

Reunification through Water and Food: The Other Battle for Lives and Bodies in China's Hong Kong Policy

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Abstract

The People's Republic of China failed to win the hearts and minds of the Hong Kong Chinese people before its resumption of the city's sovereignty on 1 July 1997. This article attempts to account for this contradiction in China's pursuit of reunification. By shifting the focus to the alternative battle to control the lives and bodies of the local population, this article demonstrates how China exploited its water and food supplies to the colony in order to control Hong Kong before and after 1997. The study pinpoints the bio-political measures used by China to secure Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong. It concludes with an analysis of the current situation in Hong Kong and the implications of China's control of water and food supplies for the relations between the ruling state and the people of Hong Kong.

Keywords: water politics; food security; Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme; Ng Fung Hong Limited; Sino-British relations; Hong Kong

China established its cross-border control of Hong Kong long before the hand-over of the colony on 1 July 1997. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Beijing has refused to recognize the legality of the three Sino-British diplomatic treaties signed in 1841, 1860 and 1898, which led to Britain's claims to sovereignty over Hong Kong.¹ In line with its refusal to recognize the legitimacy of British colonial power in Hong Kong, Beijing's unofficial political presence there was represented by the Hong Kong branch of the Xinhua News Agency (today's Liaison Office of the Central People's Government) as its formal agency, and a variety of leftist outpost organizations in the news media, education, business, and labour unions. Through repeated interventions in colonial affairs, China attempted to establish itself as the ultimate protector of the Hong Kong Chinese people. During the transition period from 1984 to 1997, Beijing even adopted a fifth column policy in an attempt

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¹ Zhang 2007.

to sway the opinion of the local Chinese community in favour of China's resumption of Hong Kong's sovereignty.²

China's actions, however, failed to win the hearts and minds of the Hong Kong Chinese. In his memoirs, Jin Yaoru 金尧如, a former leader of the Xinhua News Agency, has disclosed the discord between Beijing's policies and the Hong Kong leftist movement. While the Beijing government intended to keep the status quo, the local leftist camp challenged British colonialism from within. This tarnished the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) image in Hong Kong and was in conflict with Beijing's strategy for the colony.³ The historical studies by Zhou Yi 周奕, a senior leftist journalist, show that pro-communist patriotic struggles in Hong Kong were routinely suppressed by the British and lacked public support.⁴ Lu Yan's research into leftist media organizations indicates that ideological propaganda held little appeal for Hong Kong audiences, forcing the leftist media to commercialize their journalism rather than propagate the benefits of communist rule.⁵

Cheung Ka-Wai 张家伟 focuses on the 1967 riots in Hong Kong and points to the damaging impact that the failure of this "anti-British and anti-violence campaign" (*fanyin kangbao* 反英抗暴) had on the home-grown leftist movement.⁶ According to Qiang Shigong 强世功, the riots gave rise to a long-standing fear of Communist China that greatly affected the Hong Kong reunification process.⁷ Comments from Ian Scott are illustrative: "the end-result of the disturbances was to increase the support for ... the existing order. Faced with a choice between communism of the Cultural Revolution variety and the, as yet, unreformed colonial capitalist state, most people chose to side with the devil they know."⁸ Yin Qian is correct in asserting that China's united front work in Hong Kong was fragmented from the very beginning. For example, many of the fifth columnists sent by the CCP in Beijing to improve the Party-state's reputation among the local population took advantage of their positions to reap their own personal gains and indeed made little contribution to the communist cause.⁹

In this article, I propose that China was able to exert control over Hong Kong from across the border, not through winning the hearts and minds of the local people through ideological propaganda, but rather through bio-political measures to control their daily lives. Controlling lives and bodies is a post-Cold War strategy to dominate others by monopolizing the necessities for their survival. It has become not only a potent weapon in realpolitik, but also a lucrative business. China's provision of water and food to Hong Kong forms the basis of

2 Yin 1999.

3 Jin 1998.

4 Zhou 2009.

5 Lu 2010.

6 Cheung Ka-Wai 2009.

7 Qiang 2008.

8 Scott 1989, 104.

9 Yin 1999.

this strategy.¹⁰ This article advances insights into how China has exercised control over the water and food security of Hong Kong from the colonial to the current post-colonial era. By drawing on archive materials, official and semi-official sources from Hong Kong, China and Britain, as well as academic and popular literature, the study provides new historical findings and contemporary updates that have until now remained under-explored in the discussion of China's water and food supplies to Hong Kong. The analysis explains the reasons behind China's attempts to exert its control over the lives and bodies of the Hong Kong Chinese before 1997, and how such a bio-political strategy has led to the adoption of a new constitutional framework for reintegrating the former colony into the Chinese motherland to complement the one country, two systems formula.

Background

As a predominantly Chinese city under British rule, Hong Kong offered China a gateway through which to reach out to the world and obtain intelligence, capital and goods. The Chinese Communists first established agencies in British Hong Kong during the second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War in order to collect overseas funding and materials to support their military activities.¹¹ Shortly before the founding of the People's Republic, Mao Zedong decided to leave Hong Kong alone for pragmatic strategic and economic reasons, and referred to the colony as a useful geostrategic outpost in the South China Sea and beyond: "It is of no great significance to resolve the Hong Kong and Macau questions quickly. It is instead better to use the status quo of the two places, especially Hong Kong, to develop overseas relations and to promote import and export that benefits us more."¹²

