Hong Kong, Empire and the Anglo-American Alliance at War, 1941–45

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Introduction

I would love to be around in 1997 to see with my own eyes Hong Kong’s return to China.¹

Deng Xiaoping, 1984

The empires of the future are the empires of the mind.²

Winston Churchill, 1943

At the end of the twentieth century Hong Kong held an emotive place in the British conscience. As Britain’s last significant colony it represented a reassuringly modern and sophisticated China for Western visitors; the China that could have evolved had communist rule not intervened. But lost in the enormity of the Second World War is a hidden history every bit as dramatic as the growth of Hong Kong into its modern, urban self. The story has been understandably overlooked since 1945 as politicians came and went and the world had new, more pressing complications to catch its attention. These remain, however, interpretations. Only one thing is for certain; Hong Kong’s place now rests in Chinese history.

The fall of Singapore in February 1942 marked the nadir of the British Empire during World War II. It was the surrender of Hong Kong to the Japanese in December 1941, however, which started the rot. Disproportionate to its small size, the colony became critical in Britain’s battle to retain her Far Eastern empire. Ironically, though, the threat to British sovereignty came not from Japan but from her own allies, China and particularly, America. Under the leadership of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese attempted to reclaim the colony with the active support of Washington. At times emotions would run so high that it was almost like a replay of the American War of Independence
with the colonists arranged against the colonialists. Ultimately, of course, Chinese exertions came to nothing, but not before the triangle of British, Chinese and American relationships had all been dragged through the mire.

Britain may have been down but she was not yet out. The Chinese were unfortunate to find that the Hong Kong issue could not be viewed in isolation by the British authorities. Whatever indifference the British had viewed the colony with previously, it became increasingly inseparable from the destiny of Britain's wider Empire. As the balance of power shifted inexorably against Britain during the war, she clung ever more tightly to the idea that her power was intrinsically tied to the survival of the British Empire and her colonies. In many respects, Britain's real war was not with her declared enemies but with her main ally, America, who held it in her power to deny Britain her Empire.

If Britain's over-arching war aim was not readily apparent this was understandable. Raymond Seitz, American Ambassador to London half a century later, noted that the British appeared to have a deep attachment to understatement and obfuscation:

I remember my first encounter with British understatement shortly after I came to live [in London] in the 1970s. There was a rowdy demonstration at Stirling University when Prince Charles visited there one autumn day, and several people were hurt in the ruckus. On the television news that evening, the screen showed a picture of two plain-clothes cops kicking a long-haired student who had fallen to the ground. The news reader, using his most serious good-citizen voice, said, 'A man is helping police with their enquiries.'

 Whatever the problems of deciphering British intentions, conscious or unconscious, her inability to find tangible meaning in Empire is more interesting. British political leaders implicitly accepted that this uncoordinated and motley collection of lands and islands fitted together into some mysterious whole, providing the source of British strength. Deeper analysis of Empire was rarely encouraged, and no one wondered whether it was a military or economic liability; it was always an assumed asset. During the Second World War few British leaders deviated from this point of view. Winston Churchill's vociferous and eloquent defence of the Empire was shared throughout the British establishment, with disagreement usually stemming from his method, not his message.

The British chose to defend and rehabilitate their Empire during the war by using any means at their disposal. Beggars could not be choosers
and, reluctantly, Britain was drawn towards the need for some sort of alliance with America. No longer materially strong enough to project the power which they once did, the British hoped that American industrial might could be forged in common cause with British imperial aims. The war had ripped through any pretence that Britain could sustain the enormous responsibilities of her Empire alone. And yet British leaders still pretended that the Empire could be put back together without a price to be paid. Of course, this was wishful thinking: the Americans were traditionally arch anti-imperialists, never missing an opportunity to recall their war of independence a century and a half earlier. A common language misled many British politicians into thinking that Britain and America could share common foreign policy goals. Oliver Harvey, Anthony Eden’s private secretary, wrote in his diary that:

The US Government is becoming very baffling to us, more and more secretive. They invited Madame Chiang Kai-shek [China’s First Lady] to visit Washington and smuggled her by air through India, including a night on route without letting either us or India know anything about it all! These are not the manners of a Great Power... Why? Don’t the Americans trust us? Are they afraid of our disapproval?... Do they think they can run the war without us?4

Instead, America was pursuing her own informal hegemonic agenda with the term ‘democracy’ substituted for ‘empire’.

The Anglo-American relationship was a different creature according to its regional context. On the western front, for the most part, it worked relatively well for the simple reason that Britain had traditionally remained detached from European issues; there were few British interests in dispute. The Far Eastern war was a different matter. Here the real clash of empires was played out. America had long coveted a special role in Asia, illustrated by its strong missionary presence in China. With her predominant military strength America attempted to displace the old imperial influence, and replace it with her own. Unfortunately, however, both Britain and America had grown accustomed to having things their own way and compromise did not sit comfortably in their psychologies. The Americans were naive to expect that they could uproot a century’s imperial legacy in one fell swoop or that they could win the war alone, not to mention whether or not the natives would welcome them. Many of these accusations could also be levelled at the British. The scene was set for a turbulent alliance.
Hong Kong was key to British efforts to resurrect her Empire in the Far East, and in a wider context, sustain British imperial ambition worldwide. The colony, which barely covered 300 square miles, had little in its favour save for a deep water port and proximity to China. Yet size was not everything. It became a diplomatic test case because of the political claims which converged on it: the Chinese Nationalists claimed the British colony as an integral part of China, and in this they were supported by the Americans. The British, on the other hand, had ignominiously lost the colony to the Japanese in December 1941 and now attached their imperial pride to regaining Hong Kong. Malaya, Singapore and Burma did not have these claims. The British Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary quickly realised that if Britain was forced to relinquish Hong Kong, it would set a precedent for her other colonies. For the British the objective was to marry their imperial ambition with an Anglo-American alliance. It is not, therefore, an exaggeration to maintain that British foreign policy in the Far East was frequently seen through the prism of Hong Kong.

Note on historiography

There are already several books on the Anglo-American relationship during the war in the Far East, but none that specifically deals with the question of Hong Kong from the British perspective. Although the Anglo-American relationship is an important component of British policy, the book is not from its inception a narrow study along those lines, but seeks instead to integrate wider economic, social, cultural and political strands. While Chinese sources remain scarce due to political sensitivity, copious British and American documentation provides (to a certain extent) an understanding of Chinese policy. Detailed use has been made of the private and political papers of senior British policymakers, including Anthony Eden and Winston Churchill. The relevant Cabinet papers have also been consulted with emphasis on frequently overlooked departments such as the Colonial Office, Special Operations Executive (SOE) and Board of Trade. American material has been extracted from the Roosevelt papers and the National Archives, including State Department, Office of Strategic Services and Joint Chiefs of Staff files.

Chinese transliterations have used the Wades-Giles system, common to the period.
The Colonial Empire is our fifth, and will be our last. This is the last chance that the British will ever have of doing something for which, with all their blunders and even crimes, they have shown a peculiar genius.¹

Sir George Moss, 1944

Winston Churchill was once overheard to have said that ‘there is only one thing worse than fighting with Allies, and that is fighting without them’.² This sentiment could easily be applied to Britain’s attempt to recover her colony of Hong Kong during the Second World War. At times it seemed as if Japan’s occupation of Hong Kong was incidental to Britain recapturing it at all. Opposition to London’s continued sovereignty over Hong Kong from her Allies, China and America, was vociferous and constant. While China had a strong claim to the colony, however, she lacked the strength to extinguish Britain’s legal rights to return. Instead, what little influence Chiang Kai-shek’s government had over London was derived from her dependency on American sponsorship.

The British understood that China was unlikely to act independently of America. Anthony Eden told Lord Halifax in August 1944, that ‘China would be so dependent on the other Great Powers that she would not be likely to pursue any very independent policy . . . in matters affecting international peace and security.’³ The Sino-American alliance never lived up to the expectations of either the Chinese or Americans. Washington’s dreams and Chiang Kai-shek’s grabbing hand ensured that it was a temporary marriage of misconceptions. Its strength lay in its propaganda value not in its reality.

In the end, however, British interests in Hong Kong were best defended by Chiang Kai-shek’s own incompetence rather than the
relentless imperial dogmatism of Winston Churchill. Always preferring to do more of the 'issimoing' than the 'generalling', Chiang Kai-shek failed to deliver the China that Washington expected. With American despondency in the China theatre came the momentum to shift the centre of gravity of the Far Eastern war into the Pacific. As American support ebbed away, China's opportunity to reconquer Nanking, never mind Hong Kong, without US troops. Chiang's reckless behaviour, however, was not uncharacteristic of the corrupt Nationalist dictatorship which would do little to help itself. While T.V. Soong was having Kansas steaks flown into Chungking, Chinese soldiers were dying in their bedrolls from neglect, only a mile away.

America's shift from a regional to a global strategy towards the end of the war also greatly undermined Washington's pressure on Britain to retrocede Hong Kong. By 1944 American efforts to exclude Britain from the Far East and elevate China to a regional power had faltered while Soviet power grew inexorably. It was in such circumstances that President Roosevelt attempted to conciliate Stalin's appetite for Soviet expansion, even at the expense of facilitating Britain's return to Hong Kong. As he told Admiral Leahy when he accepted Russian control of the Chinese port, Dairen: 'Well, Bill, I can't help it.'

Porter and Stockwell have described the tempering of America's anti-colonial ambitions as a reaction to the complexities of world problems:

It is true that US anti-imperialism grew more muted as the war proceeded but British resistance and Colonial Office polemic were less influential in curbing the enthusiasm of Americans for Afro-Asian independence than the Americans' own exercise of world power and their anticipation of the profits of free-trade imperialism after the war.

Roosevelt's attempt to demolish the British Empire was at best confused, and at worst, breathtakingly hypocritical. At Tehran he had talked of a post-war world without the French and British empires. Stalin's empire was consciously excluded by the President, and thus unthreatened by any scheme which America and Russia could agree. Nor should we forget America's own colonial empire which in 1941 stretched from the Caribbean, through Latin America and across the Pacific. Republican President William McKinley told a Boston audience in 1899 that control of the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico was a 'great trust' that America carried 'under the providence of God and in the name of human
progress and civilisation'. The parallels with British imperial sentiment were striking, but something that few Americans would admit to during the Second World War. Seemingly unable to look at themselves in the mirror, Americans often found it easier to reprove the British for what they denied in themselves. 8

Britain's defence of her colony, however, rested on much more than the divisions and contradictions of her Allies. Without the determination of British personnel to rebuild her lost Empire, there would never have been a question mark hanging over Hong Kong during the war. Driven by a consensus which saw Empire inextricably linked to Britain's position as a Great Power, British policymakers remained unrepentant imperialists. Criticism of Britain's position in the Far East by America and China was counter-productive and only served to reinforce Britain's belief in Empire. Led by Winston Churchill, the London government set its face against any peace settlement which would prejudice their Far Eastern interests.

It is misleading, though, to maintain that Churchill was instrumental in forcing Britain's return to Hong Kong; this is the interpretation that he himself would like us to accept and something the legacy of his written records makes hard to escape. Churchill said of one of his books: 'This is not history, this is my case.' 9 Even a revisionist interpretation of the Churchill myth by Clive Ponting puts the Prime Minister centre stage in resisting colonial change. Ponting claims that: 'In order to strengthen opposition to change he insisted on appointing men of similar views to his own as Colonial Secretary – for example Lord Lloyd in 1940 and Oliver Stanley, who held the post from November 1942 until the end of the war. 10 This is to overestimate the importance of Winston Churchill to British foreign policy. Oliver Stanley's appointment was more of a carefully crafted political appeasement than a deliberate attempt to prevent imperial reform. The truth was that the vast majority of British servicemen, civil servants and politicians believed in the sanctity of the Empire, and opposed the abandonment of British territory overseas. Foreign policy could not be set by one man, and had personnel in SOE, the Colonial Office or the Foreign Office not believed in Britain's right to return to Hong Kong, Churchill's sentiments would have been shown to be empty. These were the people who turned British thought into action. Even a man like Clement Attlee, behind the posturing of international socialism, firmly believed in the British Empire; it was only over its purpose that he dissented.

It could also be argued that Churchill's vituperative outpourings actually retarded London's attempt to defend British interests. Roosevelt's
tendency to see the world in idealistic (and simplistic) terms was exacerbated by Churchill's reactionary stance and disguised the Prime Minister's own ambivalence towards Anglo-American cooperation. In a black moment, Anthony Eden's private secretary wrote: 'If allowed to, [Churchill] will win the war and lose us the peace as certain as certain.' That Churchill could not interfere with British colonial policy any more than he did, due to other policy commitments, was perhaps a blessing in disguise.

The fact that Hong Kong's future became such a burning issue during wartime can partly be blamed on the Prime Minister's emotional handling of the situation. It need not have been: a calmer and more measured approach to this tiny island colony would not have endangered British sovereignty, as the more subdued determination of the Foreign Office and Colonial Office showed. G.V. Kitson at the Foreign Office thought 'that as regards such politically explosive issues as Hong Kong, the Burma frontier and Tibet, it is much better to let sleeping dogs lie. "Qu'on excuse, n'accuse"!' [If we excuse them, they won't blame us.] A sensible person does not pick arguments that endanger what is most important to him. Fighting over Hong Kong hurt Anglo-American cooperation while doing little to secure the integrity of the British Empire, the two cornerstones of British policy. Churchill should have admitted that the Americans could not have dismantled the Empire without British acquiescence. To have done so, however, would have been to deflate his own importance within the British Government and popular imagination; something he was never keen to do. Lady Churchill told Churchill's doctor:

Winston has always seen things in blinkers... He sees nothing outside that beam. You probably don't realise... that he knows nothing of the life of ordinary people. He's never been in a bus, and only once on the Underground. [She smiled.] That was during the General Strike, when I deposited him at South Kensington. He went round and round, not knowing where to get out, and had to be rescued eventually. Winston is selfish; he doesn't mean to be, he's just built that way. He's an egoist, I suppose, like Napoleon. You see, he has always had the ability and force to live his life exactly as he wanted to.

This dangerous self-centredness could be seen in the Prime Minister's attempt to monopolise the London end of the Anglo-American relations with President Roosevelt. It is ironic, therefore, that to depreciate
Churchill’s significance we have to focus upon it in the first place. Nonetheless, this needs to be done because he himself has left voluminous records of his own actions for historians to follow. It is worth considering whether Oliver Stanley would have been so widely ignored had he left a ready prepared archive of his own. Instead, we are forced to rely upon others’ interpretations of the Colonial Secretary and his own scant annotations scribbled on official papers. We should, perhaps, be wary of over-emphasising the individual over the general, particularly in such complex circumstances as diplomacy.

Britain’s return to Hong Kong finds its true significance in the context of the imperial mentality which permeated British society. Imbued by a narrow educational curriculum which focused on Britain’s past military endeavours, there was little doubt in most people’s minds that Britain would return to Hong Kong. Sir Ralph Furse, an old Etonian and Oxbridge graduate, was representative of the single-mindedness of Britain’s governing elite. In charge of Colonial Office recruitment between 1910 and 1948, he was a leading proponent of Britain’s imperial destiny and followed the teaching of an old Jesuit: ‘It is wonderful how much good a man can do for the world if he does not want to take credit for it.’ Without the many hundreds of similar ‘quiet crusaders’ who were used to thinking imperially, there would have been no Hong Kong question during the Second World War. Lord Rosebery stated in 1899 that ‘Imperialism, sane imperialism, as distinguished from what I may call wild-cat imperialism, is nothing but this – a larger patriotism.’
Epilogue

If consistency often eludes practitioners of diplomacy, the reversal of Washington’s Hong Kong strategy in the aftermath of the Pacific war was ironic to say the least. In 1957, National Security Council (NSC) paper 5717 stated that ‘It is in the interest of the United States that the British maintain their position in Hong Kong.’ In fact, America’s switch to support Britain’s hold on the colony was highly embarrassing after the strident anti-colonialism of the war years. The onset of the cold war forced Washington to reassess her attitude towards colonialism. As the CIA noted in 1948, ‘the loss of their dependencies weakens the colonial powers, which are the chief prospective US allies’ while depriving America ‘of an assured access to bases and raw materials’. It was ‘a serious dilemma’ for a country which had set itself up as a champion of anti-colonialism. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Britain had convinced America that Hong Kong was no longer a colonial issue but one of national defence.

Prior to the Korean War, America’s attitude remained highly ambivalent towards the colony as Washington was mesmerised by the implosion of its China policy. Hong Kong could not escape the ructions on the Chinese mainland. Suppressed while the Japanese burned their way through the country, the revolutionary battle between the Nationalists and communists quickly resurfaced once the invaders had surrendered. Unfortunately for the Nationalists, and some might say for China, they were led by Chiang Kai-shek’s clique, who had more than proved their incompetence during the Pacific war. Their armies had rarely engaged the Japanese and little would change against Mao’s communists. With the Nationalist armies melting away, a despondent T.V. Soong pinned his hopes on a third world war breaking out. As the Americans argued over who was to blame for the Nationalists' defeat, the People’s
Republic of China was declared in October 1949. The troublesome Hong Kong question had just become even more complicated: now Hong Kong was claimed by two rival governments, the Nationalist remnants on Taiwan and the communists in Peking!

The anachronism that was Hong Kong, however, remained. The colony was a pitiful sight in 1945. It had the dubious honour of being called the most looted city in the world. It had been looted immediately after the British defeat, looted constantly during the occupation, and looted again after the Japanese surrender. Few of the city’s clubs were recognisable; the golf course had allotments dug all over it, the Jockey Club was literally a shell of its former self. Even the floorboards had been stolen! No one had escaped the ravages of war. And yet, George Hopper, American consul general, was soon telling Lieutenant General Wedemeyer on his China mission that the British had quickly and miraculously restored the life of the colony, so much so that the population had doubled from 1 million to 2 million by August 1947. British success was even encouraging some Chinese to leave China. It was also interesting to juxtapose the colony with its mother country: the vibrant entrepreneurialism which was let loose across the colony once more stood in stark contrast to regulations back in socialist Britain.

All the same, after the war the colony declined in importance. With the mother country’s economy in ruins and decolonisation accelerating, Hong Kong was low down on London’s list of priorities. In reality, the colony had returned to its pre-war status. Sir Alexander Grantham, Governor of Hong Kong from 1947 to 1958, knew perfectly well that ‘the electorate of Britain didn’t care a brass farthing about Hong Kong’. The Hong Kong Chinese were hardly more concerned. They remained apathetic towards British rule in any positive sense and only wished to be free to pursue the creation of wealth as they always had. A newspaper noted that, ‘In the cinemas “God save the King” is a sign that the doors are open.’ Most of the refugee population fleeing mainland China ‘regarded the island as little more than a reasonable hotel’.

With Mao’s triumphant communists reaching the China–Hong Kong border, the colony was gripped by the fear that it was about to be invaded for the second time in a decade. Once again Hong Kong pitted the Foreign Office against the Colonial Office. The Colonial Office, bolstered by the hard-line governor of the colony, Sir Alexander Grantham, pressed for an unequivocal statement that Britain would hold on to Hong Kong at all costs. This was familiar ground for the Colonial Office’s Paskin who lamented that, ‘The attempt on the part of the Colonial Office to get some positive decision on policy as regards the
retention of Hong Kong . . . has been going on interminably, at any rate since 1943.7 And with Creech Jones as Colonial Secretary this was not about to change. Like his predecessor Oliver Stanley, Creech Jones knew that a Colonial Secretary 'cannot break the adamant view of the Foreign Secretary'.8 Behind the seemingly endless Colonial Office-Foreign Office conflict, however, stood a determination to resist any renewed Chinese claim to Hong Kong.

The Foreign Office's public reticence over the colony was driven by its usual pragmatism. It was appreciated that without American support 'our only hope of hanging on to Hong Kong is to keep quiet about it'.9 Even so, under the pressures of the cold war, the British chose to send 30000 military reinforcements, including armour and air cover, to strengthen the colony's defence. This time they were not Canadian. Before American policy recovered its interventionist nerve in Asia with the Korean War, it was the British who were left to develop and implement the 'domino theory'. It was believed that 'If we surrender Hong Kong to the communists, there will be nothing to prevent the flood from pouring into South East Asia. It is necessary to call a halt somewhere, and we consider that Hong Kong will therefore become the symbol of the resistance of the rest of Asia to the communist advance.'10 This idea presupposed that Hong Kong actually led somewhere and defended something.11 Ultimately, however, the government could not afford its bluff being called by the Chinese. In preparation for such a humiliation, British rhetoric was toned down and contingencies prepared for a retreat.12

But for some reason, Mao chose not to move. As the cold war engulfed the Far East, Hong Kong remained a crossroads for east and west. Hong Kong was useful to everyone, including the Americans who used the colony to collect intelligence on the Chinese mainland. There were parallels with West Berlin. Hong Kong projected a shop window of Western prosperity and freedom in contrast to the austere totalitarian blandness of communism. Mao's reasoning for leaving the colony alone, though, was harder to interpret and more consequential. It is possible that he believed an invasion of Hong Kong would have involved the communists in a war with Britain and America for which he was not ready. The financial importance of the colony to China was clear, with half her foreign income being channelled through Hong Kong. Some Chinese officials even admitted that Hong Kong had been China's 'lifeline' during the Korean War, providing petroleum, chemicals and other strategic products denied them by the UN embargo. Mao even obtained his Hollywood movies and medical drugs through the port.13
These reasons alone probably do not provide the whole answer. It is likely that Taiwan held the key. Hong Kong, like Chiang Kai-shek’s last refuge, was more useful to Mao ‘outside the house’, rather than in it. He told his personal doctor that he preferred to keep Taiwan in his grip as a baton to ‘keep Khruschev and Eisenhower dancing’. In other words, it was a foreign policy tap which he could turn on or off at will. Considering the anguish which the communist threat posed to Hong Kong for the British and the Americans, it worked. Mao informed Stalin during his December 1949 trip to Moscow that he wanted to bring about order and stability in China before talking to ‘foreign imperialists’. Whatever the merits of these arguments, an informal *modus vivendi* had been reached within China that Britain would retain control.

By 1960 the colony had become the eyes and ears of America’s cold war containment strategy in the Far East. From Hong Kong, the Americans ran their spy networks into China and retained an intelligence-gathering position on the Chinese mainland. The United States Consulate General in Hong Kong was ‘the most important American source of hard economic, political and military information on Communist China’. America’s new found support for Hong Kong, though, was received with equivocation by Hong Kong’s Governor, Sir Alexander Grantham. The swollen consulate staff, obviously including many CIA operatives, were ‘extremely ham-handed’ in their operations and had to be told to stop ‘being so stupid’! The potential extraction of the 2500 Americans living in the colony in 1957 was, therefore, a critical influence on Washington’s policy. With associated foreign nationals ‘of interest to the United States’ this rose to 3300.

Like British strategists before them, Washington realised that Hong Kong was indefensible against a determined attack. It was calculated that a successful defence of the colony could only be undertaken in depth, which meant securing a defensive perimeter on mainland China. Technology had not made the defence of Hong Kong any easier or more practicable. As such, ‘US intervention would probably not be operationally feasible in case of direct communist attack on Hong Kong.’ The consequences of armed intervention in defence of Hong Kong was likely escalation with no stopping point. An earlier assessment had made this chilling observation: ‘It would be unwise for the United States to contribute forces for the defence of Hong Kong or Macao unless we are willing to risk major military involvement in China and possibly global war.’

America’s China policy had been destroyed by Mao’s victory. All that was left to do was apportion the blame. In an attempt to pre-empt any
criticism, the State Department published its 1949 China White Paper which vilified the Generalissimo. A report by the Joint Munitions Allocation Committee to the JCS confirmed this was 99 per cent correct. ‘However, the United States failed to warn the Chinese Nationalists what the United States would do if they would not accept her advice. Anticipating the United States’ endless aid, Chiang and his clique let the corruption go on.’ For all that, the ‘loss of China’ or more pointedly, the rejection of American friendship was never readily accepted in American policymaking circles.

It is interesting to note that while China at the beginning of the twenty-first century is an acknowledged world power it lacks many of the traditional trappings. Gerald Segal suggests that China today is not a world apart from Chiang Kai-shek’s time, retaining many of the period’s characteristics, being skilled in the manipulation of foreign powers but militarily weak, economically backward, and politically corrupt:

At best, China is a second-rank middle power that has mastered the art of diplomatic theatre... In 1997 China’s... per capita GDP ranking was 81st, just ahead of Georgia and behind Papua New Guinea [while remaining] a second-rate military power [with no international allies of significance]... Once prominent on the map of aid suppliers, [it] has become the largest recipient of foreign aid.

Whatever the attributes of China, past and present, in 1949 the British were no closer to scuttling and running from the colony than they had been in wartime. The new plain-speaking British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, told Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, that while Britain would be prepared to discuss the future of Hong Kong ‘with a friendly and stable Government of a unified China’, those conditions did not currently exist. The word ‘democratic’ had been deleted from Bevin’s draft. These conditions would not exist for another fifty years. In 1997, a unified and stable Chinese government received the colony of Hong Kong back into Chinese rule. If the communists had decided to walk unarmed and en masse into the colony prior to this date, it is unlikely that the British could have responded. But these remain other voices, other rooms.
Notes

Introduction

1 Daily Telegraph, 20 February 1997, obituary.
5 For example see Louis, Imperialism at Bay and Christopher Thorne’s Allies of a Kind, the United States, Britain and the War against Japan (London, 1978).

1 Return and departure

2 Ibid., pp. 137–49.
9 Kirby, p. 108.
10 Prem 3/157/1, Eden to Churchill, 8 February 1941.
11 CO 968/13/2, Maj. Grasett to Air Ministry, 6 January 1941.
14 CO 968/13/2, COS (41) 28, 10 January 1941. Telex to C in C FE.
15 Perras.
16 CO 968/13/2, COS to PM, 8 September 1941.
17 For an expansion of this idea see Correlli Barnett, Lost Victory (London, 1995), e.g. pp. 14–15.

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18 CO 967/69, 1941, personal correspondence of Sir Mark Young, Governor Hong Kong. Letters 14 October and 2 December 1941.

19 Kirby, p. 112.

20 CO 968/13/2, Hong Kong Defence policy 1941.


22 'The valour and the horror'.

23 FO 371/63392/f564, General Maltby's Hong Kong reassessment, 1947.

24 'The valour and the horror'. The programme emphasises the bitterness felt by Canadians towards Mackenzie King and the British, and the general military ineptitude that resulted.

25 MacDougall papers, Rhodes House, Oxford. MSS Ind.Ocn. 73. Item 1, notebook on the fall of Hong Kong.

26 Wright-Nooth, pp. 48–9.

27 PREM 3/157/2, 21 December 1941.

28 Kirby, p. 145.

29 FO 371/31671/f4000, 1942 situation in Hong Kong. This file contains a wealth of material relating to Japanese atrocities perpetrated against the defenders and inhabitants of the colony. The FO pushed for publicity to be given to these crimes, although the Colonial Secretary and India Office were afraid for the 'sensibilities of Canadian and Indian troops'. See also F6407.

30 James Bertram, The Shadow of a War (London, 1947), p. 120. Bertram was a Marxist.

31 Ibid. p. 150.

32 Kirby, p. 469.

33 PREM 3/90/5A, 12 March 1942, C in C India to War Office.

2 The meaning of Empire


3 See Lawrence James, The British Empire (London, 1994).


5 FO 371/31777/f6440, Sir Maurice Peterson minute, 1 September 1942.

6 Sir Reginald Stubbs, 16 September 1922 to CO while on leave in London. Quoted in Welsh, Hong Kong, p. 386.


8 Christopher M. Bell, 'Our most exposed outpost', Journal of Military History, 60 (January 1996).

9 Ibid., p. 65.

10 Welsh, p. 30.

11 Ibid. For example see pp. 133–4.

12 The politics and history of the opium trade in Hong Kong are beyond the limits of this book. However, it is instructive to note that in 1918 revenue from opium sales reached the not untypical figure of 46.5 per cent of all Hong Kong Government revenue. Ibid., p. 364.
13 CAB 96/FE(E)(45)10, 3 February 1945, War Cabinet Far Eastern committee, BOT paper on 'Certain aspects of commercial policy in China'.
14 CO 133/111, Blue Book 1940.
15 FO 371/46232/f1331, Cavendish-Bentinck minute, 13 March 1945.
16 CAB 134/280, Cabinet Far Eastern committee, 'British foreign policy in the Far East', 31 December 1945. The paper went on to state: 'The UK trade with the area under consideration [Far East] was not quantitatively of the first importance. It accounted for about 4.5% of UK imports and 5.25% of UK exports (1937–39 average).'
17 FO 371/46251/f2382, Eden on FO brief prepared for visit of General Hurley, 4 April 1945.
18 FO 371/35680/ f412/G, Brenan and Ashley Clarke, January 1943.
20 WP(44) 643, CAB 66/57, Stanley memo to Cabinet, ref. CDWA, on 15 November 1944. Quoted in Louis, p. 103.
22 Quoted in Seaman, p. 301.
25 Later on in life Clement Attlee reminisced nostalgically about his time at Oxford University, wishing to recapture 'the magic of those days and of that city'. See Trevor Burridge, Clement Attlee, a Political Biography (London, 1985), p. 16.
26 See Correlli Barnett's trilogy; The Collapse of British Power; The Audit of War, and Lost Victory.
29 CAB 66/57, WP(44) 643, Stanley memo to Cabinet on colonial development loans, 15 November 1944.
30 ADM 116/4271, memo by Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, 3 January 1940. Quoted in Bell.
31 Harvey diary, p. 191, 23 November 1942.
33 FO 371/31715/f5553, China post-war settlement, minute by Ashley Clarke, 7 August 1942. Sir Maurice Peterson agreed but argued American 'intervention will not necessarily be a grounds for altering our attitudes' on Hong Kong.
36 FO 954/24/f123, Eden to Churchill on the role of SOE, 5 April 1942.
37 FO 371/41657/f5341, Churchill's Mansion House speech, 10 November 1942.
43 Harvey diary, p. 191, 23 November 1942. Eden's supporters found much to criticise in Stanley. Not only was he a loyal Chamberlainite but he was also a poor public speaker, overly diffident and was tainted by the disastrous Norwegian campaign in 1940. See entry in forthcoming *New Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press).
47 PREM 4/43A/5, Oliver Stanley speech: 'No outside control of colonies', 5 March 1943.
48 After the war, Gent was appointed Governor of the Malayan Union and was tragically killed in a plane crash following his recall to London in 1948. See A.J. Stockwell (ed.), *Documents on the end of Empire: Malaya, II* (London, 1994), p. 34.
49 CAB 129/1, CP (45)144, Attlee memo on defence, 1 September 1945. In an essay written in 1937, he had also postulated 'rejecting altogether the concepts of imperialism, and by establishing through the League of Nations international control of raw materials'. See George Bennett (ed.), *The Concept of Empire, Burke to Attlee 1774–1947* (London, 1953), p. 407.
51 Ibid., p. 216.
52 FO 954/22/62–96, Attlee's copy of post-war Far East settlement, October 1942.
53 Porter and Stockwell, p. 48.

3 The Anglo-American relationship at war

1 FO 371/41657/f2172, Moss memo to Sir Alexander Blackburn FO, May 1944.
3 CO 967/18, report by Richard Law on Washington DC talks, September, 1942.
5 Harvey, p. 197, 7 December 1942.
7 FO 954/22/f168, Eden in Washington DC to Churchill, 29 March 1943. He met Hull, Winant, Welles, Hopkins and FDR.
8 CO 825/35/55104, minute by Lord Cranborne, 14 July 1942.
9 Quoted in Thorne, p. 394.
An Empire brought into question

1 FO 371/4072/f8170, G.P. Young minute, 9 December 1942.
2 FO 371/31662/f7822.
3 FO 371/31777/f2063, dinner discussion in NYC, 19 January 1942.
4 National Archive and Records Administration, College Park, USA. RG59, Box 5098, letter dated 12 September 1944 inquiring whether Hong Kong was returning to China.
5 Eden diary, 27 February 1942.
7 MacDougall papers, Steve Tsang interview with MacDougall, 26 February 1987.
9 CO 825/35/4, minute by Gent, 30 June 1942.
10 FO 371/31777/f965, Gladwyn Jebb minute, 7 September 1942.
11 Eden diary, 30 May 1942.
12 FO 371/31633/f3962, A.L. Scott responding to a parliamentary question on Chinese troops in Malaya, 27 May 1942. 'No offer of Chinese troops for the defence of Malaya was ever made. In May 1939, however, General Chiang Kai-shek offered 200000 troops to assist in the defence of Hong Kong, an offer which was not accepted and was subsequently withdrawn.'
13 MacDougall papers, notebook on the fall of Hong Kong. Undated.
15 FO 371/31633/f2775, A.L. Scott minute on future of Hong Kong, 8 April 1942.
16 FO 371/31715/f5087, Ashley Clarke minute, 19 July 1942.
17 CO 825/35/4, Gent minute, June 1942.
18 FO 371/31801/f4369, Miss McGeachy minute, 13 June 1942.
19 FO 371/31801/f3814, Sir Maurice Peterson on IPR conference, 13 May 1942.
20 FO 371/31801/f4369, Sir John Brenan, 13 June 1942.
21 CO 825/42/53104, Stanley, minute, 23 August 1943. He was referring to the French defence of their colonies and the general future of the Far East.
23 FO 954/6/f585, Eden to Seymour, 9 July 1942.
24 FO 371/31619/f3043, Treasury meeting, April 1942.
26 FO 954/6/f497, Niemeyer to Eden, 8 January 1942.
28 Ibid., p. 425. Gauss to Cordell Hull, 8 January.
29 CAB 65/25, 2 February 1942.
31 Ibid., p. 423. Meeting in Washington DC, 8 January.
33 Ibid., p. 446. Meeting in Washington DC, 26 January.
34 Ibid., pp. 486–8. Memo by Hornbeck, 19 March. He belatedly came to see that Chiang was treating the loan as a 'poker game', manoeuvring the US
Government into a ‘without strings’ only position. Which would ‘score for
them a first-class diplomatic victory the consequences of which in the long
run will be good neither for this country or China’.

35 FO 954/6/f572, Eden interview with Koo, 20 April 1942.
36 FRUS, China 1942, pp. 509–15. Luthringer memo on amelioration of
China’s financial difficulties, 24 April.
38 FRUS, 1942 China, p. 454. Hull to FDR, 31 January.
40 Ibid., pp. 521–3, 22, 23 and 25 May.
41 FO 371/31619/f3468, Eden minute on Chinese blackmail, 10 May 1942.
42 FO 371/31619/f4252, Wood and Eden discussion, 8 June 1942.
43 FO 371/31715/f5553, Peterson minute, 7 August 1942 and FO telex to
Chungking, 9 August 1942.
45 FO 371/31715/f5553, Peterson minute, 7 August 1942 and FO telex to
Chungking, 9 August 1942.
46 FO 371/31704/f4297, Ashley Clarke minute, 16 June 1942.
47 FO 371/31704/f4297, Eden minute, 17 June 1942.
48 CO 825/35/55104, Cranborne minute, 14 July 1942.
49 CO 825/35/55104, Cranborne minute, 14 July 1942.
50 FO 371/31773/f5506, ‘Britain’s post-war prospects in the Far East’, G.F.
Hudson, 5 August 1942.
51 FO 371/31773/f5506, Sir John Brenan minute, 8 August 1942.
52 In 1920 Hong Kong engineers demanded increased wages and, with
the employers failing to agree, withdrew their labour to Canton, quickly bring­
ing the colony to a standstill. The same occurred in 1921–22, when the
exploited Chinese seamen gathered more widespread support (almost all the
colony’s workforce of 120,000) and marched off to Canton. The colonial
government’s repressive measures only met with further agitation, forcing
the government to concede a famous victory to the seamen. Matters went
a stage further in the 1925–26 blockade of Hong Kong when anti-foreign
feeling swept the colony. It was caused by the deaths of Chinese civilians
in the Shanghai international settlement and Canton at the hands of foreign
troops (mostly British, one might add), and the agitation of a left-wing
regime in Canton. Once more Hong Kong’s workforce departed for Canton,
the strikers demanding a huge $20 million payment. The Hong Kong Gov­
ernment, left in a perilous situation, considered what to do. At the time, Sir
John Brenan was British consul in Canton. He adamantly opposed the idea
of coercion which was being put forward by the new Hong Kong Governor,
Sir Cecil Clementi, with the support of the Colonial Office (Welsh,
pp. 369–76). A further coincidence was the fact that Leo Amery was the
Colonial Secretary supporting Clementi in his use of force. Amery later
wrote of his concern that ‘the growth of an aggressive anti-European nation­
alism in China . . . led to much controversy between the Foreign Office, out
of appeasement, and those of us who were more concerned to defend the
interests built up by British enterprise in a prosperous colony like Hong
Foreign–Colonial Office conflict over the colony was nothing new.
In October 1926 the boycott ended without a penny being paid to the strikers. Ironically, the reason was the intervention of Chiang Kai-shek who had succeeded Sun Yat-sen as leader of the Kuomintang. In an attempt to reassert central authority throughout China, a pro-Chiang coup took place in Canton during March 1926. Chiang moved quickly to end the boycott because it was distracting from his military campaign against dissident warlords (Welsh, pp. 376–7). This assistance is, unsurprisingly however, rarely acknowledged in British history at a time when the colony's future was in great jeopardy. Retrospectively, the convergence of Chiang Kai-shek, Brenan and Amery almost twenty years later over the same issue remains one of the quirks of history. In preparation for a northern expedition to re-establish central authority in Shanghai and Nanking, he needed to secure his position in Canton.

53 FO 371/31773/f5506, Sir Maurice Peterson minute, 17 August 1942.
54 FO 954/6/f592, Seymour talks to Chiang Kai-shek about India, 12 August 1942.
55 FO 371/31633/f5964, Amery letter to Eden, 13 August 1942.
56 FO 371/31777/f5965, official minutes of Foreign Office–Colonial Office meeting by Gent, 20 August 1942.
57 FO 371/31777/f5965, official minutes of Foreign Office–Colonial Office meeting by Gent, 20 August 1942.
58 FO 371/31777/f5965, Ashley Clarke minute, 27 August 1942.
59 FO 371/31777/f5965, Eden, 24 August 1942.
60 FO 371/31777/f5965, Sir Maurice Peterson minute, 28 August 1942.
61 FO 371/31777/f6440, Sir Maurice Peterson minute, 1 September 1942.
62 FO 371/31777/f6440, Ashley Clarke minute, 31 August 1942.
63 FO 954/22/post-war plans and reconstruction, October 1942.
64 HS 1/176, SOE, November 1942 paper, 'Present political and military aspects of the regime in China'.
65 FO 954/22/post-war plans and reconstruction. Attlee’s copy of the revised Eden–Cranborne Far Eastern paper presented to Cabinet. Dated 9 September 1942.
66 Quoted in Welsh, p. 424.
67 FO 371/31777/f6425, interdepartmental meeting, 10 September 1942.
68 Cranborne, however, conscious of the need for consensus with the Labour Party, did not wish a split at Cabinet level. Paul Emrys-Evans (Dominions Parliamentary under-secretary) and Richard Law of the Foreign Office, on behalf of Cranborne, helped persuade Attlee to see the merits of the Colonial Office position. (Louis, p. 196)
69 FO 371/31777/f6425, F.G. Coultas minute, 21 September.
70 FO 371/31777/f6441, amended Foreign Office–Colonial Office paper, 9 September 1942.
71 CO 967/18, report by Richard Law on Washington talks, September 1942.
72 FO 954/29/f513–5, conversation between British journalist David Ewer and William Bullitt, former ambassador to Paris and Moscow, 11 August 1942.
73 CO 967/18, report by Richard Law on Washington talks, September 1942.
5 China claims Hong Kong

1 FO 371/31662/f7822, Cadogan minute on impending breakdown of extra-territoriality negotiations, 21 November 1942.
2 FO 371/31662/f7822, Ashley Clarke minute, 20 November 1942.
3 CAB 23/88, Cabinet conclusion 24 (37), March 1931.
4 FO 371/31633, Eden minute, 2 March 1942.
6 FO 371/31620/f5489, Eden minute, undated August 1942.
8 FRUS, 1942 China, pp. 269-71. Memo by Walter Adams of FE section, Washington DC, 19 March. He reflected that American help to China 'may spill over the level of appropriateness and good taste to the detriment both of the interest of China and of the US'.
9 Quoted in Thorne, p. 489 and p. 533.
10 FO 954/Political/f520, Churchill to Eden on Four Power Plan, 18 October 1942.
11 FO 954/Political/f520, Eden reply to Churchill, 19 October 1942. PM/42/228.
12 FRUS, 1942 China, p. 287. Cordell Hull to Gauss, 5 September.
13 FO 371/8539/54/10, British and American policy towards China, 28 December 1942.
14 FO 371/31627/f6518, 17 September 1942.
15 *The Times*, 14 October 1942.
17 FO 371/31664/f8036, Ashley Clarke minute, December 1942.
18 Sir John Brenan, though, later pointed out when the China Association was still adamantly pushing for equality of trade, that Britain also had similar problems to the American states: London was negotiating on behalf of India, Burma and her other colonies which possessed more open trade policies than the motherland. FO 371/31664/f8109, Brenan minute, 10 December 1942.
19 FO 371/31662/f7845, meeting of the China Association and the Federation of British Industry with Eden, 19 November 1942.
20 FO 371/31664/f8081, Brenan minute, 3 December 1942. Also Cadogan letter to Winant, 7 December.
21 FO 371/31662/f7822, Ashley Clarke minute, 20 November 1942.
22 Hansard, 14 October 1942. Mr Sorenson parliamentary question to Richard Law under-secretary state of FO. Ibid., 20 October 1942.
23 PREM 3/157/4, Seymour to FO, 16 October 1942. Ibid., Eden reply, 20 October.
24 FO 371/31662/f7742, Seymour to FO, 14 November 1942.
25 Wendell Wilkie was the Republican Party's Presidential candidate in 1940.
27 FO 371/31663/f7822, Ashley Clarke minute, 20 November 1942, quoting governor of Hong Kong, 20 June 1931.
Notes

28 FO 371/31663/f7822, Ashley Clarke minute, 20 November 1942.
29 FO 371/31663/f7822, Eden minute, 22 November 1942.
31 FO 371/31663/f7822, Ashley Clarke to Monson, CO, 25 November 1942.
32 FO 371/31662/f7973, Halifax telex to Eden, 26 November 1942. Ibid., Eden reply, 4 December.
33 FO 371/31664/f8188, Seymour telex, 7 December 1942. Ibid., Eden 11 December.
35 FO 371/31664/f8287, Seymour telex, 15 December 1942. Ibid., Ashley Clarke, Cadogan and Eden, 17 December. Eden added an aside that it was 'Interesting this time we did not give everything at the start.'
36 CAB 65/28, WM173(42), extraterritoriality, 28 December 1942.
37 Cadogan diary, pp. 500-1, 28 December 1942.
39 FO 371/35679/f23, David Ewer memorandum, 29 December 1942. Also Sir Maurice Peterson minute, 31 December.
40 FO 371/35679/f23, Cordell Hull press conference, 30 December 1942. Ibid., f1, Halifax to Eden, 31 December.
41 Thorne, p. 179.
42 FO 371/35679/f1, Foulds minute, 1 January 1943. Ibid., Ashley Clarke, 2 January, and Cadogan, 3 January.
43 Eden diary, 31 December 1942.
44 FO 371/3569/f1, Ashley Clarke to Hornbeck, 13 January 1943.
47 FO 371/35680/f285, Seymour to FO, 12 January 1943.
48 FO 371/35679/f1, Ashley Clarke to Hornbeck, 13 January 1943.
49 Tung, Wellington Koo, p. 93. Apparent comments of Soong to Koo after the signing ceremony.
50 FO 371/35739/f2529, May 1943. The Western edition, delayed by Chiang, had many of the 'fascistic' anti-Western references removed.
51 'Nations and their past', The Economist, 21 December 1996.
52 FO 371/41657/f5341, Churchill's Mansion House speech, 10 November 1944.
53 Eden diary, 11 November 1942: 'Talk with Winston on telephone. His speech has gone very well.'
54 FO 371/35824/f2913, the future of Hong Kong 1943. China Association document, circa December 1942, forwarded by CO.
55 Quoted in Thorne, p. 65.
57 FO 371/31620/f5628, Bromley minute, 10 August, and Ashley Clarke, 12 August 1942.
58 FO 371/31620/f7866, Brenan minute on loan and extraterritoriality, 25 November 1942.
60 MacDougall papers, MacDougall to Noel Sabine, CO, 22 December 1942.
61 Ibid., 30 December 1942.
62 FO 371/31803/f7609, IPR conference and the future of Hong Kong, 9 November 1942. Sir John Pratt wrote to Ashley Clarke in October to confide: ‘for many years I have felt that if we could not hold Hong Kong with the goodwill of the Chinese it was not worth holding at all.’ He wanted to return the colony ‘now’, although he realised that was unlikely to be the FO-CO consensus. A point made by an illegible scribe in the FO: ‘I agree . . . with most of Pratt’s views. The line he takes about Hong Kong, however, would not be unanimously endorsed by the Cabinet to say the least.’
63 FO 371/35905, Pratt to Ashley Clarke, private, 26 December 1942.
64 FO 371/35905, Sir Maurice Peterson to Ashley Clarke on Pratt, 21 January 1943.
65 FO 371/34087/A1914, Pratt debrief to Committee on American Opinion and the British Empire, 22 February 1943.
66 FO 371/35680/ f412/G, Seymour to Eden, 13 January 1943.
67 FO 371/35680/ f412/G, Brenan and Ashley Clarke, January 1943.
69 Ibid., Law, 1 February 1943.
70 FO 371/35680/ f412/G, Eden, 4 February 1943.
71 Hansard, 28 January 1943, vol. 386, p. 634.
72 FO 371/35683/f1090, reply to Halifax telex, February 1943. Ibid., Thornely, CO, to Oliver Harvey, FO, 11 February 1943.
73 Cadogan diary, p. 501, 31 December 1942.

6 London’s Hong Kong planning
1 HS 1/349, 1942–45 future of Hong Kong, 27 February 1943: ‘Sino-British relations’, prepared by AD/O to Minister for Economic Warfare, Lord Selborne (SO). Selborne added, ‘This is a very valuable paper.’
3 HS 1/349, 1942–45 future of Hong Kong, 27 February 1943: ‘Sino-British relations’.
4 Ibid.
5 HS 1/349, SOE paper on Sino-British relations prepared by AD/O, 23 February 1943.
6 FO 954/6/f686, Mountbatten to Eden on raising profile of Far Eastern war, 23 September 1943.
7 CO 825/35/25, CO arrangements for military administration of Hong Kong, 19 June 1943.
8 FO 825/42/15, Gent to Thornely, 16 February 1943.
9 CO 825/42/15, Monson minute, 30 June 1943.
10 CO 825/42/15, Gent minute, 1 July 1943.
CO 852, 375/5, commercial relations with China: Hong Kong interests in post-war policy. FO to Seymour, 22 July 1943, and Gent minute, 4 August 1943.

CO 825/42/15, Paskin minute, 2 July 1943.


CO 825/42/15, Gater to Stanley, 21 August 1943.

CO 825/42/15, Stanley minute, 23 August 1943.

CO 825/42/15, Gent minute, 1 July 1943.

CO 825/42/15, Paskin to Ashley Clarke, 27 August 1943.

CO 825/42/15, 10 August 1943. FO refusal to attend CO conference.

CO 825/42/15, Monson, 10 August, and Gent, 15 August 1943.

CO 825/42/15, Monson minute, 10 August 1943.

FO 371/35824/f4541, A.L. Scott minute on Paskin’s letter, 1 September 1943.


FO 371/35824/f4541, Ashley Clarke minute, 2 September 1943.

CO 825/42/15, Paskin minute, 12 November 1943.


CO 825/42/15, Gent minute, 29 December 1943.

CO 825/35/25, appointment of N.L. Smith, 18 August 1943.

CO 129/592/8.


Miners, pp. 41–2.


Leo Amery diary, 16 February 1945, p. 1030.

FO 371/41657/fs341, for details of Stanley’s, Attlee’s and Churchill’s statements on Hong Kong, November 1944.

CO 825/42/15, Gent minute, 29 December 1943.

CO 825/42/15, Monson minute, 8 May 1944. Also, Gent letter to Moss, 29 May 1944.

FO 371/41657/f2172, Moss memo to Sir Alexander Blackburn FO, May 1944.


FO 371/41657/f2172, Moss memo to Sir Alexander Blackburn FO, May 1944.

HS 1/349, Selborne meets Sir George Moss, 24 June 1944.

FO 371/41657/f2172, Moss memo to Sir Alexander Blackburn FO, May 1944.

FO 371/41746/f2968, I.H. Foulds minute, June 1944.


FO 371/41746/f2968, Sir Maurice Peterson minute, 28 June 1944.

Louis, p. 366. In 1944 Roosevelt encouraged the State Department to proceed with trusteeship plans while at the same time telling the military to plan for permanent bases throughout the Pacific. Also p. 426 for Hopkins’s comments on FDR ‘not being caught’ by WSC’s encouragement to annex islands.

HS 1/171, CO meeting with SOE, 13 June 1944.
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46 HS 1/171, CO meeting with SOE, 10 August 1944.
47 HS 1/171, CO meeting with SOE, MI2 and MI9, 19 August 1944.
48 CO 825/42/15, CO guidance to Poynton for UN negotiations, 3 August 1944.
49 CO 968/156/Pt.1, minutes by Poynton of meeting, 27 July 1944. Also Gater to Cadogan, 28 July 1944. Quoted in Louis, pp. 382–3.
50 Louis, p. 377.
51 FO 371/41657/f3681, 12 June 1944. ICI's Chungking rep argued to Paskin of the CO that Hong Kong should not be returned to China, and this would not damage Sino-British relations. Forwarded to the FO where A.L. Scott commented, 14 August 1944.
52 NARA, JCS, RG 218, Box 342, civil affairs policy for British territory of Hong Kong and Borneo.
53 Hansard, vol. 402, pp. 407–10, 6 June 1944, parliamentary question by William Astor MP for Fulham East. With classic imperial irony, Astor denied the rights of the Chinese to claim any British territory while at the same time proclaiming that the Colonial Office administration would need people 'who can love and sympathise with the Chinese'!
55 CO 825/42/15, Miss Ruskin's draft Hong Kong announcement for Stanley, 6 November 1944. Also FO 371/41657/f5341, parliamentary question by William Astor MP, 8 November 1944.
56 FO 371/41657/f5341, Daily Express, 9 November 1944. Also CO 825/42/15, Gent minute, 18 November 1944.
57 FO 371/41746/f3665, inter-departmental meeting under chair of Sir Maurice Peterson, 3 August 1944. Also f3896 for encouragement of Washington Embassy.
58 CAB 96/5, Far East (44)1, 15 November 1944.
59 CO 825/39/7, Far Eastern committee memos and meetings 1944. Gent, 13 November 1944.
60 CAB 96/8, (45)4, British commercial interests in China – position of Hong Kong, 11 January 1945.
61 FO 371/41695/f5195, Stilwell's recall, 6 November 1944.
62 FO 371/41695/f5265, appointment of Wedemeyer, November 1944.
63 FO 371/41746/f5800, Dening to FO, 9 December 1944.
64 FO 371/41746/f5802, Dening to FO, 9 December 1944. Also Eden minute undated.
65 FO 371/41746/f5802, Dening to FO, 9 December 1944. Minute by M. Butler undated.

7 Military strategy in the Far East

1 Pownall, Louis Mountbatten's Chief of Staff at SEAC, 29 April 1944. Quoted in Thorne, p. 450.
2 Quoted in Thorne, p. 294.
3 Levine, p. 137.
4 Seagrave, p. 10.
8 White, p. 157.
9 FDR, Hopkins papers, Sherwood Collection, Box 331. Chiang Kai-shek to FDR, 19 April 1943.
10 FDR, FDR Official file, China 150, Box 2. T.V. Soong to Harry Hopkins, 13 May 1943. This was a curt note informing the Americans of Chinese displeasure over their ignorance of the Casablanca conference.
11 FDR, President's Secretary, Box 27, Diplomatic Correspondence, China. Gauss, 9 December 1943.
14 NARA, RG59, Geographical files 1940–44, China Box 2237. Conversation Hornbeck and T.V. Soong, 19 August 1943.
15 FO 371/35739/f2584, Ashley Clarke minute, 19 May 1943.
16 The Chinese communists remained relatively unimportant to the British until later in the war when the Americans began to pressure Chiang to settle his differences with Mao. The Americans believed that Chiang should be fighting the Japanese, not the communists. Prior to this time, the communists were geographically isolated in Yenan and closer contacts would also have irked Chiang. Sir Horace Seymour finally met Mao on 28 August 1945 in Chungking, observing that Mao was a genuine communist but, at the same time, different from the Soviet model. The ambassador advocated that Britain continue its policy of non-intervention regarding KMT–CCP conflict, which was accepted by London. See Shian Li, 'Britain's China policy and the communists, 1942 to 1946: the role of Ambassador Sir Horace Seymour', *Modern Asian Studies*, 26, 1 (1992).
17 White, p. 108.
19 Ibid., Hong Kong 1940–44, Box 5098. 7 June 1943.
20 Ibid., dated Chungking, 2 April 1943.
21 FO 371/35834/ f1591, account of dinner with Dr Currie by Col. MacHugh, 24 March 1943.
22 Seagrave, pp. 411 and 416.
23 FO 371/35824/f4382, future of Hong Kong: US attitude, August 1943.
25 Seagrave, pp. 397 and 405–6.
26 FO 371/35834/f1591, Col. MacHugh on meeting with Currie, 24 March 1943.
27 FO 954/7/f31, FO memo on Pacific Strategy, 1 March 1944.
28 FDR, Presidential Secretary, Box 27, China 1943. John Davies letter, 9 March 1943.
29 FDR, Map Room, Box 165/F2. Chief of Staff summary of Stilwell messages, 18 February 1943.
30 FRUS, China 1944, p. 188. John Davies memo, 31 December 1943.
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31 Wedemeyer, p. 267. British policy meeting, 8 August 1944. Wedemeyer, as Louis Mountbatten's American deputy, was present at the meeting to put forward SEAC's claim for additional resources for operations. After this incident Churchill excluded him from all further meetings.


34 Thorne, p. 299. See also pp. 297–302.

35 FO 954/7/f20, Denning on political implications of Far Eastern strategy, 17 February 1944.

36 AP 20/11/91, Eden to Churchill on latter's COS (44) 168 (0), 21 February 1944.


39 Char 20/188, COS(44)207, COS to Churchill, 1 March 1944.

40 Char 20/188, Churchill note to COS, 20 March 1944.

41 PREM 3, 160/7, Churchill memo, 29 February 1944.

42 FDR, PSF, Box 74, State Departmental file: Cordell Hull, January–August 1944. Roosevelt to Hull on Indo-China, 24 January 1944.

43 FO 954/6/f618, Churchill on recovery of Burma, 10 January 1943.

44 Eden diary, 25 February 1944.

45 FO 954/7/f66, Halifax to Eden, 2 May 1944.

46 Claire Chennault was the founder of the American volunteer airforce in China that became known as the Flying Tigers, see Seagrave, pp. 369–72.

47 FO 954/7/f145/f146/f154, Eden 10 and 12 July 1944.

48 FO 954/7/f132, Ashley Clarke minute, 15 June 1944. Eden underlined the Hong Kong section.

49 FO 954/7/f81, FO paper on 'Political considerations affecting Far Eastern strategy', 22 May 1944.

50 Eden diary, 6 and 14 July 1944.

51 Ismay, p. 337.

52 Levine, p. 145.

53 Levine, p. 154.

54 FO 954/22/f229, Churchill to Smuts, 25 September 1944.

55 FDR, Map Room, Box 117. FDR to Chiang Kai-shek, 6 July 1944.

56 FDR, PSF, OSS April 1944–45, Box 4. Donovan to FDR, 24 June 1944. The President requested he show the memo to Hull and Stimson.

57 FDR, PSF, OSS April 1944–45, Box 4. Donovan to FDR, 24 June 1944.


59 FDR, Map Room, Box 11. Roosevelt to Chiang Kai-shek, 16 September 1944.

60 Stilwell Papers, p. 333, 19 September 1944. See also FDR, Map Room, Box 11, Hull memo to Roosevelt, 28 April 1944, for American suspicions against Madame Chiang Kai-shek's withholding US messages. Ambassador Gauss also reported on 'marital intranquillity between the Chiangs'.

61 FDR, PSF, Box 27, Diplomatic Correspondence, China: January–July 1944, 26 May 1944. Stimson, Secretary for War, also urged Roosevelt to rectify the hugely inflated rate of exchange which the Chinese kept for American
expenditure. Through this mechanism the Chinese accumulated millions of extra dollars. Roosevelt passed the issue over to Morgenthau.

62 Stilwell Papers, p. 332, 17 September 1944.
64 FDR, Map Room, Box 11, Chiang Kai-shek to Roosevelt, 29 March 1944.
65 FO 954/7/63, de Wiart to Ismay, 24 April 1944.
66 FDR, Map Room, Box 11, Roosevelt to Chiang Kai-shek, 8 April 1944.
67 FDR, Map Room, Box 11, Cordell Hull to Roosevelt, 7 April 1944.
68 Wedemeyer, p. 295.
69 For example see Stilwell papers, p. 304, 14 June 1944.
70 FDR, PSF, Box 4, Safe file: OSS, April 1944–45. Donovan to Roosevelt, 4 May 1944.
71 FO 954/71/229, Sterndale Bennett, 7 November 1944.
72 AP 20/10/344a, Cadogan to Churchill, 16 October 1943.
73 Hong Kong PRO, HKRS 163, MacDougall to Gent, 18 April 1945.
74 CO 582/42/15, Gent minute, 29 December 1943. Sir George Sansom in Washington DC embassy also held a similar view to Seymour on Hong Kong.
75 FDR, Map Room, Box 11. John Davies, New Delhi, 15 January 1944.
76 NARA, RG 59, Box 2237 China. Notes on Wallace's conversation with Chiang, 21 June 1944.
77 Eden diary, 11 April 1944.

8 The Cairo conference

1 Stilwell papers, pp. 251–4. Meeting in Cairo after Tehran Conference, 6 December 1943.
4 Ibid.
5 Ismay, p. 334.
8 AP 20/3/5, 25 November 1943.
9 AP 20/11/121, Eden to Churchill, attached minute by Dening, 1 March 1944.
11 Leahy, p. 185.
12 Louis, pp. 281–2.
13 Dalton diary, p. 685, 21 December 1943.
14 Leo Amery diary, p. 955, 13 December 1943.
15 Stilwell papers, pp. 236–40. See also pp. 224–5 for attempt by Soong sisters to woo Stilwell once they saw that Stilwell was their link to American aid.
16 Ch'i, Hsi-sheng, *Nationalist China at War, Military Defeats and Political Collapse, 1937–45* (Michigan, 1982), pp. 113–17. Ch'i states that during the war, the KMT 'gave up any attempt to wage revolutionary struggles [with the
result that the national party became an empty shell and its leaders reduced to soldierless generals', inciting factional intrigues. p. 236.

17 Moran, p. 130, 23 November 1943.
18 Seagrave, p. 379. John Service minute to State Department.
19 Ibid., p. 410. John Service minute to State Department.
20 The Sian incident occurred against the backdrop of the KMT's fourth annihilation campaign against the communists. Several KMT generals wanted to stop the encroachment of the Japanese before the communists, and took Chiang hostage in an attempt to persuade him to switch priorities.

21 Ibid., p. 415.
22 Elliott Roosevelt, p. 142. He added, 'I can't think what would be happening in China, if it weren't for [Stilwell].'

23 Stilwell papers, p. 251–4. Meeting in Cairo after Tehran, 6 December 1943.
24 Seagrave, p. 378.
25 Ismay, p. 335.
26 FDR, Map Room, Box 165 (2), Hurley to Roosevelt, Cairo 20 November 1943.
27 Elliott Roosevelt, p. 193.
28 Quoted in Leahy, p. 185.
29 Quoted in Seagrave, p. 386.
33 Martin Gilbert, Churchill VII, pp. 595–9. Roosevelt conceded to Churchill after the fourth plenary session of the Third Cairo Conference that 'Buccaneer is off'. The Prime Minister had also spoken disparagingly about Mountbatten's plans and his apparently extravagant demands for troops and matériel. Mountbatten's deputy, the American General Wedemeyer, however, implies that Churchill's displeasure was born from his enthusiasm for Culverin, not his opposition. He felt that if the operational demands could be reduced the operation could still go ahead. When the Prime Minister told Wedemeyer, the American thought privately, 'Don't forget Gallipoli!' See General Albert C. Wedemeyer, Wedemeyer Reports! (NY, 1958), pp. 258–60.

34 FDR, PS, Box 27, Diplomatic Correspondence, China 1943, Gauss memo, 9 December 1943. With attached Morgenthau memo for President, 18 December 1943. The President was also convinced of his own powers of economic thought, and advised Morgenthau what should be done. He suggested a course of action that was still hugely beneficial to the Chinese (and not America) while doing nothing to tackle the fundamental causes of Chinese inflation. The Treasury Secretary expressed 'complete sympathy' with the President's aim of aiding China and resisting remedial action.

36 Ibid., p. 107.
37 FDR, Map Room, Box 165 (2), Hurley to Roosevelt, Cairo, 20 November 1943.
40 FRUS, Cairo and Tehran 1943, p. 554. Tripartite dinner meeting, 29 November.
41 FO 371/35874/f6714, Sir Prideaux-Brune to Ashley Clarke, 7 December 1943.
42 Thorne, p. 312.
43 HS 1/154: 'Remorse' financial dealings. FO paper by Eric Teichman of FO Information Service, 27 October 1943. 'Remorse' was the British operational codename for playing the Chinese financial black market in an effort to subsidise their meagre finances, and avoid China's fixed exchange controls.

9 Hard choices

1 Leahy, p. 338.
3 FO 371/46251/f1147, A.L. Scott, 8 February 1945.
4 HS 1/208, AD minute, 29 March 1945.
5 CO 825/39/7, FE(44)8, 25 November 1944. Seymour letter to Eden on post-war trade, 19 September 1944.
6 CAB 96/5, FE(44)1, 15 November 1944. Hall would later become Labour's Colonial Secretary in July 1945.
7 CAB 96/8, FE(E)(44)1, note by the CO on Hong Kong's economic importance, 12 December 1944.
8 CAB 96/8, FE(E)(45)18, British shipping interests in China, 26 February 1945.
9 CAB 96/8, FE(45)9, Dr Sun Fo's comments, 27 January 1945.
10 CO 825/39/7, FE(44)10, Sir Prideaux-Brune on Anglo-American cooperation in China, 30 November 1944.
11 FO 954/7/f338, Chiang Kai-shek thanks Britain for surplus naval craft, 22 April 1945.
12 FDR, Map Room, Box 165 (2), Wedemeyer to Roosevelt, 20 December 1944.
13 FDR, Map Room, Box 11 (8), Roosevelt to Hurley, 17 November 1944.
14 Eden diary, 4 January 1945.
15 Eden diary, 2 February 1945.
16 Herbert Feis, The China Tangle (Princeton, 1953), p. 249. This is the official State Department history of the period. See also Robert Conquest, pp. 264–8.
17 Wedemeyer, p. 327.
19 FO 371/54073/f9836, Churchill minute on Soviet claims in the Far East, 23 October 1944.
20 Leahy, p. 368, 9 February 1945.
21 Moran, p. 223, 4 February 1945.
22 Ibid., p. 226, 8 February 1945.
23 FDR, Map Room, Box 165(9), State Department recommendations for Far Eastern policy at Yalta, January 1945.
24 Ibid.
27 AP 20/12/768, Churchill to Eden, 31 December 1944.
28 Moran, p. 228, 9 February 1945.
29 FO 954/22/f276, Eden to Churchill, 8 January 1945, replying to Churchill's personal letter of 31 December 1944. The Prime Minister grudgingly approved Eden's position.


31 Harvey, p. 348, 15 July 1944.


In 1949 the State Department was compiling a handbook on Far Eastern conference discussions between heads of state and foreign ministers for the period 1943–47. In pursuit of this aim, the State Department attempted to find the letter from Chiang Kai-shek that Roosevelt referred to in his meeting with Stanley. Robert Dennison, Naval Aide to President Truman, reported on 14 May 1949 that ‘a careful search has been made of all known files of President Roosevelt without result. The letter itself was not found, nor any record of the receipt of such a letter discovered.’ In all probability it never existed. See NARA, RG 59, Hong Kong 1945–49, Box 5099, April 1949.

33 FO 371/44595/AN154, conversation Law and Roosevelt, 22 December 1944.

34 FO 371/41769/f5392, Sterndale Bennett minute, 18 November 1944.


36 FO 954/7/f253, Carton de Wiart to Ismay, 21 November 1944. Also, Wedemeyer, p. 293.

37 Wedemeyer, p. 298.

38 CO 129/591/11, various minutes on Emergency Unit, 20 January and 20 February 1945.

39 Wedemeyer, p. 341.

40 FDR, Map Room, Box 11/8, Hurley to Roosevelt, 2 January 1945. See also PSF/Box 27, Hurley, 1 January 1945.

41 CO 129/591/11, Gent to Gater, 20 February 1945. See also HS 1/169, SOE Force 136 to London, 1 March 1945 for planned Sino-British guerrilla operation in Kwangtung whose ultimate aim was the liberation of Hong Kong. A London member of SOE called these plans ‘entirely nebulous’ considering the situation.

42 FO 371/46251/f4153, Colonel Ride’s report, 4 July 1945.

43 CO 129/591/11, emergency planning unit, inter-departmental meeting, 5 July 1945.

44 CO 129/591/11, Seymour reply to above, 9 July 1945.

45 CO 129/591/11, Thornely minute, 23 February 1945.


48 HS 1/171, inter-departmental meeting at CO summarising Hong Kong situation, 23 July 1945.


50 HS 1/171, inter-departmental meeting at CO summarising Hong Kong situation, 23 July 1945.

51 HKRS 211/2/37, MacDougall report on visit to Chungking, March 1945.
HKRS 211/2/37, MacDougall to Gent on visit to Chungking, 18 April 1945.

FO 371/46151/f1543, Seymour to Sterndale Bennett, 21 February 1945.

FO 371/46251/f1147, A.L. Scott, 23 February 1945. Scott, however, was disdainful of the CO's suggestion that the lease of the New Territories could be extended. See, ibid., f1375, 8 March 1945.

FO 371/46251/f1543, T.H. Brewis, 14 May 1945.

FO 371/46325/f2663, Eden, 30 March 1945.

HS 1/208, Field Marshal Wilson, Washington DC, to Ismay, 27 March 1945.


FO 371/46251/f2382, FO brief for Hurley visit, 3 April 1945. Eden added on 4 April: 'I had not known that Hong Kong was a free port. I suppose there is no qualification about this', illustrating his ignorance of Hong Kong's business role.

WO 203/5621, Sterndale Bennett to Seymour on Hurley's visit, 24 April 1945. The FO avoided mentioning the CO's predisposition to take into account the opinions of the inhabitants of Hong Kong, should Hurley 'exaggerate it into a possibly awkward commitment'. See FO 371/46251/f2382, CO brief, 31 March 1945.

FO 371/46325/f2577, Churchill minute, 11 April 1945.

WO 203/5621, Sterndale Bennett to Seymour on Hurley's visit, 24 April 1945.

Moran, p. 226, 7 February 1945.


Wedemeyer, p. 272.

Louis, p. 441.

Ibid., see pp. 512–47. Truman approved the State Department's military compromise prior to the conference to enable the military to retain full control of the Pacific islands for security purposes, p. 496.

CAB 65/60, WM(45)61, 14 May 1945.

CO 968/1571/5, Seymour to Eden, 16 May 1945.


CO 129/592/8, extract from FE(E), 10 May 1945.


Moran, p. 251, 20 May 1945. Also, p. 255.

Eden diary, 17 July 1945.

HKRS 211/2/6, letter to MacDougall, 5 July 1945.

10 Return of the Empire

1 HS 1/210, SOE paper on scheme for British publicity in Far East, 19 April 1945.

2 FO 371/46232/f3603, Seymour to Sterndale Bennett, 16 June 1945.

3 FO 371/46251/f4008, Sterndale Bennett to Seymour, 18 July 1945.


5 HS 1/331, AD4 reviews British political warfare plans for the Far East, 12 May 1945.
6 FO 371/46251/f2456, MacDougall, April 1945.
7 HS 1/171, Seymour to London, 20 July 1945.
8 Moran, p. 257, 8 July 1945.
9 Eden diary, 10 August 1945.
12 HS 1/157, SOE general intelligence report China, 10 July 1945.
14 CO 129/591/13, civil affairs agreement, Gater to Cadogan, 28 July 1945.
16 Eden diary, 17 July 1945.
17 Eden diary, 20 July 1945. Moran dined with the Edens and Churchill that night: 'They talked until nearly midnight as if nothing had happened. I wondered if I could have behaved with the same quiet dignity immediately after hearing that my [son] John had been killed.' Moran, p. 277, 20 July 1945.
18 Eden diary, 25 July 1945.
19 Moran, p. 287, 26 July 1945.
20 FO 371/46232/f4649, Ta Kung Pao, 30 July 1945.
22 Eden diary, 28 July 1945.
24 Cadogan diary, p. 776, 28 July 1945.
26 FO 371/46251/f4588, CO enquiries about Terminal, 31 July 1945.
27 CO 129/591/13, Paskin minute, 9 August 1945.
28 CO 129/591/11, inter-departmental meeting, 29 July 1945.
29 CO 129/591/11, meeting of Calvert, SAS, with CO, 3 August 1945.
30 CO 129/591/11, inter-departmental meeting, 29 July 1945.
31 Cadogan diary, p. 781, 11 August 1945. Australia and China shared the State Department's opposition but were persuaded that Japan would only surrender in an orderly manner subject to Emperor Hirohito's orders.
33 NARA, RG 165, Box 505, CCS 901/1, 11 August 1945.
34 NARA, RG 165, Box 505, CCS 901/3, 12 August 1945.
36 CO 129/591/16, Gent to Gater, 4 August 1945.
37 CO 129/591/16, FO to Chungking, 11 August 1945.
NARA, RG 165, Box 505, Telephone conversation Dunn and Lincoln, 15 August 1945.

CO 129/591/16, Wallinger, Chungking, to FO, 14 August. The Chinese were given British plans for the Hong Kong surrender the same day.

CO 129/591/16, Cabinet Far Eastern committee meeting, 17 August 1945.

CO 129/591/16, Hall to Attlee, 10 August 1945.

CO 129/591/18, COS(45)200, Alan Brooke, 17 August 1945.


CO 129/591/16, Ride to Cartwright, HQ British troops China, 15 August 1945.

CO 129/591/16, FO to Chungking, 13 August 1945.

CO 129/591/16, de Wiart to Cartwright HQ British troops China, 17 August 1945.

Ride, BAAG, p. 288.

HS 1/329, B/B 131, Kunming to ADI, 17 August 1945.

FO 371/46251/f5166, Kitson minute, 16 August 1945.

CO 129/591/18, Attlee to Truman, 18 August 1945.

FO 800/461, Truman to Attlee, 19 August 1945. The second paragraph of Truman's message stated that Secretary of State, Byrnes, had informed T.V. Soong of the President's decision, adding that 'it did not in any way represent US views regarding the future status of Hong Kong'. The CO and FO agreed that this section should be ignored, just as they had disregarded an earlier American Chiefs of Staff's attempt to distance themselves from British Hong Kong policy.


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Gimson diary, introduction.

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69 NARA, RG 59, Hong Kong 1945–49, Winant to Washington DC, 23 August 1945.

70 CO 129/591/18, Sterndale Bennett on Daily Telegraph report to C.R. Price, COS Secretariat, 23 August 1945.

71 CO 129/591/18, FO to Seymour, 28 August 1945.

72 CO 129/591/18, Seymour to FO, 26 August 1945.

73 CO 129/591/18, Ismay to Gater, CO, 24 August 1945.

74 CO 129/591/18, FO to Seymour, 28 August 1945.

75 CO 129/591/18, de Wiart to Ismay, on meeting with Chiang Kai-shek on 25–26 August 1945.

76 See CO 129/591/18, Gent to Gater, 17 August, and Gent minute, 18 August 1945.

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78 CO 129/591/18, Seymour to FO after meeting Dr K.C. Wu, 29 August 1945.

79 CO 129/591/18, Sterndale Bennett to Seymour, 30 August 1945. Sent following day, and accepted by Chiang Kai-shek. For Cabinet discussion see Gent minute 28 August 1945.

80 CO 129/591/18, Sterndale Bennett to Seymour, and reply, 30–31 August 1945.


82 Gimson diary, introduction.

83 The Japanese deny that the boats which left Lamma island were hostile to the British fleet and maintain that their warheads had already been dumped at sea. See Lo Tim Keung and Jason Wordie, Ruins of War, a Guide to Hong Kong’s Battlefields and Wartime Sites (Hong Kong, 1996), p. 182. The development of the suicide boats was initiated by the Imperial Japanese Navy in April 1944. The boats sent to Hong Kong were intended for use against Allied shipping, should any attempt be made to enter the western harbour of Hong Kong. There were 127 boats called Shinyo (shaking the ocean) with 559 personnel from Japan sent in February 1945.

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85 Wright-Nooth, p. 187.


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14 Sir Ralph Furse, p. 131.
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