

Hong Kong People and the Sino-British Joint Declaration,  
1978-1984

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# Abstract

In the early 1980s, British and Chinese officials engaged in confidential, bilateral negotiations over the future of Hong Kong. These talks produced the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration under which Britain agreed to hand Hong Kong to China in 1997, effectively marking the end of the British Empire. In the existing literature, the Sino-British negotiations have been examined from the perspective of diplomacy and interactions between officials. The role of Hong Kong people in influencing the talks has gone almost entirely unnoticed.

This thesis examines how Hong Kong people attempted to influence British, Chinese and colonial officials during the Sino-British negotiations. It ranges across different segments of Hong Kong society including businesspeople, the Governor's appointed advisors, representative bodies, pressure groups, student unions, residents' associations and more. It identifies successful and unsuccessful attempts to shape the negotiations, examines why some Hong Kong people were effective while others were not, and traces the influence of Hong Kong people on the Joint Declaration.

This thesis contributes to the literature on Hong Kong's handover by examining the underexplored yet pivotal role played by Hong Kong people. In so doing, it adds to research on the influence of the citizens of colonies on processes of decolonisation, international negotiation and diplomacy. In recent years, at least a million Hong Kong people have shown their dissent towards the implementation of the Joint Declaration through protests. An officially mandated version of Hong Kong's history is writing over the colonial past and placing primary sources at threat of destruction. This thesis is therefore a timely re-examination of the Sino-British negotiations that puts Hong Kong people at the centre of the most pivotal event in their city's history.

## Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and that I am the sole author of it. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this or any other university. All sources are cited and all secondary sources are acknowledged as references.

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All views and any mistakes are entirely my own.

# Abbreviations

## Archives

|      |   |
|------|---|
| BOHC | Bancroft Library Oral History Center, online                                  |
| BSC  | Bodleian Special Collections, Oxford  |
| CAC  | Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge  |
| CUHK | Chinese University of Hong Kong Special Collections, Hong Kong                |
| HKBU | Hong Kong Baptist University Special Collections, Hong Kong                   |
| HKHP | Hong Kong Heritage Project, Hong Kong   |
| PRO  | Public Records Office, Hong Kong  |
| SSC  | School of Oriental and African Studies (aka SOAS) Special Collections, London |
| TNA  | The National Archives, London   |
| UKPA | Parliamentary Archives, London  |

## Primary sources

Primary sources cited five or more times are given their own shortform; they are:

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| MacLehose BSC interview   | Murray MacLehose, 'Transcript of interviews with The Lord MacLehose of Beoch, KT, GBE, KCMG, KCVO, DL', interview by Steve Tsang (six occasions in April 1989 and March 1991), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 377, BSC     |
| The Galsworthy manuscript | Unpublished manuscript, 'The Hong Kong Negotiations: A Critical History', Anthony Galsworthy, ND, 7051, FOI/Hanslope  |
| Cha BSC interview         | Professor Louis Cha, 'Transcript of interview with Professor Louis Cha', interview by Steve Tsang (c. 1991), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 411, BSC   |
| Chung BSC interview       | Sir S. Y. Chung, 'Transcript of interviews with Sir Sze-yuen Chung, GBE, JP, LLD, DSc, PHD', interview by Steve Tsang (five occasions between 23 January 1989 and 3 January 1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 328, BSC |

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Li BSC interview    | Li Fook-wo, 'Transcript of interviews with Fook-wo Li Esq, CBE, JP, DSSc, FCIB', interview by Steve Tsang (4 and 8 January 1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 334, BSC   |
| Wilson memo FOI/TNA | Memo, Wilson to Morris, 4 August 1982, FCO 40/1456 f516, FOI/TNA   |
| Clift memo TNA      | Memo, Clift to Giffard, 27 August 1982, FCO 40/1465 f33, TNA   |
| Youde telegram TNA  | Telegram, Youde to FCO, 17 August 1982, FCO 40/1457 f536, TNA  |
| Lobo BSC interview  | Roger Lobo, 'Transcript of interviews with Sir Roger Lobo CBE JP LLD', interview by Steve Tsang (12 December 1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 405, BSC   |
| Fang BSC interview  | Harry Fang, 'Transcript of interview with Dr Harry Fang', interview by Steve Tsang (September 1991), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 410, BSC  |
| Tang BOHC interview | Jack Tang, 'The Textile Industry and the Development of Hong Kong, 1949-1999', interview by Carolyn Wakeman (1999), Bancroft Oral History Centre (hereafter, BOHC), 97 <a href="https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu/record/218146?v=pdf">https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu/record/218146?v=pdf</a> (accessed 5 May 2025) |
| ExCo meeting TNA    | Meeting record, Howe and ExCo Unofficials et al., 13 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA   |

## Other abbreviations

|        |                                       |
|--------|---------------------------------------|
| aka    | Also known as                         |
| BDTC   | British Dependent Territories Citizen |
| CCP    | Chinese Communist Party               |
| cf.    | Compare                               |
| ch.    | Chapter                               |
| chs    | Chapters                              |
| Dr     | Doctor                                |
| et al. | And all                               |
| etc.   | Etcetera                              |

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| ExCo   | Executive Council, Hong Kong  |
| f      | File  |
| FCDO   | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (successor to the FCO)   |
| FCO    | Foreign and Commonwealth Office   |
| FOI(A) | Freedom of Information (Act)  |
| HKD    | Hong Kong Department (FCO)  |
| HKMAO  | Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office  |
| HKUSU  | Hong Kong University Student Union  |
| ibid   | Ibidem (the same)   |
| ISD    | Information Services Department (aka Government Information Services)   |
| JLG    | Joint Liaison Group   |
| LegCo  | Legislative Council, Hong Kong  |
| M      | Million (currency)  |
| MP     | Member of Parliament  |
| NA     | No author   |
| ND     | No date   |
| OD(K)  | Oversea and Defence sub-committee of the UK Cabinet (the letter in brackets marks out the particular sub-committee; 'K' was presumably taken from 'Kong') |
| PS     | Private secretary/personal secretary  |
| SCMP   | <i>South China Morning Post</i> , a Hong Kong newspaper   |
| telno. | Telegram or telex number (used in referencing for disambiguation)   |
| UK     | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland  |
| UMELCO | Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Council   |
| US(A)  | United States (of America)  |
| w/     | With (used in referencing for some TNA files)   |

## Introduction

The 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration agreed that, in 1997, Britain would hand sovereignty and administrative control over Hong Kong to Beijing. It also outlined Hong Kong's economic, legal and political systems, and committed that these would not change for 50 years beginning in 1997. Signed by the British and Chinese governments, the Sino-British Joint Declaration was the product of 22 rounds of talks that took place behind closed doors and without a Hong Kong representative at the negotiating table.

Hong Kong became a British colony in three stages. Firstly, in 1842, the Chinese Qing Emperor ceded Hong Kong Island to Britain in perpetuity following the First Opium War. Secondly, in 1860, China ceded the peninsula of Kowloon, which sits to the north of Hong Kong Island, to Britain also in perpetuity after the Second Opium War. Thirdly, in 1898, China leased a swathe of land to the north of Kowloon called the New Territories to Britain for 99 years. These three areas – Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories – became collectively known as 'Hong Kong'.

With the 1898 Lease set to expire on 1 July 1997, British and colonial officials noted a number of concerns. Firstly, the colonial administration, which maintained a monopoly on land, issued leases for individual plots that were due to terminate three days before the end of the 1898 Lease.<sup>1</sup> Leaseholders and those considering entering into agreements for land needed to know what would happen to their plots in order to plan ahead. Secondly, although Britain held Hong Kong Island and Kowloon in perpetuity, the leased New Territories had become inseparable from the ceded areas. The fate of the New Territories therefore extended to the fate of Hong Kong itself. The '1997 issue', as it became known, began with the question of what would happen to leases in the New Territories but grew into the existential question of sovereignty over Hong Kong after 1997.

Conventional histories of the Sino-British negotiations over the future of Hong Kong are written from the perspective of diplomacy between British and Chinese officials. In 1979, Hong Kong's Governor, Sir Murray MacLehose, met the paramount leader of China, Deng Xiaoping, tabling these issues for the first time at an official level. This meeting was followed, in September 1982, by discussions between British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and China's Premier, Zhao Ziyang, and Deng Xiaoping. In 1983 and 1984, British and Chinese representatives engaged

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hughes, *Borrowed Place, Borrowed Time: Hong Kong and Its Many Faces*, 2nd ed. (André Deutsch Limited, 1976), 26; Suzanne Pepper, *Keeping Democracy at Bay: Hong Kong and the Challenge of Chinese Political Reform* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 184.

in formal talks behind closed doors. Negotiators decided that Britain would hand Hong Kong to China in 1997 and formalised this outcome in the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration.

Existing accounts of the Sino-British negotiations conceive of the exchange as an event in diplomatic history executed by the representatives of two sovereign powers who decided Hong Kong's future by themselves. In focusing on the actions of officials, however, Hong Kong people have been largely forgotten from academic examinations, popular history books and public memory alike. The existing literature leaves unanswered questions about Hong Kong people's actions, their role in the negotiations and their influence in shaping the future of their city.

In contrast to the existing literature, this thesis asks: How did Hong Kong people influence the Sino-British negotiations over the future of Hong Kong? This question can be divided into several more. Who in Hong Kong sought to influence the negotiations? Who was the most and least influential? Practically speaking, how did they do so? This thesis also considers how British, Chinese and colonial officials regarded Hong Kong people's views in asking, how did British, Chinese and colonial officials receive, incorporate or seek to counteract Hong Kong people's opinions?

This thesis begins in the late 1970s, when Hong Kong businesspeople pressured the colonial government to address the 1997 issue. It ends in 1984, when the Sino-British Joint Declaration was finalised. Hong Kong's transition from British colony to Chinese sovereignty was not complete until 1997 but this thesis does not range across the entire period of Hong Kong's handover. Extending the period to 1997 so would sacrifice depth of analysis in favour of breadth. Additionally, as will be seen, the voluminous primary sources pertaining to the Sino-British negotiations demands nuanced examination that would be lost were this thesis to attempt to range over a longer time period. Additionally, many primary sources pertaining to the 1990s are not yet available for public inspection. This thesis therefore ends with the signing of the Joint Declaration in December 1984.

## Notes on language

When writing about Hong Kong's history, one's choice of words might be taken to imply a particular political leaning.<sup>2</sup> 'Reunification' and 'resumption of the exercise of sovereignty' are associated with the Chinese government's assertion that China's sovereignty over Hong Kong

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<sup>2</sup> Law Wing Sang, 'Reunification Discourse and Chinese Nationalisms', in *From a British to a Chinese Colony? Hong Kong Before and After the 1997 Handover*, ed. Gary Chi-hung Luk (Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2017).

righted a historical wrong. ‘Handover’ and ‘transfer of sovereignty’ are anathema to Beijing as they imply that Hong Kong was begrudgingly or transactionally given to China. ‘Decolonisation’ has become a contentious term with regards to Hong Kong. Some argue that although the British colonisers left Hong Kong, they were replaced by Chinese colonisers.<sup>3</sup> Beijing maintains that Hong Kong was never a colony but merely temporarily ‘occupied’ by British administrators.<sup>4</sup> Describing the relationship between the governing powers of Hong Kong and the residents of Hong Kong is also a linguistic minefield, with terms such as ‘colonised’, ‘administered’, ‘governed’ and ‘ruled’ each potentially containing their own biases and suppositions. Even describing *what* was negotiated can be contentious: ‘the 1997 issue’, ‘the Hong Kong problem’, ‘the future of Hong Kong’, ‘Hong Kong’s sovereignty’ and other phrases carry their own implications.

This thesis is not a linguistic exploration of the political discourse surrounding the Sino-British negotiations. I could attempt to locate the most politically neutral terms and use them and them only throughout this thesis. Determining what was most politically neutral would, however, be a subjective decision reflecting more about my own view of the words I am using than of how others regard them.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, repeatedly using supposedly neutral terms and only those terms would make for staid reading. Moreover, what is considered neutral today might not be considered neutral tomorrow. Rather than seek agnosticism, I will instead embrace all of the terms above. In so doing, I intend to neuter these terms of their potential political implications.

I use ‘United Kingdom’ (UK), ‘Britain’ and ‘British’ interchangeably. ‘Britain’, ‘London’ and ‘Westminster’ are often used as metonyms for the UK government, and ‘China’ and ‘Beijing’ for the Chinese government. ‘British side’ refers to officials working for either the British government or the Hong Kong government and ‘Chinese side’ refers to officials working for the Chinese government. ‘Hong Kong people’ refers to non-officials who were ordinarily resident in Hong Kong at the time. I do not restrict ‘Hong Kong people’ to Hong Kong *Chinese* people, though this was the major ethnic group and most (but not all) of the Hong Kong people mentioned in this thesis belonged to that group. There are three reasons that ‘Hong Kong people’ and ‘Hong Kong Chinese people’ are not synonymous. Firstly, there were people who belonged to minority ethnic groups who also identified themselves as ‘Hong Kong people’. Secondly, as Helena Wu argues, the

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<sup>3</sup> Gregory B. Lee and Patrick Poon, ‘Hong Kong: The Decolonization That Never Happened’, *Postcolonial Politics* (blog), 4 September 2021 <https://postcolonialpolitics.org/hong-kong-the-decolonization-that-never-happened/> (accessed 18 November 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Michael C. Davis, *Making Hong Kong China: The Rollback of Human Rights and the Rule of Law* (Association for Asian Studies, Inc., 2020), 105; Kang-chung Ng and Angel Woo, ‘City “occupied but never a colony”’, *South China Morning Post* (hereafter, *SCMP*), 3 August 2022, 5.

<sup>5</sup> J. O. Appleby et al., ‘Truth and Objectivity’, in *Telling the Truth about History* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 268.

notion of ‘Chineseness’ in Hong Kong has been defined, re-defined and politically weaponised so much that it has become a somewhat “empty signifier”.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, identification as ‘Hong Kong Chinese’ has become a matter of political contention in recent years. ‘Hong Kong people’ thus embraces a far broader meaning than ‘Hong Kong Chinese people’.

Lastly, during the period being studied, Wade-Giles and pinyin were both used to romanise Mandarin while Yale and Jyutping were both used to romanise Cantonese. Rather than choose one system over another, I instead choose to prioritise consistency, whichever system that reflects. Where applicable, Hong Kong people are described by both their ‘western’ names and their romanised Chinese names.

## Historiography of the Sino-British negotiations

The body of literature on the Hong Kong negotiations is formed of three types of publication: popular histories, memoirs and academic works. It would be uncharitable to assert that Hong Kong people have never been mentioned in the literature. Hong Kong people, however, do not form the focus of existing studies.

The first book length narratives of the Sino-British negotiations were produced by journalists. These popular histories were mostly published in the 1980s and 1990s. Their authors saw the Hong Kong talks as an episode in UK-China diplomatic relations conducted by British and Chinese officials. Few dwelt on Hong Kong people’s attitudes. Frank Ching described the negotiations in even more exclusionary terms: “The talks were held in secret, without the participation of any Hong Kong representatives”.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, William McGurn recalled that “the views of [... the] Chinese inhabitants of the colony remained largely obscured” and that the Joint Declaration was written in such a way so as to “force it down their [Hong Kong people’s] throats”.<sup>8</sup> Some noted certain interactions between Hong Kong people and officials but rarely asserted that the former influenced the latter; for example, Robert Cottrell wrote that Hong Kong people who had meetings with Chinese officials were used by Beijing to “sell its policies directly to the people of Hong Kong” and that the Executive Council – an advisory body that includes Members

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<sup>6</sup> Helena Wu, *The Hangover After the Handover: Places, Things and Cultural Icons in Hong Kong* (Liverpool University Press, 2020), 115.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Ching, *Hong Kong and China: For Better or for Worse* (China Council of The Asia Society and the Foreign Policy Association, 1985), 8.

<sup>8</sup> William McGurn, *Perfidious Albion: The Abandonment of Hong Kong, 1997* (Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1992), 60 and 63.

appointed by the Governor – “never [...] managed to change anything”.<sup>9</sup> David Bonavia described only anecdotal impressions of the Hong Kong public’s attitudes towards the future and noted the results of a 1982 poll commissioned by the pressure group Hong Kong Observers.<sup>10</sup> Hong Kong people were not entirely absent from journalists’ books but were relegated to the peripheries and seen as inconsequential to the talks.

British and Chinese officials published autobiographies in the 1990s and 2000s that included accounts of the Sino-British negotiations.<sup>11</sup> Unsurprisingly, these memoirs also foregrounded UK-China interactions. Occasionally, however, these reminiscences provided insights into how officials handled Hong Kong views. British former Ambassador to Beijing, Sir Percy Cradock, claimed that the British side was always led by their understanding of what Hong Kong people would find acceptable and concluded: “the negotiations were not bilateral but triangular, with Hong Kong as the third party.”<sup>12</sup> Xu Jiatusun was formerly the Head of Xinhua’s Hong Kong office, China’s *de facto* embassy in Hong Kong. In his memoirs, Xu wrote that Hong Kong people could not be represented at the negotiating table because China had “decided that the Sino-British negotiations” were to be “between two governments, and no ‘third party’ would be allowed to participate.”<sup>13</sup> Although Cradock, Xu and others touched on their interactions with or concern for Hong Kong people, contacts between officials took precedence in their accounts.

Academic publications form another tranche literature. Prior to the declassification of official documents, academics had to rely for their sources on the first two groups of publications – journalists’ accounts and autobiographies – as well as newspaper articles, interviews and their

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Cottrell, *The End of Hong Kong: The Secret Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat* (John Murray (Publishers) Ltd., 1993), 100 and 143.

<sup>10</sup> David Bonavia, *Hong Kong 1997: The Final Settlement* (Columbus Books, 1985), 61–68.

<sup>11</sup> David Akers-Jones, *Feeling the Stones: Reminiscences by David Akers-Jones* (Hong Kong University Press, 2004); Denis Bray, *Hong Kong Metamorphosis* (Hong Kong University Press, 2001); Percy Cradock, *Experiences of China* (John Murray (Publishers) Ltd., 1994); Huang Hua, *Huang Hua Memoirs: Contemporary History and Diplomacy of China* (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2008); Li Hou [李后], *The Journey Back [回归的历程]* (Joint Publishing (H.K.) Co., Ltd., 1997); Ping Lu, *The Return of Hong Kong* (China Welfare Institute Publishing House, 2009); Robin McLaren, *Britain’s Record in Hong Kong* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, Asia-Pacific Programme, 1997); Qichen Qian, ‘The Return of Hong Kong and Macao’, in *Ten Episodes in China’s Diplomacy* (HarperCollins, 2005); Man Fong Wong, *China’s Resumption of Sovereignty over Hong Kong* (David C. Lam Institute for East-West Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University, 1997); Wu Jiping [吴吉平], *Record of Sino-British Talks [中英會談風雲錄]* (Sing Tao Daily [星島日報], 1997); Xu Jiatusun [许家屯], *Hong Kong Memoirs [香港回忆录]* (Lianhebao, 1993); Zhou Nan [周南], *Zhou Nan’s Oral History: Reminiscing About the Feather Fan and the Royal Scarf [周南口述：遥想当年羽扇纶巾]* (Qilu Publishing House [齐鲁书社], 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Cradock, *Experiences of China*, 211.

<sup>13</sup> Xu, *Hong Kong Memoirs*, ch. 3.

own experiences. Where academics did note the presence of Hong Kong people, almost all assumed that Hong Kong people did not significantly influence the Sino-British negotiations. For instance, Steve Tsang wrote that Hong Kong people found that their “future was decided without their direct input.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Gao Wanglai said that the Joint Declaration was negotiated “in secrecy with the involvement of only a handful of officials from the two countries [...] Hong Kong people did not have much say in the talks”.<sup>15</sup> James T. H. Tang and Frank Ching wrote that “Hong Kong people were largely denied a direct role in the negotiations about their future”.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Janet C. Y. Lee noted: “China has never allowed Hong Kong representatives to get involved in any negotiations concerning the transitional period.”<sup>17</sup> Academics have, therefore, been unanimous in the view that Hong Kong people had no or a negligible influence over the Sino-British negotiations.

Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in Hong Kong’s handover which has benefitted from the declassification of British government files. This recent wave has included new academic work as well as some popular histories.<sup>18</sup> The assumption that Hong Kong people

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<sup>14</sup> Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004), 230.

<sup>15</sup> Wanglai Gao, ‘Negotiating with China in Power Asymmetry: The Case of Sino-British Negotiations on the Handover of Hong Kong’, *International Negotiation* 14, no. 3 (2009): 476, <https://doi.org/10.1163/138234009X12481782336186>.

<sup>16</sup> James T. H. Tang and Frank Ching, ‘The MacLehose-Youde Years: Balancing the “Three-Legged Stool,” 1971-86’, in *Precarious Balance: Hong Kong Between China and Britain, 1842-1992*, ed. Ming K. Chan (Hong Kong University Press, 1994), 159.

<sup>17</sup> Janet C. Y. Lee, ‘China’s Hong Kong Policy and Political Participation in Hong Kong’, in *Political Participation in Hong Kong: Theoretical Issues and Historical Legacy*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng (Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1999), 31.

<sup>18</sup> Cheung Ka-wai [張家偉], *Secrets from the British Archives: Hong Kong and its Post-Colonial Future* [英國檔案中的香港前途問題] (City University of Hong Kong Press, 2022); Milia Hau, ‘The Official Mind of British Post-Imperialism: Influencing Parliamentary Opinions during the Anglo-Chinese Negotiations on the Future of Hong Kong, 1982-84’, *The International History Review* 43, no. 6 (2021): 1198–216, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2021.1876135>; Matthew Hurst, ‘Britain’s Approach to the Negotiations over the Future of Hong Kong, 1979–1982’, *The International History Review* 44, no. 6 (2022): 1386–401, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2021.2024588>; Matthew Hurst, ‘Negotiating with the Past: China’s Tactical Use of History, Emotion and Identity in the Sino-British Talks on the Future of Hong Kong’, *East Asia* 41, no. 2 (2024): 183–99, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-023-09422-8>; Louisa Lim, *Indelible City: Dispossession and Defiance in Hong Kong* (Riverhead, 2022); Yui Chim Lo, ‘The Last Stand of Colonialism? The Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils and the Sino-British Negotiations Over Hong Kong, 1982–1984’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48, no. 2 (2020): 370–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2019.1689620>; Chi-kwan Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age of Globalisation: Britain, China, and Hong Kong, 1979-89* (Manchester University Press, 2023); Michael Sheridan, *The Gate to China: A New History of the People’s Republic & Hong Kong* (William Collins, 2021); Rong Wei et al., ‘Reassessing Thatcher’s Foreign Policy: The Sino-British Declaration 1984’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 26, no. 3 (2024): 13691481231190502,

played a negligible role, however, has been transposed from earlier publications into more recent ones virtually unchallenged. In his recent book, for instance, Chi-kwan Mark concluded that the views of Hong Kong people “were never a decisive factor for Britain [...] and China”.<sup>19</sup> Access to new sources has, therefore, done little to shake the stubbornly pervasive lens of high diplomacy that continues to dominate the literature on the Sino-British negotiations.

There are a few notable exceptions. One is a 1984 compendium edited by Joseph Y. S. Cheng: *Hong Kong: In Search of a Future*.<sup>20</sup> This volume is not, however, a work of academic analysis. Cheng offered only introductory and contextualising information to reproduced primary sources that fill out the bulk of the book’s pages and did not attempt to trace the influence of Hong Kong people on the negotiations. Similarly, Cheng’s 1984 paper ‘The Future of Hong Kong: Surveys of the Hong Kong People’s Attitudes’ relayed the results of several opinion polls but could not say whether they had shaped officials’ thinking.<sup>21</sup>

Alvin Y. So’s 1993 paper ‘Hong Kong People Ruling Hong Kong!’ examined how Hong Kong middle class pressure groups sought to influence the colonial and Beijing governments from 1982 onwards. It also touched on Hong Kong protestors, delegations, student groups and others.<sup>22</sup> As a paper-length study, however, So lacked the space to examine these interactions in depth. This thesis builds on So’s paper in multiple dimensions. It is much longer, allowing space for a more in-depth and sustained analysis. It begins in the late 1970s rather than 1982 and argues that the prelude to the formal negotiations was important to the result. Also, it does not only examine Hong Kong people’s interactions with the colonial and Chinese governments but also with the British government. Lastly, this thesis uses primary sources that were unavailable to So at the time of his paper.

Journalist Mark Roberti used interviews in an attempt to weave Hong Kong people into the narrative of the negotiations for the book *The Fall of Hong Kong*.<sup>23</sup> The lawyer and pro-democracy activist Martin Lee Chu-ming wrote in the Introduction to the book that: “Roberti shows the sometimes silent but often courageous efforts to secure a better future made by Hong Kong

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<https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481231190502>; Rong Wei and Tim Summers, ‘The Chinese Government’s Negotiating Strategy Over the Future of Hong Kong: Revisiting the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration’, *The International History Review*, ahead of print, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2025.2466463>.

<sup>19</sup> Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 240.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Y. S. Cheng, *Hong Kong: In Search of a Future* (Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Y. S. Cheng, ‘The Future of Hong Kong: Surveys of the Hong Kong People’s Attitudes’, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 12 (1984): 113–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2158991>.

<sup>22</sup> Alvin Y. So, ‘Hong Kong People Ruling Hong Kong! The Rise of the New Middle Class in Negotiation Politics, 1982–1984’, *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 20, no. 2 (1993): 67–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00927678.1993.10771148>.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Roberti, *The Fall of Hong Kong: China’s Triumph and Britain’s Betrayal* (John Wiley & Sons, 1994).

citizens of all backgrounds: appointed advisers, legislators, and grassroots activists.”<sup>24</sup> Despite Roberti’s attempts to introduce Hong Kong people into the narrative, however, the book errs towards the actions of officials. Additionally, published in 1994, Roberti did not have access to official documents that were later declassified and which reflect the influence those Hong Kong people had on the Sino-British talks.

Several books in the social sciences have also sought to foreground the actions of Hong Kong people; they include Linda Butenhoff’s *Social Movements and Political Reform in Hong Kong*, Alvin Y. So’s *Hong Kong’s Embattled Democracy: A Societal Analysis*, Lo Shiu-hing’s *The Politics of Democratization in Hong Kong* and Ming Sing’s *Hong Kong’s Tortuous Democratization: A Comparative Analysis*.<sup>25</sup> These works were published in the 1990s and early 2000s when the prevailing question was how Hong Kong would democratise. Consequently, they concentrate on Hong Kong’s pro-democracy parties and campaigners. Additionally, although they touch on Hong Kong people’s political actions prior to 1984 by way of providing context, they are mainly focused on events after the Joint Declaration was finalised.

Lastly, Hong Kong people’s interactions with officials during the Sino-British negotiations have been noted in Ian Scott’s *Political Change and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Hong Kong* and Hung Ho-fung’s *City on the Edge: Hong Kong under Chinese Rule*.<sup>26</sup> Neither Scott nor Hung offered sustained studies of how Hong Kong people influenced the Sino-British negotiations, however, making their remarks only in passing. This thesis builds on Scott and Hung’s brief comments.

This thesis stands on the shoulders of the above and goes beyond them. It uses many primary sources that became available after most of the above were published and which reveal how Hong Kong people shaped the Sino-British negotiations without simply reproducing these sources (cf. Cheng). It does not restrict its scope to a particular class (cf. So’s focus on middle class pressure groups in ‘Hong Kong People Ruling Hong Kong!’) or political orientation (cf. the pro-democracy groups analysed in Butenhoff, So’s *Embattled Democracy*, Lo and Sing). The result is an analysis untethered from particular groupings or political leanings. Lastly, it makes

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Lee Chu-ming in Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, xix.

<sup>25</sup> Linda Butenhoff, *Social Movements and Political Reform in Hong Kong* (Praeger, 1999); Alvin Y. So, *Hong Kong’s Embattled Democracy: A Societal Analysis* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Shiu-hing Lo, *The Politics of Democratization in Hong Kong* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1997); Ming Sing, *Hong Kong’s Tortuous Democratization: A Comparative Analysis* (Routledge, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> Ho-fung Hung, *City on the Edge: Hong Kong under Chinese Rule* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), especially 122–27; Ian Scott, *Political Change and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Hong Kong* (C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1989), ch. 5.

Hong Kong people and their opinions the consistent focus at the forefront of its study (cf. Roberri, Scott and Hung).

The virtual absence of Hong Kong people from the literature has long been acknowledged but is yet to be addressed. In a 2003 paper, Cindy Yik-yi Chu observed that accounts of the negotiations “concentrated on the interactions between the two governments and regarded Hong Kong people as ‘passive recipients’ in the entire process.”<sup>27</sup> She diagnosed that scholars took the governments involved as their basic unit of analysis, focusing on official interactions with only fleeting mentions of Hong Kong people.<sup>28</sup> This reflects the Westphalian assumption that the territorially bounded state is the basic unit for analysing relations between polities remains sacrosanct.<sup>29</sup> Yet, in the 1980s, Hong Kong people fell between two states: tethered by colonialism to Britain but geographically and historically bound to China. Conceiving of the Sino-British negotiations along national lines thus necessarily excludes Hong Kong people, who did not fall into the political constituency of the British or Chinese state. Chu dubbed this foregrounding of Sino-British relations to the neglect of Hong Kong people the ‘pre-1997 phenomenon’ and called on for future scholarship to focus instead on Hong Kong people. Despite access to declassified files that have enabled historians to delve into the details of the negotiations, recent publications have done little to address this. I advance the idea that Hong Kong people’s exclusion can also be explained by noting that the existing literature takes nations as its basic unit of analysis. Consequently, as the journalist Louisa Lim succinctly put it in her 2022 popular history book: “Hong Kongers had been left out of their own story”.<sup>30</sup> Whereas the existing literature has asked whether the British government failed in its negotiations and how China prevailed, this thesis instead asked how Hong Kong people influenced the process.

## Method: Strategic reading

Locating non-officials within archives is not easy for researchers of any period or geography. Archives are neither apolitical nor unbiased: the acts of creating, collecting, cataloguing and

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<sup>27</sup> Cindy Yik-yi Chu, ‘Back to the Masses: The Historiography of Hong Kong’s Recent Political Developments and the Prospects of Future Scholarship’, *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 10, no. 1 (2003): 30.

<sup>28</sup> Chu, ‘Back to the Masses’.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (Penguin Books, 2015); Magnus Marsden et al., ‘Everyday Diplomacy’, *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 34, no. 2 (2016): 14, <https://doi.org/10.3167/ca.2016.340202>.

<sup>30</sup> Lim, *Indelible City*, 70.

accessing data unavoidably imbue the material with meaning.<sup>31</sup> The documents selected for preservation, their singular perspectives they provide and the inevitable omissions invariably skew our understanding of the past.<sup>32</sup> These issues can be especially acute in colonial collections because when colonial administrators were preparing to leave the territories they had administered, they often disposed of, doctored or curated archival collections in an attempt to curate a legacy of the Empire.<sup>33</sup> Even the catalogues on which historians rely to navigate archive collections tend to reflect hierarchies that were prevalent in the past.<sup>34</sup> It must also be acknowledged that not all groups have historically kept written records, making historians even more reliant on the archive collections produced by colonial administrators.<sup>35</sup> This all makes it difficult to find individuals and groups who did not belong to the echelons of officialdom.

Despite their drawbacks, official archives can be used to locate non-officials. Archives are often polyvalent: they both document official business and reflect the activities of non-officials who find themselves entangled in the official's archive.<sup>36</sup> I engage in what Thomas M. Larkin calls “strategic reading”: finding under-examined actors within the archives of well-known figures and institutions.<sup>37</sup> Strategic reading requires reading past one, dominant voice to find

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<sup>31</sup> Isto Huvila, ‘Introduction’, in *Paradata: Documenting Data Creation, Curation and Use*, ed. Isto Huvila et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2025), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009366564>; Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance’, *Archival Science* 2, no. 2 (2002): 87–109, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435632>.

<sup>32</sup> A. M. Burton, ‘Archive Fever, Archive Stories’, in *Archive Stories: Facts, Factions and the Writing of History*, ed. A. M. Burton (2005); Caroline Elkins, ‘Looking beyond Mau Mau: Archiving Violence in the Era of Decolonization’, *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015): 853, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/120.3.852>; Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, ‘Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory’, *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435628>.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Hampshire, “‘Apply the Flame More Searingly’”: The Destruction and Migration of the Archives of British Colonial Administration: A Southeast Asia Case Study’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 2 (2013): 334–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2013.799349>; Joel Hebert, ‘Dirty Documents and Illegible Signatures: Doctoring the Archive of British Imperialism and Decolonization’, *Modern British History* 35, no. 2 (2024): 199–222, <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwae035>; Tim Livsey, ‘Open Secrets: The British “Migrated Archives”, Colonial History, and Postcolonial History’, *History Workshop Journal* 93, no. 1 (2022): 95–116, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbac002>; Shohei Sato, “‘Operation Legacy’”: Britain’s Destruction and Concealment of Colonial Records Worldwide’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45, no. 4 (2017): 697–719, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2017.1294256>.

<sup>34</sup> Jordanna Bailkin, ‘Where Did the Empire Go? Archives and Decolonization in Britain’, *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015): 885, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/120.3.884>; Schwartz and Cook, ‘Archives, Records, and Power’.

<sup>35</sup> Lars Cornelissen, *Neoliberalism and Race* (Stanford University Press, 2025), 88–89; Rose Miyonga, “‘We Kept Them to Remember’”: Tin Trunk Archives and the Emotional History of the Mau Mau War’, *History Workshop Journal* 96 (2023): 96–114, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbad010>.

<sup>36</sup> Livsey, ‘Open Secrets’, 107.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas M. Larkin, “‘Boys,’ ‘Mandarins,’ and ‘Coolies’”: Searching for Hong Kong’s Chinese Community in the Colonial Archive’, in *East Asia beyond the Archives: Missing Sources and Marginal Voices*, ed.

others that are captured in archives. It involves swimming against the strong currents of suggestion created by the archive's catalogue and composition to locate items that attest to the thoughts and actions of non-officials. This may sound like history from below or subaltern history, where the focus is given to populations excluded from the structures of power.<sup>38</sup> The key difference is that strategic reading is agnostic about the groups one seeks in the archives. Strategic reading is not 'reading against the grain' either, which is concerned not with what a historical artifact says but instead with what it shows about how its creator might have thought.<sup>39</sup> Instead, strategic reading is reading *with* the grain while being selective about the people, groups and sorts of narratives one focuses on.

Three examples will serve to illustrate strategic reading: one example from each of colonial history, political history and Hong Kong history. Chima J. Korieh examined colonised-coloniser interactions in British Nigeria. He drew on the same archives that other historians had used to write conventional histories. Amongst these files, Korieh found petitions by Africans addressed to colonial officials, in whose archival collections these documents had become preserved. By accessing large numbers of items, Korieh uncovered sources that evidenced interactions between non-officials and officials.<sup>40</sup> Pete Millwood examined how everyday people acted as unofficial diplomats between the United States (US) of America (USA) and China. In these two countries, he accessed almost 20 collections created by governmental institutions, former officials, non-governmental organisations and more.<sup>41</sup> Vivian Kong explored how British expatriates residing in Hong Kong challenged the colonial government's mandate to leave the city ahead of Japan's invasion during the Second World War. She accessed official archives finding correspondence between British expatriates and officials. Kong supplemented archive data with newspaper reports and interviews.<sup>42</sup> All three authors accessed archives that had been used to write traditional colonial and political histories. They would have requested large numbers of

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Catherine S. Chan and Tsang Wing Ma (Leiden University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9789400604674.007>.

<sup>38</sup> Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, "History from Below", *Social Scientist* 11, no. 4 (1983): 3–20; D. Chakrabarty, 'Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography', in *Handbook of Historical Sociology*, ed. G. Delanty and E. Isin (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Chima J. Korieh, "May It Please Your Honor": Letters of Petition as Historical Evidence in an African Colonial Context', *History in Africa* 37 (2010): 83–106, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2010.0034>.

<sup>41</sup> Pete Millwood, *Improbable Diplomats: How Ping-Pong Players, Musicians, and Scientists Remade US-China Relations*, Cambridge Studies in US Foreign Relations (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

<sup>42</sup> Vivian Kong, "Hong Kong Is My Home": The 1940 Evacuation and Hong Kong-Britons', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 47, no. 3 (2019): 542–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2018.1539727>.

items and sifted through vast quantities of material, metaphorically searching for needles in haystacks. Each had to resist becoming focused on the elite actors around whom the catalogues and archives were constructed, panning for materials that gave voice to individuals and groups underrepresented in the literature.

My first step was to request large quantities of sometimes seemingly unpromising materials from a range of archives. I accessed over 1,900 folders in more than 20 archives and online repositories during the course of researching for this thesis. The second step was to sift through these collections to find materials that in some way reflected what non-official actors did, said or thought. Within the files accessed, I searched for documents evincing interactions between Hong Kong people and political officials working for the colonial, British and Beijing governments. Additionally, as this thesis is concerned with interactions *between* non-officials and officials, it was necessary to also keep track of files relating to officials: how they engaged with, responded to or sought to counteract non-officials. The third step was to consolidate this archive material and augment it with other sources such as newspapers, autobiographies and secondary literature. Once all of these resources are gathered, pertinent quotes were transcribed, sorted by time and themes, and structured into arguments in order to form chapters. By adopting strategic reading as its main method, this thesis locates Hong Kong individuals and groups that are underrepresented in the literature and traces their influence on the Sino-British negotiations.

Inherent in this method and any other archive-based research is the risk of selection bias.<sup>43</sup> One might object that in my seeking materials that evidence interactions between non-officials and officials, I might uncharitably magnify the role of non-officials and ignore other, far more important forces at play during the Sino-British negotiations. I have mitigated this by counterbalancing cases of successful influence with examples of failure in order to keep the role of Hong Kong people in perspective. Additionally, I have throughout used language carefully to avoid overstating the degree of influence or giving the impression that Hong Kong people alone were responsible for shaping the Sino-British Joint Declaration: they were not. It is, however, necessary to be selective in order to fulfil the remit of this thesis: to examine the role of Hong Kong people in the Sino-British negotiations over the future of Hong Kong.

## Sources

Government archives have been the main source for this thesis. Evidence of interactions between Hong Kong people and officials can be found in letters, telex messages (colloquially called

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<sup>43</sup> R. J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 68–77.

‘telegrams’), faxes, petitions, position papers, reports, meeting records and polling data. Access to British government files has been relatively unproblematic. Most files of interest are open and available at The National Archives (TNA) and Parliamentary Archives (UKPA). In addition, in pursuance of files that had not yet been declassified, I submitted requests under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act (FOIA) to various organs of the British government.<sup>44</sup> I have successfully obtained over 30 folders with my requests for access denied in 55 cases. Material obtained under the FOIA may have only been provided to the author, which limits replicability.<sup>45</sup> I have been explicit in citations where material has been obtained under the FOIA, enabling the reader to determine which sources are publicly available and which may need to be requested under the FOIA.

One of the most useful documents disclosed by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) was an unpublished manuscript written by an official who was present at the talks entitled ‘The Hong Kong Negotiations: A Critical History’ (cited as ‘the Galsworthy manuscript’ after the author, Anthony Galsworthy). This document was intended as an ‘internal history’, meaning a narrative that is commissioned by a government department and usually written by one of the officials involved that summarises a major diplomatic event and which is intended for FCDO staff to use as a reference or for training. This is different from an ‘official history’, where it is commonly a historian rather than an official who is commissioned to write a publication and that publication is intended for public consumption.<sup>46</sup> ‘The Hong Kong Negotiations’, as an *internal* history, was intended for officials’ eyes only. It is consequently far less guarded in its descriptions and criticisms than many of the sources open at TNA.

Colonial era Hong Kong government records are a more complicated matter. The Public Records Office (PRO) in Hong Kong provides access to certain files. The files available tend to be of a low sensitivity grading and thus often provide little insight beyond what is already available in the public domain. Hong Kong has no archives law to require government organs to transfer, appraise and open files and nor does Hong Kong have a legal mechanism comparable to the UK’s

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<sup>44</sup> For a thorough discussion of using the FOIA as a research method, see: Sophie E. Yale et al., ‘Using Freedom of Information Requests to Access Novel Data Sources in Health Professions Education Research’, *Postgraduate Medical Journal* 101, no. 1195 (2024): 481–86, <https://doi.org/10.1093/postmj/qgae166>; also see: Mandy Banton, ‘A “Legacy of Suspicion”: The UK National Archives, the “Migrated Archives” and the Insecticide Debacle of 2022’, *Africa Bibliography, Research and Documentation* 2 (2023): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1017/abd.2023.5>; Roberti also used FOI legislation in writing his book but addressed his queries to the United States government and not the British government (*Fall of Hong Kong*, xiii).

<sup>45</sup> Yale et al., ‘Using Freedom of Information’.

<sup>46</sup> Patrick Salmon and Richard Smith, ‘Introduction’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 36, no. 3 (2025): 552–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2025.2533027>.

FOIA. There is a cache of about 88,000 Hong Kong colonial government records in the UK at an FCDO facility outside Milton Keynes called Hanslope Park. Before the British authorities left Hong Kong, they copied tens of thousands of records onto microform and shipped them to the UK.<sup>47</sup> In 2011, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) admitted it was holding the records of dozens of former British colonies including the Hong Kong records.<sup>48</sup> Subsequently, the FCO transferred

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<sup>47</sup> Matthew Hurst, 'Hong Kong Colonial Government Migrated Archives at Hanslope Park', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, ahead of print, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2025.2561196>.

<sup>48</sup> David M. Anderson, 'Mau Mau in the High Court and the "Lost" British Empire Archives: Colonial Conspiracy or Bureaucratic Bungle?', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011): 699–716, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2011.629082>; David M. Anderson, 'Guilty Secrets: Deceit, Denial, and the Discovery of Kenya's "Migrated Archive"', *History Workshop Journal* 80, no. 1 (2015): 143 and 145–5, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbv027>; Anthony Badger, 'Historians, a Legacy of Suspicion and the "Migrated Archives"', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, nos 4–5 (2012): 799–807, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2012.709761>; Mandy Banton, "'Lost" and "Found": The Concealment and Release of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office "Migrated Archives"', *Comma*, no. 1 (2012): 34, <https://doi.org/10.3828/comma.2012.1.04>; Mandy Banton, 'Destroy? "Migrate"? Conceal? British Strategies for the Disposal of Sensitive Records of Colonial Administrations at Independence', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 2 (2012): 321–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2012.697622>; Mandy Banton, 'Displaced Archives in The National Archives of the United Kingdom', in *Displaced Archives*, ed. James Lowry (Routledge, 2017), 43, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315577609>; Mandy Banton, 'History Concealed, History Withheld: The Story of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office "Migrated Archives" and the Decades-Long International Search for Redress', *Archives: The Journal of the British Records Association* 55, no. 1 (2020): 19, <https://doi.org/10.3828/archives.2020.1>; Banton, 'A "Legacy of Suspicion"'; Huw Bennett, 'Soldiers in the Court Room: The British Army's Part in the Kenya Emergency under the Legal Spotlight', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011): 717–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2011.629083>; Ian Cobain, *The History Thieves: Secrets, Lies and the Shaping of a Modern Nation* (Portobello Books, 2016), ch. 4; Caroline Elkins, 'Alchemy of Evidence: Mau Mau, the British Empire, and the High Court of Justice', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011): 731–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2011.629084>; Elkins, 'Looking beyond Mau Mau'; Vincent Hiribarren, 'Hiding the Colonial Past? A Comparison of European Archival Policies', in *Displaced Archives*, ed. James Lowry (Routledge, 2017), 82, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315577609>; Stephen Howe, 'Flakking the Mau Mau Catchers', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011): 695–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2011.629089>; Jack Michael Stuart Humphrey, 'Keep Calm and Conceal: British Public Record-Keeping Practices and Policies, 1800-2018' (Master's, Middle Tennessee State University, 2018), ch. 3; David Phillips, 'The "Migrated Archives" and a Forgotten Corner of Empire: The British Borneo Territories', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, no. 6 (2016): 1001–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2016.1251557>; Gregory Rawlings, 'Lost Files, Forgotten Papers and Colonial Disclosures: The "Migrated Archives" and the Pacific, 1963–2013', *The Journal of Pacific History* 50, no. 2 (2015): 189–212, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2015.1048585>; Sato, 'Operation Legacy'; Riley Linebaugh, 'Colonial Fragility: British Embarrassment and the So-Called "Migrated Archives"', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 50, no. 4 (2022): 729–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2022.2057740>.

almost all of the colonial papers it held to TNA under catalogue reference FCO 141.<sup>49</sup> The Hong Kong colonial government files were not amongst those transferred to TNA and remain inaccessible. During the course of my research, I submitted requests for three items created by the Hong Kong government that are now at Hanslope Park. One request was denied and two were released but were not of value to this thesis. The reason for only submitting three requests is that there is a limit to the resources that can be expended on addressing an individual requestor's FOI requests and because multiple requests can be rejected on the grounds that they appear to have been submitted mendaciously in order to negatively impact the workload of civil servants.<sup>50</sup> The Hong Kong government files at Hanslope Park remain an untapped potential source but one that remains almost impossible for any researcher to access.

Chinese Foreign Ministry archives have been closed since the early 2010s and have only reopened sporadically with limits on the materials available.<sup>51</sup> It is not unusual to grapple with limited access or a complete lack of access to the archives of authoritarian states. Researchers of the Soviet Union and Russia, for example, have faced similar difficulties. Although there was a brief opening of Soviet archives following the end of the Cold War, files have been reclosed or made practically impossible to access since that brief period of openness.<sup>52</sup> In lieu of reliable access to relevant official archives in mainland China, I have instead recreated interactions between Hong Kong people and Chinese officials using the archives that I can access as well as using the autobiographies of former officials, state newspapers and captured oral histories.

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<sup>49</sup> Livsey, 'Open Secrets', 95; Timothy Lovering, 'Expatriate Archives Revisited', in *Displaced Archives*, ed. James Lowry (Routledge, 2017), 91, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315577609>.

<sup>50</sup> Freedom of Information Act 2000 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents> (accessed 25 December 2025).

<sup>51</sup> Cheung, *Secrets from the British Archives*, xvi; Arunabh Ghosh and Sören Urbansky, 'Introduction', *The PRC History Review* 2, no. 3 (2017): 1–26; Amy King, 'Navigating China's Archives', *Asian Studies Association of Australia* (blog), 2 August 2016 <https://asaa.asn.au/navigating-chinas-archives/> (accessed 5 November 2023); Anatol E. Klass, "'China Marching with India": India's Cold War Advocacy for the People's Republic of China at the United Nations, 1949–1971', *Cold War History*, 2023, 2 fn. 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2023.2217763>; Pete Millwood and Covell F. Meyskens, 'Introduction: Cold War China, Decolonisation, and the Making of International Order in Asia', *Cold War History*, 2025, 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2025.2516721>; Kazushi Minami, 'China's Foreign Ministry Archive: Open or Closed?', *Wilson Center* (blog), 2 October 2017 <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/chinas-foreign-ministry-archive-open-or-closed> (accessed 11 February 2024); Wei and Summers, 'Chinese Government's Negotiating Strategy'.

<sup>52</sup> Jamie Bryson, 'Russian History without Russia: Archive Encounters in an Era of Restricted Access', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, ahead of print, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0080440125100467>; Charles G. Palm, *Documenting Communism: The Hoover Project to Microfilm and Publish the Soviet Archives* (Hoover Institution Press, 2024).

Government archives cannot and do not hold a comprehensive collection of papers relating to a particular topic. Many papers are destroyed shortly after being read. A case in point: soon after the Joint Declaration was initialled, 10 Downing Street decided that it no longer needed to be routinely copied into telegrams about Hong Kong and an official remarked that his “shredding machine will suffer from night starvation”.<sup>53</sup> Even if a file escapes immediate destruction, it might be destroyed at a later stage: only those files deemed to possess ‘historical value’ need to be assessed for release. Finally, there are myriad grounds on which a government department may withhold files, including the perceived possibility that releasing certain material might prejudice international relations.<sup>54</sup> Only an estimated 2% to 5% of the records created by the British government are ever transferred to TNA.<sup>55</sup> It is therefore necessary to access a range of materials other than government archives.

I have also visited archives holding the personal papers of politicians and Hong Kong people. These include the papers of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (Conservative) and Hong Kong-born Member of Parliament (MP) Dr Jeremy Bray (Labour) held at Churchill Archives Centre (CAC) in Cambridge; Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe (Conservative) at Weston Library Special Collections (BSC) in Oxford; Chairman of the Urban Council and founder of Hong Kong Civic Association Hilton Cheong-Leen held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK); and Hong Kong-based social rights activist Elsie Elliott (aka Elsie Tu, née Hulme) held at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU). I have also consulted recorded oral histories and company records held by the Bancroft Library Oral History Center (BOHC) online, Hong Kong Heritage Project (HKHP), BSC and the School of Oriental and African Studies (aka SOAS) Special Collections (SSC) in London.<sup>56</sup> I have also consulted digitised copies of the UK House of Commons and House of Lords and Hong Kong Legislative Council Hansards as well as digital collections of numerous newspapers. Additionally, I have referred to autobiographies, biographies, newspapers and other sources, too.

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<sup>53</sup> Letter, Powell to Appleyard, 2 October 1984, PREM 19/1530, The National Archives (hereafter, TNA).

<sup>54</sup> Public Records Act 1958 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/6-7/51/contents> (accessed 25 December 2025).

<sup>55</sup> Richard Ovenden, *Burning the Books: A History of Knowledge Under Attack* (John Murray (Publishers) Ltd., 2021), 175.

<sup>56</sup> For more detail on the oral histories held at the Bodleian Special Collections (hereafter, BSC), see: Steve Tsang, ‘Modern Hong Kong’, in *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Asian History*, by Steve Tsang (Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.280>.

## Significance of this research

The broadest contribution of this thesis is to put Hong Kong people into the history of the Sino-British negotiations. The talks and the resulting Joint Declaration were the most impactful events in Hong Kong's post-Second World War political history. Yet, as noted above, the existing literature has centred only on British and Chinese officials. This thesis contributes by putting Hong Kong people into the historical narrative.

### *Countering the assumption of political apathy and political impotence*

This thesis argues against the political apathy and political impotence thesis. In the 1970s and 1980s, sociologists such as Lau and Kuan characterised Hong Kong Chinese people as politically apathetic and politically impotent. They blamed a combination of traditional Chinese culture, which supposedly prefers the sort of totalitarian leadership that the colonial Governor embodied, as well as the exclusionary system of the colonial administration.<sup>57</sup>

Academics have argued against the political impotence and political apathy thesis on many fronts, accusing its proponents of failing to consider counterexamples, using poor methodologies and flawed ways of interpreting their data, and adopting overly restrictive definitions. Florence Mok, for instance, argued that the assertion that Hong Kong people were politically apathetic was “ahistorical” and “based on partial evidence that was primarily drawn from interview data”.<sup>58</sup> Mok has demonstrated that, despite restrictions on political expression and few means by which to channel views to the colonial government, Hong Kong people were engaged with and able to influence colonial politics.<sup>59</sup> Lo Shiu-hing set his sights on highlighting methodological issues with the surveys underpinning Lau and Kuan's conclusions and pointed to several ways in which their interpretation of the data was flawed.<sup>60</sup> Lo, Michael E. DeGolyer and Janet Lee Scott, and Lam Wai-Man have all argued that Lau's definition of ‘political participation’

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<sup>57</sup> Siu-kai Lau, *Society and Politics in Hong Kong*, 2nd ed. (Chinese University Press, 1984); Siu-kai Lau, ‘Utilitarianistic Familism: The Basis of Political Stability’, in *Social Life and Development in Hong Kong*, ed. Ambrose Y. C. King and Rance P. L. Lee (Chinese University Press, 1984); Siu-kai Lau and Hsin-chi Kuan, *The Ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese*, 4th ed. (Chinese University Press, 1995).

<sup>58</sup> Florence Mok, ‘Public Opinion Polls and Covert Colonialism in British Hong Kong’, *China Information* 33, no. 1 (2019): 68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X18787431>.

<sup>59</sup> Florence Mok, *Covert Colonialism: Governance, Surveillance and Political Culture in British Hong Kong, c. 1966-97* (Manchester University Press, 2023).

<sup>60</sup> Shiu Hing Lo, ‘Citizen Participation, Political Culture and Governability in Hong Kong: A Critique of the Psychocultural Approach’, in *Political Participation in Hong Kong: Theoretical Issues and Historical Legacy*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng (City University of Hong Kong, 1999).

was overly narrow.<sup>61</sup> Lo proposed as a replacement: “the activity of citizens to influence government policy or to affect the government’s allocation of resources” and outlined three modes this could take: “elections, group activity, and violence”.<sup>62</sup> By adopting a broader understanding of ‘political participation’, identifying methodological failures and highlighting innumerable counterexamples, scholars have roundly defeated the political apathy and impotence thesis.

The absence of Hong Kong people from the literature is excused on the basis that they were neither interested nor consequential in the talks. For Law Wing Sang, the fact that the 1980s witnessed political “inaction is understandable because most Hong Kong people were then still trapped by their long-held political apathy.”<sup>63</sup> Joseph Y. S. Cheng similarly wrote: “most people in Hong Kong have neither an adequate understanding nor a firm position regarding the issue of Hong Kong’s future [...] the vast majority of Hong Kong people are politically apathetic [...] and] feel impotent and helpless”.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Cheng believed that Hong Kong people continued to be disinterested in politics for the following decade. In 1988, he lamented: “there is still widespread political apathy in Hong Kong”.<sup>65</sup> In 1994, he also criticised that: “the community has become amazingly apathetic.”<sup>66</sup> Steve Tsang also cited the impotence of Hong Kong people: “the Sino-British negotiations [...] epitomised the political impotence of the people of Hong Kong.”<sup>67</sup> Popular history books have agreed. William McGurn wrote that “Hong Kong people have sustained an almost militant indifference to politics”.<sup>68</sup> Ian Scott was equally clear: “Before the

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<sup>61</sup> Michael E. DeGolyer and Janet Lee Scott, ‘The Myth of Political Apathy in Hong Kong’, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 547, no. 1 (1996): 68–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716296547001006>; Wai-Man Lam, ‘An Alternative Understanding of Political Participation: Challenging the Myth of Political Indifference in Hong Kong’, *International Journal of Public Administration* 26, no. 5 (2003): 473–96, <https://doi.org/10.1081/PAD-120019232>; Shiu-hing Lo, ‘Political Participation in Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan’, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 20, no. 2 (1990): 239–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472339080000131>.

<sup>62</sup> Lo, ‘Political Participation’, 239.

<sup>63</sup> Sang, ‘Reunification Discourse’, 253.

<sup>64</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 15–16. Cheng also expressed his belief that Hong Kong people were politically apathetic and felt politically impotent in: ‘Future of Hong Kong: Surveys’, 113; ‘The 1985 District Board Elections in Hong Kong’, in *Hong Kong in Transition*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng (Oxford University Press, 1986), 68. Cheng believed that the Hong Kong public remained apathetic into the late 1980s and 1990s; see for example: ‘Hong Kong: The Decline of Political Expectations and Confidence’, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 19/20 (1988): 241, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2158547>; ‘Sino-British Negotiations on Hong Kong During Chris Patten’s Governorship’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 48, no. 2 (1994): 229, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357719408445134>.

<sup>65</sup> Cheng, ‘Hong Kong’, 258 and 255.

<sup>66</sup> Cheng, ‘Sino-British Negotiations’, 239.

<sup>67</sup> Tsang, *A Modern History*, 230.

<sup>68</sup> McGurn, *Perfidious Albion*, 79.

negotiations on their future, Hong Kong people were often characterised, probably correctly, as politically apathetic”.<sup>69</sup>

Despite having been shown to be wrong, the assumption of apathy and impotence pervades the literature on the Sino-British negotiations both implicitly and explicitly. It is important to ask how Hong Kong people engaged with and influenced the talks because the negotiations brought about the most significant change in Hong Kong’s history. The Joint Declaration has affected every person, institution and system in Hong Kong from its completion in 1984 to the present and continues to affect the lives of some 7 million people today. The Sino-British negotiations also heralded the end of the British Empire. While academics have proven the political apathy and political impotence thesis wrong in other contexts, it remains to be seen whether Hong Kong people were apathetic and impotent with regards to the Sino-British negotiations over the future of Hong Kong. The first contribution of this thesis to Hong Kong studies is that it adds to work that argues against the political apathy and impotence thesis by producing numerous counterexamples to the thesis that demonstrate political engagement and influence. Moreover, it contributes to the historiography of the Sino-British negotiations, which remains under the impression that apathy and impotence explain the absence of Hong Kong people from the historical narrative.

### *Hong Kong political participation beyond protest*

A related contribution is to argue against the preoccupation with protest as a means of political participation. In 2014 and again in 2019, large-scale protests in Hong Kong occupied large areas of the city and sometimes turned violent. Many protestors argued against Beijing’s increasing control over Hong Kong by articulating arguments based on human rights, democracy and self-determination. These recent events in Hong Kong have seemingly inspired some writers to find acts of protest, riot and rebellion in Hong Kong’s past, with some looking back as far as 1,000 years for examples. Some have concluded that protest is a quintessential mode of political participation in Hong Kong and even that it is constitutive of a unique Hong Kong identity with protests in 2014 and 2019 only recent instances in a long history of Hong Kong people resisting outside powers, both colonial and imperial Chinese. I coin this the ‘city of protest thesis’, borrowing from the title of Anthony Dapiran’s *City of Protest: A Recent History of Dissent in Hong Kong*.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Scott, *Political Change*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Antony Dapiran, *City of Protest: A Recent History of Dissent in Hong Kong* (Penguin Group (Australia), 2017).

The city of protest thesis has taken different articulations with claims ranging in scope and strength. Dapiran examined several protests and riots in Hong Kong's post-Second World War colonial history. The Cultural Revolution-inspired riots in 1967 were especially significant, Dapiran argued, as they marked the moment when "a distinct people: the Hong Kongers" began to emerge.<sup>71</sup> This connection between protest and identity was entrenched by the 2019 riots, when "a new Hong Kong identity was forged". Dapiran was explicit, however, that while protest shaped Hong Kong identity, this identity did not gravitate sufficiently far from Chinese identity to imply a need for a separation: "This is not to imagine an identity beyond Chinese sovereignty, but perhaps an identity of a place that stands in a new relation to its sovereign."<sup>72</sup>

Hung Ho-fung and Louisa Lim advanced even stronger versions of the city of protest thesis. Hung examined episodes of riot and rebellion from the year 1197 onwards. Drawing a line between these twelfth century examples and the present day, Hung concluded that Hong Kong has "never been submissive" to power but has instead been "marked by its [...] recalcitrance" and that its "long history of resistance [...] helps us make sense of the city's post-handover development".<sup>73</sup> The implication here is that protest in 1197 and protest in 2019 are both characteristic of Hong Kong people's resistance to external interference and indicative of Hong Kong people's political sensibilities. Lim also examined examples from the twelfth century and drew parallels between those events and acts of resistance during the colonial era. For Lim, protest marked Hong Kong people out as separate from the rest of China. The 2019 protests in particular allowed Hong Kong people "see themselves as a nation, a political community with a distinctive identity and an appetite for autonomy."<sup>74</sup> In positing Hong Kong as its own nation-state, Lim articulates the strongest version of the city of protest thesis of the three.

There are several issues with the city of protest thesis. Firstly, the area that we now call 'Hong Kong' did not exist some 800 years ago. 'Hong Kong' as we call it today was assembled by the British between the 1840s and 1890s and was not 'Hong Kong' before then.<sup>75</sup> Secondly, if protest supposedly distinguishes Hong Kong from China, then proponents of the city of protest thesis must explain how we are to regard the many uprisings, protests and civil wars that occurred in China over the same timespan. Given that both Hong Kong and China have witnessed protests, it seems that protests shows that Hong Kong *is* a part of China rather than separate from it. This

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<sup>71</sup> Antony Dapiran, *City on Fire: The Fight for Hong Kong* (Scribe Publications, 2020), 150.

<sup>72</sup> Dapiran, *City on Fire*, 298.

<sup>73</sup> Hung, *City on the Edge*, 198–99.

<sup>74</sup> Lim, *Indelible City*, 217–18.

<sup>75</sup> Matthew Hurst, "'Indelible City: Dispossession and Defiance in Hong Kong" by Louisa Lim [book review]', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong* 63 (2023): 328–29.

thesis avoids these first two issues as its temporal scope stays within the colonial era and it does not argue that protest is characteristic of Hong Kong.

A third issue is that proponents are fond of drawing parallels and connections between past protests and recent demonstrations yet fail to show that earlier protests inspired later ones. City of protest literature uses the present as a guide to the past. This is not uncommon; as Leo K. Shin observes: “how the history of the territory is recounted is often linked to the political and cultural conditions of the day.”<sup>76</sup> It is, however, meaningless and a teleological reading of history. In most cases, there was little or no continuity of actors between the case studies examined and recent events, and no clear reference to historical acts of resistance made by contemporaneous protest leaders. While drawing similarities, such authors have ignored dissimilarities such as different motivations, different actors, different geopolitical contexts and different technological contexts, too.<sup>77</sup> Drawing conclusions about the present by finding similarities with the past where there is no demonstrable link between the past and the present is meaningless. This thesis does not use history to make points about contemporary politics in Hong Kong. Connections are only made between the past and the present where there is a tangible, evidencable connection between the people, events and decisions of the 1980s and the Hong Kong of today.

Lastly and most significantly, by concentrating on street protests, riots and wars and calling this characteristic of Hong Kong political participation, city of protest literature neglects other forms of political participation. In defending their political apathy and political impotence thesis, Lau and Kuan defined ‘political participation’ narrowly; proponents of the city of protest thesis assume a similarly restricted sense of the methods that demonstrate political participation, focusing above all else on street protests. This thesis does not limit itself to a narrow understanding of ‘protest’ or of ‘political participation’ and examines a far wider range of political participatory methods and forms of resistance.

### *A new diplomatic history approach to Hong Kong studies*

In this thesis, I bring a new diplomatic history approach to Hong Kong studies. New diplomatic history is a relatively new subspecies of diplomatic history concerned with the impact that informal or non-official spaces, places, practices and people have in the conduct of (official)

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<sup>76</sup> Leo K. Shin, *The “National Question” and the Stories of Hong Kong*, ed. Yiu-Wai Chu, The Humanities in Asia (Springer Singapore, 2017), 131, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3668-2\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3668-2_7).

<sup>77</sup> Christopher J. H. Ho, ‘Civil Disobedience in the Era of Videogames: Digital Ethnographic Evidence of the Gamification of the 2019-20 Extradition Protests in Hong Kong’, *British Journal of Chinese Studies* 12, no. 2 (2022): 101–13, <https://doi.org/10.51661/bjocs.v12i2.187>.

diplomacy.<sup>78</sup> Similar approaches can be found in other disciplines under different names such as ‘everyday’, ‘informal’, ‘grassroots’, ‘public’ and ‘popular’ diplomacy.<sup>79</sup> In international relations, for instance, this framing is better known as ‘new diplomacy’.<sup>80</sup>

New diplomatic history can trace its origins back to the Cold War when anthropologists and political scientists carried out research into the role of people to people contacts in forging peace and facilitating mutual understanding between ideologically opposed nations.<sup>81</sup> After the Cold War, this research transmogrified into sociological and political sciences studies of how non-governmental organisations and other grassroots actors mediated international relations. In recent decades, researchers have been especially interested in how culture, identity and the public’s perceptions of other nations can affect international relations.<sup>82</sup> New diplomatic history transposes aspects from all of these waves of social scientific enquiry into the humanities, examining how non-official places and people have shaped diplomacy. Numerous recent studies have applied a new diplomatic history lens to studying China’s international relations with other nations.<sup>83</sup> There has, however, been no new diplomatic history analysis of the Sino-British negotiations nor has new diplomatic history been explicitly applied to Hong Kong political history.

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<sup>78</sup> Tessa de Boer et al., ‘Provincializing “New” Diplomatic History: An Interdisciplinary Manifesto’, *Diplomatica* 7 (2025): 227–49, <https://doi.org/10.1163/25891774-bja10148>; Jennifer Mori, ‘The State of the Art. The Way of the Future’, *Diplomatica* 1, no. 1 (2019): 5–12, <https://doi.org/10.1163/25891774-00101002>.

<sup>79</sup> Melissa Conley Tyler and Craig Beyerinck, ‘Citizen Diplomacy’, in *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, ed. Costas M. Constantinou et al. (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957930>; Marsden et al., ‘Everyday Diplomacy’.

<sup>80</sup> Shaun Breslin, ‘Beyond Diplomacy? UK Relations with China since 1997’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6, no. 3 (2004): 410, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2004.00147.x>.

<sup>81</sup> Felix Haass et al., ‘Citizens in Peace Processes’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 66, no. 9 (2022): 1547–61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220027221089691>; Lior Lehrs, ‘Unusual Peacebuilders’, in *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*, 2nd ed., ed. Roger Mac Ginty (Routledge, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003293408-8>; Marsden et al., ‘Everyday Diplomacy’, 8.

<sup>82</sup> Marsden et al., ‘Everyday Diplomacy’, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Gordon Barrett, *China’s Cold War Science Diplomacy* (Cambridge University Press, 2022); Cyril Cordoba and Kaixuan Liu, ‘Unconditional Followers of the PRC? Friendship Associations with China in France and Switzerland, 1950s–1980s’, in *Europe and China in the Cold War: Exchanges Beyond the Bloc Logic and the Sino-Soviet Split*, ed. Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl et al. (Brill, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004388123>; Sofia Graziani, ‘The Case of Youth Exchanges and Interactions Between the PRC and Italy in the 1950s’, *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017): 194–226, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X16000305>; Sophia Graziani, ‘China’s Communist Youth League, Transnational Networks and Sino–European Interactions in the Early Cold War’, in *Europe and China in the Cold War: Exchanges Beyond the Bloc Logic and the Sino-Soviet Split*, ed. Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl et al. (Brill, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004388123>; Judd Kinzley, *Uneasy Allies: Sino-American Relations at the Grassroots, 1937-1949* (Cambridge University Press, 2024); Hongshan Li, *Fighting on the Cultural Front: U.S.-China Relations in the Cold War* (Columbia University Press, 2023); Yiqing Li, ‘Art Diplomacy: Drawing China-Indonesia Relations in the Early Cold War, 1949–1956’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 10 August 2023, 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X23000227>; Pete Millwood, ‘An “Exceedingly

Three major schools dominate Hong Kong studies. The colonial school draws on official sources and focuses on colonial administrators. The Beijing school (also called the Marxist or nationalist school) also draws on official sources but does so more critically in its aim to demonstrate that Hong Kong was historically part of China in the hopes of convincing Hong Kong readers to identify with the motherland. The Hong Kong school is a reaction against both the colonial and the Beijing school. As Christopher Munn described it, the Hong Kong school “takes Hong Kong and its people, rather than colonial government or the diplomatic relationships between China and Britain, as its central subject of study.”<sup>84</sup> The Hong Kong school is explicit that it is not concerned with “the problems of colonial government” or as seeing Hong Kong as merely “a topic in diplomatic relations”.<sup>85</sup> Munn describes the work of Carl T. Smith, an early proponent of the Hong Kong school, as having pushed “governors, officials and European merchants” into “distant shadows” while allowing Hong Kong people to “move to centre stage”.<sup>86</sup> Smith achieved this by engaging in his own kind of strategic reading: Smith would review a variety of sources ranging from seemingly tangential archives, genealogical databases, newspapers and individuals’ accounts to critically re-reading official sources, then forming from these fragments a description of the pattern of life in Hong Kong.<sup>87</sup> It must also be noted that Smith was preoccupied with Hong Kong Chinese people, leaving the histories of Hong Kong’s ethnic minorities under-researched.<sup>88</sup>

The three dominant schools of Hong Kong studies conceal a binary choice: one must either study Hong Kong from the official level (as in the colonial and Beijing schools) or research Hong Kong from the perspective of Hong Kong people (as in the Hong Kong school). Adopting a new diplomatic history approach to Hong Kong political history allows us to break from the binary

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Delicate Undertaking”: Sino-American Science Diplomacy, 1966–78’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 56, no. 1 (2021): 166–90, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009419888273>; Millwood, *Improbable Diplomats*; Kazushi Minami, *People’s Diplomacy: How Americans and Chinese Transformed US-China Relations During the Cold War*, The United States in the World (Cornell University Press, 2024); Angela Romano and Valeria Zanier, ‘Circumventing the Cold War: The Parallel Diplomacy of Economic and Cultural Exchanges Between Western Europe and Socialist China in the 1950s and 1960s: An Introduction’, *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X1600038X>; Gongchen Yang, ‘James Flint and the 1759 Petition: The Influence of British Intermediaries on the East India Company’s China Trade and Sino-British Encounters’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 2025, 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2025.2540304>; Yanqiu Zheng, *In Search of Admiration and Respect: Chinese Cultural Diplomacy in the United States, 1875–1974* (University of Michigan Press, 2024).

<sup>84</sup> Christopher Munn, ‘Introduction’, in *Anglo-China: Chinese People and British Rule in Hong Kong, 1841–1880* (Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 9.

<sup>85</sup> Christopher Munn, ‘Introduction to the Paperback Edition’, in *Chinese Christians: Elites, Middlemen, and the Church in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong University Press, 2005), xix.

<sup>86</sup> Munn, ‘Introduction to the Paperback’, xv.

<sup>87</sup> Munn, ‘Introduction’, 9.

<sup>88</sup> Kate Lowe, ‘Hong Kong’s Missing History’, *History Today*, December 1991, 10.

implicit in these three schools. Rather than being forced to choose between studying officials or non-officials, this thesis instead examines interactions between the two. In so doing, it argues that Hong Kong people and political officials did not operate separately from each other; instead, it finds that the line between state and society was more porous than previously conceived. Adopting a new diplomatic history approach broadens the pool of actors considered to be involved in the negotiations, identifies a range of contexts in which they operated and shows how ideas were transacted between Hong Kong people on the one hand and colonial, British and Chinese officials on the other.

### *Contributions to Chinese studies*

The existing literature has noted Beijing's attempts to forge a United Front with Hong Kong elites during the Sino-British negotiations. When used in relation to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), 'United Front' means a union of forces joined for the purpose of achieving a task.<sup>89</sup> The term originally referred to a coalition between the CCP and the Kuomintang, formed initially at the Comintern's behest in 1923, and another coalition between the two parties established in 1937 in opposition to Japan's invasion of China.<sup>90</sup> The phrase has since been used to describe various alliances that the CCP has forged with different groups depending on China's prevailing policies and objectives.<sup>91</sup>

In the 1980s under Deng Xiaoping, two goals shaped the CCP's activities in Hong Kong: one was making Hong Kong contribute to China's economic modernisation and the other was reunifying Hong Kong as well as Macao and Taiwan with mainland China.<sup>92</sup> In pursuance of these objectives, Beijing tried to build a United Front with Hong Kong capitalists and the professional class, using their knowledge to facilitate China's reengagement with the global economy and seeking their support to ease reunification.<sup>93</sup> According to Peter E. Hamilton, China's project of

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<sup>89</sup> Christine Loh, *Underground Front: The Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong*, 2nd ed. (Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 27.

<sup>90</sup> Tom Buchanan, 'China and the British Left in the Twentieth Century: Transnational Perspectives', *Labor History* 54, no. 5 (2013): 545, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2013.849926>; Cindy Yik-yi Chu, *Chinese Communists and Hong Kong Capitalists: 1937-1997* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 13; Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (Routledge, 2005), 199.

<sup>91</sup> Chu, *Chinese Communists*, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Loh, *Underground Front*, 125.

<sup>93</sup> Tai-lok Lui et al., eds, *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Hong Kong* (Routledge, 2019), 7; Sheridan, *Gate to China*, 41 and 44.

building relations with Hong Kong elites began at least as early as 1977.<sup>94</sup> In Leo F. Goodstadt's words, Beijing attempted to "woo" of Hong Kong's capitalists by suspending its hostility towards them and folding them into mainland Chinese representative bodies.<sup>95</sup> This "wooing" Hong Kong's business community, Suzanne Pepper wrote, included a concerted effort to soothe "Anxious businessmen", who were "wined and dined and sent off to Beijing, where they received repeated assurances".<sup>96</sup> Cindy Yik-yi Chu wrote that when Xu Jiatun was appointed as the Head of Xinhua "to cultivate a group of 'pro-China' capitalists in Hong Kong".<sup>97</sup>

The existing literature has, however, seen this United Front as only allowing influence to flow in one direction: from Beijing to Hong Kong people. That is, the literature has seen Hong Kong people as merely the passive recipients of Beijing's messaging rather than participants in an exchange of views. This thesis contributes towards Chinese studies by adding to the literature on the CCP's United Front practices. It argues that Beijing had a dualistic relationship with Hong Kong public opinion wherein Chinese officials both sought Hong Kong views and tried to manipulate them. Chinese officials channelled Hong Kong people's views to senior leaders in Beijing through secret meetings and monitoring local newspapers for expressions of the public's opinions. Moreover, these sources of Hong Kong thoughts had an effect on Chinese official thinking. At the same time, China created propaganda that sought to influence Hong Kong people. The CCP, therefore, allowed influence to flow in both directions to an extent.

### *Contributions to the history of decolonisation*

In recent years, academics and the public alike have begun to critically re-examine Britain's colonial legacy.<sup>98</sup> Historians of decolonisation have turned their attentions away from officials

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<sup>94</sup> Peter E. Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong: Transpacific Networks and a New History of Globalization* (Columbia University Press, 2020), 238.

<sup>95</sup> Leo F. Goodstadt, 'China and the Selection of Hong Kong's Post-Colonial Political Elite', *The China Quarterly* 163 (2000): 728, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000014636>.

<sup>96</sup> Pepper, *Keeping Democracy at Bay*, 194.

<sup>97</sup> Chu, *Chinese Communists*, 70.

<sup>98</sup> Alice Procter, *The Whole Picture: The Colonial Story of the Art in Our Museums & Why We Need to Talk About It* (Cassell, 2021); Astrid Rasch, "'Keep the Balance": The Politics of Remembering Empire in Postcolonial Britain', *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 7, no. 2 (2020): 212–30, <https://doi.org/10.5744/jcps.2019.1007>; Astrid Rasch, 'Exemplar Empires: Battles Over Imperial Memory in Contemporary Britain', in *British Culture After Empire: Race, Decolonisation and Migration Since 1945*, ed. Josh Doble et al. (Manchester University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526159755.00018>; Charlotte Lydia Riley, *Imperial Island: A History of Empire in Modern Britain* (The Bodley Head, 2023).

and towards the experiences of colonised people and how they interacted with processes of decolonisation.<sup>99</sup> Hong Kong is yet to receive the same treatment.

Academics often forget Hong Kong entirely from purportedly world histories of decolonisation.<sup>100</sup> John M. Carroll noted that “Scholars of British colonialism concentrated mainly on Africa and India”.<sup>101</sup> Although Carroll was writing in 2007, the same criticism applies to more recent publications, too. Charlotte Lydia Riley’s 2023 book *Imperial Island: A History of Empire in Modern Britain*, for instance, lends just three substantive pages to Hong Kong.<sup>102</sup> Alan Lester’s 2024 edited volume *The Truth About Empire: Real Histories of British Colonialism* features contributions from 16 historians but Hong Kong is mentioned only once in the Introduction.<sup>103</sup> The same is true of recent popular publications: Sathnam Sanghera’s 2021 book *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain*, for example, makes no substantial mention of Hong Kong whatsoever.<sup>104</sup>

Hong Kong may have become Britain’s forgotten colony owing to the unique aspects of Hong Kong’s colonisation and decolonisation. Hong Kong was not a settler colony, exploited for natural resources, part of a civilising mission nor entirely ceded to the British. The British withdrawal from Hong Kong was the result of a peaceful process of negotiation between two sovereign states protracted across more than a decade and that did not result in the exercise of self-determination or independence. Additionally, whereas most other British colonies were decolonised within post-Second World War and Cold War contexts, Hong Kong’s handover came far later in the twentieth century. Whatever the reason, Hong Kong remains almost entirely absent from both academic and popular histories of decolonisation. This thesis adds Hong Kong into the historical literature on decolonisation. In so doing, it both fills the lacuna in the existing academic literature and encourages Britain’s forgotten colony to be remembered by the public.

Relatedly, a substantial proportion of the literature on political participation within colonial contexts centres on activists who were liberal in their orientation, being anti-imperialist

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<sup>99</sup> Amanda Behm et al., ‘Decolonizing History: Enquiry and Practice’, *History Workshop Journal* 89 (2020): 169–91, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbz052>.

<sup>100</sup> Stephen Howe, ‘Decolonisation and Imperial Aftershocks: The Thatcher Years’, in *Making Thatcher’s Britain*, ed. Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 234, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511998164.017>.

<sup>101</sup> John M. Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 2.

<sup>102</sup> Riley, *Imperial Island*, 226–28.