During the Cold War, China used Hong Kong's geostrategic importance to counter US-led containment. According to Premier Zhou Enlai, Hong Kong was "part of the strategic arrangement of the general East-West struggle" beyond "the narrow principle of territorial sovereignty." By maintaining "the status quo of Hong Kong including the British colonialist economy and capitalist system," China could "grasp a pigtail" to hold Britain back from the United States and facilitate the PRC's political and economic outreach.¹³ Thus, the newly-founded PRC's Hong Kong policy was not shaped by anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism but by its own security considerations. Zhou viewed the policy as a "long-term calculation and maximum utilization" (*changqi dasuan, chongfen liyong* 长期打算, 充分利用) of Hong Kong's "great strategic significance," and warned government officials that "guaranteeing supplies to Hong Kong ... should be taken as a

10 Cheung Siu-Keung 2012.

11 China Resource (Holdings) Company Limited 2010.

12 Qi 2004, 26.

13 Jin 1988, 4–5.

political task” with a view to exercising control over the future survival of the colony.¹⁴

Seen from this perspective, the supply of water and food from China to Hong Kong in the late 20th century must be understood not as a normal trade. It was a major building block of China’s Hong Kong policy that involved intricate geo-political actions at the local, national and global levels to advance China’s overall strategic priorities in the wider Cold War rivalry.

The Politics of Water Supplies

Water security was a serious issue that shaped Sino-British negotiations for the retention of Hong Kong, and particularly so in 1949 as the Chinese Communists were about to take power of the whole of China. At that time, Britain claimed that their military defences in Hong Kong would be strong enough to repel any attack by the Chinese Communists.¹⁵ However, the reality was that the colony’s water supply depended upon the construction of more reservoirs to collect natural rainfall as local reservoirs were unable to provide all the colony’s water needs. Recognizing the colony’s vulnerability, the British government’s Hong Kong policy realized the necessity of avoiding any military confrontation with China and the priority of “getting China’s acquiescence.”¹⁶

At the other end of the spectrum, the Chinese Communists tolerated the British colonial presence in Hong Kong. China equally realized that water shortages were a serious governance problem in Hong Kong and used the situation to advance its cross-border control. In 1959, Beijing built a reservoir in Shenzhen 深圳, then a small town across the Chinese border from Hong Kong, as part of the nationwide water resource strategy for improving local water supplies and integrating the colony into the Chinese water supply network. This project, known as the Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme, was designed to store fresh water from the Dongjiang 东江 (East river) for people in Shenzhen and Hong Kong. In 1960, Beijing presented this project to the British colonial authorities through the Guangdong provincial government.¹⁷

The Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme was of great political significance to both governments. In 1963, Zhou Enlai, seeing the great geostrategic importance of the project, provided special funds of 38 million yuan (US\$6.11 million) for its construction: “The project ... should be viewed from a political perspective and taken as a special item for foreign aid.”¹⁸ In the British assessment, the project was seen both as an effective way to gain additional water and as a PRC attempt to gain political influence. Despite the British government’s final decision to accept the project, it was viewed as a supplementary

14 Qi 2004, 44.

15 CAB/129/35.

16 CAB/195/7, 151.

17 Water Resources Board of Guangdong Province and Hong Kong Water Supplies Department 1998.

18 Li 2007, iv.

water resource to begin with and they continued to pursue a policy of creating self-sufficiency in water for the colony.¹⁹

The subsequent negotiations for finalizing an agreement for the Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme coincided with a serious drought. In 1963, Hong Kong’s reservoirs held only 1.7 per cent of their total storage capacity. The colonial government put in place mandatory water rationing, initially limiting water supplies to three hours a day, but later restricting the supply to four hours every four days. To alleviate the water shortage problem, the colonial government implemented a number of other measures such as imposing fines for the misuse of water, conserving water through a series of water-saving campaigns, reopening abandoned water wells that had been closed owing to safety issues, making artificial rain by cloud seeding, and even allowing religious groups city-wide to pray for rain.²⁰

These efforts failed to solve the water shortage crisis. The colonial authorities considered the late Qing and early Republican practice of purchasing water from Guangdong province. However, this was an expensive operation requiring the use of tankers to transport the water and failed to provide enough water to service the needs of Hong Kong’s fast-growing population. This prompted the British to sign a permanent agreement in 1964 with the Guangdong provincial authorities concerning the Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme. From 1965 onwards, fresh drinking water was channelled to Hong Kong on a routine basis.²¹ At the time, the British and Chinese leaders had not entered into any diplomatic discussions over the future of the colony. This water supply arrangement completed a major strategic task for China as it not only distinguished the People’s Republic as a more benevolent ruler than Britain but also marked the beginning of Hong Kong’s integration into China proper.

In order to balance the PRC’s gain in hydro-political power, the British colonizers did everything within their ability to ensure political autonomy and water security for the colony. Britain urged China to conduct negotiations through the respective local authorities in Hong Kong and Guangzhou so that the construction of water supply facilities would not become a diplomatic matter for both countries. During the negotiation process, the British rejected the initial proposal by China to provide free fresh water for Hong Kong. Their concern was to make the arrangement a business transaction instead of a political favour. The British also rejected China’s attempt to disclose future plans for increasing the Dongjiang water supply to Hong Kong as they wished to forestall any possible objections from the local community when they built new reservoirs in Hong Kong.²²

19 CO1030/1279; 1280; 1281.

20 Ho 2001.

21 CO1030/1654; 1655–57; 1658; 1659.

22 *Ibid.*

Meanwhile, the British proceeded with the Plover Cove reservoir project in Hong Kong as an immediate measure to cope with the city's growing demand for fresh water. In addition, they also invested in technology to convert sea water into fresh water (i.e. desalination) in the hope that it would act as an "insurance policy" for the colony in the long run.²³ During the assessment process, plans to build a nuclear reactor for the desalination plant and as an additional electricity supply were considered before being rejected on safety grounds.²⁴ Finally, in 1973, the colonial government established the world's largest desalination plant in Hong Kong, the Lok On Pai Desalter. However, the cost of producing desalinated water far exceeded the cost of purchasing more water from Dongjiang, and public objections to the continued use of desalination to provide water supplies eventually led to operations at the desalination plant being suspended in 1978 and it being shut down completely in 1982.²⁵

The failure of the desalination project drove the colonial government to re-negotiate terms with Guangdong province to increase its supply of fresh water. As a result, the Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme was expanded with the construction of more water pumping stations, pipes, and mains in 1974, 1979 and 1989, respectively. Upon the completion of these extension projects, the amount of fresh water imported from Guangdong increased four times, from around 200 million cubic metres in the 1980s to 800 million cubic metres by 2000. Dongjiang water constituted 24 per cent of the city's total water consumption in 1970, and 68 per cent in 1990. Since 2000, over 70 per cent of Hong Kong's fresh water is imported from China (see [Table 1](#)).

By comparison, the actual rainfall yield from the reservoirs ranged between 100 and 300 million cubic metres from 1980 to 2000. With rapid urbanization and industrialization, local reservoirs have not been able to satisfy the city's water needs. Statistics indicate that Dongjiang fresh water has become vital to the social and economic development of Hong Kong.

Without its own independent source of water, Hong Kong was at the mercy of China. The Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme put in place an infrastructure mechanism for China to monopolize and profit from the supply of fresh water to the colony. With Hong Kong now subject to Chinese national hydro-hegemonic control, China was already in a stronger position than Britain as diplomatic negotiations over the colony's future began in 1982. Margaret Thatcher stated in her book, *The Downing Street Years*, that her original negotiation plan was to assert Britain's sovereignty claim to the part of the colony that was permanently ceded to the UK and use it to bargain with her Chinese counterparts for "the continued British administration of the entire Colony well into the future."²⁶ However, the entire colony was "dependent on the mainland for

23 CO1030/1659, 144.

24 *Ibid.*

25 Ho 2001.

26 Thatcher 1993, 259.

Table 1: Hong Kong's Supply of Freshwater from Guangdong Province (million m³)

Year	Volume	Share of Total Consumption	Total Consumption
1965	41	22%	185
1970	66	24%	276
1975	93	26%	360
1980	172	34%	508
1985	319	50%	637
1990	590	68%	873
1995	690	75%	919
2000	706	76%	924
2005	771	80%	968
2010	715	75%	951

Source:

Integrated data from official statistics found in Water Resources Board of Guangdong Province and Hong Kong Water Supplies Department 1998 and Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 1995–2011.

water and other supplies,” and “over 90 per cent of the land of the Colony” was on leasehold.²⁷ Since Deng Xiaoping rejected her idea, she had to accept the one country, two systems formula proposed by Deng.²⁸ The Dongshen–Hong Kong fresh water supply arrangement proved to be decisive and enabled China to forestall the British pursuit of their continued claim to territorial sovereignty of post-1997 Hong Kong. As Lee Ka-Kiu 李家翹 asserts, “Because of its heavy reliance on the supply of fresh water from China, Hong Kong has already returned to the Chinese motherland in practice.”²⁹

Local reaction from Hong Kong residents to the Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme was mixed and changing. At first, the public worried about the political risks. A local anti-communist newspaper headline in 1960 read, “China definitely uses water supply as tool for political extortion against Hong Kong.”³⁰ A similar warning was found in another news headline, “The import of Dongjiang fresh water is political in character. Water supply to Hong Kong can be suspended immediately when there is a change in Chinese politics.”³¹ At the peak of the Cold War, many Hong Kong Chinese people expressed concerns over Hong Kong's reliance on the Maoist regime for its supply of fresh water as the wider East–West struggle escalated across East and South-East Asia. However, the United States voiced no such objections to the transport of water from the Communist mainland to the colony.³²

On the whole, ordinary people in Hong Kong became indifferent to the politics of the cross-border water supply infrastructure. The continued freshwater supply

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid, 488–495.

29 Lee, Ka-Kiu 2010, 70.

30 *Guangjiaojing* 1981, 70–71.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

from China meant that daily life was much improved and, according to Ho Pui-Yin, the Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme even invoked a “pro-China sentiment among the local working class.”³³ Despite the public remaining indifferent, if not hostile, to the Communist state, there was an growing acceptance that China had a strong hold over the people of Hong Kong and a decisive influence over their lives. “Blood is thicker than water” (*xuenong yushui* 血浓于水) is an old saying often used by China’s Communist leaders to highlight the inseparable relationship between Hong Kong and China; however, the water politics running across the border has shown that in reality it is more the case that “water is thicker than blood.” The following analysis reveals how China deployed the same strategy to control Hong Kong’s food security in the colonial era.

Food Supplies

Once they had completed their acquisition of Hong Kong from the Qing government, the British government’s most immediate issue with the colony was that it was too small. The total land area only amounted to about 1,100 square kilometres and its physical ecology meant that it lacked the capacity to be self-sufficient in food. Although an exaggeration, Lord Palmerston’s description in 1841 of Hong Kong being a “barren rock” is not without grounds. Most of the terrain, if not mountainous, was unsuitable for farming. By the mid-20th century, what limited arable land there was proved insufficient to provide for the daily needs of the local people (see [Table 2](#)). Hong Kong’s post-war urbanization meant that it could not produce enough food locally to feed the fast-growing population. Agriculture was marginal to the local economy and in overall decline. From the 1950s to the 1960s, agriculture made up only 3 to 5 per cent of the colony’s gross domestic product.³⁴ The figure dropped further to 1 to 2 per cent throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and remained at 0.1 to 0.9 per cent after 1990 (see [Table 3](#)).

