

## Teaching About the Hong Kong Transition

by David Grossman

After 155 years of British colonial rule, Hong Kong will become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China on July 1, 1997. It will become the Hong Kong SAR under the principle of "One Country/Two Systems," a principle that Hong Kong's future chief executive Tung Chee-hwa calls a "Ground-breaking concept that is remarkable in its origin, comprehensive in its development, and no doubt, *challenging in its implementation*"<sup>1</sup> (italics mine).

This is an unprecedented event. Hong Kong will be the first colony to have matured into a world trading economy and then be handed back to a communist-ruled motherland. China has promised the territory's 6.5 million people a great degree of autonomy and at least fifty more years of untrammelled capitalism.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, China has made it clear that it will curb or erase certain democratic electoral reforms and human rights legislation put in place by the British only in the waning years of their rule.

For secondary and university teachers, the Hong Kong Transition creates both an opportunity and a challenge for the creation of a meaningful learning experience for students. The opportunity to build upon the extensive media attention to a major historical event is clear. What challenges does it pose to the teacher? First, the advantage of having an important historical occurrence treated as a "media event" is mitigated by the fact that framing it as an "event" at a fixed point in time (July 1, 1997) results in a kind of built-in "date of expiration" for public interest. In reality, the transition will be an ongoing and developing process that will not be played out in one day or one week.

Most expert commentators identify the first crucial period of the transition as a period of two to five years after July 1997. After all, under the principle of "One Country/Two Systems," the Chinese government has said the transition of Hong Kong to Chinese rule will take fifty years. Even if we doubt China's sincerity in this regard, it is safe to presume that there will be some differences between China and Hong Kong for some

time to come. It is almost certain that most of the crucial business of the transition will occur after July 1, 1997, which only symbolizes the beginning, not the end of a process. It is important to emphasize that the study of the Hong Kong transition need not be tied to the date of the handover.

How should educators teach a significant event like the Hong Kong transition in a way that gives it meaning beyond its life in the contemporary media? There are a wide range of possibilities. I prefer an issues-based approach using scenarios for Hong Kong's future. I view this strategy as having the potential to engage students in a process that may establish long-term involvement with the Hong Kong issue, while increasing students' potential ability to analyze both this and future complex international issues.<sup>3</sup>

### SCENARIOS FOR HONG KONG'S FUTURE

If one adopts this approach, scenario content must be identified. In the case of Hong Kong, we are fortunate to have access to well-developed scenarios prepared by experts. So and Kwok present three scenarios: (1) The Collapse Scenario: "the argument of the political pessimists"; (2) The False Alarm Scenario: "the argument of the economic optimists"; and (3) The Cyclical Scenario: "what the realists are hoping for."<sup>4</sup>

I have also used a set of three scenarios, with slight modification for classroom use, developed by Global Group and Cambridge Management using the Delphi technique and reported in the Money section of Hong Kong's *Sunday Morning Post*.<sup>5</sup> The Delphi technique involves surveying expert opinion on an issue or trend to develop likely scenarios, and then asking these same experts to judge which scenario represents the most likely outcomes from their perspective. The advantage of using this set of three scenarios is that they are drawn from the expertise of a wide selection of senior political figures in Hong Kong, China, and internationally.

Moreover, we have the percentage of experts who voted for each scenario as most likely to occur. Students thus can compare their own judgments with those of the experts.

Once the students are introduced to the scenarios, the method of utilizing them in instruction is relatively straightforward. Operating in small heterogeneous groups, students compare and evaluate the selected



This large clock in Beijing counts down the days and seconds until Hong Kong is reunited with China on July 1, 1997.

Photo by Francis Chan

scenarios for Hong Kong in the aftermath of the post-July 1, 1997 transition process. (Alternatively, they can develop their own scenarios that may either recombine or add elements to the existing scenarios.) Since these scenarios assume a level of knowledge beyond that of the overwhelming majority of students, their use demands that students provide much of the historical and contemporary context themselves in order to justify their selection of a particular scenario.

Each group of students must then choose a position in support of one of the scenarios, and defend it utilizing data drawn from their own research. Each group must justify its selection or adaptation of a scenario through its research, presenting their case first in a classroom presentation and discussion, and later in a written document. Included in the appendix is a selection of electronic and print media that could be useful for instructors and students as they work through these scenarios.