<sup>103</sup> Alan Lester, ed., *The Truth About Empire: Real Histories of British Colonialism* (Hurst & Company, 2024), 22.

<sup>104</sup> Sathnam Sanghera, *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain* (Viking, 2021).

and pro-democratic.<sup>105</sup> Many expressed themselves in universalist or globalist terms, articulating their fight for independence in the language of the human right to self-determination, and made representations to international organisations, such as the United Nations.<sup>106</sup> In contrast, this thesis shows that most Hong Kong people were conservative in the sense that they initially wanted the colonial administration to continue and were wary of democracy. This thesis, therefore, contributes a contrasting case study to the literature on political participation within a colonial context.

### *Connections between the past and the present*

The Sino-British negotiations and the 1984 Joint Declaration determined Hong Kong's post-1997 future. The details agreed between British and Chinese officials have shaped the city and the lives of more than 7 million people to the present day. But the interpretation and implementation of what was agreed has proven contentious. As noted above, large-scale and sometimes violent protests that erupted in Hong Kong in 2014 and again in 2019 evidenced the discontentment of a significant proportion of the public. Subsequently, Hong Kong became a major flashpoint in international relations. In 2020, Beijing imposed a National Security Law on Hong Kong. The following year, Britain responded by opening a *de facto* refugee route allowing Hong Kong people to come to the UK and providing a pathway towards citizenship. Beijing reacted angrily, accusing London of interference in China's internal affairs. The Joint Declaration has remained a thorny

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<sup>105</sup> See for example: Ama Biney, *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Jack Corbett and Wouter Veenendaal, 'Westminster in Small States: Comparing the Caribbean and Pacific Experience', *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 4 (2016): 432–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2016.1175096>; Norman Girvan, 'Assessing Westminster in the Caribbean: Then and Now', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 53, no. 1 (2015): 95–107, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2014.993162>; Tim Harper, *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire*, 2nd ed. (Harvard University Press, 2021); Stephanie Lawson, *Tradition versus Democracy in the South Pacific: Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511470165>; Kate Quinn, 'Introduction: Revisiting Westminster in the Caribbean', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 53, no. 1 (2015): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2014.993146>; Nazmul S. Sultan, 'Self-Rule and the Problem of Peoplehood in Colonial India', *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 1 (2020): 81–94, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000601>.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Davies et al., 'Rethinking Transnational Activism through Regional Perspectives: Reflections, Literatures and Cases', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0080440123000294>.

point of contestation throughout, serving as a locus of tension in the relationship between the UK and China.<sup>107</sup>

Hong Kong has become an issue in other geopolitical relationships, too. Multiple countries have offered sanctuary to Hong Kong people fleeing the city, with almost half a million estimated to have left between 2020 and 2024.<sup>108</sup> The USA took an especially firm stance, revoking Hong Kong's special economic status saying that it was "the same as mainland China", which in turn invited criticism from the World Trade Organization.<sup>109</sup> These and other local, regional and international tensions are intertwined with the Sino-British negotiations because they have at their centre differing interpretations of the agreements reached between British and Chinese negotiators. Yet Hong Kong people remain absent from this historical picture.

Reacting to these and other objectionable events, some Hong Kong people have revisited the city's past and found solace in the previous administration. Those that have developed a nostalgia for the colonial era tend, however, to use a selective reading of history to make political points about contemporary politics.<sup>110</sup> Mark Hampton and Florence Mok argue that such nostalgia is found most commonly amongst younger Hong Kong people who, despite having no direct experience or memories of the colonial era, are so distrusting of the narratives portrayed by the current government that they have forged their own collective memory based more on emotion than veridical primary sources.<sup>111</sup>

Facts are increasingly hard to come by in today's Hong Kong. Books are being banned and removed from library shelves.<sup>112</sup> Newspapers are being blacklisted and newsagents dare not

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<sup>107</sup> Tim Summers, 'The Politics of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong, 2014–2024', *Asian Affairs* 56, no. 3 (2025): 492–515, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2025.2510454>.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Mo, 'How Should the World Perceive Today's Hong Kong?', *The Diplomat* (blog), 1 August 2024 <https://thediplomat.com/2024/08/how-should-the-world-perceive-todays-hong-kong/> (accessed 25 August 2025).

<sup>109</sup> 'Trump ends preferential economic treatment for Hong Kong', *BBC News*, 15 July 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-53412598> (accessed 25 August 2025).

<sup>110</sup> Amy Hawkins and Helen Davidson, "'The old days are no more": Hong Kong goes quiet as security laws tighten their grip', *The Guardian*, 12 April 2024 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/12/hong-kong-national-security-law-2020-impacts> (accessed 29 April 2024); Florence Mok, 'Remembering Colonial Hong Kong: Memory vs History', *The Diplomat* (blog), 1 August 2023 <https://thediplomat.com/2023/07/remembering-colonial-hong-kong-memory-vs-history/> (accessed 18 September 2023).

<sup>111</sup> Mark Hampton and Florence Mok, 'Remembering British Rule: The Use of Colonial Memory in Hong Kong Protest Movements, 1997-2019', in *Memory and Modern British Politics: Commemoration, Tradition, Legacy*, ed. Matthew Roberts (Bloomsbury, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350190498>.

<sup>112</sup> Kelly Ho, 'Public submit 50 reports about suspected "objectionable content" at Hong Kong gov't libraries', *Hong Kong Free Press*, 19 October 2023 <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/10/19/exclusive-hongkongers-submit-50-reports-about-suspected-objectionable-content-at-public-libraries/> (accessed 30 October 2023); Natalie Wong, 'Hong Kong's John Lee defends removal of public library books, highlights

stock certain titles.<sup>113</sup> Journalists, academics and students are censoring themselves, both inside and outside of Hong Kong where some members of the diaspora fear the extraterritorial reach of the National Security Law.<sup>114</sup> Companies are moving their headquarters away from Hong Kong and businesspeople visiting the city are using burner phones for fear that their data might be searched while in the territory.<sup>115</sup> Artefacts of past protests are being removed, walls scrubbed of objectionable messages, commemorative statues uprooted and oral histories of protest hidden behind a wall of anonymity.<sup>116</sup> There are even indications that materials held in archives are vanishing: the very stuff of the past removed from public view and possibly irreversibly destroyed.<sup>117</sup> This erasure of primary sources attesting to the colonial era and the suppression of expressions of dissenting views is allowing Hong Kong's past to be rewritten. The Hong Kong government is disseminating a new version of Hong Kong's history according to which Hong Kong was never a colony but was instead merely 'occupied' by the British.<sup>118</sup> Should someone claim otherwise, they may be convicted of secession and mandatorily put through re-education at Hong

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need to "serve interest" of society and stay lawful', *SCMP*, 16 May 2023 <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3220693/hong-kongs-john-lee-defends-removal-public-library-books-cites-need-serve-interest-society-and-stay> (accessed 17 May 2023); Cheng Yut Yiu and Gigi Lee, 'Hong Kong libraries remove books for 'violating' National Security Law', *Radio Free Asia*, 24 November 2021 <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/books-11242021093901.html> (accessed 19 May 2023).

<sup>113</sup> L. Gordon Crovitz and Mark L. Clifford, 'Hong Kong's Forbidden Apple', *Wall Street Journal*, 1 April 2024 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/hong-kongs-forbidden-apple-daily-possession-of-old-newspaper-can-now-be-a-crime-a637dc26> (accessed 24 October 2024).

<sup>114</sup> Giovanna Maria Dora Dore et al., *A Free Press, If You Can Keep It: What Natural Language Processing Reveals About Freedom of the Press in Hong Kong* (Springer, 2023); Bun Koon and Katrin Kinzelbach, 'Transnational Academic Spaces and Epistemic Networks: Hong Kong Emigrants' Experiences with Extraterritorial Authoritarian Practices', *Globalizations*, ahead of print, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2025.2583302>.

<sup>115</sup> Kaye Wiggins, Leo Lewis and Joe Leahy, 'Deloitte and KPMG ask staff to use burner phone for Hong Kong trips', *Financial Times*, 27 November 2023 <https://www.ft.com/content/eace699c-ce75-485b-ac14-e6c10375fdcc> (accessed 27 October 2025).

<sup>116</sup> Candice Chau, 'Two more Hong Kong universities tear down Tiananmen Massacre monuments in early hours of Fri', *Hong Kong Free Press*, 24 December 2021 <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/12/24/breaking-two-more-hong-kong-universities-tear-down-tiananmen-massacre-monuments-in-early-hours-of-fri/> (accessed 24 October 2024); Nam Kiu Tsing, *Hongkongers' Fight for Freedom: Voices from the 2019 Anti-Extradition Movement* (Haymarket Books, 2024).

<sup>117</sup> Venus Wu, 'Hong Kong's vanishing archives and the battle to preserve history', *Reuters*, 6 September 2017 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-anniversary-archives-idUSKCN1BH0OY> (accessed 1 October 2022).

<sup>118</sup> Kang-chung Ng and Angel Woo, 'City "occupied but never a colony"', *SCMP*, 3 August 2022, 5; William Yiu, 'HK never a British colony, textbooks say', *SCMP*, 14 June 2022, 5.

Kong's new Ethics College to teach them the correct interpretation of history.<sup>119</sup> Arguing against the new official version of history is made all the more difficult by diminishing access to archives and other primary sources.

This thesis contributes towards a better-informed understanding of contemporary Hong Kong, UK-China relations and other geopolitical relationships. Hong Kong's present status and its thorny position in international relations are a direct consequence of the agreements reached in the 1980s. Yet our picture of the pivotal 1980s remains incomplete. This thesis fills the gap in our knowledge of the Sino-British negotiations by examining the role played by Hong Kong people. Additionally, it uses materials copied from Hong Kong that are at risk of being removed by the authorities, censored by librarians or redacted by archivists. In particular, collections of papers and recorded oral histories of pro-democracy campaigners, such as those held at the CUHK, HKBU and the HKHP, may be at risk of censorship or self-censorship. Furthermore, as the body responsible for Hong Kong government records, the PRO is likely to reevaluate its holdings and may reclose some of its collections for inspection. While the intentional vagueness of the National Security Law makes it impossible to know for certain what will offend the censors in the future, this thesis contributes towards preserving the past by incorporating materials that are at risk of potential erasure.

## Structure

This thesis begins in the 1970s, when Hong Kong businesspeople pressured the colonial government to answer questions about the future, and ends in 1984, when the Sino-British negotiations concluded and the Joint Declaration was signed. Chapters 1 and 2 examine the prelude to the formal talks, spanning different segments of Hong Kong society from the 1970s until late 1982. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the relationship between the three governments (British, Beijing and colonial) and Hong Kong people's views. Chapter 5 and 6 extend the analysis of the first two chapters into the years of the Sino-British negotiations in 1983 and 1984.

Chapters 1 and 2 examine events that took place before the formal talks. Chapter 1 analyses the role of Hong Kong businesspeople as mediators between British and Chinese officials. It argues that Hong Kong businesspeople who had interests in Hong Kong, mainland China and Britain were in a privileged position. It shows that Hong Kong businesspeople pushed

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<sup>119</sup> Kelly Ho, 'Hong Kong's first national security convict Tong Ying-kit says he was "misled" by fake news', *Hong Kong Free Press*, 8 August 2024 <https://hongkongfp.com/2024/08/08/hong-kongs-first-national-security-convict-tong-ying-kit-says-he-was-misled-by-fake-news/> (accessed 10 August 2024).

for discussions on Hong Kong's future and went some way towards shaping how colonial officials conceived of the issue. Chapter 2 compares three segments of Hong Kong society and how each attempted to convey messages to officials during the same period. First, it examines Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Council (UMELCO), whose ostensible function as a bridge between Hong Kong society and the colonial administration was frustrated by the British side. Second, it examines how some pressure groups that operated outside of the colonial government's formal system were able to influence both British and Chinese official thinking by commissioning surveys and producing position papers. Lastly, Chapter 2 looks at pressure groups connected with the Urban Council. It argues that the channel used to convey Hong Kong views to officials was less important than the information conveyed and how valuable officials found that information.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine the relationship between Hong Kong opinion on the one hand and British and Chinese officials on the other, focusing on the period after Thatcher's September 1982 visit to Beijing and Hong Kong. The Chinese government projected propaganda into Hong Kong and conducted United Front work that sought to build trusting relationships with influential local people. As a consequence, academics and the Hong Kong public alike have been left with the impression that Beijing imposed its policies on Hong Kong people with little interest in their ideas. In contrast to this assumption, Chapter 3 uncovers a hitherto unknown network of Hong Kong advisors who shaped Chinese officials' thinking. China's relationship with Hong Kong opinion is contrasted with that of the colonial and British governments, examined in Chapter 4. The British side possessed the tools to conduct a large-scale survey of the Hong Kong public's attitudes but chose not to use this. While purporting to value Hong Kong people's views, the colonial government sought to dictate local opinion using propaganda and censorship. Taken together, Chapters 3 and 4 argue that Beijing had access to a greater range of Hong Kong views than the British.

Chapters 5 and 6 extend the analysis of Chapters 1 and 2 to the years of the formal negotiations in 1983 and 1984. Chapter 5 argues that the British and colonial governments' major source of advice during the talks came from UMELCO. It surveys a myriad of matters on which the Unofficials had significant impact, contrary to perceptions in the existing literature. The Unofficials were not, however, able to shape Beijing's thinking. Lastly, Chapter 6 ranges broadly across all of Hong Kong society, combining views from the general public, pressure groups, student unions, businesspeople and tycoons, social organisations, the Unofficial Members, and others. It argues that most Hong Kong people initially wanted the (undemocratic) colonial status quo to continue past 1997. When officials mooted the prospect of having a more representative

government in Hong Kong after 1997, this distracted Hong Kong people from contesting the broader existential question of Hong Kong's future. In contrast with the bulk of the literature on anti-imperialist, pro-democracy activism, Chapter 6 argues that democracy was not welcomed by most Hong Kong people, who wanted the colonial administration to continue.

The Conclusion returns to the questions outlined in this Introduction, summarises the main findings and explores the significance of them. Throughout the thesis, I evaluate the access and influence that Hong Kong people acquired, compare the efficacy of different lobbying methods, and chart the complex and shifting relationship between Hong Kong people and the government officials who determined their fate. Each chapter contributes towards the overall conclusion that Hong Kong people were not merely the passive subjects of decolonisation but were instead active participants in shaping the city's postcolonial future.

# Chapter 1 – Hong Kong Businesspeople as Unofficial Diplomats: Putting Hong Kong’s Future onto the Agenda

In the existing literature on the Sino-British negotiations, most accounts begin with Governor MacLehose’s meeting with China’s paramount leader Deng Xiaoping in March 1979, noting this as the first occasion on which Hong Kong’s future was raised at a high level. They then tend to jump to September 1982, when Prime Minister Thatcher met Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping. Few have interrogated events between 1979 and 1982, which Maurice Yip dubbed the “gap period”.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have tended to mention events in the gap period only in passing and, when they have, invariably focused on interactions between officials. For instance, Steve Tsang argued that during the interregnum between MacLehose’s call on Deng and Thatcher’s meeting with Deng, British officials tried to find out more about the Chinese position while the Chinese tried and failed to better understand Hong Kong.<sup>2</sup> Some papers published more recently have begun to examine the gap period but have remained fixed at the level of elite politics.<sup>3</sup> The few accounts that have mentioned Hong Kong people’s actions before 1979 and during the gap period only do so in passing and have not entertained the thought that Hong Kong people might have influenced officials.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the existing literature, which barely addresses the gap period and concentrates on interactions between officials, this chapter examines the role of Hong Kong businesspeople in politics during the gap period.

Commercial actors have at various times and in different contexts benefitted from being positioned between two nations, taking on quasi-diplomatic roles and using their access to shape interactions on both economic and political matters.<sup>5</sup> From the very beginning of the British occupation of Hong Kong in the 1840s, British actors relied on native people who became

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Yip, ‘New Town Planning as Diplomatic Planning: Scalar Politics, British–Chinese Relations, and Hong Kong’, *Journal of Urban History* 48, no. 2 (2022): 374, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144220948813>.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Tsang, *Hong Kong: Appointment with China* (I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1997), 90 and 93.

<sup>3</sup> Hurst, ‘Britain’s Approach’; Hurst, ‘Negotiating with the Past’; Chi-kwan Mark, ‘To “Educate” Deng Xiaoping in Capitalism: Thatcher’s Visit to China and the Future of Hong Kong in 1982’, *Cold War History* 17, no. 2 (2017): 161–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2015.1094058>.

<sup>4</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 7; Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 66; So, ‘Hong Kong People Ruling’, 67.

<sup>5</sup> John M. Carroll, ‘Chinese Collaboration in the Making of British Hong Kong’, in *Hong Kong’s History: State and Society Under Colonial Rule*, ed. Tak-Wing Ngo (Routledge, 1999); Paul Sharp, ‘Making Sense of Citizen Diplomats: The People of Duluth, Minnesota, as International Actors’, *International Studies Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (2001): 131–50, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1528-3577.00045>.

commercial collaborators.<sup>6</sup> Leveraging their positions, intermediaries were able to inject their own interests into proceedings and profit handsomely.<sup>7</sup> As Steve Tsang describes, compradors, merchants and others became “a kind of local ‘upper class’”.<sup>8</sup> After the Second World War, Hong Kong’s economy developed rapidly, creating a class of newly wealthy local people. Hong Kong’s businesspeople remained valuable as links between the colonial government and the rest of Hong Kong society. The administration absorbed prominent businesspeople and other local leaders into the colonial machinery by appointing them to advisory councils and representative bodies.<sup>9</sup> As China began opening its economy to the outside world in the late 1970s, Hong Kong businesspeople became ever more firmly enmeshed with the growing commercial activity on the mainland. As Peter E. Hamilton has shown, as Hong Kong businesspeople forged economic relationships, their political connections also grew, putting them in a position to act as go-betweens.<sup>10</sup>

The date 1997 was a significant cause for concern to Hong Kong businesspeople. Britain had colonised Hong Kong in the nineteenth century through two treaties and an 1898 Lease. The Lease covered the largest swathe of land in Hong Kong, the New Territories. The Lease was, however, set to expire in 1997. Without a replacement agreement between Britain and Beijing, the New Territories would revert to China in 1997 by default. Businesspeople were hesitant to embark on projects that would span the date 1997 as they were uncertain of the effect on their investments. Moreover, the New Territories was thought to be inseparable from the rest of Hong Kong. The problem therefore engulfed the entire colony and reversion of the New Territories to China would entail the end of the British colonial administration of Hong Kong wholesale. Despite the long history of closeness between colonial administrators and businesspeople and the importance of the 1997 issue to Hong Kong’s businesspeople, however, the role of Hong Kong businesspeople in the Sino-British negotiations is yet to be the focus of sustained study.

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<sup>6</sup> Carroll, *A Concise History*, ch. 1; Po-keung Hui, ‘Comprador Politics and Middleman Capitalism’, in *Hong Kong’s History: State and Society Under Colonial Rule*, ed. Tak-Wing Ngo (Routledge, 1999); Hung, *City on the Edge*, 26.

<sup>7</sup> John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong* (Harvard University Press, 2005); Tak-Wing Ngo, ‘Colonialism in Hong Kong Revisited’, in *Hong Kong’s History: State and Society Under Colonial Rule*, ed. Tak-Wing Ngo (Routledge, 1999), 4–5; Yang, ‘James Flint’.

<sup>8</sup> Tsang, *A Modern History*, 64.

<sup>9</sup> Ambrose Yeo-chi King, ‘Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong: Emphasis on the Grass Roots Level’, *Asian Survey* 15, no. 5 (1975): 422–39, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2643255>; Siu-kai Lau, ‘The Government, Intermediate Organizations, and Grass-Roots Politics in Hong Kong’, *Asian Survey* 21, no. 8 (1981): 865; Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 4–5.

<sup>10</sup> Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong*, chs 7–8.

This chapter examines interactions between Hong Kong businesspeople on the one hand and colonial, British and Beijing officials on the other. It begins by arguing that between the late 1970s and 1982, Hong Kong businesspeople pushed the topic of Hong Kong's future onto the political agenda and sought to shape how British and Chinese officials thought about the issue long before the formal negotiations began in 1983. Next, it traces the influence of Hong Kong tycoons on British official thinking, focusing on the gap period and drawing threads through to the years of the formal negotiations in 1983 and 1984. It then contrasts the experience of tycoons with that of other Hong Kong businesspeople and British officials, arguing that the British government triaged businesspeople according to the political and economic benefits they could potentially bring to Britain. Although British officials considered using Hong Kong businesspeople as intermediaries throughout the Sino-British talks, British officials ultimately failed to place their trust in Hong Kong businesspeople. The final section examines interactions between Hong Kong businesspeople and Chinese officials. It argues that Beijing was more welcoming and receptive to a broader range of Hong Kong businesspeople than the British side, and that Hong Kong businesspeople had opportunities to shape Chinese official thinking during this period. This chapter builds on the scant existing literature on the gap period, contributing to our understanding of how the prelude to the talks affected the future of Hong Kong. Additionally, given the long history of commercial actors interceding in Hong Kong colonial politics, this chapter adds to the literature on the political dimension of Hong Kong compradors.

## Shaping the agenda for MacLehose's meeting with Deng

In an interview given after he had ceased to be Governor, Lord Murray MacLehose denied that Hong Kong people played any part in his historic March 1979 meeting with Deng Xiaoping. He told his interviewer that: "delegations didn't visit me [or] put articles in the paper saying that the post-1997 situation had to be addressed". When asked by his interviewer to confirm that "it was the Government which took the lead in raising the question rather than public opinion", MacLehose replied in the affirmative.<sup>11</sup> MacLehose's recollection is, however, contradicted by the archival record. As this section will show, Hong Kong businesspeople shaped the initial interactions between British and Chinese officials on the 1997 issue in multiple ways: they passed messages between the Chinese and Hong Kong governments; they used their role as intermediaries to inject

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<sup>11</sup> Murray MacLehose, 'Transcript of interviews with The Lord MacLehose of Beoch, KT, GBE, KCMG, KCVO, DL', interview by Steve Tsang (six occasions in April 1989 and March 1991), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 377, BSC, 491 (hereafter, MacLehose BSC interview).

their own opinions; they encouraged MacLehose to raise the 1997 issue with Deng Xiaoping; and they exerted a general pressure on the colonial administration to find a resolution to the problem of the 1989 Lease. Far from playing no role in the meeting between MacLehose and Deng in March 1979, Hong Kong businesspeople mediated government interactions on a practical level, shaped official thinking and guided the Governor towards raising the 1997 issue.

During the 1970s, Hong Kong businesspeople found themselves positioned between the colonial and Beijing governments. After Mao Zedong's death in 1976 and the subsequent rise to power of Deng Xiaoping, China embarked on 'reform and opening': a series of domestic and foreign policy changes designed to reorient China's economy and rehabilitate its image globally.<sup>12</sup> In this connection, in 1978, Beijing established the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO) under the leadership of Liao Chengzhi which sought, amongst other things, to change the Hong Kong public's perception of China, encourage Hong Kong businesses to invest in the mainland and learn from Hong Kong's capitalists to the benefit of China's economic reorientation.<sup>13</sup> Beijing advanced these goals through a range of measures. The Xinhua office in Hong Kong invited leading local figures to attend events that were kept strictly social in the hopes that, by stripping them of an ideological orientation, Hong Kong people would be convinced that Beijing's intentions were innocuous.<sup>14</sup> A procession of delegations, arranged by Xinhua and paid for by Beijing, advanced from Hong Kong to cities around China.<sup>15</sup> As a Hong Kong government report summarised, Beijing arranged for Hong Kong's most "[p]rominent community leaders" to visit China, whereupon they were given "very privileged treatment" and returned to Hong Kong glowing with "a certain amount of pride" for having been chosen.<sup>16</sup> Beijing also advanced its soft power in the colony by, for instance, holding an exhibition of archaeological findings from the mainland which was "well attended by [...] practically all strata of Hong Kong society" and by loaning pandas and golden monkeys from zoos.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, the Communist-controlled media in Hong

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<sup>12</sup> Lowell Dittmer, 'China in 1981: Reform, Readjustment, Rectification', *Asian Survey* 22, no. 1 (1982): 33–46; Audrey Donnithorne, 'Prolonged Readjustment: Zhao Ziyang on Current Economic Policy', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 8 (1982): 111–26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2158930>; Wei-Wei Zhang, *Ideology and Economic Reform Under Deng Xiaoping, 1978-1993* (Routledge, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Lu, *Return of Hong Kong*, 6; telegram, MacLehose to FCO, 12 April 1978, FCO 40/940 f4, TNA.

<sup>14</sup> Telegram, MacLehose to FCO, 11 October 1978, FCO 40/940 f10, TNA.

<sup>15</sup> Tang and Ching, 'Three-Legged Stool', 159–60.

<sup>16</sup> Report, 'Movement of Opinion Direction', Home Affairs Department, Hong Kong government, 23 October 1978, FCO 40/947 f191, TNA.

<sup>17</sup> Archaeological exhibition: report, 'Movement of Opinion Direction', Home Affairs Department, Hong Kong government, 23 October 1978, FCO 40/947 f191, TNA; pandas: telegram, MacLehose to FCO, 9 January 1979, FCO 40/1046 f1, TNA; monkeys: report, 'LIC Hong Kong Assessment for September 1979', Local Intelligence Committee Hong Kong, 11 October 1979, FCO 40/1046 f23, TNA.

Kong, which used to virulently criticise the colonial government during the Mao era, were ordered to adopt a more neutral tone. Leftwing newspapers also sought to broaden their appeal by, for instance, adopting the traditional Chinese characters used in Hong Kong rather than using the simplified characters used on the mainland.<sup>18</sup> These efforts aimed at improving relations between Hong Kong and China.

Hong Kong businesses were quick to capitalise on China's reengagement with the global economy and trade increased precipitously.<sup>19</sup> The colonial government noted this drastic increase in Hong Kong-China business. A 1977 government report charted the seismic changes in Hong Kong-China business relations, surveying China's acquisition of \$100m worth of ships and \$200m worth of property, tallying an additional \$234m worth of exports to Hong Kong than the year before, and citing initiatives to open China's growing education and tourism sectors to Hong Kong.<sup>20</sup> Expansion continued into 1978, as captured by another report: Beijing increased its fleet with an additional 122 ships, developed plans for passenger flights connecting Hong Kong to Guangdong and Shanghai, and continued to welcome inward investments, particularly from overseas Chinese.<sup>21</sup> In 1978, exports from China to Hong Kong rose by 30% and imports from Hong Kong were up 161%.<sup>22</sup> Commercial links between Hong Kong and China had persisted throughout the Mao era but multiplied exponentially under Deng. With economic activity increasing between Hong Kong and China, Hong Kong businesspeople found themselves in a unique position between the two territories. Beijing decided it wanted to enlarge China's commercial relationship with Hong Kong even further. In this connection, Beijing resolved to invite the Governor to visit.<sup>23</sup> The trip would be unprecedented: China had never recognised the colonial government and a sitting Governor had never before visited Communist China.

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<sup>18</sup> Report, 'Movement of Opinion Direction', Home Affairs Department, Hong Kong government, 23 October 1978, FCO 40/947 f191, TNA.

<sup>19</sup> Edward K. Y. Chen, 'The Impact of China's Four Modernizations on Hong Kong's Economic Development', in *China and Hong Kong: The Economic Nexus*, ed. A. J. Youngson (Oxford University Press, 1983); Christopher Howe, 'Growth, Public Policy and Hong Kong's Economic Relationship with China', *The China Quarterly* 95 (1983): 512–33, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000023341>; Ian Kelly, *Hong Kong: A Political-Geographic Analysis* (Macmillan, 1987), ch. 5, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-08784-6>; Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 25–26.

<sup>20</sup> Report, 'Hong Kong's Status Quo', Public Relations Division, ISD, Hong Kong government, December 1977, FCO 40/956 f10, TNA.

<sup>21</sup> Report, 'China News Report No. 9, Part II. Matters Relating to China and Hong Kong', Public Relations Division, ISD, Hong Kong government, March 1978, FCO 40/956 f20, TNA.

<sup>22</sup> *China Association Annual Report 1979-80*, CHAS/A/41, School of Oriental and African Studies (aka SOAS) Special Collections (hereafter, SSC), 9.

<sup>23</sup> MacLehose BSC interview, 482.

Given that such an occasion would be history-making and potentially fraught with political sensitivities, China took subtle steps towards extending an invitation using Hong Kong businesspeople as intermediaries. In October 1978, Liao Chengzhi had his relative, the General Manager of the Hong Kong and Yaumatei Ferry Company Edmond Lau Ting-chung, ask the Governor why he had not visited China. MacLehose noted that this enquiry was not an innocuous remark but instead meant as a signal from Beijing of something more to come. A month later, Liao acted again through a Hong Kong contact by discussing with the Chairman of World-Wide Shipping, Sir Y. K. Pao (aka Pao Yue-kong), whether the Governor would consider a visit to Beijing. Pao relayed the conversation to MacLehose, who connected it with Edmond Lau Ting-chung's earlier enquiry. In November 1978, Pao was again used to inform the Governor unambiguously that Liao Chengzhi intended to extend an invitation to him to visit China. Pao injected his own opinions, arguing strongly that the time was right for MacLehose to take up the invitation in order to capitalise on improved relations between Hong Kong, Britain and China.<sup>24</sup> Following Pao's encouragement, MacLehose informed the Head of Xinhua, Wang Kuang, that he would "love to go to China" but that this would "have to be a formal occasion" and that he "couldn't go without some sort of formal invitation".<sup>25</sup> An invitation would soon arrive. When the Chinese Minister for Foreign Trade, Li Qiang, visited Hong Kong in December 1978, MacLehose gave him lunch at Government House – the first Chinese official to step foot in the Governor's official residence since the CCP took China in 1949.<sup>26</sup> In return, Li extended a formal invitation to the Governor to visit Beijing in the spring of 1979.<sup>27</sup> With the assistance of Hong Kong businesspeople acting as unofficial diplomats, British and Chinese officials embarked on the first step towards what would become negotiations over the future of Hong Kong.

After accepting the invitation, British officials still had to decide whether or not the Governor should raise the 1997 issue during his visit. The 1898 Lease had played on the minds of successive Governors and officials for decades. In 1938, for instance, the then Governor Sir Geoffrey Northcote considered resolving the issue by offering to buy the New Territories from China.<sup>28</sup> Following the 1967 riots in Hong Kong, the British government commissioned a report that concluded the best course of action would be to informally engage Beijing when it seemed

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<sup>24</sup> Letter, MacLehose to McLaren, 15 December 1978, FCO 40/948 f220A, TNA; Lu, *Return of Hong Kong*, 6–7.

<sup>25</sup> MacLehose BSC interview, 479.

<sup>26</sup> David Wilson, '[Untitled British Diplomatic Oral History Programme interview transcript]', interview by Malcolm McBain (19 September 2003), DOHP 83, Churchill Archives Centre (hereafter, CAC), 34; telegram, MacLehose to FCO, 9 January 1979, FCO 40/1046 f1, TNA; Sheridan, *Gate to China*, 58.

<sup>27</sup> Telegram, MacLehose to FCO, 3 February 1979, FCO 21/1734 f23, TNA; Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Letter, Northcote to Ormsby-Gore, 13 April 1938, CO 129/571/16 f1, TNA.

agreeable to do so and seek an arrangement that would allow Britain to withdraw at a mutually agreeable time.<sup>29</sup> MacLehose had himself been concerned by the issue even before assuming his post. In 1971, he identified “attempting to negotiate the future of Hong Kong [...] if a more favourable [Chinese] Government emerged [...] long before the expiry of the Lease and in advance of the collapse of confidence” as one of the key issues of his tenure.<sup>30</sup> Deng Xiaoping’s rise to power had brought about not only economic reform but political change, too: perhaps the more ‘favourable’ Chinese government that the British had long hoped for had finally materialised. To complicate matters further, the Governor did not know whom he would be meeting in Beijing.<sup>31</sup> When MacLehose asked Wang Kuang what the agenda for his visit would be, Wang replied that that bridge would be crossed when the time came.<sup>32</sup> Britain’s Ambassador to Beijing, Sir Percy Cradock, believed it “possible, though not inevitable” that the Chinese side might raise the future of Hong Kong.<sup>33</sup> The Governor’s Political Advisor, Dr David Wilson, was also uncertain of whether the Chinese intended to discuss post-1997 Hong Kong.<sup>34</sup> Uncertainty made preparations for the trip all the more difficult.

Officials were under pressure from Hong Kong businesspeople, professionals and the general public to raise the 1997 issue and foresaw a dissipation of confidence should it remain unaddressed. Hong Kong businesspeople had already become acutely concerned about Hong Kong’s future at least as early as the mid-1970s.<sup>35</sup> In 1976, the Director of the Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce, Jimmy McGregor, stated that assurances about Hong Kong’s post-1997 future would be necessary if investors were to have confidence in doing deals in the New Territories.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, the business weekly *Far Eastern Economic Review* in an issue dedicated to ‘The Future of Hongkong’ augured that business confidence was expected to decline in the 1980s in lieu of clarity over the future.<sup>37</sup> Concern turned into practical preparations amongst Hong Kong’s professionals as the 1970s progressed.<sup>38</sup> The Hong Kong Society of Accountants, for instance,

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<sup>29</sup> Chi-kwan Mark, ‘Development without Decolonisation? Hong Kong’s Future and Relations with Britain and China, 1967–1972’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 24, no. 2 (2014): 315–35, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S135618631300076X>; Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Letter, MacLehose to Monson et al., 18 October 1971, FCO 40/329, TNA.

<sup>31</sup> MacLehose BSC interview, 497–98.

<sup>32</sup> Letter, MacLehose to McLaren, 15 December 1978, FCO 40/948 f220A, TNA.

<sup>33</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 19 December 1978, FCO 40/948 f224, TNA.

<sup>34</sup> Letter, MacLehose to McLaren, 15 December 1978, FCO 40/948 f220A, TNA.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Ferdinand, ‘UK Policy towards China’, in *Europe, China and the Two SARs*, ed. Miguel Santos Neves and Brian Bridges (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000), 34, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230599314\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230599314_3); Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Carroll, *A Concise History*, 177; Tang and Ching, ‘Three-Legged Stool’, 154–55.

<sup>37</sup> Dick Wilson, ‘Counting on a compromise’, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10 December 1976, 19.

<sup>38</sup> McLaren, *Britain’s Record in Hong Kong*, 12.

adopted guidelines that specifically depreciated the value of land, building and other assets held by companies in the New Territories while some barristers began making plans to leave Hong Kong.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, lawyers and accountants began asking colonial officials difficult questions about the future. The person in the street was also becoming worried: British civil servants who visited the colony in 1978 reported that those they met were eager to discuss the future of Hong Kong.<sup>40</sup> “The 1997 problem,” commented one official, “has become a fairly common subject of discussion in Hong Kong”.<sup>41</sup> By the late 1970s, therefore, British officials in London and Hong Kong were aware of growing concern across the colony, adding to pressure on MacLehose to raise this on his visit to China.

Impetus in favour of addressing the 1997 issue came in the form of a message delivered by yet another Hong Kong businessperson. Chairman of Sun Hung Kai Bank, Fung King-hey, informed MacLehose that a Xinhua official had told him to advise the Governor that his visit would be a good opportunity to discuss the issue of land leases. At this juncture, it is necessary to stress a distinction. The 1997 issue could be considered in two parts: one was the specific problem of what would happen to leases for individual plots of land in the New Territories in 1997; the other was the broader, existential question of who would rule Hong Kong as a whole after 1997. Fung’s message contained no indication that Chinese officials wanted to discuss the existential question. Wilson paraphrased Fung as having said: “it would be a good time to talk about land leases etc when [MacLehose] visited Peking.” Fung claimed that Chinese officials wanted to discuss the land leases, but not the 1898 Lease.<sup>42</sup>

In late March 1979, the Governor and his entourage headed to China for a tour that took in Guangzhou, Xi’an, Lanzhou and Beijing.<sup>43</sup> Only after reaching Beijing were MacLehose and his delegation told that the Governor would have an audience with Deng Xiaoping the following day.<sup>44</sup> When MacLehose met Deng on 29 March in the capital, Deng took the initiative and raised the question of Hong Kong’s future. He stated that China had held a consistent stance on Hong Kong: that sovereignty over Hong Kong rightfully belonged to China and must be recovered one day. Deng left the exact date of when China would retake Hong Kong undefined: “whether it’s before

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<sup>39</sup> Accountants: Letter, Orr to Thompson, 29 September 1978, FCO 40/957 f111, TNA; barristers: Martin Lee Chu-ming, ‘The Hong Kong Heritage Project’, interview by Amelia Allsop (12 September 2007), I020, Hong Kong Heritage Project (hereafter, HKHP).

<sup>40</sup> Memo, Thompson to Quantrill, 28 May 1978, FCO 40/956 f29, TNA.

<sup>41</sup> Memo, McLaren to various, 2 November 1978, FCO 40/957 f124, TNA.

<sup>42</sup> Letter, Wilson to Clift, 23 February 1981, FCO 40/1286 f39, TNA.

<sup>43</sup> Cheung, *Secrets from the British Archives*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 21.

1997, at 1997, or after 1997 I don't know", Deng told MacLehose.<sup>45</sup> Deng had wanted to leave the discussion there but the Governor was sufficiently encouraged by Deng's comments to press the problem of leases for land in the New Territories, which Fung King-hey had said Beijing wished to discuss.<sup>46</sup> MacLehose proposed that, with Chinese consent, Britain would issue an Order in Council stating that leases could be issued for as long as Britain administered Hong Kong. The Order in Council could be executed without China's explicit approval, allowing Beijing to maintain its position that Hong Kong belonged to China. By fudging the large question of British administration over Hong Kong, the two sides could maintain their opposed positions on sovereignty while resolving the practical problem of the leases.<sup>47</sup> To the Governor's disappointment, Deng did not see the value in MacLehose's suggestion and responded by asking MacLehose to tell investors they could "put their hearts at ease".<sup>48</sup> MacLehose had come prepared to talk to the issue of leases for individual plots of land that would soon expire, per Fung's insistence, whereas Deng spoke only to the existential issue of sovereignty over Hong Kong.

Deng's comments to MacLehose compel us to question Fung King-hey's claim that it was Chinese officials who suggested the land leases as an agenda item. When Deng took the initiative to raise the topic of Hong Kong, he did so only to reiterate the CCP's general position and did not invite further discussion concerning sovereignty. Unbeknownst to MacLehose, China did not have a specific position on retaking Hong Kong (other than that Hong Kong belonged to China and must one day the two must be reunified) and was not working to develop one at that time.<sup>49</sup> The HKMAO had previously advised China's State Council that no action needed to be taken on Hong Kong, as the year 1997 was still a long way off.<sup>50</sup> China was focused on reunification with Taiwan rather than Hong Kong.<sup>51</sup> Beijing did not want to handle questions of Hong Kong's future in any detail at the time.<sup>52</sup> Deng's response to MacLehose's suggestion for resolving the land leases issue seemed to have been made without preparation, was equally uninformative and seemed intended to stonewall further conversation. As Deng had nothing much to say on either the 1898 Lease or the land leases, it is doubtful that Chinese officials told Fung that Chinese officials wanted to discuss either of these matters with MacLehose during the Governor's visit. It is

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<sup>45</sup> MacLehose BSC interview, 516.

<sup>46</sup> Unpublished manuscript, 'The Hong Kong Negotiations: A Critical History', Anthony Galsworthy, ND, 7051, FOI/Hanslope, 22 (hereafter, the Galsworthy manuscript).

<sup>47</sup> McLaren, *Britain's Record in Hong Kong*, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 6 July 1979, FCO 40/1060 f136A, TNA.

<sup>49</sup> Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 50; Wong, *China's Resumption of Sovereignty*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Lu, *Return of Hong Kong*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Hurst, 'Negotiating with the Past', 187; Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 16; Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Harvard University Press, 2011), 492.

<sup>52</sup> Xu, *Hong Kong Memoirs*, ch. 3.

possible that Fung misunderstood a message he had received from Chinese officials. Another interpretation – which is not necessarily in conflict with the first – is that Fung used his access to both governments and the trust invested in him as an intermediary to try to steer the interaction between MacLehose and Deng. If the latter is the case, then Fung succeeded in persuading colonial officials, who had been in two minds about discussing any aspect of the 1997 issue, to raise this matter at the highest level, catapulting discussion over Hong Kong’s future up the political agenda.

Despite MacLehose’s claims to the contrary, Hong Kong businesspeople played a significant role in the triangular politics between the UK, China and Hong Kong ahead of his meeting. As intermediaries, Hong Kong businesspeople not only passed messages between governments but also lent their interpretations and shaped official thinking. Collectively, Hong Kong’s business community pressured the colonial administration to raise the 1997 issue. Individually, Fung King-hey purposefully or accidentally persuaded diplomatic discussions towards discussing the future of Hong Kong. Seen from the perspective of official diplomacy, China invited MacLehose through formal channels: MacLehose’s dinner with Wang Kuang was followed by Li Qiang’s invitation to MacLehose. Yet seen from the perspective of the unofficial diplomats, Hong Kong businesspeople were involved at and affected each step of the way.

## British officials and Hong Kong tycoons

Hong Kong businesspeople were important to the colonial administration and had been for decades. The colonial government’s claim to rule, its grasp on power and its capacity to keep local unrest at bay hinged to a large degree on its ability to ensure a stable economic environment and promote growth in Hong Kong.<sup>53</sup> Although the colonial government claimed that the colony had a *laissez-faire* economic model, in reality the administration made interventions towards supporting businesses while keeping Hong Kong businesspeople close as advisors.<sup>54</sup> How, then, did Hong Kong businesspeople use their connections with British and colonial official to affect official thinking during the gap period? This section argues that during the gap period, only those who offered ideas that would benefit Britain both politically *and* economically could gain access the higher echelons of the British state, and they used that access to attempt to shape official

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<sup>53</sup> Ming Sing, ‘Democratization and Economic Development: The Anomalous Case of Hong Kong’, *Democratization* 3, no. 3 (1996): 343–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510349608403483>.

<sup>54</sup> David Clayton, ‘From Laissez-Faire To “Positive Non-Interventionism”: The Colonial State in Hong Kong Studies’, *Social Transformations in Chinese Societies* 9 (2013): 1–20.

thinking. Only a limited number of Hong Kong businesspeople gained access to the British inner circle: namely, Sir Lawrence Kadoorie and Sir Y. K. Pao.

Hong Kong-born businessman Sir Lawrence Kadoorie was Chairman of China Light and Power and the first Hong Kong person to become a member of the House of Lords. Kadoorie had previously brought two nuclear power projects – Castle Peak ‘A’ and ‘B’ – to completion in Hong Kong with the assistance of the British Department of Industry. In the early 1980s, Lord Kadoorie approached the British government with an idea for a nuclear power plant that would be based in Guangdong, supply energy to Hong Kong and incorporate British engineering. In virtue of this proposal with its twin economic and political potential, Kadoorie gained access to Prime Minister Thatcher and other senior British officials.<sup>55</sup>

In his meetings and correspondence with British officials, Kadoorie highlighted the dual commercial and political potential of the plant. The project would give Beijing a face-saving reason to allow the British administration of Hong Kong to continue beyond 1997. As a triparty project, China could point to the plant as an example of successful three-way partnerships to justify there being no need to change the status quo.<sup>56</sup> Considerations for Hong Kong’s future would even be woven into the contracts: Kadoorie required that China must make payments in respect of the nuclear plant in Hong Kong dollars, a stipulation designed to provide the Chinese authorities with an excuse to allow the continued use of the Hong Kong dollar after 1997.<sup>57</sup> When meeting Thatcher, Kadoorie compared his idea to the sports diplomacy that had led to a détente between the USA and China: “If ping pong diplomacy can bring about a rapprochement between the PRC [People’s Republic of China] and the United States,” he asked the Prime Minister, “then why not a nuclear power station [...] be a major factor in solving the problem of [...] the lease of the New Territories?”<sup>58</sup> Thatcher agreed and was enthusiastic about the potential of the proposal.<sup>59</sup>

In December 1982, Beijing’s State Council approved China’s involvement in Kadoorie’s nuclear power plant project. Hong Kong newspapers remarked on the political implications: the *New Evening Post* said it demonstrated a commitment to UK-China co-operation well past 1997 while *Wah Kiu Man Pao* believed the decision showed that Beijing did not intend to make Hong

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<sup>55</sup> Letter, Bell to Stephens, 30 July 1980, PREM 19/255, TNA.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Memo, Adrain Charles Swire to John Anthony Swire, 22 July 1982, JSS/1/11/10 B.3.7, SSC.

<sup>58</sup> Briefing, ‘Brief C4’, Department of Industry, British government, 7 September 1982, CAB 133/528, TNA. For an examination of ping pong diplomacy, see: Henry Kissinger, *On China* (Penguin, 2012); Millwood, *Improbable Diplomats*.

<sup>59</sup> Memo, Alexander to Ellison, 30 July 1980, PREM 19/255, TNA.

Kong a part of China.<sup>60</sup> The British government also lent considerable support, with the Board of Trade's Export Credit Guarantee Department underwriting a commercial loan to the company.<sup>61</sup> The project, with its promised political and economic advantages, thus drew Kadoorie closer into the triangular politics between Beijing, London and Hong Kong.

Sir Y. K. Pao and Thatcher became close friends. Perhaps the most important reason for their friendship was that Pao had provided "a large anonymous sum of money" during Thatcher's 1979 General Election campaign.<sup>62</sup> It is impossible to know how much Pao donated, as election rules at the time allowed donations to be made anonymously. Nonetheless, it cannot have hurt Pao's relationship with Thatcher. They also shared a common ideological orientation: Pao supported free enterprise and distained attempts to increase regulation of the shipping industry in which he was heavily invested.<sup>63</sup> Thatcher lauded Pao's "full-hearted support of the free enterprise system".<sup>64</sup> Pao also flaunted his connections with likeminded politicians, such as American President Ronald Reagan.<sup>65</sup> Lastly, on a personal level, Pao found plenty of opportunities to flatter Thatcher, remarking approvingly on her "capable leadership" and pledging his "personal whole-hearted support of your party and your leadership."<sup>66</sup> Pao's politics, cash and compliments ensured a firm friendship with Thatcher.

As a consequence of this relationship, Pao enjoyed a level of access to the Prime Minister that cannot be overstated. In May 1979, for instance, a meeting between Thatcher and Pao was hastily arranged at only a few days' notice and despite it coinciding with the state visit of the President of Kenya. Although the request for an audience came at an inconvenient time, Thatcher instructed her secretary to "Fit him [Pao] in".<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Thatcher appeared to place particular value on Pao's advice about Hong Kong. In the weeks before her visit September 1982 to Beijing and Hong Kong, the Prime Minister was beset by advice from her officials but still made time to read and extensively annotate a letter from Pao.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Report, 'Media Summary on Hong Kong's Future Report No. 8 Period: December 21-28, 1982', Public Relations Division, ISD, Hong Kong government, 29 December 1982, HKRS1416-1-40, Public Records Office (hereafter, PRO).

<sup>61</sup> Meeting notes, Clift and Urban Council, 13 May 1981, FCO 40/1279 f45, TNA

<sup>62</sup> Memo, Stephens to Thatcher, 10 May 1979, PREM 19/786, TNA.

<sup>63</sup> Speech, Pao at the Foreign Correspondents' Club, 12 May 1981 enclosed in letter, Pao to Thatcher, 18 May 1981, FCO 21/1945 f58, TNA.

<sup>64</sup> Letter, Thatcher to Pao, 20 May 1981, FCO 21/1945 f59, TNA.

<sup>65</sup> Letter, Pao to Thatcher, 16 June 1981, PREM 19/786, TNA.

<sup>66</sup> Letter, Pao to Thatcher, 28 June 1981, PREM 19/786, TNA; letter, Pao to Thatcher, 16 December 1980, THCR 1/3/5 f32, CAC.

<sup>67</sup> Handwritten note, Thatcher to Stephens, ND on memo, Stephens to Thatcher, 10 May 1979, PREM 19/786, TNA.

<sup>68</sup> Letter, Pao to Thatcher, 13 August 1982, THCR 1/10/39, CAC.

Pao was also well connected in Beijing, having made some US\$150m of investments in China.<sup>69</sup> At one point, Pao claimed, Beijing had formally requested that he play an intermediary role between Britain and China.<sup>70</sup> Pao clearly craved the same level of trust from the British side. He wrote to Thatcher that his personal contacts with “both sides” put him in a position to play “an unofficial and background role” between the two governments.<sup>71</sup> British officials were, however, cautious of handing Pao the designation he requested. For instance, Head of the Hong Kong Department (HKD) Richard Clift assessed that although Pao could be “an unofficial channel for communication between ourselves and the Chinese, [...] his usefulness and reliability should not be overrated.”<sup>72</sup> Although the British side resisted calling Pao an intermediary, he was treated as such by both governments. In her biography of her father, Pao’s daughter, Anna Pao Sohmen, dubbed her father an “Unofficial Ambassador”.<sup>73</sup> Even though the British refused to confirm it, this moniker was fitting for Pao.

With access to senior politicians on both sides, Pao sought to impress his ideas on officials. He believed that the date ‘1997’ held little relevance to the CCP because they had never accepted the 1898 Lease in the first place. What held Beijing back from retaking Hong Kong was, in Pao’s opinion, positive relations between the UK and China.<sup>74</sup> So long as international relations remained positive, Pao asserted, business confidence would remain strong, too. He proposed various schemes for demonstrating that relations between the UK and China were positive, opportunistically weaving his own interests into these ideas. For example, Pao suggested that Thatcher could christen one of the vessels that Pao was having built in Shanghai and, in return, a Chinese official would launch one of Pao’s Sunderland-built ships. Pao encouraged Thatcher to invite Chinese Vice Premier Gu Mu to the UK in time for the completion of his UK-built ship in February 1982.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, he tried to convince Gu that his wife, Mou Feng, a member of the Engineering Bureau of the Ministry of Construction, should launch the ship.<sup>76</sup> Chinese officials were, however, disinterested in the reciprocal launch idea. In the end, on 12 March 1982, Thatcher arrived in Sunderland intending to launch Pao’s ship the *United Effort*, though the

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<sup>69</sup> Letter, Adrian Christopher Swire to Bremridge, 7 November 1980, JSS/1/4/4/20 f8, SSC.

<sup>70</sup> Telegram, MacLehose to FCO, 12 January 1982, PREM 19/789, TNA.

<sup>71</sup> Letter, Pao to Thatcher, 20 July 1982, PREM 19/1797, TNA.

<sup>72</sup> Briefing, ‘Sir Y K Pao’s Call on the Secretary of State’, Clift to PS Pym, 20 May 1982, FCO 40/1452 f274, TNA.

<sup>73</sup> Anna Pao Sohmen, *Y. K. Pao: My Father* (Hong Kong University Press, 2014), 129.

<sup>74</sup> Minute, Pao and Carrington, 30 March 1981, FCO 40/1288 f79A, TNA.

<sup>75</sup> Minute, Thatcher and Pao, 17 December 1981, FCO 40/1291, TNA.

<sup>76</sup> Telegram, MacLehose to Jakarta, 30 January 1982, FCO 40/1446 f38, TNA; telegram, Donald to Clift, 2 February 1982, FCO 40/1446 f40, TNA.

weather put paid to the ceremony and Thatcher simply named the ship instead.<sup>77</sup> The Prime Minister's presence provided ample publicity for World-Wide Shipping but did nothing to demonstrate positive UK-China relations.

Another idea revolved around a 'soft loan' extended from Britain to China. Chinese officials told Pao that the Japanese government was providing China with "an untied loan equivalent to \$1 billion" as well as "substantial export credits".<sup>78</sup> Officials asked Pao whether Britain might consider offering something similar.<sup>79</sup> Chinese officials stressed that they were not creating a conditional link between the loan and Hong Kong's future; they feared that drawing such a connection would leave them liable to the accusation that the Party was "selling out Chinese interests" by trading Hong Kong for funds.<sup>80</sup> Despite this, when relaying Beijing's message to British officials, Pao drew an explicit connection between a loan and Hong Kong's future. Initially, Pao suggested that Hong Kong people could help to raise such a loan.<sup>81</sup> He later asked whether the colonial government might back the loan to China.<sup>82</sup> Pao added that if China extended the 1898 Lease, the two governments might consider interest on the loan as a sort of rent. (The idea made little sense, as it would have effectively seen China pay Britain to continue administering Hong Kong. Pao must have meant that China would allow Britain to continue holding the New Territories and, in exchange, Britain would forgive the interest on the loan as a sort of proxy for rent.) Pao promoted the loan idea, saying it "could improve the atmosphere for the solution" to the Hong Kong issue.<sup>83</sup> Ambassador Cradock commented that such "preferential economic aid would have to be carefully presented" but agreed that "an indication that a large sum might be be [sic] available [...] would assist the atmosphere".<sup>84</sup> Other British officials were more sceptical; such an arrangement would, after all, have been unprecedented.<sup>85</sup> Ultimately, Thatcher quashed the idea of a loan though left the door open to other forms of support for China's modernisation programme.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Memo, Clift to PS, 15 May 1982, FCO 40/1448 f116, TNA.

<sup>78</sup> I noted this in my 'Britain's Approach', 1388.

<sup>79</sup> Minute, Pao and Thatcher, 17 December 1981, FCO 40/1291, TNA.

<sup>80</sup> Minute, Pao and Carrington, 16 March 1982, FCO 40/1448 f124, TNA.

<sup>81</sup> Minute, Pao and Thatcher, 17 December 1981, FCO 40/1291, TNA.

<sup>82</sup> Telegram, Carrington to Peking, 16 March 1982, FCO 21/2097 f9, TNA; letter, Youde to Clift, 14 March 1982, FCO 40/1448 f117, TNA.

<sup>83</sup> Letter, Youde to Clift, 14 March 1982, FCO 40/1448 f117, TNA.

<sup>84</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 14 January 1982, PREM 19/789, TNA. I used this quote in my 'Britain's Approach', 1388.

<sup>85</sup> Memo, Clift to Donald, 31 March 1982, FCO 40/1449 f167, TNA.

<sup>86</sup> Letter, Thatcher to Ke, 5 August 1982, PREM 19/670, TNA.

Aside from proposing projects, Pao inserted himself in the matter of Hong Kong's future by passing messages between the governments. One of the most significant signals sent between the two governments during the gap period was conveyed through Pao in June 1982. Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Huang Hua informed Pao of China's opening terms: sovereignty over Hong Kong must return to China; Hong Kong would become a special administrative zone; and China's principles for Taiwan reunification would be adapted and applied to Hong Kong. Pao separately met Deng Xiaoping and asked the statesman whether the 1898 Lease might simply be extended. To this, Deng replied: "one billion people [that is, China's entire population] would refuse". Deng also declined to discuss whether the colonial status quo might be "frozen". Pao conveyed the content of these meetings to Thatcher. In giving Pao this information, Huang and Deng were entrusting the businessman to convey Beijing's bottom line directly to Thatcher, which he did.<sup>87</sup> Choosing Pao as their messenger for conveying such detailed and important signals of China's position on Hong Kong to the British side confirms that Chinese officials had designed Pao as an unofficial ambassador.

Both Kadoorie and Pao featured in Thatcher's itinerary when she visited China and Hong Kong in September 1982. On 28 September, Thatcher attended the opening of Kadoorie's Castle Peak Power Station in Hong Kong.<sup>88</sup> For some time afterwards, Kadoorie continued to pester the Prime Minister about the proposed Guangdong nuclear power plant. Stressing the political and commercial imperative that the project succeeded, Kadoorie began appealing to Thatcher and other British officials for an injection of £25m from the British government directly into a special purpose vehicle company.<sup>89</sup> Thatcher refused, saying it "would be quite contrary to our policy of reducing government shareholdings in the private sector".<sup>90</sup> After making several attempts, Kadoorie gave up and took to contacting Thatcher less regularly. Having extracted all the support he could, Kadoorie perhaps felt there was no longer any need to bother the Prime Minister.

The Guangdong nuclear power project, which would come to be called the Daya Bay Nuclear Power Plant, continued to fruition but lost its geopolitical relevance. Rather than becoming a project that the governments could proudly point to as an emblem of UK-China-Hong

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<sup>87</sup> Memo, Coles to Holmes, 13 July 1982, FCO 21/2214 f55, TNA.

<sup>88</sup> 'MT Engagement Diary', Margaret Thatcher Foundation, ND <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document%2F124967> (accessed 28 October 2025).

<sup>89</sup> Speaking notes, Kadoorie for a meeting with Thatcher (arranged for August 1983 but later cancelled) enclosed in handwritten letter, Kadoorie to Thatcher, 4 August 1983 enclosed in letter, Varley to Flesher, 5 August 1983, PREM 19/1532, TNA; minute, Tebbit and Rhodes et al., 1 November 1983 enclosed in memo, Barclay to Coles, 14 November 1983, PREM 19/1532, TNA; letter, Kadoorie to Thatcher, ND enclosed in letter, Walker to Tebbit, 23 November 1983, PREM 19/1532, TNA.

<sup>90</sup> Letter, Thatcher to Kadoorie, 1 December 1983, PREM 19/1532, TNA.

Kong collaboration, it instead became a bone of contention for anti-nuclear and environmental campaigners and created tension between some Hong Kong people and the colonial government.<sup>91</sup> When planning Thatcher's itinerary for her December 1984 visit to Beijing to sign the Sino-British Joint Declaration, Governor Sir Edward Youde warned against conducting any business on the nuclear front for fear of giving the impression that Britain was mortgaging Hong Kong's future in exchange for lucrative and locally unpopular contracts. As Youde noted, there was "little enthusiasm" for the Guangdong nuclear project in Hong Kong at the time.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, for several years in the early 1980s, the project with its potential for both political and economic benefits for Britain enabled Kadoorie to access some of the most prominent political actors in Britain.

Pao was also involved in Thatcher's September 1982 visit, clinging to her like a shadow during the trip. Clift described Pao's presence as "ubiquitous" and Cradock complained that he "virtually took over" parts of the trip.<sup>93</sup> The day after her meeting with Deng Xiaoping, on 25 September, Thatcher flew from Beijing to Shanghai for one day. The Mayor of Shanghai, Wang Daohan, had planned a lunchtime banquet in honour of the Prime Minister but Pao somehow convinced the Mayor to change this to dinnertime so that he could offer Thatcher lunch himself.<sup>94</sup> After lunch, Pao then whisked Thatcher to the Jiangnan Shipyard, where she named yet another one of his ships, the *World Goodwill*.<sup>95</sup>

Like Kadoorie, Pao met and corresponded with Thatcher far less after September 1982. During 1983, Pao and Thatcher exchanged a few polite messages and appear to have met only once.<sup>96</sup> In 1984, Pao and Thatcher had a handful of meetings but the relationship had become more distant.<sup>97</sup> Thatcher appears to have become ambivalent towards her erstwhile friend.

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<sup>91</sup> Roda Mushkat, 'Freedom of Association and Assembly in Hong Kong', in *Civil Liberties in Hong Kong*, ed. R. I. Wacks (Oxford University Press, 1988), 154; Herbert S. Yee and Yiu-chung Wong, 'Hong Kong: The Politics of the Daya Bay Nuclear Plant Debate', *International Affairs* 63, no. 4 (1989): 617–30.

<sup>92</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 7 November 1984, PREM 19/1530, TNA.

<sup>93</sup> Memo, Clift to Cradock and Ricketts, 7 June 1984, FCO 40/1668 f493, TNA; note, Cradock, 8 June 1984 on memo, Clift to Cradock and Ricketts, 7 June 1984, FCO 40/1668 f493, TNA.

<sup>94</sup> Letter, Holmes to Coles, 8 September 1982, THCR 1/10/37A Part 2, CAC.

<sup>95</sup> 'MT Engagement Diary', Margaret Thatcher Foundation, ND <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/124964> (accessed 30 October 2024).

<sup>96</sup> Telegram, Pao to Thatcher, ND, THCR 1/3/10 f40, CAC; telegram, Pao to Thatcher, 13 October 1983, THCR 2/4/1/26 f59, CAC; letter, Thatcher to Pao, 9 August 1983, THCR 2/4/1/23 f107, CAC; memo, Coles to Holmes, 6 May 1983, PREM 19/1055, TNA.

<sup>97</sup> Letter, Coles to Ricketts, 21 February 1984, PREM 19/1797, TNA; letter, Pao to Thatcher, 1 August 1984, PREM 19/1797, TNA; briefing, 'Background', HKD to Thatcher, 14 November 1984 enclosed in memo, Ricketts to Charles Powell, 15 November 1984, FCO 40/1672 f929, FOI/TNA; memo, Ryder to Thatcher, 28 March 1984, PREM 19/1797, TNA.

Anticipating that Pao would ask for an invitation to the Joint Declaration signing ceremony in December 1984, for instance, Thatcher commented resignedly: “we shall not succeed in keeping Sir Y K away”.<sup>98</sup> British officials gave different interpretations for why Pao, who had previously been fanatical in impressing himself on the Prime Minister, had grown distant. One was that Pao decided to remove himself from the political scene: Cradock’s replacement as Britain’s Ambassador to Beijing Sir Richard Evans assessed that Pao’s “inclination [now] appears to be not to involve himself in political issues”.<sup>99</sup> This does not seem likely, however, as Pao resumed a quasi-political role when Hong Kong’s post-1997 constitution, the Basic Law, began being drafted in 1985.<sup>100</sup> Another explanation was that Pao had been absorbed completely into the Chinese fold by late 1982. So close was Pao to the Chinese leadership that mere hours after Thatcher had had her audience on 24 September 1982, Deng received Pao also.<sup>101</sup> The Hong Kong government assessed that Pao had been “much cultivated by the NCNA [New China News Agency, aka Xinhua]”.<sup>102</sup> This explanation is dissatisfactory because Pao was in contact with Chinese officials for years before. As with Kadoorie, the more likely explanation is that Pao perceived that he had extracted all he could from his association with Thatcher and so had little reason to bother her.

The self-interest of both businesspeople and politicians undermined relations between the British government and Hong Kong businesspeople. British officials allowed Hong Kong businesspeople repeated access to senior politicians only if they offered projects that promised political *and* economic advantages to Britain. Kadoorie and Pao proposed such projects and consequently achieved access, gaining backing for some (albeit, not all) of their ideas. Once these tycoons had extracted all that they could from their contacts in the British government, however, they faded from view leaving the purported political effect of their projects unfulfilled.

In sum, only some Hong Kong businesspeople continued to shape British official thinking after MacLehose’s March 1979 meeting with Deng Xiaoping but the extent of their influence was limited due to their prioritisation of their own commercial interests. Kadoorie and Pao formed a small coterie of Hong Kong commercial actors who had privileged access to senior British politicians. They gained this access by promising economic incentives and used it mostly to advance their own aims. While sometimes successful in persuading British officials to lend

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<sup>98</sup> Telegram, Youde to Cradock, 2 November 1984, PREM 19/1530, TNA; briefing, ‘Background’, HKD to Thatcher, 14 November 1984 enclosed in memo, Ricketts to Charles Powell, 15 November 1984, FCO 40/1672 f929, FOI/TNA.

<sup>99</sup> Telegram, Evans to FCO, 4 June 1984, FCO 40/1668 f491, TNA.

<sup>100</sup> Tsang, *A Modern History*, 241.

<sup>101</sup> ‘Statement gives some optimism’, *Hong Kong Standard*, 25 September 1982, 1 and 16.

<sup>102</sup> Telegram, Haddon-Cave to FCO, 11 June 1984, FCO 40/1669 f502, TNA.

support to their commercial-cum-political projects, these tycoons were primarily concerned with the interests of their companies and had little discernible impact on international politics.

## British officials and other Hong Kong businesspeople

Other Hong Kong businesspeople proffered political views but were unable to access the higher echelons of the British government. The key difference between this cohort and the tycoons was that, while they offered ideas about the future of Hong Kong, they did not combine these with promises of economic benefits to Britain. Blaming the confidentiality under which the Sino-British negotiations were supposed to be taking place, British officials did not grant these Hong Kong businesspeople frequent meetings with senior officials. At the same time, British officials discussed the potential value of using Hong Kong businesspeople to carry messages to Beijing. Officials were, however, unable to agree on whom they could trust to act as informal emissaries. As such, the British side robbed itself of potentially valuable insights from Hong Kong businesspeople by refusing to engage in discussions with them and failed to advance its agenda using Hong Kong businesspeople as intermediaries because they did not sufficiently trust them.

During the gap period, Hong Kong businesspeople continued to push British and colonial officials to address the 1997 issue. They warned officials that the lack of action was already affecting confidence in Hong Kong's economy. In a 1981 meeting, for instance, Fung King-hey warned Richard Clift that many smaller investors were already moving their funds out of Hong Kong.<sup>103</sup> On a separate occasion, Fung suggested to David Wilson that he and two other Hong Kong businesspeople, Li Ka-shing and Sir Y. K. Pao, could go to Beijing and speak with Deng to underscore the immediacy of the problem. Wilson quashed the proposal saying that "the time was not yet right".<sup>104</sup> British officials' apparent refusal to recognise the immediacy and significance of the issue was exasperating to Fung. Fung enlisted the assistance of his advisor, the British peer Lord Shepherd, who subsequently secured a lunch meeting with the Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Asia and the Pacific at the FCO, Alan Donald. Shortly after the meeting, Shepherd wrote a letter to Donald thanking him for his time and mentioned "opening the door to Mr Fung King Hey [sic]".<sup>105</sup> A few months later, Fung secured his own audience with Donald in which he repeated that investments were already being affected and complained that he felt "powerless to act". Donald reassured Fung that Hong Kong remained a good place to invest

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<sup>103</sup> Telegram, Youde to Donald, 19 June 1982, FCO 21/2213 f42, TNA.

<sup>104</sup> Letter, Wilson to Clift, 23 February 1981, FCO 40/1286 f39, TNA.

<sup>105</sup> Letter, Shepherd to Donald, 30 July 1981, FCO 40/1278 f25, TNA.

and instructed him to defer to colonial officials for direction should conversations with Chinese officials turn to political matters; Fung agreed to do so.<sup>106</sup> Despite his contact in the Lords, it does not appear that Fung was ever able to meet a Cabinet minister in order to express his concerns to a senior politician.

On 6 May 1981 at a meeting of the Pacific Basin Economic Council, Fung King-hey said that foreign businesses were hesitant to invest in Hong Kong due to the unresolved issue of the New Territories Lease. Fung believed that the colonial status quo – that is, the British administration of Hong Kong continuing after 1997 – should be allowed to continue because “China needs HK [*sic* – Hong Kong] as it is, and she has reiterated her commitment to HK [*sic* – Hong Kong] people.” Fung therefore called on the three governments – colonial, British and Chinese – to produce a guarantee that would address the anxieties of Hong Kong’s investors and inhabitants.<sup>107</sup> Fung was not the only Hong Kong businessperson frustrated at the British side’s apparent lack of action.

Less than a week after Fung’s statement, on 12 May, three prominent Hong Kong businesspeople made speeches with similar themes running through them, each of which earned coverage in the local press. In a speech to the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Hong Kong, Sir Y. K. Pao argued that 1997 would cease to be a concern if people simply stopped worrying about it. Confidence in Hong Kong and its economic future could be willed into existence by having confidence in Hong Kong and its economic future, he argued. The more that Hong Kong could do to demonstrate its value to China while remaining under British control, the more China would be inclined to leave Hong Kong as it was.<sup>108</sup> Chairman of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation and Unofficial Member of the Executive Council (ExCo) Michael Sandberg gave a speech on the same day.<sup>109</sup> Also on 12 May, the President of the Hong Kong Building Contractors’ Association Ho Sai-chu argued in a speech that the date ‘1997’ was almost entirely meaningless. Ho called upon the British and Chinese governments “to give a concrete guarantee on Hong Kong’s future” and suggested issuing “a joint communique stating that China would give notice of 20 years or more before taking back Hong Kong.” British officials believed that this rash of speeches were made in reaction to a meeting between the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Peter Carrington, and Deng Xiaoping in April 1981.<sup>110</sup> But none of the Hong Kong businesspeople

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<sup>106</sup> Meeting record, Donald and Fung et al., 25 November 1981, FCO 21/1946 f108, FOI/TNA.

<sup>107</sup> Letter, Orr to Clift, 19 June 1981, FCO 21/1945 f67, TNA.

<sup>108</sup> Speech, Pao at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club, 12 May 1981 enclosed in letter, Pao to Thatcher, 18 May 1981, FCO 21/1945 f58, TNA. Pao also sent a copy of the same speech to Carrington (letter, Pao to Carrington, 15 May 1981, FCO 40/1288 f124, TNA).

<sup>109</sup> Letter, Orr to Clift, 19 June 1981, FCO 21/1945 f67, TNA.

<sup>110</sup> Handwritten notes, Paul, Clift and Williamson, 2 July 1981, FCO 40/1289 w/f151, TNA.

mentioned Carrington's meeting with Deng. Moreover, speaking engagements were likely arranged long before Carrington's visit rather than because of it. The quartet of speeches speaks to the frustration that Hong Kong businesspeople felt at the apparent lack of action on the 1997 issue.

Following MacLehose's visit to Beijing in 1979, Hong Kong businesspeople frequently pressed colonial officials to take action on the 1997 lest the local economy suffer from progressively lower levels of investment and capital flight. They were not to know, however, that British and colonial officials were content with allowing Hong Kong's economy to worsen to a degree. The British side was aware that Hong Kong's economy was being damaged yet officials saw a potential positive to allowing Hong Kong's economy to deteriorate slightly. MacLehose commented that it could be favourable to the British because "the Chinese will find that as time passes pressure will mount on them from their own trading organisations and business contacts in Hong Kong".<sup>111</sup> Similarly, Clift commented that while a "slide in confidence would create major problems", it "might also encourage the Chinese to engage".<sup>112</sup> Unbeknownst to Hong Kong businesspeople, colonial officials were willing to allow the prospect of Hong Kong's economy worsening slightly in order to strengthen their hand against Beijing.

While Hong Kong businesspeople pressed colonial officials to engage Beijing, Governor MacLehose was more interested in having Hong Kong businesspeople apply pressure on Chinese officials themselves. MacLehose professed that "the most effective channel" for influencing Chinese official thinking was having Hong Kong "businessmen and other third parties who have privileged access to Chinese leaders" convince Chinese officials that British rule was required for maintaining Hong Kong's prosperity.<sup>113</sup> Carrington concurred, commenting that Chinese officials were more likely to listen to Hong Kong businesspeople because they were "their own people", referring to their shared ethnicity. MacLehose said that he would personally "encourage business visitors from Hong Kong [...] to make their concern known" and would "selectively brief" Hong Kong businesspeople but would do so "very judiciously". In Carrington's words, the scheme aimed at a "selective education of the Chinese through intermediaries".<sup>114</sup> Those selected to carry messages were not to see themselves as envoys designated to speak for the British side; instead, the then Chief Clerk of the FCO Youde wrote to MacLehose, their remit would be "simply to ensure that the general nature of the problem is brought" to the attention of Chinese officials.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Telegram, MacLehose to FCO, 27 September 1979, PREM 19/789, TNA.

<sup>112</sup> Memo, Clift to Youde, 3 December 1981, FCO 21/1946 f109, FOI/TNA.

<sup>113</sup> Telegram, MacLehose to Donald, 8 April 1982, FCO 21/2212 f16, TNA.

<sup>114</sup> Meeting record, Carrington and MacLehose et al., 5 November 1980, FCO 40/1156 f57, TNA.

<sup>115</sup> Letter, Youde to MacLehose, 26 November 1980, FCO 40/1164 f152, TNA.

Yet only on one occasion did MacLehose suggest to Sir Y. K. Pao that he remind Beijing officials that “firm arrangements [...] would have to be made soon”.<sup>116</sup> Apart from this one instance, there are no indications that MacLehose enlisted Hong Kong businesspeople to ‘educate’ Chinese leaders.

After MacLehose retired as Governor and passed the reins to Sir Edward Youde, the idea of briefing Hong Kong businesspeople to speak with Chinese officials remained alive.<sup>117</sup> In London, Francis Pym, who taken over Lord Carrington as Foreign Secretary, concurred that Youde “should use his discretion in briefing suitable visitors to adopt as helpful a line as possible on the economic realities and implications without committing HMG [Her Majesty’s Government].”<sup>118</sup> Again, however, there is no evidence that a briefing campaign was launched at that time. In June 1982, Youde complained that few of the Hong Kong businesspeople who had visited Beijing had had “the courage to tell the Chinese explicitly that continuing British administration is for the foreseeable future essential to confidence”.<sup>119</sup> Donald replied, asking whether there was “any scope for briefing sensible individuals to make their own approaches”.<sup>120</sup> Thatcher seemed to agree with the idea: while she was in Hong Kong in September 1982, she asked a group of 30 local businesspeople to help her get the message to the Chinese leadership that continued British administration was the only way to ensure Hong Kong’s prosperity and stability.<sup>121</sup> While the British side agreed that Hong Kong businesspeople were potentially useful intermediaries, it appears that little action was taken in this direction under either MacLehose or Youde.

British officials could not decide who would be a sufficiently trustworthy vessel for their messages. One of the names that was repeatedly suggested was Sir Y. K. Kan (aka Kan Yuet-keung).<sup>122</sup> Kan has been described as having been Governor MacLehose’s “most trusted adviser.”<sup>123</sup> Kan had been an Unofficial Member of ExCo and the Legislative Council (LegCo) since the 1960s, taking on the role of Senior Unofficial of ExCo in 1966 and LegCo in 1974. Kan was the only Unofficial to accompany MacLehose on his visit to Beijing in March 1979 and the first Hong Kong Chinese person to receive a knighthood. After stepping down as an Unofficial in 1980, MacLehose was keen to keep Kan as a link between Hong Kong and China so appointed him to

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<sup>116</sup> Telegram, MacLehose to Donald, 15 December 1981, FCO 40/1284 f48, TNA.

<sup>117</sup> Teleletter, MacLehose to Clift, 1 February 1982, FCO 40/1446 f32, TNA.

<sup>118</sup> Teleletter, Donald to Cradock and Haddon-Cave, 17 May 1982, FCO 40/1452 f267, TNA.

<sup>119</sup> Telegram, Youde to Donald, 19 June 1982, FCO 40/1453 f357, TNA. I quoted from this source in my ‘Britain’s Approach’, 1389.

<sup>120</sup> Telegram, Donald to Youde, 23 June 1982, FCO 21/2213 f53, TNA.

<sup>121</sup> Memo, Coles to Holmes, 28 September 1982, FCO 40/1460 f709, TNA.

<sup>122</sup> Telegram, Donald to Youde, 23 June 1982, FCO 21/2213 f53, TNA.

<sup>123</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 19.

spearhead the Hong Kong government's trade relations with the Guangdong government. During a private business trip to Beijing in mid-May 1981, Kan met with Liao Chengzhi and put across a line that echoed British concerns, lauding Deng's words of assurance but stressing that further action would be needed in a matter of years.<sup>124</sup> Kan's long relationship with the Hong Kong government therefore earned him a mention when discussing who could act as an intermediary.<sup>125</sup> Youde was unsure, however, warning that Kan's attitude had changed in recent years. In particular, Kan had been overheard speaking about the colonial administration in disparaging terms. Moreover, Youde was worried about creating a semi-official channel and feared this might inflate Kan's view of himself, a prospect that Youde found "unacceptably risky".<sup>126</sup> Youde's hesitancy over Sir Y. K. Kan and the British side's general inability to agree on a reliable Hong Kong messenger indicates that they were unable to place their trust fully into Hong Kong intermediaries.

Several Hong Kong people approached British officials offering themselves as intermediaries. In February 1983, for instance, the owner of Overseas Container Line (and later a member of the Basic Law Consultative Committee, an ExCo Unofficial and the first Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), Tung Chee-hwa, told Thatcher's Principal Private Secretary Robin Butler that the colonial administration should have a mechanism by which Hong Kong people could inform the colonial government they were about to visit China and colonial officials could arm visitors with messages to take to the Chinese authorities.<sup>127</sup> ExCo Unofficials offered themselves as channels for unofficial communication between the governments, too.<sup>128</sup> British officials agreed with the principle but such a system was not put into practice.

Lord Shepherd suggested to Clift that Fung King-hey could act as a "marriage broker" between Britain and Beijing, and asked Clift to provide Shepherd with lines that Fung could put to Chinese officials.<sup>129</sup> Clift thought that Fung could not be "relied upon to put over our points squarely" and resisted providing him with a briefing.<sup>130</sup> Ahead of Fung's visit to China in February 1983, Shepherd again approached the HKD and asked whether there were any messages Fung could pass to Liao Chengzhi. Donald said there was "no particular point to get across" but that

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<sup>124</sup> Memo, MacLehose to Youde, 25 May 1981, FCO 21/1945 f64, TNA.

<sup>125</sup> Draft briefing, 'Future of Hong Kong' Education of Chinese Leadership', HKD, FCO, British government, 20 October 1982 enclosed in letter, Homes to Coles, 20 October 1982, FCO 40/1466 f74, TNA.