Statistics from the Hong Kong Agriculture and Fisheries Department reveal the insignificant contribution local agriculture made to the colony’s food supply system. Rice is the main staple food among the Hong Kong Chinese, but by the 1980s Hong Kong no longer produced rice. Fresh vegetables are still grown in the New Territories, but the total proportion of local vegetables in the city’s food consumption declined gradually, from 40 per cent in the 1960s to less than 10 per cent after 2000. Local livestock always accounted for less than 50 per cent of the city’s total consumption. Since 1980, that share has dropped to as low as 20 to 30 per cent, and occasionally below 10 per cent.³⁵

The production of local live poultry is an exception. It constituted 20 to 30 per cent of the city’s total live poultry consumption in the 1980s, and the figure

33 Ho 2001, 214.

34 Economic Research Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong 1969.

35 Hong Kong Agriculture and Fisheries Department 1950–2010.

Table 2: **Decline of Arable Land in Post-War Hong Kong (km²)**

Year	Total Land Area	Arable Land	Arable Share of Total Land Area
1960	1,031	132	12.8%
1970	1,032	125	12.1%
1980	1,060	81	7.7%
1990	1,072	69	6.4%
2000	1,099	57	5.2%

Source:

Based on data from Hong Kong Government 1961–2001.

reached 40 to 50 per cent throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. However, everything changed following the outbreaks in 2003 of avian influenza (H5N1) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The Hong Kong government decided to buy out the chicken farms in a measure to prevent any further outbreak of infection. Hong Kong's entire live poultry business was left teetering on the brink of collapse. The annual supply of local live poultry fell from 12,659 tons in 1999 to 6,417 tons in 2009.

With regards to the local seafood industry, Hong Kong's fishing fleets have consistently provided over 50 per cent of the city's marine fish for consumption. By comparison, freshwater fish farmed within the territory remains a marginal contribution, accounting for only 10 to 20 per cent of the total market share.³⁶ Hong Kong has never been self-sufficient in aquatic food production and needs to import marine and freshwater fish.

As one of East Asia's leading ports, Hong Kong has been able to import a variety of food products from virtually anywhere. However, the colony has remained dependent on China for its fresh and processed food products owing to its close proximity to China and its predominantly Cantonese population. In 1951, Beijing designated Ng Fung Hong 五丰行 Limited — a trading house of the

Table 3: **Decline of the Agricultural Sector in Hong Kong's Economy**

Year	Agriculture and Fishing (millions)	Share of Agriculture and Fishing (%)	Total of GDP (millions)
1970	377	2.0	19,119
1975	533	1.4	36,974
1980	1,110	0.9	128,040
1985	1,238	0.5	242,423
1990	1,432	0.3	536,870
1995	1,453	0.1	1,016,115
2000	920	0.1	1,180,688

Source:

Based on data from Hong Kong Government 1971–2001.

36 Ibid.

China Resource (Holdings) Company Limited under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation — as the sole distributor of Chinese food products in Hong Kong. Through Ng Fung Hong, China increased its control over Hong Kong's food supply and found a profitable market for its agricultural products.³⁷ Zhou Enlai issued orders that all provinces had to contribute some of their own produce for transport to Hong Kong.³⁸ Three express trains from Wuhan, Shanghai and Henan were laid on to transport a daily delivery to Hong Kong of fresh food such as live pigs, cattle, poultry, fish, vegetables and fruit. When Hong Kong leftists staged a city-wide food strike against the colonial administration in 1967, Zhou intervened to put an end to the strike and maintain the delivery of fresh food products to Hong Kong.³⁹

For Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, China's control of Hong Kong's food security and the need for outside capital took precedence over the struggle against colonialism. Intelligence assessments from Britain indicate that Hong Kong was China's major source of foreign currency.⁴⁰ For Zhou Enlai, this proved to be a major factor behind China's flexibility with respect to the schedule and moves to reclaim Hong Kong: "To advance socialist construction, Hong Kong can be our base for ... absorbing overseas capital and earning foreign currency."⁴¹ Rather than highlighting the security and economic considerations behind the strategy, CCP official literature tends to romanticize the importance of Chinese food supplies, calling Ng Fung Hong "the food basket of Hong Kong" (*Xianggang de cailanzi* 香港的菜篮子), and the Chinese food-delivery trains "the lifelines of Hong Kong" (*Xianggang de shengmingxia* 香港的生命线).⁴²

The Chinese government never gained total control over Hong Kong's food security during the colonial era. For example, Chaozhou-speaking merchants had long dominated the rice trade and used their kinship to monopolize the rice trade between Siam (today's Thailand) and coastal China, and although these Chaozhou-speaking merchants lost out to the larger transnational supermarkets in the 1980s, the channels they established from Thailand continued to provide the lion's share of rice shipments to Hong Kong.⁴³ In 1955, the colonial authorities formulated the Rice Control Scheme in an effort to increase daily supplies of rice and build up a stockpile. In 1968, China bypassed the scheme and exported additional rice to Hong Kong in the guise of charity. The colonial authorities objected to the practice, regarding it as a new move by China to "[gain] political capital and [put] pressure on the Hong Kong government" after the 1967 riots.⁴⁴ Under the Rice Control Scheme, rice imported from the

37 Ng Fung Hong Limited 1995–1999.

38 Qi 2004, 45.

39 Ran and Ma 2001.

40 FCO21/104.

41 Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 1993, 354.

