

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**Towards 1997 and the reunification
of Hong Kong with China:
The views of Hong Kong women**

by

Anne Julie Talbot

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology at Massey University

February 1998

Abstract of thesis entitled

**Towards 1997 and the Reunification of Hong Kong with China:
The Views of Hong Kong Women**

Anne Julie Talbot

On 1 July 1997 China will regain sovereignty over Hong Kong. To investigate this event, this exploratory study examined whether Chinese women in Hong Kong thought that the reunification of Hong Kong with China would bring about particular changes, and, if so, in which sectors of society change would be effected. The study also asked if the women viewed these changes as positive or negative, and whether various groups of women had different concerns. An effort was made to allow women to give their views in their own words so that this study could be their 'voice' about the social change that might occur in Hong Kong due to the process of decolonisation.

The first phase of this research involved 164 Hong Kong Chinese women. A questionnaire was devised with three sections: Section A gathered demographic data, Section B consisted of open-ended questions about the change of sovereignty, and Section C used a Likert-type scale to gauge strength of feeling. In the second phase of the study, four women, representing different socio-economic groups, participated in unstructured interviews.

The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using crosstabulation, and content analysis done on the open-ended questions and unstructured interviews.

The main findings were that most respondents thought that major changes would occur in Hong Kong because of the reunification; that change would occur in particular sectors of Hong Kong society (the structure and personnel of government, legal system, human rights and freedoms, education system, welfare system, and that there would be an increase in corruption); and that changes in these areas would adversely affect their lives. The study also showed that the large majority of the women (85%) held either negative or ambivalent views about the reunification and that more highly educated women, women with higher status jobs, women enjoying a higher income, were more likely to be negative towards the reunification. Conversely, less educated women, from lower status positions, tended to be more positive.

Acknowledgements

My greatest debt is to my supervisors, Dr Brian Ponter and Dr Mary Murray, for their consistently astute comments, guidance and interest. Their insights into and enthusiasm for my research have been much appreciated.

Thanks must also go to others: the many Hong Kong women whose generous participation made this work possible; Professor Glen Drover for his helpful comments in the early part of this research; Ms Pauline Lee for arranging the translation of the questionnaire, information sheet and consent form; Ms Louie Tong, my interpreter; and Ms Irene Wong who typed the Chinese version of the documents. In addition, I would like to express my appreciation for the financial support given by the Graduate Research Fund and the Department of Sociology at Massey University.

Very special gratitude is, of course, due to my husband, Dennis, and my children, Ben and Susie, for their love and patience through the whole period of this research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	v
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER TWO HONG KONG: PAST AND PRESENT	9
The expansion of European powers	9
Unequal treaties	14
The meaning of sovereignty	16
Hong Kong today	19
China today	21
Women in Hong Kong and China.	24
CHAPTER THREE THE FEARS OF HONG KONG PEOPLE	34
The fears expressed by Hong Kong people	35
Questions arising	80
Research questions	81
CHAPTER FOUR METHODOLOGY	83
Aims and objective of the study	83
Respondents	83
Research design	84
The questionnaire	85
Research procedures	88
Analysis of the data	95
CHAPTER FIVE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS	99
Characteristics of the subjects	99
How Hong Kong will change after the reunification	107
Views held by particular groups of Hong Kong women	117
CHAPTER SIX CASE STUDIES	127
Mei Ling	128
Fong	132
Candy	137
Agnes	141

CHAPTER SEVEN	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	147
Discussion		148
Conclusion		164
APPENDICES		167
Appendix A	The Joint Declaration	168
Appendix B	The Basic Law	170
Appendix C	The Questionnaire	179
BIBLIOGRAPHY		206

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1	Occupational groups	96
Table 5.1	Have you always lived in Hong Kong?	100
Table 5.2	Age range	101
Table 5.3	Self identification	102
Table 5.4	Do you belong to a religious/spiritual group?	102
Table 5.5	Level of education	103
Table 5.6	Type of occupation	103
Table 5.7	Personal monthly income	104
Table 5.8	Marital status	104
Table 5.9	Total family monthly income	105
Table 5.10	Type of accommodation	106
Table 5.11	Possibility of leaving (foreign passport or right to land)	106
Table 5.12	Do you wish to leave Hong Kong?	107
Table 5.13	How will Hong Kong change after reunification?	108
Table 5.14	The six items evoking the strongest response	108
Table 5.15	View of reunification by age	118
Table 5.16	View of reunification by self identification	119
Table 5.17	View of reunification by belonging to religious/spiritual group	119
Table 5.18	View of reunification by religion	120
Table 5.19	View of reunification by level of education	120
Table 5.20	View of reunification by those in paid work compared with those not in paid work	121
Table 5.21	View of reunification by type of occupation	122
Table 5.22	View of reunification by monthly personal salary	122
Table 5.23	View of reunification by marital status	123
Table 5.24	View of reunification by total monthly family income	124
Table 5.25	View of reunification by type of accommodation	124
Table 5.26	View of reunification by possibility of leaving (foreign passport or right to land)	125
Table 5.27	View of reunification by wish to leave	125

