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Sino-British disputes over Hong Kong in the light of the Chinese culture mandala

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Abstract
Extract:
The Chinese culture mandala prescribes that, wherever possible, authority ought to be respected and order maintained even though it requires some moral or intellectual justifications in terms of the Mandate of Heaven or civil service examinations. Scholars have long argued that the problematique of Confucius’ political philosophy is how to preserve authority at times of political and intellectual chaos and disorder.

Keywords
mandala, international relations, culture, politics, government policy
Chinese "Culturalism"

Chinese as a people are known to be characterized by their culture rather than by their race. In their classical work, *China: Tradition and Transformation*, John Fairbank and Edwin Reischauer write:

The significant human divisions within East Asia, as in the West, are primarily linguistic rather than racial. In both East Asia and the West there is a common misconception that these linguistic differences correspond to racial divisions, but in fact there is no more a Chinese or Japanese race than there is a German or Hungarian race.

They further make the interesting observation that there is a difference between Chinese culturalism and nationalism in other countries. Nationalism is often related to a sense of competition and insecurity and fear of political and cultural control by other nations; whereas culturalism in the case of China is associated with a complete confidence in her cultural superiority. This superiority remains even at the time of military weakness that may lead to the danger of political control by other groups. The Chinese unified empire has always been associated with the Chinese way of life and Chinese culture.

Yu Ying-shih also maintains that traditionally Chinese have always emphasized culture more than politics.

According to him, the 17th century Chinese thinker Ku Yen-wu drew a distinction between *guo* (state) and *tianxia* (all under heaven). *Guo* is a political concept, whereas *tianxia* a cultural notion. The latter refers to Chinese cultural tradition and heritage. So there is an important distinction between *wangguo* (the change of dynasties or governments) and *wangtianxia* (the ruin of Chinese cultural values). For the Chinese, the latter is far more profound and significant in implication than the former. Therefore, as part of his or her education, every Chinese has been inculcated with the moral obligation to prevent it from happening.

One of the political implications of this Chinese culturalism has been the prevailing concept of universal kingship since the Shang dynasty (1751-1112 B.C.). The predynastic Zhou rulers had actually accepted the Shang's claim of authority even if the latter might not have the actual military superiority. When the Zhou eventually came to power, in order to justify their overthrow of the Shang, their previous overlords, they developed the doctrine of *tianming* (the Mandate of Heaven). This doctrine could be applied to both the individual and political realms. In a personal situation, an individual's moral or immoral conduct will have much impact on his own destiny. In the political sphere, the ruler's virtue may entitle him to the authorization from Heaven (who reigns rather than rules the universe) to govern.

On the other hand, if his conduct should...
be lacking in moral qualities, his Mandate from Heaven will be taken away. This belief of universal kingship and the political Mandate of Heaven as an integral part of Chinese culturalism has had much bearing on Chinese politics ever since.

Confucius had inherited this tradition from the early Zhou founders, which is evident from the following passage in the Analects:

When the Way prevails in the Empire, the rites and music and punitive expeditions are initiated by the Emperor. When the Way does not prevail in the Empire, they are initiated by the feudal lords. . . . When the Way prevails in the Empire, policy does not rest with the Counsellors. When the Way prevails in the Empire, the Commoners do not express critical views.  

To achieve universal kingship with the blessing of the Mandate of Heaven has become the goal and ambition of most Chinese rulers in Chinese history. In modern times, Mao Zedong and Chiang Kaishek had exhibited this characteristic in their exercise of political power, and Deng Xiaoping is no exception. After the Tiananmen Incident (or "Massacre" for many critics of Beijing), Henry Kissinger wrote: "No government in the world would have tolerated having the main square of its capital occupied for eight weeks." Subsequently, it was found that he had had a limited partnership set up to do "joint business dealings" with an agency of the Chinese Government.  

Although self-interest could have motivated his remark, there might still be some truth in it. Deng Xiaoping's decision in connection with the students at the Tiananmen Square could be informed to some extent by the political culture of universal kingship whereby any challenge of the central authority, if not firmly dealt with, would result in political instability and even the forfeiture of the Mandate of Heaven.