<sup>126</sup> Telegram, Youde to Clift, 7 October 1982, FCO 40/1462 f843, TNA.

<sup>127</sup> Memo, Butler to Donald, 2 February 1983, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>128</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 25 March 1983, FCO 40/1550 f216, TNA.

<sup>129</sup> Letter, PS Belstead to Clift, 6 October 1982, FCO 40/1461 f807, TNA.

<sup>130</sup> Teleletter, Clift to Youde and Cradock, 29 October 1982, FCO 40/1467 f106, TNA.

Fung might mention “what made confidence in Hong Kong” and otherwise “Fung should listen” to his Chinese host.<sup>131</sup> Likewise, in January 1983, LegCo Unofficial Charles Yeung Siu-cho met the Hong Kong government’s Secretary (General Duties) L. M. ‘Bim’ Davies and Political Advisor Robin McLaren to ask what he should say when visiting Beijing as part of a group of New Territories representatives. McLaren told Yeung that the group should tell Chinese officials what they really thought and question any assertions made by Chinese officials that they felt were unfounded.<sup>132</sup> Davies and McLaren did not, however, tell Yeung to parrot the British line to his Chinese hosts.

British officials agreed with the idea of equipping Hong Kong businesspeople with talking points to convince Beijing of the necessity of continuing with British administration past 1997, yet no-one appeared to act on this initiative. Officials in London were under the impression that Youde was “briefing every potential and reliable visitor to China”.<sup>133</sup> Cradock at the Embassy in Beijing was “assured that we could leave it to Chinese businessmen from Hong Kong [...] to educate their compatriots”.<sup>134</sup> In practice, however, there were perishingly few examples of British officials arming Hong Kong visitors with messages to pass to Beijing and no evidence that this was done systematically at scale.<sup>135</sup> Despite agreeing in theory, the British side was never able to trust Hong Kong businesspeople sufficiently to have them act as intermediaries.

Confidentiality and distrust inhibited the relationship between Hong Kong businesspeople and British officials. While Hong Kong businesspeople saw Kadoorie and Pao granted access to the most senior British officials, they grew frustrated by what appeared to be a lack of activity or even a willingness to engage them on such a crucial issue. Consequently, many Hong Kong businesspeople gave up trying to offer themselves as channels between the UK and China or proffering their ideas.

British officials triaged its Hong Kong business contacts. In contrast to the tycoons who proffered projects promising both political and commercial potential, Hong Kong businesspeople that approached British officials merely with their opinions were not granted access to senior British politicians. As such, this group had little opportunity to shape British official thinking about the future of Hong Kong. Meanwhile, although British officials concurred that Hong Kong businesspeople might be useful as intermediaries, they failed to place their trust

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<sup>131</sup> Memo, Donald to Clift, 25 January 1983, FCO 40/1547 f74, TNA.

<sup>132</sup> Meeting note, McLaren, Davies and Yeung, 8 January 1983 enclosed in letter, Margolis to Hoare, 14 January 1983, FCO 40/1547 f88, TNA.

<sup>133</sup> Letter, Holmes to Coles, 26 November 1982, FCO 40/1467 f189, TNA; see also: briefing, ‘Secretary of State’s Meeting with the Prime Minister: 2 December 1982’, HKD, FCO, British government, 1 December 1982 enclosed in memo, Clift to Donald and PS, 1 December 1982, FCO 40/1467 f195, TNA.

<sup>134</sup> Cradock, *Experiences of China*, 172.

<sup>135</sup> Memo, Coles to Thatcher, 22 November 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

in any to act in this way. Hong Kong businesspeople were not politically apathetic but, aside from the tycoons, they were politically impotent in as much as they had little impact on the British side.

## Beijing and Hong Kong businesspeople during the gap period

Hong Kong businesspeople were largely denied the opportunity to share their thoughts with senior British officials; how did the Chinese government handle Hong Kong businesspeople during the gap period? Few authors have noted interactions between Hong Kong businesspeople and the Chinese government during this time. Journalist Robert Cottrell, for instance, noted that “Beijing entertained a flurry of Hong Kong delegations and businessmen in November and December 1981”.<sup>136</sup> Leo F. Goodstadt asserted that between 1982 and 1984, Beijing formed an “alliance [...] with business and professional interests, whose leaders came to enjoy the closest access to the Chinese leadership.”<sup>137</sup> Chi-kwan Mark wrote that between March and June 1982, “Deng was eager to hear first-hand the views of Hong Kong compatriots” but that his “main purpose was not to enquire whether China should recover Hong Kong” but rather “he wanted to solicit their views about how to maintain prosperity and stability in Hong Kong”.<sup>138</sup> These authors, however, did not examine how Hong Kong businesspeople tried to influence Chinese official thinking or whether they were effective in doing so. This section argues that the Chinese government gave Hong Kong businesspeople direct access to senior officials, who were receptive to the range of ideas brought to them. Moreover, there are indications that some of these views helped to shape Chinese official thinking about the future of Hong Kong during the gap period.

After March 1979, Beijing redoubled its efforts to develop contacts with Hong Kong businesspeople. In 1982 alone, at least 30 delegations from Hong Kong visited Beijing.<sup>139</sup> Delegates invariably met Liao Chengzhi, who was in charge of the HKMAO team that was busily developing recommendations for China’s Hong Kong policy.<sup>140</sup> Businesspeople, therefore, had direct access to the senior Chinese official in charge of Hong Kong matters. Many sought to impress one or both of the following points on their Chinese hosts. Firstly, that the land leases and the 1898 Lease were interrelated but different issues. Secondly, that the former was more

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<sup>136</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 66.

<sup>137</sup> Goodstadt, ‘China and the Selection’, 733.

<sup>138</sup> Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 76–77.

<sup>139</sup> Wong, *China’s Resumption of Sovereignty*, 22–23.

<sup>140</sup> Fang Kanshi [方侃实], ‘The Decision-Making Background and Process of Hong Kong’s Return to China, 1978-1982’ [1978~1982 年中国收回香港的决策背景与历程], *Contemporary China History Studies* [当代中国史研究] 24, no. 5 (2017): 38.

pressing and already affecting, or would soon start to affect, investors' confidence in the colony. In 1981, for instance, Edmond Lau Ting-chung met with Liao Chengzhi. Lau told Liao that even though the 1898 Lease did not expire until 1997, something had to be done about the dissipation of confidence.<sup>141</sup> Fung King-hey also met with Liao Chengzhi and other Chinese officials. On one of many trips to Beijing, Fung similarly stressed that confidence was already starting to affect Hong Kong, as evidenced by some smaller investors starting to shift their money from the colony, and that an unequivocal statement would soon be needed to prevent a further outpouring of capital.<sup>142</sup>

Both points appear to have shaped Chinese official thinking. Firstly, Chinese officials subtly shifted the way in which they talked about the two problems, reflecting that they eventually came to appreciate the separability of the Lease and land leases issues.<sup>143</sup> Secondly, after having been repeatedly warned that uncertainty around 1997 was already affecting confidence, Chinese officials began studying the issue in earnest. As journalist Frank Ching summarised, "China's hand was forced by Hong Kong residents and businesspeople who wanted the uncertainty of 1997 removed."<sup>144</sup> Whereas Deng had shown no intention of addressing Hong Kong reunification during his meeting with MacLehose in 1979, by 1982 and following conversations with Hong Kong businesspeople, China prepared a fully fledged position on Hong Kong.<sup>145</sup> Chinese official thinking was not shaped by Hong Kong contacts alone; they would have been affected by a range of influences, in particular how China's changing relations with the USA affected the feasibility of Taiwan reunification. Additionally, there were occasions on which British officials made the same points as Hong Kong businesspeople to their Chinese counterparts.<sup>146</sup> Yet Hong Kong businesspeople cannot be disentangled from this web of influences.

Liao Chengzhi and other Chinese officials remained receptive to a range of views. They even entertained opinions that ran contrary to the CCP's official position on Hong Kong. Prior to 1982, many Hong Kong businesspeople advanced that the only way to preserve Hong Kong's stability and prosperity was to allow the British administration to continue past 1997.<sup>147</sup> Fung King-hey, for instance, urged the Chinese to issue a statement confirming that British

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<sup>141</sup> Telegram, Wilson to Clift, 3 April 1981, FCO 21/1945 f42, TNA.

<sup>142</sup> Memo, Clift to Youde, 19 May 1981, FCO 40/1288 f116, TNA.

<sup>143</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 31 March 1981, FCO 21/1945 f38, TNA.

<sup>144</sup> Ching, *Hong Kong and China*, 60.

<sup>145</sup> Professor Louis Cha, 'Transcript of interview with Professor Louis Cha', interview by Steve Tsang (c. 1991), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 411, BSC, 20 (hereafter, Cha BSC interview).

<sup>146</sup> For example: minute, Carrington and Huang Hua et al., 1 October 1980, FCO 40/1161 f85, TNA; letter, Wilson to Clift, 15 April 1981, FCO 40/1288 f95A, TNA.

<sup>147</sup> Lu, *Return of Hong Kong*, 17.

administration would go on after 1997.<sup>148</sup> Sir Y. K. Pao similarly suggested that the current state of affairs ought to proceed past 1997.<sup>149</sup> Likewise, in July 1981, novelist and editor of the Hong Kong newspaper *Ming Pao*, Louis Cha Leung-yung (whose penname was Jin Yong), was received by Deng Xiaoping in Beijing – the first Hong Kong person to be met by China’s new leader since he had consolidated power.<sup>150</sup> Deng appeared receptive to the idea of Hong Kong remaining under British control after 1997, giving Cha “a very strong indication that China had no need [...] for taking back Hong Kong.” In a later interview, Cha recalled that Deng told him: “it would be better to keep the status quo. [...] so long as [Hong Kong] is useful to us [...] we will not necessarily take it back”.<sup>151</sup> Back in Hong Kong, Cha wrote editorials in favour of retaining the status quo. He could be confident that the ideas he published would be read by Chinese officials, as Liao Chengzhi had told Cha that he and his colleagues were paying close attention to Cha’s editorials.<sup>152</sup>

Cha and other Hong Kong visitors were initially unabashed in expressing their views even when they ran contrary to the CCP’s official line. For instance, Cha published an account of his meeting with Deng Xiaoping in his newspaper, one of the opening lines of which acknowledged: “There are some differences of opinion” between the editor and the statesman.<sup>153</sup> One reason for this may have been that many had the means to leave Hong Kong swiftly should the circumstances require: Kadoorie and Pao both held British passports; Cha had the right of abode in Singapore; and Fung was in a position to easily apply for Canadian citizenship.<sup>154</sup> The majority of Hong Kong’s population were not, however, as mobile.<sup>155</sup> In short, Hong Kong businesspeople invited to Beijing routinely told Liao Chengzhi and other senior officials that Hong Kong would benefit from a continuation of the British administration after 1997.

By 1982, however, none of the Hong Kong businesspeople who visited Beijing were recommending that the British administration should continue past 1997. One explanation for the shift may be that beginning in early 1982, Hong Kong visitors to Beijing were no longer necessarily met by Liao Chengzhi but instead by China’s most senior leaders, Deng Xiaoping or,

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<sup>148</sup> Memo, Clift to Youde, 19 May 1981, FCO 40/1288 f116, TNA.

<sup>149</sup> Minute, Pao and Carrington, 30 March 1981, FCO 40/1288 f79A, TNA.

<sup>150</sup> John Christopher Hamm, *Paper Swordsmen: Jin Yong and the Modern Chinese Martial Arts Novel* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 198–99.

<sup>151</sup> Cha BSC interview, 11, emphasis removed.

<sup>152</sup> Letter, Wilson to Clift, 5 October 1981, FCO 40/1290 f204, TNA.

<sup>153</sup> Louis Cha Leung-yung [查良鏞], ‘Record of a conversation with Deng Xiaoping’ [鄧小平談話紀錄], *Ming Pao* [明報], September 1981, 3.

<sup>154</sup> Kadoorie: Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 88; Pao: memo, Clift to Cradock and Ricketts, 7 June 1984, FCO 40/1668 f493, TNA; Cha: telegram, Cradock to Donald, 30 September 1982, FCO 40/1459 f665, TNA; Fung: letter, PS Belstead to Clift, 6 October 1982, FCO 40/1461 f807, TNA.

<sup>155</sup> Lui et al., *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Hong Kong*, 8.

more, often Zhao Ziyang. As a consequence, as Steve Tsang put it, “Most Hong Kong visitors lost their resolution to speak frankly”.<sup>156</sup> Christine Loh described such delegations in similar terms, saying they were too afraid to “express their true feelings in a fulsome manner”.<sup>157</sup> Hong Kong contacts may have felt comfortable telling Liao opinions that they were uncomfortable telling Deng or Zhao, whose presence may have inadvertently inhibited honest conversation. Another interpretation, not incompatible with the first, is that Hong Kong businesspeople had lost faith in the British administration. As expounded in the previous section, only tycoons who offered projects of both political and economic importance to Britain could gain access to senior British officials leaving a large swathe of Hong Kong businesspeople frustrated. Additionally, with little visible activity by the colonial administration towards addressing the 1997 issue and with Hong Kong’s economy suffering, it may have appeared that the issue that Hong Kong businesspeople had made quite clear was the most concerning them was going unaddressed by British administrators. Hong Kong businesspeople may have consequently gravitated towards the Chinese side having lost patience with and trust in the British side and realising that the seniority of officials whom they could meet in Beijing would not be matched in London.

China continued to ask Hong Kong businesspeople to carry messages to British officials, as it had done before extending an invitation to MacLehose to visit Beijing. This shows that Beijing extended a greater degree of trust to Hong Kong businesspeople than the British side could muster. Between March 1979 and September 1982, Beijing continued to view Hong Kong businesspeople as bridges to the British side. While Chinese officials were still developing a position on Hong Kong, on several occasions they persuaded Hong Kong businesspeople to ask colonial and British officials their thoughts for the colony’s future. For instance, Liao Chengzhi encouraged Edmond Lau Ting-chung to contact British officials and ask for their views.<sup>158</sup> Huang Hua told Sir Y. K. Pao that he wanted the British to suggest multiple solutions.<sup>159</sup> The British side did not respond to these blatant invitations to engage in informal diplomatic dialogue via Hong Kong businesspeople. The Chinese side also used Hong Kong intermediaries in an attempt to tell British officials that they were not ready to discuss the 1997 issue. At a dinner in Beijing, Liao Chengzhi asked General Manager of the Bank of East Asia, David Li Kwok-po, to tell British officials that Beijing was not yet prepared to discuss the future of Hong Kong. The message made its way from Li to Edmond Lau Ting-chung and then to London.<sup>160</sup> British officials, however,

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<sup>156</sup> Tsang, *Appointment with China*, 93.

<sup>157</sup> Loh, *Underground Front*, 137.

<sup>158</sup> Telegram, Wilson to Clift, 3 April 1981, FCO 21/1945 f42, TNA.

<sup>159</sup> Telegram, MacLehose to FCO, 12 January 1982, PREM 19/789, TNA.

<sup>160</sup> Letter, McLaren to Clift, 17 December 1981, FCO 40/1282 f28, TNA.

continued to develop ideas on the issue ahead of Thatcher's September 1982 visit to China, where the Prime Minister raised the topic to China's chagrin.

During the gap period, Beijing continued to use Hong Kong businesspeople to try to communicate with British officials. But China did not see Hong Kong businesspeople as mere messengers alone. Beijing also welcomed Hong Kong businesspeople to China as part of an ongoing attempt to develop its Hong Kong policy. In virtue of their direct access to senior officials and the officials' receptivity to different views, Hong Kong businesspeople were able to shape Chinese official thinking on the 1997 issue. Whereas Leo F. Goodstadt and Chi-kwan Mark described the relationship between Beijing and Hong Kong businesspeople in transactional terms, this section has found that Chinese officials were also eager to understand the views about the future that Hong Kong businesspeople brought to them.

## Conclusion

Just as the expansion of British trade and colonial control across the world relied on the wisdom and connections of local people, so too were Hong Kong businesspeople embedded in the beginnings of the handover of Hong Kong. Compradors in early colonial Hong Kong benefitted from their position as go-betweens and China's economic opening saw Hong Kong businesspeople resume this role with gusto, becoming uniquely positioned between the colony and Beijing. Through an analysis of how they used their access and by tracing the influence of non-officials on officials, this chapter has shown that Hong Kong businesspeople also inserted themselves into the triangular politics between Britain, Beijing and Hong Kong, thereby shaping initial official contacts on the future of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong businesspeople performed several functions. As China was reconnecting with the rest of the world, Hong Kong businesspeople acted as essential channels between Hong Kong, China and Britain, adding their own advice to the information they passed between these three poles. Hong Kong businesspeople encouraged the colonial government to raise the 1997 issue with Chinese officials ahead of MacLehose's March 1979 meeting with Deng Xiaoping. After the 1979 meeting, British officials triaged Hong Kong business contacts. Tycoons Lord Kadoorie and Sir Y. K. Pao enjoyed the greatest degree of access to senior British officials, which they secured by offering projects that promised both political and economic benefits to Britain. Both sought to protect the status quo in Hong Kong through a variety of different ideas designed to show the strength of UK-China relations. None were especially effective, however, but were entertained by the most senior British officials including the Prime Minister. Other Hong Kong businesspeople

were unable to secure meetings with senior British officials, who considered sending messages through Hong Kong businesspeople but ultimately could not decide on who was sufficiently trustworthy.

The British and Chinese governments handled Hong Kong businesspeople very differently. Waves of Hong Kong businesspeople were welcomed to Beijing where they enjoyed access to senior officials who listened to their views. The Chinese government appointed Liao Chengzhi as its single point of contact for receiving Hong Kong visitors, making it clear whom to approach to channel Hong Kong ideas to the Chinese leadership. Liao engaged with his visitors' thoughts and pledged to consider their concerns. In 1982, Beijing signalled that it was elevating the importance of Hong Kong by arranging meetings with Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping. For some visitors, this may have inhibited them from expressing a preference for the colonial administration to continue; others had lost confidence in the British administration, which appeared unresponsive to all but the wealthiest tycoons in Hong Kong. Britain, by contrast, had no single representative in charge of the 1997 issue and, by dividing Hong Kong business contacts according to the politically irrelevant value of the size of their projects, reduced their own ability to gain a broad picture of Hong Kong business views.

There is no claim that the Hong Kong businesspeople reviewed in this chapter represent the *vox populi* of the entire city of more than 5 million Hong Kong people. Most were high net worth individuals who possessed the means, time, temerity and language skills to travel internationally, secure meetings with officials, and discuss economic and political issues in Cantonese, Mandarin and English. Nonetheless, these Hong Kong businesspeople and their contacts with officials demonstrate that some Hong Kong people directly engaged and sometimes influenced the official thinking about and bilateral interactions over of Hong Kong's future.

This chapter adds to the scant existing literature on the gap period and how interactions that took place during this period shaped official thinking about the future of Hong Kong. In contrast to the British official narrative, which holds that Hong Kong people played no role in the 1997 issue and which has informed much of the English language literature, this chapter has found that Hong Kong businesspeople were both politically opinionated and sometimes politically impactful, too. Hong Kong businesspeople and political officials were not operating in siloes separated from each other. Instead, Hong Kong businesspeople were political collaborators who co-produced international relations; fountains of ideas, of which some were adopted by officials; and facilitators of diplomatic communications. Far from being disinterested or politically unimportant, this chapter demonstrates that some Hong Kong businesspeople were proactive and influential.

## Chapter 2 – Shaping Official Thinking: Unofficial Members, Pressure Groups and the Urban Council in the Prelude to Formal Negotiations

How could Hong Kong people other than businesspeople, express their views about the 1997 issue? This chapter examines the routes open to Hong Kong people for expressing views about the 1997 issue during what Maurice Yip called the “gap period”, which ranges from Governor MacLehose’s 1979 meeting with Deng Xiaoping to Prime Minister Thatcher’s 1982 visit to Beijing.<sup>1</sup> Linda Butenhoff outlined two such avenues.<sup>2</sup> One way stayed within the institutions of the colonial administration. The colonial government had established several councils that were supposed to bridge Hong Kong society with the state including UMELCO, Urban Council and District Boards, detailed later. A second way that a Hong Kong person could express their views was by engaging in pressure group activities. Pressure groups were outside of and circumvented the colonial government’s formal apparatus. A variety of different pressure groups existed, established at different times and for different purposes, detailed later. Additionally, these two poles sometimes crossed: some members of pressure groups also held positions on the Urban Council, a municipal services body with some seats returned through direct elections. Taking each of these three in turn, this chapter examines the extent to which Hong Kong people could shape official thinking via these channels.

Unofficial Members were appointed by the Governor to advise him and ostensibly acted as a bridge between Hong Kong society and the Hong Kong government. The role of UMELCO in the future of Hong Kong has been the focus of two recent contributions to the literature, which were both written with the benefit of access to recently declassified British government archives at TNA. In a popular history publication, Louisa Lim argued that UMELCO attempted to provide a voice for Hong Kong but that their efforts were frustrated because they were excluded from the circle of those entrusted with knowledge about official interactions, undermined by British and Chinese officials, and their advice largely unheeded.<sup>3</sup> In an academic paper, Yui Chim Lo also described UMELCO as having felt “kept in the dark about London’s plans”. He noted that the

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<sup>1</sup> Yip, ‘New Town Planning’, 374.

<sup>2</sup> Butenhoff, *Social Movements*.

<sup>3</sup> Lim, *Indelible City*, 95–122.

British government “consulted” the Unofficials only once prior to Thatcher’s 1982 visit and assessed that the Prime Minister “did not entirely follow the advice” UMELCO gave.<sup>4</sup> In short, these two recent publications argue that British and Hong Kong government officials more or less ignored UMELCO. Arguing against this conclusion, this chapter uses a closer and more comprehensive survey of declassified archival material at TNA augmented by a range of other primary sources to show that there were many occasions on which UMELCO impacted how British and Hong Kong government officials thought about the future of Hong Kong.

In the 1970s, Governor MacLehose implemented changes to the structure of government that aimed at improving the administration’s responsiveness to the public while simultaneously embarking on social reforms that sought to rewrite the contract between the state and society.<sup>5</sup> In response, pressure groups established themselves by the dozen. As the colonial administration suppressed political expressions, these pressure groups instead placed social issues in their crosshairs. In spite of colonial laws censoring publications and suppressing protests, pressure groups held press conferences, launched petitions and even staged demonstrations to push for their objectives.<sup>6</sup> By the 1980s, some pressure groups let the veil of social issues slip and took to expressing views that were unmistakably political in orientation. Such groups operated in an uneasy tension with the colonial government. As Lo Shiu-hing observed, the colonial government did not want pressure groups and their ideas to grow to threaten the administration or dictate policy; at the same time, however, colonial officials appreciated the insights and statistics that they produced and consulted groups on a range of matters.<sup>7</sup> There is an extensive literature on Hong Kong’s pro-democracy pressure groups, especially those that emerged out of the Sino-British negotiations.<sup>8</sup> Less attention, however, has been lavished on those that did not push for democracy or which operated during the gap period. This chapter examines how Hong Kong pressure groups sought to influence officials during the gap period and includes groups that did not push for democracy.

This chapter begins by assessing the influence of UMELCO and argues, contra Lim and Yui Chim Lo, that there were a number of occasions on which UMELCO directly influenced British

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<sup>4</sup> Lo, ‘Last Stand of Colonialism’, 372–73.

<sup>5</sup> Ming Sing, ‘Economic Development, Civil Society and Democratization in Hong Kong’, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 26, no. 4 (1996): 487.

<sup>6</sup> Mok, *Covert Colonialism*, 92–97, 162–64; Michael Ng, *Political Censorship in British Hong Kong: Freedom of Expression and the Law (1842–1997)* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 145, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108908580>.

<sup>7</sup> Lo, *Politics of Democratization*, 39.

<sup>8</sup> Butenhoff, *Social Movements*; Alvin Y. So, ‘Hong Kong’s Embattled Democracy: Perspectives from East Asian NIEs’, in *Hong Kong: Legacies and Prospects of Development*, ed. Benjamin K. P. Leung (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003).

and Hong Kong officials. It then reviews how pressure groups sought to shape official thinking about the future of Hong Kong from outside of the Hong Kong government's formal structure. Lastly, it considers pressure groups that had members on the Urban Council, which represented a cross between the formal apparatus created by the government and pressure groups. It shows that operating within the colonial government's formal apparatus (through UMELCO) or outside of it (through pressure group activities), including those that crossed between the two (such as pressure group members on the Urban Council), made little difference to the ability of the Hong Kong people involved to affect official thinking. Instead, the distinguishing feature was that Hong Kong people who produced proposals and polls that provided insights into Hong Kong opinion were decidedly more successful in influencing officials, as officials lacked their own sources of information and ideas. In so doing, this chapter provides further counterexamples against the accusation that Hong Kong people were politically apathetic and impotent, adds to the literature on the gap period, and reflects that Hong Kong people held a range of political opinions other than pro-democratic ones.

## UMELCO

As noted above, Louisa Lim and Yui Chim Lo described UMELCO as having felt 'in the dark' when it came to Sino-British exchanges over the future of Hong Kong. Both concluded that UMELCO's influence on officials was negligible.<sup>9</sup> A closer and more comprehensive examination of declassified records, however, questions this conclusion. This section explores the ways in which UMELCO tried to influence politics and assesses their impact. It shows that UMELCO's relationship with colonial and British officials was complex: that despite supposedly functioning as bridges to Hong Kong society and being touted as a channel for bottom-up communication, UMELCO had to press repeatedly to gain information and secure meetings with officials. When UMELCO did secure audiences, the Unofficial Members conveyed the Hong Kong public's views to officials and successfully influenced officials on a number of points during the gap period. As such, the conclusion that the Unofficial Members had little or no role is shown to be mistaken.

Hong Kong's colonial constitution created two councils: ExCo and LegCo. Each was filled by Official and Unofficial Members. Official Members were those that also held an office of the colonial government. Unofficial Members were not so employed but were instead appointed to one or both of the Councils by the Governor. The Unofficial Members of each Council were represented by a Senior Unofficial Member; sometimes, the same person represented the

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<sup>9</sup> Lim, *Indelible City*, ch. 4; Lo, 'Last Stand of Colonialism'.

Unofficial Members of both ExCo and LegCo.<sup>10</sup> By the 1980s, most of the Unofficial Members were ethnically Chinese or Eurasian with a minority being European, most but not all of whom had been born in Britain.

Unofficials and British officials had few interactions about Hong Kong's future until early 1982. In July 1980, the Senior Unofficial Member of ExCo Sir S. Y. Chung (aka Chung Sze-yuen) raised worries with the Head of the HKD Richard Clift. Chung told Clift that two segments of Hong Kong society were growing increasingly frightened: businesspeople were concerned about the land leases issue and young people were fretting about the broader future of Hong Kong "on grounds of career planning, citizenship status of their children, etc.". Chung recommended that the British offer a quid pro quo in which Britain would recognise China's sovereignty and China would allow Britain to continue administering the colony for at least 25 years from 1997.<sup>11</sup> Unofficials repeated their concerns the following year. In a March 1981 meeting with the British Foreign Secretary Lord Peter Carrington, Unofficial Member of LegCo and ExCo Lydia Dunn spoke of growing concern amongst commercial groups and the middle class as well as pressure from prospective overseas investors. Chung repeated that young people were growing apprehensive about Hong Kong's future and that the city did not wish to lose them to other territories.<sup>12</sup> Carrington said he would raise the question when he visited Beijing and that Britain's objective was to maintain the colonial administration as it was after 1997.<sup>13</sup> Aside from these, Unofficials made few substantive attempts to engage in discussions about the 1997 issue before 1982.

Unofficials were not to know that there had been little activity between British and Chinese officials on the 1997 issue. Chi-kwan Mark characterised the British approach during 1980 and 1981 as one of "Quiet but persistent prompts".<sup>14</sup> 'Persistent' is, however, an exaggeration. Following MacLehose's March 1979 meeting with Deng Xiaoping, on 5 July, Ambassador Cradock handed a written version of the British proposal for addressing the land leases issue to the Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister, Song Zhiguang.<sup>15</sup> China rebuffed the

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Hurst, 'Constitutional Change', in *A New Documentary History of Hong Kong, 1945-1997*, ed. Florence Mok and Chi Keung Charles Fung (Hong Kong University Press, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.28210040.10>; Steve Tsang, ed., *A Documentary History of Hong Kong: Government and Politics* (Hong Kong University Press, 1995), ch. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Memo, Clift to Morrice and Williamson, 31 July 1980, FCO 40/1162 f78, TNA.

<sup>12</sup> Letter, Miller to Clift, 9 April 1981, FCO 40/1288 f88, TNA.

<sup>13</sup> Telegram, PS MacLehose to FCO, 31 March 1981, FCO 40/1288 f80, TNA.

<sup>14</sup> Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 56.

<sup>15</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 6 July 1979, FCO 40/1060 f136, TNA; speaking note, 'Speaking note on the New Territories leases – left with Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister, Song Zhiguang, by the British Ambassador on 5 July 1979', 5 July 1979, FCO 40/1060 f136A, TNA.

British proposals on 24 September.<sup>16</sup> The Chief Secretary of the Hong Kong government Sir Jack Cater raised the land leases again with the Chinese Governor of Guangdong, Xi Zhongxun, when Xi passed through Hong Kong in December 1980, though only to register that the issue remained unresolved rather than to prompt discussion.<sup>17</sup> In May 1980, Chinese Vice Premier Gu Mu told the Hong Kong government's Financial Secretary, Sir Philip Haddon-Cave, who was visiting Beijing, that "the Chinese Government would find a solution" to the Hong Kong question.<sup>18</sup> Seeing Gu's comments as an invitation to discuss further, in October 1980, Lord Carrington told the Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua that the land leases problem would need addressing "within 2 years" and that the "more general question of the future of Hong Kong [...] was a separate matter".<sup>19</sup> After promising UMELCO that he would raise the issue in Beijing, Carrington spoke to Huang on 2 April 1981, describing the issue as a legal one and suggesting further talks.<sup>20</sup> These were some of the few occasions on which British and Chinese officials mentioned the unresolved 1997 issue.

By 1982, UMELCO had grown concerned. The Unofficials mistook the infrequency of updates from the British side as an indication that they were being excluded from discussions between British and Chinese officials about the 1997 issue. The Unofficials' suspicions were piqued further when the British Lord Privy Seal Humphrey Atkins read to Unofficials transcripts of his meeting with the Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang in January 1982.<sup>21</sup> Zhao had told Atkins that China held "no specific formula" for Hong Kong aside from its broad stance on recovery.<sup>22</sup> Some in UMELCO may have seen Atkins' disclosure as evidence that there was more that officials were not telling them. UMELCO therefore took it upon themselves to develop suggestions for Hong Kong's future. In early 1982, some UMELCO members created a small group led by Lo Tak-shing, an Unofficial Member of both ExCo and LegCo.<sup>23</sup> Lo had been worried about the future of Hong Kong since at least 1977 and had approached Governor MacLehose with his own proposal for fixing the issue in 1978.<sup>24</sup> MacLehose provided the small group with documents and an account of UK-China communications since March 1979 in the hopes of showing that "though things were

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<sup>16</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 24 September 1979, FCO 40/1060 f195, TNA.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Torigian, *The Party's Interests Come First: The Life of Xi Zhongxun, Father of Xi Jinping* (Stanford University Press, 2025), 361–62.

<sup>18</sup> Meeting record, Gu and Haddon-Cave et al., 8 May 1980, FCO 40/1156 w/f23, TNA.

<sup>19</sup> Minute, Carrington and Huang Hua et al., 1 October 1980, FCO 40/1161 f85, TNA.

<sup>20</sup> Telegram, PS Cradock to FCO, 2 April 1981, FCO 40/1275 f61, TNA.

<sup>21</sup> Meeting note, Atkins and UMELCO et al., 9 January 1982 enclosed in memo, Williamson to McQuade and Clift, 12 March 1982, FCO 40/1436 f33, TNA.

<sup>22</sup> Telegram, Cradock to Clift, 12 January 1982, PREM 19/789, TNA.

<sup>23</sup> Letter, MacLehose to Clift, 6 April 1982, FCO 40/1449 f204, TNA; telegram, Youde to Donald, 13 July 1982, FCO 40/1454 f419, TNA.

<sup>24</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 3–9.

moving slowly, there was movement and in all the right direction". This disclosure by the Governor was the first time UMELCO were given anything approaching a full picture of the history of Britain's exchanges with China on the 1997 issue and must have acted as further motivation for the Unofficials to ensure that they had a stake in its resolution.<sup>25</sup>

As soon as it was announced that MacLehose would be retiring as Governor and replaced by Sir Edward Youde, the Unofficials set about ensuring that the incoming Governor knew that they expected him to make addressing the 1997 issue one of his primary concerns. Chung drafted a speech which won the endorsement of the Unofficial Members and, Chung believed, "also represented the general feeling of the Hong Kong people".<sup>26</sup> During Youde's inauguration on 20 May 1982 at City Hall, Chung delivered his speech insisting that Youde resolve the outstanding issue of Hong Kong's future.<sup>27</sup> He had provided Youde with a copy of the speech in advance out of courtesy.<sup>28</sup> Chung rose and said: "I hope you, sir, will agree with me that the first priority must be the question of the future of Hong Kong". In reply, Youde acknowledged the need to provide confidence in Hong Kong's future.<sup>29</sup> Chung believed that the Unofficials' pressure from the outset of Youde's tenure ensured the 1997 question became the Governor's "number one priority."<sup>30</sup> Youde continued his predecessor's practice of meeting with the Unofficials' group on the future of Hong Kong. Before he left his post, MacLehose advised Youde to continue meeting the UMELCO small group "at tolerably regular intervals e.g. about [every] six weeks" to avoid "some of them fly[ing] off at a tangent."<sup>31</sup> The new Governor followed this advice, ensuring there was a regular dialogue between himself and the Unofficials on the future of Hong Kong.

Unofficials used their time with the Governor to push for a meeting with the Prime Minister. During their 13 July 1982 meeting, Unofficials urged Youde to go to London and convince British officials that UMELCO ought to be consulted before Thatcher visited Beijing that September.<sup>32</sup> To stress the need for the British to engage more openly with Hong Kong views, the Unofficials contrasted Beijing's ongoing consultations with Hong Kong visitors with Britain's failure to do so.<sup>33</sup> After Youde left the meeting, the Unofficials discussed the idea of sending a delegation to London

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<sup>25</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 74.

<sup>26</sup> Sir S. Y. Chung, 'Transcript of interviews with Sir Sze-yuen Chung, GBE, JP, LLD, DSc, PHD', interview by Steve Tsang (five occasions between 23 January 1989 and 3 January 1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 328, BSC, 157 (hereafter, Chung BSC interview).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 81–82.

<sup>28</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Sze-yuen Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey to Reunification* (Chinese University Press, 2001), 45–46.

<sup>30</sup> Chung BSC interview, 157.

<sup>31</sup> Letter, MacLehose to Clift, 6 April 1982, FCO 40/1449 f204, TNA.

<sup>32</sup> Telegram, Youde to Donald, 13 July 1982, FCO 40/1454 f419, TNA.

<sup>33</sup> Telegram, Youde to Clift, 19 July 1982, FCO 40/1455 f439, TNA.

under their own steam. When the Governor found out about this, he fretted that such a delegation might embarrass the British government and reveal disunity between the colonial government and its advisory councils. In the hopes of avoiding this, Youde wrote to the FCO recommending that they invite Chung and a few of Chung's "most coherent colleagues" to accompany Youde to London.<sup>34</sup> Chung was viewed as loyal: he had demurred from leading the small group because he felt it undermined the colonial government.<sup>35</sup> He had also declined Beijing's invitation to join the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a CCP advisory body.<sup>36</sup> The former Governor, now Lord, MacLehose supported Youde's suggestion, adding that receiving UMELCO in London would help to counter Beijing's "lobbying exercise".<sup>37</sup> The HKD's Clift, however, recommended against. He worried that an UMELCO delegation to London accompanied by Youde might raise expectations that a solution to the 1997 issue was in the offing only for hopes to be dashed.<sup>38</sup> FCO Assistant Under-Secretary Alan Donald added that inviting the Unofficials to give their opinions to Thatcher might set a precedent and lead to the Unofficials demanding to be consulted in the future. He added: "there are far too many people in Hong Kong whose thinking about the future is extremely woolly".<sup>39</sup> Donald would only allow Youde to come to London for discussions on his own.<sup>40</sup> Youde reported back to the FCO that UMELCO were satisfied with this.<sup>41</sup> The Unofficials had not secured the meeting they had wanted but they had ensured that the Governor would see the Prime Minister prior to her departure for Beijing.

Before he left for London, Youde had meetings with UMELCO to discuss their thoughts on the future of Hong Kong.<sup>42</sup> The Governor then left for London in July 1982. During his meeting with Thatcher, Youde conveyed two points that had been impressed on him by the Unofficial Members. Firstly, Hong Kong had to be kept whole rather than divided between the leased and the ceded portions. Secondly, while UMELCO would prefer for the British administration to continue after 1997, they felt that Britain would have to concede sovereignty in order to obtain this. Youde also pushed again for an Unofficial delegation to London before the Prime Minister left for Beijing.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Telegram, Youde to Acland, 13 July 1982, FCO 40/1454 f420, TNA.

<sup>35</sup> Letter, MacLehose to Clift, 6 April 1982, FCO 40/1449 f204, TNA.

<sup>36</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 39; Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong*, 258.

<sup>37</sup> Letter, Donald to PS Acland, 21 July 1982, FCO 40/1455 f462, TNA.

<sup>38</sup> Memo, Clift to Donald, 14 July 1982, FCO 40/1454 f423, TNA.

<sup>39</sup> Letter, Donald to PS Acland, 21 July 1982, FCO 40/1455 f462, TNA. I used this quote in my 'Britain's Approach', 1391.

<sup>40</sup> Telegram, Donald to Youde, 14 July 1982, FCO 40/1454 f422, TNA.

<sup>41</sup> Telegram, Youde to Donald, 16 July 1982, FCO 40/1454 f435, TNA.

<sup>42</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 47–48.

<sup>43</sup> Meeting note, Thatcher and Pym et al., 28 July 1982, PREM 19/789, TNA.

Once back in Hong Kong, Youde recounted his conversation with Thatcher to UMELCO and that he had recommended an UMELCO delegation to London. It was soon decided that the Unofficials would be allowed to call on the Prime Minister in September. Unofficials prepared for their meeting with the Prime Minister by availing themselves of Hong Kong public opinion. In August, UMELCO's Secretary, Joseph Wong Wing-ping, compiled a paper that summarised Hong Kong people's views about the colony's future. Two main sources informed the report: opinions expressed in public forums, such as speeches and letters to the editors of newspapers, and those that had been conveyed directly to Members of UMELCO. Wong divided the categories of opinion into five visions for Hong Kong's future:

1. Status quo: that the British colonial administration continue after 1997.
2. That the British administration continue after 1997 but that Britain recognise Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong.
3. A joint Chinese and British administration.
4. That China make Hong Kong a special administrative region.
5. That China and Britain sign a friendship treaty that agreed to extend the New Territories Lease by several decades.

The Unofficials believed that most people would prefer the first option: a continuation of the colonial status quo.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, Youde selected five delegates for the visit. Sir S. Y. Chung and Roger Lobo were chosen because they were the Senior Unofficial Members of ExCo and LegCo, respectively. Unofficial Member of ExCo Li Fook-wo was to represent the 'old boys' while Lydia Dunn was to represent the 'new'. Lastly, Unofficial Member of LegCo Chan Kam-chuen was intended to represent the grassroots, as he was employed as a building manager.<sup>45</sup> Representatives picked and research completed, the Unofficials made for London.

The Unofficials met Thatcher on 8 September 1982. The Prime Minister was, however, not particularly interested in the views of Hong Kong people. Instead, she spent most of the meeting asking for UMELCO's advice as to how to handle Chinese officials. The meeting record reflects only one reference to the opinions of Hong Kong people: unprompted by Thatcher, Chung told the Prime Minister that "over 90% of the Hong Kong people would like Hong Kong to remain status quo beyond 1997" as proven by "two major independent surveys". Exactly which surveys Chung

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<sup>44</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 49–50; Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 45.

<sup>45</sup> Li Fook-wo, 'Transcript of interviews with Fook-wo Li Esq, CBE, JP, DSSc, FCIB', interview by Steve Tsang (4 and 8 January 1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 334, BSC, 80 (hereafter, Li BSC interview).

was referring to is lost to time, but the most extensive surveys that had been conducted by that date were those commissioned by the Reform Club and Hong Kong Observers, both of which are detailed below.<sup>46</sup> Although Thatcher had not asked the Unofficial Members about the opinions of Hong Kong people, the surveys Chung described left an impression on the Prime Minister for when she met Deng Xiaoping in Beijing later that month, she referred to Hong Kong opinion polls, echoing Chung's words almost exactly: "every survey showed that the people of Hong Kong wished the British system of administration to be maintained." She did not, however, follow everything the Unofficials had advised. Chung had told Thatcher that most Hong Kong people wanted the status quo to continue; that is, Chung touted the first of the five categories contained in Wong's report. When Thatcher met Deng, however, she proposed the second of the five categories, offering China titular sovereignty so long as Britain could continue to administer the colony, which Deng rejected.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the Unofficials at least succeeded in conveying their assessment of Hong Kong wishes to the Prime Minister.

As well as showing how the Unofficials influenced Thatcher, the September meeting also reveals how British officials treated Hong Kong's appointed representatives. When British officials considered UMELCO's request for an audience, they gave little regard to the fact that the Unofficials were supposed to provide a bridge between the Hong Kong public and the authorities. Instead, British officials were more concerned with appearances. Youde had recommended that the British government extend an invitation to a select few Unofficials in order to undercut the group that were considering mounting their own delegation. That is, Youde did not recommend the visit because of the value of hearing the Unofficials' opinions but rather to pre-empt a potentially embarrassing visit by the small group. Similarly, MacLehose supported the idea of a delegation not because they could convey Hong Kong people's views to Thatcher but instead as a counterweight to Beijing's ongoing exercise of consulting and cosyng up to Hong Kong businesspeople. Furthermore, once the idea was accepted, British officials gave considerable regard to extracting the maximum possible publicity value out of the visit. In a statement drafted before the meeting and issued afterwards, British officials claimed that Thatcher's "object" in meeting the Unofficials was "to hear at first hand their [UMELCO's] views on the climate of

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<sup>46</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher and UMELCO et al., 8 September 1982 enclosed in memo, Coles to Holmes, 8 September 1982, PREM 19/790, TNA. Chung recounted the same story regarding two surveys in an oral history interview given later (Chung BSC interview, 187). In his autobiography, Chung named three rather than two surveys: the Reform Club, Hong Kong Observers and Baptist College polls (Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 51). When writing about the polls that the Unofficial Members noted, Pepper also named these three, rather than two, polls (*Keeping Democracy at Bay*, 193–94).

<sup>47</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher and Deng et al., 24 September 1982, PREM 19/790, TNA.

opinion in Hong Kong and the wishes of the people there on the question of the future”.<sup>48</sup> This statement has misled some historians into thinking that Thatcher met Unofficials because she cared for Hong Kong public opinion; for instance, Chi-kwan Mark wrote that “Thatcher hoped to gauge the ‘climate of opinion’ in Hong Kong” by meeting with UMELCO.<sup>49</sup> Yet the pretence of wanting to hear Hong Kong views bore little relationship with the conversation captured in the official record. British officials did not see consulting the Unofficials as intrinsically valuable. Instead, the exercise held a number of instrumental values: it avoided embarrassment, placed agitated Unofficials under control, counterbalanced Beijing and enabled the British government to say that Thatcher was asking after Hong Kong views even when she was not.

The Unofficials shaped Thatcher’s visit to Beijing in one more way. Once back in Hong Kong, UMELCO pressed for Youde to join the Prime Minister’s delegation in Beijing. British officials initially declined, saying this would raise expectations in the colony. The Unofficials pressed again, telling Youde that their views would “be represented authoritatively” only if he joined the Prime Minister’s party to Beijing. Youde relented and wrote to London, addressing the FCO’s concerns by arguing that expectations were already high.<sup>50</sup> A tussle between the Governor, Ambassador Cradock and officials in London ensued but ultimately Youde did join Thatcher’s party in Beijing.<sup>51</sup> The Governor’s presence signalled that Hong Kong was being represented in Beijing while meetings on the colony’s future were taking place.

British official attitudes towards Hong Kong Unofficials were also revealed in their interpretation of how Unofficial Members interacted with Chinese officials. There were very few occasions on which Hong Kong Unofficials conversed with Chinese officials during the gap period. One was a visit by Unofficial Member of LegCo and Vice Chancellor of Hong Kong University Rayson Huang Li-sung in June 1982. Mark Roberti noted that Huang visited Beijing but said: “Huang was not asked for his opinion, and he did not offer it.”<sup>52</sup> This is not the case. Ahead of his visit, Huang discussed Hong Kong’s future with some of his students.<sup>53</sup> During his meetings with

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<sup>48</sup> Press statement, 8 September 1982 enclosed in memo, Coles to Holmes, 8 September 1982, PREM 19/790, TNA.

<sup>49</sup> Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 80.

<sup>50</sup> Telegram, Youde to Clift, 6 August 1982, FCO 40/1438 f134, TNA.

<sup>51</sup> Key turns in this exchange after Youde’s initial request to London (telegram, Youde to Clift, 6 August 1982, FCO 40/1438 f134, TNA) saw British officials in Beijing intervening to doubt the wisdom of the suggestion (telegram, Atkinson to FCO, 9 August 1982, FCO 40/1438 f135, TNA), Youde rebutting his colleagues’ concerns (telegram, Youde to Donald, 13 August 1982, FCO 40/1440 f147, TNA) and finally confirmation that Beijing-based British officials had relented (telegram, Donald to Youde, 13 August 1982, FCO 40/1440 f149, TNA).

<sup>52</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 42.

<sup>53</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 73.

Deng and Liao, Huang conveyed that while his students acknowledged that Hong Kong belonged to China, they nonetheless wished to retain the status quo and their present lifestyles.<sup>54</sup> Huang's students felt that they were Chinese but were unimpressed with China's development and standard of living, so preferred to delay Hong Kong's return to China.<sup>55</sup> Deng replied by seeking to reassure Huang and his students, doing much of the talking for the remainder of the meeting.<sup>56</sup> Beijing's plans for Taiwan would form the basis of Hong Kong's future, Deng told Huang. Politically, Beijing would not send officials into Hong Kong to run the place and Hong Kong would have its own government.<sup>57</sup> There would be a new Governor, though Deng was vague on the question of how they would be selected. Furthermore, the system of elections to the District Boards would be enlarged and strengthened.<sup>58</sup> In advance of these changes, Deng urged Huang to encourage Hong Kong people to prepare to take up the reigns of local leadership.<sup>59</sup> Deng added that Hong Kong would keep its current lifestyle, laws, currency and civil service.<sup>60</sup> In a later meeting, Liao told Huang he could "guarantee" that Hong Kong's lifestyle would be maintained for 20, 30 or 50 years.<sup>61</sup> Chinese officials confided these details in Huang in June 1982; they would not be confirmed publicly until November of that year.

British officials were unimpressed by Huang's performance with Chinese officials. In an internal memo, the Head of the Far Eastern Department at the British FCO, Robin McLaren, criticised Huang for failing to "get across the point that confidence and therefore prosperity depend upon a continuation of British administration."<sup>62</sup> Still, the HKD assessed, Huang had "the potential to be an excellent intermediary" if only he could be trained to parrot lines the British side wanted him to convey.<sup>63</sup> Over dinner, two British officials sought to impress on Huang in the British side's perspective. Sir Jack Cater and Dr David Wilson insisted that "continuing British administration was essential for confidence" and stressed "the importance of making clear to the Chinese leadership" this view.<sup>64</sup> McLaren's lament was, however, misplaced. The criticism that

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<sup>54</sup> Memo, Youde to McLaren, 16 June 1982 enclosed in memo, Wilson to Morris, 4 August 1982, FCO 40/1456 f516, FOI/TNA (hereafter, Wilson memo FOI/TNA).

<sup>55</sup> Meeting record, Belstead and Huang et al., 4 August 1982, FCO 40/1456 f517, FOI/TNA.

<sup>56</sup> Wilson memo FOI/TNA.

<sup>57</sup> Memo, McLaren to Youde, 17 June 1982 enclosed in Wilson memo FOI/TNA.

<sup>58</sup> Meeting record, Belstead and Huang et al., 4 August 1982, FCO 40/1456 f517, FOI/TNA.

<sup>59</sup> Wilson memo FOI/TNA.

<sup>60</sup> Meeting record, Belstead and Huang et al., 4 August 1982, FCO 40/1456 f517, FOI/TNA; Wilson memo, FOI/TNA.

<sup>61</sup> Memo, Youde to McLaren, 16 June 1982 enclosed in Wilson memo FOI/TNA.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Handwritten note, Williamson to Clift, 2 June 1982, FCO 40/1453, TNA.

<sup>64</sup> Wilson memo FOI/TNA.

Huang failed to convey the British government's talking points to the Chinese neglects that there is no record of any British or colonial official ever having briefed Huang as to what to say. Additionally, Huang conveyed the views of his students – the young people who would inherit Hong Kong's future – which were more relevant than those of British officials. Moreover, the view of Huang's students, which he took to Beijing, was commensurate with the British government's position on the future of Hong Kong at the time; McLaren evidently did not even give attention to the contents of Huang's students' wishes, which were similar to the British government's own views. McLaren's reaction to Huang's meeting with Chinese officials again underlines that British officials were not especially interested in Hong Kong people's views but were instead concerned with control and pressing for the British administration to continue.

Recent publications by Louisa Lim and Yui Chim Lo have concluded that UMELCO's influence on officials was negligible.<sup>65</sup> Files at TNA and other primary sources show that the relationship was more complex. Lo was right to describe UMELCO as having *felt* as if they were being kept in the dark. Yet the Unofficials' suspicions were misplaced as there was little for officials to disclose until 1982. Additionally, although UMELCO were not initially provided with information about interactions between the UK and China on the 1997 issue, once the Unofficials formed a small group this group was kept up to date on the few, insubstantial contacts between British and Chinese officials relating to the issue. Lo was correct in observing that Thatcher only consulted UMELCO once prior to her September 1982 meeting with Deng but the quantity of meetings has nothing to do with impact that the Unofficial Members had on the Prime Minister's thinking during that one meeting. Moreover, although the Unofficial Members only met with the Prime Minister once before her visit to Beijing in 1982, UMELCO met more frequently with other British officials and the Governor. Lo's assessment that Thatcher largely failed to follow the Unofficials' advice is in contrast to several examples of UMELCO successfully shaping official thinking. Firstly, UMELCO pressured successive Governors to provide them with information and updates. Secondly, the Unofficials had Youde represent their concerns in London and push for a delegation to be granted, a request that was later fulfilled. Thirdly, UMELCO secured an audience with Thatcher and, during this meeting, the Unofficials promoted Hong Kong-produced opinion polls that Thatcher later deployed in her conversation with Deng Xiaoping. Lastly, the Unofficials also ensured Youde's membership of Thatcher's party in Beijing in order to represent Hong Kong. In sum, during the gap period, the Unofficial Members had a far greater influence over British officials than the existing literature portrays.

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<sup>65</sup> Lim, *Indelible City*, ch. 4; Lo, 'Last Stand of Colonialism'.

## Pressure groups

While Thatcher feigned an interest in Hong Kong public opinion, British and colonial officials gave greater regard to what it was that Hong Kong people wanted for their future. British and Hong Kong government officials monitored public sentiment not so that they could fulfil local desires but instead to understand what would be considered an acceptable resolution to the 1997 issue and to pre-empt possible local unrest. Though the colonial government possessed the means to launch a large-scale public opinion survey, they were reluctant to do so because they feared a negative reaction from Beijing (detailed in Chapter 4). The British side, therefore, had to look to other sources eager for information about the opinions of Hong Kong people. Meanwhile, Chinese officials continued to develop their Hong Kong policy and looked beyond businesspeople (examined in Chapter 1) for ideas. Like their colonial colleagues, Chinese officials also monitored expressions of Hong Kong people's sentiments.<sup>66</sup> This section argues that pressure groups earned officials' attentions by filling the demand for information.

There is an extensive literature on Hong Kong pressure groups. Most of this literature is, however, focused on groups that reacted to the 1984 Joint Declaration by pushing for Hong Kong to democratise before the handover in 1997. Little regard has been given to pressure groups that did not argue for democracy or which were operating during the gap period. For instance, while noting that pressure groups existed beforehand, Linda Butenhoff focused her analysis on those involved in the pro-democracy movement from the mid-1980s onwards.<sup>67</sup> Ming Sing also acknowledged that pressure groups existed prior to the Sino-British negotiations but concentrated on those groups that pushed for democracy after 1984.<sup>68</sup> Lui Tai-lok's analysis skipped from social movements in the 1970s to pro-democracy pressure groups after 1984, as if groups absented themselves in the meantime.<sup>69</sup> In contrast, this section examines pressure group activities during the gap period. It shows that most pressure groups did not advocate a democratic future for Hong Kong. It argues that pressure groups were at their most influential when providing the sort of material that all three governments wanted. Moreover, in examining pressure group activities *before* the formal negotiations got underway, this section argues that

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<sup>66</sup> Meeting record, MacLehose and Wang, 1 November 1979 enclosed in memo, Wilson to Clift, 9 November 1979, FCO 21/1739 f334A, TNA.

<sup>67</sup> Butenhoff, *Social Movements*, ch. 6.

<sup>68</sup> Ming Sing, 'A Changing Political Culture and Democratic Transition: The Case of Hong Kong', in *Political Participation in Hong Kong: Theoretical Issues and Historical Legacy*, ed. Joseph Cheng (City University of Hong Kong Press, 1999).

<sup>69</sup> Tai-lok Lui, 'Pressure Group Politics in Hong Kong', in *Political Participation in Hong Kong: Theoretical Issues and Historical Legacy*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng (City University of Hong Kong Press, 1999).

Hong Kong pressure groups did not merely *react* to the Sino-British negotiations but were instead *proactive* in their fight for Hong Kong's future and, thus, recovers their political agency.

In colonial Hong Kong, it was impossible to register as a political party. Instead, those interested in coming together to influence government policy had to form a pressure group and establish either as a company or register as a society.<sup>70</sup> Hong Kong Observers Ltd. was one such organisation, incorporated formally in September 1975. By the late 1970s, the membership numbered around 40 to 50 people: an assortment of lawyers, educators, journalists and business executives. They included a lecturer at the Chinese University, Dr Joseph Cheng Yu-shek, and solicitor Christine Loh, each of whom held the position of Chairperson during the period under study; journalist Frank Ching, who held the position of Vice Chairman; barrister Wong Hin-lee, who was the group's Secretary; and a journalist for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, a weekly business publication, Mary Lee.<sup>71</sup> The Observers thought that in the absence of representative government, it was important for Hong Kong people to have a political voice. Accordingly, its aims were to promote participation and interest in the city's governance, put pressure on the colonial government to respond to the people's needs, conduct research of public interest, and promote the welfare of the community.<sup>72</sup>

The Observers had been concerned with the 1997 issue for some time before Thatcher's 1982 visit. The group had pressed British officials to address the issue some years before. During a 1980 meeting, for instance, Wong told John Nott MP (Conservative) that "the main point of concern was the future of the Hong Kong leases".<sup>73</sup> The Observers were also keen to draw the Hong Kong public's attention to the 1997 issue. For instance, in October 1981, Cheng, Loh and others spoke at a seminar organised by the University Graduate Association of Hong Kong about the future of Hong Kong attended by more than 500 people.<sup>74</sup> Once Thatcher's visit was announced in early 1982, the Observers dedicated even more attention towards the future of Hong Kong.

Using money donated by its members, the Hong Kong Observers commissioned the polling company Survey Research Hongkong (SRH) to carry out an opinion gathering exercise.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 110.

<sup>71</sup> Joseph Y. S. Cheng, *Struggling for Democracy in Hong Kong: My Story* (Aurora House, 2023), 132–33 and 155; memo, Gow to Stephens, 3 September 1982, THCR 2/6/2/68, CAC; meeting note, Nott and the Hong Kong Observers, 30 January 1980, FCO 21/1832 f25, TNA; telegram, Youde to FCO, 3 November 1982, FCO 40/1462 f873, TNA.

<sup>72</sup> Hong Kong Observers, *Pressure Points: A Social Critique by the Hong Kong Observers* (Summerson Eastern Publishers Ltd, 1981), 1.

<sup>73</sup> Meeting note, Nott and Hong Kong Observers, 30 January 1980, FCO 21/1832 f25, TNA.

<sup>74</sup> Cheng Wai-ming, 'HK people taking up 1997 lease question', *Hong Kong Standard*, 24 November 1981, 6.

<sup>75</sup> Cheng, *Struggling for Democracy*, 146.

Between 10 May and 11 June 1982, SRH conducted face-to-face interviews with 1,000 people aged between 15 and 60 in Cantonese, which it was claimed this represented 3.3 million people with 95% confidence. The survey offered respondents five possible resolutions to the 1997 issue, of which they could choose multiple options: maintain the status quo; that China would hold sovereignty over Hong Kong while Britain continued to administer it; become a Special Economic Zone of China; return to China; or become independent. Maintaining the status quo was the most preferred of the options (69%) and return to China the least preferred (55%). 95% of respondents found the prospect of continuing the colonial status quo acceptable and, although fewer than half thought that the status quo was likely (39%), this was nonetheless the option felt most probable amongst those presented.<sup>76</sup> The Observers released their survey results alongside a position paper, which they had invited Chinese officials to review and comment on during the drafting process.<sup>77</sup> Alongside summarising the survey's findings, the position paper added that all of the governments involved had an "obligation to listen to the people's views". They criticised that the only Hong Kong voices to whom officials had thus far listened had been those of the business community and asserted that Hong Kong people had a "right to a transition process which safeguards their interest[s]".<sup>78</sup> The Observer's SRH poll was amongst the most reliable and largest scale of any produced during the gap period.

The Observers were the only pressure group invited to meet Prime Minister Thatcher during the gap period. Thatcher's advisor, Alfred Sherman, and Sir Jack Cater encouraged the Prime Minister to meet with several expatriates and Hong Kong Chinese people before her visit.<sup>79</sup> Arrangements were subsequently made for Observer Christine Loh to call on the Prime Minister. Loh was supposed to be joined by three expatriate businesspeople and two Hong Kong Chinese people: Helen Yu of the Hong Kong government's London office and Chancellor of the Hang Seng School of Commerce and a former ExCo and LegCo Unofficial Q. W. Lee (aka Lee Quo-wei). After Loh arrived in London, however, the Prime Minister decided that while she would gladly meet the three expatriate businesspeople, she was only "reluctantly prepared" to meet the Hong Kong

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<sup>76</sup> Vaudine England, 'Status quo tops "after 1997" poll', *Hong Kong Standard*, 13 August 1982, 1-2; telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 August 1982 enclosed in draft report, 'The Future of Hong Kong: A Special Study', FCO, August 1982 enclosed in memo, Clift to Giffard, 27 August 1982, FCO 40/1465 f33, TNA (hereafter, Clift memo TNA). The Hong Kong Observers' survey without the position paper or tables is reproduced in Cheng, *In Search*, 99-106 There is also a copy in report, 'Interviews Hong Kong 23-29 August 1982', Centre for Policy Studies, 3 September 1982, THCR 1/10/37, CAC.

<sup>77</sup> Telegram, Masefield to Morris, 10 August 1982, FCO 40/1456 f523, FOI/TNA.

<sup>78</sup> Position paper and poll, Hong Kong Observers, ND enclosed in report, 'Interviews Hong Kong 23-29 August 1982', Centre for Policy Studies, 3 September 1982, THCR 1/10/37, CAC.

<sup>79</sup> Memo, Gow to Stephens, 3 September 1982, THCR 2/6/2/68 f9, CAC.

Chinese visitors for reasons known only to herself.<sup>80</sup> Subsequently, Loh found her meeting delayed by a day and then demoted from Prime Ministerial level to a meeting with Thatcher's Private Secretary (PS) John Coles.<sup>81</sup> Loh told Coles that the Hong Kong public would prefer the status quo to continue. She confided that the Observers themselves would prefer for Hong Kong to become independent but that the majority wish was for continued colonial administration.<sup>82</sup> Although ultimately Thatcher did not meet Loh, out of all the possible Hong Kong pressure groups and civil society actors in Hong Kong, British officials extended the invitation to Loh in particular.

British officials took note of the Observers' advice. The survey was cited in summaries of Hong Kong public opinion and Governor Youde highlighted the reputability of the company that had conducted it, commenting that the poll had been "commissioned from an independent market research organisation [SRH]".<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the Observers' survey was likely one of those that UMELCO's Sir S. Y. Chung cited when meeting Thatcher and which Thatcher, in turn, used in an attempt to persuade Deng Xiaoping in September 1982. During the formal negotiations in 1983, Ambassador Cradock cited the Observers' poll as well as the Reform Club's by name.<sup>84</sup> In his autobiography, Hong Kong Observers member Cheng wrote: "I realised that it was almost impossible for us to influence the position of the British administration."<sup>85</sup> Cheng must have been unaware of the high regard that British officials gave to the Observers' poll, how it was woven into summaries of public opinion and how British officials were using the survey in their negotiations with Chinese officials.

Another pressure group inaugurated before formal negotiations over the future of Hong Kong got underway was the Hong Kong Prospect Institute. The group formed as an unincorporated organisation in September 1981, a full year before Thatcher's visit to the colony and several months before the trip was even announced.<sup>86</sup> Its founding members included two of the Hong Kong Observers: the lecturer Dr Joseph Cheng Yu-shek and William Chu, who was on the editorial board of Louis Cha Leung-yung's newspaper *Ming Pao*. Other members included Chinese University lecturer Lao Yung-wei, who sat as the group's Chairman; editor of *Pa Shing Semi-Monthly* Hu Chu-jen; editor of *Seventies Monthly* Lee Yee; and four other scholars and

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<sup>80</sup> Handwritten note, Coles to Stephens, 9 September 1982, PREM 19/891, TNA.

<sup>81</sup> Telegram, Clift to Youde, 10 September 1982, FCO 40/1457 f589, TNA.

<sup>82</sup> Memo, Coles to Ricketts, 15 November 1983, PREM 19/1059, TNA.

<sup>83</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 17 August 1982, FCO 40/1457 f536, TNA (hereafter, Youde telegram TNA).

<sup>84</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 21 July 1983, FCO 40/1571 f629, TNA; telegram, Cradock to FCO, 26 July 1983, PREM 19/1056, TNA; the Galsworthy manuscript, 130.

<sup>85</sup> Cheng, *Struggling for Democracy*, 148.

<sup>86</sup> Research Society: report, 'LIC Hong Kong Report for September 1981', Local Intelligence Committee Hong Kong, October 1981, FCO 40/1298 f9, TNA; Study Society: Cheng Wai-ming, 'HK people taking up 1997 lease question', *Hong Kong Standard*, 24 November 1981, 6.

publishers.<sup>87</sup> The group held three principles as axiomatic with regards to the future of Hong Kong. Firstly, rather than try to resolve the past, the proposals they intended to develop would concern the future. Secondly, proposals would have to be acceptable to London, Beijing and the people of Hong Kong. Lastly, Hong Kong had to be considered as a whole: it was thought untenable to separate the New Territories from the rest of Hong Kong, thus no proposal premised on separation would be considered.<sup>88</sup> With these core tenets in mind, the Institute set its sights on resolving the 1997 issue. In July 1982, the Institute published a 'Sino-British Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation'. If adopted by the two governments, such a treaty would redefine UK-China relations so that co-operation, co-ordination and bilateral projects were at its core. In a clause handling Hong Kong, the UK would recognise China's claim of sovereignty over Hong Kong, China would acknowledge that British administration benefitted all parties and both would agree to negotiate at an undefined "appropriate time".<sup>89</sup>

The Institute ensured that British and Chinese officials received copies of their draft Friendship Treaty. They delivered a copy to the Xinhua offices and used private connections to help ensure it would reach Chinese officials in Beijing.<sup>90</sup> The Institute posted the document to so many British officials that one FCO staffer commented: "everyone from the Prime Minister downwards received a copy".<sup>91</sup> British recipients included Thatcher, the then Foreign Secretary Francis Pym and Foreign Minister Lord Belstead.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, many British officials sent replies to the Institute that implied they had read the group's document. A reply sent on behalf of Belstead, for instance, said that the HKD had read the proposal "with much interest".<sup>93</sup> Similarly, a response sent on behalf of the Prime Minister claimed that the Institute's proposals would be "carefully studied".<sup>94</sup> Thatcher wrote to Jeremy Bray MP (Labour), who had forwarded a copy of the Institute's treaty to her, she called it an "interesting document" which again implied that the Prime Minister had read it.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, when British officials sought sources that indicated

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<sup>87</sup> Cheng Wai-ming, 'HK people taking up 1997 lease question', *Hong Kong Standard*, 24 November 1981, 6; Ian McLean, 'Lease agreement is needed now', *SCMP*, 16 August 1982, 14.

<sup>88</sup> Ian McLean, 'Lease agreement is needed now', *SCMP*, 16 August 1982, 14.

<sup>89</sup> Position paper, 'The Future of Hong Kong: An Approach and a Proposal', Hong Kong Prospect Institute, July 1982, PREM 19/790, TNA.

<sup>90</sup> Ian McLean, 'Lease agreement is needed now', *SCMP*, 16 August 1982, 14.

<sup>91</sup> Teleletter, Hoare to Masefield, 19 August 1982, FCO 40/1457 f551, TNA.

<sup>92</sup> Thatcher: letter, Hong Kong Prospect Institute to Thatcher, July 1982, FCO 40/1456 f530, FOI/TNA; Pym: letter, Hong Kong Prospect Institute to Pym, July 1982, FCO 40/1457 f535, TNA; Belstead: letter, Hong Kong Prospect Institute to Belstead, July 1982, FCO 40/1456 f528, FOI/TNA.

<sup>93</sup> Letter, Morris to Hong Kong Prospect Institute, 16 August 1982, FCO 40/1456 f529, FOI/TNA.

<sup>94</sup> Letter, Hoare to Hong Kong Prospect Institute, 16 August 1982, FCO 40/1456 f533, FOI/TNA.

<sup>95</sup> Letter, Thatcher to Bray, 10 September 1982, BRAY 610 4/33, CAC.

Hong Kong people's views, the Hong Kong Prospect Institute's proposals were referenced alongside other papers, surveys and media items.<sup>96</sup> Lastly, although FCO officials made no explicit reference to the Institute's 'Sino-British Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation', beginning in October 1982, they toyed with the idea of a similarly titled "UK/China Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation".<sup>97</sup> The idea was ultimately shelved after Cradock argued that such a treaty would do little to instil confidence in Hong Kong, but it was nonetheless entertained at the highest levels of British politics.<sup>98</sup>

Whereas the existing literature centres on pressure groups during and after the Sino-British negotiations, this section has examined Hong Kong pressure group activities during the gap period. Long before Thatcher's September 1982 visit, pressure groups were proactively engaged with the 1997 and did not simply *react* to events in international relations. Whereas the existing literature has focused on pressure groups that pushed for democracy, neither of the pressure groups examined in this section campaigned for Hong Kong to democratise. Instead, both sought to maintain the colonial status quo in one way or other. Lastly, Hong Kong pressure groups' ideas were considered by officials. British officials folded Hong Kong ideas into their summaries of opinions and entertained thoughts similar to those expressed by pressure groups as potential solutions to the 1997 issue. Furthermore, Thatcher referenced survey data produced by Hong Kong pressure groups during her meeting with Deng Xiaoping and British negotiators later referred to the same public opinion polls during the formal negotiations. With officials wanting ideas and information, pressure groups informed officials about Hong Kong public opinion.

## Pressure groups with members on the Urban Council

As described in the introduction to this chapter, Hong Kong people had two main channels open to them for expressing views about the future. One was to stay within the formal structures established by the colonial government, primarily by communicating thoughts to the Unofficial Members; the other was to operate outside of the administration's apparatus by engaging in pressure group activities.<sup>99</sup> Occasionally, the two crossed over. The Urban Council was a municipal services body and was the only government group to feature seats returned by direct election (until the District Boards were inaugurated in 1982). The Reform Club and Hong Kong

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<sup>96</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 August 1982 enclosed in draft report, 'The Future of Hong Kong: A Special Study', FCO enclosed in Clift memo TNA.

<sup>97</sup> Letter, Bone to Coles, 11 October 1982, PREM 19/791, TNA.

<sup>98</sup> Letter, Cradock to Donald, 24 February 1983, FCO 40/1549 f182, TNA.

<sup>99</sup> Butenhoff, *Social Movements*.

Civic Association were both pressure groups with members elected to the Urban Council. By comparing these two pressure groups, this section examines whether pressure groups that had members elected to the Urban Council had any greater access or influence than those that did not and concludes that this made no discernible difference. Instead, this section confirms the conclusion of the previous section that offering information and ideas was the key determiner of whether or not a Hong Kong group was able to access and influence officials.

The Reform Club of Hong Kong was founded in 1949 in response to Governor Mark Young's call for local views on his proposed constitutional reforms.<sup>100</sup> Although the proposed reforms were shelved in 1952, the Club continued to exist in order to contest the Urban Council elections.<sup>101</sup> The Club's founder was British-born lawyer Brook Bernacchi, who was an Urban Council member from 1952 to 1995. Fellow lawyer Francis Chaine was the Club's Honorary Chairman during the period under study and was elected to the Urban Council in 1981. The Club was broadly liberal in its orientation and campaigned for an expansion of the Urban Council's remit and powers. Apart from this demand, however, the Reform Club did not present a detailed manifesto.<sup>102</sup>

An article in the Hong Kong newspaper the *South China Morning Post (SCMP)* jolted the Reform Club into action on the 1997 issue. Appearing in September 1981, the article warned: "the future of Hongkong is of primary concern to the people of Hongkong [...] If they do not think about its long-term future, no one else will do it for them."<sup>103</sup> The *SCMP* described the article's author, Alfred Sherman, as Thatcher's speechwriter and a director of the Centre for Political Studies, which Sherman co-founded with Margaret Thatcher and Sir Keith Joseph MP (Conservative) in 1974. Given Sherman's affiliations, the Reform Club believed that the article represented a "semi-official opinion or direction by the British Government to the Hong Kong people".<sup>104</sup> The Club also took the article as saying "that the British Government will not be able to negotiate with the Chinese Government" and that it was down to Hong Kong people to carve out a future for themselves.<sup>105</sup> In answer to what they perceived to be a subtle call to arms conveyed in the pages

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<sup>100</sup> George Beer Endacott, *Government and People in Hong Kong, 1841-1962: A Constitutional History* (Hong Kong University Press, 1964), 205.

<sup>101</sup> Steve Tsang, *Democracy Shelved: Great Britain, China, and Attempts at Constitutional Reform in Hong Kong, 1945-1952* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>102</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 139.

<sup>103</sup> Alfred Sherman, 'Hongkong must take leaf from Venice', *SCMP*, 5 September 1981, 2.

<sup>104</sup> Press release, 'Reform Club's Proposal on Hong Kong Future (Press Release)', The Reform Club of Hong Kong, ND enclosed in letter, Chaine to Carrington, 11 November 1981, FCO 40/1290 f236, TNA; telegram, MacLehose to FCO, 14 November 1981, FCO 21/1945 f97, TNA.

<sup>105</sup> Letter, Chaine to Carrington, 11 November 1981, FCO 40/1290 f236, TNA.

of the *SCMP*, the Reform Club established the Hong Kong Future Ad Hoc Committee chaired by Francis Chaine tasked with researching and producing proposals for resolving the 1997 issue.<sup>106</sup>

In November 1981, the Reform Club released a two-page proposal. In it, the Club argued that the British government, Chinese government and people of Hong Kong all desired the status quo but were, inhibited from expressing this each for different reasons. In 1972, Huang Hua, who was at that time China's representative to the United Nations, wrote to the committee handling self-determination. Huang asked for Hong Kong and Macao to be removed from the list of colonies, calling the two "questions resulting from a series of unequal treaties" that were "entirely within China's sovereign right" to resolve and which did "not at all fall under the ordinary category of 'colonial Territories [*sic*]'"<sup>107</sup> Britain did not object to China's assertions and the United Nations subsequently removed the colonies from the list.<sup>108</sup> Although the British wanted to maintain its colonial administration over Hong Kong, the Reform Club diagnosed the British government's reluctance to state this as being because the British were worried that articulating this desire would leave them open to the accusation that they were acting inconsistently with regards their acquiescence in 1972. China, meanwhile, stood to benefit financially, economically, technically and strategically from the status quo. But Chinese officials were corseted from supporting the status quo as the 1898 Lease was offensive to Beijing and the Chinese people, having been forced on China under unequal circumstances and admonished as both legally invalid and insulting to the Chinese nation. The people of Hong Kong, the Club asserted, "would like to maintain the basic status quo" yet they lacked a means of expressing themselves.<sup>109</sup> Each party wanted colonialism to continue but each was prohibited from saying this.

The Reform Club sought to break this internecine situation. The British government ought to relinquish its claim over Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, they argued. In return, China should permit the British administration over all of Hong Kong to continue for 20 years. If China wanted the British administration to cease, it could give a 10-year notice.<sup>110</sup> The Club's press release was covered in local English language papers, such as the *SCMP*, and Chinese language papers,

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<sup>106</sup> Position paper, 'Submissions to the British Government and Members of Parliament on the Future of Hongkong', The Reform Club of Hong Kong, 14 April 1982, FCO 40/1450 f216A, TNA.

<sup>107</sup> Letter, Huang to the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, 9 March 1972 [https://digitalibrary.un.org/record/3895944/files/A\\_AC.109\\_396-EN.pdf](https://digitalibrary.un.org/record/3895944/files/A_AC.109_396-EN.pdf) (accessed 9 August 2025).

<sup>108</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 47.

<sup>109</sup> Press release, 'Reform Club's Proposal on Hong Kong Future (Press Release)', The Reform Club of Hong Kong, ND enclosed in letter, Chaine to Carrington, 11 November 1981, FCO 40/1290 f236, TNA; MacLehose to FCO, 14 November 1981, FCO 21/1945 f97, TNA.

<sup>110</sup> Telegram, MacLehose to FCO, 14 November 1981, FCO 21/1945 f97, TNA.

including *Sing Tao* which described the proposal as a workable solution to the 1997 issue.<sup>111</sup> The Reform Club sought to ensure that their paper was read by officials. They sent copies to British politicians including Carrington and Thatcher. In reply, British officials sought to clarify that the views Sherman expressed in his *SCMP* article “were his own” and, therefore, “did not represent” the British government’s position and was not intended as a covert call to Hong Kong people.<sup>112</sup>

On the Chinese side, the Reform Club also sent a copy of their prospectus to Deng Xiaoping.<sup>113</sup> Although it is uncertain whether or not Deng read it, there is evidence that the proposal was considered by some Chinese officials. In January 1982, the *SCMP* quoted an unnamed official as saying that China hoped to find a resolution that, while not jeopardising Chinese sovereignty, would ensure a continued British presence in Hong Kong.<sup>114</sup> The Chinese official may have made the statement in order to gauge reactions to the ideas expressed in Hong Kong. It later transpired that the Chinese official who made the anonymous statement was Zhong Xidong, a Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for the Information Department.<sup>115</sup> Zhong may have been instructed to recycle the Club’s recommendations while speaking with a journalist to ensure it gained press coverage. Chinese officials in Hong Kong would then look for local reaction and report back to Beijing. Zhong’s comments would have been given anonymously to maintain deniability. The Club claimed to have “good reason to believe that the statement [...] was a response to the Club’s proposal”.<sup>116</sup> Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong-based pro-CCP media did not contradict the claim. It is therefore plausible that the Reform Club was correct and that their proposal did penetrate Chinese officialdom. An alternative explanation, held by British and colonial officials, is that Zhong simply stepped out of line in making his remarks.<sup>117</sup> However, the Reform Club’s interpretation suits the facts better for several reasons. Firstly, Chinese officials saw but did not criticise the *SCMP*’s report. Secondly, Zhong was given no rebuke or demotion for his supposed slip.<sup>118</sup> Thirdly, it is unlikely, albeit not impossible, that a senior minister with responsibility for information would have stepped out of line so carelessly. Zhong’s comments were most likely not a slip but instead issued to float the Reform Club’s ideas in order

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<sup>111</sup> ‘End all HK claims, says Reform Club’, *SCMP*, 16 November 1981, 17; report, ‘Club’s suggestion on 1997 backed’ in *The Gist*, ISD, Hong Kong government, 16 December 1981, HKRS545-1-35-1, PRO.

<sup>112</sup> Letter, Lyne to Chaine, 26 November 1981, FCO 40/1290 f250, TNA.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Poll next year on lease plan’, *SCMP*, 15 December 1981, 21.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Diplomat talks of the lease’, *SCMP*, 20 January 1982, 1.

<sup>115</sup> Letter, Pierce to McLaren, 2 February 1982, FCO 40/1446 f45A, TNA.

<sup>116</sup> Press release, ‘Press release’, 10 March 1982, The Reform Club of Hong Kong enclosed in letter, Masefield to Williamson, 17 May 1982, FCO 40/1448 f124A, TNA.

<sup>117</sup> Letter, McLaren to Atkinson, 12 February 1982, FCO 40/1447 f61A, TNA; letter, Clift to Donald and Youde, 19 February 1982, FCO 40/1447 f69, TNA.

<sup>118</sup> Letter, Clift to Donald and Youde, 19 February 1982, FCO 40/1447 f69, TNA.

to watch for reaction in Hong Kong, which reflects that the Beijing government was considering the Reform Club's ideas and keen to see what the Hong Kong public at large might think of them.

The Reform Club was also eager to test their proposals with the Hong Kong public. They commissioned a poll from SRH, the same company the Hong Kong Observers had engaged to conduct their survey. SRH polled 998 people via telephone.<sup>119</sup> The Reform Club announced the results at a press conference in April 1982, again earning coverage in the English- and Chinese-language press.<sup>120</sup> Respondents were asked their preference for the future of Hong Kong. The Club's poll found that 85% "preferred Hong Kong to be under British administration after 1997". Asked about the particular form this might take, the majority (70%) were in favour of the status quo.<sup>121</sup> The Club then sent a four member delegation to London in April 1982.<sup>122</sup> Delegates met with a raft of MPs spanning the Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties, and furnished each Parliamentarian they met with a copy of SRH's findings.<sup>123</sup> The Club also secured a meeting with the Head of the HKD, Richard Clift. Francis Chaine stressed that Hong Kong people were growing increasingly concerned about the as yet unresolved matter of the city's future. Reform Club member Vivien Chan added that 20- to 36-year-olds needed reassurance. The delegates repeated their belief that the British and Chinese governments were "inhibited from initiating discussions on the future" and offered themselves as go-betweens. Clift listened to the group though responded only in general terms.<sup>124</sup>

The Club's poll informed British official perceptions of what people in Hong Kong wanted for their city's future. In investigating "the probable views of people in Hong Kong on the question of future sovereignty", for instance, the Foreign Secretary's PS John Homes wrote to Thatcher's PS that there had "been nothing approaching a major opinion poll" but cited the Reform Club's conclusions in place thereof.<sup>125</sup> The British side viewed polls conducted by SRH – including those commissioned by the Reform Club and the Hong Kong Observers – as especially trustworthy, with Governor Youde deeming other polls "less authoritative".<sup>126</sup> Moreover, the British side used the Club's poll as part of the negotiations. In 1983 during the formal stage of the Sino-British talks,

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<sup>119</sup> Reproduced in Cheng, *In Search*, 83–90.

<sup>120</sup> Telegram, MacLehose to Williamson, 8 April 1982, FCO 40/1449 f193, TNA.

<sup>121</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 85.

<sup>122</sup> Vivien Chan, 'Hongkong people and the 1997 lease', *SCMP*, 3 May 1982, 24; Cheng, *In Search*, 141.

<sup>123</sup> Vivien Chan, 'Hongkong people and the 1997 lease', *SCMP*, 3 May 1982, 24; letter, Chaine to Youde, 3 May 1982, FCO 40/1451 f254, TNA.

<sup>124</sup> Memo, Clift to Donald, 22 April 1982, FCO 40/1451 f227, TNA.

<sup>125</sup> Letter, Holmes to Coles, 27 July 1982, PREM 19/789, TNA. I cited this source in my 'Britain's Approach', 1391.

<sup>126</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 August 1982 enclosed in draft report, 'The Future of Hong Kong: A Special Study', FCO, August 1982 enclosed in Clift memo TNA.

Ambassador Cradock cited the Reform Club's survey alongside the Hong Kong Observers' poll to justify his assertion that the majority of Hong Kong people favoured the status quo.<sup>127</sup> Club members may not have known it but their poll was indeed read, used and valued by British officials.

Chinese officials again took note. During one of his visits to Beijing, Hong Kong businessman Fung King-hey accompanied by Jack So of Sun Hung Kai Securities met Premier Zhao Ziyang and other Chinese officials.<sup>128</sup> Zhao surprised his guests by raising the Reform Club's proposals.<sup>129</sup> This is another example of Chinese officials floating ideas originated by Hong Kong pressure groups to test reactions. Notably, Zhao was one of the most high-ranking officials in China; unlike Zhong Xidong's earlier comments, Zhao's remarks cannot be dismissed as merely the words of a mid-ranking renegade. The Reform Club, therefore, attracted the attention of British and Chinese officials at the highest level by producing public opinion data and generating ideas for Hong Kong's future. None of the Club's success in attracting attention, however, seemed to have anything to do with its association with the Urban Council.

Established in 1954, Hongkong Civic Association was another pressure group that had dominated the Urban Council elections for decades. By 1979, Hongkong Civic Association was chaired by businessman Hilton Cheong-Leen. Cheong-Leen had won membership on the Urban Council across several decades and rose to become its Chairman in March 1981. He had also previously been an Unofficial Member of LegCo until August 1979.<sup>130</sup>

Cheong-Leen wrote to Thatcher in October 1979. He warned the Prime Minister that Hong Kong's economic stability was increasingly dependent on clarity as to the future and that it was "imperative that discussions should now be initiated".<sup>131</sup> Cheong-Leen did not, however, put forward any ideas as to how this might be achieved. Cheong-Leen had to wait for a reply. Chairman of the CCP, Hua Guofeng, and a host of other Chinese officials visited the UK between late October and early November 1979. During the trip, Foreign Minister Huang Hua confirmed to the *SCMP* that the 1997 issue had been noted by both sides. In replying to Cheong-Leen following the official delegation's departure, HKD officials hid behind Huang Hua's comments to the media:

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<sup>127</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 26 July 1983, PREM 19/1056, TNA.

<sup>128</sup> Telegram, Haddon-Cave to FCO, 23 April 1982, FCO 40/1451 f230, TNA; letter, McLaren to Clift, 23 April 1982, FCO 40/1451 f236, TNA; 'Zhao Ziyang met Fung King-hey' [赵紫阳会见冯景禧], *People's Daily* [人民日报], 17 April 1982, 1; memo, Clift to Arthur, 26 May 1982, FCO 40/1452 f297, TNA.

<sup>129</sup> Telegram, Haddon-Cave to FCO, 23 April 1982, FCO 40/1451 f231, TNA.

<sup>130</sup> Hilton Cheong-Leen et al., *Hilton Cheong-Leen (張有興): First Chinese 'Mayor' of Hong Kong* (World Scientific, 2022).

<sup>131</sup> Letter, Cheong-Leen to Thatcher, 30 October 1979, FCO 21/1739 f320, TNA.

“[this] clearly shows [that] the Chinese authorities are aware of the need to reassure investors in Hong Kong that their interests will be fully taken into account when the time does come to consider Hong Kong’s future.”<sup>132</sup> Cheong-Leen had done little more than flag that there was a problem. Unlike survey results or position papers, this failed to capture officials’ attentions. Consequently, the Civic Association chairman received only a belated and lacklustre reply.

Cheong-Leen tried again a year later, passing a two-page memo to the HKD’s Richard Clift when he visited Hong Kong in November 1980. In the memo, Cheong-Leen again complained that Hong Kong people needed to be able to plan for the future. He assessed: “China’s position appears to be that while Hong Kong is Chinese territory, the present ‘Status Quo’ is best for stability and in the interests of China’s modernization programme.” With relations good between Britain and Beijing, Cheong-Leen urged officials to engage in discussions. Cheong-Leen hoped that talks would result in China consenting to a continuation of the status quo. Lastly, Cheong-Leen suggested empowering Beijing with a 25-year notice period should it wish to retake Hong Kong.<sup>133</sup> After handing the memo to Clift, Cheong-Leen asked Sir Jack Cater to forward a copy to Lord Carrington ahead of Carrington’s visit to Hong Kong in March 1981.<sup>134</sup> There is no indication that Clift, Cater or Carrington ever replied to Cheong-Leen. This may be because, while Cheong-Leen’s memo represented a slight advance on his earlier letter in proposing a notice period, it was far from a full proposal for Hong Kong’s future.

Cheong-Leen’s final attempt to intervene during the gap period took the form of another letter to Thatcher. Cheong-Leen remained firmly in favour of the status quo. While conceding that no-one would deny China’s right to sovereignty over Hong Kong, he nonetheless believed that most Hong Kong people did not want things to change. Additionally, by announcing that the status quo would continue after 1997, investors would be reassured of the long-term viability of Hong Kong as a market. Save for his support of the status quo, however, Cheong-Leen advanced no additional ideas and even appeared to disown the idea of a 25-year notice period, writing that the Civic Association was “not in a position to suggest any specific solution”.<sup>135</sup> Again, there is no indication of a reply.

The Reform Club and Hongkong Civic Association were both pressure groups with members elected to the Urban Council. Both groups were several decades old with an educated,

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<sup>132</sup> Letter, Quantrill to Cheong-Leen, 9 November 1979, FCO 40/1061 f270, TNA.

<sup>133</sup> Memo, ‘Hong Kong’s Long Term Future’, Hongkong Civic Association to Clift, ND enclosed in letter, Cheong-Leen to Cater, 26 February 1981, FCO 21/1944 f24, FOI/TNA.

<sup>134</sup> Letter, Cheong-Leen to Cater, 26 February 1981, FCO 21/1944 f24, FOI/TNA.

<sup>135</sup> Letter, Cheong-Leen to Thatcher, ND, 0016\_PER\_HCL\_Series\_1\_Subseries\_1, Chinese University of Hong Kong Special Collections (hereafter, CUHK).

middle-class membership and bilingual (if not multilingual) leaders with backgrounds in law. Both sought to maintain the status quo and encouraged officials to engage in dialogue over the 1997 issue. The Reform Club was influential: Club members had meetings with various British officials, Chinese officials floated their ideas on at least two occasions, and Governor Youde cited their opinion poll amongst other surveys as examples of valuable sources. In contrast, Hongkong Civic Association did not even receive replies to most of their communications. The differences between the two pressure groups demonstrate why one enjoyed a level of success that eluded the other.

Firstly, the Reform Club employed a range of methods to get their message across. They produced materials, such as press releases and letters to newspaper editors, that earned media coverage as well as analyses in the form of their position paper and survey. They also contacted and met a range of people including British government ministers, British opposition politicians and civil servants. In so doing, the Reform Club made themselves difficult to ignore. In contrast, Cheong-Leen's letters were easily disregarded. Produced with such infrequency, Cheong-Leen failed to create a sense of concerted pressure on officials. Additionally, there is no evidence that the Civic Association attempted to contact a wide range of British officials or any Chinese officials at all. Consequently, the Civic Association brought little pressure to bear.

Secondly, the Reform Club articulated *why* they should be listened to. They claimed that the British government had delegated responsibility for figuring out Hong Kong's future to its people, citing Alfred Sherman's article in the *SCMP*. Moreover, the Club claimed that it held a mandate from Hong Kong. In mid-April 1982, they published a document titled 'Submission to the British government and Members of Parliament on the Future of Hongkong'. Stressing that confidence was already ebbing away, the Club appealed to the British government to start negotiations with China and to tell the Chinese that most Hong Kong people wanted the British administration in Hong Kong to continue after 1997. In their 'Submission', the Club asserted that they had a "mandate from and on behalf of the great majority of the people of Hong Kong". They explained that this authority derived from their many actions: from putting forward proposals in lieu of British government action to proving through their opinion poll the acceptability of these proposals.<sup>136</sup> Notably, the Reform Club made no reference to the Urban Council elections in justifying why they should be heard. In contrast, the Civic Association made no such statement as to why they should be listened to nor sought to show that their views were representative of anyone beyond their own membership. Cheong-Leen's letters listed the Association's concerns

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<sup>136</sup> Position paper, 'Submissions to the British Government and Members of Parliament on the Future of Hongkong', The Reform Club of Hong Kong, 14 April 1982, FCO 40/1450 f216A, TNA.

but these seemed to be based on nothing more than anecdotal evidence. He was perhaps implicitly resting on his affiliation with the Urban Council. Cheong-Leen could not have known, however, that Number 10 barely understood the Urban Council's role in Hong Kong's political structure. In planning Thatcher's agenda for her September 1982 visit, FCO officials suggested she meet with Urban Council members. Thatcher was perplexed: "I find this very odd – I am already meeting Members of the Leg/Ex [*sic*] Councils".<sup>137</sup> The FCO clarified that the Urban Council was "the equivalent of the City Council" and that it was "quite separate" from ExCo and LegCo. Officials added that Urban Council members represented "a different group of people, including the professional middle classes".<sup>138</sup> Only then did the Prime Minister agree, subsequently meeting five Urban Council members on 27 September 1982.<sup>139</sup> Until early September 1982, therefore, Downing Street did not understand the function of the Urban Council and had to be educated as to whom the Urban Council members represented. Cheong-Leen could not, therefore, rest on his association with the Urban Council to give weight to his letters.

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, the Reform Club put forward concrete proposals whereas the Civic Association did not. The Club issued its first set of ideas in November 1981 and updated them in April 1982 following the results of the SRH opinion poll. In contrast, the only idea Cheong-Leen offered was that of a 25-year notice period to reassure China. The idea was not an original one. Moreover, in his letter to Thatcher, Cheong-Leen stated explicitly that the Civic Association was "not in a position to suggest any specific solution".<sup>140</sup> The Reform Club presented actionable ideas that they refined over time and in response to reliable survey data; the Civic Association explicitly lacked ideas and therefore offered little substance with which officials could engage.

Comparing the Civic Association with the Reform Club shows that elected representation on the Urban Council made no difference to the propensity of a pressure group to influence officials. A pressure group's methods and the reach of their communications decided whether they could be ignored. Their ability to articulate why they should be listened to and why their ideas were representative of a wider group dictated the seriousness with which their communications were handled. Moreover, whether a pressure group offered proposals and created useful data also factored into determining their success.

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<sup>137</sup> Handwritten note, Thatcher, ND on letter, Holmes to Flesher, 27 August 1982, THCR 1/10/37A Part 2 f209, CAC.

<sup>138</sup> Letter, Holmes to Coles, 3 September 1982, FCO 40/1441 f227, TNA.

<sup>139</sup> Letter, Coles to Holmes, 7 September 1982, THCR 1/10/37A Part 2, CAC.

<sup>140</sup> Letter, Cheong-Leen to Thatcher, ND, 0016\_PER\_HCL\_Series\_1\_Subseries\_1, CUHK.

The existing literature on the Sino-British negotiations has forgotten the Urban Council, Reform Club and Hongkong Civic Association almost entirely, sparing each only a few passing references. Consequently, the interplay between Hong Kong pressure groups and the colonial government's formal apparatus for channelling opinions has gone largely unexamined. This section has found that being an elected representative made no discernible difference to the attention one could cultivate from officials. By placing successful and unsuccessful pressure groups in contrast with each other, this section confirms that groups that produced ideas and information gained officials' attention more than those that did not.

## Conclusion

Hong Kong people could channel their thoughts through the colonial government's apparatus, particularly via the Unofficial Members, or express their views by engaging in pressure group activities which operated outside of the formal structured appointed by the administration. The literature has doubted whether either mode of expression made any impact on official thinking. This chapter has found that Hong Kong people could exert influence using both routes but only when doing so fulfilled officials' desire for information and ideas.

On the first route, Yui Chim Lo and Louisa Lim concluded that the Unofficial Members of the ExCo and LegCo had a negligible effect on British officials. This chapter has found that the British government acted only to mollify the Unofficials rather than out of a desire to hear their advice on occasion. For instance, when London allowed selected Unofficials to call on Thatcher, they hoped to neutralise the threat of a lobbying delegation and to exploit the propaganda value of the trip; British officials were not primarily concerned with what the Unofficials had to say and Thatcher did not ask about Hong Kong public opinion. British officials' motivations notwithstanding, UMELCO used the trip to recommend Hong Kong-commissioned opinion polls and promote the status quo as a potential resolution to the 1997 issue. UMELCO had some other successes, too. The small group secured regular meetings with successive Governors and obtained information about Sino-British exchanges. The Unofficials also ensured that Governor Youde would represent their concerns to London and later join the Prime Minister's party in Beijing. While the Unofficials did not obtain everything they asked for, their effect on British official thinking was more than negligible.

On the second route, a lot has been written about Hong Kong pressure groups but most of the literature has been about those that pushed for democracy during the Sino-British negotiations and after the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration was concluded. The actions of

pressure groups during the gap period, including those that did not press for democracy, have not been the subject of study. This chapter has shown that pressure groups informed official thinking during the gap period. The Hong Kong Observers, Hong Kong Prospect Institute and the Reform Club of Hong Kong produced polls and position papers that were welcomed by the colonial, British and Chinese governments. Officials, in turn, folded public opinion into their preparations and entertained the ideas that pressure groups put forward. The starkest example of this was when polls journeyed from their Hong Kong instigators into Unofficials' hands, from the Unofficial Members to Prime Minister Thatcher, and finally from Thatcher to Deng Xiaoping during the leaders' September 1982 meeting. Ambassador Cradock also referred to Hong Kong-produced polls during the Sino-British negotiations in 1983.<sup>141</sup> Pressure groups' polls were, therefore, not only read by officials, but also made several appearances at the heart of Sino-British exchanges over the future of Hong Kong. This chapter has not exhaustively documented all of the Hong Kong pressure groups that were active during the gap period – other groups notably active during this period included the Hong Kong Belongers' Association and Meeting Point as well as various student and Christian groups – nor does it purport to encompass all of their activities; there is insufficient space to examine all in depth.<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless, from those examined here alone, this chapter shows that Hong Kong pressure groups did influence officials during the gap period.

In exploring how Hong Kong views travelled via different routes to the in-trays of officials, our picture of the relationship between Hong Kong society and the colonial, British and Chinese governments is enlarged. We began with Butenhoff's binary taxonomy of the different avenues open to Hong Kong people for expressing their opinions. Yet the supposed distinction between the two routes was somewhat moot because the channel used for expression bore little relationship with the effectiveness of attempts to influence officials. Instead, officials were more receptive to approaches from Hong Kong when they advanced ideas and information: the source – whether a member of UMELCO, the Urban Council or a pressure group – was of less significance. Additionally, it was not only Hong Kong businesspeople (examined in Chapter 1) who were politically active and influential during the gap period. A broader range of Hong Kong people presented political beliefs and some shaped official thinking. Through the Unofficial Members and pressure groups, Hong Kong people showed that they were neither politically apathetic nor politically impotent.

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<sup>141</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 26 July 1983, PREM 19/1056, TNA.

<sup>142</sup> Cheng, *In Search*.

## Chapter 3 – The Chinese Government and the Opinions of Hong Kong People

How Chinese officials regarded the opinions of Hong Kong people has been considered in the existing literature only on occasion. For example, Ian Scott wrote that Hong Kong delegations that visited Beijing “often came back with a sense that their opinions had been considered”.<sup>1</sup> Alvin Y. So concurred that Beijing’s “series of meetings with businessmen, community leaders, professional groups, notables from the New Territories, student activists, and journalists” provided the Chinese leadership with briefings as well as performing other functions.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Rong Wei and Tim Summers acknowledged that Chinese officials researching Hong Kong “drew on the Hong Kong community to investigate opinions and inform strategies” from as early as 1981.<sup>3</sup> On a more specific point, Peter E. Hamilton wrote that Beijing’s policy of leaving Hong Kong’s legal and capitalist systems untouched for 50 years was the result of “negotiations between Beijing and Hong Kong business leaders.”<sup>4</sup> However, Scott, So, Wei and Summers, and Hamilton made their remarks in passing without offering sustained studies of interactions between Hong Kong people and Chinese officials. While their remarks briefly allow Hong Kong people into the story of the Sino-British negotiations, these authors have left unexamined questions as to how Hong Kong people inveigled access, how they conveyed their views and, save for Hamilton’s point on the 50-year guarantee, how much their efforts were reflected in the Sino-British Joint Declaration. Moreover, aside from a few passing mentions, most of the literature on the Sino-British negotiations has remained silent on China’s relationship with the views of Hong Kong people.

Authors might have assumed that influence flowed in only one direction because of the belief that the CCP operated an exclusively top-down manner, with edicts issued from the highest level of authority passed without challenge to lower levels and disseminated to an acquiescent public. Recent work outside of the literature on the Sino-British negotiations has challenged this image of the CCP as a complete and absolute totalitarian system. This strand of literature argues that there are mechanisms for communicating local views, expectations and desiderata up to

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, *Political Change*, 205.

<sup>2</sup> So, ‘Hong Kong People Ruling’, 74–75.

<sup>3</sup> Wei and Summers, ‘Chinese Government’s Negotiating Strategy’, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong*, 250.

higher levels, giving the Chinese public the ability to apply a limited amount of pressure on the Party.<sup>5</sup> But much of this research has been within the social sciences and relates to the past few decades.<sup>6</sup> The relationship between the Chinese state and public opinion may have been quite different in the early 1980s. Additionally, this literature concerns the CCP's relationship with the mainland Chinese public rather than with the Hong Kong public. Given these disanalogies, the complex apparatus revealed by recent research cannot be transplanted directly into the present study. Nonetheless, this literature compels us to ask whether the CCP's relationship with Hong Kong people in the early 1980s might have admitted a degree of two-way exchange and, if so, how this functioned in practice.

This chapter argues that Beijing had a dualistic relationship with the opinions of Hong Kong people, simultaneously rejecting and embracing Hong Kong views. Reflecting this dualism, this chapter proceeds in two halves. The first half examines the ways in which Beijing showed a disregard for the opinions of Hong Kong people. China remonstrated against the idea of Hong Kong being represented around the negotiating table and rejected attempts even to have Hong Kong Chinese people in the capital city at the same time as negotiating rounds were taking place. Meanwhile, China projected its vision for Hong Kong's future into the colony using propaganda, both directly through the CCP-aligned media in Hong Kong and indirectly by leaking information to Hong Kong delegations and journalists. In protesting against Hong Kong representation at the negotiations and by seeking to shape Hong Kong opinion, Beijing showed an antipathy towards Hong Kong views. By contrast, the second half explores the ways by which Chinese officials sought Hong Kong opinions. As seen in Chapter 1, China consulted Hong Kong business visitors

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<sup>5</sup> David Bachman, *Bureaucracy, Economy and Leadership in China* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45; Jidong Chen et al., 'Sources of Authoritarian Responsiveness: A Field Experiment in China', *American Journal of Political Science* 60, no. 2 (2016): 383–400, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12207>; Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Chinese Middle Class Attitudes Towards International Affairs: Nascent Liberalization?', *The China Quarterly* 179 (2004): 603–28, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741004000505>; Xiaojun Li and Dingding Chen, 'Public Opinion, International Reputation, and Audience Costs in an Authoritarian Regime', *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 38, no. 5 (2021): 543–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894220906374>; Andrew J. Nathan, 'China's Changing of the Guard: Authoritarian Resilience', *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003): 14–15, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2003.0019>; Catherine Owen, 'Participatory Authoritarianism: From Bureaucratic Transformation to Civic Participation in Russia and China', *Review of International Studies* 46, no. 4 (2020): 415–34, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210520000248>; Jennifer Pan and Yiqing Xu, 'Gauging Preference Stability and Ideological Constraint under Authoritarian Rule', *SSRN Electronic Journal*, ahead of print, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3679076>; Howard H. Wang et al., 'How Institutionalized Feedback Works: Online Citizen Complaints and Local Government Responsiveness in China', *Governance* 38, no. 2 (2025): e12907, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12907>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Frederic Wakeman, 'The Civil Society and Public Sphere Debate: Western Reflections on Chinese Political Culture', *Modern China* 19, no. 2 (1993): 108–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009770049301900202>.

to Beijing during the gap period (1979 to 1982). Beijing's consultations with selected Hong Kong people continued during the years of the Sino-British negotiations (1983 and 1984) but proceeded in a different way. Rather than consultations taking place in Beijing often within the context of delegation visits, Chinese officials instead consulted selected Hong Kong individuals in secret meetings that took place inside Hong Kong. Furthermore, Chinese officials did not restrict their pool of advisors to Hong Kong businesspeople alone and embraced a wider range of Hong Kong views that stretched beyond the commercial. Amongst those whom Chinese officials met were Unofficial Members of ExCo and LegCo. Lastly, Chinese officials also analysed newspaper coverage for expressions of local opinion, submitted summaries to Beijing and folded findings into policy. As such, some Hong Kong people had the opportunity to steer Chinese official thinking.

The relationship between Chinese officials and Hong Kong opinion has remained largely neglected by the literature. This chapter offers an explanation as to why this relationship may have gone unexamined: on the one hand, China's public statements gave the impression that officials rejected Hong Kong ideas while Beijing sought to shape the Hong Kong public's opinions through propaganda; on the other hand, although China conducted consultations with Hong Kong people, these meetings were held privately and went undiscovered at the time. Having revealed that Chinese officials folded some of the information gleaned from expressions of opinions in the Hong Kong media and through their clandestine conversations, this chapter adds to the growing literature on the CCP's relationship with public opinion. In no polity are the public's views truly homogeneous.<sup>7</sup> Hong Kong people held many and varied opinions. This chapter does not attempt to reconstruct what Hong Kong people thought in proportion to their proponents but is instead interested in the ways in which Chinese officials handled those views.

## China's objection to the 'three-legged stool'

Hong Kong people had no formal representation at the negotiating table.<sup>8</sup> Beijing strongly and publicly objected to any form of Hong Kong representation in the talks.<sup>9</sup> This section argues that China's protestations contributed to the impression that China was disinterested in Hong Kong

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<sup>7</sup> Harry Noone, 'Two-Level Games and the Policy Process: Assessing Domestic–Foreign Policy Linkage Theory', *World Affairs* 182, no. 2 (2019): 165–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0043820019839074>.

<sup>8</sup> Ray Yep, 'One Country, Two Systems and Special Administrative Regions', in *China's Local Administration: Traditions and Changes in the Sub-National Hierarchy*, ed. Jae Ho Chung and Tao-Chiu Lam (Routledge, 2010), 90.

<sup>9</sup> Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 110; Pepper, *Keeping Democracy at Bay*, 195.

views, which goes some way towards explaining why the literature has largely neglected the relationship between Beijing and the opinions of Hong Kong people.

At a press conference in Hong Kong in December 1982, British Foreign Minister Lord Belstead described there as being three stakeholders invested in Hong Kong's future: Britain, Beijing and the people of Hong Kong. He said that any agreement reached between British and Chinese negotiators must satisfy all three parties. Belstead compared this to the legs of a table: "All three legs are important, because if one of the legs gives way the table will give way as well".<sup>10</sup> (Belstead's metaphorical 'table' would later become better known as a three-legged 'stool'.) Beijing reacted strongly, rejecting the implication that Hong Kong was on a parity with the other two 'legs' and asserted that Hong Kong was territorially inseparable from the rest of China.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, as the majority ethnicity in Hong Kong was Chinese, Chinese officials asserted that Beijing alone was competent to speak for its compatriots.<sup>12</sup> With China conceiving of Hong Kong's land and people as Chinese already, there was no separate role for Hong Kong people to play in the negotiations.<sup>13</sup> British and Chinese negotiators would determine the future of Hong Kong without interference from any other party.<sup>14</sup>

Beijing remained watchful for inklings of a three-legged stool, rigorously criticising any suggestion that Hong Kong constituted a third party in the negotiations. Youde was next to incur Beijing's wrath. On 7 July 1983, less than a week before the formal negotiations were scheduled to begin, the Governor was passing through Hong Kong's airport. A journalist asked Youde whom he represented to which he replied: "I am to the governor of Hong Kong. Indeed, I represent the people of Hong Kong. Who else would I represent?"<sup>15</sup> Beijing admonished the Governor's comments. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson protested that Youde "only

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<sup>10</sup> Telegram, Roberts to FCO News Department, 10 December 1982, FCO 40/1437 f108, TNA. Belstead was not the first British official to parallel the parties most concerned with Hong Kong's future to legs. In a May 1981 speech to the Hong Kong Association, Chief Secretary in the Hong Kong government Sir Jack Cater described there as being not three but four legs: Hong Kong, Britain, Beijing and Guangdong. It does not appear, however, that Cater was the originator of the peculiar parallel, as he appeared to be in dialogue with an earlier explication involving three legs (memo, unknown to Adrian Christopher Swire, 22 May 1981, JSS/1/11/10 B.2.5, SSC). Exactly who had originated the 'three-legged stool' simile may be lost to time.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Evans, *Deng Xiaoping and the Making of Modern China* (Penguin Group, 1993), 270.

<sup>12</sup> Ambrose Y. C. King, 'The Hong Kong Talks and Hong Kong Politics', *Issues & Studies* 22, no. 6 (1986): 52.

<sup>13</sup> Evans, *Deng Xiaoping*, 270.

<sup>14</sup> Tang and Ching, 'Three-Legged Stool', 150.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in: Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 68; see also: Bonavia, *Hong Kong 1997*, 104; Cheng, *In Search*, 253; 'Governor to press Hong Kong case in Peking talks', *The Guardian*, 8 July 1983, 8; David Bonavia and Richard Hughes, 'Peking talks upset by Hongkong slip', *The Times*, 11 July 1983, 1; Derek Davies and Mary Lee, 'Forward to Square Two', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21 July 1983, 12–13.

represented the British Government".<sup>16</sup> Shortly after, China rejected a visa application made on behalf of the Hong Kong government's Chief of Information Peter Tsao Kwang-yung, who was supposed to join the British delegation in Beijing during the talks.<sup>17</sup> This was likely a retaliation against Youde's comments.<sup>18</sup> It also ensured that the British side of the negotiating table contained no ethnically Chinese people, thereby visually bolstering Beijing's claim that Britain could not represent China's compatriots. Beijing not only reasserted that Hong Kong could not be a party to the talks but also redoubled China's claim to speak for Hong Kong people.

As well as reacting against British remarks, Chinese officials also disclaimed the three-legged stool proactively. For instance, in May 1983, the Head of the HKMAO, Liao Chengzhi, told a group of New Territories businessmen in no uncertain terms that China would not accept a three-legged stool. The contents of this meeting soon became public.<sup>19</sup> The Party's mouthpiece was (and continues to be) the newspaper *People's Daily*.<sup>20</sup> The paper castigated Thatcher's claim to have a moral responsibility towards Hong Kong people as tantamount to promoting the three-legged stool.<sup>21</sup> Deng Xiaoping objected to the idea when meeting UMELCO delegates in June 1984 and this meeting was again carried by the media.<sup>22</sup> As Steve Tsang argues, Beijing's objections to Hong Kong being a party to the negotiations left Hong Kong people feeling that China did not wish to hear their views and compounded their sense of political impotence.<sup>23</sup>

The lack of Hong Kong representation in the talks was not for want of trying. Even before the formal negotiations began, UMELCO sought to ensure that Hong Kong would be seen at least on the sidelines of the negotiations. In a December 1982 letter to Belstead, Senior Unofficial of ExCo Sir S. Y. Chung suggested that ExCo Unofficials be stationed in Beijing, where the talks were to take place, when British and Chinese negotiators were meeting. Chung's ambition was to make

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<sup>16</sup> 'Foreign Affairs Spokesman answered a journalist's question: Youde would be a member of the British government delegation when participating in the Sino-British talks' [外交部发言人答记者问 尤德只作为英国政府代表团成员参加中英会谈], *People's Daily* [人民日报], 9 July 1983, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 8 July 1983, PREM 19/1056, TNA.

<sup>18</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 118.

<sup>19</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 252.

<sup>20</sup> David Gitter and Leah Fang, 'The Chinese Communist Party's Use of Homophonous Pen Names: An Open-Source Open Secret', *Asia Policy* 25, no. 1 (2018): 69–112, <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2018.0009>; Guoguang Wu, 'Command Communication: The Politics of Editorial Formulation in the People's Daily', *The China Quarterly* 137 (1994): 194–211, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000034111>.

<sup>21</sup> 'China's recovery of Hong Kong complies fully with international law' [中国收回香港地区完全符合国际法], *People's Daily* [人民日报], 20 September 1983, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Halima Guterres, 'Humiliation! Deng turns on Umelco three', *SCMP*, 24 June 1984, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Steve Tsang, 'China and Political Reform in Hong Kong', *The Pacific Review* 2, no. 1 (1989): 69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748908718801>.

Hong Kong's presence felt, though he stopped short of asking for a seat at the negotiating table itself.<sup>24</sup> Chung repeated this call during a meeting with Thatcher in December 1982, again asking that Unofficial Members be present in Beijing during the talks though not at the negotiating table.<sup>25</sup> British officials discussed the request between themselves. In a telegram to the FCO, Ambassador Cradock doubted that the Chinese would accept the Unofficials as part of the British negotiating team in Beijing.<sup>26</sup> In January 1983, Belstead replied to Chung's letter saying that "the talks which have so far taken place have not been of a type which would accommodate your proposal".<sup>27</sup> Belstead's reply, however, left the door open for the Unofficials to join the British party in Beijing at some time in the future. Consequently, in March 1983, Chung again suggested that some Hong Kong people be present in Beijing while the talks were taking place. On this occasion, Chung had in mind that these Hong Kong people be stationed in the Chinese capital so that British negotiators could consult with them when needed.<sup>28</sup> After ExCo repeated the request in April 1983, the reply was firmer and unambiguous. Although Youde supported ExCo, Cradock argued strongly against and London agreed, disbaring ExCo from being in Beijing during the talks.<sup>29</sup> Despite several valiant attempts by the Unofficial Members, Hong Kong people never sat at or near the negotiating table.

On only one occasion did British officials raise the idea of Hong Kong representation with their Chinese counterparts. In January 1984, Chung argued that the circumstances had changed and that it was worth reconsidering the question of Hong Kong representation, not only in Beijing but at the negotiating table itself. Although the negotiations were ongoing, it was already clear by this point that Hong Kong would pass from Britain to Beijing in 1997. Chinese officials had publicly said that Hong Kong people would run Hong Kong after the handover and would be expected to take on a greater degree of responsibility for local affairs under a new political structure which was still being defined. Chung argued that it was essential to involve Hong Kong people as discussion turned away from sovereignty towards the details of the future political structure that Hong Kong people were expected to administer themselves. He advanced that a Hong Kong representative should not only be present in Beijing but ought also to have a seat at the negotiating table. To avoid Beijing levelling the accusation that this would represent a three-legged stool, Chung suggested that the Hong Kong person chosen could be a member of the

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<sup>24</sup> Letter, Chung to Belstead, 10 December 1982, FCO 40/1468 f220, TNA; telegram, Pym to Hong Kong, 13 December 1982, FCO 40/1468 f216, TNA.

<sup>25</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher and Chung et al., 20 December 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>26</sup> Telegram, Cradock to Donald, 14 December 1982, FCO 40/1468 f218, TNA.

<sup>27</sup> Letter, Belstead to Chung, 13 January 1983, FCO 40/1565 f24, TNA.

<sup>28</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher and Youde et al., 9 March 1983, PREM 19/1054, TNA.

<sup>29</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 98.

British team and implied that the representative should be himself.<sup>30</sup> British officials remained hesitant. The Chinese were clearly opposed to having Hong Kong people at the negotiations and had even protested against the British officials briefing ExCo Unofficials as the talks progressed. Resurrecting the three-legged stool would risk aggravating Beijing. Despite their apprehensions, British officials were convinced to raise representation during the seventeenth round of talks on 27 and 28 June 1984. In reply, Chinese negotiators repeated that the talks were bilateral and did not require Hong Kong representatives.<sup>31</sup> As the Sino-British negotiations concluded soon thereafter, the question of Hong Kong representation was rendered moot. The Unofficial Members did not secure a Hong Kong seat but they did at least cause the British side to raise the idea with the Chinese, whose objections appeared to show once again that Beijing had little interest in the views of Hong Kong people.

China vociferously objected to Hong Kong representation, condemning the concept of a three-legged stool and insisting that only Chinese officials could speak for the ethnically Chinese people that constituted the majority of Hong Kong's population. Unofficials tried to secure a seat at or near the negotiating table but were unsuccessful in their attempts. This left Hong Kong people with the impression that Beijing held Hong Kong views in low regard. This goes some way towards explaining why the relationship between Beijing and the Hong Kong public has barely been examined in the existing literature.

## Shaping Hong Kong opinion through propaganda and leaks

As well as objecting to Hong Kong representation at the negotiations, China also sought to influence Hong Kong opinion in two main ways. Firstly, the CCP-aligned media in Hong Kong carried Beijing's vision for Hong Kong's future in the pages of their newspapers. Secondly, Chinese officials leaked information to journalists and Hong Kong visitors, using them as vehicles for projecting official messages to the Hong Kong public.<sup>32</sup> Through both propaganda and leaks, China attempted to mould Hong Kong opinion rather than to solicit it which has, in turn, contributed to the impression that Beijing was disinterested in what Hong Kong people thought.

Propaganda has a single direction: it tells people what to believe, dictating rather than enabling an exchange of views. The Party put forward its vision for Hong Kong's future through the CCP-aligned media in Hong Kong aiming, as Christine Loh put it, "to win the 'hearts and minds' of

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<sup>30</sup> Telegram telno. 32, Youde to FCO, 9 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>31</sup> Lu, *Return of Hong Kong*, 51–52.

<sup>32</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 63.

the Hong Kong community”.<sup>33</sup> Loh provided a useful taxonomy of CCP propaganda techniques, all of which were evident during the Sino-British negotiations: repetition of a message to assert its truth; intentional vagueness by which general acceptance is sought without being drawn on the details; *ad hominem* attacks, labelling one’s opponent as ‘anti-China’ or similar, or making them seem in some way untrustworthy; band wagoning by asserting that most people agree with the Party line with the implication that the reader should, too; and, in contrast to the enemy or minority view, telling only positive stories about China and the Party.<sup>34</sup> William A. Callahan added that there was a visual dimension to propaganda about Hong Kong, with maps showing Hong Kong as contiguous to China, as well as an emotional element that played on the indignity of Hong Kong’s continued separation from China.<sup>35</sup> Britain’s belligerence against China in the two Opium Wars provided a treasure trove of emotive material for the CCP’s propaganda.<sup>36</sup>

Newspapers produced three different types of article to convey Beijing’s messages. Sometimes, the CCP-aligned media simply reproduced articles from Chinese state newspapers in their own pages. Relatedly, Hong Kong papers sometimes reproduced, explained and commented on articles that had appeared in mainland publications. More commonly, CCP-aligned Hong Kong newspapers featured original columns that were designed to appeal to Hong Kong’s readers while advancing Beijing’s Hong Kong policy by stealth.<sup>37</sup> Since 1957, the CCP’s proxy in Hong Kong had been the Xinhua office.<sup>38</sup> Every evening, papers such as *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po* submitted their proposed copy to Xinhua for approval before going to print, ensuring that the Party’s line was properly and consistently conveyed to readers.<sup>39</sup> Through such propaganda, China hoped to shape rather than solicit Hong Kong opinion.

The content and virulence of China’s propaganda could change depending on the state of UK-China relations over Hong Kong. During the gap period, such articles stressed the essential ‘Chineseness’ of Hong Kong and its population, drawing a sharp distinction between Hong Kong Chinese and the British colonial administration that had controlled Hong Kong since the Opium

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<sup>33</sup> Loh, *Underground Front*, 27–28.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 38–40.

<sup>35</sup> William A. Callahan, ‘National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism’, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 2 (2004): 199–218, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437540402900204>.

<sup>36</sup> Julian Weiss, ‘The Negotiating Style of the People’s Republic of China: The Future of Hong Kong and Macao’, *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies* 13, no. 2 (1988): 180.

<sup>37</sup> Hurst, ‘Negotiating with the Past’.

<sup>38</sup> John P. Burns, ‘The Structure of Communist Party Control in Hong Kong’, *Asian Survey* 30, no. 8 (1990): 750–51.

<sup>39</sup> Cha BSC interview, 59.

Wars.<sup>40</sup> In early 1983, CCP-aligned Hong Kong media focused on disparaging the British side while encouraging Hong Kong people to believe that Beijing's plans for the future were workable.<sup>41</sup> In June, the CCP-aligned media ran a campaign that drew attention to levels of Chinese investment in Hong Kong, stressing the profit to be gained from reintegrating Hong Kong into China.<sup>42</sup> As the formal negotiations got underway in July 1983, Chinese propaganda focused on the legal basis of China's sovereignty claim.<sup>43</sup> The opening rounds of talks saw a rapid increase in Beijing's propaganda.<sup>44</sup> In September, as the talks were floundering, a Xinhua commentary cited various leftwing newspapers and magazines that had promoted reunification and accused the British of lying when officials claimed that the Hong Kong public supported continued colonial administration.<sup>45</sup> Attacks continued into late 1983, with the media carrying criticism of the British and approval for Beijing's designs for Hong Kong's future.<sup>46</sup> The onslaught cooled only in mid-1984 once British and Chinese negotiators had reached agreement on the major issues.<sup>47</sup>

Aside from CCP-aligned Hong Kong organisations, most other media producers did not answer to Xinhua. China therefore supplemented its own propaganda with other strategies to capture media attention and seek support. One way Beijing did this was to advance its relationships with Hong Kong journalists and media moguls. As noted in Chapter 1, the editor of the *Ming Pao* newspaper Louis Cha Leung-yung visited Beijing on several occasions and was welcomed personally by Deng Xiaoping. Beijing also welcomed the Chairman of Asia Television, Deacon Chiu Te-ken, and a delegation from Television Broadcasts as guests.<sup>48</sup> A group of Hong Kong journalists were treated to a 10 day tour of China, during which time the visitors met various senior Chinese leaders.<sup>49</sup> China also curried favour by appointing media figures onto advisory bodies. For instance, Beijing appointed Asia Television's Deacon Chiu Te-ken and the publisher

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<sup>40</sup> Hurst, 'Negotiating with the Past'.

<sup>41</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 87.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 109–10.

<sup>43</sup> Report, 'Chinese Propaganda and How it Might Develop', HKD, FCO, British government, 5 December 1982, FCO 40/1557 f767, TNA.

<sup>44</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 140–42.

<sup>45</sup> 'Some Hong Kong newspapers pointed out that the British authorities in Hong Kong are hypocritically playing the "public opinion card" in the issue of Hong Kong's future' [香港一些报刊指出在香港前途问题上港英当局打“民意牌”实属虚伪], *People's Daily* [人民日报], 16 September 1983, 3.

<sup>46</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 155–56.

<sup>47</sup> So, 'Hong Kong People Ruling', 80.

<sup>48</sup> Chiu: telegram, Youde to FCO, 9 April 1983, FCO 40/1550 f227, TNA; Television Broadcasts: telegram, Youde to FCO, 22 December 1982, FCO 40/1464 f1065, TNA.

<sup>49</sup> James Tang, 'HK self-rule a long term policy – China', *Hong Kong Standard*, 30 May 1983, 1; 'China "should state time frame for HK"', *SCMP*, 31 May 1983, 8.

of *Wide Angle* magazine, Chuk Woon-fai, to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.<sup>50</sup> Such appointments were ostensibly made on the basis of elections but were vetted beforehand.<sup>51</sup> This aimed at enwrapping Hong Kong's media producers and other leading personalities into the Party's mechanisms. Appointments allowed appointees to feel as though they had a part in decision-making which, in Loh's words, let those targeted "grow accustomed to the fruits of their membership" and, in turn, strengthened their identification with maintaining the Party's systems.<sup>52</sup> Anthony B. L. Cheung and Paul C. W. Wong found that there was a precipitous rise in the number of Chinese advisory committees: from 50 in 1950 to more than 200 in the 1980s, albeit not all new appointees were from Hong Kong's media and journalism industries.<sup>53</sup> Another way that China sought to forge friendships with the media was through private meetings in Hong Kong. Cha of *Ming Pao* and Mary Lee of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* were each invited to meet officials at the Xinhua offices, and Xu Jiatus met the Chairman of Television Broadcasts Sir Run Run Shaw.<sup>54</sup> Xu Jiatus was even known to make gifts of melons from Xinjiang and lychees from Guangdong to anti-CCP journalists, and engage in "dinner diplomacy".<sup>55</sup> The effect of Beijing's invitations, appointments and meetings had mixed success. Some appear to have been seduced: for instance, Cha and his newspaper *Ming Pao* softened their tone towards the CCP over time.<sup>56</sup> Others remained unaffected: Mary Lee, for instance, criticised Xu's dinner diplomacy as part of Beijing's "psychological warfare", showing she was unswayed by her own meetings with the official.<sup>57</sup>

Additionally, Beijing leaked information to journalists and Hong Kong visitors, capturing column space in media outlets that were not aligned with the CCP. Chapter 1 argued that Chinese officials welcomed Hong Kong businesspeople to Beijing to discuss ideas for Hong Kong's future. By 1982, however, the consultative dimension of Hong Kong delegations ceased because

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<sup>50</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 9 May 1983 enclosed in memo, Morris to Hoare and Clift, 12 May 1983, FCO 40/1550 f296, TNA.

<sup>51</sup> Burns, 'Structure of Communist Party', 759.

<sup>52</sup> Loh, *Underground Front*, 30.

<sup>53</sup> Anthony B. L. Cheung and Paul C. W. Wong, 'Who Advised the Hong Kong Government? The Politics of Absorption before and after 1997', *Asian Survey* 44, no. 6 (2004): 875, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2004.44.6.874>.

<sup>54</sup> Cha: letter, Webb to Morrice, 11 March 1981, FCO 40/1287 f59A, TNA; Lee: Cheng, *Struggling for Democracy*, 152–53; Shaw: teletype, Margolis to Clift, 9 July 1983, FCO 40/1553 f474, TNA.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Y. S. Cheng, 'The Democracy Movement in Hong Kong', *International Affairs* 65, no. 3 (1989): 447, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2621722>.

<sup>56</sup> Hamm, *Paper Swordsmen*, 199.

<sup>57</sup> See for example: Mary Lee, 'Hearts and minds – and a barrage of words', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 August 1982, 22–23.

Chinese officials had by that time made up their minds to retake Hong Kong.<sup>58</sup> Subsequently, Hong Kong visitors began to play a different role: Chinese officials equipped Hong Kong visitors as well as journalists with information in anticipation of gaining coverage in Hong Kong's non-aligned media.

Chinese officials activated this strategy even before Thatcher met Deng in September 1982. In February 1982, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs staffer told a Reuters correspondent that China had two key principles regarding Hong Kong's future: that China's sovereignty had to be safeguarded and that Hong Kong would remain a free port.<sup>59</sup> In June, Deng Xiaoping similarly told a group of leftwing visitors from Hong Kong and Macao that China would regain sovereignty over Hong Kong while maintaining the city's prosperity, earning press coverage for the remarks.<sup>60</sup> Robert Cottrell described this as marking "the start of a public relations campaign" that "aimed at progressively manipulating Hong Kong public opinion into accepting China's plans for resumption as both patriotic and inevitable".<sup>61</sup> Even during Thatcher's visit to Beijing, Chinese officials continued to talk to the press about matters that ought to have remained confidential between the two leaders. On 23 September, Margaret Thatcher sat in a meeting room in the Great Hall of the People awaiting Zhao Ziyang. Zhao marched down the corridor towards the room, stopping momentarily before the threshold. He turned to a group of journalists who were waiting outside and announced that China "will certainly take back its sovereignty over Hong Kong [... and] will not affect Hong Kong's stability or prosperity".<sup>62</sup> Zhao then turned into a room to meet Thatcher, whose carefully prepared speaking notes had become quickly redundant before the meeting had even begun. Both before and during Thatcher's September 1982 visit, Chinese officials made calculated comments to journalists that sought to shape Hong Kong people's expectations rather than consult their views.

In the months after Thatcher left China, Beijing's leaks turned into a deluge. Although Britain and China had agreed to keep discussions on the future of Hong Kong confidential, the

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<sup>58</sup> Ba Zhipeng [巴志鹏], 'The China-UK "Hong Kong Question" and Hong Kong's Return to China' [中英 "香港问题" 和香港回归的起步], *Journal of Henan Polytechnic University (Social Sciences Edition)* [河南理工大学学报(社会科学版)] 8, no. 1 (2007): 108; Luke Kwong, 'Refurbishing Hong Kong's Image: The 1997 Saga and Chinese Nationalism Under Deng Xiaoping', *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2004): 186, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570061033004749>.

<sup>59</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 43.

<sup>60</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 73; 'Deng talks about sovereignty', *SCMP*, 2 July 1982, 16; John Gittings, 'Peking aims to regain control of Hong Kong', *The Guardian*, 21 July 1982, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 74.

<sup>62</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 86; McLaren, *Britain's Record in Hong Kong*, 17; Vogel, *Transformation of China*, 495; cf. Roberti (*Fall of Hong Kong*, 47), who recounts this story a little differently.

Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Qian Qichen, told journalists from the *Financial Times* “We cannot place maintenance of prosperity over sovereignty”, undermining the British insistence on the primacy of economic considerations and repeating Zhao Ziyang’s assertion that China would indubitably retake Hong Kong.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, a former head of Xinhua Hong Kong, Zeng Tao, told a separate group of *Financial Times* journalists that sovereignty would have to belong to China.<sup>64</sup> Meeting Urban Council member Dr Denny Huang Mong-hwa, Liao Chengzhi said that three points would be axiomatic to China’s Hong Kong policy: China would resume sovereignty over Hong Kong; Hong Kong would become a self-governing special administrative zone; and Hong Kong’s political, economic and social systems and institutions would remain unchanged. Huang relayed these messages to the Hong Kong public in an interview with local radio station Commercial Radio.<sup>65</sup> Chinese officials repeated these three points on many occasions. For instance, the Mayor of Shenzhen conveyed these three points to a group of leading personalities from the Heung Yee Kuk, a body that represented the New Territories, and a Hong Kong Trade Development Council delegation led by a former Senior Unofficial Member of ExCo and LegCo Sir Y. K. Kan heard these same three points from Xi Zhongxun.<sup>66</sup> By reiterating the same key messages to different visitors, Beijing hoped to gain media coverage and public acceptance.

As Beijing refined its plans for Hong Kong’s future in increasing detail, Chinese officials issued updates to the Hong Kong public using leaks. As Mark Roberti described, when Chinese officials gave out information, they “expected the delegations to spread the word in Hong Kong”.<sup>67</sup> At the beginning of November, the Mayor of Shanghai, Wang Daohan, confirmed to Sir Y. K. Kan that China would retake Hong Kong, whose prosperity and stability would be protected and its political, economic and legal systems left unchanged. Kan then passed this information on to reporters.<sup>68</sup> Later that same month, when meeting a delegation of the Hong Kong’s Factory

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<sup>63</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 7 October 1982, PREM 19/791, TNA.

<sup>64</sup> Telegram, Cradock to Donald, 11 October 1982, FCO 21/2217 f147, TNA; telegram, Cradock to Donald, 12 October 1982, FCO 21/2217 f151, TNA.

<sup>65</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 3 November 1982, FCO 40/1462 f873, TNA; ‘Liao Chengzhi met Denny Huang’ [廖承志会见黄梦花], *People’s Daily* [人民日报], 20 October 1982, 4; ‘Denny Huang returned from Beijing where he talked about the resumption of sovereignty and plans for a city with a high degree of autonomy’ [黄梦花自京归来谈话收回主权无讨论余地一个高度自治自由市可获妥当安排], *Ta Kung Pao* [大公报], 1 November 1982, 4; “‘Stupid to mention treaties’”, *SCMP*, 5 November 1982, 10.

<sup>66</sup> Heung Yee Kuk: telegram, Youde to FCO, 15 November 1982, FCO 40/1462 f921, TNA; Trade Development Council: Torigian, *Party’s Interests Come First*, 363; telegram, Cradock to FCO, 1 November 1982, FCO 40/1462 f859, TNA; meeting notes, Xi and Hong Kong Trade Development Council delegation, 1 November 1982, FCO 40/1462 f930, TNA.

<sup>67</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 63.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 56–57.

Owners' Association, Liao Chengzhi used the phrase "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong" (*Gangren zhi Gang*, 港人治港) for the first time in describing China's intentions for Hong Kong's political future.<sup>69</sup> While still in Beijing, the delegation's leader, Wong Kam, conveyed Beijing's new motto to Hong Kong journalists via telephone. Once back in Hong Kong, Wong gave two press conferences which ensured extensive media coverage for the 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong' formula.<sup>70</sup> Liao later revealed to yet another Hong Kong delegation that he had borrowed the idea from a Hong Kong person, though did not specify who.<sup>71</sup> Another important advance was the 12-point plan, which enwrapped 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong' into its formulation. Originally known as Marshall Ye's nine-point plan for Taiwan, HKMAO staff adapted the nine points into 12 points for Hong Kong.<sup>72</sup> Chinese officials announced the 12 points to a visiting delegation from the Hong Kong Federation of Students mere days before the formal talks were due to start in July 1983.<sup>73</sup> The 12-points were:

1. Apart from defence and international relations, Hong Kong's internal affairs would be managed by Hong Kong people.
2. China would not send officials to rule Hong Kong; Hong Kong people would rule Hong Kong. The only requirement on who could be a leader of Hong Kong's future political system would be that they must a patriot and support Hong Kong's reunification with China.
3. Hong Kong's laws would remain largely unchanged, albeit some small adjustments would be necessary.
4. Hong Kong's lifestyle would remain unchanged.

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<sup>69</sup> Cheung, *Secrets from the British Archives*, 66; Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 99.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel Chung, 'Beijing hints at self-rule', *Hong Kong Standard*, 21 November 1982, 1; 'Local people "will run HK by 1997"', *SCMP*, 21 November 1982, 5; 'Hong Kong people will be governed by Hong Kong people' [將由香港人治港], *Kung Sheung Daily News* [工商日報], 21 November 1982, 1; 'Recover the sovereignty of Hong Kong and establish a Special Administrative Region no later than 1997 – Hong Kong people rule over Hong Kong' [收回香港主權不遲於1997設特別行政區港人治港], *Ta Kung Pao* [大公報], 21 November 1982, 1; telegram, Youde to FCO, 30 November 1982, FCO 40/1463 f975, TNA; report, 'Media Summary on Hong Kong's Future Report No. 5 Period: November 30-December 6, 1982', Public Relations Division, ISD, Hong Kong government, 7 December 1982, HKRS1416-1-40, PRO.

<sup>71</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 21 January 1983, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>72</sup> Lu, *Return of Hong Kong*, 32; Qi Pengfei [齐鹏飞], 'A Historical Prelude to the Return of Hong Kong to China' [香港回归的历史前奏曲], *Contemporary China History Studies* [当代中国史研究] 13, no. 4 (2006): 77.

<sup>73</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 254; Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 112–13 and 199; So, 'Hong Kong People Ruling', 77.

5. Hong Kong people would enjoy freedoms of publication, speech, assembly, residence and travel.
6. Members of all political factions would be tolerated in Hong Kong so long as they remained peaceful.
7. The Hong Kong government would be responsible for law and order with its own police force.
8. Hong Kong's capitalist structure would remain unchanged.
9. Hong Kong's status as a free port and financial centre would remain unchanged.
10. Hong Kong's currency would remain freely convertible, though the design of banknotes would change.
11. The Hong Kong government would retain certain powers for managing its foreign affairs, such as issuing its own travel documents.
12. Hong Kong people would be responsible for enacting social reforms of their own.<sup>74</sup>

Lastly, China also conveyed the idea that Hong Kong's colonial constitution would be replaced by a 'mini constitution', which would come to be called the Basic Law, via leaks. In April 1983, a 30-person delegation consisting of academics from Hong Kong University and the Chinese University visited China.<sup>75</sup> Liao Chengzhi told the group that a team from Hong Kong would draft a mini constitution for the territory.<sup>76</sup> Upon their return to Hong Kong, they relayed this news to the press.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, that November, Ji Pengfei told a delegation from the New Territories that the mini constitution would enshrine China's assurances to Hong Kong, including the commitment to leave Hong Kong's systems and lifestyle basically unchanged for 50 years. Ji added that Hong Kong people would be consulted when the mini constitution was drafted.<sup>78</sup> Once they had returned to Hong Kong, the delegation's leader, Wong Lap-kwong, relayed this to the press.<sup>79</sup> In December, Ji told the Chinese Reform Association that once the mini constitution was drafted, it would be put to Hong Kong people "for comments and modification" before being passed up to the National People's Congress for promulgation.<sup>80</sup> In these instances and others, Chinese

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<sup>74</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 29 July 1983, FCO 40/1562 f176, TNA.

<sup>75</sup> So, 'Hong Kong People Ruling', 77; note for the record, Masefield, 19 March 1983 regarding meeting, Masefield and Hollingworth et al., 18 March 1983 enclosed in letter, Masefield to Morris, 24 March 1983, FCO 40/1550 f248, TNA; "'Constitution of our own" in 1997', *SCMP*, 12 April 1983, 10.

<sup>76</sup> "'Constitution of our own" in 1997', *SCMP*, 12 April 1983, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 12 April 1983, PREM 19/1054, TNA.

<sup>78</sup> Memo, Priest to Morris, Hum and Clift, 7 December 1983, FCO 40/1557 f776, TNA.

<sup>79</sup> 'Joint announcement could speed up talks', *SCMP*, 18 November 1983, 15.

<sup>80</sup> Memo, Priest to Morris, Hum and Clift, 7 December 1983, FCO 40/1557 f776, TNA.

officials bypassed British negotiators and spoke indirectly to Hong Kong people via journalists and Hong Kong delegations.

Beijing's propaganda and leaks worried UMELCO, whose members became "increasingly concerned" about the "scale and effectiveness" of China's propaganda.<sup>81</sup> They told the Governor that Beijing's leaks were "having a significant effect on public opinion" in Hong Kong. The Unofficial Members were fearful that if the British made no reply, "silence would be taken as agreement and the Chinese plan would gain acceptance as a 'fait accompli'."<sup>82</sup> In the absence of a British rebuttal, the Unofficials warned, Hong Kong people would begin telling themselves that China's plan was the only option available.<sup>83</sup> UMELCO repeatedly asked British officials to make some sort of response.<sup>84</sup>

British officials were also aggrieved by Beijing's leaks. Youde complained to colleagues that China's incorrigible activities were swiftly tying Britain's hands. Their messages were so blatant that, in the Governor's estimation, "any reasonably perceptive observer can put the jigsaw together and fill in many of the remaining blanks for himself".<sup>85</sup> Cradock was infuriated with the leaks, seeing them as "a breach of the confidentiality which we agreed".<sup>86</sup> He took his protestations to Chinese officials, who dismissed Cradock's complaints, saying that they had simply provided answers to journalists' questions. Thatcher was also angered by the conduct of the Chinese and wanted her officials to retaliate against the media offensive.<sup>87</sup> The desire to mount a reply was, however, outweighed by competing worries. British officials felt that a public spat between the two sides would likely damage business confidence in Hong Kong. Additionally, British officials were concerned that going on the offensive against Beijing might make Chinese negotiators less receptive to British arguments in the privacy of the Sino-British talks.<sup>88</sup> Youde argued that while it was tempting to counter Chinese statements, to do so would only draw the two sides into an undiplomatic row which would not be conducive to attaining the overall objective of reaching an agreement in the talks.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, it would be embarrassing for the British if Britain took aim at particular points the Chinese had made only to concede them later.<sup>90</sup> Lastly, Beijing's leaks to the press and visiting Hong Kong delegations conveyed some benefit to

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<sup>81</sup> Memo, Morris to Clift, 22 November 1982, FCO 40/1463 f948, TNA.

<sup>82</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 29 October 1982, PREM 19/791, TNA.

<sup>83</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 30 November 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>84</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 71.

<sup>85</sup> Telegram, Youde to Donald, 12 October 1982, PREM 19/791, TNA.

<sup>86</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 8 October 1982, FCO 21/2216 f141, TNA.

<sup>87</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 87-90.

<sup>88</sup> McLaren, *Britain's Record in Hong Kong*, 18.

<sup>89</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 30 November 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>90</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 71.

the British as they provided insights into the often opaque Chinese position. While undiplomatic, the Hong Kong government viewed Beijing's leaks as "Generally helpful" and strove to gather as much intelligence as possible by meeting with Hong Kong people on their return.<sup>91</sup> To excuse themselves from passing comment on the talks or Beijing's leaks, British officials reminded journalists that the talks were supposed to be "confidential".<sup>92</sup>

British officials' refusal to engage in a media war with Beijing had several repercussions. Firstly, local newspapers were frustrated that British and colonial officials would not give them attributable comments. The tension between the media and officials grew to the point that some newspapers, including the *SCMP*, effectively went on strike. In August 1983, the papers refused to criticise the Chinese government or defend the British side unless they were given useable, substantive statements from senior Hong Kong government figures.<sup>93</sup> Secondly, as China's messages went unchallenged, Beijing's designs for Hong Kong's future became increasingly seen as the inevitable outcome of the negotiations. This, in turn, further compounded the impression that Hong Kong views did not matter to Beijing or the British side. UMELCO's apprehensions ultimately came true and Beijing's designs proved a *fait accompli*: the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration was based on Beijing's 12-point plan, and the Basic Law was drafted between 1985 and 1990 more or less along the lines that Chinese officials had leaked.

Beijing projected its vision for Hong Kong's future via the media, leaking details to journalists and Hong Kong visitors both before and during the supposedly confidential negotiations. The CCP-aligned media in Hong Kong reproduced mainland articles and, under Xinhua's watch, wrote new ones that contained Beijing's key messages. Chinese officials also targeted Hong Kong media producers that were not aligned with the Party by leaking information to journalists and visitors from Hong Kong. China's media strategy went unanswered by Britain as the British were reticent to enter into a war of words. Allowing Beijing to broadcast its designs uncontested, however, made Hong Kong's future appear inevitably to be one within China.

Hong Kong people could be forgiven for believing that there would be little point trying to convince Chinese officials to adopt alternative plans for Hong Kong's future. Beijing showed a disregard for Hong Kong opinion by denying Hong Kong people a seat at the negotiating table and by seeking to shape, rather than solicit, public views. This may also explain why academic

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<sup>91</sup> David Akers-Jones, 'Transcript of interview with Sir David Akers-Jones', interview by Steve Tsang (1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 416, BSC, 254.

<sup>92</sup> Legislative Council (Hong Kong) Hansard, 6 October 1982 [https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr82-83/english/lc\\_sitg/hansard/h821006.pdf](https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr82-83/english/lc_sitg/hansard/h821006.pdf) (accessed 14 January 2024).

<sup>93</sup> Memo, Hoare to Morris and Clift, 31 August 1983, FCO 40/1554 f504, TNA.

commentary has given little regard to Beijing's relationship with Hong Kong opinion. Yet this outward impression contrasted with Beijing's covert means of collecting Hong Kong views.

## China and the opinions of Hong Kong elites

Dictatorships regularly forge alliances with business elites, offering them protection in exchange for political support.<sup>94</sup> In the case of Hong Kong, the existing literature has noted that Chinese officials sought to forge a United Front with Hong Kong elites but has seen the direction of influence as being one-way: from Beijing to the elites courted, comforted and co-opted into supporting the CCP's designs for Hong Kong's future.<sup>95</sup> Mark Roberti, for instance, wrote that "Hong Kong delegations were invited to China and advised of the policies that the leadership had worked out for Hong Kong".<sup>96</sup> Roberti and others have therefore seen the purpose of United Front work as Beijing imposing its ideas on Hong Kong people. However, the collaboration that Beijing forged with Hong Kong elites during the Sino-British negotiations contrasts with the existing picture of China's United Front activities in Hong Kong. This section argues that the United Front was not simply an exercise in China imposing its policy on these elites. Instead, Chinese officials sought the trust of Hong Kong elites in order to engage them in frank and honest discussions that, moreover, shaped how Chinese officials thought about the future of Hong Kong. The United Front was, therefore, not a one-way but instead a two-way channel that allowed some Hong Kong people to influence Chinese officials' thinking.

Chinese officials claimed that they took Hong Kong views on board. For instance, in a speech in January 1984, Xu Jiatao said that China's plans for Hong Kong were informed by "constructive opinions put forward by various sections [...] in Hongkong" and that Beijing's plans were, therefore, "representative of the views of a broad section of the people".<sup>97</sup> Chinese officials frequently told their British counterparts that Hong Kong opinions were important to them. In March 1982, for instance, Chinese Vice Premier, Gu Mu, told the Hong Kong government's Financial Secretary, John Bremridge, that "China would seek and take into full consideration the

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<sup>94</sup> Semuhi Sinanoglu, 'Autocrats and Their Business Allies: The Informal Politics of Defection and Co-Optation', *Government and Opposition* 60, no. 4 (2025): 1273–91, <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2025.10021>.

<sup>95</sup> Chu, *Chinese Communists*; Goodstadt, 'China and the Selection'; Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong*; Loh, *Underground Front*; Pepper, *Keeping Democracy at Bay*, 194.

<sup>96</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 63.

<sup>97</sup> Speech, Xu to the Hong Kong University Convocation, 10 January 1984 enclosed in letter, Ji to Adley, 7 February 1984, PREM 19/1263, TNA.

opinions of people in Hong Kong”.<sup>98</sup> When the then Head of Xinhua, Wang Kuang, met Governor MacLehose in April 1982, Wang said that Beijing would consult local people before firming up its proposals for Hong Kong’s future.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, Deng Xiaoping told Margaret Thatcher in September 1982 that his government would engage in discussions with two groups of people: the British government, to ensure “that major disturbances should be prevented” during the transition period, and “certain circles in Hong Kong”, who would be engaged “on the policies and principles to be followed” after 1997.<sup>100</sup> How, then, did China try to understand Hong Kong views?

Xu Jiatun spearheaded Beijing’s United Front in Hong Kong. When Xu arrived as the new Head of Xinhua in 1983, he was tasked with convincing Hong Kong people that Beijing held good intentions for their future.<sup>101</sup> Hong Kong businesspeople and professionals were concerned by the prospect of the Communist Party taking over Hong Kong; Xu attempted to reassure them that their interests would not be threatened by reunification and that, on the contrary, Beijing welcomed their expertise.<sup>102</sup> Hong Kong capitalists were redefined as ‘patriots’: even if they were opposed to communism and/or socialism, they could nonetheless support China’s modernisation and reunification.<sup>103</sup> Friendship was central to the task: Christine Loh explained that United Front work “targets people of influence to bring them on-side” through a slow and personalised process of relationship-building.<sup>104</sup> As Xu himself described in his memoirs, he began to forge friendships with media moguls, journalists, businesspeople, lawyers and other professionals, disregarding ideological differences and focusing instead on a shared love of China and a desire for national reunification.<sup>105</sup> He built these personal connections by hobnobbing with Hong Kong’s elite, reportedly attending dinner every night with a different notable Hong Kong person.<sup>106</sup> Xu also cast off the veil of secrecy that had shrouded the Xinhua

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<sup>98</sup> Meeting record (extract), Gu and Bremridge, 10 March 1982 enclosed in letter, MacLehose to Donald, 13 April 1982, FCO 21/2212 f23, TNA.

<sup>99</sup> Meeting record, MacLehose and Wang et al., 8 April 1982 enclosed in letter, MacLehose to Donald, 13 April 1982, FCO 21/2212 f23, TNA.

<sup>100</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher and Deng et al., 24 September 1982, PREM 19/790, TNA.

<sup>101</sup> Cheung and Wong, ‘Who Advised’, 887; Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 113; Hung, *City on the Edge*, 121; Scott, *Political Change*, 174.

<sup>102</sup> Goodstadt, ‘China and the Selection’, 726; Hung, *City on the Edge*, 51; Kwong, ‘Refurbishing Hong Kong’s Image’, 195; Xu, *Hong Kong Memoirs*, ch. 4.

<sup>103</sup> Chu, *Chinese Communists*, 11; Xiaoping Deng, *Deng Xiaoping on the Question of Hong Kong* (New Horizon Press, 1993), 11.

<sup>104</sup> Loh, *Underground Front*, 27.

<sup>105</sup> Xu, *Hong Kong Memoirs*, ch. 4.

<sup>106</sup> Sheridan, *Gate to China*, 193; So, ‘Hong Kong People Ruling’, 74.

office, opening its doors to guests for meetings and social occasions.<sup>107</sup> In so doing, Xu forged alliances between himself and Hong Kong elites based on friendship, trust and mutual benefit.<sup>108</sup>

In virtue of Xu's assiduous work to build relationships with Hong Kong elites, China curated a pool of local advisors to whom officials could turn when in doubt. In a later interview, Louis Cha Leung-yung provided significant insights into how these meetings worked. Meetings were arranged without much prior notice: often only one day in advance. A Xinhua official, usually Yang Chi, would come to Cha's home to notify him that his presence was required the following day. Most rendezvous were held in the Bank of China building or occasionally in the Xinhua offices. There, Cha would usually meet HKMAO officials Li Hou or Lu Ping, who were deputised by Liao Chengzhi. Cha recalled that other Hong Kong elites – including property developer Henry Fok, shipping magnate Sir Y. K. Pao and prolific investor Li Ka-shing – also had meetings with Chinese officials.<sup>109</sup> In his autobiography, Xu Jiatun added to this list one of the Co-founders (with Fung King-hey and Lee Shau Kee) of Sun Hung Kai Properties, Kwok Tak-shing; the Chairman of Television Broadcasts, Run Run Shaw; and industrialist Cha Chi-ming.<sup>110</sup> Cha humbly added that while some of the suggestions he made were reflected in the Joint Declaration, he could not claim the credit for having originated many points “because other Hong Kong leaders must have given them [Chinese officials] the same advice”.<sup>111</sup> Exactly which of Beijing's Hong Kong advisors had the most sway with Chinese officials is impossible to say. Chinese officials consulted these Hong Kong advisors throughout the Sino-British negotiations.

Meetings between Chinese officials and Hong Kong elites provided opportunities for the latter to shape the thinking of the former. For example, Cha advised Chinese officials on the form that the final agreement should take. While a ‘treaty’ would ensure Britain handed sovereignty over Hong Kong to China, Cha told his hosts, it would leave no room for other details that would be necessary for maintaining confidence in Hong Kong's economy and future. A ‘declaration’ had “no binding force” in law, Cha continued, but it had force “ethically and morally”. Cha convinced the Chinese government to insist on a ‘declaration’ rather than a ‘treaty’.<sup>112</sup> Chinese officials took Cha's advice and insisted that the accord be known as a ‘declaration’.

Chinese officials also consulted Martin Lee Chu-ming, a barrister and chairman of the Bar Association. Lee claimed the credit for ensuring that three points relating to law were folded into

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<sup>107</sup> Cindy Yik-yi Chu, ‘Overt and Covert Functions of the Hong Kong Branch of the Xinhua News Agency, 1947-1984’, *The Historian* 62, no. 1 (1999): 42.

<sup>108</sup> Chu, ‘Overt and Covert’, 42–43; Goodstadt, ‘China and the Selection’, 733; Sheridan, *Gate to China*, 120.

<sup>109</sup> Cha BSC interview, 24–30.

<sup>110</sup> Xu, *Hong Kong Memoirs*, ch. 4.

<sup>111</sup> Cha BSC interview, 25–28.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 66–67.

the Joint Declaration.<sup>113</sup> Firstly, Lee said he ensured that Hong Kong's common law system would continue after 1997. Lee met with a Xinhua Deputy Director, Li Jusheng, and his wife at his Chambers. He showed his guests the legal books lining his office shelves and explained how legal precedent functioned in the common law system. After discussing numerous case studies, Li told Lee: "I've seen enough, Hong Kong must continue to have your own laws because our laws are different".<sup>114</sup> Annex I Part II of the Joint Declaration states that the common law system shall continue in Hong Kong after 1997. Lee believed it was his intervention that ensured this provision.

Secondly, Lee claimed he had a hand in shaping the Court of Final Appeal. Through his contacts with Chinese officials, it became apparent to Lee that the negotiations had not yet touched on the topic. Lee raised the issue with a Xinhua Deputy Director, Li Qixin. Li asked Lee how such issues were currently resolved. Lee told him that the Privy Council in London acted as the final court for Hong Kong legal matters. Li said that this, of course, could not continue after 1997 and that it should be based in Beijing: moving from one capital to the other. Lee asked, "where would the judges be?" The Chinese official replied they would need to come from Hong Kong, as mainland Chinese judges would not understand Hong Kong's legal system. Lee probed: "what about lawyers, barristers and solicitors". Li replied: "fly them up from Hong Kong because our lawyers couldn't cope with your law". The barrister pushed further: "what about our authorities and books and so on?" Lee continued in this vein until he finally asked Li: "could you have the Court of Final Appeal be set up in Hong Kong? Because that would save us a lot of inconvenience." Li agreed.<sup>115</sup> Annex II Part III of the Joint Declaration declares that the Court of Final Appeal for Hong Kong shall be in Hong Kong after 1997, although final adjudication on matters of state, such as defence and foreign relations, would remain vested in the central government in Beijing.<sup>116</sup>

Thirdly, Lee said that he originated the idea of having foreign judges sit on the Court of Final Appeal. Speaking to Li Qixin on a different occasion, Lee asked whom the judges would be on the Court of Final Appeal. While Hong Kong remained under British control, any overseas businessperson investing in Hong Kong did so safe in the knowledge that any legal issue they encountered could be taken all the way to the Privy Council in London. But after 1997 and with

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<sup>113</sup> Roberti also noted that Martin Lee Chu-ming made these three points to Chinese officials (*Fall of Hong Kong*, 131).

<sup>114</sup> Martin Lee Chu-ming, 'The Hong Kong Heritage Project', interview by Amelia Allsop (12 September 2007), I020, HKHP. Lee did not name the Chinese official he met but it can be inferred that he met Li Jusheng.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. Again, Lee did not name the Chinese official he met but it can be inferred that he met Li Qixin.

<sup>116</sup> Anthony B.L. Cheung, 'From Colony to Special Administrative Region: Issues of Hong Kong's Autonomy within a Centralized Authoritarianistic State', *Verfassung in Recht Und Übersee* 31, no. 3 (1998): 307, <https://doi.org/10.5771/0506-7286-1998-3-302>.

the Court of Final Appeal being based in Hong Kong, could an international investor truly trust a Court comprised only of local judges? Lee advised that the Court should invite three overseas judges from common law Commonwealth countries to sit alongside two Hong Kong judges, as this would reassure international investors. Li thought that Lee's idea was a good one but asked whether the British would agree to it. The next day, Lee spoke to the Hong Kong government's Attorney General, Michael Thomas, who agreed with the idea.<sup>117</sup> Although the Joint Declaration does not specify that the majority of judges should be foreign or specifically from Commonwealth countries, Annex I Part III does say that judges sitting on the Court of Final Appeal may be invited from other common law jurisdictions. Again, Lee shaped Chinese official thinking and saw his legal proposals reflected in the Joint Declaration.

China's consultations with Hong Kong elites were used for different purposes during the course of the Sino-British negotiations. Initially, Chinese officials did not possess clear or detailed plans for Hong Kong's future and turned to trusted Hong Kong confidants for ideas. Hong Kong elites were therefore able to influence Beijing's thinking as it evolved over time. Gradually, the Chinese authorities came to rely less and less upon Hong Kong contacts for originating ideas as Beijing's own thinking became more refined. Chinese officials continued to meet Hong Kong personalities and present their increasingly specific policy ideas to them, asking whether the elites thought them viable, appealing to international investors and acceptable to the masses.<sup>118</sup> Beijing hoped to win support for the proposals but, if the Hong Kong advisors held a drastically contrary opinion, Chinese officials might reconsider their draft policy.<sup>119</sup> Such meetings were unlike those described in the previous section in which Chinese officials invited Hong Kong people to Beijing in order to leak information to them and to earn press coverage. In contrast, Chinese officials' meetings with Hong Kong elites occurred covertly, were not covered by the press and most took place inside of Hong Kong. These meetings were not for propaganda: they were for consultation, clarification and confirmation of Beijing's ideas.

Such meetings also furthered China's aim of bringing Hong Kong capitalists and other elites on side. Beijing saw certain Hong Kong people as constitutive of its economic goal of modernisation and its political goal of reunification. Chinese officials approached selected Hong Kong people both for the extrinsic benefits they would bring and in order to develop their Hong Kong policy. Although it is impossible to disentangle the opinions of Hong Kong elites from the range of other influences to which Beijing would have been subjected, Hong Kong advisors have

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<sup>117</sup> Martin Lee Chu-ming, 'The Hong Kong Heritage Project', interview by Amelia Allsop (12 September 2007), I020, HKHP. Again, Li Qixin's name is inferred.

<sup>118</sup> Cha BSC interview, 33.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 56.

nonetheless claimed they were influential on a range of points. Notably, these secret, one-to-one meetings were not advertised to the press or used as opportunities for Beijing to project messages to Hong Kong. They were, therefore, not for propaganda but instead an opportunity for Chinese officials to understand Hong Kong elites' views and for Hong Kong elites to shape Chinese official thinking.