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Since the middle decades of this century approximately one hundred new states have emerged as western colonial empires have relinquished their sovereignty over their former colonies. But the political development of some formerly colonial territories has not followed the same path. Some have moved to "sovereignty in free association" (Lee and Bray 1995:359), for example, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands with America, and the Cook Islands with New Zealand, and some have been swallowed up by their larger neighbours (East Timor and Irian Jaya by Indonesia). At midnight on 30 June 1997 Britain will cede her sovereign rights over Hong Kong, one of its few remaining colonies, to China.

Although reunification implies perhaps a merging of equal parties, the reunification of Hong Kong and China is not one of equal partners entering an alliance on commensurate terms. Hung (1995:91) describes the transition of sovereignty in Hong Kong as "not only an enormous economic and political project, but a social and philosophic convergence of two cultural blocks centuries apart". The last Asian colony of the "world's oldest parliamentary democracy" (Bueno de Mesquita, Newman and Rabushka 1996:4), Hong Kong is a thriving and highly developed capitalist society made rich by the adoption of free-market policies and hard work on the part of the people who live there. Its citizens, protected by the rule of law administered by an independent judiciary, cherish a wide range of civil rights: freedom of speech, the freedom to travel as they will, a free press, and academic freedom. During the last fifteen years Hong Kong people have formed political parties and participated in western-style democratic elections.

While the economy of China, under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, has grown enormously, economic development in Hong Kong has far outstripped that of China, leaving a wide gap between the two economies. Although some people in China have become wealthy, most people have not benefited from economic development. Found mainly in the rural areas, the bulk of the population (industrious as they are) still remain very poor.

What is more, although adopting capitalist economic practices, the Chinese regime continues to espouse socialist ideology and to conduct its affairs via the rule of man rather than the rule of law. Wood, Hunter and Ingleby (1995:47) argue that the nature of the rule of law is "stable, impartial, general, measured and ordered" and the

character of the rule of man "idiosyncratic, arbitrary or capricious"¹. Jayawickrama (1997 June 25:11) explains further: "China is "ruled by law", Hong Kong is not. Hong Kong is subject to the "Rule of Law"". In making this distinction, Jayawickrama (1997 June:11) underlines the fact that in Hong Kong there is a "law-making body elected by, and reflecting the will of, the people; a Judiciary independent of the other branches of government but competent to review both legislative and executive action; and a constitutionally entrenched statement of fundamental human rights". These elements, basic to the Rule of Law (and included in the Basic Law (Appendix B) in order to maintain the current system in Hong Kong after the reunification) do not characterise the system in China.

Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1996:21) adopt a similar argument and claim that, because of "different political histories", the law in Hong Kong and the law in China share no common ground. While the people of Hong Kong, via the rule of law (embedded as it is in constitutions and independent courts), are both accorded protection and can seek redress, the people of China are "often locked up without reason and released without reason" (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1996:22). Further, redress through the legal system is not generally available.

In China, bribery, corruption, and favouritism are a part of life, and people value their 'connections' (*guanxi*) which make it possible to get things done and to procure goods and services that would otherwise be out of reach. In practice, ordinary citizens of China do not enjoy the civil rights that Hong Kong people appreciate. Freedom of speech, freedom to travel, press freedom and academic freedom are not part of life in China. Nor are the people able to participate directly in the choice of rulers.

