



The Globalist Research Foundation



Rivkin Perspective IX

The Sun Also Rises: The Hong Kongification of China

In all the clatter, patter, and chatter that enveloped the last days of Hong Kong, little thought was given to the possibility that this was Britain's finest hour rather than the hour tolling the death knell of an empire with the fading out of Britain as a global power. The setting sun was clearly seen; the rising sun glimpsed by few. For most newscasters and mindshapers, the turnover of Hong Kong to China brought to an end Britain's long recession from global power and influence. It was the United States, the world's only recognized superpower who could undertake the task of guaranteeing the Hong Kong way of life as spelled out by the Treaty — even though it was Britain and not the United States who was the cosigner. Britain was scarcely mentioned as having any role to play in Hong Kong's future.

It is this assumption that I wish to challenge. Far from fading out, Britain's power and influence in Hong Kong and China are likely to soar beyond any power and influence that she had enjoyed at the height of imperial greatness. For what Britain is likely to achieve within the 50 years that Hong Kong's special way of life is guaranteed by treaty, is not only the dominant role in Hong Kong but the dominant role in China as year in and year out it becomes more and more "Hong Kongified."

The reason for my confidence is writ large in the post-imperial Commonwealth of 53 states: a commonwealth including every state that had once been part of the British imperial system, a commonwealth which recognizes the Queen as its head, enjoys a true special relationship with Great Britain and enriches Britain ever more handsomely than she had been enriched during the golden days of empire. What Britain had come to learn both within Britain itself and beyond its borders in its former colonies and dominions was the principle that he or she who rules most governs least. This has proved to be true with the British monarchy; it has proved to be no less true with the colonies and dominions. The substance of power is enhanced not lessened by indirectness. This is so because direct exercise of power domestically runs into the normal conflicts that are bound to arise in a free society. Those who govern, parliament for example, must take sides and face the consequences of a failure to win a parliamentary majority. Those who rule, the Queen for example, stand above the conflict confident that her basic constitutional role, so

fraught with sovereignty will daily be sustained by all parties whether charged with government or in opposition — after all the Queen's ministers take an oath of loyalty to her and not Parliament and become members of her privy council. Similarly with the post-imperial Commonwealth, the fact that the Queen is its head gives her the real substance of power at the same time freeing her from the need for maintaining law and order or the internal governance of its members. By this arrangement, the special relationship makes for commercial and financial ties which enriches Britain, and diplomatic ties which strengthen Britain in the United Nations and other world bodies. It is in the light of this successful transformation of its empire into a commonwealth of sovereign states that inspired Mrs. Thatcher in 1984 when it was clear that the new Commonwealth was a healthy and growing concern for Britain, to come up with her ingenious formula for Hong Kong, one nation two systems, a formula which would in effect not only allow Britain to enjoy even more influence and substantive power than she had enjoyed as the imperial power, but would open the way to the Hong Kongification of China, enjoying a very special relationship with Britain hardly different from that which she enjoys with the members of the Commonwealth.

This special relationship of Britain via Hong Kong was confirmed when the Foreign Secretary, the Right Honorable Robin Cook, asserted in a press interview on 25 June 1997 that he wanted Hong Kong to be the bridge to China. "Hong Kong," he said, "is going to be even more important to Britain in the future because it will provide a gateway between us and China. But because it is Hong Kong that is that gateway and that bridge into China, it is very important that Hong Kong thrives both as a prosperous economy and also as a free society. That is why we cannot, and never have accepted the dismissal of the elected LEGCO and its replacement by an appointed one. . . . There is no doubt that we will be improving our economic links with China. But also with Hong Kong. Do remember that we export far more to Hong Kong than we do to the whole of the rest of China, and our investments in Hong Kong are ten times the investments in China. *Hong Kong is much more important to us economically and I believe, after 30 June 1997 will be even more important to Britain because it does give us that access to the Chinese mainland to a much better degree than ever before.*"

Cook, it should be noted was only echoing what had been the grand refrain of his predecessor Malcolm Rifkind as evidenced in Rifkind's statement to Parliament on 20 March 1997 embodied

in the foreword to the Hong Kong Annual report: "We for our part intend to remain engaged in Hong Kong: engaged commercially, economically, culturally, and politically. Such engagement is important not just because Hong Kong is important in its own right, *but because of its role as by far the most important channel for every kind of exchange between China and the wider world, and because Hong Kong's growing role as a financial and commercial centre for the whole Asian region* — a role which will be greatly strengthened by the opening of the new airport next year."

"Britain's determination to remain engaged in Hong Kong is best symbolized by the magnificent new building which on 1 July 1997 will become the British Consulate General in Hong Kong. The Consulate General, with a staff larger than most of our embassies around the world, will be there to promote our large and continuing interest in Hong Kong. Last year, our economic interest included nearly £3 billion of exports, *tens of billions of pounds* of investment, and 1000 or so British companies operating in Hong Kong.

"As to the fears for the future, Rifkind was sanguine as the co-signatory of the Joint Declaration Britain has an interest in its implementation. By restoring a stable and prosperous Hong Kong to China on 1 July 1997 Britain will have discharged its solemn promises to China under the Joint Declaration. The onus will then be on China to fulfill the *remarkable (!)* series of undertakings which it made to Britain about almost every aspect of Hong Kong's way of life after the handover. Those undertakings last for 51 years. They are undertakings given by one Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council to another, in a binding international treaty registered at the United Nations. We shall expect China to carry out its side of the bargain."

What is more Britain will help monitor the implementation of the promises made to Britain in the Joint Declaration to the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group which will remain in Hong Kong until 1 January 2000, when under the terms of Annex II of the Joint Declaration, the JEF ceases its work.

But this far from ends Britain's involvement with Hong Kong. "Britain's commitment to Hong Kong" Rifkind affirmed, will, however, last long beyond that — *and indeed beyond the 50 years of the Joint Declaration*. I am confident that the British government and Parliament and all those in the United Kingdom with any kind of interest in Hong Kong will show over the next five decades the same commitment to Hong Kong displayed over the thirteen years since the Joint

Declaration was signed. This report marks another important stage on a journey which Britain and Hong Kong have long made together, but which is far from over.”

In the light of the statements of Malcolm Rifkind and his successor Robin Cook anticipating that Hong Kong’s future will dwarf its past, and their confidence that China will play out its scripted role for the Hong Kongification of China, it is a matter for wonderment that the newscasters and the shapers of public opinion should have failed to see that the turn over of Hong Kong to Britain was one of Britain’s finest hours and not, as pictured, its final hour. It was a reminder that though the sun might have set on Britain’s imperial power, it was rising again towards a brightness never achieved even when it basked in the golden glow of imperial splendor. The prize for the surrender of British sovereignty over Hong Kong is no less than the Hong Kongification of China. With the gaining of its last sovereignty over Hong Kong, China has speeded up not lost its transformation of China into an enlarged mirror image of Hong Kong.

In a word what we are likely to see is the Hong Kongification of China.

Indeed that day may yet come when China will be looked upon as the jewel in Britain’s post-imperial crown even as India had been looked upon as the jewel in Britain’s imperial crown in Queen Victoria’s day and for all we know a shadow member of the Commonwealth.

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