CDO scheme vs Town Talk
by leaders / middle elite random people
gather feedback
meet the people session
but there may not be any changes
more of government surveillance rather than democratic

Article

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Public opinion polls and covert colonialism in British Hong Kong

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Abstract

This article examines colonial statecraft and state–society relations in a pivotal period for Hong Kong. Using historical methods and archival evidence, it overcomes the limitations in existing research, which is often theoretically driven and reliant on published sources. The article reveals that the Hong Kong masses were made *structurally invisible* by the Movement of Opinion Direction (MOOD), a polling exercise introduced by the reformist colonial state. The public were unaware that their views were disseminated to policymakers and that they affected policy formulation: this was covert colonialism. The article investigates confidential MOOD reports generated by the Home Affairs Department from 1975 to 1980, demonstrating why and how the colonial administration constructed public opinion. By disclosing what these secret files reveal about changing public attitudes towards the colonial government, the United Kingdom and the People's Republic of China (PRC), the article also provides new insights into public receptions of the state's reforms and potential threats to the colonial regime in the 1970s.

Keywords

state–society relations, public opinion, surveys, political culture, identity, Sino-Hong Kong relations

From the 1980s, there has been considerable polling of public opinion in Hong Kong, undertaken for example for the Hong Kong Transition Project and the Hong Kong University Public Opinion Programme. Prior to the 1960s, the colonial state in Hong Kong did not consult the public directly. Ambrose King described the administrative system as a 'synarchy': 'a joint administration shared by both British rulers and non-British,

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predominantly Chinese leaders'.[1] There were few channels for the public to raise their grievances. The Urban Council was the only institution with democratically elected members. Nonetheless, only two of 10 were elected councilors and its franchise remained extremely limited. Although the franchise was slightly widened in 1965, its authority was rarely extended. This was mainly because of the colonial government's reluctance to introduce a 'significantly more democratic local government'. Senior civil servants firmly believed in the efficiency of a centralized administration and were concerned that an increasingly democratic local government would lead the Chinese government to believe that Hong Kong was 'moving down the path to independence'.[2] As a result, a strong sense of 'alienation' was felt by Hong Kong society.[3] The Star Ferry Riots in 1966 first 'revealed the existence of considerable social discontent' in the colony.[4] A communication gap between the state and society was evident.[5] It was then when the colonial government started recognizing that 'an unreformed law and order' was 'unsustainable' and 'new forms of legitimation' were required.[6] Nonetheless, no regular opinion polls were conducted at this point. Opinions of the public were only gauged on an ad hoc basis in response to the riots by the Commission of Inquiry, the Secretary of Chinese Affairs, and the police force.[7] The leftist-inspired riots in 1967 represented a new '"test" or a "question" of legitimacy' for the colonial government.[8] To prevent future upheavals, the state reformed.[9] The introduction of the City District Officer Scheme in 1968 widened channels of political participation without introducing democratization or delegating further executive power to the Urban Council.[10] It signified a departure from the colonial government's ruling strategies. The scheme was 'a multifunctional political structure'.[11] Ten City District Offices were set up to provide policymakers with intelligence about public opinion, to explain the state's policies, to answer public enquiries, and to manage district affairs. This reform sought to incorporate the lower strata of society into the administrative authority. City District Officers observed the people of Hong Kong in their everyday lives and surveyed them collectively via District Monthly Meetings and Study Groups, which were new devices 'geared primarily to reach local leaders'; Town Talk, a new confidential official publication, was oriented towards ordinary people.[12]

The City District Officer Scheme has not been thoroughly explored. Most of the scholarship so far touches on it briefly and is theoretically driven. Steve Tsang, John Carroll, and Ian Scott, for example, have provided a short institutional history of the scheme, mainly focusing on the background in which it was introduced and its functions.[13] King's article published in 1975 is the most recent article with a detailed account of the scheme. King's work mainly relies on published sources and small-scale oral interviews: it is impressionistic. His article does not show how the colonial state constructed and monitored public opinion using the Movement of Opinion Direction (MOOD), a significant innovation, and state-funded public opinion polling before the 1980s.

The 1970s was an important period for Hong Kong. It was an age of rising affluence, political consciousness, and policy initiatives. A detailed and longitudinal view of state–society relations in the 1970s is vital because these years were precursors to political and social changes in the 1980s and beyond. Using historical methods, this study examines MOOD, a bureaucratic instrument, which was produced by the Home Affairs Department to monitor shifts in public sentiments, complementing the City District Officer Scheme and other longer-established indirect mechanisms to gauge public

attitudes. The department started producing confidential MOOD reports in 1975 and the last issue of MOOD accessible at the Hong Kong Public Record Office was printed in 1980: this is the range covered by this article. This article demonstrates how the state, by observing and surveying ordinary people, constructed public opinion. It argues that by using MOOD, the bureaucracy was making the Hong Kong masses *structurally invisible*. Although high-ranked officers were fully aware of MOOD, which was embedded in the City District Officer programme, its presence was concealed from the public. People therefore unconsciously took part in policy formulation: this was covert colonialism. Deploying relatively sophisticated sampling techniques, MOOD informed colonial bureaucrats about popular responses to its reforms.

The invisible structure

Prior to the 1980s, some outside observers and expatriates portrayed the colonial government as a 'night watchman'. Unlike most colonial regimes, the state in Hong Kong did not have 'comprehensive control over the colonial society'.[14] These scholars promoted the idea that the city-state was a peculiar late 20th-century example of laissez-faire in a colonial setting. The government possessed 'a limited reach in society as a result of its deliberate policy of indirect rule, a combination of economic laissez-faire and political non-intervention'.[15] George Endacott, for instance, described the state in Hong Kong as 'a minimum of government' in the style of 'Benthamite laissez-faire'.[16] From the 1980s, sociologists reinforced this abstract notion of a laissez-faire state. Lau Siu-kai asserted that Hong Kong was a 'minimally-integrated social-political system'. The colony was 'largely exempted from interference by social and economic forces in the system'. Hong Kong Chinese were politically apathetic and the state did not pursue any kind of 'activism' to 'intrude unnecessarily into society to restructure it'. The links between an 'autonomous bureaucratic polity' and 'atomistic Chinese society' were extremely limited.[17] Being atomistic, the Chinese households in Hong Kong relied on familial networks and were capable of self-regulating.[18] 'Boundary maintenance' was sustained, meaning that politics only took place at the boundary between the state and society, and was 'not highly institutionalized in a formal or legal sense'.[19] There were no 'political institutions which enable[d] non-bureaucratic "outsiders" to acquire or exercise political power'.[20] Equally, the state lacked 'the organizational penetration into the Chinese society'.[21] Other sociologists purported the notion of a 'highly insulated state', in which only a limited number of elites were absorbed into the administrative system to legitimize the foreign rule.[22]

Lau's position was ahistorical, based on partial evidence that was primarily drawn from interview data. He acknowledged that his 'theoretical approach' inevitably led to the omission of 'many historical and empirical details' and failed to examine the complex nature of Hong Kong's social-political system 'in a particular structural-historical context'.[23] Since the 1990s, revisionists have refuted the concept of laissez-faire and convincingly argued that a 'minimally-integrated social-political system' misrepresented state–society relations in Hong Kong. The state's power was 'far more penetrating' and state–society relations were 'complex and contingent upon particular situations'.[24] At times, the colonial government deliberately created 'social cleavages' and collaborated with different social groups, ranging from marginalized industrialists to social activists,

to manipulate public opinion and maintain effective governance.[25] Ma Ngok observed that 'the mutual non-intervention between polity and society was over-stated'.[26] Wai-man Lam asserted. that Lau's study failed to demonstrate that the colonial state was 'underdeveloped' and that Chinese society was 'overdeveloped'. Insufficient evidence suggested that the Chinese communities in Hong Kong could satisfy their needs through 'private means'. Throughout the post-war period, social movements challenged state policies.[27] Michael Ng argued that the press was 'continuously and systematically monitored and pervasively censored through the collaborative efforts of executive actions, legislation provisions and judicial decisions'. The Control of Publications Ordinance passed in 1951 strengthened the state's power of press control, which previously could only be exercised by the Governor during emergencies.[28] The freedom to protest in public was also restricted by statutory controls, showing implicitly that the state was conscious that it had to monitor social unrest.[29]

Although an erroneous view of state–society relations has been refuted, how the reformist Hong Kong colonial state interacted with its Chinese communities and improved political communications remains under-investigated. It is also unknown whether constructed public opinion had an impact on policymaking. Using archival evidence, this article offers an understanding of how this non-democratic and at times repressive late colonial state functioned. It argues that 'the masses' were made *structurally invisible* by the bureaucracy, and involved in the policymaking process through MOOD, a formally institutionalized programme coordinated by the Home Affairs Department. MOOD's methods and disseminations also demonstrate how it was used to understand changing public sentiments in Hong Kong. Containing a substantial amount of valuable and rich qualitative data about ordinary Hong Kong Chinese, there is no comparable surviving state document. Analysis of this data also contests the dominant narrative which argues that political culture in Hong Kong shifted in the 1970s due to the emergence of local identity, especially among the post-war baby boomers.[30] The existing literature portrays Hong Kong as a homogenous entity. This article analyses how class and age impacted on these complex social processes.

Constructing public opinion at the local level

From 1968, to detect grievances and solicit views of the 'man in the street' from 'different walks of life', the City District Officers produced the confidential Town Talk, 'one of the most important channels for soliciting public opinions'.[31] It emphasized the qualitative aspect of opinions, for department heads and high-ranked government officials. Opinions of the public were gathered by observing and having casual conversations with ordinary people. Nonetheless, the existing knowledge about these opinion polls is extremely limited as they were 'not officially included in the CDO [City District Officer] Scheme'.[32] To understand how public opinion was constructed in the 1970s and in the absence of access to confidential state records, King resorted to interviewing several officers. The only thing that was commonly known was that no clear guidelines were provided in the late 1960s and early 1970s on who the City District Officers should interview, which resulted in interviewees being consulted spontaneously and repeatedly. This put the report's authoritativeness in question. As Augustine Kam Chui, the Deputy Director of the Home Affairs Department, noted:

> The major criticism of Town Talk over years has been that it was unsystematic and had no statistical basis. This will always be the case but its credibility can be increased very considerably if the staff involved each contact a predetermined number of people every week to ensure that the coverage is as widely extend[ed] as feasible.[33]

MOOD, a successor of Town Talk, was introduced in March 1975. It intended to be a 'more authoritative and therefore influential' public opinion poll.[34] It was a confidential report generated by the Home Affairs Department. The main purpose of MOOD was 'to draw attention to subjects which are currently or potentially of public concern, and to assess public reactions, attitudes and feelings in appropriate instances'.[35] Like Town Talk, MOOD placed its priority on collecting opinions that were not reported by the news media. It examined the impact of the press on public opinion, public misconceptions and voices of 'the less articulated classes' who 'cannot get their views heard and have therefore suffered in silence'.[36] Controversial topics and anti-government activities were investigated, as well as the opinions of civil servants who disagreed with state policies.[37] Due to the sensitivity of the intelligence gathered, the reports only circulated among senior officials.[38] Heads of departments were reminded to store their MOOD reports 'securely all the time'.[39]

MOOD was important for colonial bureaucrats. It was stated clearly that MOOD was given 'the first priority over all other work' as it was 'read by the Governor and his policy advisers every week, and was referenced during policy making'.[40] It remains difficult for historians to determine exactly how this information was used. Surviving records are partial. Nonetheless, piecemeal evidence in archives suggests that MOOD was read by high-ranked officials and fed into policymaking. R. B. Crowson referred to the predecessor of MOOD when examining the possibility of introducing a British enquiry into alleged corruption in Hong Kong:

> Town Talk of 2 August said that several people had suggested that the British Government should now launch a full separate investigation into the Godber case. As against this, a UK enquiry would be a major blow to Hong Kong's amour propre.[41]

This suggests that MOOD, a significant enhancement to Town Talk, was taken into account by officials in the policymaking process.

State records on the Golden Jubilee Incident in 1977 and 1978 provided a good account of how MOOD influenced government's administration. The MOOD report was found carefully kept in one of the files on the Golden Jubilee Incident in the National Archives in London, indicating that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office did consider it an important document. Most importantly, the content found in the telegram sent by MacLehose to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 31 May 1978 closely resembled the MOOD report which was published a week earlier. On 24 May, MOOD described the mixed opinions found in Hong Kong society:

> Overall public reaction was still very mixed, different people taking different sides according to their own education background, convictions and basic attitudes. The government's publicity efforts to redress the balance during the next few days were successful to some extent in enabling the public to see the situation in better perspective…. Unfortunately, this message came rather late and the more critical sectors of the public were inclined to be incredulous….

> There was still not much support for the 16 teachers. Only radical students, free thinkers and critics of the government sympathized with them. However, there was much more sympathy towards the displaced students whose schooling had been thus disrupted…. Secondary and post-secondary students were inclined to criticize the closure of the school as suppressive and Draconian action.[42]

Similar records were found in the Governor's telegram:

> Vocal opinion is split fairly down the middle between those supporting and those opposing the Government's action. Much of the criticism is directed at the closure itself and appears to have derived from sympathy for the pupils whose education has been disrupted…. There has not been much public sympathy for the 16 teachers who claimed to have been victimized for revealing financial mismanagement of the school…. Nevertheless, the revelation of this earlier complaint has understandably caused confusion and some damage to the Education Department and government's credibility. Some people have clearly found it difficult to believe the true situation.[43]

MOOD's account, which suggested that the secondary and post-secondary students were 'particularly sensitive and resentful to any government measure which appeared to them to be high-handed or dictatorial', was clearly being taken into consideration by the Education Department.[44] In encountering the tutorial classes organized by radical post-secondary students, the non-interventionist approach was deliberately taken by the Department as it was believed that 'to do so [intervene] would have brought post-secondary students directly into the arena'.[45] The Department instead offered to place Golden Jubilee students in other schools. To ensure that 'decisions would be taken on an intelligent understanding of community aspirations and sensitivities' and that decisions would respond to the call for 'more opportunities for public consultation', a Committee of Inquiry was set up.[46] A 'public invitation' was issued to invite Hong Kong citizens to share their views on the incident.[47] Lord Goronwy-Roberts was also aware of the public confusion stated in MOOD. To reduce 'prevailing tension and distrust', he recommended the Director of Education to 'make public his findings of the financial mismanagement' of the school and make clarifications regarding the school's closure and its change of sponsorship.[48] These records suggest that MOOD had influenced the state's ruling strategies.

The credibility of MOOD was always questioned. The Commissioner for Census and Statistics, for example, pointed out that the 'MOOD method has areas where it can be improved', such as the choice of samples and statisticians' conduct.[49] As better-informed respondents were contacted frequently, reports did not 'truly reflect the attitudes and thinking of an average citizen or a man in the street'.[50] In no way was MOOD a wholly representative sample which revealed comprehensive views of a cross-section of communities in Hong Kong. Issued on a weekly basis, there was insufficient time for thorough investigations.[51] Another criticism of MOOD was that it could be biased. Officials used MOOD as 'an axe of their own to grind'.[52] City District Officers' and monitors' personal opinions distorted public attitudes. People who were approached may also have been reserved, knowing that the MOOD monitor was a civil servant.

As MOOD was 'not comparable with that of a professional public opinion survey and exact accuracy is not claimed', the administration sought to improve its methodologies,

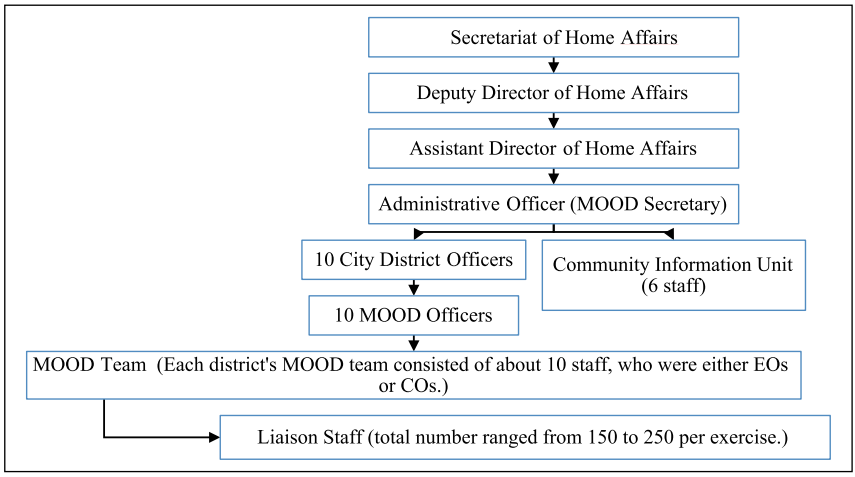

Figure 1. Chain of command in the operation of MOOD* in 1977.
Notes: EO = Executive Officers; CO = Community Organizers
*The total number of staff engaged in MOOD exercises ranged from 280 to 380.

which reinforces the view that MOOD was valuable to bureaucrats.[53] Its highly restrictive nature also suggests that its findings were acknowledged and handled carefully. Archival evidence indicates that MOOD was a sizable unit with a clear chain of accountability (see Figure 1).[54] Records also reveal that the Home Affairs Department was systematic in observing and soliciting public opinion. Each MOOD exercise began with the debriefing given by the Deputy Director at the Home Affairs Department Headquarters. Policy papers were provided to ensure MOOD Officers, who were nominated by City District Officers, had 'an intelligent and accurate understanding of the subject [topic]'. Similar documents were disseminated to the Community Information Unit in the Home Affairs Department, which consisted of six experienced liaison civil servants. During each meeting, the City District Officers were given a topic and the number of respondents required. On the next day, every City District Officer, assisted by his or her MOOD Officer, held a meeting to explain and discuss the subject with the district MOOD team.[55]

To reach the grass roots, the MOOD staff then created samples using data supplied by Mutual Aid Committees and kaifong associations, by liaising with community leaders. Each monitor had a 50-person contact list, of which every week, one-third of the people were removed from the list and replaced by new contacts. On special occasions, the City District Officers could add previous contacts to the list and use them more than once.[56] The Community Information Unit also monitored comments made through the mass media and attempted to determine the sentiments of groups and areas that were potentially sensitive, such as coolies and hawkers in some circumstances. It also conducted random sampling through telephone calls, using the data provided by the Census and Statistics Department.[57] Each MOOD drew data from approximately 2500 people.[58] MOOD also advised its staff to be indirect and pay close attention to their interviewing techniques. This avoided giving the impression of surveillance and could 'take the

respondents off their guards'.[59] When the reports were returned, the City District Officers convened a meeting in which findings were checked, discussed, analysed, and compiled in note form. The officers had to provide details of the respondents, including age group, class, educational background, type of residence, gender, and occupation. A final MOOD meeting, attended by all MOOD Officers, the Deputy Director and Assistant Director, was then held at the Home Affairs Department Headquarters. During the meeting, feedback collected from all districts was examined as a whole and compared with data obtained by the Community Information Unit.[60] An editor analysed all findings to produce one MOOD report for circulation. In 1975, MOOD was printed on every Thursday for circulation on Friday.[61] In 1977, MOOD became a biweekly report.[62]

By 1977, there were between 150 and 250 monitors. They were either full-time Executive Officers or part-time Community Organizers working outside office hours. The Home Affairs Department built up a regularly updated contact list of about 10,000 people.[63] The list was claimed to 'cover a wide cross-section of occupation groups, stratified in respect of age and educational background'.[64] About 300 to 400 people were selected from the list for each MOOD issue. Apart from interviewing people on the contact list, the Home Affairs Department staff spoke to people in the community. The number of these incidental samples varied in different districts. It ranged from 2000 to 3000 in total. In normal circumstances, no respondent was interviewed more than once in less than four months.[65] As the Chief Secretary and the Secretary for Administration imposed the duties of assessing and predicting public reactions towards proposed and existing policies, on request, the Home Affairs Department was obliged to report opinion trends on specific topics to relevant departments directly.[66]

MOOD was a qualitative research project, which adopted an informal interviewing system modelled on the Osaka Feedback Scheme and the Japanese Monitor System for National Policy.[67] Each report had tailor-made topics and targeted groups. Tests and pilot surveys were carried out in advance, such as checking the sample coverage and anticipating non-response rate. This was done to determine the method used in soliciting views, for example, whether through observations, sending out questionnaires, or interviews.[68] If it was in the format of interviews, 'informal' techniques were employed. Questions were not standardized. Staff could tailor the wording and alter the order of the questions which they believed were appropriate for the contacts. Such unstructured approach, it was judged, succeeded 'better than set questions in getting to the heart of the respondent's opinion'.[69]

To further improve the methodology of MOOD, it was recommended that a departmental representative should attend discussions if that report was requested by a particular department.[70] As MOOD only covered Kowloon and Hong Kong island, the presence of the staff of the New Territories Administration, such as the District Officer of Tsuen Wan, was useful. Not only could they learn the techniques for contacting interview subjects, but information from the New Territories could also be gathered and used for comparison.[71] On important topics, such as Green Papers on constitutional development, the department used 'more scientific methods' to gather and ascertain public views regularly.[72] To enhance the report's credibility, three-quarters of the contacts in each issue of MOOD were incidental casual respondents. The established contact lists in different districts were renewed and the categorical breakdown, such as age and occupation of

respondents, was sent to the Census and Statistics Department.[73] These new arrangements were made possibly because City District Officers and monitors approached some better-informed and responsive respondents repeatedly, affecting the representativeness of MOOD. These changes also lowered the risks that officials carried out fewer interviews than required.

By 1979, the Home Affairs Department was still reluctant to change the sampling method extensively due to 'the extra work involved' and the fact that 'it was impractical with the then limited resources'.[74] Nonetheless, the frequency was changed and MOOD was issued on a monthly basis, allowing more time for fieldwork.[75] It was not until April 1980 that the Home Affairs Department switched to a quota sampling method. The selection of contacts according to gender, age and occupation was now in proportion to the number and distribution of the overall population in the area. This new method was adopted probably because of the changing geographical distribution of Hong Kong's population. According to the government census in 1971, 25 per cent of the total population lived on Hong Kong island, 18 per cent in Kowloon, 37 per cent in New Kowloon, and 17 per cent in the New Territories. By 1981, the distribution had changed, with a large increase in the New Territories: 24 per cent of the total population lived on Hong Kong island, 16 per cent in Kowloon, 33 per cent in New Kowloon and 26 per cent in the New Territories.[76] This per district approach represented a better division of labour as it reduced the cost and time for travelling to other districts. City District Officers also had better understanding of the areas and neighbourhoods in their own districts. The new methodology reduced the sampling size from 2500 to 993. These 993 respondents now included people in Tsuen Wan and Kwai Chung.[77]

This section has demonstrated how the bureaucracy invested considerable resources polling a representative sample of people, a mass made *structurally invisible* by the colonial state. The colonial government regularly collected and analysed public opinion, and closely monitored the movement of opinion direction. The circulation of sensitive public opinion was restricted to senior policymakers, including the Governor and his policy advisers, and was referenced in policy formulation.

Political attitudes and identities of Hong Kong Chinese

The improved methodologies allowed MOOD to deconstruct changing popular sentiments by class and age, and hence assess public reactions to administrative reforms and identify potential threats to the colonial state. MOOD investigated topics which were either 'of current interest or political importance chosen by the Home Affairs Department', or which had been requested by a Secretary or Head of Department.[78] During the period from March 1975 to June 1976, MOOD covered a number of ad hoc affairs, including public reactions to the Labour Relations Bill, the proposed increase in public transport charges, school fees, and electricity prices. The colonial government also displayed a clear interest in political attitudes and identities, and what influenced them. Changing political attitudes of Hong Kong Chinese towards the colonial government, the United Kingdom, and China were the state's main concerns in this period. For an alien state to retain legitimacy without introducing an electoral system, 'not only must legitimate demands be satisfied, but the population must be convinced that such satisfaction is

genuinely the objective of the government'.[79] The colonial regime was desperate to develop a sense of 'civic pride' as a substitute for 'national loyalty' among the Chinese population.[80] It was believed that this not only enhanced the state's legitimacy, but also provided Britain with powerful bargaining chips in their negotiations with China.[81] Along with the Hong Kong Festival and the 'Keep Hong Kong Clean' campaign, the state introduced legislative changes, such as legalizing Chinese to become the official language in 1974.[82]

Nonetheless, there were increased tensions between Hong Kong and Britain. The devaluation of the pound in 1967 had drastically affected public confidence in the British government. To add fuel to the fire, Britain's entry into the European Economic Community curtailed Hong Kong's textile exports to the British Isles under more restrictive quotas. London also increased Hong Kong's contribution to the maintenance of the British garrison from 29 per cent in 1970 to 75 per cent in 1978.[83] On the other hand, the 1967 riots had already demonstrated the significance of the 'China factor': a surge in Chinese nationalism could lead to violence and chaos, shattering political stability. Nationalism did not diminish but flourished in the early 1970s, which could be observed from the emergence of patriotic social movements, such as the Chinese Language Campaign and the Senkaku Islands Movement. Given the uncertainty imposed by the end of the Cultural Revolution, the death of Mao and the fall of the Gang of Four after 1976, the state had to observe changing perceptions towards China. In this context, it was vital for the state to be fully informed of changing political attitudes and identities so that it could measure the success of its community-building project, continue fostering a sense of belonging among the community, and avoid any anti-colonial or British sentiments being exploited and turned into disturbances.

Attitudes towards colonial rule

The political culture in Hong Kong experienced changes in the 1970s. Hong Kong Chinese used to be 'very cautious about saying anything adverse about the government in public'. Most complaints in newspapers tended to be anonymous.[84] According to MOOD, such political inactivity could be explained by 'the persisting fatalism inherited from traditional attitudes formed by experience under successive Chinese governments', which discouraged people from contesting colonial policies and questioning misdeeds of the state.[85] The perception that politics was dangerous and that ordinary people lacked capabilities to comprehend it could be found in a number of Cantonese proverbs, such as 'officials have two mouths' (a traditional saying which means that authorities could always find an excuse to justify their decisions), 'the poor should never attempt to fight the wealthy, or the wealthy to fight officialdom', and 'the governor of a prefecture can commit arson with impurity, but the people are not even allowed to light their lamps'.[86] This attunes to the claims of scholars such as Lau Siu-kai, Kuan Hsin-chi, J. Stephen Hoadley, and Norman Miners, who asserted that administrative power was the prerogative of rulers in the history of China.[87] However, when compared to the 1950s, the public in the mid-1970s was 'much more prone to take issue with the government over what they consider[ed] to be unjust official action, believing that the incompetent, corrupt, or unfair officer should not, and will not, get away with his wrongdoings, in the face of

public exposure'.[88] Knowing that the state was unlikely to suppress and arrest them, the grass-roots members of society started to 'speak up or stage protest action(s)'.[89]

According to MOOD, popular political participation was the outcome of social development, emerging problems and challenges, and new policy responses to them.[90] After the 1967 riots, the City District Officer Scheme was introduced to close the communication gap between the people and the government. Policies were publicized and explained to the public. Campaigns, such as 'Clean Hong Kong' and 'Fight Violent Crime', were launched to build up a positive image of the state. The Governor and high-ranked civil servants appeared in public more frequently to discuss policies and problems. People's confidence towards the government grew due to its responsiveness to public opinion in the Chinese Language Movement, the Godber affair, and the setting up of the Independent Commission Against Corruption in the first half of the 1970s: 'many more people feel that the government is prepared to take a fair and honest attitude about its own failings and shortcomings'.[91] As a result, not only was there an increase in public engagement in current affairs 'at all levels of society', but 'the traditional fear of authority or officialdom' had been 'greatly reduced'.[92]

Nonetheless, respondents still found the state's services and documents 'slow, time-consuming and complicated, difficult to understand', especially the colonial laws. While finding the staff in the City District Council 'largely unhelpful', they also believed that the high-ranked civil servants were 'adopting a rigid and unimaginative approach' in solving problems.[93] The shift in political culture was not profound. Uneducated low-income earners were 'less aware of the essence of implications of the new style of open government'. Many still believed that the state was 'almighty' and only governed according to its interests. They remained 'largely indifferent to how Hong Kong [was] governed' as long as their lives were not affected.[94] The working class paid little attention to issues outside their daily livelihood: 'subjects like the future of Hong Kong [were] too remote, and too much above them, to be of much interest'.[95] It was also observed that there was 'no general public aspiration or pressure for constitutional reform' and ordinary people 'at large, [were] not interested in the mechanism or constitutional set-up of government'. According to MOOD, 'majority attitudes indicate a lack of enthusiasm about elections'.[96]

Shift of political culture led to tensions between the generations. Among the middle-aged and elderly, the period did not witness 'the creation of a new political and social climate'.[97] Political conservatism persisted. To avoid 'rocking the boat', many of them advocated 'a style of "strong government"' which should refrain from 'becoming too accommodating towards rabble-rousers'.[98] The upper and middle classes were also 'staunch supporters of the status quo'.[99] Many of them viewed political activism 'with dislike and concern' as they were worried that 'social order and discipline will inevitably be undermined' and perceived these informal means of political engagement as 'undignified and unbecoming of their status'.[100] Although they often supported the state's policies publicly, in private, many expressed concerns over the increasingly 'liberal or accommodating' governing style, which they thought would 'give rise to escalating public aspirations' that were impossible to meet.[101] The wealthy strata within the middle-aged and elderly groups conformed closest to Lau's description of 'utilitarianistic familism'.[102] Rather than having strong emotional attachment to the colony, they stayed only because

'living in Hong Kong offers many attractions'. The 'outward-looking' economy and its rising international status provided these people who possessed 'capital and entrepreneur qualities' with 'first class opportunities'. They could 'enjoy their wealth more cheaply, safely and freely' in the colony because of the low tax rate and social stability. Being in an 'overwhelming Chinese society', they had a higher social status through business and adopted the Chinese way of life while enjoying 'the full benefits of living in a cosmopolitan city'.[103] Most of the professionals and middle-scale proprietors supported the existing social order because of instrumental concerns: 'they have by large succeeded in going some way up the social ladder, often through hard work and preserving effort, and do not wish to lose that position'.[104]

The young generation held 'significantly different, and largely less favourable, views of the government than their elders'.[105] Many of them found the paternalistic type of government intolerable. MOOD predicted that some of them were going to demand more political participation and increased consultation, and become 'even more aggressive and presumptuous' towards the colonial government.[106] Radicals among students argued that 'the government has become more enlightened and accommodating because it can see very well that there is no alternative'.[107]

Attitudes towards the British government

MOOD also shows that the public had limited knowledge about the 'Empire' and imperial relations. Many had little interest in British politics, which could be observed when British members of parliament visited Hong Kong in 1976. Apart from knowing that MPs were elected, the Hong Kong public had virtually no idea about what members of parliament did. The report pointed out that 'some respondents believed that the visits were for the purpose of "checking up" on the Hong Kong government'.[108] Despite the degree of autonomy enjoyed by Hong Kong, the public still held the impression that the colonial state was 'to a large extent, "controlled" by the United Kingdom government'. The UK parliamentary members were viewed as 'inspectors'.[109] The same report also reflected the absence of confidence and scepticism towards both the colonial state and the British government. Many contacts argued that local officials would not present the parliamentary members with an accurate picture of the situation in Hong Kong:

> They assumed quite intuitively that government officers would try to show the visitors only the better side of things. It simply did not occur to them that Hong Kong government very often tried to make visitors see Hong Kong's difficult and intractable problems in the hope that they could be better understood.[110]

The only information respondents of all classes and educational backgrounds had about the British government was its 'deteriorating economy', notably the 'shrinking pound'.[111]

The royal visit by the Queen in 1975 enabled MOOD to evaluate attitudes towards the head of state and answer students' radicalism. The announcement of the trip 'did not arouse much enthusiasm, particularly from the grass-roots level'. Many even denounced the trip as 'untimely' under the 'gloomy economic situation' as they misbelieved that a substantial amount of public expenditure would be spent.[112] Despite the warm welcome

upon the Queen's arrival, most families certainly were not 'well-wishers'.[113] They only considered the royal visit 'no more than items of entertainment'. People 'do not regard themselves as subjects of the Queen of Great Britain, but rather as Chinese people coming by choice and force of circumstance to live under an alien government'. Most respondents called Queen Elizabeth II either *neoi wong* (女王, the Queen) or *jing neoi wong* (英女王, the Queen of England). MOOD interpreted this as an absence of political allegiance to both the United Kingdom and the British Crown. Hong Kong's grass roots and junior civil servants were apathetic. Some identified the Queen as either *si tau po* (事頭婆, the female boss) or *baau zou po* (包租婆, the landlady), demonstrating that their relations with the Crown were practical and instrumental.[114] Similar reactions were detected in the celebration of the Silver Jubilee in 1977 and the visit of Prince Charles in 1979. The 1977 MOOD again suggested that most Hong Kong people did not 'consciously think of themselves as British subjects', 'except when they actually seek to travel on a British passport'.[115] The visit of Charles was 'very well received' in 1979 only because Charles was often described by the mass media as 'charming, friendly and approachable', and that 'no lavish decorations or public funds had been wasted'.[116] The visit did not instil 'public confidence and trust in the British government'.[117]

Although some students started a campaign to boycott the royal visit in 1975, Hong Kong society in general was 'on the whole unsympathetic towards the boycott'. The majority believed that the boycott was 'meaningless and of no avail' since it certainly would have zero impact on the colony's constitutional position.[118] The lower income groups, in particular, paid no attention to it. A 'non-conformist and aggressive attitude' was spreading from university to senior secondary students. Nonetheless, the post-secondary students were 'on the whole divided'. Graduates, in particular, were more pro-establishment. While some undergraduates believed that they could use the campaign as a channel to express their discontent, most were 'indifferent' and showed 'reluctance to get personally involved over the issue, either as a supporter or critic of the boycott'. In private conservations, many even 'expressed disapproval'.[119] The growing student movement in the 1970s did not only divide the student community, but also the general public. Some viewed rising student political engagement as 'a healthy and beneficial trend for the community'. However, more believed that young students were 'impulsive and immature'.[120]

Attitudes towards China

According to MOOD, before 1967, most Chinese migrated to Hong Kong as they 'disliked communist ideology' and 'hated and feared the Central People's Government'. Most immigrants looked at communism 'with suspicion and hostility'.[121] Some even worried that any link with the communists would 'get them into black books of the Hong Kong government'.[122] In terms of political allegiance, some were loyal to the Kuomintang and viewed Taiwan as the legitimate government of China. They hoped that Taiwan would eventually take over China.[123] MOOD reveals that despite the unpopularity of the leftist-inspired 1967 riots, the public was less hostile to China in the mid-1970s because it was clear that the central Chinese government had no intention of taking back Hong Kong early. By avoiding direct confrontation with the colonial government, communist

China seemed content to maintain the status quo in Hong Kong for 'cogent and important reasons'.[124] China's willingness to supply Hong Kong with scarce resources, such as water during droughts in the 1960s and oil during the oil crisis in 1974, also gave the general public an impression that China was 'quite ready to help Hong Kong'.[125] According to the observation of the Home Affairs Department staff, it became more prevalent to 'celebrate' the National Day of the PRC in the colony:

> The number of 'celebration dinner parties' has increased significantly. It appears that invitations have been very widely distributed to non-communist groups, including associations known to have right-wing connections or sympathies. Many more 'neutral' people have accepted the invitations. They feel much less inhibited about attending such parties. Some of them even regard it as an honour to have been invited.[126]

Different views were shared by former migrants from China and the locally born young generation. A large proportion of middle-aged and elderly groups still viewed communism with scepticism. The young generation took a relatively 'relaxed attitude' about 'the likelihood of Hong Kong returning to China'. Most post-war baby boomers however 'still preferred the status quo' and did not 'cherish returning to live in China under a communist regime'.[127] The general optimism towards China stretched into the late 1970s: 'a general feeling of relief and confidence currently prevails'.[128] While it was conventionally believed that 'older Chinese had often kept their negative views of the PRC', MOOD shows that attitudes of the middle-aged and elderly towards China had improved significantly in 1978.[129] Many were 'now more relaxed about China and welcome the improvement of Hong Kong and Beijing relations'.[130] For the young generation, the Return Home Movement lost momentum and MOOD detected 'no significant trend' of students wanting to return to China.[131]

The mass media in Hong Kong played an important role in shaping views towards China. By the mid-1970s, most Hong Kong Chinese had greater access to the mass media. The literacy rate in Hong Kong was high: 83 per cent in 1971 with an anticipated increase of 8 per cent over the next 10 years.[132] Most households owned radios. Television sets were becoming prevalent. Before the 1970s, the liberal mass media had avoided reporting on Chinese news, except atrocities and chaos during political upheavals. In the early 1970s, the press and media in Hong Kong 'began to change perceptibly'.[133] Right-wing newspapers stopped focusing on the shortfalls of the communist regime and started providing less biased accounts. The communist press ceased to attack misdeeds of the colonial state to 'make their papers more credible, acceptable or attractive to Hong Kong'.[134] For instance, to increase the readership in Hong Kong, *Wen Wei Po* (文匯報) no longer used simplified characters in their papers. *Cheng Ming* (爭鳴), a new magazine sponsored by the communists, featured debates and philosophical dissertations on communist policies and doctrines to appeal for the support of Hong Kong's young and intellectual audience.[135]

Chinese policies after 1976 also convinced people that China would 'gradually shift from communism to socialism'.[136] Many believed that the use of Western technologies and modernization in China would 'inevitably have an impact on the political and ideological stand of China's leadership'. The emergence of an intelligentsia who were partial

to Western philosophies was a sign that the state would soon 'evolve into a new type of regime'.[137] After the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976, it was crucial for Beijing to maintain the stability of Hong Kong. Increased optimism could be observed with many starting to refer to the Chinese Communist Party as 'the Chinese government' and the mainland as 'China'. Taiwan was now labelled 'a territory'.[138] Economic modernization and increased visits to the mainland led many to believe that the living standard there had risen 'very considerably'.[139] The 'dull and colourless' life and 'apparent backwardness', however, prevented many from considering a return to and settlement in the mainland permanently.[140]

Conclusion

The Home Affairs Department monitored popular political attitudes and social aspirations on important topics and sensitive issues. Such constructed public opinion influenced policymaking, and bureaucrats created a *structurally invisible* concept of public opinion. Thus, by implication, the state did not rule indirectly and did not view the Chinese communities as self-regulating. These MOOD reports were circulated restrictively among senior officials. Ordinary people were unaware that they were exercising political influence: this was covert colonialism. They believed that the undemocratic administrative system only gave certain social elites access to policy formulation processes.

Throughout the period from 1975 to 1980, MOOD's techniques improved. The Home Affairs Department and the City District Office broadened their contact lists, expanded the samples, and increased incidental contacts. They then adopted a per district quota sampling method and incorporated the New Territories. To maintain and improve the qualitative aspect of MOOD, informal and unstructured techniques were adopted in interviews. MOOD became increasingly scientific.

The MOOD materials provided Hong Kong bureaucrats with intelligence on shifting popular sentiments on the reformed colonial state, the British government, and China. Findings in MOOD were largely reassuring. In general, there was improved communication between the state and society. Political culture was changing, especially among those of the young generation and at the grass-roots level, although political conservatism was still deeply rooted in the middle-aged and elderly groups, particularly among entrepreneurs and professionals within the upper and middle classes. Neither group advocated major constitutional reforms. They did not pose a major threat to the colonial rule as they were not cohesive. Even the post-war baby boomers were divided. On the whole, the public at large supported colonialism; a desire to maintain the status quo, an open economy, low tax rates, and social stability; and a lifestyle which blended Chinese culture with cosmopolitanism – although the public was indifferent to the British government and political allegiance to the monarchy was non-existent. By contrast, the public adopted a more positive attitude towards the PRC, a shift that affected even the middle-aged and elderly, who formerly viewed the communist regime with fear, hostility, and contempt. Nonetheless, patriotic student movements waned in the mid-1970s.

Notes

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10. Scott, Bridging the gap, 144; