

PREFACE—THIRTY-THREE YEARS ON

An anthology of my editorials is here translated into English for the first time; the oldest of them date back thirty-three years. For someone who still writes three commentaries for the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* every week, rereading these old editorials recalls affairs that feel current, but are borne back by the experiences of the territory into the past.

It was sixty years ago, on a second attempt, that I fled from Swatow (Shantou) in Chiuchow (Chaozhou), a town built by the harbour on the eastern coast of Guangdong, to become an illegal immigrant of British Hong Kong. As part of my 'liberation', I was issued an identity card that described my nationality as 'claimed Chinese'. Hong Kong was often described as a small piece of borrowed land surviving on borrowed time. Apart from four years when I went to study in England, I have lived and worked on this small piece of borrowed land these sixty years. Even if I cannot call it my hometown, Hong Kong is where I have taken root.

In the days of colonial rule, not only were Chinese customs and the Chinese way of life not subject to discrimination, they were respected, even celebrated. 90 per cent of the inhabitants of Hong Kong originated from mainland China and yet both political and economic power were held by the British, whose numbers were less than 5 per cent of the population and a small number of a Chinese 'elite' who had the favour of the British. On its sovereignty reversion to China in 1997, Hong Kong became a special administrative region in southern China. Between then and now, the Peking government has not altered the capitalist system and the British

Rule of Law has been sustained; Peking has explicitly guaranteed that Hong Kong people's freedom of movement and lifestyle will remain unchanged. And yet, in spite of the promise of 'No change for fifty years', the quality of life for Hong Kong people has undergone a metamorphosis.

In the colonial days, the vast majority of Hong Kong people travelled either on Certificates of Identity or British Dependent Territories passports. Not many held British passports and Hong Kong citizenship status always differed from that of British citizenship's. Similarly, after reversion of sovereignty in 1997, the vast majority of Hong Kong people hold Hong Kong SAR passports and only a very small number have People's Republic of China's passports. Whether it is to Britain or China that Hong Kong's sovereignty belongs, Hong Kong people's identity has always been precarious, entitled and disenfranchised at the same time.

While governing Hong Kong, the British practised and proved Bronisław Malinowski's theory of 'functional anthropology'. They encouraged coexistence and harmony between the British and local Chinese culture to build a stable and happy environment so that even in the absence of democracy, material life improved by leaps and bounds. Personal freedom in Hong Kong topped the rest of the region's. As the British retreated honourably, Hong Kong people felt sad at being decolonized. From China's point of view, there was great joy and cause for celebration that Hong Kong was to be returned to its motherland, as it rectified Britain's wrongful treatment of China in history; the reunification was always destined. However, because Beijing feared a 'three-legged stool' situation, Hong Kong people were barred from the negotiations leading up to the handover and from then on, Hong Kong people felt helplessness at the discomfort of their identity and worry and frustration became a part of life.

This anthology contains articles about Hong Kong in the ten years leading up to the signing of the Draft Joint Declaration between China and Britain in 1984, an event that officialized Hong Kong's fate. From these writings, Hong Kong already appears nostalgic for the way of life under colonial rule (there is even a trace of Anglophilia). Unlike other former colonies of Britain that were politically and emotionally ready to declare independence, Hong Kong was generally regarded as being 'acquired' by a political system that Hong Kong people in the 1950s and

1960s actively avoided and sought refuge from. Their wariness of communist China was understandable. People were restless from the helplessness of their situation and the exclusion of their participation from any decision (and arguments) between Britain and China that related to their future only aggravated their fear.

I hope these writings reflect fairly the anxiety and consternation of the Hong Kong people at losing the right to choose, from being excluded from decisions about their future. After 1984, my duty as commentator and the tendency to conjecture as a writer drove me to explore Hong Kong's possible paths after the signing of the Draft Joint Declaration. Perhaps these writings too will become available in English in the near future.

It was my wife who edited the original Chinese anthology and my daughter who translated this collection. We are craftsmen working in a typical family business; and our collaboration is the source of my joy.

Lam Hang-chi

19 April 2017

The Chinese University Press : Copyrighted Materials

PREFACE TO THE CHINESE EDITION

The editorials collected in this volume were written under the pen name Lam Hang-chi for the 'Short Commentary on Politics and Economics' column in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*. The editorials cover Hong Kong's political and economic system, personnel changes, China–Hong Kong relations, and all the problems surround the 1997 problem. The editorials appeared between mid-1975 and September of 1984, a stretch of ten years. Even though the main criterion for the current anthology was strict relevance to these four areas of interest, it is not hard to imagine the difficulty of compiling a volume of reasonable length from a total of over four thousand editorials. Here I must thank the editor.

Chronologically, this volume ends just before the Joint Declaration was signed because I feel the signing of the Joint Declaration was a watershed in Hong Kong's history. Between 1975 and 1984, I commented on Hong Kong affairs based on the central premise of Hong Kong's political uncertainty. Prioritizing Hong Kong's status quo, I made many extravagant and some would feel overly-fanciful conjectures on Hong Kong's future.

Once the Joint Declaration was signed, circumstances changed. As China began to make blueprints for Hong Kong's future, my commentary henceforth had to consider the benefit of the common good and searched for possible, realistic solutions and outcomes. Before the Joint Declaration, British colonialists acted as an insulator between China and Hong Kong but after the signing, even if all parties aimed for status quo for Hong Kong, the function of British colonialists as a buffer necessarily weakened

as China's influence on Hong Kong strengthened and became increasingly direct. With these changes, it would have been unconstructive to comment on Hong Kong affairs solely from Hong Kong's perspective. What Hong Kong people must tackle head on is rebuilding an appropriate relationship with China. If the relationship is too intimate with too much reliance on China, Hong Kong would lose its vibrancy and unique position; on the other hand, to replace the British government with an insulating agent like 'democratic politics' would be unrealistic.

In the final edits of this anthology which covers a complex and disorienting period of Hong Kong's history, I discovered that many of the conjectures and predictions did not stray far from the truth and eventuality. On China and Britain's attitudes and handling of Hong Kong, on the changing sentiments of the Hong Kong people towards the withdrawal of first British commercial interests and later political control, my commentaries were prescient and I hope readers will find they have stood the test of time.

However, I deeply regret my misgauging of Britain's interest in continuing to govern Hong Kong before Sino-British negotiations began in 1982. In my eagerness to promote the preservation of Hong Kong's status quo, I vastly overestimated Britain's desire to hold onto Hong Kong, thereby neglecting to notice China's adaptability and capability in political strategy.

For China, Hong Kong's economic importance pales in comparison to its political and symbolic function. Hypnotized by the notion of reunification and ethnic pride, the Chinese were never going to let economic concerns override political ones. This was within my expectations. What was wholly unexpected was China's proposal to let Hong Kong keep its capitalist system for a further fifty years after return of sovereignty and that such a concept would guide its policies going forward. It might have been political expediency that gave rise to the idea but once proposed, neither Britain nor Hong Kong was prepared for a response. Although the confidence of Hong Kong people still wavered, this ground-breaking concept gave Hong Kong people hope that there would be 'a high degree of autonomy' and 'all will remain unchanged'. The anxiety over the departure of the British and the arrival of the Chinese was vastly diminished.

Once Britain decided to give up Hong Kong's sovereignty, a future that retains status quo became impossible. But the current administrative system has some excellent qualities that are worth our utmost efforts to retain. Hong Kong's political system will necessarily undergo changes but how to avoid these changes impacting our way of life is the collective responsibility of the Hong Kong people. The change in the political environment means Hong Kong people cannot to ponder and conjecture and to quibble over ideology. We must now act with determination and tackle problems head on.

To accept or to reject (forcefully or passively) the political change is an individual choice. The *Hong Kong Economic Journal* stands by the administrative system that has enabled Hong Kong to prosper in past years but recent development reminds us we cannot dwell on past achievements. Whether one chooses to embrace change by staying or leaving Hong Kong, each must be respected for his choice because both paths demand risk and sacrifice. The risk-reward ratio in investment does not apply here because higher risk does not yield higher reward. Put another way, the decision to stay or leave Hong Kong is not an economic decision but a political one. We can only feel sympathy for those who are teetering in fear or frustration because the decision is one no one else can make for them.

Broadly speaking, before the signing of the Joint Declaration, Hong Kong people were exploring the 1997 issue and the focus was on how to find a way to keep our accustomed way of life. There is no need for Hong Kong people who have escaped from mainland China to hide their disgust and fear of communist rule because the demands of the communist ideology are not compatible with human nature. The people who feel at ease in a capitalist society are in general those who put self-interest, spiritually and materially, above those of the masses. We hope that during the 'fifty years of unchange' Hong Kong people will be able to live the kind of life to which we have been accustomed! Chinese people are proud of Chinese culture but the Chinese officials' 'what the foreigners can do the Chinese can do better' attitude leaves much to be desired. In terms of both civilized and material life, the Chinese have much room for improvement. To build ethnic dignity, it is imperative to take a hard look at China's value system and governing structure. Hong Kong's anomalous

situation as a British colony has provided China with a channel for making foreign currency and an example of not only a vibrant economy but also a modern society. No Chinese person would object to Hong Kong sovereignty being returned to China or consider it an unnatural development but we hope the change will mean Hong Kong can build on its current foundation to develop further and better. China and Hong Kong should encourage one another for mutual improvement. If China intends to control Hong Kong, it would be an act of vanity that will be detrimental to both.

I hope this book can be useful to readers when assessing Hong Kong's situation; I also hope that you will not hesitate to point out my analytical and psychological blind spots that have resulted in overly fanciful theories and conjectures. I shall be grateful for your corrections.

Lam Hang-chi

19 September 1984