Guiding the reunification is the Joint Declaration (Appendix A) signed by the British and Chinese on 24 September 1984. Enshrined in the Declaration is the stated intention of the Chinese to "resume the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong with effect from 1 July 1997" and the British decree that it will "restore Hong Kong to the PRC with effect from 1 July 1997". The Declaration also embodies other promises which indicate the Chinese intention to maintain the current economic and social systems of Hong Kong "basically unchanged for 50 years after 1997", and that the territory will "be run by local inhabitants and not by officials sent from Beijing" (Ching

¹ It must be noted that such arguments, underpinned as they are by particular ideological constructs, obfuscate the ways in which particular notions within the rule of man (the underlying beliefs as to what constitutes the basis of an ordered society, for example) are encapsulated within the rule of law.

1985:33). Yahuda (1996:2), pointing out that the autonomy of self-administered independent areas allowed in imperial China was limited by Chinese law and official forbearance, and insisting that the autonomy of the treaty ports was established through military force, claims that the proposal that Hong Kong could remain an autonomous self-governing enclave under the sovereignty of socialist, communist-party-run, China is without precedent. Further, no communist state has voluntarily allowed that "such an enclave should come into existence" (Yahuda 1996:2).

The Joint Declaration derived not from an act of state that could be rescinded but was established via an international treaty with Britain and confirmed, as Yahuda (1996:2) notes, through a "kind of covenant with the local Chinese Hong Kong people in the shape of a Basic Law (Appendix B) that has been ratified by the sovereign body in Beijing, the National People's Congress (NPC)". The Joint Declaration which promulgates what Deng Xiaoping called a "one-country, two-system" concept for Hong Kong, promises autonomy to Hong Kong².

For many people in Hong Kong, however, because the concept of autonomy is understood differently in Hong Kong and China³, there are doubts about whether this promised autonomy will actually be accorded the territory. These doubts are fuelled by recent moves by the Chinese such as the setting up of a provisional legislature which, Beijing has indicated, will replace the current elected legislature immediately after the handover, and the recent rhetoric from Beijing leaders that certain things will, or will not, be allowed to be voiced in Hong Kong after 1997. Also worrying Hong Kong people is the fact that the rising stars of the communist elite favour a consolidation of economic progress rather than the fast pace of reform set by Deng Xiaoping. Naturally, the citizens of Hong Kong wonder whether the promises the Chinese have made in the Declaration will be honoured, whether other modifications on the part of the Chinese government will precipitate transformations in the political, economic and social structures of Hong Kong, and wonder what opinions they will be able to express after the handover. They worry too that the adoption of economic

² Although Hong Kong is permitted to preserve its capitalist way of life for fifty years, the Central government of China has responsibility for the defence and foreign affairs of Hong Kong. Other Special Administrative Regions of China which have been granted autonomy for "trade and investment" (Sung 1996:188), continue to remain under the "control of central communist authorities" (Yahuda 1996:2). For example, they are not allowed to administer themselves (unlike Hong Kong) and must remit taxes to the Central Government of China.

³ While, as Clark (1989:154) points out, autonomy to those in the west refers to "the liberty to live under one's own laws", to the Chinese the concept incorporates a "socialist insistence on the idea of autonomy within limits set by higher authorities. The adoption of the western concept of autonomy with regard to Hong Kong would mean that the Chinese leaders would have to restrict their practice of seeking to control and administer every aspect of life in Hong Kong as they currently do in China.

consolidation in China (rather than radical reform) will slow down the economy in Hong Kong and that, consequently, they will suffer economically. They ask if the way of life they currently enjoy will change? And, if so, in what ways?

Exactly what will happen in Hong Kong after June 1997 is the major question in Hong Kong. Some are optimistic, claiming that China would not want to jeopardise the economic wealth that flows via Hong Kong to China - that China would not want to 'kill the goose that lays the golden eggs'. Coupled with comments about good 'connections' with mainland people and claiming that Hong Kong is rightly part of China, some contend that British rule has meant that Britain has made enormous amounts of money that should rightly belong to Hong Kong, and that the potential of Hong Kong people has been thwarted. Conversely, other people are pessimistic, arguing that the leaders in Beijing do not understand Hong Kong society or its people, that corruption and bribery will become part of life in Hong Kong after 1997, and that the political, economic and social freedoms Hong Kong people enjoy will be swept away by Chinese rule. These concerns have led many to emigrate.