42 China Resource (Holdings) Company Limited 2010.

43 Zheng and Wong 2005.

44 FCO21/205, 7.

Table 4: Rice Imports to Hong Kong from Thailand and China (1,000 tons)

Year	Imports from Thailand	Thailand's Share of Total	Imports from China	China's Share of Total	Overall Imports
1955	162.4	67.30%	39.3	16.29%	241.3
1960	171.1	48.29%	70.5	19.90%	354.3
1965	199.0	57.68%	88.2	25.57%	345.0
1970	185.9	55.46%	84.0	25.06%	335.2
1975	118.7	35.55%	179.8	53.85%	333.9
1980	123.0	34.45%	185.4	51.93%	357.0
1985	151.9	43.10%	148.1	42.03%	352.4
1990	230.7	66.24%	54.5	15.65%	348.3
1995	251.6	77.25%	20.4	6.26%	325.7
2000	239.2	81.08%	9.7	3.28%	295.0

Source:

Based on data in Zheng and Wong 2005, 191–93.

mainland was not permitted to dominate the overall market share. Even when, owing to poor harvests in the mid-1970s, there was a disruption to the supply of Thai rice, Chinese rice made up only 30 to 50 per cent of the total market share. Since then, the figure declined to below 50 per cent in the 1980s, and less than 10 per cent by 2000 (see Table 4).

The same can be said of imported staple food commodities from China. In the 1950s, Hong Kong imported 50 to 70 per cent of its vegetables from China,⁴⁵ but that figure dropped to less than 50 per cent in the 1960s and 1970s, and fell further to 20 to 40 per cent throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The import of seafood and freshwater fish products from China has been in decline, too. Chinese seafood and freshwater fish products made up 40 to 60 per cent of the total market share in the 1960s, 30 per cent in the 1980s and 10 per cent after 2000. The only exception is the import of livestock and poultry, for which Hong Kong has relied heavily on China. Chinese imports accounted for over 60 per cent of the market share in the early 1960s and have frequently exceeded 80 per cent in subsequent decades (see Table 5).

Statistical data indicate that throughout the 20th century China increased its control over the lives of the Hong Kong Chinese people. Although the degree of control was not consistently strong in the cases of rice, vegetables and fish, the bio-political control exerted by China proved to be decisive. Alexander Grantham was the first colonial governor to confront the threat of Communist China. Given that Hong Kong was dependent on China for the necessities of life, Grantham foresaw that “advancement to self-government and independence as is the case with most British colonies” would not occur in Hong Kong.⁴⁶ In 1965, Grantham wrote, “Here I would throw in a statistic ... that more hogs

45 Wong 1971.

46 Grantham 1965, 105.

Table 5: Staple Foodstuff Exported from China to Hong Kong (HK\$ millions)

Year	Vegetables and fruits	China's share of total import	Fish products	China's share of total import	Livestock and poultry	China's share of total import
1960	125.23	47.45%	64.93	57.30%	156.55	63.15%
1965	205.16	51.03%	116.10	65.75%	392.18	88.59%
1970	302.63	45.10%	172.54	51.40%	393.71	79.52%
1975	531.56	41.94%	331.87	50.15%	1,040.20	90.51%
1980	1,074.20	37.78%	633.76	35.68%	1,562.04	95.52%
1985	1,918.35	38.55%	1,150.82	31.71%	2,232.32	94.79%
1990	3,669.93	41.20%	2,824.36	33.18%	2,563.34	99.05%
1995	3,708.99	29.45%	2,360.61	16.76%	2,968.51	88.18%
2000	2,545.80	23.06%	2,506.20	16.54%	2,480.80	76.63%

Source:

Integrated data from Zhongguo zhengchan cujinhui Xianggang fenhu 1961–2001 and Gang'ao jingji nianjian she 2001.

were slaughtered in Hong Kong than in any other city in the world except Chicago, and 90 per cent come from China.”⁴⁷

When David Trench, the colonial governor from 1964 to 1971, assessed the impact of the 1967 riots on water and food security, he concluded that “our dependence on food from China is ... substantial. Any sudden cessation of supplies from China would create chaos here.”⁴⁸ The comments from Denis Bray, colonial cadet and later secretary for home affairs, highlighted the predicament for the colonial government: “For a couple of days, there was no delivery of pigs from China by train. This was serious as it was always possible for China to cut off the food and water supplies on which we depended. We searched the region for alternative supplies, but none could supply the volume of animals we needed.”⁴⁹ Hong Kong was always viewed by the British as vulnerable to a Chinese embargo on water and food supplies.

The United States also recognized Hong Kong's vulnerability, which explains why the United States provided only “moral support” to Britain when the latter sought American assistance with the defence of Hong Kong in the 1950s.⁵⁰ Britain resorted to launching a series of anti-communist propaganda campaigns to gain support for its colonial rule. The British branded many home-grown communist and leftist organizations as terrorists and condemned their anti-colonial protests.⁵¹ The colonial government pointed to the economic gap between Hong Kong and mainland China as evidence that Hong Kong's capitalist system was a success.⁵² Following China's military crackdown on the pro-democracy

47 Ibid, 172.

48 FCO21/214, 120.

49 Bray 2003, 126.

50 Mark 2004.

51 Qiang 2008.

52 Lui 2011.

movement in Tiananmen Square in June 1989, the British attempted to reassure the Hong Kong Chinese population with the construction of several major infrastructure projects and a semi-democratic election system.⁵³

All these British efforts succeeded in winning the hearts and minds of the Hong Kong Chinese but Britain was unable to stop Hong Kong's eventual retrocession to China.⁵⁴ The last governor, Christopher Patten, remarked on the vulnerability of the crown colony: "Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula – the land ceded outright by grant – depend on the hinterland to the New Territories and beyond for food and water."⁵⁵ In the late 20th century, China managed to install two powerful institutional mechanisms, the Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme and Ng Fung Hong Limited, in order to control the lives and bodies of the local population. The city's dependence on China for water and food led both colonial officials and the public to accept that the fate of Hong Kong rested in Chinese control.