Nowadays culture is not only important in analyzing internal affairs of a nation, but also in examining international politics. Any attempt to understand political events of the world would only scratch the surface if cultural background is not carefully taken into consideration. As Samuel Huntington has recently pointed out, with the end of the Cold War culture has increasingly replaced ideology as the cause of conflicts in international relations. This is particularly the case with regard to China whose identity is so closely linked to culture. For instance, using human rights and democracy as yardsticks to measure the civilized nature of certain East Asian societies may need to be modified somewhat, no matter how valuable they may still remain as universal human qualities.

If Chinese culture is inherent in the identity of the Chinese as a people, it is all the more paramount that we should understand Chinese politics in the light of Chinese culture and tradition. The current Sino-British Disputes over Hong Kong have again focused on China's manner of dealing with the outside world. It is about time that her behaviour should be interpreted less ideologically and more culturally. I shall discuss below the disputes in the light of their cultural background to illustrate Chinese cultural traits as a rich and reliable source for dissecting events about China. For this purpose, I shall coin the term "Chinese culture mandala" as a hermeneutic symbol to unravel the perceived inscrutability and mystery of Chinese politics.

6 Samuel P. Huntington “The Clash of Civilizations?”, Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993, pp22-49
Chinese "Culture Mandala"

The term *Mandala* literally means "circle" in Sanskrit and has the general meaning of "mystic symbol of the cosmos". As a mystic symbol, it "plays a mystical and ritual role in Indian religions, especially Hinduism, Buddhism, and Tibetan Lamaism, as well as in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism." The *mandala* may appear in different forms depending on the scripture upon which it is based, but it generally reflects the layout of the royal palace of a cosmic god. By meditating on the *mandala*, the devotee expects to identify himself with the central deity surrounded by lesser deities and achieve supreme deliverance. But to be successful, certain rituals must be performed to effectively manipulate cosmic forces and deities. Sometimes a meditator would make a *mandala* of his own body for the sake of being unified with the cosmos.

Apart from its mystic and symbolic meaning, the term *mandala* also has the general meaning of a "circle" or "wheel" with a set of directions or spatial relationships around a central point. Its meaning has been extended to the political sphere to refer to the circle of kingdoms giving allegiance to a ruler with power, charisma and merits. O. W. Wolters examines the historical political patterns in Southeast Asia in terms of a *mandala*:

... a *mandala* represented a particular and often unstable political situation in a vaguely definable geographical area without fixed boundaries and where smaller centres tended to look in all directions for security. *Mandalas* would expand and contract in concertina-like fashion. Each one contained several tributary rulers, some of whom would repudiate their vassal status when the opportunity arose and try to build up their own networks of vassals.8

What is significant of the political alliance is that the loosely defined sphere of influence could only be maintained by the power of the centre. The vassal kingdoms are also secondary centres in their own right. If the primary centre becomes weak, the secondary ones may opt for independence or shift allegiance to another power centre. To fully appreciate the political culture of *mandalas*, we need to understand the source of power for the centre, the ritual role played by the king, and the processes of formation and dissolution of a *mandala*. Generally speaking, agricultural production and trade built the economic basis for the earliest *mandalas*, which in turn were constantly reinforced through marriage, tributary relations, and ritual means.

It has been argued that in Southeast Asia the development of the *mandalas* in the main followed the Indian rather than the Chinese model despite the proximity of China. It was more difficult to emulate the Chinese model, owing to the relative complexity of its cultural components such as ancestor worship, sacrifice to Heaven and recruitment through civil service examinations. The model had to be adopted along with its accompanied cultural elements, whereas the Indian model could be more easily adapted to local situations. Furthermore, the Indian *mandalas* did not have the control of a central authority as sophisticated as their Chinese counterparts. As a result, they were less stable and the question of legitimacy and succession was always present. One way for them to legitimize kingship is to identify the king with a god through ritual means.

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The ancient Chinese also believed in such linkages between certain symbols and cosmic forces, or between microcosm and macrocosm, which are much elaborated upon in *The Book of Changes* (*I Ching*). Heaven is the centre of the macrocosmic *mandala*, whereas the emperor (the Son of Heaven) authorized by Heaven to rule is the hub of the earthly *mandala*. The Chinese Mandate of Heaven dictates that the emperor must emulate the moral paradigm of Heaven as closely as possible to maintain the charisma, power and influence of the *mandala*. As the flourishing of the *mandala* contributes to the stability and well-being of the Chinese world, it has enjoyed both the cultural prestige and blessing in China. Consequently, most rulers in Chinese history have been primarily preoccupied with the preservation of the Heaven-endowed Mandate and the *mandala*. Any inkling of possible challenges to their authority is to be dealt with firmly to preclude the possible crumbling and eventual loss of the Mandate. Their firm actions have carried all the cultural weight of continuing the sacred, universal kingship. Thus "the rites and music and punitive expeditions should be initiated by the Emperor (or any contemporary Chinese ruler)", which has been enshrined in the *Analects* of Confucius. The above cultural belief with all its moral and political implications could be called the "Chinese culture mandala".