While it seems certain that changes will undoubtedly be wrought in the lives of everyone in Hong Kong, it is very difficult, from the pre-reunification perspective, to predict accurately what will happen. The concern in this thesis is with the women of Hong Kong: what do they think will happen, what do they think their lives will be like after reunification? Little has been done specifically on women's perceptions of the future in Hong Kong. While Wilkens (1993:8) explores the "relationships between gender, news exposure and fear of the future" and DeGolyer (1995) briefly mentions women in his paper entitled *Corruption and its Discontents: Perceptions of Corruption in Hong Kong*, neither elaborated on the wider range of issues about which women in Hong Kong, because of the impending reunification with China, may well have formed opinions. In seeking the opinions of women, my purpose is to present an understanding of the hopes and fears Hong Kong Chinese women have regarding their futures after reunification.

My particular interest regarding women and the opinions they form stems from certain observations made in the course of my studies. Like Haggis (1990:68), I am concerned that the focus of so many sociological observations, ordinary people going about their daily lives, are not seen as 'us' but, rather, as 'them'. Positioned as the 'other', ordinary people are thus excluded from the making of sociological knowledge. The subjectification of ordinary people and a subsequent lack of recognition of their "distinct presences and realities" (Haggis 1990:68) continues, I suggest, despite the

awareness of many sociologists (such as feminists, those interested in ethnographic research, and interactionists). A second, related, concern is that the voices of women are conspicuously absent in accounts of historical change.

Such omissions, the fact that women's voices are "not 'there' in the historical accounts and analyses" (Haggis 1990:68), has long been a concern of feminists. Keen to understand why and how women's experiences are obscured in the academic and intellectual discourses of western thought, feminists have explored the processes of exclusion and indicated both broad dimensions of exclusion (Rowbotham 1973; Taylor 1983), and explored particular areas of oppression (see, for example, Walby (1990) for an overview).

With regard to their theorising about the broad dimensions of women's exclusion, many feminists have drawn on the writings of de Beauvoir whose pioneering work, "The Second Sex", was first published in 1949. Stressing that the oppression of women hinges not so much upon the physical differences between women and men, but upon the social significance accorded any differences, de Beauvoir (1983:20) argues that the identification of women as the 'other' stems from an innate inclination of the human consciousness to identify that which is not the self as the 'other'. She claims that this identification, coupled with, firstly, an inherent tendency of human consciousness to seek to dominate and, secondly, women's reduced capacity to work (because of menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth (functions not accredited a social value because that are 'natural')), led to male supremacy.

While various arguments have been put forward over time about the wider sources of women's oppression⁴, other writers have looked at how women's invisibility is reinforced. Language, for example, has been identified as a critical factor in both the "nature and quality of women's conceptual presence in knowledge" (Haggis 1990:69). Not only, as Spender (1981) asserts, does the use of language such as 'man' and 'humanity' systematically obscure women's presence but, as Moller-Okin (1979) argues, basic western socio-political expressions (such as citizenship, for example) are predicated on the presumptive exclusion of women from 'civil society'.

⁴ While Firestone (1970) claims that the patriarchal system (via which women are subjugated) is both biological and pre-social, and Sacks (1974) argues that it is women's participation (or not) in public labour (which involves the production of goods for exchange) which defines them as social adults and thus determines their oppression, Hartman (1979) and Eisenstein (1981) understand the oppression of women as being subject to two systems, that of patriarchy and capitalism. However, while for Hartman (1979) the two systems are separate and semi-autonomous, Eisenstein (1981) argues that they are so interrelated as to be one. There has been criticism too of the work of de Beauvoir. See, for example, Tong (1989) and Mackenzie (1986).

Compounding this situation is the western emphasis on the events of 'public' life. This emphasis is related to the fact that, historically, women have been seen as located primarily within the private sphere where history was thought not to be made. Feminists, regarding the distinction made between the public and private as controversial, share a conviction that the failure to incorporate the understanding or explanation of experiences that occur within the private sphere (the realm in which much of women's experience occurs) into the public sphere means that significant areas of women's experiences are ignored. Such a split, it is argued, also ignores the experiences of men within the private realm.

As Haggis (1990:25) points out, "This 'public' focus is reflected in most research topics". Illustrating this, Delphy (1984) argues that the experiences of women who do not work outside the home are rendered invisible in studies of social stratification which classify people according to 'jobs'. Hekman (1990:95), claiming that Delphy's observation is "just one stance of a larger problem that informs the social scientific treatment of women", notes that "because women cannot be subjects they also cannot be actors in the social scene". One of the reasons that women are, and have been, thought not to be actors (and explains their subsequent absence in historical accounts) is that women's work in the private sphere supposedly did not, and does not, produce 'value' (in the Marxist sense). Because only labour in the 'public' sphere in such interpretations produces 'value', focus has been placed on this sphere in accounts of historical change. Further, where women have been excluded from the market (thought to be the site of 'economic' rationality), they have been viewed as non-rational and, therefore, supposedly incapable of making history⁵.