The politics of controlling bodies and lives is manifest in Beijing's arrangement to supply food and water to the Hong Kong Chinese people. This is portrayed in official Chinese rhetoric as a laudable policy that demonstrates the traditional Confucian political ideal of "benevolent rule" (*renzheng* 仁政). Such an interpretation has become the standard view among several mainland intellectuals. For example, Gu Xinghui 古星辉 believes that Hong Kong owes its economic success to the support provided by China: "Hong Kong is such a peculiar city, where the socialist government on the mainland supports its prosperity. ... The decades-long stability and prosperity of post-war Hong Kong has resulted from Beijing's policy."⁵⁶ Xiao Chen 晓晨 echoes the same patriotic sentiments, referring to the benevolence of the CCP: "Mainland China always provides Hong Kong with abundant foodstuffs and reliable material that protect the wellbeing of millions of compatriots at home and at work."⁵⁷ Qiang Shigong reiterates this propaganda: "Everything is based on China's affection for its people. ... The selfless aid from the central government to Hong Kong involves a paterfamilias-like care and affection for children."⁵⁸ The mainland Chinese discourse is embedded in emotionally charged and moralistic language, and is a bizarre combination of patriotism, paternalism and altruism.

These representations of Hong Kong–China links situate previous and current Hong Kong policies in what Julia Strauss, in reference to Africa–China ties, calls "a distinguished lineage of principled relations."⁵⁹ China bases its justification of its engagement with Hong Kong on the principles of anti-colonialism, patriotism, traditional ideals, unconditional assistance and mutual benefit. However, in

53 So 1999.

54 Tsang 2004.

55 Patten 1998, 12–13.

56 Gu 1987, 4.

57 Xiao 1994, i

58 Qiang 2008, 157.

59 Strauss 2009.

reality the PRC's strategy of controlling the lives and bodies of the Hong Kong population is based not so much on national sentiment but on pragmatic calculations: the successful implementation of this water and food security strategy has been crucial to gaining territorial unification and global outreach.

The Current Case

The establishment of the one country, two systems model means that China's current governance over Hong Kong recognizes the ideological differences of the Cold War. However, such a politics of recognition has failed to create the "harmonious society" required for peaceful coexistence as assumed in the rhetoric of China's state policy.⁶⁰ Post-colonial Hong Kong has had to deal with many governance problems such as the Asian financial crisis and the first outbreak of H5N1 in 1997, the emergence of SARS and the huge opposition to the legislation of Article 23 of the Basic Law in 2003, and continuous demonstrations for universal suffrage and other civic rights. In an attempt to resolve a growing number of contentions, China introduced the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) to complement the one country, two systems formula and further consolidate its sovereignty power over Hong Kong.⁶¹

Since the implementation of CEPA in 2003, Hong Kong has benefited from a range of preferential terms in its cross-border trade with China. In terms of political propaganda, officials on both sides have cited CEPA as being an essential tool for boosting Hong Kong's economy. However, evaluation reports issued by the post-colonial Hong Kong government show that the city's economic rebound during the early 2000s was not entirely down to CEPA. CEPA's impact was more of an "intangible benefit" that helped to "rebuild confidence" in Hong Kong's economy.⁶² Of the annual export value of traded goods under CEPA from 2003 to 2007, the highest recorded share made up only 4.1 per cent of Hong Kong's overall domestic exports and 10.6 per cent of Hong Kong's domestic exports to the mainland. This implies that the majority of Hong Kong's domestic exports to the mainland did not need CEPA for their exchange (see [Table 6](#)). In the case of the trade in the service industry, the cumulative business receipts from 2007 to 2009 amounted to HK\$198.5 billion; however, 98 per cent of the business receipts went to 4 out of a total of 38 service areas covered by CEPA. The contribution of the trade in services under CEPA was equally modest: a mere 3 to 4 per cent of Hong Kong's annual gross domestic products (see [Table 7](#)). CEPA's impact on China's cross-border control of the daily lives of the Hong Kong Chinese has proven to be more psychological and partial than substantial.

This has driven China to re-visit its old Hong Kong policy from the Maoist era in an effort to shore up its state power in the territory. In 2012, China announced

60 Lee, Joseph Tse-Hei, Nedilsky and Cheung 2012.

61 Lee, Francis L.F., and Chan 2011.

62 CB(1)1849/06-07(04), 5.

Table 6: Annual Export Value of Trade in Goods under CEPA

Year	Total trade in goods under CEPA (billions)	Share of domestic exports to mainland (%)	Share of total domestic exports (%)
2004	1.15	3.0	0.9
2005	2.36	5.3	1.9
2006	3.25	8.1	2.4
2007	1.25	10.6	4.1

Source:

Based on data from CB(1)1849/06-07(04).