With the economic reform in China, we might easily forget the accompanied cultural heritage of tight political control, which has functioned well in South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. What has happened in China is part of this cultural heritage. In a speech given to members of the Drafting Committee of the Hong Kong Basic Law on 16 April 1987, Deng Xiaoping stated that China's open-door policies in economy must go hand in hand with the "persistence" of socialist institutions under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. Whenever there was a clamp-down of capitalist liberalization in China, the outsiders were all quick to pronounce that there was a change of policies. According to Deng, this "persistence" has been part of the Chinese Constitution, there has not been any change. It is just that the critics have paid attention only to the economic reform and not to the "persistence" of socialist institutions. He also explained why student demonstrations at Tiananmen Square were dealt with in such a harsh manner. Apparently with the disastrous upheaval of the Cultural Revolution in mind, he emphasized that China needs political stability, which is the main condition for economic development. In the same speech, he also mentioned that since the Opium Wars the unification of China (referring to Taiwan and Hong Kong) has been the common wish of the Chinese people for one and a half centuries. Significantly, most Chinese (to the extent that they consider themselves Chinese) would not quarrel with this statement in general. Such is the impact of the Chinese *culture mandala*.

The notion of the Chinese *culture mandala* may be in conflict with the Western values of democracy and human rights. But Deng Xiaoping is not the only Asian leader taking issue with the West on these values. Lee Kuan Yew and Dr. Mahathir have also made known their opposing views on a number of occasions. Even Deng's chief ideological rival in Taiwan, President Lee Tenghui, has to pay at least lip service to the cultural and political heritage of the "unification of China", which in Western minds often adds to the conceptual confusion of the difference between "Taiwan" and the "Republic of China" (Taiwan's official name). Yet Taiwanese and Chinese politics makes much capital out of the purported differentiation. This is another example where no one could properly understand Chinese politics without being initiated into the Chinese *culture mandala*. 
With hindsight, the issue of the Tiananmen Incident is larger than the killing of students, which is regrettable in any perspective. Can we better understand Beijing’s motivation for the clamp-down if the Incident is analyzed in the light of the Chinese culture mandala? While the mayhem associated with the Incident is unequivocally wrong, the suppression rather than negotiated compromise with the students occupying the square may be “culturally understandable.” To maintain that it is “culturally understandable,” does not mean that it is immune from criticisms or moral judgments on various grounds. I would like to argue that in making the decision Deng Xiaoping and his senior colleagues did not necessarily deviate from the culture mandala they have inherited. To hold them personally responsible for the crackdown may be “morally justifiable” but not “culturally illuminating.” This is because being inheritors of the culture mandala they had no other choice but to clamp down what they considered a challenge of their authority. Kissinger’s now famous comment, “No government in the world would have tolerated having the main square of its capital occupied for eight weeks,” would be closer to truth if it is amended as “No government under the Chinese culture mandala would have tolerated having the main square of its capital occupied for eight weeks.”

Mao Zedong would not have allowed the main square of his capital to be occupied for eight weeks. Chiang Kai-shek would not have tolerated this. In fact, many Asian leaders including Lee Kuan Yew would not have condoned this. So, is it culturally unusual that Deng Xiaoping did not permit it? And historically Chinese dynasties had not been any worse for this cultural mentality. In fact, we could even argue that the political stability of the imperial China owes much to this mentality and more recently the so-called “East Asian Economic Miracle” could be attributed to the political stability derived from this tradition. The recent Michael Fay case in Singapore and the disputes of human rights between East Asian governments and the West have clearly illustrated the cultural gulf between East and West.

The Sino-British Disputes Over Hong Kong: A Historical Overview

The present problem of Hong Kong originated in the three treaties which the Manchu government signed with the British after the Opium Wars. After the first Opium War of 1840, Hong Kong island was ceded to Britain as the result of the Treaty of Nanjing signed in 1842. The Convention of Beijing concluded in 1860 forced China to cede Kowloon to the British after the second Opium War of 1856. And finally, under the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong signed in 1898, China granted Britain a 99 year lease on New Territories and 235 islands of the Hong Kong region. So 1997 is the year when the 99 year lease is due to expire. Practically, all Chinese “baptised” by the modern history of China would have a sense of humiliation and frustration about the “unequal treaties” Western Powers forced upon her in the past. It is a memory of shame and disgrace.

Although 1997 is the year when the 99 year lease under the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong expires, Beijing was not anxious to recover Hong Kong right after the establishment of “People’s Republic of China” in 1949. Hong Kong was an important window for China to contact the outside world when the West under the leadership of the US imposed a blockade upon her. This is clear from Chou En-lai’s public statement at that time:

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Our policy of not recovering Hong Kong and allowing the British occupation of it should not be measured and decided by the narrow principle of sovereignty. Before our liberation of the country, we have decided not to liberate Hong Kong. By so doing, we are not weak or compromising, but have taken the initiative to engage more actively in the offensive and struggle as part of the long-term global strategy.\(^\text{10}\)

It is therefore clear that, apart from her sense of historical obligation, Beijing's handling of the Hong Kong problem has also been predicated upon her overall-strategic interest. Chou had even blatantly stated that maintaining Hong Kong's status quo was a way of capitalising on Britain's vulnerable points, because the latter would then become more concerned about her own interest in the colony rather than about her role of close cooperation with the American strategic deployment in the Far East. China's strategy then was to exploit the differences between the two Western powers. The reason why Hong Kong's reversion to China was scheduled for 1997 is not just due to historical circumstances of the lease, but also due to China's strategic consideration.

The current Sino-British disputes about Hong Kong's democratic reforms could be traced back to the Joint Declaration signed on 19 December, 1984. It states that after 1997 the executive officials of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region will be selected by election or consultation and that the present social and economic systems and lifestyle will remain the same for the next 50 years, which is the well-known policy of "one country, two systems" first proposed by Deng Xiaoping in 1984. Furthermore, in April, 1990, the Basic Law, the mini-constitution for Hong Kong after 1997, was passed by China's Seventh National People's Congress. The representatives of the various sectors of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Government had also actively participated in its drafting process. Therefore, the Basic Law could be said to symbolize a certain degree of the consensus of all parties concerned, and also some continuity with the Joint Declaration. Item 45 of the Basic Law clearly specifies that the candidates for the executive officials will eventually be nominated by a widely based representative committee according to actual circumstances, the principle of gradual approach, and the democratic procedure. The ultimate goal is to select the officials through general elections (presumably by the people of Hong Kong). Item 68 also states that the formation of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong (Legco) will be based upon actual circumstances and the principle of the gradual approach. The final aim is to select all Councillors through direct general elections after 1997. The ambiguity of the Basic Law leaves room for later disputes between China and Britain.

Prior to the promulgation of the Basic Law, the Hong Kong Government had already made attempts to expedite the democratization. For instance, before the signing of the Joint Declaration in December 1984, the Hong Kong Government issued the Green Paper for democratic reform in July of the same year. Soon after it produced the White Paper. The fundamental aim of the two documents is: "to progressively establish at the highest level of the Government in Hong Kong representative institutions that are more directly responsible to the Hong Kong people and firmly rooted in Hong Kong."\(^\text{11}\) Meanwhile, the number of the Legco seats to be directly elected has kept increasing from the original Green Paper to the White Paper and finally to the democratic reform proposal of Chris

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\(^\text{11}\) ibid, vol. 1, p. 169.
Patten passed on June 30, 1994. Apparently Mr Patten is trying to make Hong Kong's political structures more democratically based before 1997. This may serve the dual purpose of winning the hearts of the Hong Kong people and hopefully resulting in more democratic institutions after 1997.

In Beijing's view, any democratic reform and self-rule is part of her internal affairs and has nothing to do with the British Government. What would be the British motivation to move ahead the schedule of democratic reforms as mentioned in the two documents? Britain has seized Hong Kong as a result of the unequal treaties imposed upon the Manchu Government after the two Opium Wars. After more than one hundred years' colonial rule with no democracy, Britain now proposes to implement democratic reforms as a matter of "moral responsibility" to the Hong Kong people (which is quite insulting, to say the least, from Beijing's viewpoint) two or three years before the 1997 reversion. Beijing believes that there must be some hidden agenda on the part of Britain.

When Britain first brought out the Green Paper and the White Paper, Beijing did not take them seriously and often made no comment. Sometimes Beijing even replied: "This is a matter for the British Government to decide. It is not our responsibility". Britain could consider the reply as a gesture of tacit approval. After all, to eventually bring about general elections is what Beijing intends, which explains her non-response. But gradually China was awakened to the political implications of Britain's democratic reform in terms of the battle for the hearts of people in Hong Kong. Therefore, when Chris Patten made known the reform proposal in 1992, Beijing reacted strongly. What infuriates Beijing in particular was Britain's clear-breaching of the understanding between the two countries by proposing to expand the electorate base in the election of the Legco members even after much compromise from China.

According to some comments from the mass media in the colony, the British intention was to effect a major overhaul of Hong Kong's political institutions between 1984 to 1997 as a democratic structure to be maintained for the next 50 years as specified in the Basic Law. In the light of the later development of events, this explanation is fair and accurate. However, interpretations of the British motivation for initiating the reforms could vary, depending on the political views and personal interests involved. In fact, practical considerations have led the diverse sectors of Hong Kong to adopt various political positions. We would not understand the crux of the matter if we should fail to take this into consideration. Regarding the divergent political views in Hong Kong, Xu Jiatun makes the following incisive observations:

Soon after my arrival in Hong Kong, I realized that the political leanings of the businessmen here are invariably linked to their businesses. They tend to side with whoever supports them financially and in business. If more than one party support them, they would lean towards whoever has assisted them most. As a result, their positions tend to waver. This could more or less explain the so-called "Pro-Communist China", "Pro-Britain" and "Pro-America" stands.

If we look at the Beijing-British disputes from the economic perspective, the two countries share much common interest in Hong Kong. Neither side could resort to economic pressure to coerce the other side into following its way. This was the case a few years ago. It is even more so nowadays after Beijing's enormous investment in Hong Kong during the last few years. For instance, in

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12 ibid, vol. 1, p. 172.

the global stock market crash of October 19, 1987, Hong Kong’s Hang Seng stock index plunged about 1,000 points. As a result, the Hong Kong market was forced to close for four days, which was a great blow to its reputation as a financial center. During that crisis, the Chairman of The Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, Sir William Purves, requested (on behalf of the Hong Kong Government) Beijing’s Bank of China to join forces in rescuing the stock market. Beijing immediately agreed to the joint rescue efforts. In the last two or three years, many Chinese companies listed their shares in Hong Kong to raise capital. As the stakes are getting higher and higher on both sides, they will undoubtedly continue to cooperate in any economic crisis before the Chinese takeover. This was particularly the case during the period of cooperation before the arrival of Chris Patten as the new Governor of Hong Kong in the middle of 1992. But Patten’s initiatives and confrontational style have ushered in a new era of Sino-British relationship.

Democratic Reforms in Hong Kong: A “Safeguard after 1997” or Mere “Pyrrhic Victory”? If Xu Jiatun’s aforementioned Memoirs does shed some light on the inside perspective of Beijing, Sir Percy Cradock’s Experiences of China significantly reveals that Chris Patten’s reform package is a clear violation of understanding with China. Sir Percy Cradock had been British Ambassador to China from 1978 to 1984, and Foreign Policy Adviser to the two Prime Ministers, Margaret Thatcher and then John Major, from 1984 to 1992. He firmly believes that Chris Patten’s confrontational style in proposing the democratic reform in Hong Kong is not in its best interest and is convinced that to cooperate with China is the only alternative because “on the Chinese side, the arguments for negotiation were less compelling: they (the Chinese) were in a position to dictate.” He incisively points out the psychological dilemma of Hong Kong people. On the one hand, they would like to have more democracy before 1997 (that is why Patten is popular); on the other, they prudently want to avoid confrontation with China (that is why the business community criticizes Patten). In other words, they want to have their political cake and eat it too.

According to Sir Percy, initially Beijing did not agree to any direct election in Hong Kong at all because that would amount to condonation of its independence. Then in 1988 China reluctantly agreed to 10 directly elected seats of the Legislative Council in 1991 with the eventual increase to 15 seats in the 1995 election, which will continue to serve through 1997 until 1999. This arrangement has been known as the “through train”, for with China’s agreement the democratic structure will continue after 1997.

But the Tiananmen Incident in 1989 drastically changed the public opinion in Hong Kong and the sentiments of the British Parliament and media. There emerged a ground swell of distrust of China and a demand for the Hong Kong people to have more say in electing Councillors of the Legco to safeguard its future. After much negotiation, Beijing reluctantly agreed to 18 directly elected seats out of the total number of 60 in 1991, slowly increasing to 20 in 1995, 24 in 1999, and 30 in 2003. This was a great compromise made on the part of Beijing as a gesture of goodwill towards Margaret Thatcher and Sir (now Lord) David Wilson.

Beijing was understandably bitter and angry when Chris Patten, the new and last Governor of Hong Kong, took advantage of the loopholes of the Basic

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15 ibid, p. 248.
Law, proposing to drastically democratize the structure of the Legco. Mr Patten's new style heralded the end of cooperation and the beginning of confrontation. On the surface, his proposal abides by the agreed number of 20 seats to be directly elected in 1995, but greatly democratizes the composition of the "election-committee" that will select the other 10 seats in the same year. The proposal also expands the electorate base of the additional nine seats for "functional constituencies" (representing groups such as bankers, lawyers, accountants, and teachers) on top of the existing 21 constituency seats. Consequently, it is not the number of the Legco seats that is the bone of contention, but Mr. Patten's obvious manoeuvre by stealth to make 39 seats (apart from the existing 21 constituency seats) "truly democratic". If the proposal could be adopted and the newly formed Legco could enjoy the "through train" until after 1997, then the people of Hong Kong would be able to control their own destiny after the Chinese takeover. But it is unlikely that this best case scenario will eventually come to pass.

On June 30, 1994, the Legco finally passed Chris Patten's proposal, and China immediately threatened to abolish the result of any reforms in 1997. Thus it appears that the much hoped for "through train" may eventually derail. Only history will tell whether this will turn out to be a Pyrrhic victory for Hong Kong. Many people will consider the present outcome a moral victory for democracy, but it also promises a great deal of uncertainty in the future. Governor Patten called the passing of the proposal "the closing of a chapter" and said, "We must turn a new page."

History is always a telling witness of many heroic acts that often turn out to be tragic pages in her infinite volume.

Let us now sum up the arguments on both sides over Hong Kong's political reforms. From the Chinese angle, Britain took Hong Kong by force during the Opium Wars, and, after agreement with Beijing in the last few years over the composition of the Legco, blatantly breached this understanding with China (after much compromise from the latter). The British approach has been legalistic, capitalizing on the loopholes of the Basic Law to expand the electorate base of selecting the Legco members. From the Chinese cultural perspective, the British have been insincere and are playing on legalistic tricks, which is tantamount to the waging of the Third Opium War. Culturally Chinese tend to shy away from legalistic negotiations. They like to reach broad understanding first and then fill in the details in a spirit of cooperation.

From the British point of view, Britain has a "moral responsibility" towards the Hong Kong people after 150 years of colonial rule. There is a basic distrust of Beijing's ability and intention to maintain the present lifestyle of Hong Kong in view of the Chinese record of human-rights abuse in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989. Since the reversion of Hong Kong to China is irreversible, the only way to protect the interests of Hong Kong is to put in place the full democratic structure before 1997 so that any drastic change by Beijing will incur the criticism and hostility of the Hong Kong public and the international community. The strategy is to make it a legal fait accompli particularly if Beijing could give her explicit or implicit agreement.

It is the irony of history that Patten could successfully resort to public opinion in Hong Kong to support his reform proposal. In keeping with the Confucian prescription of moral cultivation, all "patriotic" Chinese including the present leaders in Beijing should engage in self-examination pondering why the people in Hong Kong, three years before its recovery to the motherland, strongly favour more democracy. There is a clear tendency for

Hong Kong to drift away from the central authority of Beijing in defiance of the Chinese culture mandala. This is all the more reason why Beijing is nervous and angry.

Chris Patten has been perceived to be in a no-loss situation regardless of whether Beijing will dismantle the Legco structure or not in 1997. If Beijing allows for the “through train”, he will be remembered as a hero. On the other hand, if Beijing should carry out their threats to abolish the Legco then, he could always say that he has done his best to safeguard democracy in Hong Kong. And it is almost certain that before 1997 the exodus from the colony will accelerate to join the great Chinese Diaspora. Meanwhile, the inexorable law of the Chinese culture mandala will continue to operate attracting and dispelling the peripheral elements depending on the charisma, moral qualities and political power of the central authority.

**Democracy and Chinese “Culture Mandala”**

In keeping with the Chinese culture mandala the idea that the central authority with its prestige and legitimacy must be honoured and maintained by all means is more than just a heritage we should cherish for sentimental reasons. For hundreds of years it has stood the test of time. Moreover, Deng Xiaoping’s view that China’s economic reforms and open-door policies could only succeed against the background of political stability is in harmony with the East Asian experience in the last few decades. The experience of the East Asian Miracle could easily testify to his view. And in turn the success of the economic reform will contribute to social and political stability. Therefore the two are closely related. Despite economic liberalization, Beijing will continue to impose tight political control both on the mainland and in Hong Kong.

In a lecture at Hong Kong University on December 14, 1992, Mr Lee Kuan Yew said that Hong Kong deserved democracy only “if you can divorce yourself from China and tow [Hong Kong] 2,000 miles away. If you can’t, I say look at the realities close to it.”17 In his view, the realities are that China will not allow Western democracy to be introduced into Hong Kong, which might subsequently destabilize politics in China. Deng Xiaoping has been known to admire Singapore’s combination of high economic growth with social discipline and political control. In a speech to Hong Kong’s business leaders on May 7, 1994, Lu Ping, Director of China’s Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, also pointed out that Hong Kong has always been an economic city, never a political city, and this is where its value to China lies, implying that Beijing will not allow Hong Kong to be politically active.

Recently arguments have come from different quarters to support the view that in certain countries democracy should not be introduced too hastily, as it might have a destabilizing effect on their societies. For instance, between 1986 and 1989 the experience of the “four little tigers” in East Asia had lent support to the theory of “new authoritarianism”, according to which for some underdeveloped countries such as China a rapid democratization is “neither politically feasible nor economically advisable”. Regarding this, Gordon White wrote in a recent article:

> Full democracy is an ultimately desirable state which must await the establishment of social, economic and political preconditions: notably the separation of political and economic life; the spread of markets; the formation of a diversity of socio-economic interests and groups in civil society, and a concomitant growth in political awareness and skills. According to its advocates, a “new authoritarian” regime ought to emerge from the matrix of Marxist-Leninist state socialism to guide this transition,  

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establishing the social and economic basis for a longer-term, second transition towards democracy.  

At one stage, the theory attracted some senior Chinese leaders such as Zhao Ziyang, the former Secretary General of the Party, but was completely suppressed in the wake of the June 1989 Tiananmen Incident. In accordance with the theory, it is not desirable for China to be fully democratic in the Western sense until all the necessary conditions are in place. And the democratization of Hong Kong should also proceed gradually for the same reason. No one believes that the political development in Hong Kong can be entirely separated from that in China. This conservative outlook is in sharp contrast with Chris Patten’s following liberal view:

I was brought up to believe that there is almost a mechanistic connection between economic freedom and political liberty. That is observedly not the case in Asia, though I think that economic freedom in time has political consequences. ... greater democracy helps to make communities more prosperous. It helps to make a government better too.

Patten may be right in arguing that economic freedom has political consequences, which is what adherents of “new authoritarianism” would like to believe. That is why they advocate patience and a transitional period to ready an underdeveloped society for democracy, and not a sudden transformation into full-fledged democracy at one stroke. In this connection, it might be worthwhile to reflect upon Confucius’ thought in the Analects: “Do not make haste. Ignore minor considerations. If you make haste, you will not reach your goal. If you allow yourself to be distracted by minor considerations, the great tasks will not be accomplished.” But Patten’s belief that “greater democracy will make communities more prosperous” does not seem to be in harmony with the recent experiences of economic developments. As a matter of fact, the sympathy for “economic development under discipline and even soft authoritarianism” has been gaining ground since Mr Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore publicly stated in Manila in November 1992:

Contrary to what American political commentators say, I do not believe that democracy necessarily leads to development. I believe that what a country needs to develop is discipline more than democracy. The exuberance of democracy leads to undisciplined and disorderly conditions which are inimical to development.

Furthermore, Milton Friedman, the Nobel Prize winner in economics, argued that Hong Kong with its lack of democracy under the British colonial government is the model of free market and high economic growth. In his view, although the people in Hong Kong do not have the right to vote (political freedom), they have the right to free speech, free worship, free travel, and free assembly (civil freedom). He maintained that if Hong Kong had gained political freedom as well, it “would have gone the way of India, Ghana, or other former British colonies, where those freedoms were used to enact laws that interfered with the exercise of civil and economic freedoms.” In other words, democracy is not regarded as conducive to economic growth and development.

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Deng Xiaoping has often emphasized the importance of clamping down on criminal activities along with implementing the economic reforms and open-door policies. Lately, Chinese President Jiang Zemin also told visiting Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in Beijing: "Without the resolute measures taken then (during the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen Incident), China would not have enjoyed today's stability." The Chinese leaders' stress upon discipline and order appears to be justifiable and in harmony with the Chinese culture mandala. Unfortunately, the law and order situation in China has become somewhat out of control as a result of the more liberal policies. As an example of this deteriorating situation, in April, 1994, 24 Taiwanese tourists along with their Chinese crew were murdered (burnt to death) by robbers on board a boat at Qiandao Lake in Zhejiang province. Corruption, vice and criminal activities have all been rampant. Moreover, regional autonomy has started to challenge the central authority. This is not the environment for Hong Kong to be politically too assertive in the run-up to 1997.

The Future of Hong Kong: A Culture Perspective

If there is any ground in Samuel Huntington's thesis that cultural conflict will replace ideological struggle in the coming era, cultural understanding is crucial in resolving many international issues. The Sino-British disputes over Hong Kong could be somewhat exacerbated by cultural differences. On the one hand, China is genuinely concerned that full democracy in Hong Kong may turn it into a political base of subversion against the socialist motherland. This explains the provisions in the Basic Law against subversion and China's publicly stated intention to intervene in Hong Kong's affairs after 1997 in case of subversive activities against China. On the other hand, despite Britain's deeply felt "moral responsibility" towards Hong Kong, her firm belief in the efficacy of democracy as a safeguard against Chinese abuse of power after 1997 may be unrealistic and rather misplaced.

Apart from the consideration that Beijing may not honour any democratic reform put in place, democracy is not a panacea for all our problems. Many societies have failed economically and socially despite their practice of full democracy in the Western sense. The social decline and breakdown of moral fibre in the West has been attributed to the overemphasis of the rights and freedom of the individuals. And even if Western democracy is such an asset for a civil society, there is the legitimate consideration of the timing of its implementation as the aforementioned "new authoritarianism" theorists have persuasively argued. The ancient Greek philosopher Plato had vividly described the personified character of democracy thus:

... he lives from day to day, indulging the pleasure of the moment. One day it is wine, women and song; the next water to drink and a strict diet; one day it is hard physical training, the next indolence and careless ease, and then a period of philosophic study. ... There is no order or restraint in his life, and he reckons his way of living is pleasant, free and happy, and sticks to it through thick and thin. 24

Furthermore Western democracy is based on the philosophic assumption that one individual is as important and valuable as another. All people are supposed to be created equal in the eyes of the creator. There may be no need for us to challenge this assumption, but we


could question the presupposition behind the one person-one vote political system that humans are equal in their judgments and abilities. Not long ago, Lee Kuan Yew ventured the view that perhaps Singaporeans who are married and between 40 and 60 years of age should have two votes instead of one because they tend to be socially more responsible. Far from being irrational, this suggestion could be rationally argued and defended.

The Chinese *culture mandala* prescribes that, wherever possible, authority ought to be respected and order maintained even though it requires some moral or intellectual justifications in terms of the Mandate of Heaven or civil service examinations. Scholars have long argued that the problematique of Confucius' political philosophy is how to preserve authority at times of political and intellectual chaos and disorder. He said: "The rule of virtue can be compared to the Pole Star which commands the homage of the multitude of stars without leaving its place." 25 Elsewhere he also stated: "The virtue of gentleman is like wind; the virtue of the small man is like grass. Let the wind blow over the grass and it is sure to bend." 26

Finally let us conclude with the following words of Sir Percy Cradock: "... the policy of co-operation with China for the benefit of Hong Kong, if not the only conceivable policy, is the only one that will allow Britain to leave the stage knowing that it has done its best to fulfil its responsibilities to the six million people in its charge." 27 These words were not written by a conservative pro-Beijing Chinese, but by someone who had served as Foreign Policy Adviser to two British Prime Ministers and was personally involved in the negotiations with Beijing.

27 Percy Cradock, op. cit., p. 258.