The criticism that feminists offer in regard to the position of women as the 'other' and their consequent subjugation, and the absence of women's 'voice' in accounts of historical change, provides the backdrop against which to set my questions regarding the social change that may perhaps occur when Hong Kong is reunified with China. Concerned to address what could be argued to be not so much an overt resolution to ignore women but rather a failure to recognise the key assumptions and practices of sociological inquiry⁶, this study focuses on Chinese women in Hong Kong who, already unequally positioned economically and socially to men, may be more affected by the changes the reunification may bring. Like Jones (1993:15), I do

⁵ For an overview of the feminist critique of rationality see Hekman (1994).

⁶ Sociology emerged at a time when, because they were relegated to the private sphere wherein work was accorded no 'value', women were not (as discussed above) accorded status as actors within the public sphere of economic rationality. Sociology is also, therefore, a modernist discipline and is, it can be argued, inexorably 'rationalistic'.

acknowledge the concerns of feminists such as Anzaldua (1987) and Spelman (1988) that white feminists abrogate the authority of women of colour when they speak on their behalf. As a white feminist this issue, for me, is a vexing one. On one hand, as a sociologist, I wish to address a topic in Hong Kong (the views of Hong Kong Chinese women on the reunification) which, I believe, is not being adequately looked at. On the other hand, mindful of Anzaldua's (1990: xix, xxi) claims that even when white feminists make an effort to acknowledge differences they, in their very efforts, "not only objectify these differences, but also change those differences with their own white, racialized, scrutinizing and alienating gaze", I acknowledge that the legitimacy of my study might be rejected *a priori*, because I am a white feminist. I do have to ask, however, whether skin colour does, as Jones (1993:15) notes, "signify, by itself, one's political position and establish the boundaries of one's feminism"⁷. While, even in asking this question I realise that some may suggest that I am seeking to diminish the indubitable disparities of privilege among women, I wish to state that I clearly recognise that racial privilege does both structure the production and dissemination of knowledge, and authorise particular feminist theories over others.

In conducting this research, I am aware of my position as a white feminist and endeavour to keep what I understand as the issues inherent within my position to the forefront of my mind. I hope, in order that Chinese women's views on the reunification be comprehensively explored, that this study will be but one 'voice' for the experiences of ordinary Hong Kong Chinese women during this time of transition to Chinese rule.

Having briefly outlined the situation facing Hong Kong, having mentioned, in a general sense, the misgivings that the people of the territory are voicing, and having stated that the prime focus of this thesis is to allow the voice of women to be heard in this time of unprecedented historical change in Hong Kong, I will, in Chapter Two, outline the imperialist practices which led to the annexation of Hong Kong and discuss the Chinese understanding of the treaties and the notion of sovereignty. How the Chinese have long regarded the treaties and how they understand the notion of sovereignty has naturally influenced moves, unsettling to many Chinese in Hong Kong, which the Chinese government has made in regard to the recovering of sovereignty over Hong Kong. I will then present an overview of both Hong Kong and China today, before discussing, in general terms, the position of women in Hong Kong and China. When comparing their own lives with the lives of women in China, Hong Kong

⁷

One could ask the same question regarding other factors such as class, for example.

women may have reason to be concerned that reunification will mean a deterioration in their position in Hong Kong.

In Chapter Three the concerns that Hong Kong people express will be elaborated. Their concerns spring not only from the context of the immediate society of Hong Kong but from the wider influences on that society and therefore include the events and developments which occurred in Britain, Hong Kong and China both before the colonisation of Hong Kong, during that period, and those which have happened since that time. They reflect, too, the decisions taken, and the stances adopted, by the governments of Britain, China and Hong Kong. Although it is my intention to provide an historical background to enable the reader to understand the present, the events, developments, decisions taken and stances adopted will not be discussed in a strict chronological order. To do so would negate my main purpose, to present an understanding of the hopes and fears women hold, mediated as they are by societal influences.

In Chapter Four the research questions are presented and the research methodology discussed. The results of the survey are presented in Chapter Five, and the main themes of the unstructured interviews in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven includes the discussion of the findings and the conclusion.