China's United Front with certain Hong Kong people was not always a one-way street. Beijing's alliances with Hong Kong businesspeople, professionals and other selected elites were not forged purely in order to absorb Hong Kong people into China's sphere but also provided opportunities for consultation. Moreover, contrary to the political apathy and political impotence thesis, certain Hong Kong people could shape Chinese official thinking about the future of Hong Kong.

## Chinese officials and the Hong Kong Unofficial Members

Chinese officials also held meetings with Unofficial Members of ExCo and LegCo. In the existing literature, interactions between Chinese officials and Hong Kong Unofficials are usually resigned to recalling how Deng Xiaoping embarrassed Unofficials Sir S. Y. Chung, Lydia Dunn and Q. W. Lee when they visited Beijing in June 1984.<sup>120</sup> As such, the existing literature portrays Beijing as dismissive of the Unofficials' views and as rejecting their potential as Hong Kong representatives. Yet Hong Kong Unofficials themselves believed that the interaction in June 1984 was not wholly negative. Moreover, there were many more meetings between Chinese officials and Hong Kong Unofficials which are glossed over in the existing literature. Beijing's relationship with UMELCO was changeable: sometimes the Unofficials rankled Chinese officials and evoked Beijing's ire; on other occasions, Chinese officials secretly sought contact with the Unofficials and, as Sir S. Y. Chung put it, "wanted to hear our views".<sup>121</sup> Beijing's relationship with UMELCO therefore embodied the dualism that characterised Beijing's relationship with Hong Kong opinion more broadly.

Initially, Beijing attempted to incorporate the Unofficials into their growing United Front in Hong Kong by offering them positions in various institutions.<sup>122</sup> In 1982, China invited Chung to join the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; he declined.<sup>123</sup> In March 1983, a Xinhua employee extended an invitation to ExCo Unofficial Lo Tak-shing and some of his

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<sup>120</sup> Bonavia, *Hong Kong 1997*, 117; Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 146.

<sup>121</sup> Chung BSC interview, 201–202.

<sup>122</sup> Cheung and Wong, 'Who Advised', 875.

<sup>123</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 39; Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong*, 258.

colleagues to attend a Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference meeting.<sup>124</sup> The Unofficials consulted the Governor, who told all ExCo Members that any Member who received such an invitation should not accept it.<sup>125</sup> Beijing was not, therefore, successful in absorbing the Unofficials.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the only sitting Unofficial to visit Beijing before Thatcher's September 1982 visit was Rayson Huang Li-sung. After Thatcher's visit, interactions between Chinese officials and Hong Kong Unofficials gradually increased. In October 1982, for instance, LegCo Unofficial Francis Tien Yuan-hao met the Mayor of Shanghai, Wang Daohan.<sup>126</sup> On hearing the details of the meeting, Youde came to believe that Beijing had been testing Tien as a potential "channel for 'consulting' local [Hong Kong] Chinese about the Chinese [government's] plan for Hong Kong". Tien met Wang again only a few weeks later.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, in March 1983, an ExCo Member whose name is redacted from the archival record lunched with Xinhua staff member Qi Feng. The unnamed ExCo Member proposed that he could act as a channel of communication between Beijing and Hong Kong but the offer appears not to have been taken up.<sup>128</sup> In April 1983, LegCo Unofficial and Chairman of Jardine's, David Newbigging, who had six-monthly lunches with Wang Kuang, met State Councillor, Chen Muhua.<sup>129</sup> Then, in May 1983, ExCo Unofficial Allen Lee Peng-fei led a pro-British delegation of 'young professionals' to Beijing.<sup>130</sup> Without admitting that the Unofficials represented Hong Kong people, Beijing nonetheless increased its interactions with UMELCO over the course of the Sino-British negotiations, thereby providing opportunities to discuss the future of Hong Kong.

Xu Jiatusun's arrival as the Head of Xinhua in June 1983 marked a significant shift increase in relations between Chinese officials and Hong Kong Unofficials. Almost immediately upon arriving, Xu asked the Vice Chancellor of the Chinese University, Ma Lin, to arrange a meeting for him with Unofficials Sir S. Y. Chung and Lydia Dunn and the by then former LegCo and ExCo Unofficial Q. W. Lee (who had ended his appointment in August 1978 and would become an ExCo Unofficial once again in September 1983).<sup>131</sup> The initial meeting took place at Ma Lin's chancery

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<sup>124</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 21 March 1983, FCO 40/1550 f202, TNA; meeting record, Thatcher and Chung, 4 May 1983, PREM 19/1055, TNA.

<sup>125</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 25 March 1983, FCO 40/1550 f215, TNA.

<sup>126</sup> Telegram, Youde to Donald, 12 October 1982, PREM 19/791, TNA.

<sup>127</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 13 November 1982, FCO 40/1462 f920, TNA.

<sup>128</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 25 March 1983, FCO 40/1550 f216, TNA.

<sup>129</sup> Wang: letter, Youde to Clift, 4 August 1982, FCO 40/1457 f547, TNA; Chen: telegram, Cradock to FCO, 4 May 1983, FCO 40/1550 f274, TNA.

<sup>130</sup> So, 'Hong Kong People Ruling', 77.

<sup>131</sup> Telegram, Youde to Peking, 20 July 1983, FCO 40/1552 f404, TNA.

in August. Thereafter, the Unofficials met Xu Jiatusun or his colleagues once a month.<sup>132</sup> Sometimes different Xinhua officials would join; for example, a Xinhua Deputy Director, Li Chuwen, joined a meeting between Xu, Chung and Lee in September 1983.<sup>133</sup> On other occasions, different Unofficials would be invited; for instance, Chen Shou-lum joined a meeting between Xu and Chung in late 1983.<sup>134</sup>

These secret meetings between Chinese officials and Hong Kong Unofficials provided both sides with windows into the other's thinking.<sup>135</sup> Unofficials used these audiences as an opportunity to explain ideas to Chinese officials. For example, in September 1983, Xu sought to understand a proposal that British negotiators had laid out: that Hong Kong would come under Chinese sovereignty but retain a 'British link' to the territory. Chung informed Xu that this effectively meant administrative control, as separate to sovereignty. Xu replied that sovereignty and administration were not divisible in this way.<sup>136</sup> Though some meetings gave clarity, others led to confusion. In October 1983, for instance, several Unofficials attended a meeting with Xu Jiatusun. They were left with the impression that the Chinese side was willing to address the near-term issue of land leases in the New Territories first, then the existential question of Hong Kong's future second. This was, however, a misunderstanding and led to disagreements within ExCo as to how to advise British negotiators.<sup>137</sup> Chung relayed the contents of these meetings to Governor Youde but the public remained unaware that they were going on.<sup>138</sup> Alongside these secret meetings, Unofficials and Chinese officials encountered each other at social occasions, too: Unofficials Oswald Cheung and Chen Shou-lam recalled in separate oral history interviews that UMELCO maintained friendly relations with Xu Jiatusun, enjoying lunch or dinner with him on occasion and exchanging views on a person-to-person basis.<sup>139</sup>

As noted by the existing literature, relations between Beijing and UMELCO reached a low point when three Unofficials visited Beijing.<sup>140</sup> In early 1984, Li Chuwen extended an invitation to

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<sup>132</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 95–96.

<sup>133</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 3 October 1983, FCO 40/1555 f603, TNA.

<sup>134</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 154–55.

<sup>135</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 10 September 1983, PREM 19/1058, TNA.

<sup>136</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 3 October 1983, FCO 40/1555 f603, TNA.

<sup>137</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 154–55.

<sup>138</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 95–96.

<sup>139</sup> Oswald Cheung, 'Transcript of an interview with Sir Oswald Cheung, OBE, QC, JP', interview by Steve Tsang (5 January 1989), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 327, BSC, 85; Chen Shou-lam, 'Transcript of interviews with Shou-lam Chen Esq, CBE, JP', interview by Steve Tsang (16 August 1989 and 10 November 1989), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 409, BSC, 175.

<sup>140</sup> Bonavia, *Hong Kong 1997*, 117; Cheung, *Secrets from the British Archives*, 99–100; Ching, *Hong Kong and China*, 26; Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong*, 352; Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 146; Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 96–98; Sheridan, *Gate to China*, 127.

Chung and Lee to visit Beijing. Chung replied that he wanted other Unofficial colleagues to join in order to make the delegation more representative. He proposed adding Lydia Dunn and Roger Lobo to the visit. Chinese officials extended the invitation to Dunn but not to Lobo.<sup>141</sup> Lobo assumed that this was because he was Eurasian at a time when Deng Xiaoping was meeting only Hong Kong Chinese guests and/or because the Chinese were unhappy about the 'Lobo motion' (detailed in Chapter 5, this motion called on the FCO to give LegCo Unofficials the opportunity to debate the Sino-British Joint Declaration before it was signed).<sup>142</sup> Chung also attached three conditions to the visit. Firstly, he wanted to ensure that the Unofficials would be going to China as Members of UMELCO rather than as individuals. Secondly, he wanted an assurance that they would be given an audience with Deng Xiaoping. Thirdly, Chung wanted delegates to travel on Hong Kong passports rather than Chinese travel permits. These three conditions were agreed to and Chung accepted the invitation in principle with the date yet to be decided.

In late April 1984, UMELCO learned that the House of Commons intended to stage a debate on the future of Hong Kong on 16 May. The Unofficials promptly started to form a delegation bound for London in order to lobby MPs ahead of the debate. At almost the same time, Xu summoned Chung, Dunn and Lee to an urgent meeting. Xu informed the trio that Beijing had fixed the date for their visit as 10 May. The date chosen for the Unofficials to go to Beijing was not coincidental: by choosing the 10 May, Beijing was attempting to prevent some of UMELCO's most senior Unofficials from journeying to Britain right before the House of Commons debate. Chung told Xu that he, Dunn and Lee could not go to Beijing on the proposed date owing to the London-bound delegation. Xu replied that the three could go to Beijing while their Unofficial colleagues went to London. Chung rejected this, citing his responsibility as ExCo's Senior Unofficial. The trio's visit to Beijing was, therefore, postponed.<sup>143</sup>

In early May 1984, Chung and Lee were again called to a meeting with Xu. Xu said that their appointment with Deng Xiaoping had been rescheduled for 23 June. The next day, Chung informed the Acting Governor and Hong Kong government Chief Secretary, Sir Philip Haddon-Cave, about Beijing's proposal. Haddon-Cave assessed that it would be unwise for the colonial government to object, as this would have been a propaganda boost for the Chinese side.<sup>144</sup> The Unofficials thus set about preparing for their visit. Chung, Dunn and Lee informed their Unofficial colleagues about the trip, their ambitions for it and what they intended to discuss in advance, but

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<sup>141</sup> Chung BSC interview, 171–72.

<sup>142</sup> Roger Lobo, 'Transcript of interviews with Sir Roger Lobo CBE JP LLD', interview by Steve Tsang (12 December 1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 405, BSC, 200 (hereafter, Lobo BSC interview).

<sup>143</sup> Chung BSC interview, 172–74.

<sup>144</sup> Telegram, Haddon-Cave to FCO, 8 May 1984, PREM 19/1265, TNA.

did not consult the other Unofficials on what should or should not be said.<sup>145</sup> Q. W. Lee drafted a speaking note.<sup>146</sup> The delegates ran the speaking note by Xinhua officials before leaving Hong Kong and, it appears, received no pushback.<sup>147</sup>

Relations quickly soured, however. On 9 May, the Unofficials released a manifesto ahead of their lobbying mission to London (detailed in Chapter 5) to which Beijing took exception.<sup>148</sup> While in London, the Unofficials articulated several proposals that irritated Beijing. They argued that Britain could give up sovereignty but could not renege on its responsibilities to the millions of British nationals in Hong Kong.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, they suggested that the Basic Law should be negotiated bilaterally by Britain and China.<sup>150</sup> These points drew criticism from Beijing.<sup>151</sup> These and other comments left Chinese officials believing that UMELCO were pro-British.<sup>152</sup> A few weeks later, Deng showed his annoyance when he told a group of Hong Kong visitors that UMELCO should moderate their stance and could visit Beijing but not as representatives of Hong Kong people.<sup>153</sup> China resolved to retaliate by humiliating its visitors.

One of the ways China sought to undermine the Unofficials was by contrasting the trio's treatment with that of another group of three Hong Kong visitors the day before. Chinese officials had previously approached a friend of the CCP and Chairman of the Federation of Hong Kong Industries, Tang Hsiang-chien, to organise a delegation.<sup>154</sup> Tang invited his cousin, Chairman of the General Chamber of Commerce, Jack Tang Chi-chien, as well as the Chairman of the Chinese

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<sup>145</sup> Harry Fang, 'Transcript of interview with Dr Harry Fang', interview by Steve Tsang (September 1991), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 410, BSC, 119 (hereafter, Fang BSC interview); Chen Shou-lam, 'Transcript of interviews with Shou-lam Chen Esq, CBE, JP', interview by Steve Tsang (16 August 1989 and 10 November 1989), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 409, BSC, 147.

<sup>146</sup> Q. W. Lee, 'Transcript of an interview with Sir Quo-wei Lee CBE JP LLD FIB', interview by Steve Tsang (7 and 14 December 1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 407, BSC, 59.

<sup>147</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 325.

<sup>148</sup> Chung BSC interview, 174.

<sup>149</sup> Nigel Hawkes and Jonathan Mirsky, 'Cries of pain from Hong Kong', *The Guardian*, 13 May 1984, 14.

<sup>150</sup> Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 143–44; Teresa Ma and Derek Davies, 'All out of step', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 24 May 1984, 44–45.

<sup>151</sup> Telegram, Evans to Hong Kong, 12 May 1984, FCO 40/1667 f370, TNA; 'The statement of UMELCO is an attempt to obstruct the early conclusion of an agreement by the Chinese and British governments on the Hong Kong issue' [香港行政和立法两局非官守议员发表声明 企图阻挠中英关于香港问题会谈早日达成协议], *People's Daily* [人民日报], 12 May 1984, 4.

<sup>152</sup> Chung BSC interview, 174.

<sup>153</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 324.

<sup>154</sup> Jack Tang, 'The Textile Industry and the Development of Hong Kong, 1949-1999', interview by Carolyn Wakeman (1999), Bancroft Oral History Centre (hereafter, BOHC), 97 <https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu/record/218146?v=pdf> (accessed 5 May 2025) (hereafter, Tang BOHC interview).

Manufacturers Association, Ngai Shiu-kit, to join him.<sup>155</sup> When the delegates met Deng Xiaoping, they were given a rapturous reception. Deng came to the gate of the Great Hall of the People to meet the visitors personally and shook their hands while journalists took photographs.<sup>156</sup> Once seated, the group conversed convivially and, following the conversation, posed for an official photograph with Deng Xiaoping in the centre.<sup>157</sup> This was how China treated its friends and allies.

Deng's treatment of the three industrialists was designed to contrast with that of the three Unofficials the following day. The UMELCO three had arrived in Beijing on 21 June but were forced to wait until 23 June for their meeting with Deng while Deng met the three businesspeople on 22 June.<sup>158</sup> Deng's cold shoulder treatment began before the two parties had exchanged a word: rather than greet the three Unofficial Members at the door, Deng instead waited for them inside the Sichuan Room.<sup>159</sup> Chung walked into the meeting room and bowed to Deng but Deng offered only a handshake. Before Chung had a chance to sit down, Deng asked the Senior Unofficial whether it was his first time in Beijing. After Chung replied that it was, Deng said that the three should use their visit to understand China and its people better: "It will be useful for you".<sup>160</sup> The interaction was all the more demeaning to Chung, who relied on a translator as he did not speak Mandarin.<sup>161</sup> Deng then welcomed the three but cuttingly added: "in your private capacities".<sup>162</sup> The comment struck at one of the points Chung had negotiated many months before: that the trio would be welcomed as Unofficials rather than as individuals.<sup>163</sup> Chung protested that he and his colleagues represented ExCo and LegCo.<sup>164</sup> Deng replied with a lecture: "In the past two years we have conducted extensive discussions with public figures from Hong Kong and we know very well what is really in the minds of Hong Kong residents."<sup>165</sup> Puffing on a cigarette, Deng added that attempting to influence the negotiations would be a waste of time.<sup>166</sup> China did not recognise the 'three-legged stool'.<sup>167</sup> For the first six minutes of their meeting, every barbed comment and retort

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<sup>155</sup> Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong*, 248; Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 146.

<sup>156</sup> Tang BOHC interview; Chiu Kit-ying, 'Deng lashes the trio', *Hong Kong Standard*, 24 June 1984, 1.

<sup>157</sup> Tang BOHC interview.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid; Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong*, 248; Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 146.

<sup>159</sup> Chiu Kit-ying, 'Deng lashes the trio', *Hong Kong Standard*, 24 June 1984, 1; Halima Guterres, 'Humiliation! Deng turns on Umelco three', *SCMP*, 24 June 1984, 1.

<sup>160</sup> Hugh Davies, 'Peking snubs Hongkong trio', *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 June 1984, 2.

<sup>161</sup> David Bonavia, 'Hongkong delegates snubbed by Deng', *The Times*, 25 June 1984, 4.

<sup>162</sup> Hugh Davies, 'Peking snubs Hongkong trio', *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 June 1984, 2.

<sup>163</sup> Chung BSC interview, 172.

<sup>164</sup> Hugh Davies, 'Peking snubs Hongkong trio', *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 June 1984, 2.

<sup>165</sup> Bonavia, *Hong Kong 1997*, 117.

<sup>166</sup> Hugh Davies, 'Peking snubs Hongkong trio', *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 June 1984, 2.

<sup>167</sup> Halima Guterres, 'Humiliation! Deng turns on Umelco three', *SCMP*, 24 June 1984, 1.

was amplified by microphones, recorded by reporters and captured on video. UMELCO's embarrassment was swiftly sent to Hong Kong where the exchange was played on repeat.<sup>168</sup>

The remainder of the 90-minute meeting proceeded without the press present.<sup>169</sup> Unofficials launched into the two-part speaking note Lee had drafted. The first half was designed to convince Deng that there remained problems yet to be addressed; the second proposed solutions to the outstanding issues.<sup>170</sup> On the first half, Unofficials told Deng that some Hong Kong people remained anxious about the future. Some were worried that Britain and China might rush into an agreement and that there may be a jostling for power in the lead up to 1997. People also worried that after the handover, the Hong Kong government might become Beijing's puppet, that Chinese cadres might not accept Hong Kong's capitalist system and that, while everyone believed in Deng, China's future leaders might think differently about Hong Kong.<sup>171</sup> Deng replied that Beijing's policies would benefit Hong Kong, whether or not people realised this.<sup>172</sup> Apart from stationing some army troops in Hong Kong, Deng said that Beijing would not send anyone into the city to interfere: "the people of Hongkong [...] have the ability to administer the affairs of Hongkong". With regards to the worry that a change in China's leadership might bring about a change in China's Hong Kong policy, Deng simply said: "Some people are worried whether it will change. I say it won't. The crux of the matter is whether the policy is correct. If it is, it won't change; otherwise it will." Deng ruminated that Hong Kong's success was down to its majority Chinese population.<sup>173</sup> "The Chinese are by no means short of talent," Deng added, echoing the ethnonationalist tone found in patriotic publications.<sup>174</sup> Before the Unofficials could move onto the second half of their speaking note, Deng announced that he was "very tired" and asked the visitors to speak with Ji Pengfei in his place.<sup>175</sup> The meeting ended abruptly.

Despite Deng's comportment, the Unofficials did not lose hope of influencing Chinese officials. That evening, the Unofficials made some progress on the second half of their speaking note during a dinner with Ji Pengfei and other Chinese officials.<sup>176</sup> They proposed that Beijing could calm Hong Kong's concerns by making three commitments. Firstly, that the Sino-British

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<sup>168</sup> Chiu Kit-ying, 'Deng lashes the trio', *Hong Kong Standard*, 24 June 1984, 1; David Bonavia, 'Hongkong delegates snubbed by Deng', *The Times*, 25 June 1984, 4.

<sup>169</sup> Chiu Kit-ying, 'Deng lashes the trio', *Hong Kong Standard*, 24 June 1984, 1.

<sup>170</sup> Chung BSC interview, 178.

<sup>171</sup> Speaking note, UMELCO delegate for meeting with Deng, 23 June 1984, RG.13 5-7, Hong Kong Baptist University Special Collections (hereafter, HKBU).

<sup>172</sup> 'UMELCO members' Peking visit', *Dateline Hong Kong*, 6 July 1984, 1-2.

<sup>173</sup> Xiaoping Deng, *Build Socialism with Chinese Characteristics* (Foreign Languages Press, 1985), 31-33.

<sup>174</sup> 'Deng Voices Confidence in Hongkong People', *Beijing Review*, 2 July 1984, 6.

<sup>175</sup> Chung BSC interview, 178.

<sup>176</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 104; Chung BSC interview, 178.

agreement would be detailed and the Basic Law based upon it. Secondly, that Hong Kong people would have a hand in drafting the Basic Law. Thirdly, that a committee of Chinese people would be appointed to monitor and advise on its drafting, which Unofficials called the 'Basic Law Legal Committee'.<sup>177</sup> Ji undertook to consider all three suggestions. In his memoirs and later interviews, Chung claimed that all three suggestions influenced Beijing.<sup>178</sup> The archival record contains nothing either to support or to disprove Chung's assertion. At the very least, Chung felt as if Ji Pengfei was receptive to the Unofficials' proposals.

Although the Unofficials felt that they had made some headway with Ji Pengfei, the media and the Hong Kong public were not privy to this meeting and saw the altercation with Deng Xiaoping as a humiliation. China compounded the feeling of disrespect after the Unofficials had left Beijing. Back in Hong Kong, Chung opined that Deng remained in denial about how much uncertainty Hong Kong people still held about the future. To counteract Chung's assertion, Xu sought the permission of the three businessmen whom Deng had met the day before the Unofficials to publish a transcript of their meeting with Deng; the businessmen consented.<sup>179</sup> The CCP-aligned media subsequently published a combination of Deng's words to the businessmen and his comments to the Unofficials, which aimed at undermining Chung's description of Deng. Additionally, the official Chinese transcript called the Unofficials "prominent Hong Kong figures" rather than 'Unofficials', as Chung had demanded.<sup>180</sup> The Unofficials hit back by publishing their own transcript, adding that the Chinese official record contained "an omission".<sup>181</sup> The Unofficial delegation to Beijing and subsequent disagreements plunged China-UMELCO relations to a new low point.

So scarred were relations that, according to Chung, Beijing issued a veiled threat on his life soon thereafter. Not long after the abortive trip to Beijing, Xinhua told the Hong Kong police force's intelligence unit, Special Branch, that the Taiwanese were sending an agent to assassinate Chung. Special Branch promptly provided Chung with enhanced protection and a hotline, and Chung took additional precautions throughout the end of 1984 and into 1985. But the Taiwanese element made little sense to Chung: "Taiwan was supporting me at that time", he later told an interviewer. He reasoned that the CCP had made up the purported plot simply to spook him.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 105; speaking note, UMELCO delegate for meeting with Deng, 23 June 1984, RG.13 5-7, HKBU; statement, 'The Future of Hong Kong', UMELCO, 29 November 1984 enclosed in letter, Chung to Raison, 28 November 1984, FCO 40/1673 f953, TNA.

<sup>178</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 106.

<sup>179</sup> Tang BOHC interview.

<sup>180</sup> Deng, *Deng Xiaoping*, 6–11; 'Deng Xiaoping on the Hongkong Issue', *Beijing Review*, 23 July 1984, 16–17.

<sup>181</sup> 'Umelco issues a "full text"', *SCMP*, 29 June 1984, 1.

<sup>182</sup> Chung BSC interview, 163–68.

While there is no evidence of an attempt being made on Chung's life, there was clearly no love lost between him and Beijing.

The existing literature has dwelt on the confrontation between Deng and the UMELCO three, contrasting the warm welcome that Deng afforded to the trio of businesspeople with the cold shoulder he gave to the three Unofficial Members the next day.<sup>183</sup> Focusing overly on this one upset, however, underplays the many months of cordial relations sustained between Beijing and the Unofficials. The Unofficials were initially wary of Chinese officials and rejected offers to join consultative bodies. Once Xu Jiatao took the reins at Xinhua, a series of secret meetings helped to foster relations and led to the extension of an invitation to visit Beijing. Between the invite and the visit, however, UMELCO's May 1984 manifesto and lobbying mission to London irked Deng Xiaoping. Beijing signalled its disdain for the Unofficials by contrasting their treatment with that of the three businesspeople the day before and, on the day of the meeting, by embarrassing the Unofficials. Relations between Unofficials and Beijing then plunged to a nadir that showed no sign of resurrection during the course of the Sino-British negotiations. Nonetheless, across the span on the Sino-British negotiations, there were occasions when Chinese officials exchanged views with Hong Kong Unofficials.

China's relationship with the Hong Kong Unofficial Members is representative of Beijing's approach to Hong Kong opinion more broadly. The relationship was two-sided: at once rejecting opinions and asserting Beijing's supremacy to speak on behalf of Hong Kong people while at the same time seeking ideas in secret meetings. The CCP's apparent relationship with Hong Kong opinion was, therefore, quite different to the actual relationship forged through secret meetings and behind-closed-doors conversations, even after Deng Xiaoping's beratement. Whereas the existing literature on Chinese officials' interactions with public opinion has been largely social scientific, has examined recent case studies and has neglected Beijing's relationship with Hong Kong, the above provides a case study of China's relationship with Hong Kong public opinion in the historical context of the 1980s. Lastly, interactions between Chinese officials and Hong Kong Unofficial Members again shows that Hong Kong people were not politically apathetic nor politically impotent: they had opinions and they affected Beijing's official thinking.

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<sup>183</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 155; Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong*, 352 fn. 3; Lim, *Indelible City*, ch. 4; Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 146.

## China and the opinions of the Hong Kong public

Chinese officials consulted Hong Kong *elites* including those who occupied the higher echelons of the commercial, professional, media and other sectors as well as the Unofficial Members. It might be argued that this does not suffice to demonstrate that Beijing was interested in Hong Kong opinions and that Chinese officials consulted a select pool of Hong Kong people because they wanted to maintain Hong Kong's prosperity, which in turn aimed at supporting China's economic modernisation. Chinese officials, therefore, were not really interested in Hong Kong opinions but were instead concerned with furthering China's national objectives. In reply, this section considers some of the ways in which Chinese officials showed a degree of interest in the opinions of the Hong Kong *public*. It is never the case in any polity that the public's opinions are homogeneous.<sup>184</sup> The Hong Kong public held many different views. The aim of this section is not to represent the many and various views held but rather to explore how Chinese officials gathered, analysed and used those expressed thoughts.

Xinhua staff and HKMAO officials based at the Xinhua offices also took note of Hong Kong public opinion. After Governor MacLehose left Beijing in March 1979, the HKMAO created a group to develop recommendations about the 1997 issue.<sup>185</sup> The group launched several research projects that generated ever more granular policy proposals for Beijing to consider. Their initial report was concerned with the broad question of what China should do about Hong Kong. Completed in April 1981, the report outlined three possibilities: that no action be taken, that China should seek the return of Hong Kong before 1997 or that China resume sovereignty over Hong Kong once the 1898 Lease expired in 1997. Its authors concluded that China's resumption of sovereignty in 1997 was the only viable option.<sup>186</sup> In December 1981, the Central Committee Secretariat concurred.<sup>187</sup> Having rendered a decision on the headline that China should retake Hong Kong, Deng instructed the HKMAO to produce a more detailed report containing substantive proposals.<sup>188</sup> During their research, HKMAO staff considered a Xinhua report about Hong Kong public opinion.<sup>189</sup> The resulting document, titled 'A Preliminary Plan for the Solution to the Hong Kong Question', was submitted to the Central Committee Secretariat in March 1982.<sup>190</sup> The paper recommended adapting the nine-point plan for reunifying Taiwan into a 12-point plan

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<sup>184</sup> Noone, 'Domestic-Foreign Policy'.

<sup>185</sup> Fang, 'Decision-Making Background', 39.

<sup>186</sup> Lu, *Return of Hong Kong*, 15–16.

<sup>187</sup> Ba, 'China-UK "Hong Kong Question"', 108; Kwong, 'Refurbishing Hong Kong's Image', 186.

<sup>188</sup> Lu, *Return of Hong Kong*, 18.

<sup>189</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 66.

<sup>190</sup> Lu, *Return of Hong Kong*, 18.

for Hong Kong, detailed above.<sup>191</sup> As HKMAO researchers had found that Hong Kong people were particularly concerned that their way of life may be threatened by Hong Kong's return to China, it was hoped that the 12-point plan would appeal to Hong Kong people as it left Hong Kong's systems largely unchanged. Deng endorsed the 12-point plan in principle and ordered the HKMAO to gauge Hong Kong people's reactions to it.<sup>192</sup> A five-member team was promptly dispatched to Hong Kong and set up office in the Xinhua headquarters. According to one, the researchers sought the opinions of Hong Kong people "from all walks of life" in the course of their research.<sup>193</sup> Hong Kong opinion was, therefore, entertained at every stage in the development of the Chinese government's Hong Kong policy.

Alongside their HKMAO colleagues, Xinhua staff monitored local media to understand local sentiment and passed their findings back to Beijing in the form of reports.<sup>194</sup> Sometimes, Hong Kong views expressed in local newspapers influenced China's policy towards Hong Kong. Xinhua worker Wong Man Fong recalled in his memoirs one occasion when he took inspiration from Hong Kong newspapers. Wong had found that "Hong Kong people had no confidence in China" and searched for a way to alleviate their concerns. While reading "a series of editorials in Hong Kong newspapers", Wong came across the idea of maintaining British rule "for 30 or 50 years after 1997".<sup>195</sup> It is likely that the paper Wong was reading was the *Ming Pao*, as the idea was closely associated with that paper and Liao Chengzhi had told its editor, Louis Cha Leung-yung, that Chinese officials were taking close note of his editorials.<sup>196</sup> Wong knew that Beijing would not agree to Britain's administration continuing for a single year after 1997, let alone 30 or 50 years. But he could adapt the "frame of reference" – that is, 30 to 50 years – to help to solve the issue of Hong Kong people lacking confidence in Beijing. Wong therefore recommended that Beijing commit to maintaining Hong Kong's way of life fundamentally unchanged for 30 to 50 years. This formula represented several benefits: China would retake sovereignty over Hong Kong and, although the British would leave, their systems would stay in place. Investor confidence should, therefore, be retained and would, in turn, contribute to China's economic modernisation.<sup>197</sup> In June 1982, Liao Chengzhi tested reactions to the idea with a Hong Kong visitor, Vice Chancellor of Hong Kong University Rayson Huang Li-sung, framing it as a "guarantee" of no change for either

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<sup>191</sup> Wong, *China's Resumption of Sovereignty*, 20 and 38.

<sup>192</sup> Wong, *China's Resumption of Sovereignty*, 22.

<sup>193</sup> Lu, *Return of Hong Kong*, 23.

<sup>194</sup> Meeting record, Wang and MacLehose et al., 8 April 1982 enclosed in letter, MacLehose to Donald, 13 April 1982, FCO 21/2212 f23, TNA.

<sup>195</sup> Wong, *China's Resumption of Sovereignty*, 20–21.

<sup>196</sup> Letter, Wilson to Clift, 5 October 1981, FCO 40/1290 f204, TNA; the Galsworthy manuscript, 38.

<sup>197</sup> Wong, *China's Resumption of Sovereignty*, 20–21.

20, 30 or 50 years.<sup>198</sup> In November 1983, Ji Pengfei, having taken over as the Head of the HKMAO, confirmed China's policy when he told a New Territories delegation that Hong Kong would remain unchanged for 50 years.<sup>199</sup> Adapted from the editorials of a Hong Kong newspaper, this notion was tested with and then broadcast to the Hong Kong public via visitors to Beijing. Subsequently, it became a central aspect of China's Hong Kong policy and was incorporated into Annex 1 of the Joint Declaration.

Beijing continued trying to create channels of communication during the Sino-British negotiations, too. In early September 1983, a Hong Kong member of the National People's Congress, Li Lin-san, approached members of the Yuen Long, Sai Kung and North District Boards. Li asked the District Board members to "channel grassroots public opinion on the 1997 issue to the Chinese authorities" to him.<sup>200</sup> In the case of Li Lin-san in particular, Beijing certainly seemed to be serious about understanding Hong Kong public sentiment. It is unclear whether these meetings, delegations or channels shaped Chinese official thinking. Nonetheless, Beijing created the opportunity for connections between Chinese officials and representatives of Hong Kong grassroots organisations.

Chinese officials were concerned with the opinions of Hong Kong's elites and held private discussions with Unofficial Members, businesspeople, professionals and others but they were also interested in the many and varied opinions of Hong Kong people at large. Through contact with a range of organisations, Chinese officials sought to understand grassroots sentiment. Both Xinhua and HKMAO staff monitored newspapers to understand local sentiment. Additionally, China also sought to establish a channel for grassroots opinions to flow to Beijing. China, therefore, was not only interested in Hong Kong elite views but also Hong Kong public opinion. In this regard, as noted above, China's relationship with Hong Kong opinions was dualistic: Beijing sought to direct the media and passed messages via visiting delegations yet also used the media and meetings with delegates to ask about Hong Kong people's thoughts. Lastly, Hong Kong people expressed their thoughts and some ideas even made their way into the Joint Declaration. As such, Hong Kong people were neither politically apathetic nor politically impotent, even when it came to contact with Chinese officials.

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<sup>198</sup> Memo, Youde to McLaren, 16 June 1982 enclosed in Wilson memo FOI/TNA.

<sup>199</sup> Bonavia, *Hong Kong 1997*, 112.

<sup>200</sup> Frank Choi, 'Mystery man goes to boards', *SCMP*, 7 September 1983, 1; 'NPC man continued lobbying in NT', *SCMP*, 12 October 1983, 12.

## Conclusion

The existing literature on the Sino-British negotiations over the future of Hong Kong has given little consideration to Beijing's relationship with Hong Kong opinion. Only a few authors have mentioned contacts between Chinese officials and Hong Kong people but have seen these interactions as Beijing seeking to impose its views rather than to seek those of Hong Kong people.<sup>201</sup> Authors have also described China's United Front with Hong Kong elites but this has again been viewed as a one-sided relationship.<sup>202</sup> Most writers have not considered Beijing's relationship with Hong Kong opinion at all. This is perhaps a reflection of the assumption that the CCP operated in an entirely top-down manner. A relatively recent tranche of literature, mostly in the social sciences, has begun to probe this assumption.<sup>203</sup> This literature has not, however, stretched to the early 1980s nor examined Beijing's relationship with Hong Kong people.

This chapter addressed the gap in our understanding of the relationship between the Chinese state and the Hong Kong public during the Sino-British negotiations. It has argued that China had a dualistic relationship with Hong Kong opinion. On the one hand, China objected to the idea of Hong Kong representation in the negotiations, embodied in the 'three-legged stool' metaphor. Beijing claimed that China and China alone was competent to speak for its Chinese compatriots. Additionally, China sought to shape Hong Kong opinion through propaganda proliferated through the CCP-aligned Hong Kong press, by leaking information to the non-aligned media and by cosying up to media producers.

On the other hand, Chinese officials also sought Hong Kong opinions. A series of secret consultations gave Hong Kong elites the opportunity to shape Chinese official thinking, such as Louis Cha Leung-yung's suggestion on the format of the agreement between Britain and China as well as Martin Lee Chu-ming's interventions on the future of Hong Kong's legal system. Consultations also included meetings between Xu Jiaturun and Unofficial Members of ExCo and LegCo. The existing literature has seen the Unofficial Members' relationship with Beijing defined by Deng Xiaoping's rudeness in June 1984. But before the Unofficial Members travelled to Beijing, they had a cordial relationship with Xu Jiaturun and, during the visit, Sir S. Y. Chung felt that Ji Pengfei

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<sup>201</sup> Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong*; Scott, *Political Change*; So, 'Hong Kong People Ruling'; Wei and Summers, 'Chinese Government's Negotiating Strategy'.

<sup>202</sup> Chu, *Chinese Communists*; Goodstadt, 'China and the Selection'; Sheridan, *Gate to China*.

<sup>203</sup> Bachman, *Bureaucracy, Economy*, 45; Chen et al., 'Sources of Authoritarian Responsiveness'; Johnston, 'Chinese Middle Class'; Li and Chen, 'Public Opinion'; Owen, 'Participatory Authoritarianism'; Pan and Xu, 'Gauging Preference Stability and Ideological Constraint under Authoritarian Rule'; Wang et al., 'How Institutionalized Feedback Works'.

took the trio's proposals seriously. Additionally, Xinhua and HKMAO officials monitored Hong Kong media and sought to channel views from the grassroots of Hong Kong to Beijing.

Beijing's relationship with Hong Kong opinion has been largely absent from the literature because only one side of its two-sided nature has so far been on public view. Oftentimes, Beijing's rejection of Hong Kong representation, its attempts to mould public opinion and its undermining of the Unofficials were the only visible aspects. The other side in which Chinese officials consulted elites, monitored public opinion and met with Unofficials was unknown. In showing that China's United Front with Hong Kong elites was not a one-way street, this chapter builds on the existing literature on the United Front and adds further examples to rebut the political impotence and political apathy thesis, showing that some Hong Kong people were able to affect Chinese official thinking.

## Chapter 4 – The British and Colonial Governments and the Opinions of Hong Kong People

In January 1982, a journalist asked the British Lord Privy Seal, Humphrey Atkins, whether “Hong Kong people should do something” about the issue of the New Territories Lease expiring in 1997 or should instead “keep quiet and see what happens”. Atkins replied that Hong Kong people had not previously been shy about making their opinions known and that “the views and wishes of the people of Hong Kong will obviously be taken into account”.<sup>1</sup> Officials on the British side repeatedly said that they would consider Hong Kong opinions when making decisions about the colony’s future. How did British and colonial officials learn what Hong Kong people thought, how did they weigh Hong Kong views against the British government’s other interests and how much influence did Hong Kong opinion have on the Sino-British negotiations?

In the existing literature on the Sino-British negotiations, there remains disagreement over the extent to which the British side understood Hong Kong opinion on the 1997 issue. On the one hand, Frank Ching was convinced that the British side gained insights into the Hong Kong public’s wishes via the “opinion-gathering machinery”.<sup>2</sup> Rebekah C. Cockram concurred that the “FCO made active efforts to consult with groups in Hong Kong”.<sup>3</sup> On the other, Chalmers Johnson rejected the idea that Hong Kong people were consulted by any side.<sup>4</sup> John Flowerdew argued that Hong Kong views played only a limited role in colonial decision-making despite Governor Youde’s claims to the contrary.<sup>5</sup> Chapter 1 went some way towards demonstrating that certain Hong Kong businesspeople influenced the British side to an extent, but did their role continue, change or cease as the Sino-British talks got underway in 1983 and 1984?

Across the British Empire, colonial administrations had historically sought to understand the public’s opinions through a variety of means. Many had advisory boards, engaged in

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<sup>1</sup> Telegram, MacLehose to FCO, 10 January 1982, FCO 40/1436 f9, TNA.

<sup>2</sup> Ching, *Hong Kong and China*, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Rebekah C. Cockram, ‘Cession and Retreat: Negotiating Hong Kong’s Future, 1979-1984’ (Senior Honors, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2018), 48.

<sup>4</sup> Calmers Johnson, ‘The Mousetrapping of Hong Kong: A Game in Which Nobody Wins’, *Asian Survey* 24, no. 9 (1984): 900–902.

<sup>5</sup> John Flowerdew, *The Final Years of British Hong Kong: The Discourse of Colonial Withdrawal* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1998), 43.

consultations with community leaders and examined local media in order to monitor views.<sup>6</sup> Hong Kong was no different. After riots in 1966 and 1967, the Hong Kong government strove to incorporate local views into the process of policymaking and enhance the connection between the administration and the community. One way it did this was to create more committees through which opinions could be channelled up to the government. In addition to the Urban Council, in 1968, District Offices were established in the heart of communities, each staffed with an Officer who was supposed to explain the government's policies to locals and relay the public's reaction to those policies back to the government. In so doing, the District Officers were meant to act as a bridge between the government and Hong Kong people.<sup>7</sup> In 1973, under the auspices of the District Offices, Mutual Aid Committees were formed on the basis of residential areas. The Mutual Aid Committees were intended to foster neighbourliness, promote social campaigns, and further enhance the lines of communication between the government and Hong Kong people.<sup>8</sup> By 1982, the District Offices had evolved into District Boards, which had a larger range of responsibilities than the District Offices that had come before them and notably returned some seats via elections.<sup>9</sup> Commenting on the system of government in general rather than the Sino-British negotiations in particular, Ambrose Yeo-chi King assessed that the colonial administration's network of consultative committees ensured that people could channel their views into the decision-making process.<sup>10</sup> In addition to these visible attempts to understand local views, Florence Mok has uncovered a range of opinion-gathering mechanisms that were employed by the administration. Some were overt while others were covert and all impacted colonial policymaking to a degree.<sup>11</sup> King and Mok did not, however, explore if or how the colonial government's opinion-gathering machinery was used to gauge views on the future of Hong Kong. The colonial government had a variety of means by which it *could* have engaged with Hong Kong people's opinions but it remains to be seen whether or not it did so.

This chapter analyses the means by which the British side collected and handled Hong Kong people's opinions about the future. As with Chapter 3, this chapter does not attempt to

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<sup>6</sup> Julius Agbor et al., 'A Theory of Colonial Governance', *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1530867>.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Scott, 'Bridging the Gap: Hong Kong Senior Civil Servants and the 1966 Riots', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45, no. 1 (2017): 140–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2016.1227030>.

<sup>8</sup> Janet Lee Scott, 'Structure and Function in an Urban Organization: The Mutual Aid Committees', *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22 (1982): 1–3.

<sup>9</sup> Butenhoff, *Social Movements*, 33–34.

<sup>10</sup> King, 'Administrative Absorption'; King, 'Hong Kong Talks', 56–57.

<sup>11</sup> Mok, 'Public Opinion Polls'; Florence Mok, 'Town Talk: Enhancing the "Eyes and Ears" of the Colonial State in British Hong Kong, 1950s–1975', *Historical Research* 95, no. 268 (2022): 287–308, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hisres/htab039>; Mok, *Covert Colonialism*.

reconstruct the many and myriad views held by Hong Kong people but rather to examine how British officials handled Hong Kong views. The first and second sections examine how the British and Hong Kong governments, respectively, gathered information about the views of Hong Kong people. They argue that British and colonial officials mostly monitored newspapers and relied on pressure groups and members of the public to post letters, position papers and opinion polls to officials. Consequently, the British side had access to a more limited range of opinions than the Chinese government, examined in the previous chapter. The final section argues that although British officials said that Hong Kong views were welcomed, colonial officials used the law and the media in an attempt to influence opinion by examining the ways in which the British side sought to direct Hong Kong opinion through propaganda and censorship. This chapter builds on the work of Mok and King by extending the scope of analysis from the colonial government to encompass the British government, too. It also intervenes in the disagreement between Ching, Cockram, Flowerdew, Johnson and others by evaluating the relationship between the British side and Hong Kong opinions.

## The British government and Hong Kong opinions

This section compares the British government's rhetoric regarding Hong Kong opinions with its apparatus for gathering and understanding it. It argues that Thatcher's claim to welcome Hong Kong views was not reflected in the meetings she held with Hong Kong people. Aside from such meetings, the FCO collected Hong Kong opinions by gathering newspaper clippings and other materials. This provided only piecemeal information, however, and effectively placed responsibility for conveying views to the British on the people of Hong Kong themselves. This section concludes that the British government collected only anecdotal data on Hong Kong opinion and that its words did not match its actions.

The British government claimed that it valued the opinions of Hong Kong people. When Thatcher visited Hong Kong in September 1982, she told a press conference that the main purpose of her visit was to hear the "views of the people who live here".<sup>12</sup> After the Prime Minister left Hong Kong, British and colonial officials adopted a vocabulary of 'consultation' and of ensuring the 'acceptability' of any eventual agreement to Hong Kong people. When Lord Belstead, the then minister with responsibility for Hong Kong, made a speech at a press conference in Hong Kong in December 1982, he reiterated that the UK and China would "seek a solution acceptable

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<sup>12</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 September 1982, FCO 40/1458 f651, TNA.

to the people of Hong Kong, to China and to Britain”.<sup>13</sup> Governor Youde told the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce that people could make their views known using the media or via “numerous channels open to them”, which the Governor left unspecified.<sup>14</sup> UMELCO helped to promote the idea of consultation, with the Senior Unofficial of ExCo Sir S. Y. Chung saying: “People can write to the Governor, all Government officials, or the Foreign Office in London”.<sup>15</sup> In London, the Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, informed the House of Commons that the British government was “keep[ing] in close touch with Hong Kong opinion”.<sup>16</sup> The minister with responsibility for Hong Kong, Richard Luce, told the Commons that he was availed of Hong Kong views via “official and unofficial channels” such as through his meetings with the Governor, senior officials, UMELCO and “representatives of a wider range of social and professional groups.”<sup>17</sup> Even Queen Elizabeth II spoke of Hong Kong opinion in her speech at the opening of Parliament: “My Government [...] will continue talks with China [...] with the aim of reaching a solution acceptable [...] to the people of Hong Kong.”<sup>18</sup> ‘Consultation’ and ‘acceptability’ remained a prominent feature of the British side’s official lexicon all the way from September 1982 to the end of the Sino-British talks in 1984.

Yet the question remained: *how* would Britain consult Hong Kong people? When Hong Kong journalists asked Thatcher, she gave as examples her meetings with groups who, while appointed or elected on a limited franchise, were the closest to representatives that Hong Kong had to offer – UMELCO and members of the Urban Council, District Boards and Heung Yee Kuk – as well as her contacts with representatives of community organisations and university students.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, ‘consultation’ meant British officials engaging directly with Hong Kong groups in discussions about the future of Hong Kong. Such meetings were, however, often far from discursive. Thatcher tended to project her own thoughts about Hong Kong’s future during meetings rather than listen to the Hong Kong people whose views were purportedly so important

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<sup>13</sup> Speech, Belstead at a Hong Kong press conference, 10 December 1982 transcribed in telegram, Roberts to FCO, 10 December 1982, FCO 21/2219 f233, TNA.

<sup>14</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 21 January 1983, FCO 40/1546 f53, TNA.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Adley, *All Change Hong Kong* (Blandford Press, 1984), 33.

<sup>16</sup> House of Commons (London) Hansard, 22 March 1983 <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1984/mar/22/foreign-affairs> (accessed 13 January 2025).

<sup>17</sup> House of Commons (London) Hansard, 26 January 1984 [https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1984/jan/26/hong-kong-1#S6CV0052P0\\_19840126\\_CWA\\_411](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1984/jan/26/hong-kong-1#S6CV0052P0_19840126_CWA_411) (accessed 13 January 2025).

<sup>18</sup> House of Commons (London) Hansard, 22 June 1983 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1983-06-22/debates/9e6146e6-5576-4f60-8f69-4aeb17c28e32/QueenSSpeech#contribution-2c0a7257-14cf-4713-b9c2-8c2e6f71b35e> (accessed 26 August 2025).

<sup>19</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 September 1982, FCO 40/1458 f652, TNA.

to her. For example, on 27 September 1982, Thatcher met a group of Hong Kong businesspeople. Her opening statement set the agenda: she wished to “discuss how the Chinese might be brought to understand what made Hong Kong successful”. Thatcher was more concerned with negotiation strategy rather than the hopes of Hong Kong people. In the Prime Minister’s mind, Hong Kong’s success was owed to the British administration; the city’s continued prosperity would, therefore, only be guaranteed by continued colonial administration. When one of the businesspeople put forward his own proposal for the future, Thatcher did not engage with it, showing that the Prime Minister did not wish to discuss Hong Kong views but was instead interested in imposing her own ideas.<sup>20</sup> On the same day, Thatcher had a meeting with UMELCO. The Prime Minister criticised China’s claims to have consulted Hong Kong people. She argued that Hong Kong visitors to Beijing had felt too cowed to tell Chinese leaders “the truth” that British administration was the only realistic option for Hong Kong’s future success. LegCo Unofficial Rayson Huang Li-sung rejoined: “some of us’ had tried to do so”. Thatcher was seemingly oblivious to the fact that Huang had visited Beijing earlier that year and had tried to convince Deng Xiaoping and Liao Chengzhi to retain the status quo (as detailed in Chapter 2). She then asked for UMELCO’s help in convincing the Chinese authorities of the truism that continued British administration was necessary for Hong Kong.<sup>21</sup> Thatcher added that it would be helpful for Hong Kong people to explain to Chinese leaders the basis of Hong Kong’s stability and prosperity, which she believed to be British administration.<sup>22</sup> Thatcher did not once ask what UMELCO thought would be best for Hong Kong.<sup>23</sup>

Parading the Prime Minister in front of Hong Kong groups armed British officials with ample examples to show that Hong Kong people’s views were welcomed by the top echelons of the British government.<sup>24</sup> Reporters were not in the room whilst the meetings were taking place, so they were not to know that Thatcher was interested less in listening and more in impressing her own viewpoint. Although the Prime Minister *met* Hong Kong people, she did not spend her time with them asking their opinions and instead sought to impart her own vision of Hong Kong’s future.

When asked about other forms of consultation, Thatcher was unable to answer. The Prime Minister said only that her officials were “already considering these matters” and directed Hong Kong people to express their views to Hong Kong’s “elected councils [... and] the Executive

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<sup>20</sup> Memo, Coles to Holmes, 28 September 1982, FCO 40/1460 f709, TNA.

<sup>21</sup> Minute, Thatcher and UMELCO et al., 27 September 1982, PREM 19/788, TNA.

<sup>22</sup> Chung BSC interview, 194.

<sup>23</sup> Minute, Thatcher and UMELCO et al., 27 September 1982, PREM 19/788, TNA.

<sup>24</sup> Briefing, ‘Brief C1’, FCO, 7 September 1982, CAB 133/528, TNA.

and Legislative Council”.<sup>25</sup> Shortly thereafter, several newspaper commentators levelled the criticism that Hong Kong people had not yet been consulted, adding that they hoped local opinion would be considered in the near future, with some calling on the Governor to participate in the talks.<sup>26</sup> As an October 1982 article published in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* put it: officials had promised that “London would ‘take the views and wishes of the people of Hongkong fully into account.’ But how [...] does London know the wishes of the people of Hongkong?” The article went on to criticise the existing machinery, arguing that bodies were either unrepresentative, such as UMELCO, or “confined to dealing with low-level strictly local matters”, such as the Urban Council.<sup>27</sup> With little practical detail forthcoming, some in Hong Kong remained unconvinced of the Prime Minister’s claim that Britain would take heed of Hong Kong views.

The FCO did take some steps towards gathering views from Hong Kong. Warwick Morris arrived at the HKD in 1982 and was assigned to work, “alone at first”, on the newly created ‘Future of Hong Kong’ desk.<sup>28</sup> Around August 1982, the HKD opened several series of files dedicated to collating expressions of Hong Kong views. Surveys and position papers were filed into series HKK 040/2.<sup>29</sup> Speeches, interviews and “Views of the public” were placed in HKK 040/3.<sup>30</sup> Then, in 1983, an official was tasked with collating British, Hong Kong and foreign press reports on the future of Hong Kong as well as gathering letters from the public.<sup>31</sup> It is, however, impossible to know the extent of these series, how British officials engaged with them or who, if anyone, read them because they have not been transferred to TNA and appear to no longer exist.<sup>32</sup> Additionally,

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<sup>25</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 September 1982, FCO 40/1458 f652, TNA.

<sup>26</sup> Memo, Clift to Giffard, 27 September 1982, FCO 40/1458 f650, TNA.

<sup>27</sup> Derek Davies and Mary Lee, ‘The people without a voice of their own’, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 October 1982, 44–45.

<sup>28</sup> Warwick Morris, ‘British Diplomatic Oral History Programme: Recollections of Warwick Morris, 1969 to 2008’, written interview by Jimmy Jamieson (2009–2020), DOHP 194, CAC, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Handwritten note, NA, 19 August 1982 on teleletter, Hoare to Masefield, 19 August 1982, FCO 40/1457 f551, TNA.

<sup>30</sup> Memo, Morris to Hannah, 1 November 1983, FCO 40/1558 f708, TNA.

<sup>31</sup> Memo, Morris to Hum and Clift, 25 October 1983, FCO 40/1556 f695, FOI/TNA.

<sup>32</sup> My FOI requests to TNA and the FCDO did not unearth what became of these series (FOI ref. TNA1703155878168 to TNA responded to 8 January 2024; FOI ref. FOI2023/25494 (aggregated with FOI2023/24490) to the FCDO responded to 26 January 2024). Within the FCDO’s Operational Selection Policy, there are several grounds on which such files might have been disposed: the files might have been judged to have been of “short-term value” (ground 6.2), disposed of because they were predominantly “Newspaper cuttings/copies of publications” (ground 6.5) and/or deselected for being “Public correspondence” (ground 6.11) (‘FCDO Methodology For The Selection and Transfer of Public Records to The National Archives: Appraisal Report’, FCDO, British government, ND <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d703479084b18b95709f50/FCDO-Methodology-For-The-Selection-and-Transfer-of-Public-Records-to-The-National-Archives.odt> (accessed 10 December 2025)).

British officials occasionally met with Hong Kong visitors. For instance, in October 1983, the FCO's Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Asia and the Pacific Alan Donald and Assistant Head of the HKD Christopher Hum met five members of the Urban Council.<sup>33</sup> Such meetings were few, however, and were not always dedicated to discussing ideas about the future of Hong Kong.

One explanation for London's apparently lacklustre attempts to gather Hong Kong people's views is that officials in Westminster saw the Hong Kong government as primarily responsible for this task. Various comments reflect this attitude. For instance, the then Foreign Secretary Francis Pym said that consultation consisted of the Governor's meetings with ExCo; the Hong Kong public writing to the Governor, senior officials, UMELCO and District Offices; and the local press publishing views.<sup>34</sup> Apart from collecting newspaper clippings, none of these activities involved officials in Westminster. Similarly, the Head of the HKD Richard Clift praised the Governor's efforts to collect views from ExCo, District Officers, the District Boards and letters from the public.<sup>35</sup> Again, the burden was placed on the Hong Kong government rather than officials in Westminster. In an August 1983 report, HKD officials wrote that the Governor was receiving ExCo's advice and there would be "no advantage in seeking other tests of Hong Kong opinion at this stage. [...] there is no reason to suppose that a wider canvass of opinions would produce a different answer."<sup>36</sup> The HKD must have forgotten that in order to know whether opinions differ, one must first engage in consultations. Either way, officials in Westminster largely left the task to their colleagues in Hong Kong.

In summary, the HKD committed scant resources to coming to their own understanding about what Hong Kong people wanted for their city's future. Although an official was assigned to keeping files reflecting Hong Kong opinion, these files are absent from the archival record and would likely have reflected only a small fraction of opinions in the colony. While British politicians claimed that Hong Kong views would be considered, civil servants in London delegated the task to the colonial government.

## The Hong Kong government and Hong Kong opinion

As the Hong Kong government assumed most of the responsibility for fulfilling the British side's pledge to consult Hong Kong, how then the Hong Kong government assess and understand the

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<sup>33</sup> Minute, Donald and Urban Council et al., 3 October 1983, FCO 40/1556 f668, FOI/TNA.

<sup>34</sup> Letter, Pym to Owen, 21 March 1983, FCO 40/1550 f203, TNA.

<sup>35</sup> Memo, Clift to Donald, 1 June 1983, FCO 40/1551 f360, TNA.

<sup>36</sup> Report, 'The Future of Hong Kong: Talks with the Chinese: A Reappraisal One Year On', HKD, 24 August 1983, DEFE 13/2286 f7A, TNA.

views of Hong Kong people? As detailed below, the colonial government's methods were passive, meaning that officials gleaned their understanding from reading position papers, opinion polls and newspaper accounts rather than actively engaging Hong Kong people in discussions about their desires for the future.

Consultation of Hong Kong views was a highly contested matter. Following the January 1982 announcement of Thatcher's visit that September, speculation abounded that the topic of Hong Kong's future would be on the agenda.<sup>37</sup> From July onwards, Hong Kong papers discussed the 1997 issue on most days, including ruminating on how local people might make their views heard by Chinese and British officials. The newspaper *Ming Pao*, for instance, clamoured for residents' wishes to be considered by Beijing and London. *Wah Kiu Yat Po* urged residents to express their thoughts and come up with a solution. Some papers, however, expressed doubt that the Hong Kong public's views would be taken into account. *Sing Pao* pointed out that those whom Beijing had so far consulted were hardly representative of the general public, as their wealth would equip them with escape routes should the need occur.<sup>38</sup> The Hong Kong Observers' August 1982 poll, noted in Chapter 2, found that only 2% of 1,000 respondents agreed with the proposition that the colonial government was consulting local opinion well. The Observers jibed: "So much for 'government by consultation'!"<sup>39</sup> Questions of consultation were, therefore, prominent even before Thatcher arrived in Hong Kong.

Governor Youde was aware of the Hong Kong public's growing interest in the 1997 issue and the concern that local views might not be heard. With Thatcher's visit on the horizon, in July 1982, Youde wrote to London in the hopes of initiating a discussion about the practicalities of understanding Hong Kong opinion. Referring to the Hong Kong delegations that had visited Beijing in their droves, Youde said that it had "not gone unnoticed" amongst the press and the public that China was already conducting consultations whereas the British side was not. UMELCO had pushed the Governor to consult Hong Kong people and Youde agreed, writing in a letter to the FCO: "It is after all, [*sic*] their future which is at stake."<sup>40</sup> Youde's letter, however, received only a curt acknowledgement: "the points you make [...] are indeed well understood in the FCO".<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Report, 'Assessment and Summary of Press Reports on, and Reaction to, Visit to Hong Kong [and China] by the Lord Privy Seal and Deputy Foreign Secretary, Mr. Humphrey Atkins (January 3, January 8 to 10, 1982)', Public Relations Division, ISD, Hong Kong government, 21 January 1982, FCO 40/1436 f23, TNA.

<sup>38</sup> Report, 'HK urged to speak up on 1997' in *The Gist*, ISD, Hong Kong government, 23 July 1982, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Position paper and poll, Hong Kong Observers, ND enclosed in report, 'Interviews Hong Kong 23-29 August 1982', Centre for Policy Studies, 3 September 1982, THCR 1/10/37, CAC.

<sup>40</sup> Letter, Youde to Acland, 9 July 1982, FCO 40/1455 f461, TNA.

<sup>41</sup> Telegram, Donald to Youde, 22 July 1982, FCO 40/1455 f458, TNA.

The Governor made another attempt to initiate discussion the practicalities of understanding Hong Kong opinion in an August 1982 telegram. Recalling that British officials had already “stated publicly that the views and wishes of the people of Hong Kong will be taken into account”, Youde noted that there remained no clear method for achieving this. He outlined the range of existing sources of views: surveys commissioned by others (to which we might add other forms of expression sent by Hong Kong people directly to the government, such as in the form of letters and petitions), the local media and UMELCO. The Governor added some other possible sources that “could if necessary” be consulted: “influential associations and organisations” such as the Urban Council and Heung Yee Kuk; the District Boards, although Youde noted that this would have to wait until after Thatcher’s visit as some Board members were yet to be elected; and commercial bodies.<sup>42</sup>

Youde’s telegram convinced his colleagues in London to discuss how Hong Kong views could be collected. A draft FCO report agreed that “Hong Kong opinion will of course need to be consulted”.<sup>43</sup> There is, however, no evidence in the archives that civil servants in London communicated their agreement to the Governor. There is also no evidence of there being any discussion about how views would be gathered or weighed, the process by which information would be passed between the two governments or what additional resources would be committed to the considerable task of accurately estimating the views of some 5 million people. As the following sub-sections argue, these are only some of the factors that undermined the British side’s ability to gather and understand Hong Kong people’s views.

Borrowing Youde’s taxonomy of the sources, the following sub-sections examine how the Hong Kong government collected surveys, other expressions sent to the government such as letters, the media, and non-commercial organisations such as the Urban Council, Heung Yee Kuk and District Boards. The British side’s relationship with commercial individuals and groups has already been examined in Chapter 1 and the influence of UMELCO is the focus of the next chapter.

## Surveys

The colonial government had various tried and ways of gathering the views of Hong Kong people. From 1965 to 1975, the government covertly monitored public opinion through Town Talk, an eavesdropping programme.<sup>44</sup> Town Talk was replaced by the Movement Of Opinion Direction survey, which monitored public sentiment through interviews with around 2,500 residents per

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<sup>42</sup> Youde telegram TNA.

<sup>43</sup> Draft report, ‘The Future of Hong Kong: A Special Study’, FCO, August 1982 enclosed in Clift memo TNA.

<sup>44</sup> Mok, ‘Town Talk’.

edition.<sup>45</sup> Both Town Talk and the Movement Of Opinion Direction indirectly involved the public in policy formation but were kept secret.<sup>46</sup>

In 1982, the colonial government launched yet another colony-wide scheme. The Fast Opinion Survey Scheme was motivated by a desire to produce insights more rapidly. Every evening, 100 office staff would be designated to be on 'stand by'. Should the Hong Kong government decide that it wanted to quickly take the public's temperature on a matter, the officers would be activated to telephone a selection of residents over an evening and produce a report within 48 hours.<sup>47</sup> When the Fast Opinion Survey Scheme was piloted on 18 February 1982, 890 respondents were asked which issue incoming Governor Youde should tackle first. Of 12 options, the future of Hong Kong beyond 1997 was only the sixth most cited issue, noted by just 6.6% (59) of respondents.<sup>48</sup> Although the Fast Opinion Survey Scheme was firmly established by the time that Thatcher issued a public commitment to consult Hong Kong views in September 1982, it was not used to gather detailed information about the local population's hopes for the future of Hong Kong.

Separately from the Fast Opinion Survey Scheme, the Home Affairs Department launched its own survey to monitor perceived problems, satisfaction with the government and local issues. The poll sampled around 1,000 people per survey. After Thatcher left the colony in September 1982, the Home Affairs Department conducted an opinion poll asking which issues people were the most concerned about. "Hong Kong's future" was noted by 20% of respondents as a "problem". In January 1983, that percentage sat at 26%, fell to 14% in March, rose slightly to 17% in May then reached 20% in July 1983.<sup>49</sup> The Home Affairs Department's poll did not, however, dig into the details of why Hong Kong people saw the future as problematic. Moreover, it did not ask Hong Kong people how they wished for the issue to be resolved.

Although the Hong Kong government possessed the means by which to survey opinions on the future of Hong Kong, British authorities were hesitant to do so. One reason was that colonial officials believed Hong Kong people would not understand such a survey. As Youde put it, launching an opinion poll would be complicated by "the difficulty of educating the population [...] in the complexities of the issue."<sup>50</sup> Another reason was because they believed that Beijing

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<sup>45</sup> Mok, 'Public Opinion Polls'.

<sup>46</sup> Mok, *Covert Colonialism*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Memo, Ng to various, 24 December 1982, HKRS570-2-10 f1, PRO; meeting note, Fast Opinion Survey Scheme Liaison Officers, 4 October 1982, HKRS570-2-10 f3, PRO.

<sup>48</sup> Memo, Au to various, 23 February 1982, HKRS570-2-10 f6, PRO.

<sup>49</sup> Report, 'Summary of results of an Opinion Poll in July 1983', Home Affairs Department, Hong Kong government, July 1983, HKRS570-2-10 f20, PRO.

<sup>50</sup> Youde telegram TNA.

would find such a survey unacceptable. In April 1982, Wang Kuang told Governor MacLehose that although Beijing was consulting Hong Kong individuals about the 1997 issue, such consultations would “certainly not” include a plebiscite.<sup>51</sup> The British side took this as an indication that China might protest if the British side mounted anything similar. When MacLehose was replaced by Governor Youde, his successor continued to believe that a referendum would be impossible owing to likely Chinese objections.<sup>52</sup> The government was explicit in denouncing a plebiscite: a Hong Kong government spokesman dismissed the idea of a government-run opinion poll on the grounds that it only conducted surveys on “controversial” issues, a statement that the *SCMP* reported with bewilderment.<sup>53</sup> Cradock shared this view and reflected in his memoirs that “the strength of Peking’s objections to any direct Hong Kong participation” had been underappreciated.<sup>54</sup> Pym in London agreed, assessing that there were “dangers in developing new mechanisms to test Hong Kong opinion” given that the Chinese would object to being “out-voted by their ‘compatriots’”.<sup>55</sup>

The assumption that Beijing would have objected to a large-scale opinion poll was probably true, though there is no indication that British officials attempted to gauge Chinese officials’ reactions to the idea. Another reason that the Hong Kong government did not conduct an opinion poll was because the British side would not have wished to have been beholden to its results. As Pym wrote in a memo to Thatcher: “we must not allow our consideration for the ‘wishes of the people’ to develop into acceptance of the paramountcy of the will of the population.”<sup>56</sup> British officials risked discovering that the majority view in Hong Kong was contrary to Britain’s interests; by refusing to execute a survey, officials maintained a degree of deniability. But this also left officials without reliable information about what the Hong Kong public wanted or would find acceptable.

In the absence of their own survey, the Hong Kong government had to look to other sources to discern Hong Kong opinion. Colonial civil servants collected information about surveys commissioned by others into scrapbooks. There were multiple problems with relying on surveys executed by third parties, however. Each survey asked its own questions leaving officials hostage to the questions that others had set. This also entailed that surveys could not be easily compared with one another to show trends across time, or to identify similarities or differences

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<sup>51</sup> Meeting record, Wang and MacLehose et al., 8 April 1982 enclosed in letter, MacLehose to Donald, 13 April 1982, FCO 21/2212 f23, TNA.

<sup>52</sup> Youde telegram TNA.

<sup>53</sup> ‘A real need to survey 1997 issue’, *SCMP*, 16 January 1983, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Cradock, *Experiences of China*, 249.

<sup>55</sup> Memo, Pym to Thatcher, 16 February 1983, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

between segments. Furthermore, colonial officials had to trust in the methodological soundness, correct collection and unbiased interpretation of published polls. Taken together, these issues make it highly doubtful that Hong Kong government officials could glean any reliable, longitudinal and systematic insights into the opinions of the Hong Kong public beyond the mere snapshot in time that each individual poll provided.

After the Sino-British Joint Declaration was drafted, the colonial government launched an opinion-gathering effort that welcomed views to the specially created Assessment Office.<sup>57</sup> The exercise was, however, beset with issues. Initially, the Assessment Office would only accept submissions as complete if they included the submitter's name and address.<sup>58</sup> Some were concerned that their submission may fall into the hands of the CCP after 1997 which might invite reprisals and were, therefore, reluctant to make their views known. This stipulation was later reversed but had already caused confusion and distrust, and no additional time was granted in which to make submissions.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, in compiling their report, the assessors made their own determinations about which submissions could be discarded, gave equal weighting to groups as they did to individuals, and used indirect sources alongside direct ones.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, the Assessment Office was a rather redundant exercise. Britain and China had already reached agreement over Hong Kong's future and neither government would accept giving Hong Kong people a veto over the assiduously negotiated document.<sup>61</sup> The British side published the text as a white paper that told Hong Kong people that the Joint Declaration was being offered to them on a 'take it or leave it' basis: "there is no realistic possibility of amending the text. The agreement must be taken as a whole".<sup>62</sup> The Assessment Office noted "resentment at the lack of involvement in the talks and frustration at the fact that the draft agreement could not be altered."<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, the Office concluded: "most of the people of Hong Kong find the draft agreement acceptable."<sup>64</sup> The Hong Kong Observers condemned the Assessment Office as "a

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<sup>57</sup> Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 154.

<sup>58</sup> McGurn, *Perfidious Albion*, 62.

<sup>59</sup> Ching, *Hong Kong and China*, 45.

<sup>60</sup> Hau, 'Official Mind', 1206.

<sup>61</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 103.

<sup>62</sup> White paper, 'A Draft Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Future of Hong Kong', Hong Kong Government Printer, 26 September 1984, 7.

<sup>63</sup> 'Arrangements for Testing the Acceptability in Hong Kong of the Draft Agreement on the Future of the Territory: Report of the Assessment Office and Report of the Independent Monitoring Team', Independent Monitoring Team, Assessment Office, 29 November 1984, 19.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

farce”.<sup>65</sup> Coming after the Sino-British negotiations had already produced a draft agreement, the Assessment Office exercise cannot be considered a survey of Hong Kong people’s hopes for the future and had no effect whatsoever on the Joint Declaration.

### *The media*

Hong Kong officials maintained voluminous books of newspaper clippings throughout the negotiations. Amongst the articles collected were a mixture of editorial commentaries, letters from the public to the editors of newspapers, and reports reflecting a range of ways that opinions were expressed such as summaries of opinion poll results, the headlines from pressure groups’ position papers, descriptions of protests and quotations from a range of Hong Kong people commenting on the progress of the negotiations.

The Press Library had been keeping newspaper clippings about Hong Kong’s future since 1979, though these were little more than unsystematic scrapbooks.<sup>66</sup> From November 1982, the Information Services Department (ISD) adopted a somewhat more systematic approach, collating local newspaper clippings and officials’ comments and distilling these into a weekly report titled “Media Summary on Hong Kong’s Future”.<sup>67</sup> Each Media Summary was broken into three parts. Firstly, a précis of the major themes that week. Secondly, significant events – such as an official’s comments, reports on a round of negotiations, a visitor to the colony, major pressure group activity, etc. – and detailed how the press and the public had reacted to this event. Thirdly, the tenor and interests of the newspapers were described, broken out into ‘Communist papers’ and ‘non-Communist papers’ (both in Chinese) and the ‘English-language press’.<sup>68</sup> In this way, the colonial government sought to keep track of sentiments expressed in the local newspapers, using this as a proxy for Hong Kong opinion.

Like the surveys gathered by colonial officials, the Hong Kong government’s scrapbooks were also a flawed means of measuring of Hong Kong people’s views. Newspaper commentary is not the same as public opinion. The people who wrote to newspapers or consented to being quoted in them were, in a sense, exceptional. As Haddon-Cave noted, pressure group members and commentators who were named in reports were in the minority, with most of the Hong Kong public wanting to “keep their heads down [...] fearful of victimisation”.<sup>69</sup> The opinions of the

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<sup>65</sup> Bonavia, *Hong Kong 1997*, 136.

<sup>66</sup> See for example: HKRS545-1-42, PRO.

<sup>67</sup> See for example: HKRS14161-1-40 through -49, PRO.

<sup>68</sup> Memo, Masefield to Hoare and Clift, ND, FCO 40/1463 f997, TNA.

<sup>69</sup> Telegram, Haddon-Cave to FCO, 6 December 1983, PREM 19/1059, TNA.

majority of Hong Kong people who had no wish to be cited in print were, therefore, unavailable through this medium. There is no indication that colonial officials attempted to compensate for this by interrogating the biases or calculating the representativeness of each article, or by weighing clippings on either side of a debate against each other. The weekly Media Summary was, therefore, little more than an abbreviation of newspaper coverage of a very small clique of Hong Kong people without the capacity to say much about the Hong Kong public's opinions more broadly.

Moreover, it is unclear whether the right people ever read the weekly Media Summary. The Media Summary was distributed to senior officials including the Governor, Chief Secretary Charles Haddon-Cave, Secretary (General Duties) Lewis 'Bim' Davies, the Secretary for City and New Territories Administration (later called the Secretary for District Administration) David Akers-Jones, the Secretary for Home Affairs Denis Bray, and others.<sup>70</sup> Although the Governor was a member of the British negotiating team and was on the distribution list, there is no indication that Media Summary was ever sent to Britain's lead negotiator, the Ambassador to Beijing (Sir Percy Cradock until late 1983, then Sir Richard Evans), or other senior decisionmakers, such as the Prime Minister or Foreign Secretary. It is possible that colonial officials communicated summaries to these key individuals, either verbally or in memos that no longer exist, but there is no evidence of this. There is also no direct evidence that the weekly Media Summary influenced officials.

### *Hong Kong views sent to the Hong Kong government*

The Hong Kong government could also stand to gain insights into Hong Kong opinion from materials it received from the public. On the approach to Thatcher's September 1982 visit, Hong Kong individuals and groups sent an avalanche of missives to the colonial government's offices. The first letter arrived at Government House on 7 September 1982 and "Written representations in various forms" continued to arrive.<sup>71</sup> Letters, reports, transcripts of speeches and position papers as well as newspaper clippings and surveys commissioned by others arrived from pressure groups including the Hong Kong Observers, Reform Club of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Civic Association, Hong Kong Belongers' Association and Hong Kong Prospect Institute; the student unions of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Hong Kong Baptist College; trade bodies such as the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, Hong Kong

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<sup>70</sup> Memo, Masefield to Hoare and Clift, ND, FCO 40/1463 f997, TNA.

<sup>71</sup> First letter: telegram, Haddon-Cave to FCO, 7 September 1982, THCR 1/10/37A, CAC; quote: telegram, Youde to FCO, 12 October 1982, FCO 40/1460 f769, TNA.

and Kowloon Trades Union Council; and other groups including the General Association of Kowloon District Associations, the *Oriental Daily News* newspaper and a “delegation representing several hundred right-wing Chinese schools, clansmen’s associations and trade unions”.<sup>72</sup> Though triggered by Thatcher’s visit, such materials continued to arrive after Thatcher had left the colony and throughout the Sino-British negotiations in 1983 and 1984.<sup>73</sup>

Colonial officials collected materials in both English and Chinese. The District Affairs and Home Affairs Departments were amongst those that received the largest quantity of materials. The Secretaries in charge of these Departments both read Chinese. Akers-Jones built on the Chinese reading skills he had acquired in Malaya by learning spoken Cantonese.<sup>74</sup> Bray was born in Hong Kong and spent many formative childhood years there before his parents relocated the family to the UK, and spoke Cantonese as his first tongue.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, almost all Chinese language materials were translated into English so that civil servants who did not possess Chinese language skills could still understand the material. The resources dedicated to translation implies that the opinions of Hong Kong people, expressed in either language, were valued and that departments wanted their officials to understand local views.

Hong Kong people’s letters articulated a wide range of views on the future of the colony. In addition to *what* the letters said, the composition of the letters reflected different perceptions of the relationship between the colonial state and Hong Kong society.<sup>76</sup> As Miranda Johnson has commented regarding Māori petitions to British authorities in New Zealand, it is not only the contents but also the *form* of missives between society and the state that can provide insights into how the relationship between them was perceived.<sup>77</sup> The form of Hong Kong people’s letters

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<sup>72</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 12 October 1982, FCO 40/1460 f769, TNA.

<sup>73</sup> Telegram, Higginson to PS No. 10, 7 September 1982, FCO 40/1441 f239, TNA.

<sup>74</sup> Akers-Jones, *Feeling the Stones*, 13; David Akers-Jones, ‘Transcript of interview with Sir David Akers-Jones’, interview by Steve Tsang (1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 416, BSC, 9.

<sup>75</sup> Bray, *Hong Kong Metamorphosis*, 4; Jeremy Bray, *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: Science, Politics and Trust: A Parliamentary Life*, ed. Elizabeth Bray (Elizabeth Bray, 2004), 8.

<sup>76</sup> See for example: letter, Kong to Haddon-Cave, 10 July 1983, HKRS1101-2-9 f24, PRO; letter, NA to unknown, ND, HKRS1101-2-9 f27, PRO; letter, Chen to unknown, 21 August 1983, HKRS1101-2-9 f34, PRO; letter, “A citizen of Hong Kong” to Wan Chai District Board, 20 August 1983, HKRS1101-2-9 f35, PRO; letter and petition, Hu to various, 25 August 1983, HKRS1101-2-9 f37, PRO; letter, Leung to Akers-Jones, 26 August 1983, HKRS1101-2-9 f38, PRO; letter, “Several housewives” to unknown, 30 October 1983, HKRS1101-2-9 f52, PRO; letter, Lai to Blaker, 11 January 1984, HKRS1101-2-9 f59(1), PRO.

<sup>77</sup> Miranda Johnson, ‘Subjects of Difference: Māori Petitions and the Late-Nineteenth Century Colonial State’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 53, no. 3 (2025): 545–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2025.2462629>; see also: Emma Kluge, ‘Papuan Petitions as an Archive of Decolonisation’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 53, no. 3 (2025): 658–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2025.2500357>.

to colonial officials similarly provides insights into how the relationship between the two was seen at the time.

Some of the communications resembled the memorial style petition used when addressing the Emperor and his administrators in Imperial China. Memorials were traditionally written on high quality paper that was then folded inside a cloth cover and bound. The sender's name, recipient, date and topic would be written on the outside. Within these petitions, the writer would begin by showering plaudits on their munificent ruler before humbly setting forth recommendations.<sup>78</sup> Some Hong Kong people sent petitions of a similar style to the colonial government. For example, the Federation of Societies in Sheung Shui District wrote to ExCo and LegCo in March 1984. Their short letter of six pages was enclosed inside a cover page, probably made from a thick cardboard in place of cloth, upon which the topic of the letter was written, as was custom: "Hong Kong's future". There followed a demonstration of the upmost respect to the recipient: "We dare to raise the issue of the future of Hong Kong", it began, "We respectfully pray to submit [this petition] to the British Parliament and related parties". The remaining pages continued in a similar vein, tentatively setting out principles followed by proposals that built thereon.<sup>79</sup> The Assistant Director for ExCo and LegCo acknowledged the petition in far less elaborate terms than those in which it had been expressed received.<sup>80</sup> This and other deferential letters showed that the Imperial style still weighed heavily on some Hong Kong people in their perception of the relationship between themselves and the colonial government.

In contrast, others treated colonial Secretaries as a constituent might treat their MP. They asserted their right to be listened to and laid out recommendations like demands, occasionally criticising the colonial administration's lack of consideration for Hong Kong people's views. For instance, Kong Kang-ching, who gave a post office box in place of a personal address, wrote to Akers-Jones, Thatcher and Xu Jiatur. In his letter, Kong credited "hardworking Chinese" for Hong Kong's "present prosperity" and criticised the colonial administration for having "lacked foresight" in failing to improve Hong Kong's social and political situation. While noting that Hong Kong people were unused to China's socialism, Kong nonetheless thought it inevitable that "Hong Kong will finally unite with China." He advanced many suggestions for how to maintain the city's

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<sup>78</sup> Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Harvard University Press, 1994); Yang, 'James Flint'.

<sup>79</sup> Letter, Federation of Societies in Sheung Shui District to ExCo and LegCo, 8 March 1984 enclosed in memo, Chan to Davies, 14 March 1984, HKRS1101-2-9, PRO.

<sup>80</sup> Memo, Chan to Davies, 14 March 1984, HKRS1101-2-9, PRO.

prosperity in the meantime.<sup>81</sup> Kong received a courteous but brief acknowledgement from the District Administration offices.<sup>82</sup>

There were two notable differences between Hong Kong letter writers and someone who might write to their MP in a parliamentary democracy such as Britain. Firstly, many Hong Kong people sent their letters to the Hong Kong government anonymously, signing off under a group name and/or sent without a return address. This perhaps reflects a degree of trepidation that Hong Kong people harboured about the possible legal ramifications of petitioning the government. Secondly, Hong Kong government officials were, of course, not MPs. They were not elected and had no duty to react to pressure from 'constituents'. Hong Kong people could write but the pressure they could apply was limited by the minimal power they held over colonial officials.

There are indications that Hong Kong government civil servants engaged with the materials they received. Various opinion polls, newspaper clippings and letters were annotated, translated, replied to and sometimes shared amongst officials.<sup>83</sup> On one occasion, Ambassador Cradock even referred to Hong Kong opinion polls and Hong Kong Chinese language newspapers. Chinese negotiator Li Jusheng had asserted that any Hong Kong opinion that posited anything other than the desire for a resumption of Chinese control was unrepresentative. In July 1983, Cradock replied that polls and newspapers indicated the contrary. Another Chinese negotiator, Yao Guang, pointed out that none of the Hong Kong newspapers the Ambassador had cited disagreed with the principle that Hong Kong was China's territory.<sup>84</sup> Yet British officials' references to such materials are fleeting and few. It therefore appears that although the Hong Kong government gathered clippings and other materials, these did not significantly affect the Sino-British negotiations.

Seen as sources of the Hong Kong public's views, they were replete with limitations and drawbacks, some of which paralleled the issues with newspaper articles and opinion polls. Views expressed in letters were not analysed or reconciled in any systematic way. Although weekly summaries of the media made their way to the Governor and senior officials, comparable reports consolidating the far wider range of views expressed through other mediums were not produced and simply languished in folders without even a Media Summary-style report to make sense of them. This might imply that officials were not as interested in local views as they were in how the

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<sup>81</sup> Letter, Kong to Akers-Jones, 26 July 1983, HKRS1101-2-9 f25, PRO.

<sup>82</sup> Letter, Tai to Kong, 5 October 1983, HKRS1101-2-9 f48, PRO.

<sup>83</sup> For Departments, see for example: HKRS1101-2-9 and HKRS1101-2-10, both PRO; for District Offices, see for example: HKRS500-4-10 and HKRS500-4-16, both PRO.

<sup>84</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 21 July 1983, FCO 40/1571 f629, TNA; telegram, Cradock to FCO, 26 July 1983, PREM 19/1056, TNA; the Galsworthy manuscript, 130.

government was being perceived by the media. It is possible that colonial officials rationalised and weighed the evidence themselves, but there is no indication that there existed a formalised process for doing this. Additionally, although officials occasionally shared missives with their colleagues across the Secretariat, there is no indication of a cross-departmental attempt to consolidate the views received from Hong Kong people. Lastly, as with the weekly Media Summary, there is no evidence that the Hong Kong government's materials were shared with colleagues in London or the British Embassy in Beijing. With Westminster reliant on the Hong Kong government to gather Hong Kong views, this lack of communication was the most critical feature that undermined the Hong Kong government's opinion gathering machinery.

### *Influential organisations: Heung Yee Kuk, Urban Council and District Boards*

Youde had also suggested the Heung Yee Kuk, Urban Council and District Boards as possible sources of information about Hong Kong opinion. Youde placed these groups in a category labelled "if necessary" and, as it transpired, it must not have been thought especially necessary to engage these groups, as each received perishingly little contact with colonial or British officials. The Heung Yee Kuk received just 40 minutes of Luce's time in September 1983.<sup>85</sup> In October 1983, Donald and Hum received five Urban Council members in London, who expressed concern over Beijing's propaganda campaign and sought ways of protecting Hong Kong's freedoms and autonomy.<sup>86</sup> Ambassador Designate Evans had a one hour meeting with the Urban Council in November 1983.<sup>87</sup> Face-to-face meetings with these groups were infrequent. Hong Kong and British officials did keep newspaper clippings about and the occasional letter from these groups; it was perhaps thought that this sufficed.

Aside from infrequent, often brief meetings and maintaining scrapbooks, there is no other indication of colonial officials aiming to, in Governor Youde's words, "seek the views" of these groups.<sup>88</sup> On the contrary, on one occasion the colonial government intervened to *prevent* a meeting. In March 1983, Heung Yee Kuk Chairman, Lau Wong-fat, wrote to Thatcher asking for a briefing. Lau had to wait almost eight weeks for a reply: in April, the Hong Kong government Chief Secretary's office interceded to turn down the request on the basis that the Sino-British

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<sup>85</sup> Cathy Yeung, 'Minister hears view on future of HK', *Hong Kong Standard*, 28 September 1983, 2.

<sup>86</sup> Minute, Donald, Hum and five members of the Urban Council, 3 October 1983, FCO 40/1556 f668, FOI/TNA.

<sup>87</sup> Barry Choi and Frank Choi, 'Evans told of need for British link', *SCMP*, 19 November 1983, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Youde telegram TNA.

negotiations were confidential.<sup>89</sup> The British side's refusal to engage groups contrasted with the Chinese government's willingness to entertain those same groups. For instance, only a few months before Lau wrote to Thatcher, Chinese officials had discussed the negotiations with seven Heung Yee Kuk members while they were on a visit to China.<sup>90</sup> This meant that British and colonial officials were robbed of the same level of understanding of Hong Kong opinion as their Chinese counterparts were able to acquire.

## *Summary*

The colonial government, like the British government, claimed in that it valued the opinions of Hong Kong people. In private, however, Youde had to work to convince officials to take account of Hong Kong views but his suggestions as to how to achieve this did not fully align with the administration's actions. Surveys were collected but were not systematically analysed. Newspaper clippings filled scrapbooks and were summarised in weekly reports but no attempt was made to probe the representativeness of these articles and Haddon-Cave conceded that they reflected the opinions of a highly select set of Hong Kong people. Letters from the public were engaged with and sometimes shared between departments but there is no indication that they had any effect on official thinking. Lastly, groups such as the Urban Council, Heung Yee Kuk and the District Boards were rarely consulted and, on occasion, their attempts to obtain meetings were even subverted by the colonial government. Additionally, colonial officials only used passive methods, placing the onus on Hong Kong people to make their views known whether that be by commissioning a survey, writing to a government office, publishing an opinion in a newspaper or attempting to secure a meeting. This was despite the fact that the administration possessed numerous tried and tested mechanisms for surveying Hong Kong opinion. Overall, the colonial government was left with few sources of Hong Kong opinion and those it did obtain were far from authoritative, scientific or representative.

This section intervenes in the debate over the extent to which the British side sought and understood Hong Kong opinion. It shows that the colonial government's understanding of Hong Kong people's opinions was limited and anecdotal. Only views ferried via the channels described had a chance of being picked up by colonial officials, who might easily have missed such expressions. While officials in Westminster and the British negotiators tacitly delegated responsibility for assessing local opinions to the Hong Kong government, there is little evidence

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<sup>89</sup> Letter, Davies to Lau, Chan and Ho, 26 April 1983, FCO 40/1550 f266, TNA.

<sup>90</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 21 January 1983, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

that the Hong Kong government passed the few Hong Kong views it did collect to the relevant individuals. Florence Mok and Ambrose Yeo-chi King contributed valuable work concerning the colonial government's apparatus for collecting Hong Kong public opinion but neither author examined how these mechanisms were used during the Sino-British negotiations. The above shows that the colonial administration did not use the channels and methods it had developed for gathering Hong Kong opinions to understand the public's desires regarding the future of their own city.

## Shaping Hong Kong opinion through propaganda and censorship

Towards the middle of the twentieth century, the British Empire embodied a contradiction. On the one hand, the metropole flaunted liberties and freedoms that its imperial subjects purportedly enjoyed.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, in the colonies themselves, restrictions on association, censorship of the media, disenfranchisement of the populace, and the suppression of anti-colonial sentiment using violence, torture and execution was evidence to the contrary.<sup>92</sup> A similar irony beset Hong Kong in the 1980s: the authorities repeatedly claimed that they wanted to hear Hong Kong views; at the same time, however, colonial laws inhibited organisation and disbarred political parties, and the government took active steps towards shaping local opinion through propagating falsehoods and controlling the media.<sup>93</sup> Not only did the colonial government refrain from using its opinion-gathering machinery to understand Hong Kong people's views but it also sought to shape local opinion through propaganda and censorship.

The social scientific literature has demonstrated that the press can play a significant role in mediating state-society relations. As seen in the previous section, the media can help officials to understand public views, effectively passing opinions from one level to the other; the media can also have a role in manipulating public opinion, as in the case of pro-CCP propaganda examined in the previous chapter; the public's desire to consume media can also have an effect on type and tenor of the stories reported.<sup>94</sup> Historians of decolonisation have built on social

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<sup>91</sup> Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 4.

<sup>92</sup> Erik Linstrum, *Age of Emergency: Living with Violence at the End of the British Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 26.

<sup>93</sup> Chin-Chuan Lee and Joseph Man Chan, 'Government Management of the Press in Hong Kong', *Gazette* 46, no. 2 (1990): 125–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001654929004600204>; Ng, *Political Censorship*; Mok, *Covert Colonialism*.

<sup>94</sup> See for example: William L. Allen and Scott Blinder, 'Media Independence through Routine Press-State Relations: Immigration and Government Statistics in the British Press', *The International Journal of*

scientific theorisation with empirical case studies that have examined the role of the media during decolonisation.<sup>95</sup> Yet few have considered how the colonial government's management of the media impacted local opinion during the Sino-British negotiations. John Flowerdew dedicated only a single paragraph to the topic.<sup>96</sup> Lee Chin-Chuan and Joseph Man Chan lent it two pages.<sup>97</sup> In an edited book chapter, S. M. H. Sze surveyed the relationship between the media and political participation in Hong Kong ranging from the Second World War to 1997 but denounced Hong Kong's five most popular papers, which took 70% of the market share in the 1980s, as "apolitical, entertainment oriented and lack[ing] columns related to serious political reporting, analysis or commentaries".<sup>98</sup> Chapter 3 has examined Beijing's relationship with the Hong Kong press, but how did the colonial government interact with Hong Kong media organisations? This section argues that while the colonial government relied on the Hong Kong media to find expressions of local opinion, it simultaneously sought to shape Hong Kong people's views through propaganda and censorship.

British and colonial officials touted the media as a way of conveying views upwards. For example, when Thatcher was asked how she could be sure of Hong Kong views, she replied that she "read many of the Hong Kong papers" amongst other sources.<sup>99</sup> In a speech to the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, Governor Youde professed: "If people wish to make their views public, the press and media are always ready to give them space."<sup>100</sup> When the former Foreign Secretary, David Owen MP (Labour), asked the then Foreign Secretary, Francis Pym, how Hong Kong people were to be consulted, Pym replied to his predecessor saying that Hong Kong people "can and do make their views known to district offices [*sic* – Pym meant District Boards] [...] UMELCO [...] by writing to the Governor and other senior officials [... and] the vocal free press".<sup>101</sup> Additionally, as shown in the previous section, officials monitored newspapers for expressions of local opinion. On the other hand, the colonial government endowed itself with significant legal

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*Press/Politics* 23, no. 2 (2018): 202–26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161218771897>; Matthew A. Baum and Philip B. K. Potter, 'The Relationships Between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis', *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (2008): 39–65, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060406.214132>.

<sup>95</sup> Rosalind Coffey, *The British Press, Public Opinion and the End of Empire in Africa: The 'Wind of Change', 1957-60* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022); Linstrum, *Age of Emergency*.

<sup>96</sup> Flowerdew, *Final Years*, 45.

<sup>97</sup> Lee and Chan, 'Government Management', 133–34.

<sup>98</sup> S. M. H. Sze, 'Media, Subculture and Political Participation: Characteristics of Political Populism of Hong Kong', in *Political Participation in Hong Kong: Theoretical Issues and Historical Legacy*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng (City University of Hong Kong Press, 1999), 193.

<sup>99</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 September 1982, FCO 40/1458 f653, TNA.

<sup>100</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 21 January 1983, FCO 40/1546 f53, TNA.

<sup>101</sup> Letter, Pym to Owen, 21 March 1983, FCO 40/1549 f203, TNA.

controls over the media. Michael Ng has catalogued how the administration kept control over publications using the law and how legislation promoted self-censorship amongst media producers.<sup>102</sup> Likewise, Chin-Chuan Lee and Joseph Man Chan have detailed how the ISD carefully mediated relations between the colonial administration and the media.<sup>103</sup> Existing research causes us to question how free the Hong Kong media was to act as a beacon for Hong Kong public wishes in the way that British officials described.

British officials thought it essential to control Hong Kong public opinion. Thatcher, for instance, considered ways of ensuring that Hong Kong people were aligned with British official thinking, telling a meeting of officials: “We might need to send a team of people to explain our [the British government’s] thinking about the future”.<sup>104</sup> Declassified archival documents show that the colonial government used its censorship powers during the Sino-British negotiations. In advance of Thatcher’s September 1982 visit, amongst a “frenzy” of media speculation, officials attempted to “damp down expectations” albeit with little success.<sup>105</sup> Then, in December 1982, the Entertainment Television Authority wrote to all Hong Kong radio stations asking that they avoid the 1997 issue in their regular programming, such as discussion shows, and only mention it during news segments.<sup>106</sup> Though framed as a request rather than an order, it was inadvisable to fail to comply because the Hong Kong government maintained a monopoly over the airwaves and the issuance of broadcast licenses. Similarly, the producers of the Andy Lau Tak-wah drama film *The Home at Hong Kong* were forced to cut references to 1997 as well as newsreel footage of Margaret Thatcher’s 1982 visit to Hong Kong when the film was released in 1983. Chief Censor Pierre Lebrun said: “We cut the bits that were prejudicial to the outcome of the talks on Hongkong’s future”. Film industry professionals were concerned that growing uncertainty over what was and was not acceptable to the censors would discourage potential backers from investing in Hong Kong’s film industry.<sup>107</sup> Although these are only a few instances of censorship, these are only the instances we know about through the available archival material; it is plausible that the colonial government exerted its weight on more occasions. Moreover, they would have sent a message to media producers to censor themselves lest they invoke the wrath of the colonial government.

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<sup>102</sup> Ng, *Political Censorship*.

<sup>103</sup> Lee and Chan, ‘Government Management’.

<sup>104</sup> Meeting note, Thatcher and Pym et al., 28 July 1982, PREM 19/789, TNA.

<sup>105</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 56.

<sup>106</sup> Report, ‘Media Summary on Hong Kong’s Future Report No. 6 Period: December 7-13, 1982’, Public Relations Division, ISD, Hong Kong government, 14 December 1982, HKRS1416-1-40, PRO.

<sup>107</sup> Charles Scanlon, ‘1997 taboo for HK films’, *Hong Kong Standard*, 19 September 1983, 3.

Aside from direct intervention, the British side also sought to control Hong Kong opinion by manipulating the media. One way that officials did this was by creating narratives for journalists to consume and report on that were not entirely true. British officials were in unanimous agreement that Hong Kong people should be “*seen to be involved*”.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, maintaining this appearance was thought so necessary that the colonial government issued guidance to representative offices in Britain and other countries to “counter any suggestion that the views of the people of Hong Kong are not [...] being taken into account”.<sup>109</sup> British officials ensured that Hong Kong people were *seen to be involved* by advertising whenever they met with local people. For example, UMELCO’s visit to Downing Street in early September 1982 (as detailed in Chapter 2) and Thatcher’s meetings in Hong Kong (noted above) were flaunted through press releases and in comments made by British officials to Hong Kong journalists; we will see in Chapter 5 how UMELCO’s later meetings with British officials were also lauded in positive press releases that betrayed growing dissatisfaction, disunity and disagreement behind closed doors. Yet, as previously argued, such meetings were often less discursive and more dictatorial, with the Prime Minister telling successive audiences that British administration must continue in order to protect Hong Kong’s prosperity.

British officials also exaggerated when describing the state of the Sino-British talks. In October 1982, for instance, Governor Youde told LegCo in the Council Chamber, which was open to the public and the press, that “meetings in Peking to follow up Mrs. Thatcher’s visit have begun.”<sup>110</sup> In actuality, Ambassador Cradock had only had one meeting with the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister with responsibility for Sino-British relations, Zhang Wenjin, and formal negotiations would not begin until July 1983. Having attempted to calm Hong Kong nerves in the short term, Youde became increasingly embarrassed as successive months ticked over without Britain and China coming to the negotiating table.<sup>111</sup> Youde had hoped there would be a steady stream of events to report on and provide opportunities for “the Hong Kong dimension” to be “*seen to be involved*” in the talks.<sup>112</sup> But by November 1982, with little activity to report and nothing further to announce, Youde complained that the “lack of any outward sign of activity ‘on

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<sup>108</sup> The same phrase appeared in the following, emphasis added to both: telegram, Youde to Donald, 1 October 1982, FCO 40/1466 f3, TNA; telegram, Cradock to Donald, 1 October 1982, FCO 21/2216 f130, TNA.

<sup>109</sup> Telegram, Haddon-Cave to Hong Kong Government Office London, 29 February 1983, FCO 40/1548 f93, TNA.

<sup>110</sup> Legislative Council (Hong Kong) Hansard, 6 October 1982 [https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr82-83/english/lc\\_sitg/hansard/h821006.pdf](https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr82-83/english/lc_sitg/hansard/h821006.pdf) (accessed 14 January 2024).

<sup>111</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 106.

<sup>112</sup> Telegram, Youde to Donald, 1 October 1982, FCO 40/1466 f3, TNA.

behalf of Hong Kong' is already leading to questions here." China, meanwhile, continued to welcome Hong Kong delegates to Beijing and project propaganda into the colony. Something had to happen to show Hong Kong people that their government was acting on their behalf, the Governor urged.

Youde recommended manufacturing an event to present to the press, which, it was hoped, would subsequently report on the event to the Hong Kong public. The Governor suggested taking himself to London to give the impression that Hong Kong was being represented there.<sup>113</sup> In other words, the Governor proposed fabricating an event purely to give newspapers something to report on and in order to reassure the Hong Kong public. In Beijing, Ambassador Cradock agreed it was important "for Hong Kong people to be seen to be involved".<sup>114</sup> But he balked at Youde's suggestion of manufacturing an event, arguing that the potential benefits were few. If the bluff were exposed, it could damage the colonial government's reputation and weaken UMELCO's trust. Besides, Cradock argued, as he led the British negotiating team it would make more sense for him to visit London rather than Youde to go, or for Youde to visit Cradock in Beijing; there was no reason for Youde to be in London.<sup>115</sup> Youde defended his proposal. The point was not to show bilateral progress between the British and Chinese negotiators but rather to demonstrate that there was activity by British actors on behalf of Hong Kong people – even when there was not. Concerned Unofficials, Youde added, had told him that Beijing's campaign of consultations was undermining confidence in the British side. By making the visit, the Governor would be signalling to UMELCO and the Hong Kong public that their views were being brought to London's attention.<sup>116</sup> Foreign Secretary, Francis Pym, quashed the idea, concurring with Ambassador Cradock that the potential benefits were outweighed by the possible pitfalls.<sup>117</sup> Although Youde's scheme did not get off the ground, it reflects the lengths to which British officials considered going to misdirect the Hong Kong public and manage local opinion.

The British side also manipulated the press by leaking stories to journalists in the hopes of influencing Hong Kong opinion. Youde was alarmed by an intelligence report outlining China's United Front tactics, which said that Beijing was aiming to isolate Hong Kong people who supported the colonial government. Simultaneously, Beijing sought to win over the significant segment of Hong Kong society who concurred that Hong Kong belonged to China while doubting Beijing's ability to successfully run a capitalist enclave. In response, Youde floated the idea of

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<sup>113</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 12 November 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>114</sup> Telegram, Cradock to Donald, 1 October 1982, FCO 21/2216 f130, TNA.

<sup>115</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 15 November 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>116</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 16 November 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>117</sup> Letter, Homles to Coles, 18 November 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

selectively briefing journalists and encouraging them to write articles casting doubt on Chinese officials' understanding of how Hong Kong worked, while being careful to avoid attribution to colonial officials.<sup>118</sup> Cradock agreed with the idea but recommended that these briefings be given to journalists at non-Hong Kong newspapers in anticipation that such stories would be repeated in Hong Kong, putting greater distance (and, therefore, deniability) between British officials and the Hong Kong papers.<sup>119</sup> The FCO concurred and worked with the Governor to identify "ways in which the press could be influenced."<sup>120</sup>

There followed an "an intensive briefing campaign".<sup>121</sup> Local Hong Kong newspapers as well as publications that were sold across the world such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time* magazine and *The Economist* were listed as potential targets.<sup>122</sup> Employees of the British Embassy in Washington sought to guide American media outlets to publish articles that were favourable to British viewpoints.<sup>123</sup> A piece published in the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, for example, by the HKD's Warwick Morris as having been published as a result of "selective briefing done at our request in Washington."<sup>124</sup> There is also some evidence that Cradock gave off the record briefings to British journalists in London ahead of Geoffrey Howe's July 1984 visit to Beijing, resulting in several articles that said Britain had hardened its stance against the Chinese.<sup>125</sup> The only difference between how British officials sought to control the media narrative and how their Chinese counterparts did so was that British officials carried out briefings and leaks covertly whereas the Chinese were often unabashed about what they were doing.

Hong Kong views were, therefore, both welcome and unwelcome. Actions undertaken by British officials operating in London, Hong Kong and elsewhere around the world went beyond merely reporting meetings to the press to include discussions on how to curb Hong Kong opinion, considering creating an event to give the appearance of activity, feeding stories to the press while avoiding attribution and censoring the media in Hong Kong. Comparing these active efforts to control opinion with the passive means used to collect Hong Kong views, the overall impression is that the British and Hong Kong governments were more concerned with managing Hong Kong people's opinions than with listening to it. Additionally, the Hong Kong case illustrates the duality

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<sup>118</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 19 November 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>119</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 22 November 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>120</sup> Letter, Holmes to Coles, 26 November 1982, FCO 40/1467 f189, TNA.

<sup>121</sup> Minute, Thatcher and Haddon-Cave et al., 2 December 1982, FCO 21/2219 f231, TNA.

<sup>122</sup> Letter, Holmes to Coles, 26 November 1982, FCO 40/1467 f189, TNA.

<sup>123</sup> Cheung, *Secrets from the British Archives*, 71.

<sup>124</sup> Memo, Morris to various, 11 January 1983, FCO 40/1546 f20, TNA. The article to which Morris referred was: 'A Talk on Hong Kong's Future With R.C. Lee', *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 28 December 1982, a copy of which is enclosed in Morris's memo.

<sup>125</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 348.

of the role of the media as an actor situated in between the state and society. On the one hand, colonial officials used newspapers as sources to understand Hong Kong opinion. They therefore held the potential to shape officials' perceptions of local views. On the other hand, the British side used the press as a tool by which to shape and control that very same local opinion. This also goes some way towards explaining why even those Hong Kong people who did express their political opinions may have found it difficult to have an effect on British official thinking.

## Conclusion

As Florence Mok and Ambrose Yeo-chi King have detailed, the colonial government possessed a myriad of mechanisms and an elaborate network of boards designed to aid officials in understanding the opinions of Hong Kong people. There has been, however, no examination of whether the colonial government used its apparatus to understand Hong Kong views during the Sino-British negotiations. Despite the channels apparatus available for officials to use, none were activated during the Sino-British talks. Instead, the colonial administration adopted passive methods in taking to monitoring newspapers, letters, position papers and opinion polls for expressions of local views. While providing some anecdotal insights into the opinions of Hong Kong people, each of these sources were dogged by issues that brings their representativeness, reliability and usefulness into question. Westminster relied on the Hong Kong government to take the lead in understanding local opinion. There is, however, little evidence that colonial officials took their sources and systematically summarised, weighed or reported their cross-section of sources to key decisionmakers in London and Beijing.

Moreover, the British side's claim to value local opinions sits in tension with officials' attempts to shape Hong Kong views. The colonial government censored the media, lied to the public about the progress of the talks, published misleading statements about meetings, gave unattributable briefings to international journalists and even considered creating events merely to give the appearance of activity where none existed. By tampering with the media's ability to report and feeding falsehoods to journalists, the colonial administration muddied many of the very same newspaper sources on which it relied for indications of Hong Kong opinion.

There exists in the literature on the Sino-British negotiations a debate over the extent to which the British government considered Hong Kong opinions. Frank Ching and Rebeck C. Cockram professed that the British side made an active use of its opinion-gathering machinery; John Flowerdew and Chalmers Johnson doubted this. This chapter has found that the British side's impression of Hong Kong's wishes was patchy, unscientific and failed to live up to officials'

purported desire to hear Hong Kong views. Moreover, it was open to the accusation of being tempered with by the very colonial officers who professed an interest. The British side made no use of its active apparatus for understanding Hong Kong opinion and was instead informed by a patchwork of sources gathered passively.

This chapter has explored almost all of the dimensions outlined in Governor Youde's taxonomy of potential sources of Hong Kong views. It explored how the colonial government handled opinions expressed in surveys, letters, the media and organisations such as the Urban Council, Heung Yee Kuk and District Boards. Youde also noted business organisations; these were examined in Chapter 1. Youde listed UMELCO as another potential source, which forms the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter 5 – The Role of the Unofficial Members in the Sino-British Negotiations

British officials touted the Unofficial Members of the ExCo and LegCo as channels by which Hong Kong people could make their views known. In autobiographical accounts, former British officials maintained that they regularly asked for the Unofficial Members' opinions, particularly those of ExCo Unofficials. Sir Percy Cradock wrote that ExCo were “fully informed and consulted at each step of the negotiations”.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Sir Robin McLaren claimed that ExCo “were consulted on all important policy matters before decisions were taken”.<sup>2</sup> The existing literature is divided on whether or not the Unofficials impacted the negotiations. On the one hand, academics including Chi-kwan Mark have noted that Unofficials had regular meetings with British officials.<sup>3</sup> Mark described the Conservative government as “eager to consult the Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils regarding Britain’s negotiating strategy.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Milia Hau stated that “Thatcher consulted [UMELCO] before every round of negotiations”.<sup>5</sup> Steve Tsang asserted that these meetings equated to influence, asserting that ExCo “played a significant role” in British policymaking.<sup>6</sup> Journalist Mark Roberti said that ExCo “fought doggedly for Hong Kong’s interests”.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, others have cast doubt on UMELCO’s willingness or ability to argue against British officials and have questioned the Unofficials’ capacity to represent Hong Kong views, both in general terms and specifically with regards to the Sino-British negotiations. Most Unofficial Members were appointed into their position in virtue of their belonging to the highest strata of Hong Kong’s business and professional circles. As Ambrose Yeo-chi King put it, the Unofficials were representative more of the “grass-tops” than of the grassroots.<sup>8</sup> Appointments created and perpetuated an alliance between the colonial government and Hong Kong’s (mostly

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<sup>1</sup> Cradock, *Experiences of China*, 198.

<sup>2</sup> McLaren, *Britain’s Record in Hong Kong*, 22–23.

<sup>3</sup> Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 110, 117, 131, 137, 143–44 and 154.

<sup>4</sup> Chi-kwan Mark, ‘Decolonising Britishness? The 1981 British Nationality Act and the Identity Crisis of Hong Kong Elites’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48, no. 3 (2020): 579, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2019.1638619>.

<sup>5</sup> Hau, ‘Official Mind’, 1204.

<sup>6</sup> Tsang, *Appointment with China*, 101.

<sup>7</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, xiv.

<sup>8</sup> King, ‘Administrative Absorption’, 425.

commercial) elite.<sup>9</sup> The Unofficials were not elected representatives of the people and were, in Joseph Y. S. Cheng's words, "not accountable to the Hong Kong public".<sup>10</sup> Instead, as Lo Shiu-hing described, they were a "politically conservative, pro-establishment" clique whose interests were best served by identification with the colonial government, reluctant to challenge officials for fear of losing the benefits and privileges enjoyed in virtue of their appointment as Unofficial Members.<sup>11</sup> Many have, therefore, dismissed the Unofficials as unwilling or unable to influence British and colonial politics. For instance, in her popular history book, Louisa Lim assessed that "the Unofficials' impact on the Joint Declaration was limited".<sup>12</sup> Similarly, journalist Robert Cottrell concluded that ExCo "never [...] managed to change anything."<sup>13</sup> The belief that the Unofficials were ineffectual has found its way into journalistic coverage, too. For instance, in *The Guardian*, Vincent Ni and Jason Rodrigues wrote that the Unofficial Members "tried – and failed – to influence the course of history."<sup>14</sup> The prevailing attitude is, therefore, that the Unofficials were mere 'yes men' who approved of anything and everything the Governor demanded, and consequently had little or no influence on the Sino-British talks.

The Unofficial Members have often been left on the peripheries of the literature about the Sino-British negotiations, perhaps owing to the assumption that they were incidental to the talks. The only study dedicated to the Unofficial Members' sway over the negotiations was by Yui Chim Lo, who argued that: "UMELCO had little influence over the British policy."<sup>15</sup> This conclusion was, however, based on a thorough analysis of only three of the issues that the Unofficials attempted to impact. Additionally, Lo's paper mostly drew on just two primary sources: autobiographies and TNA series PREM 19. The paper did not cite archive material from any other UK-based archives, such as transcripts of interviews with former Unofficial Members held at the BSC, nor did it make use of any archive material stored in Hong Kong. There remain various case studies other than

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<sup>9</sup> Alvin Y. So, 'New Middle Class Politics on Hong Kong: 1997 and Democratization', *Asiatische Studien – Études Asiatiques* 49 (1995): 93, <https://doi.org/10.5169/SEALS-147176>; So, 'Hong Kong's Embattled... NIEs', 175.

<sup>10</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 78.

<sup>11</sup> Lo, *Politics of Democratization*, 48; see also: Yash Ghai, 'The Past and the Future of Hong Kong's Constitution', *The China Quarterly* 128 (1991): 802, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000004355>.

<sup>12</sup> Lim, *Indelible City*, ch. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 143 cf. 116 where Cottrell details how ExCo held the FCO back from changing its negotiating objectives.

<sup>14</sup> Vincent Ni and Jason Rodrigues, 'The Hong Kong "Unofficials" who advised Britain on the handover – and were ignored', *The Guardian*, 30 July 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/30/the-hong-kong-unofficials-who-advised-britain-on-the-handover-and-were-ignored> (accessed 16 September 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Lo, 'Last Stand of Colonialism', 372.

the three Lo identified as well as a wealth of primary materials that are yet to be examined in detail in assessing the Unofficials' degree of influence on the Sino-British negotiations.

This chapter examines the role of the Unofficials in the Sino-British negotiations, building on the analysis in Chapter 2 that considered the Unofficial Members' influence during the period before the formal negotiations got underway. It draws on a range of sources including some that have already been referred to in the existing literature – such as autobiographies and the PREM 19 series – but also other TNA series, material from other UK-based archives, items from Hong Kong archives, interviews and more. Contact between the Unofficial Members and Chinese officials was noted in Chapter 3; consequently, only passing mention is made to this relationship in this chapter which instead focuses on the Unofficials' interactions with British and colonial officials.

This chapter adopts a new diplomatic history approach to examining the influence of the Unofficial Members on the Sino-British negotiations. New diplomatic history moves the focus away from examining exchanges between officials in formal meeting rooms and towards the roles played by non-officials in informal spaces as well as how emotions intervened in diplomacy.<sup>16</sup> The Unofficials Members were non-officials by their nature; they met with each other and with officials in a range of different contexts and locations which, as will be shown, provided opportunities for exchanges with differing degrees of frankness; and emotions intervened at several stages. This chapter, therefore, adds a Hong Kong case study to the growing literature on new diplomatic history.

The first three sections proceed chronologically and show that the Unofficials' influence changed over time. The Unofficial Members were at their most influential in early 1983, their influence dipped by late 1983, then relations between the Unofficials and British officials reached a nadir in mid-1984, and finally the Unofficials' propensity to impact the talks recovered towards the end of 1984. It argues against Lo's conclusion that the Unofficials had a negligible impact on the British side by examining several cases where the Unofficials acting in what they believed to be Hong Kong's best interests – even against the opinions of the Governor and other officials – and which affected the Sino-British negotiations. The final section assesses whether the Unofficials represented the views of Hong Kong people at large.

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<sup>16</sup> de Boer et al., 'Provincializing "New" Diplomatic History'; Mori, 'State of the Art'.

## Consulting ExCo, late 1982 to mid-1983

When Thatcher visited Hong Kong in September 1982, she touted the Unofficials as a channel by which the public could express their views upwards.<sup>17</sup> Yet the British government also promised the Chinese government that discussions over Hong Kong's future would be confidential and bilateral, ruling out having a representative of the people of Hong Kong at the negotiating table.<sup>18</sup> Against this background, how did the Unofficial Members carve out a place for themselves as advisors to the British side and what effect did ExCo have on the British government's approach to the Hong Kong negotiations?

Following Thatcher's September 1982 visit to Hong Kong, the Unofficials, investors and the Hong Kong public alike were initially buoyed by the announcement that the British and Chinese governments had "agreed to enter into talks".<sup>19</sup> For the Unofficials, however, relief was quickly overtaken by the concern that British and Chinese officials were secretly progressing discussions without their knowledge.<sup>20</sup> Beijing's frequent leaks to the media aggravated this perception.<sup>21</sup> In October 1982, an article appeared in the British broadsheet, *The Observer*, that was particularly concerning to the Unofficials because it reported aspects of Thatcher's conversation with Chinese leaders that the Prime Minister had not confided to them.<sup>22</sup> UMELCO were left feeling "angry" when both the Governor and the FCO refused to comment on the veracity of the article.<sup>23</sup> In Youde's words, ExCo's Senior Unofficial Sir S. Y. Chung became that "convinced that HMG [Her Majesty's Government] is not prepared to trust the Unofficials".<sup>24</sup>

Meeting British officials in London in late 1982, Chung said that he and his ExCo colleagues resented how little information British officials had entrusted the Unofficials with.<sup>25</sup> At that time, the British side's aim for the negotiations was to prolong the colonial administration past 1997: an aspiration that the Unofficials shared. Chung demanded that the British government commit to consulting the Unofficials before it made any changes to this position.<sup>26</sup> Youde recommended that the British government concede to Chung's request and commit that

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<sup>17</sup> Press conference question and answer session, Thatcher in Hong Kong, 27 September 1982 transcribed in telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 September 1982, FCO 40/1458 f652, TNA.

<sup>18</sup> Scott, *Political Change*, 181.

<sup>19</sup> Telegram, Donald to FCO, 24 September 1982, FCO 40/1458 f640, TNA.

<sup>20</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 75.

<sup>21</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 58–59.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Gavshon, 'Blueprint for Hong Kong rule', *The Observer*, 10 October 1982, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 58–60.

<sup>24</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 20 October 1982, FCO 40/1466 f71, TNA.

<sup>25</sup> Letter, Holmes to Coles, 15 October 1982, FCO 40/1466 f50, TNA.

<sup>26</sup> Meeting record, Chung and Pym et al., 14 October 1982, PREM 19/1798, TNA.

the British government would not change its negotiating objective “without consultation with Unofficials”.<sup>27</sup> Ambassador Cradock argued against the Governor’s proposal, reminding his colleagues that the talks were supposed to be bilateral and confidential. Cradock also warned against creating a precedent, as there may be occasions in the future when it might be felt wiser not to update ExCo.<sup>28</sup> The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, Francis Pym, however, sided with Youde. Thatcher decided: “We will [...] hold full discussions with the Unofficials before we take any decision on major changes in our negotiating position.”<sup>29</sup> By October 1982, therefore, ExCo had the British government’s commitment that they would be consulted.

British officials had many motivations for acquiescing to ExCo’s calls for consultation. One was that some British officials did genuinely value the Unofficial Members’ thoughts. Governors had in the years before the First World War appointed Chinese representatives to the Councils in the belief that they could provide insights into how the local population may react to the government’s policies.<sup>30</sup> A similar logic remained in the 1980s. In his memoirs, Cradock recalls that Thatcher “would urge” him to pay particular attention to the views of ethnically Chinese Unofficial Members “who, she pointed out, were after all Chinese and must therefore know the minds of their compatriots in Peking”.<sup>31</sup> Sir S. Y. Chung stressed the same point, reminding British officials “several times” that the Unofficials were the Governor’s only source of “Chinese’ advice”.<sup>32</sup> It is unclear whether or not Chung truly believed that his and his colleagues’ ethnicity gave them any greater insight into official thinking in Beijing than a non-Chinese person may have held. Cradock himself “had to disagree” with the argument.<sup>33</sup> Chung might have made the claim as part of his broader argument that British officials ought to consult the Unofficials.

Additionally, British officials were anxious to be seen to consult Hong Kong views (as noted in Chapter 4). When Britain and China eventually reached an agreement over the future of Hong Kong, British Parliamentarians would want to see evidence that it was agreeable to the people of Hong Kong and keeping in contact with the Unofficials could help make this case. Pym commented that “involving EXCO [*sic*]” would be “very useful in demonstrating to Parliament that the wishes of the people of Hong Kong have been taken into account” and that ExCo should, therefore, be consulted.<sup>34</sup> In Hong Kong, the Unofficials placed Governor Youde under pressure

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<sup>27</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 20 October 1982, FCO 40/1466 f71, TNA.

<sup>28</sup> Telegram, Cradock to Donald, 14 October 1982, FCO 40/1466 f43, TNA.

<sup>29</sup> Telegram, Pym to Hong Kong, 21 October 1982, FCO 40/1466 f79, TNA.

<sup>30</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Cradock, *Experiences of China*, 196.

<sup>32</sup> Letter, Youde to Clift, 1 November 1982, FCO 40/1467 f201, TNA.

<sup>33</sup> Cradock, *Experiences of China*, 196.

<sup>34</sup> Memo, Pym to Thatcher, 16 February 1983, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

to involve them more closely. As had been the case for decades, part of the Unofficials' function was to lend credibility and legitimacy to the colonial administration while reducing the potential for unrest in Hong Kong.<sup>35</sup> Youde would have wanted to avoid any indication of a rift between the Unofficials and himself, and was anxious to "carry ExCo with us".<sup>36</sup> He therefore pressed London to allow him to brief ExCo more extensively. Lastly, press releases and media coverage of meetings between British officials and Hong Kong Unofficials helped to avoid the criticism that Hong Kong views were being ignored and helped to produce an outward appearance of activity towards addressing the 1997 issue, which Youde had been keen to convey (as noted in Chapter 4).<sup>37</sup> For all of these reasons, British officials had an interest in keeping ExCo's concerns at bay.

Even after the Prime Minister pledged to discuss major changes with the Unofficials, Unofficial Members remained suspicious that British officials did not trust them. In November 1982, Youde reported to London that "among ExCo Unofficials there was a strong feeling that they were still not being taken sufficiently into our confidence". The Unofficials were concerned that either the UK and China were negotiating secretly and that they (the Unofficials) were not being informed or, more worryingly, that the two governments had not even begun to discuss the future of Hong Kong.<sup>38</sup> Chung also complained that the Unofficials were being prevented from properly carrying out their role. Meeting Thatcher in December 1982, he argued that the British government would only receive ExCo's best advice if they were provided with commensurate information. The Unofficials had a special status so should be treated differently, Chung said.<sup>39</sup> Such was his frustration with how ExCo was being treated that Chung and his colleagues considered resigning en masse.<sup>40</sup> In a further attempt to address ExCo's discontent, on 13 January 1983, Lord Belstead reiterated the British government's commitment in a letter to Chung: "I can give you the assurance [...] that [ExCo's] advice will be sought on the formulation of [the British government's] position and the conduct of the negotiations and we shall keep the [Executive] Council fully informed".<sup>41</sup> Less than a week after Belstead's letter, the Unofficials began a series of meetings designed to enable such consultations to take place.

On 18 January 1983, ExCo held its first meeting dedicated to the future of Hong Kong.<sup>42</sup> Matters relating to the 1997 issue were addressed in what were called 'part two' meetings, with

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<sup>35</sup> Goodstadt, 'China and the Selection', 721.

<sup>36</sup> Telegram, Youde to Donald, 13 October 1982, FCO 40/1466 f40, TNA.

<sup>37</sup> Lee and Chan, 'Government Management', 127.

<sup>38</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 18 November 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>39</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher, Chung and Coles, 20 December 1982, PREM 19/1053, TNA.

<sup>40</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 58.

<sup>41</sup> Letter, Belstead to Chung, 13 January 1983, FCO 40/1565 f24, TNA.

<sup>42</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 97.

ordinary ExCo business siphoned off into what were called ‘part one’ meetings.<sup>43</sup> Throughout 1983 and 1984, ‘part two’ meetings were held at least two or three times a week.<sup>44</sup> As activity increased in mid-1984, ExCo met on all seven days and occasionally attended two ‘part two’ meetings in a day, making for eight a week.<sup>45</sup> Journalist Mark Roberti tabulated over 70 meetings across the span of the negotiations.<sup>46</sup>

‘Part two’ meetings were a significant additional demand on the Unofficials’ time and were matched by the resources needed to research future-related issues. ExCo Members were provided with a dedicated room in which to view official documents relating to the negotiations.<sup>47</sup> Access was tightly controlled with Members having to sign in and out, and material could not be taken outside of the room.<sup>48</sup> As a result of their dogged persistence and Chung’s insistence, by the start of 1983, ExCo had secured both the British government’s pledge that they would be consulted and were also given the time, space and resources to fulfil their vocation as advisors.

The ExCo Unofficials were disappointed by how quickly the British appeared to break their promise to consult them, however. Before bilateral talks could get underway, Beijing insisted on a premise: Britain must agree that sovereignty over Hong Kong would return to China in 1997. The British objected that the future of sovereignty over Hong Kong should be a subject of discussion in the formal negotiations. Cradock formulated a way of breaking the impasse without conceding sovereignty, which he dubbed the “first finesse”.<sup>49</sup> He proposed that Thatcher write to the Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang saying she could *consider* the question of sovereignty but only if an agreement could be reached that would be acceptable to both the British and Chinese governments and to the people of Hong Kong.<sup>50</sup> After this letter was drafted, Thatcher instructed Cradock to wait for Youde to inform ExCo about the message; once Youde had briefed ExCo and confirmed that he had done so, the Ambassador would then and only then deliver the message

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<sup>43</sup> Li BSC interview, 84; Q. W. Lee, ‘Transcript of an interview with Sir Quo-wei Lee CBE JP LLD FIB’, interview by Steve Tsang (7 and 14 December 1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 407, BSC, 46.

<sup>44</sup> Oswald Cheung, ‘Transcript of an interview with Sir Oswald Cheung, OBE, QC, JP’, interview by Steve Tsang (5 January 1989), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 327, BSC, 68.

<sup>45</sup> Chung BSC interview, 162; Li BSC interview, 90; Q. W. Lee, ‘Transcript of an interview with Sir Quo-wei Lee CBE JP LLD FIB’, interview by Steve Tsang (7 and 14 December 1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 407, BSC, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 115.

<sup>47</sup> Li BSC interview, 90-2; Q. W. Lee, ‘Transcript of an interview with Sir Quo-wei Lee CBE JP LLD FIB’, interview by Steve Tsang (7 and 14 December 1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 407, BSC, 45-46.

<sup>48</sup> Li BSC interview, 90-92.

<sup>49</sup> Cradock, *Experiences of China*, 186.

<sup>50</sup> Paper, ‘Future of Hong Kong: The Next Stage’, FCO, British government, 11 February 1983 enclosed in memo, Pym to Thatcher, 16 February 1983, PREM 19/1053, TNA; letter, Thatcher to Zhao, 10 March 1983, THCR 3/1/29 f25, CAC.

to Zhao.<sup>51</sup> Youde informed ExCo and reported back to London that most Members were “wholeheartedly in favour” of the tactic.<sup>52</sup> Members were, however, disappointed that they had not been told about the plan beforehand nor given the opportunity to provide feedback when the letter was being drafted. This left ExCo feeling that “they were now being informed rather than consulted.”<sup>53</sup> British officials acknowledged this oversight and were subsequently careful to consult ExCo when deciding how to handle Zhao’s reply.<sup>54</sup> These efforts appeared to have the desired effect, with the Head of the HKD Richard Clift believing that the Unofficial Members were left “much less suspicious” of the British government.<sup>55</sup>

The ‘first finesse’ brought Britain and Beijing closer to the negotiating table but the talks still needed an agenda. The Chinese wanted the first order of business to be “the form of transference of sovereignty” and insisted on using the definite article ‘the’.<sup>56</sup> British officials tried to avoid this, believing it would tie their hands before the negotiations had gotten underway, and suggested instead using the indefinite article: “a transfer of sovereignty”.<sup>57</sup> When British officials asked ExCo for their advice, they recommended omitting any article. The British took this forward and their Chinese counterparts agreed (the article would have made no difference in Chinese anyway).<sup>58</sup> Additionally, the British wanted to delay discussions about sovereignty for as long as possible. ExCo suggested they make “transfer of sovereignty” the final order of business and advised adding “in that order” to prevent the Chinese from discussing sovereignty first. Lastly, ExCo also recommended stating explicitly that the agenda should remain confidential.<sup>59</sup> All three of ExCo’s recommendations were reflected in the final text of the agenda:<sup>60</sup>

It is agreed that during the course of the talks matters relevant to the future of Hong Kong should be discussed, in particular all the subjects mentioned in Mrs Thatcher’s letter [the ‘first finesse’] and Premier Zhao’s [letter of reply]. These will include [1] arrangements for the maintenance of the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong after 1997, [2] arrangements

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<sup>51</sup> Telegram, Pym to Peking, 11 March 1983, PREM 19/1054, TNA.

<sup>52</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 15 March 1983, PREM 19/1054, TNA.

<sup>53</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 98.

<sup>54</sup> Letter, Holmes to Coles, 20 May 1983, PREM 19/1055, TNA.

<sup>55</sup> Memo, Clift to Donald, 1 June 1983, FCO 40/1551 f360, TNA.

<sup>56</sup> Zhou, *Zhou Nan: Reminiscing*, 260; telegram, Cradock to FCO, 25 May 1983, PREM 19/1055, TNA; telegram, Cradock to FCO, 3 June 1983, PREM 19/1055, TNA.

<sup>57</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 21 June 1983, PREM 19/1055, TNA.

<sup>58</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 22 June 1983, PREM 19/1055, TNA.

<sup>59</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 8 June 1983, PREM 19/1055, TNA.

<sup>60</sup> Cheung wrote about British and Chinese officials’ disagreement over the definite article but omitted to mention the Unofficials at all (*Secrets from the British Archives*, 81–82).

in Hong Kong between now and 1997, and [3] matters relating to the transfer of [sovereignty], in that order. It is agreed that the agenda should remain confidential.<sup>61</sup>

British officials busily set about preparing for the first round of formal talks. They decided they would draft detailed papers intended to educate their Chinese counterparts on Hong Kong's legal, financial, economic and monetary systems.<sup>62</sup> These informational papers were all "cleared with EXCO [*sic*"]".<sup>63</sup> Officials also showed ExCo a draft joint statement that the British and Chinese governments would release to announce that talks had started, which ExCo again reviewed and approved.<sup>64</sup>

The Unofficial Members pressed the British government in order to obtain a promise that they would be consulted and secured the resources, time and space necessary to fulfil their advisory role having made repeated representations. Additionally, officials were explicit in their concern to keep the Unofficial Members of ExCo 'on side', conscious of how the media would portray the relationship between them and how this might impact on the Hong Kong public's opinion. Furthermore, the Unofficial Members were not ineffectual in the negotiations. Aside from ExCo's disappointment regarding the drafting of the 'first finesse', ExCo Unofficials and British officials worked in lockstep throughout the first half of 1983 with the Unofficials' recommendations on the agenda and educational papers adopted by British officials. Even before the formal negotiations began, therefore, the Unofficials contributed towards shaping British official thinking and used this time to carve out a place for themselves.

## Redefining Britain's negotiating objective, late 1983 to early 1984

In a classic 1988 paper, Robert D. Putnam postulated that negotiators engaged in international talks have to respond to pressures at two levels. On one level is the desire to maintain cordial bilateral relations with their official counterparts. On the other is pressure from domestic pressure groups.<sup>65</sup> Since Putnam elaborated the 'two-level game theory', it has since been enlarged by political science theorists: Peter F. Trumbore, for instance, argued that the framework

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<sup>61</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 8 June 1983, PREM 19/1055, TNA.

<sup>62</sup> Mark, 'To Educate Deng'.

<sup>63</sup> Letter, Holmes to Butler, 4 August 1983, PREM 19/1056, TNA.

<sup>64</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 16 June 1983, PREM 19/1055, TNA.

<sup>65</sup> Robert D. Putnam, 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games', *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 427–60, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027697>.

out to admit a broader range of domestic actors and pressures that only pressure groups.<sup>66</sup> We may conceive of the Unofficial Members of ExCo as one such ‘domestic’ source of pressure on British negotiators during the Sino-British talks. In late 1983 into early 1984, the British side responded to both levels of the two-level game: while the ExCo Unofficials’ advice initially dominated Britain’s approach to the negotiations, British officials decided that they needed to change tack lest the negotiations break down and took to influencing ExCo’s views rather than the other way around. The flow of influence, therefore, went from ExCo Unofficials to British officials during 1983 but this was inverted in early 1984 by British officials in what they perceived to be a pragmatic reaction to negotiating with Chinese officials. Consequently, as British officials played the two-level game, the Unofficial Members’ influence began to weaken.

ExCo Unofficials and British officials were agreed in their perception of what Hong Kong people wanted. As the Senior Unofficial of LegCo, Roger Lobo, summarised: “a majority in Hong Kong wanted the status quo to be preserved”. If that was unobtainable, the “second best” option would be Britain transferring titular sovereignty to Beijing “provided that British administration continued.”<sup>67</sup> ExCo Unofficials were pleased with the relationship between themselves and London: “the consultation of HMG [Her Majesty’s Government] with the Executive Council [...] is working very well”, Chung assessed.<sup>68</sup> While the Unofficials and British officials were in agreement, the two parties collaborated cordially.

Faced with Chinese intransigence, the British side was forced to reconsider the options open to them in August 1983. Following a review, British officials arrived at three potential courses of action. (1) British negotiators could continue insisting on the colonial status quo but risk the talks breaking down. Alternatively, (2) they could offer to weaken the colonial administration, such as by increasing the representation of ethnic Chinese on the Councils, in exchange for retaining a British governor. Or (3) Britain could capitulate to there being no British administration after 1997.<sup>69</sup> Afraid that the talks might collapse, Cradock recommended making some form of concession by giving ground in one area or another; that is, either (2) or (3).<sup>70</sup> ExCo disagreed, saying that Hong Kong people would never forgive them for conceding at this early

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<sup>66</sup> Peter F. Trumbore, ‘Public Opinion as a Domestic Constraint in International Negotiations: Two-Level Games in the Anglo-Irish Peace Process’, *International Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (1998): 547, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0020-8833.00095>.

<sup>67</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher and ExCo Unofficials et al., 4 July 1983, PREM 19/1056, TNA.

<sup>68</sup> Speaking note, Chung at a meeting between Thatcher and ExCo Unofficials et al., 4 July 1983, PREM 19/1056, TNA.

<sup>69</sup> Paper, ‘The Future of Hong Kong: Talks with the Chinese: A Reappraisal One Year On’, HKD, FCO, British government, 24 August 1983, DEFE 13/2286 f7A, TNA.

<sup>70</sup> Cradock, *Experiences of China*, 117 and 189.

stage.<sup>71</sup> Despite Cradock endorsing a change of tack, ExCo's argument that Hong Kong people would find making a concession unacceptable and convinced British negotiators to persevere in seeking (1) continued colonial administration. In the early months of the formal negotiations, therefore, ExCo's advice still dominated British policy and even trumped that of the British Ambassador to Beijing.

As summer faded into autumn without a change from the Chinese side, some ExCo Unofficials contemplated asking Chinese negotiators to expand on their plans for Hong Kong's future. They believed that once Beijing presented its proposals, British negotiators could challenge their ideas and show that they were unworkable.<sup>72</sup> Unbeknownst to ExCo, Cradock was working on a similar formula, which he called the "second finesse". Under Cradock's scheme, the British would restate their view that continued colonial administration past 1997 would be best for Hong Kong but, on the condition that Britain was not committing itself to any of Beijing's suggestions, offer to explore China's ideas for Hong Kong's future.<sup>73</sup> With ExCo and Britain's lead negotiator in rare agreement, during the fourth round of talks in September 1983, Cradock suggested to Chinese negotiators that they could expand on their ideas at the following round.<sup>74</sup>

Several events conspired to shake ExCo's confidence in this course of action, however, and many Members quickly changed their minds.<sup>75</sup> Firstly, it had become custom for both sides to issue a press release following each round of talks. During the fourth round, however, Chinese negotiators refused to include some of the positive adjectives that had graced previous joint press releases. The omission was noted by commentators, some of whom saw it as an indication that the talks were condemned to failure.<sup>76</sup> Secondly and relatedly, the Hong Kong dollar was thrown into turmoil. Chinese propaganda in the Hong Kong press, British officials' refusal to break with the confidentiality of the talks and the obvious lack of progress between the two sides had created a febrile atmosphere in Hong Kong. Local businesspeople and the general public started to lose hope in there being an amiable resolution to the 1997 issue. They began to sell off assets and use Hong Kong dollars to buy foreign currency, which weakened the exchange rate of the Hong Kong dollar and quickly led to inflation. On 24 September 1983, the day immediately following the downbeat statement from the fourth round of Sino-British talks, the Hong Kong

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<sup>71</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 116.

<sup>72</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 14 September 1983, PREM 19/1057, TNA; the Galsworthy manuscript, 138–39.

<sup>73</sup> Cradock, *Experiences of China*, 190–91.

<sup>74</sup> Telegram telno. 933, Cradock to FCO, 23 September 1983, PREM 19/1057, TNA.

<sup>75</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 26 September 1983, PREM 19/1057, TNA.

<sup>76</sup> Telegram telno. 932, Cradock to FCO, 23 September 1983, PREM 19/1057, TNA.

dollar plunged to an all time low against the US dollar in a crisis known as ‘Black Saturday’.<sup>77</sup> The fall was stabilised by pegging the Hong Kong dollar to the US dollar – an idea that journalist Mark Roberti said had come from a “local economist” whose paper had convinced Governor Youde.<sup>78</sup> Thirdly, Thatcher told journalists that Hong Kong would have become independent long ago had it not been for the complication that the New Territories had been leased rather than ceded to Britain. Following this statement, Hong Kong’s pro-Communist press redoubled their barrage of propaganda, aiming their criticisms squarely at the Prime Minister. This, too, showed external spectators that the negotiations were not going well.<sup>79</sup> Lastly, in disregard of the order of the agenda, Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian told the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, that China was unwilling to discuss Chinese ideas for Hong Kong’s future until the issue of sovereignty was settled.<sup>80</sup> In this context and worried that anything other than an unwavering commitment to the continued colonial administration could exacerbate local instability, most ExCo Members disowned the idea of asking the Chinese to elaborate on their plans.<sup>81</sup> Unofficials Oswald Cheung and David Newbigging asserted that if British negotiators stood firm, the Chinese would back down.<sup>82</sup> Chief Secretary and Official Member of ExCo Sir Philip Haddon-Cave agreed. Governor Youde attempted to persuade ExCo away from this hardline stance and urged them back towards the ‘second finesse’, but ExCo Unofficials remained dedicated to rescinding the advice they had given previously.<sup>83</sup>

The Unofficials had to be cajoled away from this position. In October 1983, ExCo Unofficials arrived in London for further consultations with Thatcher. Speaking to delegates at their hotel, Youde found that some of the Unofficials, including Lydia Dunn and Lo Tak-shing, remained committed to the hardline position of continuing to insist on British administration past 1997. Others, however, had softened their stance on exploring Chinese proposals. These Unofficial Members were perhaps influenced by the change of scenery. In Hong Kong, the Unofficials had to keep discussion of the negotiations between themselves and examined questions of the future inside a highly controlled room. They had also been surrounded by the cavalcade of crises that had cascaded upon the city that September. London was, however, a

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<sup>77</sup> John Greenwood, *Hong Kong’s Link to the US Dollar: Origins and Evolution*, 2nd ed. (Hong Kong University Press, 2022), 138–41.

<sup>78</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 75.

<sup>79</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 26 September 1983, PREM 19/1057, TNA; telegram, Clark to FCO, 5 October 1983, PREM 19/1058, TNA.

<sup>80</sup> Telegram, Thomson to Hong Kong, 27 September 1983, PREM 19/1057, TNA.

<sup>81</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 26 September 1983, PREM 19/1057, TNA.

<sup>82</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 4 October 1983, PREM 19/1058, TNA.

<sup>83</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 154.

break from the Hong Kong bubble: the Unofficials might have used the trip to gain some perspective over Hong Kong's regrettable but resolvable issues. A split of opinion subsequently appeared amongst the group.<sup>84</sup>

Youde promptly informed Thatcher of this division amongst the Unofficial Members.<sup>85</sup> During their meeting on 7 October 1983, the Prime Minister encouraged ExCo Unofficials to accept the 'second finesse' by exploiting the difference of opinion between them. She asked rhetorically whether the Unofficials would prefer to see the negotiations break down rather than hear, without commitment, Beijing's ideas. She tantalised them with the prospect that Beijing's plans might be acceptable to Hong Kong people: if it later "emerged that the Chinese were willing to offer a [...] satisfactory arrangement [...] how would the ordinary people of Hong Kong react to the fact that we had not even explored this offer?" Chung was unmoved and claimed it was "the unanimous recommendation of the Unofficials that HMG [Her Majesty's Government] should [...] seek to continue British administration after 1997 for as long as possible." Oswald Cheung undermined Sir S. Y. Chung's claim of unanimity, saying he "entirely agreed" with Thatcher. Towards the end of the meeting, the Unofficial Members were given the proposed text of the 'second finesse' and half an hour in which to consider it. When they returned, Chung announced that he and his colleagues agreed to it.<sup>86</sup> Divisions amongst the ExCo Unofficials reduced their capacity to influence British officials who, having decided their preferred course of action, capitalised on this disunity to persuade ExCo Unofficials.

A week later, Cradock delivered the 'second finesse' to Chinese Vice Minister Yao Guang, formally inviting the Chinese side to expand on their ideas for Hong Kong's future.<sup>87</sup> When Chinese negotiators brought their proposals to the fifth round in October 1983, it was apparent that Beijing had not developed its ideas beyond the 12-point plan they had leaked that July.<sup>88</sup> After reading a report of the fifth round, Chung, now seemingly resigned to the inevitability that Hong Kong would return to China, concluded that safeguards would be needed in order to keep the Chinese to their promise of leaving Hong Kong's systems and lifestyle relatively untouched. He urged British negotiators to secure "some kind of overall insulator" between Hong Kong and potential future Chinese interference as a matter of urgency.<sup>89</sup> Initially, not all ExCo Members agreed with Chung that British negotiators needed to make seeking assurances a priority. Some Members argued

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<sup>84</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 156.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher and ExCo Unofficials et al., 7 October 1983, PREM 19/1058, TNA.

<sup>87</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 14 October 1983, PREM 19/1058, TNA.

<sup>88</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 19 October 1983, PREM 19/1058, TNA.

<sup>89</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 26 October 1983, PREM 19/1058, TNA.

that British negotiators were capable of addressing the question of assurances alongside discussions on other bilateral issues.<sup>90</sup> But, by early January 1984, more ExCo Members – both Unofficial Members and Official Member Haddon-Cave – were calling for British negotiators to prioritise pressing the Chinese for assurances.<sup>91</sup>

Chung outlined several suggestions for the shape that assurances might take. One was having Beijing agree that constitutional changes could only be initiated by Hong Kong.<sup>92</sup> Another idea was credited to a Taiwanese-born academic at the Chinese University, Professor Bryon Weng, who suggested that Hong Kong could have a Commonwealth-like relationship to China and drew parallels with the relationship between Puerto Rico and the USA.<sup>93</sup> A third idea was that proposed changes should require approval from an advisory commission that would feature representatives from Britain, China and elsewhere.<sup>94</sup> This idea was credited to Wang Guangying, a mainland Chinese businessman who had established China Everbrite Group as a vehicle for mainland investments in Hong Kong.<sup>95</sup> Xinhua Xu Jiatus had told LegCo Unofficial, Allen Lee Pengfei, that the idea “could be considered”.<sup>96</sup> Ji Pengfei even discussed something similar with a visitor from Hong Kong.<sup>97</sup> ExCo Unofficials were, therefore, optimistic that Beijing might agree to issuing some sort of guarantee of Hong Kong’s relative autonomy after 1997.

Other Hong Kong people also reacted to the leaked 12-point plan by demanding assurances. In October 1983, five members of the Urban Council met the FCO’s Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Asia and the Pacific, Alan Donald, and Assistant Head of the HKD, Christopher Hum, in London. The Urban Council members expressed concern that there were no guarantees or external safeguards in place to ensure Hong Kong’s freedoms and autonomy.<sup>98</sup> In February 1984, the Chairman of both the Urban Council and the pressure group Hong Kong Civic Association, Hilton Cheong-Leen, called on the British government to “lift the cloak of confidentiality” that remained draped over the negotiations and to stimulate a discussion over the forms that “international guarantees” might take.<sup>99</sup> The Public Security Advancement

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<sup>90</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 3 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>91</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 203.

<sup>92</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 3 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>93</sup> Daniel Chung, ‘Puerto Rico-style plan for Hong Kong’s future’, *SCMP*, 3 January 1984, 14.

<sup>94</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 3 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>95</sup> Meeting record, Howe and ExCo Unofficials et al., 13 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA (hereafter ExCo meeting TNA).

<sup>96</sup> Telegram telno. 31, Youde to FCO, 9 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid; memo, Wye to Priest, 13 June 1984, FCO 40/1670 f597, TNA.

<sup>98</sup> Minute, Donald and five members of the Urban Council et al., 3 October 1983, FCO 40/1556 f668, FOI/TNA.

<sup>99</sup> Speech, Cheong-Leen to the Urban Council, 14 February 1984, PREM 19/1263, TNA.

Association, which claimed to represent 16 organisations based in the New Territories, wrote to Governor Youde arguing that because Beijing “utterly denies human rights [and] suppresses public opinions”, it would be necessary for the final agreement to be guaranteed by the United Nations or for there to be some mechanism put in place between Britain and China as a safeguard for Hong Kong.<sup>100</sup> The pressure group Hong Kong Observers elaborated several ideas in advance of a December 1983 visit to Beijing.<sup>101</sup> One was that any powers not explicitly reserved for Beijing should be vested in the post-1997 Hong Kong government by default. Another was that the membership of the committee empowered to draft Hong Kong’s postcolonial constitution, the Basic Law, be determined through consultations with Hong Kong people. Lastly, that the draft Basic Law be subject to a referendum. Colonial and British authorities consolidated all of these suggestions onto table. In an adjacent column, they noted the drawbacks of each idea and remained reluctant to raise the notion of assurances with the Chinese.<sup>102</sup>

In mid-January 1984, ExCo Unofficials were back in London for further consultations and again turned the conversation towards assurances. ExCo’s series of meetings with British officials began with concordance. Chung started a meeting with Howe by saying that “the Unofficials now accepted that British administration was no longer a viable proposition.”<sup>103</sup> Official and Unofficial Members agreed to redefine Britain’s objective yet again:

Negotiation for the highest possible degree of autonomy for Hong Kong, both internal and external, consistent with the assumption by China of sovereignty and the right of administration. We should also seek in the negotiation to assert the principle of minimum change in the Hong Kong systems [*sic*]. Any agreement should contain the maximum possible safeguards against Chinese interference including of course a Chinese undertaking of no change for at least 50 years after 1997.<sup>104</sup>

Chung then resurrected his argument that there was little point in British negotiators debating the details of Hong Kong’s future with Chinese officials before safeguards had been established and rehearsed the suggestions he had previously put forward. Some Unofficial Members including

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<sup>100</sup> Letter (translation), Wong to Youde, 13 March 1984, HKRS1101-2-9 f63, PRO.

<sup>101</sup> Cheng, *Struggling for Democracy*, 157–58; Scott, *Political Change*, 209; ‘Observers leave for talks on our future’, *SCMP*, 6 December 1983, 20; Daniel Chung, ‘Local “voice” in draft body’, *SCMP*, 13 December 1983, 1 and 24.

<sup>102</sup> Report, ‘Suggested Forms of Assurances for Lasting Settlement for Hong Kong’, NA, ND enclosed in letter, Ricketts to Coles, 13 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>103</sup> ExCo meeting TNA.

<sup>104</sup> Letter, Ricketts to Coles, 16 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

Michael Sandberg were especially enthusiastic about the idea of an advisory council.<sup>105</sup> Lo Tak-shing and Lydia Dunn put forward similar ideas. Dunn said that she was concerned about China exerting “subtle interference” after 1997 and Lo was similarly worried about “insidious changes” initiated from Beijing.<sup>106</sup> Dunn recommended having an authority that would intervene only when the agreement was breached while Lo proposed that an organisation could be established that would draw attention to any breaches of promises after 1997.<sup>107</sup>

British officials had for months resisted the idea that their negotiators should raise assurances with their Chinese counterparts. Youde worried that if British negotiators insisted on discussing assurances, Chinese suspicions as to Britain’s intentions might be reignited.<sup>108</sup> A Cabinet committee called OD(K), which was dedicated to matters of Hong Kong’s future, examined a range of ideas for assurances but concluded pessimistically: “There could be no copper-bottomed safeguards”.<sup>109</sup> When ExCo Unofficials visited London in mid-January 1984, therefore, British officials tried to dissuade them. Howe, Youde and Cradock each told ExCo Unofficials that Beijing would reject any form of international monitoring mechanism on the basis that such a device would be incompatible with Chinese sovereignty.<sup>110</sup> On the Commonwealth proposal, Howe probed the form this would take and the Unofficials were unable to answer his questions. Cradock dismissed the Commonwealth idea as being fundamentally the same as China’s concept of a ‘Special Administrative Region’.<sup>111</sup> More generally, Thatcher cautioned that one must avoid proposing mechanisms that could turn into a means for Beijing to interfere with Hong Kong.<sup>112</sup> In an effort to close the conversation once and for all, Howe added that, as a co-signatory to the agreement, Britain would be in a position to call out any breaches, implying that further assurances would be unnecessary.<sup>113</sup>

British officials recognised, however, that the clamour for guarantees was growing both inside and outside of ExCo. ExCo Unofficials were unwilling to abandon the topic; Professor Weng and the Hong Kong Observers had stimulated public concern; and even mainland Chinese people, such as Wang Guangying, were contributing their ideas. Eventually, they relented. On 10 February

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<sup>105</sup> ExCo meeting TNA.

<sup>106</sup> Lo: *ibid*; Dunn: meeting record, Thatcher and ExCo Unofficials et al., 16 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>107</sup> ExCo meeting TNA.

<sup>108</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 203–204.

<sup>109</sup> Annex, Cabinet Office, British government, 16 January 1984 annexed to meeting minutes, OD(K)(84) 1st meeting, 16 January 1984, CAB 148/241, TNA.

<sup>110</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 205.

<sup>111</sup> ExCo meeting TNA.

<sup>112</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher and ExCo Unofficials et al., 16 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>113</sup> ExCo meeting TNA.

1984, Ambassador Sir Richard raised the topic of assurances with the Chinese lead negotiator, Zhou Nan. Zhou said that China's commitment to keeping Hong Kong unchanged for 50 years would be contained in the Sino-British agreement.<sup>114</sup> Howe also raised the matter of assurances while visiting Beijing in April 1984, noting the need for obligations to bind both the British and Chinese sides.<sup>115</sup> Chinese officials predictably refused to be shackled by such guarantees yet ExCo and others had succeeded in pressing the British to raise the topic.

While British officials and ExCo Unofficials bartered over assurances, they worked more collegiately on other points. After agreeing to redefine Britain's negotiating objective, ExCo Unofficials insisted that the British inform the Hong Kong public of this change. British officials responded by undertaking to prepare a paper on how this might be achieved. Officials also continued to seek ExCo's feedback on working papers and accepted some of the Unofficials' points.<sup>116</sup> British officials asked ExCo for their advice on whether negotiators should seek to reach an interim or a final agreement. ExCo Unofficials favoured seeking an interim agreement, which officials initially accepted.<sup>117</sup> British officials quickly reversed their concurrence with ExCo, however, much to ExCo's chagrin.<sup>118</sup> These examples show that although British officials resisted raising assurances with the Chinese, they worked cordially with ExCo on a range of other matters.

The Unofficials have been characterised as mere 'yes men', reluctant to challenge officials in the colonial government or the metropole for fear of losing the benefits and privileges they enjoyed in virtue of their appointment.<sup>119</sup> In the literature on the Sino-British talks, academics have criticised UMELCO for having "remained publicly silent during the initial phase of the negotiations."<sup>120</sup> With the benefit of declassified files, we can see that the Unofficial Members of ExCo may have been silent in public but they were active in private. ExCo's advice remained dominant throughout the early stages of the Sino-British negotiations. In late 1983, British officials considered changing course in the face of Chinese obduracy but ExCo convinced them to insist on continued colonial administration for several more rounds of talks. Pressure from the Unofficial Members was not, however, the only consideration weighing on British officials. After British officials decided that a change of course was necessary to avoid a

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<sup>114</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 214.

<sup>115</sup> Telegram, Evans to FCO, 16 April 1984, PREM 19/1264, TNA; telegram, PS to FCO, 17 April 1984, PREM 19/1264, TNA.

<sup>116</sup> Meeting record, Luce and ExCo Unofficials et al., 17 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>117</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 205–206.

<sup>118</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 February 1984, PREM 19/1263, TNA; telegram, Youde to FCO, 3 March 1984, PREM 19/1263, TNA.

<sup>119</sup> Lo, *Politics of Democratization*, 84.

<sup>120</sup> Scott, *Political Change*, 172.

breakdown and sensing a division amongst the ExCo Unofficials, Thatcher exploited this difference of opinion and coaxed them into accepting the 'second finesse'. As such, ExCo Unofficials' advice became intermingled with encouragement from British officials. Next, the Unofficials pushed for British negotiators to procure assurances from Beijing. British officials were reluctant to raise this topic with the Chinese side but, with pressure growing from other quarters inside and outside of Hong Kong, eventually relented. In sum, ExCo were able to press British negotiators on certain matters but British officials redirected pressure the other way when they felt it necessary to do so in response to the two levels at play.

## UMELCO appeal for public support, early 1984 to late 1984

While the literature has remained largely unaware of how the Unofficial Members affected the talks in private, it has noted few exceptions: a LegCo motion in March 1984 followed by an independent delegation to London that May have been seen as exceptions to the general rule that the Unofficials were hesitant to speak up against British officials.<sup>121</sup> This section begins by detailing why the Unofficial Members were content with conducting consultations in private until March 1984 and why, at that point, they changed to public-facing means of pressuring the British government. The following sub-sections examine how efficacious this revised approach was for the Unofficials in obtaining their goals.

ExCo Unofficials were initially content with engaging in consultations behind closed doors. This was a continuation of a process they had been familiar with for addressing ordinary ExCo matters, which Chung called "consensus politics". The process would begin by the Senior Unofficial co-ordinating all Members until agreement was reached on an issue amongst themselves. The Senior Unofficial would then take the group's opinion to Hong Kong government officials. Officials would, in turn, deliberate amongst themselves. Deliberations might result in the Unofficials' recommendations being adopted, rejected or a hybrid created.<sup>122</sup> The 'consensus politics' model suited the Unofficials because they had no need to make their work known to the public: as appointees who did not rely on elections to maintain their positions, the Unofficials were unused to justifying themselves to the rest of Hong Kong.<sup>123</sup> The same process was initially

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<sup>121</sup> Bonavia, *Hong Kong 1997*, 113; Scott, *Political Change*, 200.

<sup>122</sup> Chung BSC interview, 75–76.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 71–72.

applied to 'part two' meetings about future-related matters and sufficed during 1983 and the beginning of 1984.<sup>124</sup>

By early 1984, however, the Unofficial Members became dissatisfied with the 'consensus politics' model. But the Unofficials' lack of outward-facing activity fuelled criticism that they were obsequious 'yes men'. Moreover, the ExCo Unofficials became frustrated as their advice was overridden by British officials with increasing frequency. A series of events in early 1984 showed ExCo Unofficials that their capacity to impact British official thinking was gradually reducing. Having agreed in January 1984 to redefine the British side's negotiating aim, the Unofficials and officials disagreed on how to inform the Hong Kong public of this change. The FCO suggested that Howe, while on a visit to Hong Kong, could make a statement unveiling the new direction. Most ExCo Members, however, thought this would be too sudden and that Hong Kong opinion needed preparing and educating over a longer timescale.<sup>125</sup> OD(K) were informed of ExCo's objections but nonetheless approved the proposal for Howe to make an unveiling statement.<sup>126</sup> ExCo were further shunned when Howe rejected their suggestion that he come to Hong Kong for consultations before travelling to Beijing.<sup>127</sup> As a compromise, ExCo Unofficials called on ministers in London in early April. The April visit saw relations worsen as the meeting descended into bickering. Chung began by affronting his hosts, criticising British negotiators for a "tendency to retreat". Chung and other ExCo Unofficials proceeded to ask about the rights of British Dependent Territories Citizens (BDTC) and raised concerns about establishing a Sino-British group for handling the transition, which were both highly sensitive matters that are detailed below.<sup>128</sup> These events created significant tension between the Unofficials and British officials.

After this series of disagreements and with British officials exasperated by ExCo repeatedly raising the same sensitive subjects, Howe was determined to rein in the ExCo Unofficials. On a visit to Hong Kong in mid-April, Howe told ExCo that if negotiations were to conclude by the September deadline imposed by Beijing, British negotiators "would need freedom to operate tactically". Consequently, "It would not be practicable for there to be consultation with ExCo on every tactical point."<sup>129</sup> Howe's statement effectively suspended the

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<sup>124</sup> Chen Shou-lam, 'Transcript of interviews with Shou-lam Chen Esq, CBE, JP', interview by Steve Tsang (16 August 1989 and 10 November 1989), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 409, BSC, 4.

<sup>125</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 February 1984, PREM 19/1263, TNA.

<sup>126</sup> Telegram, Howe to Hong Kong, 29 February 1984, PREM 19/1263, TNA; annex, Cabinet Office, British government, 28 February 1984 annexed to meeting minutes, OD(K)(84) 2nd meeting, 27 February 1984, CAB 148/241, TNA.

<sup>127</sup> Letter, Ricketts to Coles, 16 March 1984, PREM 19/1263, TNA.

<sup>128</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher and ExCo Unofficials et al., 6 April 1984, PREM 19/1264, TNA.

<sup>129</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 19 April 1984, PREM 19/1264, TNA.

British government's commitment to consult ExCo, inevitably weakening their capacity to influence the negotiations.