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## ESSAYS

## SCENARIO ONE

## LITTLE CHANGE FOR FIFTY YEARS

- ◆ A stable political environment within the Special Administrative Region (SAR) would be maintained, along with a law based on precedents.
- ◆ There would be a free flow of capital and a strong, internationally convertible currency.
- ◆ Land titles and other such agreements entered into before the handover would be honored.
- ◆ With some minor exceptions, the Joint Declaration, Basic Law, and all their various annexes would be honored by the SAR government.

While life in the territory would undoubtedly change over the fifty-year lifespan of the Basic Law, as it would anywhere in the world in half a century, those who voted for the scenario thought these changes would not impact adversely on the "One Country/Two Systems" concept. However, even if the letter of the Basic Law was maintained, these experts still expected some change to business culture within SAR during the next two to five years.

For example, business leaders would be dealing with more mainland-trained Chinese within the government, rather than British or British-trained Chinese. Businessmen thought that where British companies were often favored in the past when contracts were awarded, in the future, Chinese and other Asian companies with Chinese ownership would gain favor.

*Scenario One was selected as most likely by 31% of the expert panel.*

## SCENARIO TWO

## BUREAUCRACY GRADUALLY SETS IN

- ◆ Pre-1997 Governor Chris Patten's 1995 "grass roots" Legislative Council will be replaced by a more business-orientated council.
- ◆ A pro-Beijing SAR chief executive is elected by the Preparatory Committee chosen by Beijing, and there is a Legislative Council comprised entirely of members loyal to mainland China. The Basic Law might then easily be altered as "conditions warrant." In addition, the chief executive and legislators could select judges who might be more sympathetic to influence from Beijing, when necessary, than to strict interpretation of Western-based law.

### THREE SCENARIOS FOR HONG KONG'S FUTURE



Photo by Francis Chan

- ◆ Business kidnappings might increase with local law enforcers refusing to crack down. Simultaneously, there might be similar inaction on the part of mainland China over turning back a rising tide of crime.
- ◆ Corruption may increase, and businesses fear the use of bribes and pay-offs could alter the "level playing field."
- ◆ Local businesses could face competition from mainland ministries through businesses they own.

While the current status quo in Hong Kong would be fundamentally unchanged, those who voted for this scenario expected one or more of the above developments to arise. These interviewees expected to see some conflict with the Basic Law as it is perceived today and increased bureaucracy. There was also a strong fear of a few unexpected events, such as competition from mainland government companies hurting existing

Hong Kong companies. Interviewees thought a lot would depend on the ability of the SAR chief executive, whoever he or she may be, to interact with, and sometimes withstand pressure from, as well as his ability to win acceptance by, the Hong Kong business community and local residents.

*Scenario Two was selected as most likely by 57% of the expert panel.*

## SCENARIO THREE

## SUPPRESSION OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY

## Using Mainland Armed Forces

- ◆ Chinese troops from Guangdong Province would join troops stationed in Hong Kong to supplement the Hong Kong police. Their task would be to keep order, discourage civil disobedience, and suppress it as quickly as it occurred. Alternatively, mainland troops could be stationed in the territory to protect the local populace if China were at war.
- ◆ Known dissidents would be under house arrest or otherwise controlled.
- ◆ Criminal Courts would either suspend operation, or follow a rigid political line on punishment and detention of troublemakers.
- ◆ Surveillance would be strong, and a police state mentality would prevail.
- ◆ Some service sectors would be under strict control, such as medical and telecommunications.
- ◆ The Government would be all-powerful, and for all practical purposes, civil rights would be suspended.

This might all sound scary, but leading figures in this group genuinely thought some, if not all, of this could happen. Under the Joint Declaration, there is a clause under which China can claim unlimited power over the SAR. Section 3, Article 3 says:

*The Hong Kong SAR will be directly under the authority of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. The Hong Kong SAR will enjoy a high degree of autonomy except in foreign and defense affairs which are the responsibilities of the Central People's Government.*

There is concern this article could be the basis for the central government to take control of everything from Legislative Council (Legco) legislation to overriding Hong

Kong court legal decisions. It could be used to authorize large troop incursions in the SAR. This might sound unrealistic, but some interviewees felt the past could be a prologue to the future.

It must be remembered that in May 1989, an estimated one million Hong Kong residents turned out to show support for students protesting in Tiananmen Square. On June 4, 1989, the people of Hong Kong woke up to learn that Chinese troops had moved into Tiananmen Square and brutally crushed the students. Within hours, more than 200,000 hastily gathered at the Happy Valley racecourse. A small group of well-organized activists subsequently set up an underground network to get student leaders out of China. "Operation Yellowbird," financed by secret donations from businessmen and using high-speed boats used for smuggling, succeeded in getting some of the most-wanted dissidents to the West. The Beijing authorities immediately reacted by putting democrats in Hong Kong on their "suspect list," accused of fostering political unrest and supporting groups whose objective was seen as the overthrow of the Chinese Government.

Some interviewees were concerned about what would happen if one million citizens in

Hong Kong took to the streets after 1997 to protest against any of China's actions. They thought there was a strong possibility, if the police believed they could not handle the situation, that mainland troops stationed in the SAR and southern provinces would be called in to eliminate any such protest. Under such a scenario, it is thought police and troops would attempt to seek out and arrest all individuals involved in any future "Operation Yellowbird."

Mainland troops could also be called in for situations having nothing to do with Hong Kong or its citizens. For example, if Taiwan declares independence, China would declare war and move troops in to protect Hong Kong.

These experts predicted that business reaction to such state of events would be immediate. Ever since the Cultural Revolution riots in Hong Kong in the mid-1960s in favor of Chairman Mao, most corporations in the territory have maintained and updated contingency plans to move people and assets out. Corporate leaders interviewed said the activation of these measures would depend on the level of the state of emergency.

*Scenario Three was selected as most likely by 12% of the expert panel.*

### Explanatory Notes for the Scenarios

**The Joint Declaration** (Sino-British Joint Declaration) is the document that Britain and China signed in 1984 setting the return date of Hong Kong as July 1, 1997. Under the Declaration, Hong Kong is guaranteed a high degree of autonomy from China for fifty years as a Special Autonomous Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China under the principles of "One Country/Two Systems" and "Hong Kong People Governing Hong Kong."

**The Basic Law** is essentially China's mini-constitution for Hong Kong, and gives legal effect to the provisions of the Joint Declaration and provides more details in several areas. It was promulgated by the Chinese National People's Congress in 1990, and comes into force on July 1, 1997.

**The new chief executive**, Mr. Tung Chee-hwa, a Hong Kong shipping magnate, has already been selected by a 400-member China-controlled Selection Committee, and will begin serving on July 1, 1997, replacing the last colonial governor, Chris Patten.

**The existing elected Legislative Council**, or Legco, will be abolished on July 1, 1997, and replaced by a Provisional Legislature made up of members already selected by the selection committee. China argues that the Legco election of 1995 violated the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. Britain argues that the election was consistent with these documents, and that there is no legal basis whatsoever for the Provisional Legislature. Both Legco and the Provisional Legislature have sixty seats. Thirty-three members of the Provisional Legislature come from Legco.

## APPENDIX: Utilizing the Scenarios: Electronic and Print Media Resources

### Electronic Resources on the World Wide Web

If the technology is available, the most efficient means for students to access much of the needed data is on the World Wide Web. Because of the dramatic nature of the Hong Kong transitions and the media attention, it has generated a plethora of Web sites. Below I give a brief annotation of ten selected sites, but please understand that it may already be out of date as you read this article. The focus here is on materials that will allow both students and teachers to monitor and "access" information about the transition as it is in process from today through July 1997 and beyond:

**The Hong Kong Virtual Library**

<http://www.asiawind.com/hkwwwv/>

This facility "will see through the transition of Hong Kong's sovereignty, a milestone in world history." It contains basic information topically arranged and serves as a gateway to other Hong Kong related WWW sites. It is linked to the well-managed Asian Studies World Wide Web Virtual Library site maintained by Dr. T. Matthew Ciolek.

