Between Chinese and Western Civilizations: Reflections on Hong Kong before and after Reunification with China

Ricardo King-Sang Mak
Hong Kong Baptist University

Timothy Man-kong Wong

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol45/iss45/10

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Introduction

The year 1997 marks a new page in the history of Hong Kong. Returning to China after more than 150 years of British rule, Hong Kong people strive now not only to create new political institutions to put into practice the principle of “one country, two systems,” but also to redefine their cultural links as well as identification with Chinese and Western civilizations. Because of the handover, Hong Kong people must live with a new identity in a new social and political setting. This new identity has a material base. The China factor has become more vital to Hong Kong than ever because the opening of the Chinese market has gradually transformed the role of Hong Kong as China’s window to the world and as Western countries’ springboard into China. Working closely with China and being reunited with China, however, are two different matters. Despite the Chinese government’s repeated assurances that China will not meddle in Hong Kong’s internal affairs, Hong Kong people regard the issue of reunification with fear and anxiety. They fear that Hong Kong’s glory may fade away if the foreign investors pack up and leave. For this reason, in the decade after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, industrialists, politicians, historians and artists have underscored Hong Kong’s pluralistic character and Western heritage.

Although the mass media presents Hong Kong people as emotionally and psychologically resisting the transfer of sovereignty back to China, the reunification must be lived with than swept aside. In this context, Hong Kong people are struggling to redefine themselves and their Weltanschauung. China and the West, the past and the future, etc. are broken into pieces and reinserted into the post-reunification Hong Kong way of life.
Identity Crisis and Spatial Confusion

The principles of “fifty years without change” and “one country, two systems,” as agreed in the Sino-British Declaration of 1984, revealed China’s and Britain’s desire to maintain Hong Kong’s western-oriented capitalism and international status. Hong Kong is supposed to be integrated properly into the capitalist world dominated by Western industrial nations. Hong Kong people had no difficulty in accepting this state of affairs and, indeed, in taking advantage of it. According to the International Monetary Fund report in June 1996, Hong Kong is “the world’s seventh largest trading entity and seventh largest stock market, the world’s fifth largest banking center in terms of external financial transactions and the fifth largest foreign exchange market in terms of average daily turnover, the fourth leading source of foreign direct investment, the busiest container port, and one of the world’s most prosperous economies, with per capita GDP of US$24,500 comparable to all but the wealthiest industrial countries.”

Ironically, despite its economic achievement, Hong Kong has difficulty keeping its people. The constant outflow of population to Western countries like Australia, Canada and the USA after the Sino-British Joint Declaration suggests that many affluent people in Hong Kong saw great advantages to emigrating to the West in face of China’s takeover. Many people decided to stay in Hong Kong simply because they had no better choice. However, Hong Kong people have never really identified themselves with any Western countries. What they wanted from the West were merely business opportunities and legal and economic systems. What they feared most was a massive capital withdrawal from Hong Kong after Hong Kong’s return to China. Hong Kong people’s mixed feelings about the West are well reflected in their attitudes toward the British and the Americans.

Undeniably the British left Hong Kong with handsome economic reserves, an efficient and healthy administration, a sound legal system and a clean human-rights record. The political reform and the policy of localization since the 1980s allowed the new rising middle class of Hong Kong to participate in the process of political decision-making. However, while the interests of the general public in Hong Kong were largely ignored by the ruling expatriate-businessmen complex, British culture and way of life were appreciated by a minor portion of the Hong Kong population. Many of the three million Hong Kong people bearing British Dependent Territory Citizenship (now British National Overseas) might never forgive the British for using the British
Nationality Act 1981 to strip them of the right of abode in Britain. A sense of betrayal ran high in the early 1980s when the British backed down in face of the Chinese leaders’ opposition to a possible participation of Hong Kong people in negotiating the future of Hong Kong. For many who desired a smooth transition in the final years of the British rule, the electoral reform introduced by the last governor Chris Patten in 1992 only created mutual distrust between China and Hong Kong.

Despite China’s growing investment in Hong Kong, the USA remains Hong Kong’s biggest export market and one of its most important trading partners. At the same time, Americans had a long history of interfering in Asian affairs. Alerted by China’s growing strength in Asia-Pacific, the USA has sought to secure its interest in Hong Kong by emphasizing its commitment to Hong Kong and by signaling its support for democratic movements in Hong Kong. However, many Hong Kong Chinese, even leading Hong Kong democrats like Martin Lee and Emily Lau, whose outspoken critiques of the Beijing government have won for them the reputation of freedom fighters, had no reason to welcome any direct intervention by America into Hong Kong.

Before the 1980s, the Chinese government was rather remote to Hong Kong people. It may be true that only a small river separates China and Hong Kong, but it is equally true that this river symbolizes the line dividing communism and capitalism. China’s confrontation with the Western capitalist nations in the zenith of the Cold War deprived it of any real contacts with the Crown Colony. Bad memories of the political movements in the initial phase of the PRC and strange tales about the Great Leap Forward Movement and the Cultural Revolution have jointly contributed to constructing an image of China as an inscrutable totalitarian state. Deng Xiaoping’s reform marked the beginning of China’s modernization program. In less than twenty years, China became the biggest exporter of raw materials to Hong Kong. Lured by China’s vast land and cheap labor, Hong Kong capitalists moved their outmoded labor-intensive industries northward to South China, preparing thus for Hong Kong’s economic and social integration into the South China economic zone.

Growing economic cooperation, however, has not eased Hong Kong people’s fear about China. For many Hong Kong citizens, the 1989 Tiananmem incident has become an ineradicable collective memory. In addition, the conservative political model fixed in the Hong Kong Basic Law, China’s decision to replace the legitimate Legislative Council after the handover with a Provisional Legislature, the contro-
versies over human rights and judiciary independence in post-1997 Hong Kong, and the apparent restrictions of political parties' activities, —all suggest that China intended to tighten its grip on Hong Kong. These changes partly explain why the Hong Kong Democrats who confronted the Beijing government won landslide victories in both the 1991 and the 1995 elections.

The Western Watchdog and the Western Trouble-makers

Hong Kong was reunified with China on July 1, 1997. Conventional wisdom among the Chinese people is that it is better to accept reality if it cannot be altered. Herbert Yee's research explains why the Chinese people in Hong Kong, having found that fending off communism with democracy has lost its validity after 1997, choose to live with the new system. It is true that the Hong Kong Democrats and their allies are still fighting for a political system that accommodates a popularly elected legislature and a Chief Executive backed by public opinion. However, for so many Hong Kong citizens, a competent and open-minded Chief Executive is exactly what they need. Whether he or she is elected or handpicked by Beijing seems to matter little. Similarly since freedom and money are the ethos of Hong Kong culture, the legitimation of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government will not be challenged as long as it guarantees Hong Kong's position as the Manhattan of South China. Leaving the history of colonial ruling behind, many now look at Western nations and cultures from different perspectives.

The West has doubtlessly lost much of its political influence after Hong Kong's return to China. The British, for example, have evolved from being the master of the Crown Colony to being the business partners of the HKSAR. Its activities in Hong Kong are now limited by the Sino-British Joint Declaration and by the subsequent agreements. Though claiming that Britain still has the responsibility to secure the stability of Hong Kong, Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, cannot and will not make any substantive move toward interference in Hong Kong's affairs. Occasionally, he may remark on the situation of Hong Kong. But he understands, we believe, that any move beyond the Sino-British understanding might cause unnecessary conflicts. For instance, many influential Hong Kong people protested when the British Embassy in Hong Kong surprisingly arranged for informal meetings with candidates weeks before the first Legislature election scheduled on
May 24, 1998. Similarly, despite the USA’s strong interest in post-reunification Hong Kong, it seems unrealistic to expect America to offend China for Hong Kong’s sake.

Nevertheless, many Hong Kong people, especially the Democrats and the media, continue to believe that Western powers can serve as a stabilizing force. Knowing that both the C. H. Tung leadership and the Beijing government were monitoring the development of the newly founded HKSAR, Hong Kong media as well as the Democrats seldom hesitated in the past three years to utilize Western criticisms of the HKSAR as a means of exerting pressure on the new government. It is not an exaggeration that Western powers, though not Hong Kong’s watchdogs, were sometimes considered as such. Hong Kong media and politicians reacted strongly every time Western politicians expressed their concern over the rule of law, the freedom of market and human rights in Hong Kong.\textsuperscript{15} When differences between Hong Kong and China drew Western attention, Western reaction became politicized. For instance, Hong Kong was shocked when the \textit{Economist} described it in August 1999 as a city with a dim future because China overruled the verdict of Hong Kong’s Court of Final Appeal that children born of a Hong Kong father in Mainland China had the right to Hong Kong citizenship.\textsuperscript{16}

However, Hong Kong people’s attitude toward the West also underwent changes since the end of 1997. Doubtless it is to the \textit{laissez faire} tradition and its internationalized market that Hong Kong’s success is due. For years Hong Kong has been ranked as the freest market in the world.\textsuperscript{17} However, the structural weakness of the Hong Kong economy and its lack of restrictions over the inflow and outflow of capital finally attracted too many international speculators.\textsuperscript{18} The economy, which has relied heavily on real estate speculations and financial services after its manufacturing sector moved northward, was unable to fend off the assaults of Western funds. From August 1997 to August 1998, the Hang Seng Stock Exchange Index declined from 16,000 points to 6,900. The impact of the financial crisis was awful, but the change in attitude was even more drastic. Undeniably, the international financial oligarchy caused great pain to Hong Kong. However, an unfriendly attitude toward Western countries grew so rapidly that even the Financial Secretary, Donald Tsang, shared this opinion.\textsuperscript{19} Extreme theories that portrayed Westerners as greedy and insatiable monsters began to prevail.\textsuperscript{20}

Unable to tolerate more such crises, the Hong Kong government interfered in the stock market at the end of August 1998 and succeeded in stopping the Hang Seng Index from sinking further. This move, of
course, violated Hong Kong's traditional policy of non-interventionism and aroused suspicion among Western economists and politicians. Despite the Hong Kong's attempts to reclaim its status as a liberal and international city, the city continues to revise its conception of the West. While maintaining that it is still open to the West, Hong Kong has become aware of the potential threat from western economies. In case of emergency, the HKSAR will disregard the reaction of the Western nations and take strict if extraordinary measures to protect itself. In addition, since Hong Kong now relies on China more than ever, the Western nations' policies which hinder Hong Kong's economic development e.g. the USA's unwillingness to support China's bid for the permanent Most-Favored-Nation status and the Sino-American controversy over intellectual property, have become sources of conflict between Hong Kong and the USA. In effect, Western political and cultural forces, instead of being merely present in Hong Kong life, are now manipulated in light of governmental policy.

The Chinese Patron outside the Door

Despite China's resumption of its sovereignty over Hong Kong, many Hong Kong people still do not identify themselves with China. A poll shows that one year after the handover, the number of Hong Kong citizens who regard themselves as Chinese declined by 2.5% instead of increasing. Although 65.5% of the respondents agree that Hong Kong citizens should contribute to the economic development of China, 68.6% of them believe that when conflicts of interest arise between China and Hong Kong, Hong Kong people should place their own local interests over national interests. Compared with 1997, two more percent of respondents in 1998 believe that liberty and human rights are more important than nationalistic considerations. The poll preliminarily concludes that in face of pragmatism and domestic interests, the issue of a Chinese national identity is an expendable one for Hong Kong people. Such an attitude should not be surprising for, as the pollster stated in another article, Hong Kong people had played no part in the building of modern China. What Hong Kong had encountered was the reality of colonial rule. Without such collective experience and memory, it would seem difficult for Hong Kong people, especially those of the younger generation, to identify with the Chinese regime shortly after the reunification.

Hong Kong's hope for a popular democracy was shattered by the Sino-British conflict over the electoral reform introduced by Chris
Patten. Since 1992 the PRC officialdom's "militant, aggressive mode of decision-making and policy implementation on almost all Hong Kong issues in the name of full sovereignty recovery and genuine sovereignty actualization" kept disturbing Hong Kong. China's rather aggressive tactics in replacing the Legislature, whose tenure should have lasted from 1995 to 1999, with a Provisional Legislature, shocked Hong Kong. It seems ironic that on the eve of the reunification, Hong Kong citizens, while anticipating the historic moment, could only wish that China would keep its promise of not meddling in Hong Kong's domestic affairs.

Obviously the China that Hong Kong people would want to encounter is one that gives Hong Kong a real free hand, and the new Chief Executive that Hong Kong people want to work with is one that, though not directly elected by Hong Kong people, represents Hong Kong's interests. C. H. Tung struggled to maintain Hong Kong's old faces, to prove to the Western world that Hong Kong is gradually democratizing in its particular way and to upkeep Hong Kong's position as the freest market on earth. It must be acknowledged that, despite a number of controversial issues, Hong Kong's development has not yet been harmed by reunification. A political scientist concludes, after observing the social and political environment of Hong Kong in its first year, that "...fundamental human rights in Hong Kong have so far not been breached." In fact, the People's Liberation Army stationed in Hong Kong, the quasi Beijing agents as well as newspapers under Beijing's influence have all exercised great self-restraint. During the visits of President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair to Hong Kong in July and October 1998, they were impressed both by the success of "one country, two systems" in Hong Kong and by China's non-intervention policy.

Nevertheless, public opinion still shows that the Beijing government's prudent policies have not yet eased the anxiety of Hong Kong people. From 1998 to 1999 when Hong Kong was hit harshly by the worst economic recession since 1967, the Chief Executive who was a symbol of the principle of "one country, two systems" was harshly criticized. From October 1998 to April 1999 the number of respondents who were satisfied by the Beijing government's way to deal with Hong Kong never exceeded 48%. The Beijing government was apparently discredited when the People's Congress overruled the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal's verdict on the rights to Hong Kong citizenship (see note 16). For Hong Kong people, though China's sovereignty is a fact, China's non-interference continues to be desirable.

Although C. H. Tung has sought to engineer among the Hong Kong
people a stronger sense of “Chineseness” by emphasizing the importance of the Chinese language, the significance of Chinese historical heritage, etc., his efforts have not produced the desired results. Interestingly, it is new economic developments that are bringing Hong Kong and China closer together. China’s reaction during the recent Asian financial crisis suggests that its support now a more positive effect on the Hong Kong economy. In early 1998 the continuously sinking Japanese Yen put Renminbi (the Chinese dollar) under devaluation pressure, due to the rise in wages and production costs. The issues are complex. If the Japanese dollar had continued sinking, while the Renminbi remained strong, Japan would again become a better trading partner of the West. However, if the Chinese government were to take the option of devaluing the Renminbi, Hong Kong would have no alternative to devaluing the Hong Kong dollar. Otherwise, Hong Kong, given its high standard of living, might eventually be overtaken by other new rising cities in coastal China. However, devaluing the Hong Kong dollar would also lead to the decline of property values, thus slowing down the pace of economic recovery. Fortunately the State Council of China and the Central Bank of China maintained the Renminbi’s value. The slow recovery of the Japanese Yen in mid 1998 further made the devaluation of the Renminbi unnecessary. By backing Hong Kong in this critical period and by refraining from interfering in its internal affairs, China appeared to be the generous and steadfast patron. Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji’s statement in October 1998 that China would do whatever it could to contribute to Hong Kong’s recovery also comforted an anxious people.

In the near future Hong Kong’s economy will depend on that of China in many other ways. For instance, it is widely believed that China’s possible acceptance by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade will give new momentum for Hong Kong to grow. Shenzhen, the Special Chinese Economic Zone adjacent to Hong Kong, given its lower cost of living and spacious environment, has become not only a industrial base of Hong Kong, but also a resort and even residential area. Simply put, the pragmatic and domestic-minded Hong Kong people want to see that China aid Hong Kong economically without stepping onto its soil.

Educating for the Better

Before the reunification with China, there were voices reminding the Hong Kong government to pay special attention to the problems in
education. “Hong Kong’s work force lacks the skills and creativity to run a world-class service center, a reflection of the shortcomings of the territory’s education system,” a columnist warned. A research team from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology reported that the educational system in Hong Kong did not respond efficiently to the industrialists’ needs. Also, education researchers and politicians in Hong Kong urged the government to improve the educational system.

C. H. Tung was aware of the problem. Painting a picture of the future of Hong Kong in his first policy address on 8 October 1997 for the newly founded HKSAR, he spoke about the importance of education to the future of Hong Kong: “The SAR Government encourages enterprises to develop into higher value-added activities. Hong Kong’s ability to reach this goal depends mainly on the number of our citizens who have the ability to enter these fields. We must, therefore, provide every citizen with the opportunity to receive quality education so that they master the skills needed to participate in the new economy, to create wealth for themselves and for Hong Kong.” In addition, he pointed out, “it [the educational system] must enable us to contribute to the development of our country; it must give us an international outlook. It should be diverse, drawing on the strengths of East and West. It must inspire commitment to excellence.” To him, education is a means to local and national ends. Reforming education, ranging from financial issues to curricular ones, thus became a major topic of the HKSAR administration. Recently, the ten major directions of changes in education have been succinctly presented. Confronted by these numerous changes, the Hong Kong people appear to be the most anxious about those changes concerning the promotion of Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI). That policy, of course, is the result of C. H. Tung’s intention to strengthen the Chineseness of the younger generations. This policy, too, has produced anxiety in Hong Kong. No one would dispute the need to address Chineseness. The issue is whether or not the use of the English language as the medium of instruction (EMI) will be maintained. It is probably because the EMI is taken as an assurance that the younger generations will thus continue to maintain links with the rest of the world. Perhaps, eventually the CMI policy may be considered a definitive turning point, away from the West and toward Asia.

C. H. Tung believes that “greater use of mother-tongue teaching will help raise the standard of teaching in non-language subjects. It also allows more time to be given to specialized teaching of English and Chinese so that all language standards may be raised.” Tung’s state-
ment represented the government’s decision to move ahead with the promotion of the CMI, which has been a subject of heated debate in Hong Kong for a long time. About two weeks before his policy address, the Education Department (ED) had issued a requirement that all secondary schools adopt the CMI starting from September 1998. However, the ED also permitted schools to apply for exemption from doing so and thus to continue with the EMI.  

By mid-October 1997, 124 schools applied for staying with the EMI. In the academic year of 1997-1998, there were altogether 468 secondary schools. In other words, more than one fourth of schools did not want to comply with the CMI policy. The ED therefore set up a vetting committee to review these applications. On 1 December 1997, the committee announced that 100 out of 124 applications were approved. Immediately afterwards, some of the rejected applicants bitterly doubted whether the judgment made by the committee was careful and impartial. More significantly, others criticized the ED for having initiated a labeling effect — an EMI school would be regarded as first-class-ranked (and therefore prestigious), with an official endorsement of its higher status as well. The CMI schools would be regarded as second-class-ranked (and therefore inferior). So some parents were eager to get their children admitted to those primary schools that had affiliations with EMI secondary schools. Some would send their children to EMI kindergartens, although the tuition fees were much higher than average.

Twenty out of the twenty-four rejected applicants appealed. In March 1998, sixteen out of twenty appeals were successful. These cases did not ease the problem at all. As a result, the committee had to emphasize again that the EMI was not an award and the CMI was not a punishment. Despite that assurance, the public took the issue in the opposite way. The policy permitting selected institutions to stay with the EMI caused distress and division among other institution in Hong Kong. A number of critics questioned the ED’s commitment to promoting CMI while permitting some schools to stay with the EMI. Some CMI schools believed that the academic levels of their future pupils would be lowered, while some suggested that the label CMI negatively impacted on their students’ self-esteem. Those who intended to stay with the EMI fell into two groups: the approved ones and the unapproved ones. Apparently, rejected applicants turned their attention to a successful application to the EMI in the future.

The fact that Hong Kong is a Chinese society where the Chinese language is the medium of communication has a long history. It is also
true that the EMI has a long history. Here, it is useful to consider the salient features about the EMI and the CMI in the history of education in Hong Kong. In order to sustain and maintain support from voluntary organizations, the government introduced a grant-in-aids scheme in 1873. Only after the changes in the scheme in 1893, under which EMI schools received more financial aids than CMI schools, the EMI gradually became a dominant form of education in Hong Kong. Between 1928 and 1949, however, the reverse took place because CMI schools could seek from China "a political patron" and "a national structure," under which their students could proceed to their university education in China. Up to 1951, about 80% of the secondary school sector adopted the CMI. When university education in China became an impossible and/or undesirable choice for students in Hong Kong, CMI schools lost their students. In 1958, the percentage of enrollment in CMI schools dropped to 45%, and it went down to 39% in 1961. In 1976, the percentage dropped to 19%. When the expansion of the secondary school sector took place between the late 1970s and 1980s, the CMI apparently became an unpopular option, which hardly reached 10% in the early 1990s. But it has been argued that the EMI only appeared to be a label without substance in practice.

The promotion of the CMI is not new at all. In 1946 a substantial attempt to bring the CMI into practice bore no fruit. In view of the sharp increase of EMI schools since the late 1950s, debates as to how to maintain a good standard of English among students in Hong Kong have never ceased. More significantly, the EMI and English language education was interwoven, some would think that the former was the best means to the latter end. And the former was thought to be effectively tapping the heritage and the strength of Western civilization. For those newly established schools, they did not dare to risk their future by claiming to be a CMI school, a brand that the parents would tend to avoid. And yet, teachers, principals, students and their parents knew that the general standard of the English language in the society was not improving. Soon after the Education Commission (EC) was established in 1984, the issue of the medium of instruction did not escape its attention. The first EC report had already recommended that the government promote the CMI and strengthen English language education. These recommendations were raised again and further elaborated in the fourth EC report. There was no easy answer to this issue. Rita Fan, the chairperson of the EC between 1990 and 1992, spelt out clearly that to compromise between the CMI and the EMI was a necessary solution to the
situation. She remarked that “we agree that conducting classes in the students’ mother tongue would probably best enable them to understand their studies. However, there were students who could learn equally well in English. Should we insist that all students learn in Chinese (the spoken form being Cantonese in Hong Kong) and thereby remove from the small group of students who could learn well in English the choice of doing so? . . . Eventually the Commission suggested a method which strongly favored the use of Chinese as the teaching language in secondary schools, but preserved the right of choice for parents and schools.”

Apparently, her version of compromise, namely to advocate the CMI in secondary schools but to make available some EMI schools, is basically the same idea behind the government’s current policies of promoting the CMI.

This compromise originated because of the widely shared belief that English was commercially valuable in the job market in Hong Kong. The success stories of the graduates of Morrison Memorial School in the 1840s, the first Western school in Hong Kong, had already proven it. There were indeed many similar stories from other Western schools in Hong Kong, such as St. Paul’s College or the Central School. First English enjoyed a better political and social position while Hong Kong was a British colony. Second, Hong Kong’s economy has been international in character, and English is the main language of international business. As Robert Lord pointedly suggested, “English has, especially since the 1950s, became an international language of first importance. Indeed, this trend may well not stop until English becomes, perhaps in the early twenty-first century, the world lingua franca, a language that everyone everywhere who has any sort of ‘white-collar’ prospect will need to have an adequate command of.”

The failure to accomplish a generally good standard of English in Hong Kong naturally serves as a reminder for educators to look into the advantages of the CMI. As a matter of fact, complaints about the poor standard of English have a long history in Hong Kong. There are many causes for this failure, the two most important being improper methods of English language education, and a lack of favorable social and cultural conditions for the development of English as a language. Here, we do not intend to examine the extent to which these causes are sound. Nor do we intend to search for proper ways to develop English language education. These are subjects of other researches. Finally, however, we must agree with Wang Gungwu’s remark that “[We must] stop pretending that English is not a foreign language in Hong Kong. The fact that
we’re a British colony has not changed that.”

Although English is in fact a foreign language in Hong Kong, some inhabitants think otherwise. In addition, some external forces may also account for a strong favor of the EMI. While hearing of recent attempt by the government to promote the CMI, Edda Ostarchild, the chief executive of the Institute of Linguists in Britain, expressed his reservation of the policy. His view was recorded as follows: “The currently high level of competence in English may, over a period of time, drop as the language of classroom instruction in Hong Kong is changing from English to Chinese. Hong Kong has been fortunate in that the bilingual capacity of its people is a great asset in facilitating communications on an international scale and provides a competitive edge. For this reason, the Hong Kong people’s bilingualism needs to be supported and safeguarded.”

For another example, there were even rumors outside Hong Kong saying that the government had prohibited English in schools. Ostarchild’s comment and these rumors indicate that the English language is indeed so crucial to Hong Kong that the world is paying attention to the issue.

The promotion of the CMI was a historical issue. The government intended to help students remove the language obstacle, and eventually to obtain a better performance in their studies. However, the medium of instruction is indeed a subtle issue, English language education and the EMI were mistakenly interwoven together, partly because of the conventional wisdom (with a history of more than 150 years) that English language was the key to the competitive edge of Hong Kong. Furthermore, the basic rationale behind all the moves towards the education reforms – to be better prepared for the “knowledge-based, technology-driven and competitive global environment” – reinforces among the public that the EMI schools would stand a better chance in the future. Perhaps the entire issue is indicative of the choice that Hong Kong has to make, occupying as it does a position somewhere in the East and in the West at the same time.

Conclusion

Not many cities are experiencing the dynamics of influences from the East and the West at the same time. On the political front, Hong Kong’s national identity is Chinese while the cherished standards from the West have been the standards as well. On the economic front, Western investment in Hong Kong and the Chinese market have become goals that Hong Kong cannot afford to miss. Moreover, China and the West both now bear equal responsibility for Hong Kong’s eco-
omic future. On the educational front, Hong Kong people expect that the younger generations will improve their knowledge about (information) technology and their levels of competence in the English language. The promotion of English no longer bears the political weight that it did under British colonial rule. Rather, the challenge of the new economy, which is of a clear global character, is motivating that promotion of English. Whether one considers them pragmatic or visionary, Hong Kong people are proud of their flexibility in handling their delicate and evolving civilizational situation. Perhaps such pride is the source of the energetic spirit that drives Hong Kong to prosper, somewhere in between the civilizations of China and the West.

Hong Kong Baptist University

NOTES:

1 The complexities behind the connotation of “Hong Kong Man (People),” as a result of the long history of interactions of East and West, are elaborated in the two articles by Hugh D. R. Baker in 1983 and 1993. See, Baker, “Life in the Cities: The Emergence of Hong Kong Man,” and “Social Change in Hong Kong: Hong Kong Man in Search of Majority.”

2 Dodsworth and Mihaljek, Hong Kong, China: Growth, Structural Change, and Economic Stability During the Transition, 1.

3 Ting, The External Relations and International Status of Hong Kong, 18.

4 As early as in 1987, there was research showing that foreign investors, despite the assurance of the Beijing government were worried about a tight restriction over the freedom of assets. See Ho, “An Attitudinal Survey of Foreign Investors in Hong Kong: Does the 1997 Issue Matter?” 15-16.

5 Li, Hong Kong from Britain to China: Political Cleavages, Electoral Dynamics and Institutional Changes, 21.

6 Sze, “Culture,” 532.


8 See, Lee and Chan, “Hong Kong’s Changing International Relations Strategy,” and Ting “China, United States and the Future of Hong Kong.” Both converge on the point that the USA sees Hong Kong as instrumental to the modernization and liberalization of China. The USA is also likely to use its economic strength to compel China to
install open, accountable and democratic institutions in Hong Kong.

9 The fact that Emily Lau requested President Clinton to help speed up democratization in Hong Kong, or to step in when a real political crisis occurs in Hong Kong (see Hong Kong Economic Times, 1998.7.11) is rather an exceptional case.

10 Sit, “Hong Kong’s transferred Industrialization and Industrial Geography,” 880-904.


13 Ibid., 110.

14 For instance, he talked with C. H. Tung about the bright future of Hong Kong during the latter’s visit to London. See South China Morning Post 1997.10.22. When visiting Hong Kong in October 1998, Tony Blair also emphasized that Britain will watch over Hong Kong in the coming years.

15 The march of the People Liberation Army into Hong Kong on the day of the handover, in the reports of Hong Kong media, symbolized Hong Kong’s falling back into a totalitarian state. See for instance Express 1997.7.1. The Hong Kong Human Rights reports were quite often used as weapons against the new government. See for instance, Hong Kong Daily News, 1997.7.31.

16 Ming Pao, 1999.8.23. For a brief discussion of this issue see Cheng, “Political Changes since the Establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region,” 85.

17 According to Economist, Hong Kong was still the most liberal economy on earth in December 1997.

18 For a brief analysis of the problem of the Hong Kong economy before and after the reunification, see Liu, The Asian Financial Crisis and After: Problems and Challenge for the Hong Kong Economy.

19 For instance, Sir Donald strongly protested when the Standard and Poor Credit Rating Agency downgrade Hong Kong banks credit rating, emphasizing that the Western countries inadequate understanding of Hong Kong. See South China Morning Post, 1997.11.3.

20 Dr. P. F. Chan, once the chairman of the United Stock Exchange Market of Hong Kong describes in a lecture the hedge funds that have caused great trouble to Hong Kong as “barbarians.” See his “Barbarians over Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Electronic Economist Limited, 1998), 2. Hong Kong Economic Time also published on
11.11.1997 an article entitled “New Western Invasion by Armor-Clap Warships and Destructive Weapons,” which is about Western speculators’ attack at the Hong Kong stock market. This phrase is very often employed by Chinese historians to depict 19th century Western imperialistic penetrations into China.

The Standard and Poor Rating Agency downgraded almost instantly Hong Kong’s long-term and short-term credit rating, while Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman urged the HKSAR government to apologize for its imprudent measure.

C. H. Tung and Joseph Yam, head of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, have explained the extraordinary measures in different occasion. In addition, one advisory committee consisting of prominent business leaders like the President of Siemens, Head of the Deutsche bank and Chairman of the Mitsubishi Enterprise was formed to facilitate the reorganization of the Hong Kong economy.


Wang, *Hong Kong People’s Civil Consciousness and National identity: One year after the Handover*, 17.

Ibid., 15-16.

Ibid., 17.


Mak, “Working with the Old Partners in a New Context: HKSAR and the West,” 36-47.


On the first anniversary of Hong Kong’s return to China, top British and American officials expressed such kind of opinions. See *Hong Kong Economic Times* 1998.7.1; *Singtao Daily Press* 1998.7.2 and *Ming Pao*, 1998.7.4.


Ibid., 11.

Kraar, “The Economy: The Threat from within,” 47.
Berger and Lester ed., Made by Hong Kong, 64-69.

Researchers in the field of Education studies expressed their concerns. A good example is Ho Kwok-keung, Studies of Problems in Hong Kong Education. Politicians also expressed their concern, see for example, David Yu-lin Chu, “Educational Reform for Special Administrative Region Era”.


79th paragraph of the 1997 Policy Address.

The recent moves in education are summarized in ten major points. 1) Support school-based management and innovative practices; 2) Provide a quality learning environment; 3) Develop and maintain a dedicated and professional teaching force; 4) Maximise the benefits of IT in education to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning; 5) Enable our students and workforce to be bi-literate and tri-lingual; 6) Improve the system of assessing students; 7) Develop Hong Kong into a regional centre of excellence for higher education; 8) Ensure students are not deprived of education for lack of financial means; 9) Ensure continuous improvement to the education system; and 10) Provide a curriculum which develops students’ potential to the full and meets the needs of the community. See, Quality Education: Policy Objectives for Education and Manpower Bureau (Hong Kong: HKSAR, 2000).

85th paragraph of the 1997 Policy Address.


Singtao Daily Press, 1998.3.14


So, “Language-Based Bifurcation of Secondary Schools in Hong

For example, Liu Kwang-ching, an eminent China historian, completed his secondary school education in Hong Kong in 1939 and he took part in the nation-wide university entrance examination through which he was admitted to the Xinan Lianda [Southern West United University] in Kunming, Yunan. See, Su "An interview with Liu Kwang-ching," 1309.


Sweeting, A Phoenix Transformed: The Reconstruction of Education in Post-war Hong Kong, 72-75.

"The newly established (since 1984) Education Commission is supposed to be a coordinating agent which oversees the overall education policies and the interface between different sectors of the system. The Education Commission is composed of representatives from the crucial government departments, as well as prominent community figures and educators." Cheng "Educational Policymaking in Hong Kong: The Changing Legitimacy," 109.

For a brief summary of these suggestions from the first report, see Education Commission Report NO. 4, 87-90.

Fan, "Expectations and Challenges in School Education," 76.

Chan, "Four Chinese Students of the Hong Kong Morrison Memorial School," 282-87.

Lord, "Language Policy and Planning in Hong Kong: Past, Present, and (Especially) Future," 11.

There were many complaints about the "failure to communicate" in English, as seen in the history of Hong Kong. There were also attempts to improve the standard of English in schools. But none proved to achieve a lasting success. Evans, "The Context of English Language Education, the case of Hong Kong," 30-55.

For a useful discussion, see Lau, Hong Kong's Colonial Legacy: A Hong Kong Chinese's View of the British Heritage, 101-126.

For further information, see Bruce comp., Language in Hong Kong Education and Society: A Bibliography. See also, "The Hong Kong Language Education Research Database," available from http://www.language.com.hk; Internet. Recently, there is an exciting research in this respect, see Marsh, Hau and Kong, "Late Immersion and Language of Instruction in Hong Kong High Schools: Achievement Growth in Language and Nonlanguage Subjects." 302-346.

"China Takes the Lead in English," South China Morning Post,
"Bilingual Edge ‘May Be Lost’,” *South China Morning Post*, 1997.12.27.

Singtao Daily Press. 1998.1.16.

“Message,” *Quality Education: Policy Objectives for Education and Manpower Bureau*.

**WORKS CITED**

**A. Governmental Documents**


“The 1997 Policy Address”, *Hansard* (8 October 1997); 


**B. Newspapers & Magazines**

*Economist*  
*Express*  
*Hong Kong Daily News [In Chinese]*  
*Hong Kong Economic Time [In Chinese]*  
*Ming Pao [In Chinese]*  
*Singtao Daily Press [In Chinese]*  
*South China Morning Post*

**C. Books and Articles**


Bruce, Nigel. *Language in Hong Kong Education and Society: A Bibliography*. Hong Kong: English Centre, The University of Hong Kong, 1996.

Published by BYU ScholarsArchive, 2001


Irving, Edward Alexander, "The System of Education in Hong Kong."
SPECIAL REPORTS ON EDUCATIONAL SUBJECTS, BOARD OF EDUCATION, GREAT BRITAIN 14 (1905): 61-132.


Ng, Lun Ngai Ha, Interactions of East and West: Development of Public Education in Early Hong Kong. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1984.


Wang, Chia-ying, Hong Kong People’s Civil Consciousness and National identity: One year after the Handover [in Chinese]. Hong Kong: Hsiang-kang hai hsia liang an kuan hsi yen chiu chung hsin, 1999.