The next day, Howe delivered the unveiling statement that ExCo had rallied against. The Foreign Secretary told the Hong Kong public:

it would not be realistic to think of an agreement that provides for continued British administration in Hong Kong after 1997. For that reason, we have been concentrating on other ways of securing the assurances necessary for the continuity of Hong Kong's stability, prosperity and way of life.<sup>130</sup>

Howe's unveiling statement was an inflection point for Hong Kong at large. For the first time from the mouth of a British official, Hong Kong people learned that British administration after 1997 was an unrealistic ambition.<sup>131</sup>

The Unofficials resolved that the changing context demanded adopting different tactics. British officials had become less receptive to the Unofficials' advice and concerns: their objections to the unveiling statement had gone unheeded; their early April visit to London had descended into quarrelling; and critical issues, such as assurances and BDT rights, were being neglected in their view. Moreover, Howe had said in as many words that British negotiators would not necessarily consult the Unofficials anymore. Howe's unveiling statement in April admitted that continued British administration was no longer a possibility. Additionally, the Unofficials had their own reputations and interests to consider: both as Unofficial Members and as individuals whose lives (and, often, businesses) were rooted in Hong Kong, the Unofficials wanted the opportunity to shape their own futures and to be respected by the Hong Kong public for the efforts they were making. The 'consensus politics' model was no longer working.

ExCo Unofficials together with their LegCo colleagues adopted a "going public" strategy. Contrary to the behind closed door conversations that characterised the 'consensus politics' model, by going public the Unofficials sought to take "the pulse of the public, to get and reflect public opinion" and to use this evidence to pressure British officials.<sup>132</sup> The Unofficials' new strategy showed itself in a series of events in 1984, examined in the following sub-sections.

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<sup>130</sup> Speech, Howe to a press conference in Hong Kong, 20 April 1984 enclosed in memo, Goulden to Ricketts, 8 May 1984, FCO 40/1667 f343, TNA.

<sup>131</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 261–62; Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 88; Lim, *Indelible City*, ch. 4; Scott, *Political Change*, 185–86.

<sup>132</sup> Chung BSC interview, 171.

## *Going public and the Lobo motion*

The Lobo motion marked the beginning of UMELCO's 'going public' strategy. ExCo Unofficials were privy to information about the Sino-British negotiations but their LegCo colleagues excluded from the inner circle. Relations between ExCo and LegCo grew tense. In November 1983, some LegCo Members anonymously told the *SCMP* that they were annoyed at their exclusion: "Legislative Councillors are supposed to know everything that is going on. Yet members are not being kept informed. It's unbelievable". Another unnamed Unofficial Member disclosed that frustration was "growing by the day".<sup>133</sup> Before the negotiations got underway, ExCo and LegCo Unofficials had agreed that the objective of the talks should be to seek continued British administration. In November 1983, Chung warned Youde that this aim had changed. ExCo Unofficials' mandate to speak on behalf of UMELCO was based on the agreement that the overriding objective was ensuring continued British administration, Chung reminded the Governor, but the 'second finesse' had effectively jettisoned this goal. China's leaks to the press had made it clear that there had been a change of direction. Yet Chung was prohibited from confirming this to his LegCo colleagues, contributing to LegCo's consternation.<sup>134</sup> Prompted by Chung's complaints, Youde addressed a meeting of UMELCO on 16 December 1983. He confided that British negotiators had failed to convince Beijing to retain the colonial status quo and had asked the Chinese for details about their designs. Chung added that the British government had concluded that there was no longer any possibility of maintaining British administration.<sup>135</sup> In a telegram to the FCO, Youde described the meeting as having been "tense and in some parts emotional" with some Unofficial Members taking the news "much harder than I expected".<sup>136</sup> UMELCO subsequently launched themselves into a series of convocations to come up with a new strategy aimed at ensuring that British negotiators would secure the best terms for what had become Hong Kong's inevitable reunification with China.<sup>137</sup>

Meanwhile, ExCo sought to release LegCo from the secrecy to which they were committed. On 31 January 1984, ExCo met to discuss an FCO paper. The Members were dismayed at its contents, seeing the paper as a reflection of how little London understood Hong Kong opinion. As British officials were clearly in need of Hong Kong views, a "disappointed" ExCo argued that LegCo Members ought to be free to express their thoughts on the future and their interpretation of Hong Kong people's desires. Their Members should be able to express their

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<sup>133</sup> Michael Chugani, 'Legco [*sic*] "outsiders" question talks secrecy', *SCMP*, 22 November 1983, 16.

<sup>134</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 25 November 1983, PREM 19/1059, TNA.

<sup>135</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 197–98.

<sup>136</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 16 December 1983, PREM 19/1059, TNA.

<sup>137</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 76.

opinions without Beijing criticising the British side for breaking with confidentiality, as LegCo were excluded from the British side's inner circle. Lydia Dunn added that LegCo Members should also be encouraged to critically assess Beijing's plan. Allowing LegCo to speak freely and stimulate discussion would provide London with a better picture of Hong Kong views, which they clearly needed.<sup>138</sup> In a hastily revised version of the offending paper, the HKD acknowledged that LegCo were "appointed to represent" the "Hong Kong people" and agreed that LegCo Members "should be free to express their views about the future." It added that LegCo Members ought to be "encouraged to conduct commonsense discussion among Hong Kong people" but should "where practicable [...] consult with the Governor" in order to avoid a "sudden flurry of statements".<sup>139</sup>

Subsequently, on 10 February 1984, Youde updated LegCo on the status of the Sino-British talks and admitted that, with ExCo's consent, British negotiators were no longer arguing for the British colonial administration to continue after 1997. LegCo Unofficials were startled by this news: they had been told in December 1983 that British negotiators were listening to Beijing's designs but not that Britain had resolved to abandon hope of administering Hong Kong past 1997. Importantly, following ExCo's arguments and the HKD's updated recommendations, Youde gave LegCo Unofficials permission to voice their opinions in public.<sup>140</sup>

With their newly acquired freedoms, LegCo Unofficials devised a plan to apply pressure to the colonial government via the LegCo Chamber. In January 1984 while the Senior Unofficial Members, Sir S. Y. Chung of ExCo and Roger Lobo of LegCo, were away in London for discussions with British officials, junior LegCo Unofficials held a meeting chaired by Acting Senior Unofficial Dr Harry Fang.<sup>141</sup> Junior Members remained aggrieved by the lack of information provided to them. One Unofficial Member suggested using the freedoms Youde had recently granted to make a public show of dissatisfaction.<sup>142</sup> This turned into the idea of applying pressure via a motion in the LegCo Chamber. The motion would call upon the FCO to give LegCo Unofficials the opportunity to review the eventual agreement prior to it being signed.<sup>143</sup> Fang drafted the motion and showed it to Lobo on his return.<sup>144</sup> He agreed to take it forward himself and it thereafter became known as

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<sup>138</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 31 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>139</sup> Paper, 'Future of Hong Kong: Public Presentation of HMG's Position', HKD, FCO, British government February 1984 enclosed in letter, Ricketts to Coles, 15 February 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>140</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 13 February 1984, FCO 40/1664 f108, TNA; the Galsworthy manuscript, 236.

<sup>141</sup> Fang BSC interview, 115; Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 81.

<sup>142</sup> Lobo BSC interview, 188–89 and 197.

<sup>143</sup> Fang BSC interview, 115.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*; Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 81.

the 'Lobo motion'.<sup>145</sup> In a later interview, Lobo said that his motivation for taking the motion forward derived from his frustration that Britain and China were "deciding on their own what was best for Hong Kong when we, the people of Hong Kong, did not have a say and did not know what our future would be."<sup>146</sup> On 24 February 1984, Lobo publicly announced his intention to table the motion.<sup>147</sup>

Youde instructed his officials to say that the motion was of the Unofficials' own making.<sup>148</sup> This was not entirely true: the initiative for the Lobo motion had come from LegCo Unofficials but its scope was the result of a negotiation between the Unofficials and the Governor. Initially, the Unofficials wanted to stage the debate on 14 February; Youde persuaded them to delay it to 14 March.<sup>149</sup> In the meantime, Lobo approached Youde with a draft text for the motion, which read: "The Council deemed it essential that any agreement reached must be acceptable to the people of Hong Kong." Youde disapproved of this wording, reminding Lobo that the British side had committed to seeking an agreement acceptable to *three* parties: Hong Kong people, the Chinese government and the British Parliament. The draft text, Youde told him, ignored two of these three groups. Lobo then produced a fallback: "This Council deems it essential that any proposal for the future of Hong Kong should be debated in this Council before any final agreement is reached." Youde had no objections and this became the form of words subsequently used.<sup>150</sup> Through this exchange, Youde delayed the motion by a month and circumscribed the boundaries of the debate by negotiating a weaker formulation of words than the Senior Unofficial had originally wanted. In bartering with the Governor and accepting his pushbacks, Lobo signalled that while the Unofficials intended to pressure the British side, they were nonetheless committed to maintaining the appearance of overall harmony between the Unofficials and the Governor.

From its announcement to its staging, the Lobo motion elicited a diverse range of reactions.<sup>151</sup> Yet, as Lobo recalled in later interviews, the Hong Kong public were generally approving: "some praised me and wanted their children to shake hands with me".<sup>152</sup> Similarly, others told Lobo: "You and your motion were the turning point".<sup>153</sup> Amongst Lobo's supporters

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<sup>145</sup> Fang BSC interview, 191.

<sup>146</sup> Roger Lobo, '[Untitled Hong Kong Heritage Project interview]', interview by Amelia Allsop (12 March 2009), I283, HKHP.

<sup>147</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 259.

<sup>148</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 February 1984, FCO 40/1664 f134, TNA.

<sup>149</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 237.

<sup>150</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 16 February 1984, FCO 40/1664 f111, TNA.

<sup>151</sup> Lobo BSC interview, 198–99.

<sup>152</sup> Roger Lobo, '[Untitled Hong Kong Heritage Project interview]', interview by Amelia Allsop (12 March 2009), I283, HKHP.

<sup>153</sup> Lobo BSC interview, 198–99.

were the Chairman of the Urban Council, Hilton Cheong-Leen; a group of 16 New Territories organisations; and nine trade unions.<sup>154</sup> Chinese officials were, however, outraged by the Lobo motion and aggravated further when the minister with responsibility for Hong Kong, Richard Luce, commented that the Lobo motion was reasonable and the desire for a debate understandable.<sup>155</sup> Zhou Nan summoned Ambassador Evans and reminded him that the future of Hong Kong was a bilateral matter for Britain and China.<sup>156</sup> Zhou said that the two sides had agreed to keep the talks confidential and that the Lobo Motion, if enacted, would draw secret details out into the open and thus represent a significant leak. Evans replied that LegCo Members were constitutionally empowered to table a motion on any subject, that the British side had always observed confidentiality and that it was not playing the ‘public opinion card’ or attempting to create a ‘three-legged stool’. On another occasion, Zhou told Evans that the Chinese side would react strongly if the Lobo Motion proceeded and was passed.<sup>157</sup> They made their disgruntlement public: the *People’s Daily* criticised the Lobo Motion calling it a return to the three-legged stool.<sup>158</sup> Zhou’s vituperation did not, however, persuade the British side to suppress the Unofficials and the Lobo motion proceeded.

On 14 March, the Lobo motion was debated in the LegCo Chamber. The public gallery was crammed with journalists and members of the public could listen to the debate broadcast live over the radio.<sup>159</sup> All Members accepted Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong and that British administration could not continue. Some Members admonished Britain’s pretence of consulting Hong Kong: “Both the Chinese and British governments have openly invited the people of Hong Kong to express their views”, said Wong Lam, “Yet how can they express their views if they have very little or no knowledge of what is going on?” Similarly, Allen Lee Peng-fei read a statement penned by nine union leaders demanding that officials “make the contents of the talks public” and “give the public the opportunity to discuss”.<sup>160</sup> After the debate, Chung and Lobo sent jointly

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<sup>154</sup> Cheong-Leen: speech, Cheong-Leen to the Urban Council, 3 April 1984, FCO 40/1667 f314, TNA; New Territories organisations: letter, Wong to Youde, 13 March 1984, HKRS1101-2-9 f63, PRO; trade unions: Cheng, *In Search*, 166.

<sup>155</sup> Telegram, Evans to FCO, 1 March 1984, PREM 19/1263, TNA.

<sup>156</sup> Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 134.

<sup>157</sup> Telegram, Evans to FCO, 1 March 1984, PREM 19/1263, TNA.

<sup>158</sup> ‘Roger Lobo proposed a motion that the future of Hong Kong must be debated by LegCo, Hong Kong opinion pointed out this was a return to the old ‘three-legged stool’ [罗保提出香港前途须由立法局辩论的动议 香港舆论指出这是重弹 “三脚凳” 老调], *People’s Daily* [人民日报], 2 March 1984, 4.

<sup>159</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 82.

<sup>160</sup> Legislative Council (Hong Kong) Hansard, 14 March 1984 [https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr83-84/english/lc\\_sitg/hansard/h840314.pdf](https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr83-84/english/lc_sitg/hansard/h840314.pdf) (accessed 7 November 2025).

signed letters to all British MPs and Lords enclosing a transcript of the debate.<sup>161</sup> The Lobo motion was not the first occasion on which the Unofficials had shown dissent towards or questioned the colonial administration in the LegCo Chamber but, as a sustained and undisguised criticism of the colonial government, it was unprecedented.

In summary, tensions between the Unofficials and British officials resulted in the Unofficials taking a new tack. No longer restrained to confidential conversations, the Unofficial Members sought public and press attention in order to apply pressure to British officials. The Lobo motion was the first major indication that disgruntlement amongst LegCo Unofficials had boiled over. The Lobo motion also had the effect of stirring up discussion in Hong Kong, much of which was supportive of the Unofficials.

### *Going public on nationality-related matters*

The Unofficials also used the going public strategy to press for a resolution on nationality-related matters. Nationality was one of the most sensitive topics in Hong Kong. In 1977, the British Labour government published a Green Paper that proposed consolidating existing immigration legislation and citizenship categories into just two groups.<sup>162</sup> MacLehose saw the two-group system as potentially problematic as it would give Hong Kong people the impression that Britain was already abandoning the colony by resigning Hong Kong people to the same category as Britain's former colonies. He suggested a three-group concept instead, comprising (1) British Citizens, (2) Citizens of the UK and Colonies, who would enjoy the right of abode in the dependent territories (Hong Kong people would fall into this category), and (3) British Overseas Citizens. Ultimately, the British government was convinced to create a third group: BDTTC, which was a category both of citizenship and of nationality.<sup>163</sup> After the Conservatives won the 1979 General Election, Labour's 1977 proposals were developed into a 1980 White Paper, which granted Hong Kong's wish for a third category of British citizenship.<sup>164</sup> Although London ultimately acquiesced, the debacle left many with the impression that Britain was pre-emptively casting off its responsibilities in anticipation of handing Hong Kong to Beijing.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Memo, Clift to Ricketts, 3 April 1984, FCO 40/1666 f263, TNA.

<sup>162</sup> 'British Nationality Law: Discussion of possible changes', command paper 6795, Home Office, April 1977.

<sup>163</sup> Mark, 'Decolonising Britishness?', 570.

<sup>164</sup> 'British Nationality Law: Outline of Proposed Legislation', command paper 7987, Home Office, July 1980.

<sup>165</sup> Mark, 'Decolonising Britishness?', 584.

The Sino-British negotiations put the relationship between Hong Kong people and the metropole under the spotlight once again, as China did not (and still does not) recognise dual nationality. During their January 1984 visit to London, ExCo Unofficials made multiple demands on British negotiators relating to nationality. They wanted British negotiators to secure China's agreement that BDTCs could keep the rights they presently enjoyed after 1997.<sup>166</sup> They also wanted the name 'British' retained, with Dunn warning that any change of title would be regarded as Britain "down-grading" its commitment to Hong Kong people.<sup>167</sup> Additionally, Unofficial Members also compelled the UK to assist anyone who did not want to live under Chinese rule to settle elsewhere, the implication being Britain.<sup>168</sup> However, when Howe visited Beijing in April 1984, he was unable to convince Wu Xueqian to give ground on nationality-related issues.<sup>169</sup> Dissatisfied with the lack of progress, UMELCO made nationality one of its primary themes as it turned towards the public for support.

With a Parliamentary debate about the future of Hong Kong scheduled for 16 May 1984, UMELCO announced that they would send a delegation to London to lobby MPs. It would be the first delegation UMELCO had launched of their own initiative, independently of British officials' organisation.<sup>170</sup> The Unofficials drafted a manifesto that outlined several "anxious questions": how would the acceptability of the Sino-British agreement be tested and what would the British government do if Hong Kong people did not accept it; would the agreement be reflected in the Basic Law and would Parliament withhold ratification until the Basic Law was drafted; what mechanism would ensure that the agreement was implemented; would Britain remain in effective control of Hong Kong up to 1997? Nationality-related matters were also a prominent theme. UMELCO asked how BDTCs' rights would be preserved and whether Hong Kong people who "cannot accept the idea of living under Communist authority" would "have a right to settlement in the United Kingdom"? The manifesto listed four provisos on which the acceptability of the Sino-British agreement hinged; nationality-related matters were amongst the four: "*guaranteeing* that the rights of British nationals will be safeguarded."<sup>171</sup> As such, the Unofficials intended for nationality and related issues to be amongst the primary themes of their May 1984 manifesto and mission to London.

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<sup>166</sup> Letter, Ricketts to Taylor, 20 February 1984, PREM 19/1263, TNA.

<sup>167</sup> Meeting record, Luce and ExCo Unofficials et al., 17 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

<sup>168</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 206–207.

<sup>169</sup> Telegram, Evans to FCO, 16 April 1984, PREM 19/1264, TNA.

<sup>170</sup> Chung BSC interview, 228.

<sup>171</sup> Manifesto, 'The Future of Hong Kong', UMELCO, 9 May 1984, BRAY 812 104/1056, CAC, original emphasis.

Chung furnished Youde with a copy of the manifesto just one day before the Unofficials flew to London, which Youde urgently telegraphed to the FCO.<sup>172</sup> An FCO-commissioned account of events written some years later recalled: “The FCO and Sir Geoffrey personally were considerably angered by this”.<sup>173</sup> Howe instructed Haddon-Cave to speak immediately with Chung. The Foreign Secretary expressed his disappointment that UMELCO had given no forewarning about their statement. He worried that Beijing would accuse the British government of orchestrating the Unofficials’ manifesto. Lastly, noting that it was signed by UMELCO rather than ExCo and that LegCo Unofficials were not supposed to be privy to the contents of the negotiations, Howe was concerned that the British would be accused of having broken confidentiality, therefore making the talks even more difficult.<sup>174</sup> Haddon-Cave conveyed these points to Chung but he refused to withdraw the manifesto, which was released to the press moments before the Unofficials flew to London the next day.<sup>175</sup>

UMELCO met a hostile reception in London. Chung believed that the FCO had briefed MPs and the press that the Unofficials had come to London to lobby for the right to mass migration from Hong Kong to the UK.<sup>176</sup> If this were true, then it would represent yet another example of British officials manipulating the media (as expanded on in Chapter 4). Questions about immigration dominated discussion during the Unofficials’ meetings. Members of Parliamentary groups on Hong Kong and China grilled UMELCO with questions about migration, despite the visitors’ attempts to raise other topics.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, members of the Foreign Affairs Committee asked about the Unofficials’ somewhat counterintuitive proposal that Hong Kong people should be assured of their right to leave Hong Kong and settle elsewhere. Chung argued that this would give Hong Kong people piece of mind, making them more inclined to stay rather than encouraging them to leave.<sup>178</sup> When meeting Thatcher, the Unofficials stressed that it was not only UMELCO who were concerned about nationality arrangements: Hong Kong people at large were worried, too. They buttressed this assertion by handing the Prime Minister a portfolio of materials including surveys and statements that attested to Hong Kong sentiment. One opinion poll conducted by the Wan Chai District Board, for instance, had found that 60% of 1,118 respondents thought the

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<sup>172</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 8 May 1984, PREM 19/1265, TNA.

<sup>173</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 297.

<sup>174</sup> Telegram, Howe to Hong Kong, 8 May 1984, PREM 19/1265, TNA.

<sup>175</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 152; telegram, Haddon-Cave to Peking, 9 May 1984, PREM 19/1265, TNA.

<sup>176</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong’s Journey*, 86; Mark, *Decolonisation in the Age*, 143–44; Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 89–90.

<sup>177</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong’s Journey*, 86–87.

<sup>178</sup> Meeting summary, members of the Foreign Affairs Committee and UMELCO delegates, 14 May 1984, HC/CP/10456 fHK4, Parliamentary Archives (hereafter, UKPA).

British government should make arrangements for BDTA passport holders to emigrate. Thatcher remained noncommittal.<sup>179</sup>

Despite their efforts, the Unofficial Members were unable to change Parliamentarians' minds. During the House of Commons debate, Howe disassociated the government from UMELCO's manifesto: "that statement was issued entirely on their own initiative. Its terms were not the subject of any prior consultation with the Government, either in London or in Hong Kong." None of the Foreign Affairs Committee MPs whom the Unofficials had met spoke in the Unofficials' favour. Many MPs denounced the ideas put forward by the Unofficials. Former Prime Minister Edward Heath MP (Conservative), for example, declared: "The Foreign Secretary was right to emphasise that the statement from the Unofficial Members [...] represent only their personal views. [...] Those of us who have met other delegations, have visited Hong Kong over a long period and know many sections of the population, know that the Unofficial Members appointed by the Governor do not represent the people of Hong Kong. They never have, and they never will." Robert Parry MP (Labour) commented: "We should make sure that we are listening to the right people and not just to the Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils." Robert Adley MP (Conservative) said that the Unofficials seemed "to reflect no so much the daily concerns of the Hong Kong public but the obsessions of the few" and expressed his agreement with the *SCMP's* description of UMELCO's manifesto as "unrealistic and unnecessarily pessimistic". Sir Ian Percival MP (Conservative) echoed comments about UMELCO: "its representatives are here speaking only for themselves." For the most part, the House spoke against the visitors or ignored them entirely.<sup>180</sup> The Unofficials watched from the public gallery above the Chamber as one after another MPs they had met and those whom they had not spoke out against them.<sup>181</sup>

The following month, the Unofficials launched a similarly ineffective trip to Beijing, as detailed in Chapter 3. The May manifesto had personally angered Deng Xiaoping, who subsequently gave his visitors a cold reception and only entertained half of Chung's talking points before retiring.<sup>182</sup> Abandoned by MPs in Westminster and humiliated by Deng in China, neither delegation had much effect. Both attempts appeared to have failed.

Shortly after the Unofficials returned from Beijing to Hong Kong, however, Youde noted a shift in local attitudes. Before the Unofficials had visited the two capitals, the Unofficials'

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<sup>179</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher and UMELCO delegates et al., 15 May 1984, PREM 19/1265, TNA.

<sup>180</sup> House of Commons (London) Hansard, 16 May 1984 <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1984/may/16/hong-kong> (accessed 16 August 2024).

<sup>181</sup> Pepper, *Keeping Democracy at Bay*, 197–98.

<sup>182</sup> Ching, *Hong Kong and China*, 26; Chung BSC interview, 174 and 178.

compliance with confidentiality and resignation to private discussions with British officials had entailed an erosion in their public standing and the criticism that they were not doing enough to speak out for the people of Hong Kong. After countenancing British and Chinese leaders, however, the Unofficials earned considerable respect and their opinions attracted far greater attention than before. Youde, ever concerned about keeping the Unofficials aligned with the British side, telegraphed the FCO encouraging his colleagues “to make a major effort to reach an understanding with the Executive Council on strategy [...] and on the major issues”.<sup>183</sup> UMELCO’s attempts to influence officials directly had failed but their desire to win public support had succeeded, compelling British officials to repair relations.

Following Youde’s advice, Howe took up nationality-related issues with the explicit aim of rebuilding relations with ExCo. The Foreign Secretary suggested broaching some of ExCo’s stronger proposals with Chinese negotiators. He anticipated that Beijing would probably reject the ideas but thought it “necessary for our relations with EXCO [*sic*], which are already fragile, that we should be seen to do this.”<sup>184</sup> There followed an exchange of letters between Howe and Wu Xueqian on nationality-related issues and ExCo were consulted at every step.<sup>185</sup> Although Wu gave little ground, Howe deferred to ExCo in deciding when to continue pressing the Chinese and when to hold back.<sup>186</sup>

Ultimately, British and Chinese negotiators reached an understanding on nationality that was formalised in a pair of memoranda appended to the Joint Declaration. The British memorandum declared that Hong Kong BDTs would cease to be BDTs on 1 July 1997 but could acquire a new citizenship status so long as they applied for a new passport associated with the new status before 1 July 1997. Hong Kong BDTs would not be able to apply for the new status after 1 July 1997 (except for those born between 1 January and 1 July 1997, whose parents would have until 31 December 1997 to apply on their child’s behalf). The new status would entitle its holders to consular services and protections. It would not confer the right of abode in the UK but this was not a change: BDTs already had no right of abode in the UK.<sup>187</sup> The 1985 Hong Kong Act created a new category of British citizenship. In January 1984, ExCo Unofficials had requested that the word ‘British’ remain in the title of this category and this was fulfilled: the new status would be called ‘British National (Overseas)’.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 3 July 1984, PREM 19/1266, TNA.

<sup>184</sup> Letter, Howe to Thatcher, 13 July 1984, PREM 19/1266, TNA.

<sup>185</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 380; telegram, Youde to FCO, 12 September 1984, PREM 19/1267, TNA.

<sup>186</sup> Briefing, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with Unofficial Members of the Executive Council of Hong Kong: 19 September 1984’, NA, ND enclosed in letter, Ricketts to Powell, 17 September 1984, PREM 19/1267, TNA.

<sup>187</sup> Mark, ‘Decolonising Britishness?’, 584.

<sup>188</sup> Meeting record, Luce and ExCo Unofficials et al., 17 January 1984, PREM 19/1262, TNA.

The Chinese memorandum acknowledged the British memorandum. It reiterated China's stance that "Hong Kong Chinese compatriots", whether they were BDTs or not, "are Chinese nationals." Avoiding the word 'passport', the memorandum added that Beijing would "permit Chinese nationals in Hong Kong" to use "travel documents issued by the Government of the United Kingdom for the purpose of travelling", adding that China did not permit its offer of British consular protection and services to extend to consuls in Hong Kong or China.<sup>189</sup>

The memoranda made public which aspects of ExCo's requests had been obtained by the British government: Hong Kong BDTs would be able to apply for passports with the word 'British' in the title and pass this down for one generation. What was not advertised to the public was the British government's work on assurances for those potentially at risk of reprisal after Beijing took over Hong Kong. The Unofficials' May 1984 manifesto had asked whether Hong Kong people who "cannot accept the idea of living under Communist authority" would "have a right to settlement in the United Kingdom".<sup>190</sup> Parliamentarians had balked at the idea of allowing mass migration from Hong Kong into the UK. But secretly, British officials considered the Unofficials' concerns.

The FCO assessed that it would be impossible to promise all BDTs that they could relocate to the UK; the numbers involved would be prohibitive. OD(K) nonetheless agreed a scheme that would allow some Crown employees and people who were otherwise at risk of persecution by Beijing to enter the UK whereupon they would be able to make an application for citizenship that would be looked on favourably by the Home Secretary. The scheme extended to around 6,400 Hong Kong people and their dependants, equating to around 25,000 individuals.<sup>191</sup> The Unofficials, therefore, saw some of their requests partially fulfilled.

In summary, the Unofficial Members applied their going public approach to pressing British officials on nationality-related issues. Nationality was a sore point following the 1981 British Nationality Act, which Hong Kong people saw as being aimed at putting distance between Britain and Hong Kong.<sup>192</sup> With the Sino-British negotiations proceeding apace, Unofficial Members grew eager to influence official thinking on nationality and made the issue a centrepiece of their May manifesto. Although UMELCO's visits to London and Beijing did not

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<sup>189</sup> 'Memoranda (Exchanged Between the Two Sides)', 19 December 1984.

<sup>190</sup> Manifesto, 'The Future of Hong Kong', UMELCO, 9 May 1984, BRAY 812 104/1056, CAC, original emphasis.

<sup>191</sup> Memo, Howe to Thatcher, 13 July 1984, PREM 19/1266, TNA; annex 2, Cabinet Office, British government, 6 September 1984 annexed to meeting minutes, OD(K)(84) 9th meeting, 4 May 1984, CAB 148/241, TNA. When asked how many Hong Kong people had used the route since its inauguration, the Home Office replied that it "does not hold the information" requested (email, Home Office to the author, 8 April 2025 FOI ref. FOI2025/04737).

<sup>192</sup> Mark Hampton, *Hong Kong and British Culture, 1945-97* (Manchester University Press, 2016), 169.

immediately deliver victories for the Unofficials, the trips earned them significant respect amongst the Hong Kong public and led to the Governor compelling London to reestablish ties with the Unofficials. Subsequently, British officials raised nationality-related matters with their Chinese counterparts and created a scheme aimed at offering sanctuary to tens of thousands of Hong Kong people should they require it.

### *A return to the 'consensus politics' model: The Joint Liaison Group*

Following a degree of success on nationality-related issues after going public, towards the end of the negotiations the Unofficials returned to closed door consultations. Another of the Unofficials' concerns was the idea of establishing a Sino-British joint group, which would later be called the Joint Liaison Group (JLG). The Chinese side proposed creating such a group for the purpose of facilitating contact between British and Chinese officials during the transition to 1997 and for addressing Hong Kong-related matters that were not covered by the Sino-British agreement. Initially, ExCo were stridently opposed to a joint group, worried that China could use it to interfere in Hong Kong's affairs before 1997.<sup>193</sup> Howe was attracted to the idea, believing that it offered Britain the potential to "influence the drafting of the Chinese Basic Law", but he acknowledged the corresponding risk that Beijing could use the group to interfere in Hong Kong's affairs prior to 1997.<sup>194</sup>

With ExCo expressing strong concerns over the joint group, Howe spoke cautiously about the idea when he met Chinese officials in Beijing in April 1984. Paramount amongst his concerns, Howe told his hosts, was the worry that allowing such a group in Hong Kong would give the impression that Beijing had established a local organ of power. Chinese officials reassured Howe that the group would be purely advisory.<sup>195</sup> Deng added that it might sit peripatetically in London, Beijing and Hong Kong.<sup>196</sup> This went some way towards addressing Howe's concerns but ExCo remained against the proposal.

Shortly after Howe's April 1984 visit to Beijing, UMELCO released their manifesto and mounted their delegation to London in May and, as described above, this disrupted the relationship between ExCo Unofficials and British officials. Howe reacted by ignoring the Unofficials' misgivings about the joint group. In a memo to Thatcher, for instance, he made no

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<sup>193</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 3 April 1984, PREM 19/1264, TNA.

<sup>194</sup> Memo, Howe to Thatcher, ND, PREM 19/1263, TNA.

<sup>195</sup> Telegram, PS to FCO, 17 April 1984, PREM 19/1264, TNA.

<sup>196</sup> Annex, Cabinet Office, British government, 8 May 1984 annexed to meeting minutes, OD(K)(84) 5th meeting, 3 May 1984, CAB 148/241, TNA.

reference to the Unofficials' concerns and instead recommended that the British government agree to the group, contrary to UMELCO's stance.<sup>197</sup> OD(K) subsequently agreed in principle to establishing some form of joint group.<sup>198</sup> When ExCo were informed of OD(K)'s decision, they gave it a "hostile and cynical" reception with both Unofficial and Official Members recording their dissent.<sup>199</sup> Within the space of mere weeks, Howe went from acting on ExCo Unofficials' advice in raising their concerns in April to ignoring them entirely in May. By the time that British officials reestablished relations with ExCo in July, the JLG (as it had come to be known) had become an inevitability.<sup>200</sup> But the Unofficials still had the opportunity to shape the specific details of the group.<sup>201</sup> Li Fook-wo suggested that the purpose of the JLG be explicitly stated in the Sino-British agreement.<sup>202</sup> Maria Tam further proposed arguing for a 'mirror image': the group would operate for the same number of years after 1997 as it did before 1997, allowing the UK to retain a link of sorts with Hong Kong.<sup>203</sup> The Unofficials could not by this point prevent the JLG but they strove to ensure that its scope would be agreed upon and its power carefully constrained.

What most concerned ExCo Unofficials, however, was that Beijing had abandoned the peripatetic idea and was now insisting that the JLG be based in Hong Kong.<sup>204</sup> ExCo were against this but saw that the location of the group could be used as leverage to eke out concessions on other details. ExCo therefore suggested that locating the JLG in Hong Kong would be more bearable if China agreed to delay establishing it until 1993.<sup>205</sup> British officials were also reluctant to see the JLG established in Hong Kong, which led British and Chinese negotiators into an impasse over this point. With the talks floundering, Howe arranged meetings with Chinese officials for late July 1984. Chinese officials were eager to resolve the entire negotiations during Howe's visit. They offered to delay locating the JLG in Hong Kong until 1986, that it could continue

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<sup>197</sup> Memo, Howe to Thatcher, 18 May 1984, PREM 19/1265, TNA.

<sup>198</sup> Annex, Cabinet Office, British government, 24 May 1984 annexed to meeting minutes, OD(K)(84) 6th meeting, 23 May 1984, CAB 148/241, TNA; the Galsworthy manuscript, 306.

<sup>199</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 307.

<sup>200</sup> In a letter, Howe's Principal Private Secretary Len Appleyard recalled: "Following a meeting with EXCO [sic], the Governor [...] proposes that all references to 'joint group' in the text should be amended to 'joint liaison group'" (letter, Appleyard to Powell, 17 July 1984, PREM 19/1266, TNA). It is unclear, however, if ExCo proposed the name 'JLG' and Youde recommended this to London or Youde came up with the name. If the former, then ExCo had yet another hand in shaping Sino-British interactions.

<sup>201</sup> Lo also noted ExCo's impact on the details of the JLG as one of the three case studies entertained in depth in his paper, calling it "another case of their [ExCo's] limited success in influencing British policy" ('Last Stand of Colonialism', 377).

<sup>202</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 109.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 110; telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 July 1984, PREM 19/1266, TNA.

<sup>204</sup> Annex, Cabinet Office, British government, 29 June 1984 annexed to meeting minutes, OD(K)(84) 7th meeting, 28 June 1984, CAB 148/241, TNA.

<sup>205</sup> Telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 July 1984, PREM 19/1266, TNA.

operating until 2000 and for an explicit statement that the JLG would not interfere in the colonial government's business. Reporting to Thatcher, Howe reflected that the Chinese had shown leniency on one of the most important aspects to ExCo: continuation of the JLG after 1997. Howe added: "Sir SY Chung stressed to me [...] that an extension of the existence of the group [...] would, as evidence of continuing British involvement, be a very valuable aid to confidence in Hong Kong."<sup>206</sup> After several days of negotiations, Howe persuaded Chinese officials to agree that the JLG would not move to Hong Kong until 1 July 1988 – an improvement of two and a half years – and would continue operating until 1 January 2000.<sup>207</sup> Though this was not precisely what Maria Tam had proposed with her 'mirror image' idea, which would have seen the JLG operate for as many years after 1997 as it had in the lead-up to 1997, it nonetheless went somewhat towards it. Howe's explicit references to the Unofficials' advice during the final furlong of the negotiations shows that the group remained paramount in Howe's mind when the opportunity arose to clinch the agreement.

In his memoirs, Chung reflected on ExCo's successes in shaping the JLG. Tam and her colleagues had pushed Howe towards negotiating for an extension of the JLG's life into the years after the handover and secured a British link past 1997, albeit they did not achieve as long a duration as they had hoped. Additionally, Li Fook-wo's insistence that the JLG be clearly described was fulfilled in Annex II Section 6 of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which reads: "The Joint Liaison Group shall be an organ for liaison and not an organ of power."<sup>208</sup> With the return to the 'consensus politics' model, the Unofficials resumed their close work with British officials on the JLG and other matters. ExCo remained "very much involved" in drafting the final details of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which was initialled that September and signed in December 1984.<sup>209</sup>

## Summary

Until early 1984, the Unofficial Members influenced British thinking in closed door meetings. These out of sight interactions have been largely overlooked in the literature, which has focused more on the Unofficials' public-facing actions such as the Lobo motion and independent delegations. These were not the beginning of UMELCO's attempts to affect British officials'

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<sup>206</sup> Telegram, Howe to Thatcher, 28 July 1984, THCR 1/10/75 f3, CAC.

<sup>207</sup> Telegram, Howe to Thatcher, 30 July 1984, PREM 19/1266, TNA.

<sup>208</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 109–10.

<sup>209</sup> Li BSC interview, 107.

thinking nor the totality of their efforts but rather an evolution of a continued tussle to make their opinions heard.

The Lobo motion marked the start of the Unofficials' turn outwards and was followed by the May delegation. 'Going public' on nationality-related issues was not directly effective in influencing British or Chinese officials but earned the Unofficials a level of respect that motivated Youde to compel his colleagues to repair relations with UMELCO. Once the relationship was restored, ExCo returned to working collaboratively with British officials in closed door consultations on matters such as the JLG. Although the Unofficials had little impact on the Sino-British negotiations while their relationship with British officials was at a low point between May and July 1984, after ties were reestablished the two sides resumed their collegial work and the Unofficials shaped some of the final details of the Joint Declaration.

This section intervenes in the debate over the Unofficials' role in the Sino-British negotiations. It finds evidence for Steve Tsang's assessment that ExCo "played a significant role".<sup>210</sup> Contrarily, the examples examined in this section demonstrate that Robert Cottrell, Louisa Lim and Yui Chim Lo were mistaken in their assessments that the Unofficials had a limited or no effect on the Sino-British negotiations. More broadly, this section adds further evidence that Hong Kong people were not politically apathetic. The Unofficial Members had more motivation than most to yield to the Governor's way of seeing things and yet they refused to do so.

## UMELCO as representatives of Hong Kong people

The Unofficial Members spoke up for what they believed to be in Hong Kong's best interests. In both private meetings out of the view of the public and through outward-facing activities that aimed to apply pressure to officials, UMELCO sought to shape British official thinking. But to what extent were the opinions the Unofficials presented to British officials reflective of the Hong Kong general public's views?

UMELCO's capacity to represent Hong Kong people was repeatedly drawn into question. The Hong Kong newspaper *The Star* complained that most members of the Hong Kong public did not distinguish between Unofficial Members and officials of the Hong Kong government and were, therefore, unlikely to express views to the Unofficials that challenged the colonial administration.<sup>211</sup> Pro-China newspapers and student groups similarly debated the extent to

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<sup>210</sup> Tsang, *Appointment with China*, 101.

<sup>211</sup> Quoted in report, 'Assessment and Summary of Press Reports on, and Reaction to, Visit to Hong Kong by the Lord Privy Seal and Deputy Foreign Secretary, Mr. Humphrey Atkins (January 3, January 8 to 10, 1982)', Public Relations Division, ISD, Hong Kong government, FCO 40/1436 f28, TNA.

which ExCo could be said to represent Hong Kong views while some young professionals criticised ExCo for being “elitist and out of touch”.<sup>212</sup> While some questioned the Unofficials’ capacity to represent Hong Kong views, others levelled personal accusations. For example, Urban Council member Elsie Elliott called Maria Tam “a Government yes-woman” who had conspired with Urban Council Chairman Hilton Cheong-Leen, whom Elliott dubbed “a Government puppet”, to “misrepresent the facts” about what Hong Kong people want.”<sup>213</sup> In short, some Hong Kong people certainly did not regard the Unofficials as their representatives.

British and colonial officials also questioned the Unofficials’ capacity to represent Hong Kong views. A January 1982 survey instigated by the Hong Kong government showed that almost half of Hong Kong’s adults were not aware that ExCo existed.<sup>214</sup> In October 1982, with the Unofficials insisting that British negotiators argue for the colonial status quo in the negotiations, Head of the HKD Richard Clift assessed that their stance was out of step with the Hong Kong public at large who held a more flexible attitude.<sup>215</sup> In late November 1983, the British Cabinet debated the representativeness of ExCo, noting that while Unofficial Members had the means to leave Hong Kong, most of the population did not.<sup>216</sup> The question was thrust to the fore in May 1984, when the Unofficials mounted their delegation to London. British ministers rejected the Unofficials’ views on the basis that they were not elected representatives.<sup>217</sup> As Frank Ching points out, it was ironic that members of Parliamentarians questioned UMELCO’s capacity to represent Hong Kong while MPs and civil servants, whom Hong Kong people had not elected, determined their fate through negotiations that excluded any Hong Kong representative.<sup>218</sup>

The Unofficial Members rejected the ‘yes men’ monicker. In later interviews, former Unofficial Members concurred that Youde never imposed his views on the Unofficials and allowed them free reign when speaking to the Prime Minister.<sup>219</sup> According to Li Fook-wo, Youde told the Unofficials, “This is your meeting. I am only accompanying you”, and sat silently at their side.<sup>220</sup> Similarly, Chung recalled that although Youde would debate with Unofficial Members, “he

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<sup>212</sup> Teresa Ma, ‘The future: behind closed doors’, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 August 1983, 17–18; memo, Clift to Donald, 1 June 1983, FCO 40/1551 f360, TNA.

<sup>213</sup> Letter, Elliott to British MPs, 30 September 1983, RG.13 21-4, HKBU.

<sup>214</sup> Teresa Ma, ‘The future: behind closed doors’, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 August 1983, 17–18.

<sup>215</sup> Teleletter, Clift to Youde and Cradock, 25 October 1982, FCO 40/1467 f104, TNA.

<sup>216</sup> Minutes, OD(K)(83) 2nd meeting, 17 November 1983, CAB 148/229, TNA.

<sup>217</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong’s Journey*, 87–88; Pepper, *Keeping Democracy at Bay*, 197; Chung BSC interview, 227–28.

<sup>218</sup> Ching, *Hong Kong and China*, 26.

<sup>219</sup> Chung BSC interview, 290; Li BSC interview, 98.

<sup>220</sup> Li BSC interview, 98, original emphasis.

never interfered.”<sup>221</sup> In the absence of pressure from the Governor or other British officials, Unofficials were at liberty to speak freely. The views they brought may, however, have been purely personal ones.

UMELCO themselves were careful to avoid claiming that they *represented* Hong Kong people. As Chung told journalists in January 1984: “I was not elected by Hongkong citizens therefore I cannot represent them.”<sup>222</sup> Instead, the Unofficials claimed only to *reflect* or *present* views.<sup>223</sup> The Unofficials availed themselves of public opinion by reviewing an array of materials. The UMELCO office received hundreds of letters from individuals and organisations.<sup>224</sup> They also noted views that were expressed via the newspapers.<sup>225</sup> Unofficial Members had meetings with various representative organisations, too.<sup>226</sup> In September 1983, Unofficial Member Maria Tam launched a survey that found a preference for maintaining the status quo but her sample was limited to 50 members of company boards. Members claimed that they spoke personally to “student groups, labourers, taxi drivers, workers’ representatives, industrialists, foreign investors and civil servants” and monitored views that were expressed at District Board and Urban Council meetings.<sup>227</sup> Additionally, Unofficial Members held positions on more than 300 committees and boards between them.<sup>228</sup> While these sources offered plentiful information, each could be criticised for being anecdotal in nature.<sup>229</sup> For the most part, therefore, the Unofficials’ understanding of Hong Kong public opinion was derived without a systematic or scientific basis, and from relatively small sample sizes.

The Unofficials’ capacity to assess Hong Kong views was further frustrated by their being sworn to secrecy about the negotiations. Unofficial Members frequently encouraged Hong Kong people to speak up during the negotiations.<sup>230</sup> While the Unofficials could listen, they could not

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<sup>221</sup> Chung BSC interview, 290.

<sup>222</sup> ‘... and Sir S.Y. says “I only reflect views”’, *SCMP*, 7 January 1984, 1.

<sup>223</sup> For example: *ibid*; ‘Umelco flooded with status quo demands’, *Hong Kong Standard*, 21 October 1983, 3; manifesto, ‘The Future of Hong Kong’, UMELCO, 9 May 1984, BRAY 812 104/1056, CAC.

<sup>224</sup> Julina Chan, ‘Most want to Retain Status Quo – Sir S. Y.’, *SCMP*, 21 October 1983, 1.

<sup>225</sup> In a January 1984 meeting, for instance, Chung referred to ideas that had appeared in the *SCMP* (Daniel Chung, ‘Puerto Rico-style plan for Hong Kong’s future’, *SCMP*, 3 January 1984, 14). Similarly, Roger Lobo recalled reading media reaction to the ‘Lobo motion’ (Roger Lobo, ‘[Untitled Hong Kong Heritage Project interview]’, interview by Amelia Allsop (12 March 2009), I283, HKHP).

<sup>226</sup> For example, in April 1984, three Unofficials met a joint committee representing 13 organisations that had conducted a survey of Kwun Tong residents’ opinions about the future (memo, Foo to Akers-Jones, 3 May 1984, HKRS1101-2-9 f77, PRO).

<sup>227</sup> Meeting record, Thatcher and UMELCO delegates et al., 15 May 1984, PREM 19/1265, TNA.

<sup>228</sup> Manifesto, ‘The Future of Hong Kong’, UMELCO, 9 May 1984, BRAY 812 104/1056, CAC.

<sup>229</sup> Chiu Kit-ying, ‘Youde tipped to use public opinion card’, *Hong Kong Standard*, 22 September 1983.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. Lo, ‘Last Stand of Colonialism’, 384.

converse meaningfully or provide the sort of information about the state of the talks that a person would need to draw an informed opinion. Lobo recalled in a later interview that he dared not discuss Hong Kong's future even with his own family for fear of breaching the Official Secrets Act.<sup>231</sup> As an unnamed Unofficial Member told a journalist anonymously, the Unofficials "were absolutely forbidden to take soundings" and were "consulted in our personal capacities", therefore "our views might have been wrong" and the claim that "Hong Kong was being consulted" via ExCo was "a gross exaggeration".<sup>232</sup> Some Unofficial Members even questioned their own ability to represent Hong Kong views. In a two-day debate, for instance, Unofficial Members discussed Governor Youde's statement made on 6 October that "the Unofficials play an essential representative role".<sup>233</sup> Debating the speech on 27 and 28 October, Unofficial Rayson Huang Li-sung criticised that LegCo Unofficials "disproportionately represented [...] certain sectors of our community", potentially leading to a "misrepresentation of the wishes [...] of the community as a whole."<sup>234</sup> Unofficial Charles Yeung Siu-cho added his "reservations on their [Unofficial Members'] representative role", describing the "claim to represent the public" as "tenuous" because "their mandate is not drawn from the people". Several Unofficial Members called on the public and media to be more vocal, perhaps to obviate the limitations they felt as Unofficial Members.<sup>235</sup>

There is some evidence to suggest that the views the Unofficials espoused were generally shared across Hong Kong. One source of such evidence is UMELCO itself, which strove to prove that the views they articulated were indicative of public opinion, particularly after UMELCO went public in early 1984. Two months after their May 1984 delegation, for instance, UMELCO published a statement designed to show that their manifesto summarised the Hong Kong public's concerns. They received 8,427 items of correspondence from individuals of which 8,400 were fully supportive, 10 partly supportive and only 17 against, and 1,509 items from organisations of which 1,504 were supportive, four partially supportive and just one opposed.<sup>236</sup> 14 of 18 District Boards expressed their full support of the Unofficials. The Unofficials also pointed to an SCMP-commissioned poll, which found that 82% of 605 respondents fully or partially approved of the

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<sup>231</sup> Lobo BSC interview, 191.

<sup>232</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 105.

<sup>233</sup> Legislative Council (Hong Kong) Hansard, 6 October 1982 [https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr82-83/english/lc\\_sitg/hansard/h821006.pdf](https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr82-83/english/lc_sitg/hansard/h821006.pdf) (accessed 14 January 2024).

<sup>234</sup> Legislative Council (Hong Kong) Hansard, 27 October 1982 [https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr82-83/english/lc\\_sitg/hansard/h821027.pdf](https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr82-83/english/lc_sitg/hansard/h821027.pdf) (accessed 14 January 2024).

<sup>235</sup> Legislative Council (Hong Kong) Hansard, 28 October 1982 [https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr82-83/english/lc\\_sitg/hansard/h821006.pdf](https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr82-83/english/lc_sitg/hansard/h821006.pdf) (accessed 14 January 2024).

<sup>236</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 90.

views that the Unofficials had articulated while in London on their lobbying mission.<sup>237</sup> Messages of support also appeared in newspapers. For example, a letter signed by 10 people who described themselves as having been “born and brought up in Hongkong” lauded the Unofficials’ manifesto as reflecting “the views of at least a vast majority” of Hong Kong people.<sup>238</sup> The Unofficials’ report did not, however, acknowledge that the same *SCMP* poll found that only 2% of respondents had read the May manifesto in full.<sup>239</sup> Nor did the Unofficials note the contrary conclusion drawn by another poll. Commissioned by Commercial Radio and executed by SRH, the survey found that only 43% of 751 respondents thought UMELCO’s delegation “represented the hopes and opinions of Hong Kong people”.<sup>240</sup> There was support for the position articulated by the Unofficial Members but there were also detractors who objected to the Unofficials speaking on their behalf.

In summary, Unofficial Members did not claim to represent Hong Kong people and some Hong Kong people, British officials, Chinese officials and the Unofficial Members themselves doubted UMELCO’s capacity to do so. Moreover, Unofficial Members were hindered in their ability to gather and weigh views by the sources available to them and because they were prohibited from discussing the negotiations with others. Some surveys and anecdotal evidence indicate that the Unofficials did convey views that were shared by at least some in Hong Kong society outside of their own clique but cannot be taken as conclusive. Although the Unofficial Members were careful not to claim that they *represented* Hong Kong people, there remains uncertainty over whether the views they *presented* were reflective of a significantly wider constituency.

## Conclusion

Across the British Empire, colonial officials appointed local elites into advisory positions in order to establish an elite-consensual polity, keeping administrators informed while maintaining a rein on people of influence. Hong Kong was no different.<sup>241</sup> As Hong Kong’s Unofficial Members had a motivation to identify their interests with those of the colonial government, academics have questioned the extent to which the Unofficials were willing or able to go against the Governor, both in general and in the particular case of the Sino-British talks.<sup>242</sup> In the literature on the

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<sup>237</sup> Paper, ‘Public Response to the Statement Issued by UMELCO’, UMELCO, 18 July 1984, FCO 40/1670 f633, TNA; Halima Guterres, ‘A solid “Yes” vote for Umelco’, *SCMP*, 25 May 1984, 1.

<sup>238</sup> 10 signatories, ‘Wanted: undertaking on fundamental rights’, *SCMP*, 6 July 1984, 19.

<sup>239</sup> ‘Solid support “possibly a vote of sympathy”’, *SCMP*, 26 May 1984, 1.

<sup>240</sup> Report, ‘1997 What Hong Kong Thinks’, Survey Research Hongkong for Commercial Radio, July 1984, BRAY 812 104/1063, CAC.

<sup>241</sup> King, ‘Administrative Absorption’, 427.

<sup>242</sup> Lo, *Politics of Democratization*, 48.

negotiations, some academics have asserted that British officials consulted ExCo.<sup>243</sup> Others, however, have argued that ExCo were almost entirely unable to affect British officials.<sup>244</sup> Yui Chim Lo, for instance, concluded that the Unofficials' role was "limited".<sup>245</sup> On the contrary, recently released primary sources show that the Unofficial Members, particularly ExCo Unofficials, had a notable effect on the British side during the Sino-British negotiations.

This chapter has engaged with three of the factors that interest proponents of new diplomatic history: non-official individuals, place and emotion.<sup>246</sup> The Unofficial Members were not officials but nor were they allowed to interact with members of the Hong Kong public; they occupied a quasi-official position that at once gave them information and access to officials but which also placed them in an unenviable position of expectation and pressure. Furthermore, where the Unofficial Members met sometimes affected their work. The cloistered room in which Unofficial Members could pour over confidential documents and dwell on the series of crises that befell Hong Kong gave rise to a pessimistic outlook and cautious planning; this attitude was dispelled when the Unofficials were in London, away from the Hong Kong bubble. Similarly, the LegCo Chamber, which was open to the public, was an arena for a different sort of debate than those had in the privacy of corridors or meeting rooms. Lastly, emotion played a powerful role at several junctures. Initially, the Unofficials were anxious that talks were proceeding without their knowledge and, believing that they were being excluded, felt "angry" according to Sir S. Y. Chung.<sup>247</sup> Worry that Beijing might break its promises to Hong Kong motivated the Unofficials to mount a sustained effort calling on British negotiators to secure assurances intending to instil a sense of confidence to counteract growing concern. Frustration, distrust and an acute awareness that Hong Kong people derided the Unofficials as 'yes men' drove them to drop the 'consensus politics' model in favour of 'going public'. Embarrassment played a significant role in the Unofficials' visit to London and Beijing, and the subsequent support shown by Hong Kong people. Officials had feelings, too. Howe was annoyed when the Unofficials repeatedly pressed the same talking points and felt betrayed when the Unofficials launched their May 1984 manifesto.<sup>248</sup> Deng Xiaoping was angered by the Unofficials' manifesto and their lobbying in London.<sup>249</sup> British negotiators resisted raising several topics out of fear of how their Chinese counterparts might

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<sup>243</sup> Tsang, *Appointment with China*, 101.

<sup>244</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 143.

<sup>245</sup> Lo, 'Last Stand of Colonialism', 378.

<sup>246</sup> de Boer et al., 'Provincializing "New" Diplomatic History'; Mori, 'State of the Art'.

<sup>247</sup> Chung, *Hong Kong's Journey*, 58–60.

<sup>248</sup> The Galsworthy manuscript, 297.

<sup>249</sup> Chung BSC interview, 174.

react. This chapter, therefore, adds to the growing new diplomatic history literature with particular reference to place and emotion.

The Unofficial Members were not 'yes men'. ExCo meetings saw a diversity of views expressed amidst genuine discussion: the Unofficial Members disagreed with each other, Official Members sometimes agreed with Unofficial Members, and Members of both stripes disagreed with Governor Youde and London. The Unofficials were blunt when they told Thatcher, Howe, Luce and other officials when they believed that an official was wrong, and spoke against officials in public and private on various occasions. On a range of issues, the Unofficials showed that they were sufficiently independent of any authority to make representations where they felt they reflected Hong Kong views. Moreover, the Unofficials affected British official thinking, the Sino-British negotiations and the Joint Declaration because they were consulted on the wording of key documents, overrode Ambassador Cradock's advice on negotiation tactics, pressed British negotiators to raise assurances, secured undertakings for tens of thousands of BDTC status holders, shaped the details of the JLG and more. Therefore, the Unofficial Members were neither politically apathetic nor politically impotent. Rather, they informed British officials' thinking on both specific and broad points, albeit to varying degrees at different times, and ultimately influenced the Joint Declaration.

## Chapter 6 – The Limits of Influence and the Functional Value of Democracy

Unlike other British colonies, there was never any chance of bringing Hong Kong to independence. Instead, Hong Kong had to be content with a high degree of autonomous self-administration within China. The 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration promised that after 1997, the legislature would be constituted by elections and the chief executive “selected by election or through consultations held locally”.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, from 1984 onwards, Hong Kong people expected a move towards a more representative form of government ahead of the handover.<sup>2</sup> In the mid-1980s, the colonial administration took the first tentative steps in this direction with the 1985 District Board elections and by tabling a series of proposals for enhancing the representativeness of LegCo.<sup>3</sup> The 1989 Tiananmen massacre in Beijing further spurred democratic developments in Hong Kong and, in 1992, Governor Patten pushed through reforms that led to the colony’s first – and only – fully elected LegCo inaugurated in 1995.<sup>4</sup> Since 1997, activists have continued to contest the direction and scope of democracy in Hong Kong. Contention about the scope and speed of democratisation have been amongst the main focuses of large-scale protests seen in 2014 and again in 2019.<sup>5</sup> In short, from the 1980s onwards, public and academic debate about Hong Kong politics has been dominated by questions of democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Joint Declaration of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on the Question of Hong Kong’, December 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Butenhoff, *Social Movements*, 65; King, ‘Hong Kong Talks’.

<sup>3</sup> Albert H. Y. Chen and Michael Ng, ‘The Making of the Constitutional Order of the Hong Kong SAR: The Role of Sino-British Diplomacy (1982-90)’, in *Constitutional Foundings in Northeast Asia*, ed. Kevin Y. L. Tan and Michael Ng, *Constitutionalism in Asia* (Hart, 2022); Cheng, ‘1985 District Board Elections’; Tsang, *A Modern History*, 231–35.

<sup>4</sup> Cheng, ‘Sino-British Negotiations’; Ralf Horlemann, *Hong Kong’s Transition to Chinese Rule: The Limits of Autonomy* (Routledge, 2003), chs 3–4; Hurst, ‘Constitutional Change’, 69; Shiu-hing Lo, ‘An Analysis of Sino-British Negotiations Over Hong Kong’s Political Reform’, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 16, no. 2 (1994): 178–209, <https://doi.org/10.1355/CS16-2D>; Alvin Y. So, ‘The Tiananmen Incident, Patten’s Electoral Reforms, and the Roots of Contested Democracy in Hong Kong’, in *The Challenge of Hong Kong’s Reintegration with China*, ed. Ming K. Chan and Alvin Y. So (Hong Kong University Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Carrico, *Two Systems, Two Countries: A Nationalist Guide to Hong Kong* (University of California Press, 2022); Dapiran, *City of Protest*; Dapiran, *City on Fire*; Davis, *Making Hong Kong China*; Hung, *City on the Edge*; Zuraidah Ibrahim and Jeffie Lam, eds, *Rebel City: Hong Kong’s Year of Water and Fire* (World Scientific, 2020); Tsung-gan Kong (aka Brian Kern), *Umbrella: A Political Tale from Hong Kong* (Pema Press, 2017); Brian Kern, *Liberate Hong Kong: Stories from the Freedom Struggle* (Bui Jones, 2023); Lim, *Indelible City*; Shibani Mahtani and Timothy McLaughlin, *Among the Braves: Hope, Struggle, and Exile in the Battle*

In parallel with changes in Hong Kong politics, the academic literature has been focused on democracy. Especially around the year 1997, researchers reflected on each of the unsteady steps Hong Kong had taken in its unfolding democratic journey. Many pinned the early 1980s as the catalyst of the contemporary democracy movement.<sup>6</sup> For example, Ambrose Yeo-chi King assessed that: “Ever since 1982 when the future of Hong Kong became an issue [...] the demand for political democratization [became] no longer confined to a small group of democratic activists.”<sup>7</sup> Ming Sing blamed a “consistently widespread and prolonged presence of political powerlessness” for having “crippled any attempt at launching a pro-democracy movement before 1984”.<sup>8</sup> Joseph Y. S. Cheng said that “concern for the future of the territory and the challenge posed by the development of representative government contributed to the organization and development of many other political groups and grassroots pressure groups.”<sup>9</sup> Alvin Y. So and Shiping Hua wrote: “the democracy movement was a response to British decolonization and the upcoming return to Chinese control in 1997.”<sup>10</sup> The beginnings of the contemporary democracy movement and move towards representative government, and the handover of Hong Kong have thus been placed alongside one another, intertwining the two topics.

In the wake of recent pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, some writers have looked into Hong Kong’s past to find historical precedents.<sup>11</sup> When authors have searched Hong Kong’s

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for *Hong Kong and the Future of Global Democracy* (Hachette Books, 2023); Tsing, *Hongkongers’ Fight for Freedom*; Daniel F. Vukovich, *After Autonomy: A Post-Mortem for Hong Kong’s First Handover, 1997–2019* (Springer Nature Singapore, 2022); Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Vigil: Hong Kong on the Brink* (Columbia Global Reports, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Butenhoff, *Social Movements*; Joseph Y. S. Cheng, ed., *Political Participation in Hong Kong: Theoretical Issues and Historical Legacy* (City University of Hong Kong Press, 1999); Lo, *Politics of Democratization*; Suzanne Pepper, ‘Hong Kong, 1997: East vs. West and the Struggle for Democratic Reform within the Chinese State’, *Asian Survey* 37, no. 8 (1997): 683–704; Ian Scott, ‘Party Politics and Elections in Transitional Hong Kong’, *Asian Journal of Political Science* 4, no. 1 (1996): 130–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185379608434075>; Ian Scott, ed., *Institutional Change and the Political Transition in Hong Kong* (St. Martin’s Press, 1998); Alvin Y. So, ‘1997 and Democratic Compromise in Hong Kong’, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 31, no. 1 (1999): 59–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1999.10415731>; So, *Hong Kong’s Embattled Democracy*; Alvin Y. So and Sai-Hsin May, ‘Democratization in East Asia in the Late 1980s: Taiwan Breakthrough, Hong Kong Frustration’, *Studies in Comparative International Development* 28, no. 2 (1993): 61–80, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02687116>; Sing, ‘Economic Development, Civil Society’; Sing, *Hong Kong’s Tortuous Democratization*.

<sup>7</sup> King, ‘Hong Kong Talks’, 74.

<sup>8</sup> Sing, ‘A Changing Political Culture’, 78–79.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Y. S. Cheng, ‘Prospects for Democracy in Hong Kong After the Beijing Massacre’, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 23 (January 1990): 163.

<sup>10</sup> Alvin Y. So and Shiping Hua, ‘Democracy as an Antisystemic Movement in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China: A World Systems Analysis’, *Sociological Perspectives* 35, no. 2 (1992): 400.

<sup>11</sup> Dapiran, *City of Protest*; Dapiran, *City on Fire*; Hung, *City on the Edge*; Lim, *Indelible City*.

past for protestors who spoke in favour of democracy, however, they have tended to ignore the many countervailing voices that articulated a myriad of different political positions and which were not in favour of democratising Hong Kong. Additionally, paralleling moves towards representative government with Hong Kong's handover conceals a developmentalist, progressivist assumption that Hong Kong, like other colonies, was sure to follow a linear path towards democratic self-administration in concert with decolonisation.<sup>12</sup> The views of Hong Kong people who were not in favour of democracy and the implication that democratisation necessarily follows decolonisation remain to be interrogated.

The Hong Kong public was, of course, not unanimous in their opinions. Nonetheless, their desires for Hong Kong's future can be broadly described as progressing in three stages. Firstly, before the Sino-British negotiations began, most Hong Kong people wanted the colonial status quo to continue.<sup>13</sup> A range of individuals, groups and sources indicated a wish to maintain the British administration of Hong Kong past 1997. Implicitly, they were content with Hong Kong remaining an undemocratic polity. Secondly, between September 1982 and the end of 1983, some Hong Kong people began to articulate a way of synthesising self-administration and Chinese nationalism. Many Hong Kong people believed that Hong Kong rightfully belonged to China but were wary of the CCP taking control of Hong Kong. In an attempt to combine the belief that Hong Kong belonged to China and the hesitance to come under CCP administration, some proposed that Hong Kong could have a high degree of autonomy and self-administration within China, winning some supporters by synthesising the two. The majority, however, remained wary of anything other than the undemocratic colonial status quo. Lastly, by 1984, the idea of representative government had gained widespread support and the majority wanted Hong Kong to have a democratic government by (or before) 1997.

This chapter argues that three major factors explain the change from desiring continued colonialism to supporting democratisation. Firstly, Chinese officials articulated a version of reunification that appealed to those Hong Kong people who were cautious of the CCP but who were nationalistic and/or anti-imperialist. Secondly, some Hong Kong people saw self-administration as a way to preserve Hong Kong's relative autonomy after 1997, lauding democracy not so much as a political philosophy but rather for its utility. Thirdly, British, Chinese

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<sup>12</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (Profile Books, 2022); David Myer Temin, 'Development in Decolonization: Walter Rodney, Third World Developmentalism, and "Decolonizing Political Theory"', *American Political Science Review* 117, no. 1 (2023): 235–48, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000570>; John Willinsky, 'History and the Rise of the West', in *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End* (University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Chen and Ng, 'Making the Constitutional Order', 44.

and colonial officials separately and without intending to do so encouraged Hong Kong people to discuss representative government: British MPs welcomed pro-democracy activists and made statements in the House of Commons promoting democracy for Hong Kong; colonial officials produced a succession of publications and statements that similarly encouraged discussions about democracy; and Chinese officials fed ideas of self-administration to visitors from Hong Kong. Whereas the literature on Hong Kong politics from the mid-1980s onwards has centred on democratisation, this chapter argues that most Hong Kong people did not initially want democracy and that there were multifaceted reasons for why this opinion changed over time.

## A preference for the colonial status quo

In a 1996 publication, Britain's former Ambassador to Beijing Sir Percy Cradock wrote: "There was little local demand for it [democracy] in the years before the negotiations."<sup>14</sup> This assertion is born out in archival, autobiographical and newspaper sources. Public opinion polls, interviews with the members of boards and committees, and pressure groups' statements reflect that most Hong Kong people initially wanted colonialism to continue past 1997. Few agitated for a more representative form of government; moreover, they were in the numerical minority.

There is a long history of Hong Kong Governors entertaining the idea of installing representative government then scaling back their plans or abandoning ideas completely. After the Second World War, Governor Sir Mark Young tabled proposals for an elected Municipal Council, which were subsequently abandoned under Governor Sir Alexander Grantham.<sup>15</sup> In the 1970s, Governor MacLehose made changes to constitutional conventions that aimed at increasing local representation within the Councils, though stopped short of installing elections to LegCo or ExCo.<sup>16</sup> Before MacLehose left his post, the Hong Kong government published Green and White Papers on district administration in 1980 and 1981, respectively, that aimed at giving Hong Kong people the experience of casting a vote in District Boards elections but left the membership of ExCo and LegCo within the Governor's gift.

Throughout the period of the British administration of Hong Kong, Governors tempered their plans owing to the prospect of protestation from Beijing. Examples of the CCP showing its opposition to any semblance of democracy in Hong Kong are legion. In January 1958, Premier Zhou Enlai told a British Lieutenant Colonel that introducing even a modicum of self-governance

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<sup>14</sup> Percy Cradock, 'Memorandum: Sino-British Relations Over Hong Kong', *Chinese Law & Government* 29, no. 1 (1996): 51.

<sup>15</sup> Tsang, *Democracy Shelved*.

<sup>16</sup> Hurst, 'Constitutional Change'.

in Hong Kong would be perceived as “a very unfriendly act”. In October 1960, the future Head of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office Liao Chengzhi implied that China would launch military intervention – “positive action” – should self-government become a prospect.<sup>17</sup> In March 1963, a *People’s Daily* editorial said that “the status quo should be maintained” until the question of Hong Kong was resolved.<sup>18</sup> As such, Hong Kong’s political system remained largely unchanged until after the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed.

Moreover, colonial administrators were aware that internal pressure for democracy was minimal. Surveys indicate that by the time of Thatcher’s September 1982 visit, most Hong Kong people wanted the colonial status quo to continue and did not clamour for democracy. These polls were not commissioned by the colonial government. As noted in Chapter 4, the Hong Kong government possessed multiple means of surveying public opinion but colonial officials feared that using this apparatus to gather views about the future would rankle Beijing.<sup>19</sup> Instead, evidence of Hong Kong public’s opinions can be found in surveys commissioned by newspapers, research institutions and pressure groups. As noted in Chapter 2, the Reform Club commissioned SRH to poll the public on their desires for Hong Kong’s future in early 1982. Of 998 respondents, 70% expressed a preference for maintaining the status quo.<sup>20</sup> Also noted in Chapter 2, the Hong Kong Observers enlisted SRH to interrogate public opinion and found that 69% of 1,000 respondents favoured the colonial administration continuing past 1997.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the Baptist College surveyed 600 company executives in mid-1982 and found that the most preferred option for Hong Kong’s political future, chosen by 41% of respondents, was for Britain and China to delay discussion for 30 to 50 years and maintain the colonial status quo in the meantime.<sup>22</sup> A survey by the newspaper *Express* executed in late 1982 found that 80% of 200 respondents wanted the status quo to continue.<sup>23</sup> These polls must be taken as only indicative rather than definitive. Some were conducted on small sample sizes and others focused on certain segments of society at the expense of others. Additionally, some did not explicate their polling or interpretation methodologies. While acknowledging the limitations of these polls, they nonetheless

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<sup>17</sup> Memo, Laird to Wilford, 7 May 1971, FCO 40/327 f5, TNA.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Comments on the statement of the Communist Party of the United States of America’ [评美国共产党声明], *People’s Daily* [人民日报], 8 March 1963, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Mok, ‘Public Opinion Polls’; Mok, ‘Town Talk’; Mok, *Covert Colonialism*.

<sup>20</sup> Reproduced in Cheng, *In Search*, 83–90.

<sup>21</sup> Reproduced in Cheng, *In Search*, 99–106.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Investors want early word on lease issue’ *Hong Kong Standard*, 26 July 1982, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Report, ‘Maintain HK’s status quo: Polls’ in *The Gist*, ISD, Hong Kong government, 3 August 1982, HKRS545-1-35-1, PRO.

consistently found that Hong Kong public opinion favoured the maintenance of the colonial status quo.

Many of the members of Hong Kong's sprawling network of boards and committees agreed with public opinion. The Urban Council's membership was a mixture of appointed and elected persons representing a broad range of views. In late 1982, members were asked their thoughts on addressing the 1997 issue. Urban Council members Selina Chow and Philip Kwok recommended that Britain and China negotiate an agreement to replace the nineteenth century treaties in order to provide a firm and equitable foundation on which the colonial administration could continue. Recognising that China would find this objectionable, another member of the Urban Council, Howard Young, thought that the status quo could continue so long as Beijing was given the right to serve Britain a notice should it wish to retake Hong Kong. Francis Chaine, who was also a member of the Reform Club, advanced that Hong Kong should become an official trust territory: a non-self-governing territory administered under British care. Similarly, when a newspaper interviewed 20 District Board members in August 1982, all but four wanted the colonial administration to continue.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, 13 Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of the New Territories Rural Committees interviewed by the *SCMP* in July 1982 also preferred maintaining the status quo.<sup>25</sup> There was, therefore, a strong inclination amongst the membership of Hong Kong's boards and committees towards maintaining undemocratic British rule.

The main pressure groups in Hong Kong advocated for colonial administration to continue, too, as noted in Chapter 2. Position papers produced by the Hong Kong Belongers and the Hong Kong Prospect Institute, for example, clung firmly to the colonial system.<sup>26</sup> The Hong Kong Observers, having found from their own survey that most local people had little interest in change, also advocated for the status quo. As John Nott MP (Conservative) summarised following a meeting with the Observers in 1980: "The Observers said there was no real pressure for the release of Hong Kong from its Colony status."<sup>27</sup> A distinction must be drawn between the views that pressure groups articulated on behalf of the public and the opinions of individual members of those groups, who may have harboured different desires. Additionally, pressure groups had learned to be cautious about what they advocated, as punitive colonial laws could be wielded against those perceived to be a threat to the administration.<sup>28</sup> Even if their members did not

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<sup>24</sup> Report, 'Status quo after 1997 is majority wish' in *The Gist*, ISD, Hong Kong government, 31 August 1982, HKRS545-1-35-1, PRO.

<sup>25</sup> 'Countdown to 1997: what the people think', *SCMP*, 2 July 1982, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Summarised in telegram, Youde to FCO, 27 August 1982 enclosed in draft report, 'The Future of Hong Kong: A Special Study', FCO, British government, August 1982 enclosed in Clift memo TNA.

<sup>27</sup> Meeting note, Nott and the Hong Kong Observers, 30 January 1980, FCO 21/1832 f25, TNA.

<sup>28</sup> Ng, *Political Censorship*.

themselves agree, pressure groups nonetheless admitted that the public at large were content with undemocratic colonial rule.

A desire for continued British administration was not confined to the 'grassroots' general public and middle-class pressure groups. As explored in Chapter 1, most of Hong Kong's business elites also saw continued British administration as the best option for Hong Kong's future. This was unsurprising: British administration afforded their companies an environment in which to operate and there was apprehension that Beijing might impose communism should it retake Hong Kong. Likewise, as shown in Chapters 2 and 5, most of UMELCO also began from a position of wanting the British administration to continue. From the working class, to the middle class, to the business elite and from everyday citizens without access to the Governor, to those who inveigled occasional meetings with colonial officials, to the Unofficials with the Governor's ear, the majority of people across Hong Kong society wanted Hong Kong to remain as a British colony after 1997.

Few individuals and groups adopted an explicitly pro-democratic stance. One was the Liberty and Democracy Party. Established in 1965, it claimed to have 4,000 members by 1983.<sup>29</sup> Rather than wait for 1997, the Party called on Britain to return Hong Kong to China immediately and replace the colonial administration with self-rule under the joint supervision of Beijing and Taipei.<sup>30</sup> The purpose of joint supervision was, it seems, to encourage Beijing and Taipei to unite around their care for Hong Kong.<sup>31</sup> The Party continued to press this model for resolving the 1997 issue before and during the Sino-British negotiations.<sup>32</sup> Along similar lines, in 1978, the Reform Club sponsored a petition that called for universal suffrage.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, some elected members of the Urban Council – Dr Denny Huang Mong-hwa, Elsie Elliott and Tsin Sai-nin – were amongst the most stalwart supporters of introducing a greater degree of electoral democracy into the colonial system. In the 1970s, the three lobbied London to overhaul LegCo, calling for one third of its Members to be chosen by direct elections, one third by professional groups who would indirectly elect its Members and one third to be appointed by the Governor. Though calling for an increase in the representative element of LegCo, these Urban Council members did not call for a wholesale overthrow of the colonial administration nor did they challenge the Governor's

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<sup>29</sup> 'Party's "plan" for our future', *SCMP*, 24 August 1983, 13.

<sup>30</sup> 'British rule "must come to an end"', *SCMP*, 19 August 1983, 16.

<sup>31</sup> 'Disagree with "Chinese Communist Party ruling Hong Kong" and establish a representative assembly' [不贊同「中共治港」應成立代議士大會], *Hong Kong Times* [香港時報], 18 September 1983.

<sup>32</sup> 'Opinion papers submitted', *SCMP*, 23 August 1983, 19; 'Local mission for Peking', *SCMP*, 8 September 1983, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Pepper, *Keeping Democracy at Bay*, 188.

position.<sup>34</sup> Huang, Elliott and Tsin were, however, in the minority in Hong Kong more broadly. The FCO assessed: “All the available evidence suggests that there is little public support in Hong Kong for such reforms”.<sup>35</sup> Head of the Hong Kong Department Richard Clift agreed: “the great majority of people there are simply not interested in elections”.<sup>36</sup> This official assessment is validated by polling data, interviews with board and council members, and pressure group manifestos showing that the weight of opinion favoured maintaining the colonial status quo in Hong Kong. While there were groups and individuals demanding democracy in Hong Kong in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they were few and in the minority.

When asked their opinions, Hong Kong people expressed that they wanted the undemocratic colonial administration to continue. A desire for the current political arrangement to continue is not political apathy: it is an active preference for one political arrangement above other options. Survey respondents did not reply to pollsters’ questions with uncertainty, interviewees were not unsure and pressure groups did not find that Hong Kong people held no desires; instead, respondents replied with a clear preference for the status quo. While a few held designs for a more representative government in Hong Kong, they remained in the minority in the early 1980s.

### Three factors that contributed towards a desire for democracy

Between September 1982, when Thatcher met Zhao and Deng in Beijing and the end of the Sino-British negotiations in 1984, the majority view in Hong Kong switched from preferring the undemocratic colonial status quo to desiring representative government and accepting that Britain would hand Hong Kong to Beijing. Opinion polls reflect this change. A January 1984 poll organised by a member of the Eastern District Board found that 81% of 2,019 respondents thought that the future head of the Hong Kong government should be elected to their position.<sup>37</sup> Two thirds of 1,222 people polled by Sham Shui Po West District Board in early 1984 felt that Hong Kong should gradually democratise, 50% that all top administrators should be elected in the future and 37% that most positions should be elected with a minority left as appointments.<sup>38</sup> A

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<sup>34</sup> Letter, Elliott, Huang and Tsin to Goronwy-Roberts, 24 June 1978, FCO 40/937 f1, TNA.

<sup>35</sup> Briefing, ‘Visit by Mr Peter Blaker MP to Hong Kong: 23-25 September 1979, Brief No. HK6’, September 1979, FCO 40/1055 f41, TNA.

<sup>36</sup> Briefing, ‘Minister of State’s Discussions with Sir Murray MacLehose: 10 January 1980, Hong Kong – Democratic Reform’, Clift to Murray and Cortazzi, 3 January 1980, FCO 40/1156 f5, TNA.

<sup>37</sup> Figures rounded from report, ‘Report on Opinion Poll on the Future of Hong Kong’, Chum Ting-Pong, 28 January 1984, HKRS545-1-43, PRO.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Leung, ‘Poll shows residents fearful about future’ *SCMP*, 12 April 1984, 14.

July 1984 survey of 4,274 people by the Kwun Tong District Board found that half wanted Hong Kong's future leaders to be chosen via direct elections.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, a November 1984 poll by the Central District Caritas Service Centre found that, of around 500 respondents, 61% wanted the Chief Executive to be directly elected in the future.<sup>40</sup> These surveys are subject to the same caveats as those noted above: sample sizes were sometimes small, respondents selected in a biased way, and polling and interpretation methods not always published. Additionally, a few polls drew contrary conclusions. Nonetheless, surveys conducted in 1984 unanimously reflected a change of opinion amongst the Hong Kong public.