Table 7: Business Receipts from Trade in Service under CEPA

Year	Total trade in services under CEPA (billions)	Total of Hong Kong's GDP (billions)	CEPA trade in services' share of Hong Kong's GDP
2007	54.0	1,552.0	3.4%
2008	75.7	1,592.9	4.7%
2009	68.8	1,550.9	4.4%
Total	198.5	4,695.8	4.2%

Source:

Based on data from CB(1)2065/09-10(01) 2010.

that securing continuous water and food supplies for Hong Kong will be a new challenge. Government officials are required to “take into account political implications and consider the overall situation” (*jiangzhengzhi, gudaju* 讲政治, 顾大局) in maintaining the stability and quality of such supplies.⁶³

China's rapid economic development has led to environmental pollution and food contamination scares. The water supply provided by the Dongjiang has come under growing pressure in terms of both its capacity and its quality owing to the drastic urbanization and industrialization developing alongside its drainage area.⁶⁴ The country has weathered a series of food safety scandals which have culminated in political controversy.⁶⁵ These problems have diminished the appeal of Chinese fresh water and food to the people of Hong Kong. The local media has voiced concerns over the safety of Dongjiang water and has publicized numerous cases of food poisoning in the mainland.⁶⁶ Moreover, Hong Kong's economic rebound has led to rampant inflation of food prices since 2004. In 2008, at the peak of the inflation rise, the price of rice, pork, beef, poultry and vegetables increased by 44.9 per cent, 35.1 per cent, 37.6 per cent, 13.5 per cent and 16.7 per cent, respectively. The overall rate of inflation for food prices appeared to amount to 16.8 per cent. Despite a slowdown in

63 “Rang Gang’Ao tongbao guoguo haonian” (Let Hong Kong and Macau compatriots have a good year), *Renmin ribao*, 2 January 2012.

64 Li 2007.

65 China.com. 2013. “Guanzhu Zhongguo shipin anquan wenti” (Concerns on China's food safety problem), 26 March, <http://news.china.com/focus/shipin角度/>. Accessed 26 March 2013.

66 “Shipin anquan luanxiang” (Chaos over food safety”), *Wenweipo*, 26 March 2013.

Table 8: Food Price Inflation in Hong Kong SAR

Year	Rice	Pork	Beef	Poultry	Vegetable	Overall
2000	-3.5%	-7.4%	-0.2%	-5.2%	-4.5%	-2.2%
2001	-1.1%	-6.3%	+0.3%	+2.9%	+1.1%	-1.7%
2002	-4.0%	-7.7%	-0.2%	-0.7%	-6.6%	-3.1%
2003	-3.1%	-4.7%	+0.9%	-9.8%	+1.1%	-1.7%
2004	+2.9%	+0.4%	-0.2%	+26.2%	+3.7%	+2.5%
2005	-3.7%	+3.4%	+2.5%	-2.4%	+12.5%	+3.2%
2006	-0.9%	+1.5%	+2.3%	+12.1%	+4.2%	+2.5%
2007	+9.1%	+18.6%	+12.3%	+11.9%	+2.8%	+7.1%
2008	+44.9%	+35.1%	+37.6%	+13.5%	+16.7%	+16.8%
2009	+8.2%	-9.2%	+7.3%	+14.2%	-3.1%	+0.9%
2010	-1.8%	-2.7%	+0.9%	+1.8%	+13.1%	+3.5%
2011	+0.2%	+18.5%	+11.4%	+8.7%	+1.7%	+9.9%
Overall	+47.2%	+39.5%	+74.9%	+73.2%	+42.7%	+37.7%

Source:

Based on data in the official statistics on composite consumer price indices in Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2000–2011.

the rate of increase in most cases from 2009 to 2011, food prices in Hong Kong remain generally high and are increasing (see Table 8).

The rising cost of living owing to the increases in food and water prices has led to public anger in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Legislative Council has frequently voiced its concern over the territory's heavy reliance on fresh water supplies from the Dongjiang, the price of which has continued to rise despite its contamination from pollution.⁶⁷ Ng Fung Hong's monopoly over the supply of pork livestock has provoked much discontent in the local food industry and has prompted the government to investigate that company's business practices.⁶⁸ In 2011, several hundred demonstrators protested against the inflationary water and food prices and asked the Hong Kong government to intervene.⁶⁹

Maintaining the security of water and food supplies has become a contentious issue between China and Hong Kong. However, supplying Hong Kong with water and food has turned into an extremely profitable operation for China. Since the implementation of the Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme in 1960, consistent increases in the unit price of Dongjiang fresh water have generated huge revenues for Guangdong province (see Table 9). Standard management reference material from the Dongshen–Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme describes the water Dongshen supplies to Hong Kong as “political water, economic water, and life water” (*zhengzhi shui, jingji shui, shengming shi* 政治水, 经济水, 生命水).⁷⁰ Following Deng Xiaoping's economic reform of

67 CB(1)734/12-13(04).

68 CB(2)699/02-03(03).

69 “Kaizhi yangyang jia, shangjie fan tongzhang” (Expenditures of all kinds increase, anti-inflation [protestors] take to the streets), *Oriental Daily*, 15 August 2011.

70 Li 2007, 138.

Table 9: Unit Price for Dongjiang Freshwater

Year	Unit Price (HK\$ per m ³)	Rate of Increase
1960	0.05	–
1970	0.234	268.00%
1980	0.500	113.67%
1990	1.297	159.40%
2000	3.085	137.85%

Source:

Based on data in Ho 2001, 222.

the 1980s, China now considers not just the original political task of controlling Hong Kong through the creation of a dependency on its water supply, but also market-driven calculations for profit.⁷¹

