of democracy in Hong Kong. In late 2003, President Hu Jintao warned Tung Chee-hwa that the issue of electoral reforms could not move ahead without prior consultation with Beijing. On April 6, 2004, the Standing Committee of the NPC ruled that any local attempts to modify election laws would require approval from Beijing, that the Hong Kong chief executive could not introduce any electoral reforms bills without approval from the Standing Committee, and that the Legislative Council could not introduce electoral reform legislation. After local opposition parties condemned the ruling as a violation of the one country, two systems model, on April 26 the Standing Committee declared that direct elections for chief executive or the Legislative Council violated the Basic Law, thus ruling out the possibility of popular elections for chief executive in 2007 and for expanded elections for the legislature in 2008.

Most people in Hong Kong appear to have resigned themselves to the fact that the Chinese government has ultimate authority over Hong Kong's constitutional reform. On July 1, 2004, the seventh anniversary of the transition, hundreds of thousands of people protested the PRC government's decision to prohibit general elections. A survey in the spring of 2004 found that public dissatisfaction with the Hong Kong government's handling of relations with the central authorities in Beijing was at its highest level since the 1997 handover. But it is difficult to tell how much the demand for political reform reflects popular opinion in Hong Kong. In the first post-handover elections for the Legislative Council in September 1998, approximately 53 percent of registered voters turned out. In the second elections in September 2000, only around 44 percent of voters turned out; the

Democratic Party lost quite a bit of support. An opinion poll in May 2004 showed that the support for universal suffrage in the 2007 and 2008 elections had declined steeply since July 2003.

COLONIALISM AND ITS LEGACIES

How did being a British colony for more than 150 years affect Hong Kong's history? What are the legacies of colonialism? Despite its rocky start, Hong Kong's status as a British colony and free port helped make it into a thriving commercial center. The rule of law and political stability encouraged both Chinese and foreign investment, while Hong Kong's colonial status protected it from many of the troubles that plagued China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although the Hong Kong government had more than its share of corruption, its generally efficient and nonpolitical civil service frequently drew praise from the various regimes on the mainland. Under British rule, Hong Kong also achieved a high standard of living for many of its inhabitants. By the early 1990s, Hong Kong's per capita income had surpassed Britain's. The region enjoys one of the world's lowest infant mortality rates and has extremely high life expectancy rates.

During the countdown to 1997, the Western media depicted Hong Kong as a bastion of democracy, free expression, and prosperity, often ignoring how for so long Hong Kong had been a colony with little democracy or freedom of expression. But any assessment of the British colonial legacy must consider the entire colonial period rather than only the last decade or so of British rule, when the British introduced last-minute political reforms. Although colonial Hong Kong was theoretically based on the rule of law, some jurists and legal scholars argue that common law has never taken root in Hong Kong, mainly because it is so different from the traditional Chinese legal system, while others suggest that most people in colonial Hong Kong had only a superficial knowledge of common law because the language of the law was English (trials are often still held in English, as many judges are expatriates and most counsels received their legal training in English). Furthermore, the government enacted a wave of anti-Chinese legislation from the earliest years, passed various emergency and discriminatory ordinances, and often censored the Chinese press. The 1951 Control of Publications Ordinance, which made it an offense to publish anything that might incite people to commit sedition or treason, was not repealed until 1987. As journalist C. K. Lau argues, Hong Kong's "supposedly high degree of press freedom" should be "better understood as allowing the press great latitude to comment on Chinese politics, but not on the legitimacy of British rule."⁸

Hong Kong's colonial civil service was generally efficient and politically neutral, but until the last years Europeans dominated senior positions on

the grounds that Chinese were not qualified or trustworthy enough. Political power, writes Leo Goodstadt, "was controlled by colonial officials, alien in both language and culture who, with the other members of this European minority, enjoyed superior status and influence solely on account of their race." Because they were so isolated from the Chinese community, "expatriates were in no position to identify the frustrations and the aspirations of their constituents, their fears as well as their hopes." Because these expatriates had little knowledge of life in public housing estates, for example, standards of housing and social services "fell well below what Hong Kong could afford even after its prosperity was assured by its export triumphs."⁹ Similarly, James Hsiung argues that because they were not problems facing expatriates, the colonial government had little concern about Hong Kong's inordinate income-distribution inequities, "the very problem of abject poverty amidst affluence"; the "scandalous" condition of the elderly living in poverty; and the lack of unemployment insurance, which the government believed would only encourage laziness. "The sad thing," laments Hsiung, "is that this lack of compassion perpetuated by colonial policy as such has rubbed off on the British-educated local elite even into the post-colonial era."¹⁰