Anecdotal evidence also supports the assertion that attitudes in Hong Kong had changed by 1984. In a speech delivered in January 1984, Urban Council Chairman Hilton Cheong-Leen assessed that the majority of Hong Kong people wanted self-administration to replace colonialism.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, having visited the colony on several occasions, Robert Adley MP (Conservative) was left with the impression that sections of Hong Kong society that had previously scorned the idea of democracy had reversed their opinion by early 1984.<sup>42</sup> A desire for undemocratic colonialism to continue had been replaced by a preference for a representative form of self-government by 1984.

The following sub-sections argue that three factors were responsible for this change. Firstly, Beijing's announcement of 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong' allowed Hong Kong people who patriotically wanted to realise the reunification of China but who remained wary of the CCP to envision a future in which Hong Kong administered itself within greater China. Secondly and relatedly, as Hong Kong's return looked increasingly unavoidable, some looked to democracy as a way of ensuring the high degree of autonomy that Beijing had promised Hong Kong would be protected in practice. Thirdly, British, Chinese and colonial officials each separately encouraged Hong Kong people to consider the different forms that representative government could take. Few did so purposefully but the effect was the same. The overall effect was that Hong Kong people, the majority of whom had harboured no particular desire for democracy in 1982, were convinced to change their minds by 1984. In this regard, Hong Kong people did not convince political officials to provide them with what they wanted for Hong Kong's

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<sup>39</sup> C. K. Lau, 'Kun [sic] Tong has little faith in 1997 pledge', *SCMP*, 27 July 1984, 13; 'Survey claims no faith in Beijing pledge', *Hong Kong Standard*, 28 July 1984, 3.

<sup>40</sup> 'Caritas survey: 54pc accept pact', *SCMP*, 15 November 1984, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Speech, Cheong-Leen to Urban Council, 10 January 1984 enclosed in letter, Cheong-Leen to Thatcher, 29 December 1983 enclosed in letter, Coles to Ricketts, 6 January 1984, FCO 40/1663 f7, TNA.

<sup>42</sup> Adley, *All Change*, 34.

future; instead, officials themselves determined the future political structure of Hong Kong for Hong Kong people.

### *Synthesising nationalism and democracy*

Hong Kong's university student groups provide a microcosm of Hong Kong society and the relationship between nationalism and democracy. By the early 1980s, the leaders of Hong Kong's student groups exhibited a complex and potentially contradictory set of attitudes. Following the 1967 riots, the colonial government sought to improve its social policies but this brought with it a correlating increase in the public's expectations of the quality and quantity of services.<sup>43</sup> With political parties and groupings outlawed in the colony and the avenues for anti-colonial expression inhibited, the 1970s saw a growth in groups that debated social issues as proxies for expressing criticism of the British administration.<sup>44</sup> During the 1970s, for instance, student groups campaigned on issues such as corruption, the government's controls over schools and social reform, each acting as a veil for their antipathy towards colonial control.<sup>45</sup>

Those who had reached university-going age by the 1980s had likely been exposed to the discourse of social injustice that had dominated the 1970s and had grown up witnessing the city's pronounced inequalities for themselves, laying the blame for this at the feet of the British administration. Additionally, most had been born in Hong Kong and identified its future with their own. Feeling that their own prospects were wrapped up with the result of the negotiations, they were highly motivated to contest the city's future and less hesitant about criticising the colonial administration than the generations that had come before.

At the same time as being anti-imperialistic, the leaders of Hong Kong's student groups also tended to be Chinese nationalists. In this sense, 'Chinese nationalism' meant a commitment to restoring China's national pride and achieving, amongst other things, the liberation of Hong Kong from British colonial control and its restoration to China. The colonial government, as constant reminder of the disunification of China brought about by foreigners, was a perennial target of patriotic fervour. Though Britain was not alone in having carved up China in the nineteenth century, it was singled out for particular vehemence for having mounted the First Opium War which marked the beginning of a hundred years of humiliations for China.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Sing, 'Economic Development, Civil Society', 487.

<sup>44</sup> Davies et al., 'Rethinking Transnational Activism'; Ng, *Political Censorship*; So, 'New Middle Class', 93.

<sup>45</sup> Mok, *Covert Colonialism*, 92–97, 162–64; Ng, *Political Censorship*, 145.

<sup>46</sup> William A. Callahan, *China: The Pessimist Nation* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 43–51; Michael Dutton, 'Friend and Enemy', in *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi*, ed.

Nationalism should not be equated with support for the CCP, however. Many of the parents and grandparents of students had fled the mainland seeking sanctuary and opportunity in Hong Kong as the CCP took over. Many students harboured a lingering distrust of the CCP themselves, too. Chinese nationalism was, therefore, nonpartisan and dissected national pride from alignment with the Party.

Most students shirked from campaigning for democracy in Hong Kong. Such a plea would have been anathema to both the colonial government, whose legislation would allow for prosecution, and the CCP government, whose one-party authoritarianism was seen as incompatible with electoral democracy. But this left the future of Hong Kong uncertain. The nationalistic drive wanted to see the British imperialists removed and Hong Kong returned to China but distrust of the CCP meant that reversion to Beijing's control was not appealing to students. The students faced a dilemma: nationalism entailed rejecting the colonial administration and calling for reunification, but this seemed to lead inexorably to Hong Kong being turned over to the CCP which threatened the liberalism and salubrious lifestyle made possible by capitalism to which they had become accustomed.

The students' attitudes were on show during Thatcher's September 1982 visit. While she was still in Beijing, the Prime Minister asserted that the nineteenth century treaties were valid in international law. This unwittingly offended many in Hong Kong, whether aligned to the CCP or not.<sup>47</sup> Subsequently, when Thatcher arrived at Hong Kong's Kai Tak Airport, she was met by student protestors chanting and brandishing banners.<sup>48</sup> Police officer seized their placards.<sup>49</sup> Simultaneously, the Hong Kong Baptist College Student Union issued a statement saying that the treaties were unequal and should be abolished, that Hong Kong was a part of China, and that recovery of sovereignty was the responsibility of all Chinese people.<sup>50</sup> The next day, some 30 students from the Chinese University, Polytechnic and Baptist College student unions protested outside the Government Secretariat holding placards that read "Oppose the unequal treaties"

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Ivan Franceschini et al. (ANU Press and Verso Books, 2019); Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 61.

<sup>47</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 24 September 1982, FCO 40/1458 f647, TNA.

<sup>48</sup> Cheng, *In Search*, 170.

<sup>49</sup> Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 50.

<sup>50</sup> Report, Pascoe for Reuter, 29 September 1982, FCO 40/1459 f662, TNA; 'Some Hong Kong newspapers wrote articles and patriotic students delivered speeches and demonstrated against Mrs Thatcher's affirmation of the unequal treaties regarding Hong Kong' [香港一些报纸撰文、爱国学生发表谈话和举行示威 反对撒切尔夫人肯定有关香港的不平等条约], *People's Daily* [人民日报], 30 September 1982, 4.

and “The treaties of aggression are not valid”.<sup>51</sup> That evening, the Hong Kong Federation of Students, an umbrella organisation for the student unions, led a boycott of a civic reception held in Thatcher’s honour.<sup>52</sup> Baptist College Student Union members continued to protest to the final day of Thatcher’s visit.<sup>53</sup> From the moment she touched down to the moment she left, Thatcher’s visit was dogged by students denouncing the colonial administration.

While the students’ banners denounced the colonial administration, they did not advocate replacing it with a democratic one. Their reluctance to write this on their placards cannot be blamed on colonial laws alone: under the Public Order Ordinance, the students’ unsanctioned anti-colonial protests were sufficient grounds for arrest and student groups were already aware they were being watched, so they might as well have added to their criticisms of the Prime Minister a call for democracy, too.<sup>54</sup> The students might not have had strong views about the sort of system that should replace the British administration. It seems more likely, however, that they focused on anti-imperialism rather than pro-democratic messaging out of a concern for Beijing’s possible reaction. A solution came from an unlikely source: Beijing.

Chinese officials were aware that there remained significant suspicion of the CCP’s intentions amongst Hong Kong students and the Hong Kong public more broadly.<sup>55</sup> In November 1982, Liao Chengzhi announced ‘Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong’ as a guiding policy for Hong Kong’s post-1997 political structure.<sup>56</sup> The phrase was both permissive and vague, leaving students to interpret the mantra as embodying objection to the colonial administration and a commitment to reunification in harmony with the Party line while keeping the CCP at an arm’s length. Some student union leaders interpreted this as an indication that Beijing might permit democracy in a Hong Kong that was within China’s sovereignty. Student union leaders optimistically adopted this combination of reunification and representative government and pressed for more detail and confirmation from Chinese officials. In June, for example, a delegation of the Hong Kong Federation of Students to Beijing broached a proposal for

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<sup>51</sup> Chistine Cheung, ‘PM gets a mixed reaction’, *Hong Kong Standard*, 28 September 1982, 1–2.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Some Hong Kong newspapers wrote articles and patriotic students delivered speeches and demonstrated against Mrs Thatcher’s affirmation of the unequal treaties regarding Hong Kong’ [香港一些报纸撰文、爱国学生发表谈话和举行示威 反对撒切尔夫人肯定有关香港的不平等条约], *People’s Daily* [人民日报], 30 September 1982, 4.

<sup>53</sup> “‘Validity’ of treaties rapped again’, *Hong Kong Standard*, 29 September 1982, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Sa Ni Harte, ‘Revealed – The SCOPG report’, *Hong Kong Standard*, 16 January 1981, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ching, *Hong Kong and China*, 44; Lu, *Return of Hong Kong*, 51; Wong, *China’s Resumption of Sovereignty*, 20.

<sup>56</sup> Cottrell, *End of Hong Kong*, 99.

democratic self-rule in Hong Kong.<sup>57</sup> In mid-September, the Hong Kong University Student Union (HKUSU) asked for “democratic self-government” in a meeting with Xu Jiatur, who replied that the details of Hong Kong’s future political structure were yet to be decided.<sup>58</sup>

Though some student union leaders adopted this synthesis of Chinese nationalism and democracy, many of the students they represented remained cautious about the CCP’s intentions. The tension between the leadership and the wider student body became embarrassingly evident in the autumn of 1983. That September, the Hong Kong University, Chinese University and Polytechnic student unions together with the UK-based Federation of Hong Kong Students penned a joint letter to Thatcher calling for democracy “right now” on the grounds that it would be the only guaranteed way of protecting Hong Kong’s lifestyle and living standards. From their conversations with Chinese officials, the student leaders asserted that Beijing would accept “‘western democracy’ in Hong Kong”.<sup>59</sup> Eager to get their letter to Thatcher before her meeting with UMELCO scheduled for 7 October 1983, the leaders handed it to a student who was about to fly from Hong Kong to the UK to resume their studies.<sup>60</sup>

In their haste, however, student union leaders failed to obtain their peers’ consent for co-signing the letter. Some students soon objected that the letter’s contents did not represent their own views and that they had not been consulted before it had been signed on their behalf.<sup>61</sup> Under pressure from its members, the HKUSU held an emergency debate that attracted around 1,500 attendees and lasted for 10 hours.<sup>62</sup> Some days later, the HKUSU staged a vote that received 3,049 respondents of which 55% voted that the HKUSU should not be party to the letter, 33% that it should and 11% abstained.<sup>63</sup> HKUSU leaders undertook to retract their signature post hoc and inform Thatcher of the circumstances.<sup>64</sup> Controversy spread to the Polytechnic Student Union, which held a mammoth meeting that ranged across two days. Following the discussion, the Council of the Union decided against ratifying the letter.<sup>65</sup> With two of the three student unions

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<sup>57</sup> ‘Students off to Peking with offer’, *SCMP*, 9 July 1983, 8.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Students demand Chinese assurances’, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 23 September 1983, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Letter, Executive Committees of the Student Union of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the United Kingdom Federation of Hong Kong Students to Thatcher, 5 October 1983 enclosed in letter, Ng to Bray, 1 May 1984, BRAY 812 104/1056, CAC.

<sup>60</sup> ‘How haste led to student letter row’, *SCMP*, 7 November 1983, 13.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Student unions lash out at UK’, *SCMP*, 9 October 1983, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Francis Li, ‘Student leaders quit at stormy meeting’, *SCMP*, 26 October 1982, 1; Walter Cheung, ‘Student row threatens Zhao letter’, *SCMP*, 27 October 1983, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Figures rounded from: ‘HKU turnaround in dispute over Thatcher letter’, *Hong Kong Standard*, 3 November 1983, 1.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Students reject Thatcher letter’, *SCMP*, 3 November 1983, 10.

<sup>65</sup> Donald Cheung, ‘Mystery continues over letter to Thatcher’, *SCMP*, 5 November 1983, 11; Julina Chan ‘Poly union council raps committee’, *SCMP*, 6 November 1983, 8.

retracting their support under pressure from their peers, Hong Kong's students remained divided on the issue of democratisation.

Outside of student circles, the prospect of combining nationalism with representative government appealed to certain other people in Hong Kong society. Like most of the student population, most Hong Kong people identified as Chinese, believed that Britain had obtained Hong Kong on unequal terms and were patriotic; however, they feared the CCP and life under communism.<sup>66</sup> Pressure group Meeting Point said in a position paper that "Hong Kong is an inalienable part of China" and that nationalism was a "fundamental principle" but could be separated from support for the CCP. The group called for Hong Kong to have "a free, democratic and autonomous government" and be returned to China's sovereignty.<sup>67</sup> The Director of the social campaigning organisation the Society for Community Organization, Fung Ho Lup, and Hong Kong Observers member Dr Joseph Cheng Yu-shek also agreed that, if Beijing kept to its promises, self-government within China may represent a workable solution.<sup>68</sup> In the estimation of Elsie Elliott, most Hong Kong people "want[ed] to be united with their own Chinese Government" but they also hoped to retain their present lifestyle.<sup>69</sup> 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong' offered a way of achieving both. Elliott promoted the idea when, for instance, she wrote to Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Richard Luce MP (Conservative), that Hong Kong people "would be happy to have China take over now [... with] patriotic representation through direct election [sic]".<sup>70</sup> Fellow Urban Council member Tsin Sai-nin also combined a desire for democracy with the discourse of reunification. Tsin argued that democracy would help Hong Kong to maintain its prosperity which, in turn, would "further assist China in her unification and modernisation."<sup>71</sup> 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong' therefore gained adherents through its potential to combine patriotism, reunification and anti-colonialism with representative local government.

As with the students, there remained a disunity of opinion across Hong Kong society. Urban Council members quarrelled amongst themselves. The division was on full show when an Urban Council delegation went to London in October 1983. Elliott, who was not amongst the delegates, wrote to British Parliamentarians warning them against listening to the delegation. According to Elliott, leader of the delegation, Hilton Cheong-Leen, had colluded with ExCo

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<sup>66</sup> Pepper, *Keeping Democracy at Bay*, 192; Roberti, *Fall of Hong Kong*, 44.

<sup>67</sup> Position paper (translation), 'Our Proposals on the Future of Hong Kong', Meeting Point, January 1983, HKRS545-1-35-2, PRO.

<sup>68</sup> Pepper, *Keeping Democracy at Bay*, 199.

<sup>69</sup> Letter, Elliott to MPs, 30 September 1983, RG.13 21-4, HKBU.

<sup>70</sup> Letter, Elliott to Luce, 21 July 1984, BRAY 812 104/1056, CAC.

<sup>71</sup> Speech, Tsin at City Hall, 12 October 1983 enclosed in memo, Tai to Davies, 3 November 1983, HKRS1101-2-9 f51, PRO.

Unofficial, Maria Tam, to put pressure on the other delegates so that they would unanimously advise Parliamentarians that Hong Kong people wanted the colonial status quo to continue.<sup>72</sup> Elliott's accusations were shown to be baseless, however: when the Urban Council delegation met British officials, they expressed a variety of opinions, falsifying Elliott's forewarning.<sup>73</sup> This and other spats amongst the Urban Council served to demonstrate that the views proffered by Elliott and Tsin were not shared by all members. Like the students, the members of the Urban Council remained torn over issues of democracy and sovereignty.

Moreover, even after Beijing announced that Hong Kong people would rule Hong Kong after 1997, Hong Kong people at large remained wary of democracy throughout 1983. In October 1983, Tsin announced his intention to create a coalition of pro-democratic organisations to push for political reforms and promote "democratic awareness".<sup>74</sup> Tsin received a lukewarm response: of 1,000 organisations invited to join, only 40 replied expressing an interest.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, some quarters continued to actively articulate a desire for the colonial status quo. For example, the student protestors that blighted Thatcher's visit in September 1982 were counterbalanced by some 40 Hong Kong people who turned out in support of the Prime Minister and the British administration.<sup>76</sup> In June 1983, eight people approached the UMELCO Office claiming to represent 528 organisations from a range of sectors spanning commerce, trade unions, native associations, journalism, medicine, education, entertainment, industry, merchants and alumni associations for 13 Taiwanese institutions. The unannounced visitors were received by Unofficials Lo Tak-shing, Allen Lee Peng-fei and Stephen Cheong Kam-chuen. They rejected Beijing's 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong' formula as impractical, warning that any change to the status quo would affect the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.<sup>77</sup> A July 1983 survey by the Quarry Bay Working Group found from asking 1,771 people that the most preferred option for Hong Kong's future was still for it to continue as a colony (38%).<sup>78</sup> Likewise, in September 1983, Maria Tam launched a survey of 50 company board members, the majority of whom expressed a

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<sup>72</sup> Letter, Elliott to MPs, 30 September 1983, RG.13 21-4, HKBU.

<sup>73</sup> Minute, Donald, Hum and Urban Council members, 3 October 1983, FCO 40/1556 f668, FOI/TNA.

<sup>74</sup> 'Groups to fight for democracy and rights', *Hong Kong Standard*, 3 October 1983, 1.

<sup>75</sup> 'Alliance for HK freedom to be set up next year', *Hong Kong Standard*, 19 December 1983, 2.

<sup>76</sup> Olivia Sin, 'Jeers and cheers', *SCMP*, 28 September 1982, 14.

<sup>77</sup> Memo (translation), Kowloon Chamber of Commerce Association and 527 other associations to Unofficial Members of ExCo, 30 June 1983 enclosed in letter, Sargent to UMELCO, 1 July 1983, FCO 40/1551 f377, TNA.

<sup>78</sup> Report, 'Questionnaire on the future of Hong Kong', Quarry Bay Working Group, Eastern District Board enclosed in memo, Lui to Akers-Jones and Leung, 27 July 1984, HKRS1101-2-10 f9, PRO.

continued preference for the colonial status quo.<sup>79</sup> While the idea of representative government gained supporters after Beijing announced its ‘Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong’ formula, swathes of Hong Kong society remained unconvinced or were actively against democracy.

In sum, in late 1982, Chinese officials raised the prospect that Hong Kong could govern itself after 1997. To some, this vague mantra represented the possibility that Chinese nationalism could be synthesised with democracy. The idea gained adherents but Hong Kong society at large remained torn, with some still committed to colonialism. Whereas most Hong Kong people had expressed a preference for the undemocratic status quo to continue when asked in 1982, by the close of 1983, Hong Kong was torn over the idea of democracy with no clear majority in favour or against.

### *Democracy as a protection for Hong Kong’s post-1997 autonomy*

As the Sino-British negotiations wore on and continued colonialism looked increasingly unlikely, some Hong Kong people turned towards democracy because they perceived it as potential a way of protecting the post-1997 Hong Kong government’s autonomy vis-à-vis Beijing. As Joseph Y. S. Cheng commented: “As Hong Kong citizens gradually realized that British administration would inevitably be terminated [...] The assumption was that a representative government would be able to resist external interference effectively.”<sup>80</sup> Cheng did not go into detail on this point, however. This sub-section reviews the evidence that some Hong Kong people promoted democracy not for its own sake but for its functional value as a possible protector of autonomy after 1997. It argues that the change in preference from colonialism to democracy was, therefore, not driven entirely by a shift in political ideology but instead because democracy was seen as a ‘second-best option’ whose adoption was necessitated by the need to keep Beijing at bay after the British administration had ended.

Surveys of Hong Kong public opinion conducted in 1984 show that trust in Beijing and its promises for Hong Kong’s future remained low. An April survey by the Wan Chai District Board found that 60% of 1,118 respondents had no confidence in Beijing’s 50-year promise.<sup>81</sup> The Sham Shui Po West District Board poll previously mentioned found that 84% of people were concerned that China might intervene in the local administration after 1997.<sup>82</sup> The Quarry Bay Working Group

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<sup>79</sup> Chiu Kit-ying, ‘Youde tipped to use public opinion card’, *Hong Kong Standard*, 22 September 1983.

<sup>80</sup> Cheng, ‘1985 District Board Elections’, 69.

<sup>81</sup> Briefing, ‘A brief summary of main points raised in DB meetings on the future of Hong Kong’, UMELCO, ND enclosed in meeting record, Thatcher and UMELCO delegates, 15 May 1984, PREM 19/1265, TNA.

<sup>82</sup> Matthew Leung, ‘Poll shows residents fearful about future’ *SCMP*, 12 April 1984, 14.

poll noted above concluded that most of those surveyed did not think 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong' was feasible.<sup>83</sup> A September poll by the Federation of Alumni Associations received responses from around 1,400 graduates of the Chinese University of which half doubted China's trustworthiness.<sup>84</sup> 51% of 1,140 respondents to an exercise by the Caritas Social Centre in Aberdeen expressed concern that China might intervene in Hong Kong's affairs after 1997.<sup>85</sup> These surveys show that Hong Kong people had little faith in China's promises, such as the commitment to granting Hong Kong a high degree of autonomy after 1997.

Additionally, some surveys showed a correlation between low levels of trust in Beijing and a desire for democracy in Hong Kong. A July 1984 survey by the Kwun Tong District Board, for example, found from 4,274 responses that 62% had no faith in Beijing's promise to leave Hong Kong's systems largely untouched for 50 years.<sup>86</sup> This poll drew an explicit connection between distrust of Beijing with an increasing desire for democracy.<sup>87</sup> With faith in Beijing's promises low and the prospect that Hong Kong would return to China looking increasingly likely, Hong Kong people turned towards democracy as a form of protection.

The Hong Kong Observers drew a more explicit connection between democratic government and keeping Beijing at bay. The pressure group's opinions had changed markedly over the years. Before the Sino-British negotiations began, its members privately expressed a preference for bringing Hong Kong to independence.<sup>88</sup> They did not articulate this publicly, however, as they recognised that most Hong Kong people did not share their views. As noted in Chapter 2 and the first section of this chapter, in 1982, the Observers commissioned a survey that showed that the Hong Kong public wanted the colonial administration to continue. Putting public views above their own personal opinions, the Observers therefore wrote a position paper calling for continued colonialism. In December 1983, the collective refreshed its position. The Observers had had multiple meetings with Chinese officials over the years, both as a group and as individuals.<sup>89</sup> But these meetings had failed to fill the group with confidence that Beijing could

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<sup>83</sup> Report, 'Questionnaire on the future of Hong Kong', Quarry Bay Working Group Eastern District, ND enclosed in memo, Lui to Akers-Jones and Leung, 27 July 1984, HKRS1101-2-10 f9, PRO.

<sup>84</sup> 'Graduates pessimistic on Hongkong's future', *Hong Kong Standard*, 10 September 1984, 2.

<sup>85</sup> Stanley Leung, 'Social survey group calls for clarity on agreement', *SCMP*, 11 November 1984, 12.

<sup>86</sup> C. K. Lau, 'Kun [sic] Tong has little faith in 1997 pledge', *SCMP*, 27 July 1984, 13; 'Survey claims no faith in Beijing pledge', *Hong Kong Standard*, 28 July 1984, 3.

<sup>87</sup> Press release, Sham Shui Po West survey organisers, 11 April 1984, HKRS500-4-10 f26, PRO.

<sup>88</sup> Memo, Coles to Ricketts, 15 November 1983, PREM 19/1059, TNA.

<sup>89</sup> Cheng, *Struggling for Democracy*, 152–53 and 156–57; letter, Galsworthy to Margolis, 9 August 1983, FCO 40/1553 f468, TNA; 'Anna Wu: The absurdities of HK politics and how to fix them', *EJInsight*, 6 March 2017 <https://www.ejinsight.com/eji/article/id/1505818/20170306-anna-wu-the-absurdities-of-hk-politics-and-how-to-fix-them> (accessed 23 August 2021).

be trusted to keep to its promises regarding the rights and relative autonomy of Hong Kong after 1997. With reversion to Chinese sovereignty looking increasingly likely, the Observers drafted another position paper that conceded that Hong Kong would become a Special Administrative Region of China but which called for the installation of an elected local government. Chairperson of the Observers Christine Loh was explicit: the Observers' purpose in pushing for elections was to imbue Hong Kong with as much autonomy as possible within China. Loh added that the group regarded this as a third best option, after independence and colonial administration.<sup>90</sup> From the ideal of independence to the fallback of continued colonialism, the Observers landed finally on a pragmatic proposal that, if Hong Kong had to come under Chinese sovereignty, then it should have a democratically elected local government in order to protect its relative autonomy from China. For the Hong Kong Observers and members of the public who similarly saw democracy as a way to put distance between Hong Kong and Beijing, the push for democracy was spurred by necessity.

Privately, British officials shared the view that a representative Hong Kong government could help to put some distance between it and Beijing. In a 1983 paper, Governor Youde argued: "the stronger the indigenous political and administrative region we can leave behind [...] the better the chance an autonomous Hong Kong regime would have of survival."<sup>91</sup> Similarly, the by then former Ambassador to Beijing, Sir Percy Cradock, opined that "the internal strength of the governmental structure would be a key element in the guarantees for Hong Kong after 1997" and should be built in such a way so as "to minimise the opportunities for Chinese interference".<sup>92</sup> Sir S. Y. Chung thought along the same lines, though it is uncertain whether he expressed this to colonial or British officials at the time. In an interview given later, Chung said that Hong Kong had "to find some way of insulating ourselves" from Beijing and that "The only possible known solution which is generally acceptable is to let the local people elect the Government."<sup>93</sup> Across Hong Kong and outside of Hong Kong, too, people looked to democracy as a stopgap.

In stark contrast to opinions expressed only two years earlier, by 1984, the Hong Kong public had largely become supportive of the idea of democracy. Early on in 1984, it had become clear that Britain could not continue administering Hong Kong after 1997 and that Beijing would take over but many Hong Kong people still distrusted the CCP. Democracy was thus perceived and promoted as a way of protecting Hong Kong's post-1997 autonomy vis-à-vis Beijing.

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<sup>90</sup> Memo, Coles to Ricketts, 15 November 1983, PREM 19/1059, TNA.

<sup>91</sup> Draft paper, 'Proposals for Increased Participation by the People of Hong Kong in the Management of the Affairs of the Territory', Youde, ND enclosed in letter, Youde to Clift, 18 April 1983, FCO 40/1550 f278, TNA.

<sup>92</sup> Telegram, Cradock to FCO, 11 November 1983, PREM 19/1059, TNA.

<sup>93</sup> Chung BSC interview, 251–52, original emphasis.

## *Discussion of democracy encouraged by British, Chinese and colonial officials*

Chinese, British and colonial officials each encouraged Hong Kong people to discuss different ideas for self-administration. Though they did so in different ways and independently of each other seemingly without the intention to stimulate debate in the colony about democracy, British, Chinese and colonial officials were each responsible in their own way for encouraging Hong Kong people to discuss – and ultimately accept – the idea of a self-governing Hong Kong under Chinese sovereignty.

Chinese officials continued to promote the ‘Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong’ formula throughout 1983 and into 1984. Through sheer insistence, Chinese officials encouraged Hong Kong people to accept that their future would be self-government with Hong Kong as a part of China. Additionally, Chinese officials took their promises one step further by stating explicitly that the future Hong Kong government could be returned democratically. In a May 1984 letter to the HKUSU, for example, Zhao Ziyang wrote: “it is natural for the Hong Kong SAR [Special Administrative Region] to implement a democratic political system.”<sup>94</sup> Zhao did not elaborate on the form this would take and the differences between China’s idea of democracy and Britain’s idea of democracy would later come to cause issues when the Basic Law was being drafted between 1985 and 1990.<sup>95</sup> In 1984, however, British officials interpreted Zhao’s remarks and other indications from the Chinese side as signalling to the British government: “You make Hong Kong more democratic between now and 1997 and we will ensure that there is a reasonable degree of democracy maintained [... but] you can hardly expect us, the Chinese, to bring it in.”<sup>96</sup> Chinese officials’ remarks were amongst the influences that encouraged Hong Kong people and British officials alike to think about a democratic future.

Events in Hong Kong also spurred discussions about democracy. In April 1984, Sir Geoffrey Howe made a speech in Hong Kong announcing that it would no longer be possible to

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<sup>94</sup> Letter, Zhao to Hong Kong students, 22 May 1984 reproduced in pamphlet, ‘Green Paper on Representative Government – Selected Data’ [代議制綠皮書–資料選輯], Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union, ND, BRAY 812 104/1060, CAC.

<sup>95</sup> Ming K. Chan, ‘Democracy Derailed: Realpolitik in the Making of the Hong Kong Basic Law, 1985-1990’, in *The Hong Kong Reader: Passage to Chinese Sovereignty: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, ed. Ming K. Chan and Gerald A. Postiglione (M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 8–9; Yash Ghai, ‘Hong Kong and Macao in Transition (i): Debating Democracy’, *Democratization* 2, no. 3 (1995): 275, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510349508403442>.

<sup>96</sup> Memo, Horris to Hoare, Hum and Clift, 30 November 1983, FCO 40/1557 f742, TNA.

think of Britain administering the colony after 1997. Having conceded that the colonial administration would come to an end and knowing that the history of British decolonisation was one of bringing territories to democratic self-government, there was little need to suppress discussion of representative government in Hong Kong any longer. Howe's speech was a watershed moment after which it became possible to contemplate the previously taboo topic of democratisation.

Throughout 1984, the colonial government published a series of proposals that actively encouraged the public to discuss about representative government.<sup>97</sup> In July, in the midst of the Sino-British negotiations, the Hong Kong government published a Green Paper titled 'The Further Development of Representative Government in Hong Kong'. The Green Paper proposed that some LegCo Unofficials should be chosen via indirect elections: that is, representatives of particular sectors, called 'functional constituencies', would elect an Unofficial Member to represent their sector. Some would be picked by an electoral college comprised of Urban Council, Regional Council and District Board members. The remainder would remain appointed by the Governor. While declining direct elections for LegCo, saying that the idea was "not appropriate at the present time", the Green Paper left the door open to the possibility in the future. The Green Paper also proposed that, beginning in 1991, some ExCo Unofficials should be elected from amongst the LegCo Unofficials.<sup>98</sup> There followed a two month consultation period during which the Hong Kong government received over 360 written submissions; monitored several surveys; collected comments from the District Offices, Mutual Aid Committees and Urban Council members; and indulged a LegCo debate on the topic.<sup>99</sup>

The Green Paper was followed by a White Paper in November, a month before the Joint Declaration was signed.<sup>100</sup> The White Paper confirmed that, in 1985, an electoral college would return 12 Unofficial Members to LegCo. Additionally, nine functional constituencies – commercial, industrial, financial, labour, social services, education, legal, medical and engineering – would indirectly elect a further 12 Unofficial Members. 22 Unofficials would be appointed by the Governor and 10 seats would be reserved for Official Members, making for 56 LegCo Members. The Green Paper's proposals for ExCo were, however, scrapped on the grounds

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<sup>97</sup> Mok, *Covert Colonialism*, 238.

<sup>98</sup> Green Paper, 'The Further Development of Representative Government in Hong Kong', Hong Kong Government Printer, July 1984.

<sup>99</sup> White Paper, 'The Further Development of Representative Government in Hong Kong', Hong Kong Government Printer, 29 November 1984, 6.

<sup>100</sup> King, 'Hong Kong Talks', 60.

that they had elicited little reaction in the community.<sup>101</sup> These announcements and publications from the colonial administration encouraged Hong Kong people to consider representative government.

British parliamentarians also encouraged Hong Kong people to think about democracy as never before. Prior to 1984, Hong Kong pro-democracy delegations had received a subdued reception in London. Only a handful of MPs had been interested in representative government in Hong Kong. In 1979, for instance, three members of the Anglo-Hong Kong Parliamentary Group – Sir Paul Bryan MP (Labour), Ted Rowlands MP (Labour) and the future Governor of Hong Kong Chris Patten MP (Conservative) – returned from a visit to the colony calling on the British government to consider democratic reform.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Robert Parry MP (Labour) was the President of Tsin Sai-nin's Association for Democracy and a Patron of the United Nations Association in Hong Kong.<sup>103</sup> British MPs interested in democratising Hong Kong were, however, in the minority until 1984. After it became clear that Britain would hand Hong Kong to China, however, pro-democracy delegations to London received a notably warmer welcome than their predecessors.

This is illustrated, for example, by a delegation led by Dr L. K. Ding (aka Ding Lik Kiu). Ding was born in the British protectorate of Sarawak, had trained in medicine at Johns Hopkins and arrived in Hong Kong in 1962 where he became deeply involved in addressing social issues via the church, serving as Chairman of the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee.<sup>104</sup> In May 1984, Ding led a delegation to London that called itself 'The Hong Kong Delegation for the Promotion of Democracy' and claimed to represent a membership of 40.<sup>105</sup> Those joining the trip to London included figures from across Hong Kong's civil society such as Fung Ho Lup of the Society for Community Organization; Urban Council members Frederick Fung Kin-kee and Lee Chik-yuet, who was also Vice Chairman of Meeting Point; President of the HKUSU, Fung Wai Kwong; Executive Secretary of Meeting Point, Ma Kwok Ming; and Andrew Tu Hsueh-kwei, Chairman and

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<sup>101</sup> White Paper, 'The Further Development of Representative Government in Hong Kong', Hong Kong Government Printer, 29 November 1984.

<sup>102</sup> Minute, Blacker and three members of the Anglo-Hong Kong Parliamentary Group, 5 December 1979, FCO 21/1738 f348, TNA; briefing, Clift to Murray and Cortazzi, 3 January 1980, FCO 40/1156 f5, TNA.

<sup>103</sup> House of Commons (London) Hansard, 16 May 1984 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1984-05-16/debates/6cfc4fd1-9446-4b90-9d58-3668a71ab28d/HongKong> (accessed 5 September 2024).

<sup>104</sup> Butenhoff, *Social Movements*, 56 and 58; Francis Li, 'Public must have role in shaping our future', *SCMP*, 28 March 1983, 16; Gary Cheung, 'Farewell to doctor with a mission and a view on everything', *SCMP*, 5 July 2008, 14.

<sup>105</sup> 'Democracy fight up to us, local delegation told', *Hong Kong Standard*, 18 May 1984, 6.

Co-founder with Elsie Elliott (whom he would later marry) of the Association for the Promotion of Public Justice in Hong Kong.<sup>106</sup>

In a church hall off of Fleet Street, the group began their visit by releasing a pamphlet titled 'Towards an elected government in Hong Kong'. The manifesto criticised three weaknesses in Hong Kong's political system: unaccountability, unrepresentativeness and channels of communication that were inhibited in one way or another. Chinese officials, the publication said, had indicated that Beijing would allow there to be elected representatives in the future Hong Kong government and the colonial government had signalled its willingness to explore such ideas with the release of the Green Paper. In the future, therefore, members of Hong Kong's decision-making bodies should be elected democratically, civil and political rights be protected by law, and the judiciary remain independent.<sup>107</sup> Specifically, the pamphlet proposed that ExCo and LegCo Members should be elected. At least one third of LegCo should be elected by 1987 with the proportion of elected seats increasing thereafter. ExCo should follow suit, with LegCo and ExCo merging in around 1993 to become a Municipal Council. The Governor should be replaced by a Mayor to be either indirectly elected by Municipal Council Members or directly by universal suffrage of a public franchise.<sup>108</sup> The group claimed that the Hong Kong public was broadly behind the proposals and purported to have surveyed 500,000 people (which is doubtful, as it would have been around 500 times larger than the next largest survey conducted in Hong Kong and there is no other evidence that such a poll ever took place).<sup>109</sup> Their manifesto launched, Ding and company set off for Westminster.

With its call for democracy, its desire to overhaul the colonial system and its explicit challenge to the Governor's position, one might have expected that Ding's delegation would have been shunned by British parliamentarians. Instead, the group enjoyed meetings with a range of Conservative and Labour MPs.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, during a House of Commons debate on 16 May 1984, several of the MPs whom the group had met not only noted their proposals but even voiced support for them and the general idea of democratising Hong Kong. Adley said that his fellow parliamentarians "would be mad – to do anything other than pursue that course", referring to Ding's demand for democratising Hong Kong. Robert Parry referred to his meeting with the Ding delegation saying: "I fully support the campaign led by Dr. Ding". Tom Clarke MP (Labour) did not

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<sup>106</sup> Letter, Archer to Bray, 30 April 1984, BRAY 812 104/1056, CAC.

<sup>107</sup> 'Noisy and cold welcome for Ding', *SCMP*, 9 May 1984, 14.

<sup>108</sup> Pamphlet, 'Towards an elected government in Hong Kong', Ding and delegates, May 1984 enclosed in letter, Archer to Bray, 30 April 1984, BRAY 812 104/1056, CAC.

<sup>109</sup> 'Noisy and cold welcome for Ding', *SCMP*, 9 May 1984, 14.

<sup>110</sup> Rosemary Langford, 'Ding sways top Tory', *SCMP*, 10 May 1984, 14.

explicitly reference his meeting with the Ding delegation in his speech to the Commons but he did support the need to democratise Hong Kong, citing pressure from young people. Sir Bernard Braine MP (Conservative) outlined the key points of the Ding delegation's proposals and commented: "That sounds sensible to me".<sup>111</sup> Howe explicitly mentioned ambitions to democratise Hong Kong during his speech. Although Ding did not meet with Howe and Howe made no reference to Ding's delegation, Ding nonetheless saw this as a positive development and was quoted by a journalist as having said before leaving London: "Did you notice? Sir Geoffrey refers to democratic representation".<sup>112</sup> Ding's fellow delegates concurred that it had been a "meaningful and successful" trip.<sup>113</sup>

Some Hong Kong people began to consider the prospect of representative government for a Hong Kong within China after Chinese officials announced 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong'. The colonial government spurred such conversations when it published Green and White Papers on representative government in 1984. Meanwhile, British parliamentarians who had previously refused to meet democracy campaigners from Hong Kong showed that they now welcomed discussions about democracy in Hong Kong. Official encouragement was another factor that contributed towards Hong Kong people shifting from a preference for the colonial administration to backing democratic reforms.

## Democracy as a distraction?

Academics have questioned whether the colonial government purposefully raised the prospect of democratisation to shift Hong Kong people's attentions away from worrying about the Sino-British negotiations. For instance, Ian Scott "inferred [...] that there was a deliberate alternation between the announcement of undesired political changes and measures aimed at boosting future confidence".<sup>114</sup> Scott was referring to a series of events in 1984 which, to repeat, included the following: in April, Howe announced that Hong Kong would no longer be administered by the British after 1997; in July, the Hong Kong government published the Green Paper on representative government; in August, Howe made a speech in Hong Kong unveiling more details about arrangements after 1997 and, in September, the draft Joint Declaration was released; this was followed in November by the publication of the White Paper on representative government.

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<sup>111</sup> House of Commons (London) Hansard, 16 May 1984 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1984-05-16/debates/6cfc4fd1-9446-4b90-9d58-3668a71ab28d/HongKong> (accessed 5 September 2024).

<sup>112</sup> Sheila Dawes, 'We're satisfied, says Dr Ding', *Hong Kong Standard*, 18 May 1984, 1.

<sup>113</sup> 'Democracy fight up to us, local delegation told', *Hong Kong Standard*, 18 May 1984, 6.

<sup>114</sup> Scott, *Political Change*, 186.

This section examines the question of whether democracy was raised as a way of distracting Hong Kong people from contesting the broader, existential issue of Hong Kong's future towards the end of the Sino-British negotiations. It agrees that the release of proposals about representative government alongside updates on the Sino-British negotiations had the effect of encouraging an association between democracy and decolonisation which saw Hong Kong civil society redirect their energies towards the former rather than the latter. It argues, however, that there is no evidence that British officials did this intentionally.

Howe's April 1984 statement had a notable effect on Hong Kong civil society. Rather than continuing to contest whether or not Hong Kong would return to China in 1997, most turned their attentions towards debating the shape of the future government. This is illustrated by Ding and his associates, whose above-described visit to London in May centred on representative government rather than sovereignty over Hong Kong. After returning to Hong Kong, in July 1984, eight leaders from a range of social and political groups met at the Christian Industrial Committee building to discuss the Green Paper.<sup>115</sup> By the following month, the group's membership had ballooned: representatives of more than 50 pressure groups, unions and other organisations attended the Second Meeting of the Joint Conference on the Green Paper, which continued to convene at the Christian Industrial Committee building.<sup>116</sup> Under the chairmanship of Szeto Wah, who was also the Chairman of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, delegates considered different models for democratising Hong Kong. The model agreed on by the close of the second meeting resembled that which Ding's delegation had proposed in London in May 1984, which is perhaps unsurprising given that Ding was integral to the Conference.<sup>117</sup> Later that year, the Joint Conference revised its plans and obtained support from 89 groups for direct elections to LegCo, demanding that no fewer than one fifth of the Council's seats be directly elected by 1988. In September, they organised a mass rally at Ko Shan Theatre which was attended by a reported 1,000 people. Ding, Szeto and 14 other representatives spoke, urging the public to support their call for early direct elections to LegCo.<sup>118</sup> The Joint Conference, which was convened in response to the Green Paper and encouraged by a developing interest in democracy across Hong Kong, gathered support from a wide range of groups and civil society actors. Once Howe had conceded that sovereignty over Hong Kong would be restored to China, Ding and the

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<sup>115</sup> Minute, 1st Meeting of the Representatives from the Joint Conference, 31 July 1984, BRAY 812 104/1058, CAC; itinerary for Jeremy Bray's visit to Hong Kong, ND, BRAY 1982 104/1059, CAC.

<sup>116</sup> Letter, Bray to Howe, 12 August 1984, BRAY 812 104/1055, CAC; itinerary for Jeremy Bray's visit to Hong Kong, ND, BRAY 1982 104/1059, CAC.

<sup>117</sup> Letter, Bray to Howe, 12 August 1984, BRAY 812 104/1055, CAC.

<sup>118</sup> Chiu Kit-ying, 'Big hand for direct Legco polling', *Hong Kong Standard*, 17 September 1984, 1.

rest of the collegium he had helped to assemble acquiesced to this and focused instead on debating the form that democracy should take.

Aside from the Joint Conference, other groups and individuals dedicated their time to discussing democracy, too. The Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union under Szeto Wah's Chairmanship published a multi-issue pamphlet series about the Green Paper.<sup>119</sup> In June 1984, the Union held a seminar entitled 'How to carry out democratic education in schools'. The event was attended by 22 organisations, all of whom put their signature to a letter calling for democratic education.<sup>120</sup> The Green Paper also attracted university student attention. In early July, the Hong Kong Federation of Students pre-empted the colonial government's Green Paper by launching its own at a press conference titled 'Hong Kong Democratic Political System Development Green Paper'.<sup>121</sup> That same month, the Hong Kong Federation of Students staged a forum at the Polytechnic about democratisation.<sup>122</sup> In August, Lingnan College Student Union representatives met with Unofficial Members, bringing with them a seven-point statement the core argument of which was that Hong Kong should move towards direct elections and quickly.<sup>123</sup> In September, eight organisations, which included students' and residents' groups, penned an open letter criticising the government's Green Paper for being overly conservative and calling for 10 directly elected LegCo seats in 1988.<sup>124</sup> Meanwhile, elected Urban Council members Peter Chan, Kwan Lim-ho, Frederick Fung Kin-kee and Lee Chik-yuet co-ordinated an exercise to examine public views on the Green Paper. Pressure groups and social activists also united to read and prepare a response to the proposals.<sup>125</sup> By 1984, groups across Hong Kong society were focused on the shape of Hong Kong's future government and resigned to accepting that this would be applied to a Hong Kong under China's sovereignty.

Some in Hong Kong questioned the timing of the release of publications about representative government. For instance, Elliott protested that Hong Kong people were being asked to provide feedback on the development of the governmental structure before the overall future of the colony was confirmed. "The least you can do," she wrote to Luce, "would be to instruct the Hong Kong 'Government' to delay implementation of the Green Paper until the results

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<sup>119</sup> Pamphlet, 'Green Paper on Representative Government – Selected Data' [代議制綠皮書—資料選輯], Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, ND, BRAY 812 104/1060, CAC.

<sup>120</sup> Letter, Szeto to Akers-Jones, 19 June 1984, HKRS1101-2-10 f4, PRO.

<sup>121</sup> Frank Choi, 'Direct election is the key – students', *SCMP*, 10 July 1984, 14.

<sup>122</sup> Linda Lui, 'Democracy necessary, but not easy', *SCMP*, 16 July 1984, 14.

<sup>123</sup> 'Students' proposal carries high risk', *Hong Kong Standard*, 11 August 1984, 3.

<sup>124</sup> 'Students reject govt claim', *Hong Kong Standard*, 9 September 1984, 2.

<sup>125</sup> Matthew Leung, 'Group poised for action on Green Paper', *SCMP*, 11 July 1984, 11.

of the Sino-British talks are known.”<sup>126</sup> The Hong Kong public also asked questions. Talking Points was a weekly report that had developed out of the Movement Of Opinion Direction survey, described in Chapter 4.<sup>127</sup> Based on colonial officials’ conversations with a small number of respondents, Talking Points reports were indicative rather than representative of the Hong Kong public’s views and reactions. The July 1984 edition of Talking Points recorded that the Hong Kong public was “divided on whether the Green Paper had been issued at the appropriate time.”<sup>128</sup> Amongst some in Hong Kong, therefore, there was a concern that ideas of representative government had appeared at the wrong time and that the Sino-British negotiations should be resolved first.

Although Hong Kong civil society became largely focused on the question of democracy, there is no indication amongst the files at TNA and the PRO that officials tabled democracy as a concerted ploy to redirect attention away from the negotiations. Colonial officials considered representative government years before: Governor MacLehose initiated internal consultations during the 1970s and the resulting 1980 Green Paper ‘A Pattern of District Administration in Hong Kong’ came before the Sino-British negotiations were even conceived.<sup>129</sup> Additionally, during the Sino-British negotiations, British officials thought it desirable to maintain a separation between the two issues. As Youde said, promoting discussion about representative government should not be “misinterpreted” as the British making “preparations for withdrawal” or seen by the Chinese “as a plan to frustrate their ambitions.”<sup>130</sup> The need to disavow the notion that Britain was withdrawing early even shaped what was and was not included in the Green Paper. The Hong Kong government had wanted to write of the possibility of moving towards a system in which the Governor would be elected. Howe was wary that this might imply that the British were affecting an early withdrawal and therefore ensured the Green Paper made it clear that the Governor would “continue to be appointed formally by the Queen until 1997”.<sup>131</sup> In a later interview, the former Secretary for District Administration David Akers-Jones described the timing of the publications as “an unfortunate coincidence”.<sup>132</sup> The effect on Hong Kong civil society was the same, however,

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<sup>126</sup> Letter, Elliott to Luce, 21 July 1984, BRAY 812 104/1056, CAC.

<sup>127</sup> Mok, ‘Public Opinion Polls’; Mok, *Covert Colonialism*, 241.

<sup>128</sup> Report, ‘Talking Points’, City and New Territories Administration liaison staff, Hong Kong government, 27 July 1984, BRAY 812/1058, CAC.

<sup>129</sup> Lobo BSC interview, 240.

<sup>130</sup> Letter, Youde to Clift, 18 April 1983, FCO 40/1550 f278, TNA.

<sup>131</sup> Green Paper, ‘The Further Development of Representative Government in Hong Kong’, Hong Kong Government Printer, July 1984, 19.

<sup>132</sup> David Akers-Jones, ‘Transcript of interview with Sir David Akers-Jones’, interview by Steve Tsang (1990), MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 416, BSC, 314.

as questions about representative government overtook the broader issue of the future of Hong Kong during the final months of the Sino-British negotiations.

In summary, in 1984, Christian, student, residents' associations, social and pressure groups and Urban Council members turned their focus towards matters of democracy and consequently brought less pressure to bare on the broader, existential question of Hong Kong's future. While there is no evidence that officials raised representative government with the purpose of distracting from the negotiations, discussions about democratisation nonetheless served to direct attentions and resources towards the topic.

## Conclusion

In its most basic form, democracy should react to the preferences of the majority. Initially, most Hong Kong people wanted the undemocratic colonial administration to continue. They did not obtain this. Since the 1980s, public and academic discussion has been dominated by discussions about democracy. As the transition from British colony to China's sovereignty got underway in the mid-1980s, the Hong Kong government began to implement its plans for increasing the representative element of the administration.<sup>133</sup> By the late 1980s, the colonial government was negotiating with Beijing on the pace and scope of democratisation and abandoned some of its proposals.<sup>134</sup> In the 1990s under the Governorship of Chris Patten, Hong Kong saw its first fully and last fully elected LegCo, much to China's chagrin.<sup>135</sup> Since the handover, protestors have pushed to increase the pace and enlarge the scope of democratisation, keeping the subject at the forefront of contemporary social scientific work and inspiring research into Hong Kong's past pro-democracy protests.<sup>136</sup>

Academics looking into Hong Kong's past have been drawn to groups that advocated democracy because they were writing in a context in which such democratic politics were dominant.<sup>137</sup> But by looking into Hong Kong's past for evidence of pro-democratic expressions that mirror the present, authors have used history teleologically and neglected countervailing

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<sup>133</sup> King, 'Hong Kong Talks', 62.

<sup>134</sup> Chen and Ng, 'Making the Constitutional Order'.

<sup>135</sup> Cheng, 'Sino-British Negotiations'; Shiu-hing Lo, 'Historical Origins of the Hong Kong Model of Democracy and Interactions with the China Factor', in *Hong Kong's Indigenous Democracy: Origins, Evolution and Contentions*, The Theories, Concepts and Practices of Democracy (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 37.

<sup>136</sup> For example: Dapiran, *City of Protest*; Dapiran, *City on Fire*; Hung, *City on the Edge*; Lim, *Indelible City*.

<sup>137</sup> For example: Butenhoff, *Social Movements*; Lo, *Politics of Democratization*; So, *Hong Kong's Embattled Democracy*.

views. This chapter has begun to address this by examining some of the non-democratic visions articulated for Hong Kong's future. It has shown that most people initially did not want Hong Kong to democratise and that pro-democracy campaigners were in the minority. When asked in the early 1980s, Hong Kong people were not at all uncertain about the future they preferred. The majority wanted the colonial status quo to continue past 1997, by which it is inferred that they did not prefer that Hong Kong develop into a self-administering democracy. This option was chosen by people from across all sections of Hong Kong society: from members of the public to pressure groups, Urban Council members to Unofficials, and students to tycoons. It is in evidence in opinion polls, interviews and position papers, and reflected in letters, meeting minutes and anecdotal reminiscences. Expressing a desire for an undemocratic political system is not the same as being apathetic towards politics: one may choose a non-democratic system out of a desire for it. This again demonstrates that Hong Kong people were not politically apathetic, they simply preferred an undemocratic colonial autocracy.

Furthermore, by paralleling democracy and decolonisation, the assumption that the two are inexorably intertwined has gone unchallenged. This chapter has argued that decolonisation is not a sufficient explanation for Hong Kong's democratisation. Three factors were at play. When Chinese officials announced the 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong' formula, some Hong Kong people took this as an appealing way of combining nationalism with self-government. Additionally, for those who remained worried about Beijing's possible interference in Hong Kong affairs after 1997, democracy came to be valued as potentially a way of protecting the post-1997 Hong Kong government's autonomy against overreach from Beijing. Lastly, Hong Kong people were encouraged to consider representative government: through announcements, publications, leaks and warm welcomes extended to pro-democratic delegations, Chinese, British and colonial officials separately and unintentionally permitted, stimulated and promoted discussions about democracy in Hong Kong. One of the consequences of this was that most Hong Kong people acquiesced to what had become a truism: that Hong Kong would return to China. In so doing, they ceased to contest the broad, existential questions that were yet to be formalised in the Joint Declaration and began instead to debate the shape the Hong Kong's future and more representative government out to take. With the most preferred option of colonialism continuing past 1997 denied to them, democracy was adopted only as a 'second best' option based more on compromise, its perceived utility and extrinsic influences.

I have argued throughout this thesis that Hong Kong people influenced how officials thought about Hong Kong's future, strategized over the Sino-British negotiations and executed the Sino-British Joint Declaration. In most cases, the examples I have given have been where

Hong Kong people made specific suggestions and informed points of detail: businesspeople encouraged Governor MacLehose to raise the 1997 issue with Deng Xiaoping (as shown in Chapter 1); pressure groups provided polling data to which Thatcher referred when meeting Deng (recounted in Chapter 2); Louis Cha Leung-yung's editorials gave Chinese officials the idea of a 50-year period of no change while a small clique of Hong Kong elites advised Chinese officials on particular matters (explored in Chapter 3); Hong Kong newspapers provided British and colonial officials with evidence of local views (examined in Chapter 4); and ExCo Unofficials pressed for concessions on passports, the Joint Liaison Group and other matters (analysed in Chapter 5). That is to say, Hong Kong people were influential on many particularities of the Sino-British negotiations over the future of Hong Kong. These successes notwithstanding, however, this chapter shows that Hong Kong people were ultimately unsuccessful in affecting the issue that had the broadest scope: they did not secure continued colonial administration after 1997. This does not contradict the overall argument of this thesis: the many examples of Hong Kong people influencing the future of the city still stand. But it does compel us to keep the findings of this thesis in perspective. Hong Kong people influenced the Sino-British negotiations in many ways but they did not obtain the future that most of them had wanted.

## Conclusion

The Sino-British negotiations over the future of Hong Kong mattered most to the people of Hong Kong, the British government and the Chinese government. The existing literature has, however, only examined the UK-China dimension of the talks and neglected Hong Kong people almost entirely. When authors have occasionally asked whether Hong Kong people played any role in the Sino-British negotiations, most have lacked access to the sources necessary to answer their questions or replied in the negative. Our picture of the Sino-British negotiations has, therefore, leaned towards the history of British and Chinese officials' interactions.

This thesis writes Hong Kong people into the history of the Sino-British negotiations. By examining recently declassified archive material alongside a range of other primary sources, it has identified interactions between Hong Kong people and British, Chinese and colonial officials both before and during the Sino-British negotiations. It has shown that Hong Kong people were not passive, acquiescent recipients of decisions rendered purely by officials. Rather, they were active, politically engaged and wielded their agency to shape the city's future in a myriad of ways. This thesis concludes that Hong Kong people shaped the Sino-British negotiations and the resulting Joint Declaration. In the following, I revisit and address the questions that framed this thesis, summarise the arguments made in the chapters, and highlight the contributions and significance of these findings.

### Who sought to influence, and who was the most and least influential?

People from across Hong Kong society tried to affect the Sino-British negotiations. The two most influential segments were businesspeople and the Unofficials. In the 1970s, Hong Kong's business community exerted a general pressure on the colonial administration to address the 1997 issue. Those that operated between Britain and China from bases in Hong Kong found themselves enviably positioned to act as unofficial diplomats. They were also able to exploit their connections in all three locations to insert their own interests into international relations. In particular, Fung King-hey encouraged Governor MacLehose to raise the 1997 issue with Deng Xiaoping and Sir Y. K. Pao frequently acted as a messenger between the sides, injecting his own opinions into proceedings.

In the years after MacLehose's March 1979 meeting with Deng, however, the British and Chinese governments began treating Hong Kong businesspeople differently. British officials

triaged their contacts, only granting Hong Kong businesspeople who promised projects of both economic and political significance audiences with senior politicians, namely Lord Kadoorie and Pao. During the formal negotiations, the British side refused to discuss the state of the negotiations with Hong Kong businesspeople, excusing this on confidentiality but also due to distrust.

Meanwhile, China initially welcomed businesspeople to Beijing in delegations to ideate about Hong Kong's future. Then, Chinese officials turned to confidential meetings with Hong Kong businesspeople as well as Hong Kong's social and media elites for advice and feedback as the talks progressed. This involved Louis Cha Leung-yung, who advised on the Sino-British agreement being a 'declaration', and Martin Lee Chu-ming, who convinced Beijing to allow Hong Kong's common law system to remain and for its court of final appeal to be based in Hong Kong with external judges able to sit thereon. Hong Kong businesspeople were, therefore, especially influential on the Chinese side and initially highly influential on the British side.

The Unofficial Members of ExCo had a sizeable impact on the British side, with Sir S. Y. Chung an especially prominent proponent of his colleagues' concerns. ExCo Unofficials advised Governors, the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretaries and other officials on the British side. They were consulted on the agenda, working papers and the negotiators' objectives, and were particularly instructive on the details of nationality-related issues and the Joint Liaison Group. Their Unofficial colleagues in LegCo held less sway but were nonetheless central to the 'going public' initiative, launched by Roger Lobo's tabling of the Lobo motion, that eventually led British officials to rebuild ties with the Unofficials. Unofficials also met with Chinese officials, though there is little indication that they affected Beijing's thinking. Nonetheless, Unofficials wielded significant influence over the British side.

Businesspeople and the Unofficials were not the only segments of Hong Kong society to have a degree of impact on the Sino-British negotiations. British, Chinese and colonial officials gave particular attention to pressure group activities. The polls commissioned by the Hong Kong Observers and the Reform Club were wielded by Thatcher in her meeting with Deng and, later, by Cradock in trying to convince his Chinese interlocutors that Hong Kong people wanted the British colonial administration to continue. The Hong Kong Prospect Institute's idea for a Sino-British treaty was considered by British officials. Lastly, the Reform Club's position paper was floated by Chinese official Zhong Xidong, quite possibly in order to test reactions to the ideas it contained. Officials also noted the actions and ideas of groups including the Urban Council, the District Boards, the Heung Yee Kuk, student unions, social organisations, residents' associations, church

groups and more. Officials pilfered the proposals these groups produced and strategized in relation to their reactions.

Officials from all three governments also had a complicated relationships with Hong Kong's media. Chinese, British and colonial officials each fed journalists propaganda, falsehoods and half-truths in the hopes of shaping the Hong Kong public's opinions. At the same time, however, all three governments relied to a significant extent on reporters as a way of understanding local attitudes and occasionally borrowed ideas from the pages of newspapers. In particular, the idea of a 50-year guarantee of no change arose from the pages of a Hong Kong newspaper read by a Xinhua staffer.

In examining the political engagement and influence of a range of Hong Kong individuals and groups, this thesis provides multiple counterexamples to the political apathy and political impotence thesis. Historians have already presented counterexamples to the assertion of political impotence and political apathy. None, however, have examined the engagement and influence of Hong Kong people during the Sino-British negotiations. As the most consequential event in Hong Kong's colonial history, it is important to ask whether or not Hong Kong people were interested and influential. Moreover, although the political apathy and political importance thesis has been criticised from many angles, the literature on the Sino-British negotiations remains littered to references to the supposed apathy and impotence of Hong Kong people by way of excusing their absence from the narrative. It was, therefore, important to examine apathy and impotence with regards to the negotiations specifically.

In surveying the wide range of Hong Kong people who articulated opinions about the future of Hong Kong, this thesis has argued that a great number of Hong Kong people were not at all apathetic. Moreover, a range of Hong Kong people affected the Sino-British negotiations and shaped the Joint Declaration, demonstrating that Hong Kong people were not politically impotent either. Influence was not binary: Hong Kong people influenced some things but not others. In particular, Hong Kong people failed to secure the continuation of the colonial administration past 1997. Proponents of the political impotence thesis will find examples that support their position. These examples are, however, outweighed by the many more illustrations of Hong Kong people affecting the talks.

Additionally, this thesis has wrestled with the assumption that the CCP operated in a purely top-down fashion through its United Front activities. A recent thread of literature has begun to probe this presumption but studies have tended to be in the social sciences, examined recent rather than historical cases and neglected to examine Beijing's relationship with Hong Kong people. This thesis has argued that the CCP did not operate in an exclusively top-down manner.

Rather, Chinese officials sought the opinions of a select group of Hong Kong people as well as Hong Kong people at large through newspapers and other channels. These views were then communicated to decision-makers in Beijing. This finding enlarges our understanding of the CCP's response mechanisms and Beijing's relationship with Hong Kong people. Furthermore, while some of the CCP's United Front tactics in Hong Kong were unidirectional – such as its propaganda campaigns – others were bidirectional and some selected Hong Kong people the opportunity to shape Chinese officials' thinking about Hong Kong and its future.

Lastly, historians of the British Empire and decolonisation have become increasingly interested in how the inhabitants of colonies experienced, interacted with and affected the withdrawal of British occupiers from their territories. Hong Kong has, however, remained absent from this literature. Indeed, Hong Kong is often overlooked altogether in purportedly 'global' histories of British decolonisation. This thesis contributes towards the literature on the political agency of colonised people by examining how Hong Kong people sought to shape the negotiations that led to Britain's withdrawal from its last populous colony and the effective end of the British Empire.

## How did Hong Kong people seek to influence officials?

Hong Kong businesspeople and Unofficials shaped official thinking in their confidential, behind closed doors meetings with officials. They put forward arguments, suggestions and sometimes commercial projects, sometimes offering evidence of Hong Kong people's thoughts to buttress their proposals. Businesspeople and Unofficials, therefore, sought to persuade and dissuade. They also, on occasion, threatened that Hong Kong would suffer should a particular course of action be taken or omitted. Both groups occasionally tried to apply pressure through more public means: businesspeople occasionally gave comments to the media and speeches at events while Unofficials at one point adopted a 'going public' strategy. For the most part, however, Hong Kong businesspeople and Unofficials confined themselves to their discussions with officials in meetings.

Mindful of the need to show Parliament that Hong Kong people accepted the result of the talks and wanting to avoid civil unrest in the colony, British officials were anxious to understand what Hong Kong people thought. Although the colonial government possessed the means to conduct a plebiscite, it did not launch an opinion survey for fear that Beijing would react negatively. China, meanwhile, wanted to ensure Hong Kong's continued success, in part as an enticement to Taiwan and in part to support the mainland's economic modernisation. China had

only headline ideas for Hong Kong's future. British and Chinese officials were both left eager for proposals and insights into local opinion. Groups were therefore at their most effective when they commissioned opinion polls or produced position papers, such as the Hong Kong Observers, Reform Club and Prospect Institute examples given above.

For Hong Kong trade organisations, residents' associations, student unions and individuals, the main means by which they attempted to influence officials was writing letters. British, Chinese and colonial officials noted and sometimes replied to letters, though it does not appear that any had an especially significant effect on the official level. As far as the British side goes, one of the reasons that letter-writing did little to affect official thinking was that the colonial government had no mechanism for summarising, weighing and reporting on the views expressed via letters to decision-makers. Letters were collected but little else appears to have come of them. Hilton Cheong-Leen's letters are a case in point. The Chairman of the Hong Kong Civic Association wrote to London once or twice a year but had no notable impact on British officials and did not even receive replies to all of his missives.

Much of the recent literature about politics in Hong Kong has centred on street protests. What I have coined 'city of protest' literature looks to Hong Kong's past for examples of protests. This thesis has found that although some students picketed Thatcher's September 1982 visit to Hong Kong, protests were rare during the period of the Sino-British talks and had no discernible effect on the negotiations. Instead, this thesis has identified a wide range of participatory methods that were both more common and more effective than protests. This thesis agrees with proponents of the city of protest thesis that Hong Kong people have historically stood up for themselves but compels proponents to expand their understanding of 'political participation' to encompass a broader range of means.

Additionally, this thesis has applied a new diplomatic history approach to the Sino-British negotiations. In so doing, it has revealed that Hong Kong's future was determined by various people using a range of methods spread across many different locations. Hong Kong's future was determined by British and Chinese officials who discussed in the negotiation rooms, the Great Hall of the People in Beijing and the offices of state in Westminster. But it was also negotiated in the Unofficials' special viewing room, hotel lobbies and over dinners; contended in the pages of newspapers, position papers and polling results by media producers and pressure groups; and debated in letters sent by ordinary people to colonial officials in private and loud expressions of opposition made by placard-carrying students in public. In contrast to the three major schools of Hong Kong history, which force a binary between studying Hong Kong Chinese people or researching officials, this thesis has examined interactions between these two poles. It has

overcome the limitations of traditional studies of the Sino-British negotiations by adopting a new diplomatic history approach, allowing us to locate a far wider range of means, places and people involved in shaping the future of Hong Kong. Consequently, this thesis has probed the porosity that existed between the colonial state and Hong Kong society, reconceiving of officials and non-officials not as siloed apart from each other but rather constitutive of each other's political lives.

Lastly, much of the literature on decolonisation has centred on anti-imperialist, pro-democratic protestors. Indeed, the bulk of the literature on Hong Kong politics since the mid-1980s has focused on democratisation. Yet most people in Hong Kong did not initially want Hong Kong to democratise: they wanted the colonial status quo to continue. This thesis has argued that democracy was thrust on Hong Kong and that there were multifarious motivations behind its adoption.

## How did officials handle Hong Kong people's views?

Britain and China handled Hong Kong businesspeople quite differently. Following MacLehose's 1979 meeting with Deng Xiaoping, British officials adopted a triage approach to those Hong Kong businesspeople who wished to call on British officials. Only tycoons who promised projects of political and economic significance – namely, Pao and Kadoorie – could capture the attentions of senior British officials and even they faded into the background once they had extracted all that they could from British politicians. As for the others, British officials' refusal to break with confidentiality robbed them of information and ideas that Hong Kong businesspeople could have offered and alienated Hong Kong business contacts who turned to supporting China's plans for Hong Kong's future. Although British officials considered arming Hong Kong businesspeople with talking points to take to Beijing, there is no evidence that they did this on a widespread basis owing to their inability to find a sufficiently trustworthy Hong Kong person.

British officials were less responsive to Hong Kong views than their Chinese counterparts. During the early 1980s, Beijing asked Hong Kong businesspeople their thoughts on whether or not China should retake Hong Kong. During the Sino-British negotiations, Chinese officials continued to iterate their ideas in collaboration with Hong Kong elites in confidential meetings. China's United Front with selected Hong Kong people allowed Beijing to secure the support of Hong Kong elites and gave Hong Kong advisors the opportunity to shape Chinese official thinking.

Throughout most of the period under study, British officials sought to accommodate ExCo Unofficials' views. Early on in the talks, Ambassador Cradock urged a change of tack whereas ExCo Unofficials compelled negotiators to stay the course and, for several months, the

Unofficials won out. The convivial relationship between Hong Kong Unofficials and British officials was tested in the first half of 1984 and, when the Unofficials launched delegations to London and Beijing, they were ignored, berated and/or their ideas dismissed. Chinese officials held secret monthly meetings with Unofficial Members though never appeared to act on their thoughts. British officials took the Unofficials' advice more seriously, even if they did not always agree with or act on it.

Officials on the British and Chinese side were somewhat similar in how they handled views emanating from the rest of Hong Kong society. Both sets of officials had meetings with a range of individuals and groups spanning pressure groups, church leaders such as Dr L. K. Ding, social movement organisers such as Fung Ho Lup and others. Both monitored the papers taking note of editorials, opinion polls and ideas expressed in letters to the editor. Neither launched their own survey of Hong Kong views.

Taking the above altogether, how officials handled Hong Kong views was dictated by several factors. Firstly, the origin of the idea: Hong Kong people who occupied a high position in economic, social or media spheres tended to have greater access to officials than those who did not, with British officials especially amenable to the commercial elite. With greater access came greater opportunity to shape official thinking. This is not to argue that Hong Kong people outside of these echelons had no effect whatsoever. Indeed, pressure groups had an especially pronounced capacity to affect official thinking when their information and ideas dovetailed with official thinking. But such groups had fewer opportunities to meet with officials directly than certain business elites and the Unofficial Members. Who one was, therefore, went some way towards determining the audience one might receive.

Secondly, the state of the Sino-British negotiations also affected how Hong Kong views were handled. Officials were generally more receptive to Hong Kong views at the beginning of the process than towards the end. The Unofficials Members' advice increasingly came into conflict with British officials' desire to maintain constructive relations with their Chinese counterparts. Moreover, once Sir Geoffrey Howe announced in April 1984 that Britain would no longer administer Hong Kong after 1997, any Hong Kong view that ran contrary to this decision was rendered moot. Who espoused an idea and how they conveyed it mattered but so too did the broader context of the negotiations and UK-China relations at the time it was proposed and the governments' other, sometimes conflicting, ambitions.

Thirdly and relatedly, officials' receptivity to Hong Kong views was also premised on the content of the ideas. For instance, at the start of the talks, British officials were especially welcoming of those Hong Kong people who stated a preference for the colonial administration to

continue after 1997. By 1984, a warmer welcome was afforded to those that lobbied for a strong local administration formed on the basis of democratic principles. Chinese officials, meanwhile, welcomed a diversity of views before 1982, after which China had determined to take back Hong Kong and would not entertain any ideas that ran contrary to this headline decision. British officials publicly and Chinese officials privately claimed that they wanted to hear Hong Kong opinions but how officials handled Hong Kong ideas was at least partially conditioned by its origin, the broader context and the content of the proposal.

One of the unsurprising findings of this thesis is that not every attempt to shape official thinking was successful. The clearest example of this is that Hong Kong people did not achieve the continuation of British colonialism that the majority initially wanted. Nonetheless, some Hong Kong people had some influence, particularly on how officials perceived each other and the 1997 issue and on points of detail in the negotiations and Joint Declaration.

One of the surprising findings of this thesis is that Chinese officials were more open to discussing Hong Kong's future with Hong Kong people than British officials. The British side explicitly called on Hong Kong people to express themselves, committed to considering views and ensuring that the final agreement would be acceptable to them. Yet the British side made few attempts to fulfil these promises. Newspaper articles were gathered into weekly summaries and letters, position papers, surveys and other materials filed neatly into folders. These steps were, however, far from adequate for reaching an informed, weighted, systematic understanding of local views and were not routinely transmitted to key decisionmakers. British officials did consult ExCo Unofficials and, for a short while, Pao and Kadoorie, but not the general public at large. Chinese officials also monitored the media but, unlike the British, ensured their findings were collated into reports that went to the highest level. Chinese officials also met with Hong Kong businesspeople, professionals, media producers, pressure groups and other representatives, and folded their feedback into policy. While impossible to quantify, it appears that China adopted Hong Kong views to a greater degree than the British.

## Beyond academia

The Sino-British negotiations and the 1984 Joint Declaration they produced decided that Britain would hand Hong Kong to China in 1997 but this was not the end of contentiousness in Hong Kong politics. Between 1985 and 1990, the Basic Law Drafting Committee wrote Hong Kong's postcolonial constitution. Beijing appointed all 59 members of the Committee, giving 36 seats to mainland drafters and 23 to Hong Kong representatives with only two allotted to Hong Kong

people who were not pro-Beijing (Szeto Wah and Martin Lee Chu-ming).<sup>1</sup> In 1992, Governor Patten installed democratic reforms that Beijing said went against the spirit of the Joint Declaration.<sup>2</sup> In 1997, Britain handed Hong Kong to China. In 2014 and again in 2019, a sizable proportion of the Hong Kong public showed their discontent towards the negotiated settlement agreed between Britain and China in the 1980s and its implementation with large-scale, sometimes violent protests.<sup>3</sup> UK-China relations have plunged to a new low in part due to disagreements over Hong Kong. China has even described the Joint Declaration as “a historical document that has absolutely no practical significance and no bindingness upon the Chinese Government’s handling” of Hong Kong.”<sup>4</sup> In 2021, the British government “declared China to be in a state of ongoing non-compliance with the Joint Declaration”.<sup>5</sup> In recognition of Britain’s “historic and moral commitment to the people of Hong Kong”, the government created a bespoke visa route specifically for British National (Overseas) passport holders, allowing Hong Kong people to move to the UK and begin a five-year pathway towards citizenship.<sup>6</sup> The Chinese Embassy in London said that the scheme “severely violates the Sino-British Joint Declaration and [...] grossly interferes in Hong Kong affairs, which are China’s internal affairs”.<sup>7</sup> The Joint Declaration, therefore, remains alive and contentious in UK-China international relations and continues to affect the lives of Hong Kong people today.

From the very beginning of the Sino-British negotiations to today, the events covered in this thesis have continued to exert an impact on Hong Kong, its population and diaspora as well as relations between Hong Kong, China and Britain. In examining events in Hong Kong’s past that relate directly to Hong Kong’s present, this thesis contributes to understanding contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> Chen and Ng, ‘Making the Constitutional Order’, 63; Davis, *Making Hong Kong China*, 06; Loh, *Underground Front*, 157; Pepper, *Keeping Democracy at Bay*, 202.

<sup>2</sup> Tsang, *A Modern History*, 261.

<sup>3</sup> Antony Dapiran, ‘Hong Kong’s Reckoning’, in *China Story Yearbook 2019: China Dreams*, ed. Jane Golley et al., China Story Yearbook 2019 (The Australian National University, 2015); Antony Dapiran, ‘Hong Kong’s National Security Law’, in *China Story Yearbook 2020: Crisis*, ed. Jane Golley and Linda Javin, China Story Yearbook 2020 (The Australian National University, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Statement, Lu Kang to press, 30 June 2017 [https://newyork.china-consulate.gov.cn/chn/fyrth/201706/t20170630\\_9492924.htm](https://newyork.china-consulate.gov.cn/chn/fyrth/201706/t20170630_9492924.htm) (accessed 24 October 2025).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Six-monthly report on Hong Kong: July to December 2020’, FCDO <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/six-monthly-report-on-hong-kong-july-to-december-2020/six-monthly-report-on-hong-kong-july-to-december-2020> (accessed 31 December 2025).

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<sup>7</sup> Statement, Chinese Embassy in London spokesperson to a questioner, 25 February 2022 [https://gb.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/PressandMedia/Spokepersons/202202/t20220226\\_10645791.htm](https://gb.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/PressandMedia/Spokepersons/202202/t20220226_10645791.htm) (accessed 31 December 2025).

Hong Kong beyond academic debates by examining the roots of recent disagreements and the extent to which Hong Kong people affected the Sino-British talks over Hong Kong's future.

Today in Hong Kong, the authorities are rewriting the colonial past, removing books and newspapers that contain contrary messages, and placing archives and other primary sources under threat of irreversible destruction.<sup>8</sup> Some Hong Kong people who have placed themselves into exile are still being hounded abroad.<sup>9</sup> A nostalgia for the colonial past has developed based, not on an understanding of the period, but instead on a feeling of opposition to the current government.<sup>10</sup> This thesis tackles both of these issues. Firstly, by making use of sources that are at risk of erasure, this thesis has incorporated materials that might be lost imminently. Secondly, by reviewing the relationship between the colonial state and Hong Kong society, this thesis compels readers to question colonial nostalgia. Hong Kong people may wonder whether the older generation attempted to affect the negotiations; this thesis shows that Hong Kong people did try to determine their own future but that a suppressive colonial legal and media environment, a lack of effective mechanisms for channelling views to the colonial authorities, and a reluctance in Westminster to allow Hong Kong people to dictate negotiations that were considered to be between the UK and Beijing moderated the influence Hong Kong people could hope to have.

To argue that Hong Kong people affected the Sino-British negotiations should not be taken to mean that Hong Kong people are responsible for the city's current situation. Hong Kong people had some effect on the negotiations and shaped parts of the Joint Declaration but did not secure other points, in particular the outcome that the majority initially wanted: for the British colonial administration to continue past 1997. Furthermore, while the Joint Declaration was a significant agreement that continues to impact every aspect of Hong Kong today, it was not the only relevant document in shaping Hong Kong's post-1997 future. Lastly, while Hong Kong people have their fingerprints on the Joint Declaration, its implementation has been extremely contentious.

Hong Kong people influenced colonial, British and Chinese officials and how they conducted the Sino-British negotiations, and shaped the Joint Declaration. Individuals and groups from across Hong Kong society sought to have their say through a variety of means and did so with varying degrees of success. Officials handled Hong Kong views differently depending on the person articulating it and their position in society, the state of the Sino-British negotiations, and the degree to which the information accorded with officials' preconceptions or offered ideas

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<sup>8</sup> Venus Wu, 'Hong Kong's vanishing archives and the battle to preserve history', *Reuters*, 6 September 2017 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-anniversary-archives-idUSKCN1BH0OY> (accessed 1 October 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Koon and Kinzelbach, 'Transnational Academic Spaces'.

<sup>10</sup> Hampton and Mok, 'Remembering British Rule'.

that were workable within the broader context of the talks, international relations and officials' ambitions for Hong Kong's future. Officials walked a delicate line between responding to Hong Kong people and maintaining relations on the official level. A need to keep the negotiations from breaking down often overrode acquiescing to Hong Kong people's desires. Hong Kong people had a complex relationship with the officials that negotiated their future – one that has been forgotten from the literature. This thesis places Hong Kong people into the history of the Sino-British Joint Declaration negotiations.

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