**Britain and Hong Kong**

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/hongkong/index.html>

This site represents the British government's view of the transition. It includes "Twenty things you always wanted to know about Hong Kong (July 1996)," a monthly briefing paper on Hong Kong issues, and other documents and speeches by British politicians.

**Hong Kong Issues: Chinese Embassy, Washington, D.C.**

<http://www.china-embassy.org/Press/HongKong.htm>

The Chinese Embassy in the U. S. maintains a Hong Kong issues page on its web site. It includes documents such as the Basic Law and official Chinese per-

spectives on Hong Kong questions, e.g., "Hong Kong Will Enjoy High Degree of Autonomy After 1997." It also posts up-to-date responses of the Chinese government on transition-related issues, such as the selection of the SAR chief executive Tung Chee-hwa and the Provisional Legislature.

**Hong Kong Government Information Centre**

<http://www/info.gov.hk/>

This site contains a Topical Information List (A to Z) that provides data on most aspects of life in Hong Kong, including its governmental structure and policies. It also includes most of the important documents connected to the transition.

**South China Morning Post/1997: Countdown to History**

<http://www.scmp.com/1997/97main.html>

This site provides both background and continuous coverage of events from Hong Kong's largest circulation English language daily. This is a relatively new site, but very promising. The site claims to offer "all the information you need to understand this historical event." It includes an article, "The Road to Agreement 1830-1984," recent articles, a timeline, important documents (i.e., the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law), and a section entitled "Views and Opinions."

**Far Eastern Economic Review Interactive Edition**

<http://www.feer.com/>

This site provides continuous coverage of Hong Kong events through selected articles from a respected weekly based in Hong Kong. You can search this site for articles about Hong Kong.

**Hong Kong in 1997**

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~fesling/hkstuff/97.html>

At this point, this is a limited site, but it contains the Basic Law under which

## APPENDIX: Utilizing the Scenarios: Electronic and Print Media Resources Continued

the new Special Administrative Region (SAR) will be governed, the Joint Declaration of 1984 in which Britain recognizes China's sovereignty over Hong Kong, and the new Hong Kong flag and emblem (the Bauhinia flower). It links to a larger site on Chinese culture and civilization.

**Beijing Review**

<http://www-cibtc.ceic.gov.cn/bjreview/BJRREVIEW.HTML>

China's premier weekly news magazine covers China's economic and social developments and carries important documents of the Chinese government and speeches made by state leaders. Since the scope of the *Review* is China in its entirety, its coverage of Hong Kong is periodic, but very important, as it represents the Chinese government's official point of view on Hong Kong related topics.

**China Books and Periodicals**

<http://www.chinabooks.com/>

This is the main importer and distributor of books and magazines from China. Basically, it is a catalogue outlet for materials, primarily from China, but from other sources as well. It can process subscriptions for most of China's major periodicals, including *Beijing Review* (U. S. \$41 per year). You can also get their catalogue via "snail" mail: China Books & Periodicals, 2929 24th Street, San Francisco, CA 94110. Phone (415) 282-2994. Fax: (415) 282-0994.

**History of Hong Kong**

<http://www.stolaf.edu/people/glasoe/project.html>

Research project (in progress) by a student at St. Olaf College. Ultimately, it will cover topics from Early History and the Opium War to The Future of Hong Kong.

**Selected Print Resources on Hong Kong**

The list below is a very short compilation of general sources with commentary. This list, of course, is far from complete, and there are many excellent books and articles that do not appear here. I have intentionally kept the list short and purposeful, with the twin criteria of emphasis on contemporary events and relative ease of accessibility to teachers in North America.

**BOOKS**

*Hong Kong 1996*. Hong Kong: Government Printing Office, 1996.

The Hong Kong Government's Information Services Department puts out this annual yearbook of data plus a topical review of most aspects of life in Hong Kong (legal, economic, environmental, population, etc.) including a review of the events of the past year. Thus, *Hong Kong 1996* reviews the year 1995. Its Appendices are a rich source of data about Hong Kong. It is available from the Hong Kong Government Publications Centre, Queensway Government Offices, Low Block, Ground Floor, 66 Queensway, Hong Kong.

Cheung, Stephen Y. L. and Stephen M. H. Sze, eds.

*The Other Hong Kong Report*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1995.

This critical annual review (since 1989) of events in Hong Kong is meant to "counteract official misrepresentation," especially as found in the Government yearbook cited above. It is prepared by scholars, professionals, and commentators to provide a more critical viewpoint of Hong Kong than that in the Government's yearbook, and thus provides a good balance to official perspectives.

Miners, Norman. *The Government and Politics of Hong Kong*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Now in its fifth edition, this definitive description of the politics of Hong Kong was recently updated to add considerable material reflecting the issues and background of the 1997 transition. Its Appendix includes the most important constitutional documents, including the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.

Chan, Ming K. and Gerard Postiglione, eds.

*The Hong Kong Reader: Passage to Chinese Sovereignty*. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996

This collection of recent writings by academics, most of them based in Hong Kong, looks at some of the basic issues governing Hong Kong's future: politics, judicial practice, education, migration, economics, etc. I found the last article by Alvin So and Reginald Kwok ("Socioeconomic Center, Political Periphery: Hong Kong's Uncertain Transition Toward the Twenty-first Century," 209-216) particularly useful as a teaching tool because it outlines three scenarios for Hong Kong's future.

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, David Newman and Alvin Rabushka. *Red Flag Over Hong Kong*. Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers, 1996.

This book calls itself a "handbook" about the future of Hong Kong. It bases its forecasts on future developments in China and Hong Kong on an explicit analytic model of decisionmaking. As might be surmised from the title, it paints a "bleak picture indeed" of Hong Kong's future, and I include it because it is very recent and provides one of the most articulate descriptions of a "negative scenario" of Hong Kong's future. It includes the text of the Joint Declaration in the Appendix.

**PERIODICALS**

In the months before and immediately after July 1997, there will be a virtual glut of articles about Hong Kong in the mainstream U. S. media. However, for continuing and informed coverage of the Hong Kong transition, the best of the relatively accessible sources would be articles in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and *The Economist*. For a Chinese governmental perspective, there are periodic articles on Hong Kong in *Beijing Review*.

**NOTES**

1. Chee-hwa Tung, "Living Up to the Challenge Ahead," *South China Morning Post*, 18 December, 1996. "One Country/Two Systems" is the formula by which China will resume its exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong in July 1997, but not impose its socialist system on Hong Kong for a period of fifty years. Reportedly the policy was first developed by China's leadership for the purpose of reunification of Taiwan with the mainland, but it was applied to Hong Kong in the negotiations with Britain about the future of Hong Kong in the early 1980s.
2. In Asia and the Pacific Region, Hong Kong has the third highest gross national product per capita. At U. S. \$21,650 per capita, its GNP is marginally behind Singapore's (U. S. \$23,360 per capita) and still well behind Japan (U. S. \$34,630

per capita). However, Hong Kong's GNP per capita is forty-one times that of China (U. S. \$530 per capita). Hong Kong also has more than U. S. \$70 billion fiscal reserves.

3. For a fuller description of this issues-centered, future-oriented teaching approach, see, e.g., Wilma S. Longstreet, "Alternative Futures and the Social Studies," in *Handbook on Teaching Social Issues*, ed. Ronald W. Evans and David W. Saxe, (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1996), 317-326. Longstreet advocates the development of multiple models of the future so that students can compare and evaluate their likely outcomes. Students can then "be encouraged to take positions and defend them utilizing scenarios and research tools." (323) Longstreet argues that this future-

oriented, issues-centered mode of instruction creates a kind of complex learning hub that creates opportunities for students to create competencies in (a) communications and information handling, (b) facing uncertainties, (c) value formation, (d) inquiry, and (e) decision making.

4. Alvin Y. So and Reginald Y. Kwok, "Socioeconomic Center, Political Periphery: Hong Kong's Uncertain Transition Toward the Twenty-First Century," in *The Hong Kong Reader*, eds. Ming K. Chan and Gerard A. Postiglione. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996, 209-216.
5. "Outlook Bleak, Says '97 Survey," *Sunday Morning Post*, Sunday, 26 May, 1996, Money section. Edited for classroom use with additional notes supplied by this article's author.