Hong Kong has often been described as a capitalist's paradise and as one of the world's freest and most competitive economies. But this economy historically depended on political patronage and discriminatory monopolies that favored large British firms. Directors of large British firms such as Jardine and Matheson, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, and the Swire Group regularly held seats on the Executive Council and the Legislative Council. Cable and Wireless, a British corporation, had the telephone monopoly until very recently. Well after World War II, the colonial government refrained from encouraging industrialization because it violated official colonial policy of stressing trade and commerce. The overrepresentation of business and professional classes in the colonial power structure also restricted competition in the property market. As historian Ming Chan puts it, free trade and free enterprise "did not always mean fair trade and equal opportunity."¹¹

Free-market economists frequently praise Hong Kong's *laissez-faire* system, but this commitment to *laissez-faire* enabled the colonial government to shirk many of its responsibilities. Compulsory and free primary education was not guaranteed until 1971, and three years of compulsory and free secondary education was not guaranteed until 1978. Nor did the colonial administration have a shining record in higher education. Until the mid-1980s—the last decade of British rule—less than 5 percent of high school graduates could attend degree-granting institutions. (By 1997 the number had risen to 18 percent after the number of degree-granting institutions increased by four times.) And even though by the 1990s more than 40 percent of Hong Kong's population owned their apartments, at least three hundred

thousand people were still living in squatter huts. Although the colonial government frequently justified its low social welfare spending on budgetary grounds, in the postwar period the government faced only a handful of budget deficits. By the end of British rule, writes Goodstadt, "most of the adult population had been reared, educated and spent much of their working lives in an environment disadvantaged and even impoverished by the failure to upgrade the social infrastructure in line with economic growth." The colonial government was so successful in "making *laissez faire* and minimal economic and social intervention an integral part of the Hong Kong outlook," Goodstadt argues, "that not a single serious political party in Hong Kong sought to challenge the legitimacy of this old-fashioned set of doctrines or their primacy in economic management before 1997."¹²

The British will be remembered for their many contributions to Hong Kong, but they will also be remembered for their many failures. Anna Wu, a lawyer who in 1975 helped found the Hong Kong Observers, a pressure group dedicated to discussing contemporary issues, and who was appointed by Patten to the Legislative Council in 1992, argues that Murray MacLehose's refusal to introduce elections to the Legislation Council during his tenure was "disastrous" for Hong Kong. Such reforms would have given Hong Kong a "much more stable and more mature alternative" to colonial rule and would have prepared Hong Kong much better for the post-1997 HKSAR government. Politics, Wu maintains, would have "been part of our lives and culture, not a new concept." By not introducing democracy until the 1990s, the colonial government actually legitimized the PRC government's opposition to political changes.¹³ Thus, it is not only Beijing that is to blame for the HKSAR's problems. Rather, argues Ming Chan, "the inadequate foundation, unhealthy political culture, flawed legal-administrative framework and questionable bureaucratic practices inherited from the British—together with the inability of the Hong Kong people to stand firmly to defend their much cherished freedom, democracy and high degree of autonomy because of their colonial deprivation—ought to be blamed as well."¹⁴

Colonial officials often blamed Hong Kong's retarded political culture on its Chinese residents, their traditional culture, and their refugee mentality. Historian David Faure disagrees: "Confucianism no more dictates the evolution of the economy or the evolution of politics in Hong Kong or anywhere else in East Asia than Christianity may be said to be the driving force of such in Europe and America." Rather, Faure argues, "the failure to widen the franchise in the late 1940s and early '50s deprived all of Hong Kong of any effective channel of politicking." Realizing that there was no room for them in Hong Kong's administrative structure, Hong Kong people exerted their power in the few arenas where they could, such as business and the professions, thereby creating "the impression that Hong Kong people were apolitical."¹⁵ Similarly, Leo Goodstadt rejects as "blaming the victims" the standard argu-

ment that Chinese political apathy was a legitimate reason for not introducing political reforms. "A more accurate explanation of why Hong Kong had no directly-elected members of its legislature until the final decade of British rule was to be found in a colonial culture that combined self-satisfied complacency with mistrust of the local population." Because the British "lacked the confidence to allow the public to participate directly in the political process," Goodstadt argues, Hong Kong "remained a constitutional anachronism whose political arrangements remained virtually unchanged from the previous century until the final decade of the colonial era."¹⁶

To claim, however, as some observers have, that the interest in politics in the 1980s and 1990s entirely disproves the common image of Hong Kong people as historically being politically apathetic is anachronistic. Demands for reform in the 1980s and 1990s were shaped by Hong Kong's changing social, economic, and political conditions, in particular the rise of a local identity, the Sino-British Joint Declaration, and the local reactions to the Tiananmen Square Massacre. By this time, Hong Kong was a different place, its citizens a different people. Furthermore, if Hong Kong people deserve much of the credit for Hong Kong's economic prosperity and political stability, they must also bear some of the blame for its poor housing conditions and social services, repressive education system, and weak political culture. If the Hong Kong public was indeed as resentful of the colonial administration's poor record in terms of social services and political reform as critics sometimes charge, it could have demanded more from its government. Political and social activists in the 1970s often encountered resentment and resistance from all classes of the Chinese community who, insisting that conditions in Hong Kong were already much better than in China, warned against becoming involved in politics and causing trouble for the government.

The end of British rule did not give Hong Kong a fresh start. On the contrary, Beijing is committed to keeping Hong Kong's political structure in the form it had assumed by the last years of the colonial era, especially the functional constituency model for the new Legislative Council because legislators from these constituencies consistently vote against any measures to promote democratic reforms, civil liberties, or political accountability. In his July 1, 1997, speech celebrating the establishment of the HKSAR, Tung Chee-hwa explained that the Basic Law "reaffirms the implementation of a different system within one country" and "protects the rights and lifestyle of Hong Kong people and delineates our obligations."¹⁷ But some critics argue that the Basic Law prevents the HKSAR from modifying or expanding its welfare and economic policies to fit the needs of changing times and that it has expanded the role of the business elite, especially from the property sector, in Hong Kong's power structure. According to Goodstadt, the Basic Law has made it hard for the HKSAR government to break from the old *laissez-faire* doctrine, guaranteeing that Hong Kong's economy "should be managed along the most conservative lines."¹⁸

One considerably less controversial legacy of colonialism in Hong Kong is the English language, which continues to be important in government, business, and the professions and which according to the Basic Law will remain an official language in the HKSAR. Despite controversial and not entirely successful efforts by the government to promote the study of Mandarin (or Putonghua), there is little doubt that English will survive in Hong Kong. Unlike some postcolonial societies, there have been no attempts in Hong Kong to eradicate English for nationalist or political reasons. Far from being condemned as the language of the colonial oppressor, English is widely regarded as crucial for maintaining Hong Kong's status as a regional headquarters to multinational companies (even while many of these companies have opened offices in mainland China) and as the language of success in the business, financial, and professional communities. When the Hong Kong government decreed shortly before the handover that Chinese would be the language of instruction for most schools after 1998, many schools and parents opposed the decree. And while learning Mandarin is becoming increasingly important for doing business with the mainland, a command of English will always be an important asset for another valuable prize: emigrating to English-speaking countries.

While the role of English as the language of the colonial administration helped make Hong Kong an international city, the weak command of English in Hong Kong is also a legacy of colonial rule. Some educators and employers have noted a decline in the quality of English since 1997, but longtime observers realize that the level of English in Hong Kong has always been low. It is not only poorly trained teachers employing ineffective and outdated teaching methods who are to blame; the weak command of English is also a result of Hong Kong's divided colonial social structure. As C. K. Lau argues, "the English-speaking community and the Chinese-speaking community have always lived parallel but largely separate lives." Thus, there are "virtually no opportunities for most Hong Kong Chinese to use the English they learn at school in real life." Unlike in Singapore, where the postcolonial government has promoted the use of English both to strengthen Singapore's status as a shipping and trading center and to achieve racial harmony among that city-state's multiethnic population, "English is not a language that the average Hong Kong Chinese use spontaneously as a means of communication."¹⁹

THE LEADERSHIP PROBLEM

One of the most serious weaknesses of Hong Kong's post-1997 political system is also a legacy from the colonial period. This weakness, in the words of Lau, is the HKSAR's "failure to produce political leadership."²⁰ In January 2001, Anson Chan, Hong Kong's highly popular chief secretary, sud-

denly announced that she would resign in May, a year before her contract expired. Known for disagreeing with Tung Chee-hwa about the pace of democratic reforms and for defending press freedom in Hong Kong, Chan had earlier declared that she would resign before approving policies that would compromise her principles. In July 2003, two of the most unpopular members of Tung's cabinet resigned. On July 16, 2003, Security Secretary Regina Ip resigned after the July 1 demonstration against her proposed National Security Bill. Hours later, Financial Secretary Antony Leung, who was already under fire for failing to reduce Hong Kong's high unemployment rate and to restore consumer confidence in the economy, stepped down. Leung had been criticized for purchasing a luxury Lexus automobile just before delivering the 2003 budget, which included increasing the tax rate on new cars. Although Leung insisted that he had decided to increase the tax, which would have cost him HK\$50,000 (US\$6,400), only after purchasing his new car, the case embarrassed the HKSAR government and hurt its credibility, especially when the government seemed so unwilling to investigate the case, which became known as "Lexusgate." In July 2004, two top health officials stepped down after a Legislative Council report on the SARS epidemic of 2003 found that the government had been slow in trying to contain the contamination from SARS.

The premature resignation of Tung Chee-hwa, Hong Kong's first post-colonial head of government, is only the most celebrated example of this leadership problem. Although Tung insisted that he was stepping down for health reasons, his resignation in March 2005, during the second half of his second five-year term, was widely seen as proof that he had failed to please the PRC government. Tung had lost his main backer in Beijing, former president Jiang Zemin, while new president Hu Jintao, faced with complaints from Hong Kong's business tycoons about Tung's performance, felt no obligation to retain him. In December 2004, Hu had publicly criticized Tung after legal challenges prevented the HKSAR government from making a major sale of government-owned land. As Hong Kong-based editor Hugo Restall explains, Tung was also losing "even the small semblance of control he once enjoyed over his cabinet." Tung resigned just in time for the Selection Committee, whose term was to expire in mid-July 2005, to pick his successor. Had he waited any later to resign, argues Restall, Beijing would have had to form a new selection committee, drawing unwanted attention to the undemocratic nature of the selection process.²¹

If Tung Chee-hwa had a hard time as chief executive of Hong Kong, his successor, former chief secretary Donald Tsang, also has his work cut out for him. Tsang, who in 1995 had been the first Chinese to become financial secretary, had the greatest public approval of any member of Tung's cabinet. Tsang also enjoys the support of the business magnates who urged Beijing to remove Tung. Like the PRC leaders, these tycoons oppose greater demo-

cratic reform in Hong Kong. The PRC leaders fear that democratization in Hong Kong might fuel demands for the same on the mainland, while both PRC leaders and the local business moguls worry that democratization would result in higher taxes and in demands for more government spending. Thus, Tsang will have to perform a very careful balancing act: not alienating his business supporters, proving his loyalty to China after so many years of dedicated service to the British (for which he was knighted in 1997), and satisfying the ordinary people who, writes Restall, "are fed up with government and business elites colluding to determine Hong Kong's future without popular input."²² If the experience of the Tung administration is any lesson, it is the people of Hong Kong who will be shortchanged in this delicate balancing act.

In November 2005, Tsang announced that he had appointed 153 members of the public, including prodemocracy legislators such as Democratic Party leader Lee Wing-tat, to join the Commission on Strategic Development, the HKSAR advisory group that is studying how to expand democratic reforms in Hong Kong. Only three weeks earlier, Tsang had been criticized and ridiculed by prodemocracy lawmakers for comparing Hong Kong's slow progress toward universal suffrage with the United States, where women did not gain the right to vote until well more than a century after the United States won its independence. Surely, critics such as barrister and legislator Ronny Tong asked, Tsang was not suggesting that it might take Hong Kong another century to achieve universal suffrage. Prodemocracy critics have also rejected any assertions that Hong Kong is not ready for democracy, and Tsang's insistence that democratization in Hong Kong must be a gradual process that cannot take place without the approval of the authorities in Beijing, noting that other former colonies and Communist countries have had democracy for years. Other critics have complained that Tsang, despite his own humble origins and professed interest in democratization, has continued his predecessor's habit of appointing mainly older businessmen and bankers to his cabinet.

HONG KONG AND MAINLAND CHINA

Eclipsed by the concerns and speculations about Hong Kong's new status, a less frequently asked question is what Hong Kong's reversion to Chinese sovereignty has meant for people in China. On the eve of the 1997 reversion, many observers predicted that because the PRC would have to tolerate some autonomy for Hong Kong, this would lead other areas of China to copy what has made Hong Kong so successful. But China itself is changing so quickly that Hong Kong's reversion is unlikely to have much of an effect on the mainland. Although the official mainland media covered the countdown to the handover with special television shows and documentaries about Hong

Kong, it now rarely even comments on the anniversary of Hong Kong's return. Indeed, having reverted to Chinese sovereignty, Hong Kong has lost much of its distinctive quality, a distinctiveness that becomes less prominent every year as mainland cities become more developed. At the same time, Hong Kong remains a foreign place to many mainlanders. Until the signing of the Closer Economic Partnership Agreement between Hong Kong and Guangdong in 2003 and the "individual tourism" scheme introduced in autumn 2003 for mainland visitors from Guangdong, other neighboring provinces, and various major Chinese cities, obtaining an entry permit to Hong Kong could be harder than to many overseas countries. Flights to Hong Kong usually depart from the international section of mainland airports, and Hong Kong companies still enjoy tax breaks and other benefits reserved for foreign investors.

In the past decade, Hong Kong and Guangdong have become more closely integrated than at any time since the 1949 revolution in China, so much so that anthropologist Gregory Guldin has predicted the emergence of a giant "Pearl River megalopolis" that includes Guangzhou, Macau, Hong Kong, and some smaller mainland cities.²³ More people than ever before travel across the border between Hong Kong and Guangdong, especially to Shenzhen, while intermarriage—mainly between Hong Kong men and mainland wives—has helped change the texture of Hong Kong society. Although mainlanders in Hong Kong are still sometimes treated as bumpkins who cut in line at bus stops and fast food restaurants and are often blamed for Hong Kong's rising crime rates, they also comprise the majority of Hong Kong's tourists and are the new big spenders in the region's department stores.

These changes are reflected in how Hong Kong people view mainlanders and themselves. Surveys in the early 1990s found that Hong Kong Chinese considered mainlanders poor, lazy, unfriendly, superstitious, coarse, uncultured, and unintelligent, while mainlanders found Hong Kong people arrogant, hypocritical, and unfriendly. The surveys also found that these negative impressions increased the more often the two groups came into contact with each other. Such feelings appear to have been particularly strong among Hong Kong's youth. Polls in January and May 1996 showed that only one-fifth of the young people surveyed considered mainlanders to be reliable, and more than three-quarters identified themselves first as Hong Kongese rather than Chinese. With China's rising profile in the international arena and the emphasis on patriotic education and propaganda, however, Chinese nationalist and patriotic feelings have become pronounced in Hong Kong.

Even as more and more Hong Kong people are beginning to identify themselves primarily as Chinese rather than as Hong Kong Chinese or Hong Kongers, they often see themselves, and Hong Kong, as being culturally and politically distinct. Unlike people in mainland China (or in the United States), most Hong Kong people have not grown up with various forms of political indoctrination, such as singing national anthems or pledging allegiance to flags. Thus, they sometimes have a hard time identifying politically with

China, especially with its Communist regime. The right-of-abode controversy was ostensibly about the autonomy of the Hong Kong judicial system under a new government, but it was also about who qualified as Hong Kong Chinese: many local residents insisted that the mainlanders had no right to settle in Hong Kong. In May 2005, the HKSAR government announced that it intended to raise public hospital charges to deter mainland women from trying to obtain residency for their children by giving birth there. Mainland women, the government explained, accounted for more than 30 percent of births in public hospitals, and the government was determined not to subsidize medical services for nonresidents at the expense of local residents.