Consequently, the unit price of fresh water from Dongjiang is among the highest in the world. In 2000, the unit price paid by Singapore to Malaysia for fresh water amounted to HK\$0.33 (US\$0.043) per cubic metre, but Hong Kong paid ten times more than Singapore, about HK\$3.08 (US\$0.397) per cubic metre.⁷² In 2005, there was a new agreement between Guangdong and Hong Kong over the city's freshwater supply which allowed Hong Kong to adjust the volume of Dongjiang water it purchased on a monthly basis. Under the new agreement, the total freshwater payment dropped slightly, from HK\$2,530 million (US\$325.90 million) in 2005 to HK\$2,495 million (US\$321.4 million) in 2006. However, the amount increased again to HK\$2,959 million (US\$381.17 million) in 2009 and HK\$3,146 million (US\$405.26 million) in 2010.⁷³

Ng Fung Hong has also reaped enormous economic benefits. Before its privatization in 2000, the company enjoyed decent revenue growth. Its annual turnover increased from HK\$4,636 million (US\$597.20 million) in 1992 to HK\$6,663 million (US\$858.31 million) in 1999, and annual profits rose from HK\$77 million (US\$9.91 million) in 1992 to HK\$597 million (US\$76.90 million) in 1999 (see Table 10). The strong material and economic benefits gained by the mainland through its water and food supplies to Hong Kong is at odds with Beijing's ostensible moralistic and sentimental claims. If China fails to slow down the rising cost of fresh water and food, its image as a benevolent motherland will continue to diminish among the people of Hong Kong.

Conclusion

This study of Hong Kong's water and food security has shed light on the political, economic, strategic and rhetorical components of China's Hong Kong policy since the Cold War. In the end, the PRC did not cut its water and food

71 Ibid, 105.

72 Ho 2001.

73 Hong Kong Water Supplies Department 2000–2010.

Table 10: Ng Fung Hong Limited's Annual Turnover and Profit (HK\$1,000)

Year	Turnover	Profit after Taxation
1992	4,636,020	77,003
1993	4,282,511	90,672
1994	4,632,177	238,129
1995	5,216,480	319,821
1996	4,498,387	376,865
1997	6,360,027	527,902
1998	6,921,635	630,193
1999	6,663,962	597,123

Source:

Based on data in Ng Fung Hong Limited 1995–1999.

supplies to British colonial Hong Kong. However, the colony did not have the benefit of such historical hindsight when it was confronted with the immediate presence of a communist regime on its doorstep. The colony instead had to manoeuvre under the constant threat to its sovereignty posed by its neighbour upon which it also relied heavily for water and food supplies for survival. The historical irony of this is revealed when the common background of the local population is taken into account. The majority of Hong Kong's people went there as refugees escaping communist rule and to pursue a better life in the colony, but their betterment in life outside of China has been dependent on China.

To China, the politics of controlling lives and bodies has also been a double-edged sword in the long run. There is a new, fast-growing movement in post-colonial Hong Kong for greater autonomy following the increasing state intervention and economic domination from China. This tide of sentiment against the current Chinese national rule has led to some provocatively hoisting the United Flag during demonstrations and calling for the municipal governance plan devised by Mark Young, the 21st governor of Hong Kong during British colonial days, to be resurrected to transform Hong Kong into a city-state.⁷⁴ China needs to emphasize its power over the lives and bodies of the Hong Kong people in order to shore up its rule over the territory. Several Chinese officials have openly mooted the idea of cutting water supplies in their warnings to the rising number of pro-independent Hong Kong radical youth.⁷⁵ However, using water and food security to consolidate territorial control involves a risk that is fundamentally unpredictable and unpreventable. As recent as in 2011, H5N1 once again threatened Hong Kong when infected birds and chickens were found in the community. To control against the spread of infection, the Hong Kong SAR government ordered the culling of 17,000 chickens and banned the trade in live chickens for weeks at the expense of the normal order of life.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Chen 2011.

⁷⁵ "Yimian longshiqi yinqi di fansi" (Reflection induced from the dragon-lion flag), *Apple Daily*, 30 October 2012.

⁷⁶ "Jinong nuchi gei Chow Yat-ngok haisi" (Chicken farmers angrily rebuke Chow Yat-ngok for fatal blow), *Sun Daily*, 23 December 2011.

The politics of controlling lives and bodies mixes with a political imperative for advancing power and an economic interest for making profit. This has created a constant pressure on China not only to favour Hong Kong with abundant water and food supplies, but also to maintain an artificial exchange at low prices in order to demonstrate its “benevolent rule.” If China should choose to reduce its supplies of food and water to Hong Kong, it would damage its own national political and economic interests, both in Hong Kong and on the mainland. Resentment of China’s use of bio-political power to instil cross-border control has increased among the local Hong Kong Chinese community. Challenges to the benevolence of the motherland have highlighted the fact that food and water supplies do not come free of charge; on the contrary, Hong Kong has paid China for them, and China earns a lucrative profit from them.⁷⁷ In short, the more China applies this bio-political strategy to extend its power, the more China overloads itself with a growing political economic burden that drains it of its new-found power. The politics of controlling lives and bodies has driven China into a dilemma in its empire-building process.

摘要: 中国没有胜出“洗脑赢心”之争, 但终在 1997 年 7 月 1 日成功重申香港主权。本文尝试阐述当中的来龙去脉, 从而解开中国能够统一香港之谜。透过另辟蹊径的追溯滥觞, 寻绎针对香港人口力求“捆身锁命”之争, 本文指出中国如何在 1997 年之前及其之后, 利用食水及食物供应来控制香港。探讨重点在于中国曾经采用什么生灵政治行动, 压倒英国殖民主义, 极力确保香港主权可以如期归还。最后, 本文分析最新动向, 跟进这种统一措施怎样冲击当前中港关系, 导致国家和人民积累难以化解的政治经济紧张。

关键词: 水源政治; 食物安全; 东深—香港供水工程; 五丰行; 中英关系; 香港

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