HISTORY IN HONG KONG

Hong Kong's history did not, of course, end with the colonial period any more than it began with the colonial period. History has in fact become a crucial and ongoing theme in how the new government has tried to smooth Hong Kong's reunification with China. But this has opened up a host of complicated questions. How, for example, can reunification with mainland China be reconciled with Hong Kong's status as a place whose history was shaped for more than 150 years by not being politically part of China? How are some of the more turbulent events in PRC history to be treated, especially when they have been viewed with such abhorrence by so many people in Hong Kong, not to mention having caused so many people in the PRC to seek refuge in Hong Kong? The answer has been a curious blend of promoting Chinese nationalism by revising, glossing over, or downplaying much of PRC history while emphasizing Hong Kong's historical distinctiveness.

When school began in September 1997, the Chinese history textbooks in Hong Kong were noticeably thinner than in previous years. In late 1995, Beijing had called for general changes in Hong Kong textbooks, but in early 1997 Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen declared that history textbooks should be rewritten "to suit the changes after 1997." Responding to appeals from Beijing, local publishers deleted or reduced topics that might be offensive or controversial: for example, Taiwan and Tibet history, the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward, and the democracy movements in China during the late 1970s and in 1989. The Tiananmen Square Massacre was rephrased as merely an "incident" rather than a "crackdown." The new textbooks devoted considerably more space to the Opium Wars, which in pre-1997 textbooks had often been described as little more than a trade conflict, and to the Cultural Revolution, which had affected several of China's leaders.

The HKSAR government has tried to put aside turbulent parts of Hong Kong's history that are linked to the PRC. Shortly after the reversion to Chinese sovereignty, Tung Chee-hwa invited several elderly leftists involved in

the 1967 riots to a tea reception at Government House, where he commended them for their "outstanding contributions to Hong Kong society." Some of the men had worked for pro-Beijing newspapers in Hong Kong; others had been members of the famous East River Column during World War II. In July 1999, the government awarded Lee Chark-tim, who in 1967 had been president of the pro-Beijing Federation of Trade Unions and a member of the Anti-British Struggle Committee, the HKSAR's top honor: the Grand Bauhinia Medal. One of Lee's comrades, Wong Kin-lap, received the Golden Bauhinia Star. In July 2000, Liu Yat-yuen, who had also been a member of the Anti-British Struggle Committee, was awarded the Silver Bauhinia Star. In July 2001, the Hong Kong Security Bureau rescinded deportation orders against several people who had been deported in the 1950s and 1960s as radical leftists. Lo Tong, then principal at a pro-Beijing, patriotic middle school, had been deported in 1950 for raising the PRC flag and singing the national anthem at his school. Tsang Chiu-for, the highest-ranking Chinese police officer in Hong Kong at the time, had been deported in 1961 on suspicion of being a Communist spy. The government also awarded the Grand Bauhinia Medal to Yeung Kwong who, as chairman of the pro-Beijing Federation of Trade Unions and nominal head of the Anti-British Struggle Committee, had led a group of protesters in chanting anti-British slogans outside Government House. The awards were widely criticized by the public and the press as an attempt to vindicate the riots as a legitimate anti-British movement and appease pro-Beijing forces in Hong Kong. Pro-Beijing newspapers and legislators defended the awards, however, arguing that the radical leftists' role in the 1967 disturbances should not overshadow their subsequent contributions to Hong Kong.

For the historian, perhaps the most interesting way in which history figures in the ongoing process of Hong Kong's reunification with China is the HKSAR government's effort to use history and heritage preservation to promote a sense of Hong Kong localness and belonging within a larger sense of Chinese nationalism. Since 1997, several new museums have been devoted to Hong Kong's history, all run by the government's Leisure and Cultural Services Department. The main exhibit at one of these new museums, "The Hong Kong Story" at the Hong Kong Museum of History, introduces Hong Kong's natural and cultural heritage since prehistoric times with dioramas, reconstructed street scenes, films, and interactive exhibits. Here visitors can learn about Hong Kong's rich history through a variety of exhibits: boarding a fishing boat that rocks gently to the sounds of straining ropes, strolling through a traditional Cantonese village, or witnessing the horror and suffering during the Japanese occupation. Visitors can also help commemorate the reversion to Chinese sovereignty in an exhibit that includes an excerpt from Jiang Zemin's handover speech and ends with the handover fireworks display, with Hong Kong's trademark night skyline in the back-

ground. As the last caption in this "Hong Kong Story" notes, even though the museum exhibit ends with the reversion to Chinese sovereignty, "the Hong Kong story will continue to be written."

NOTES

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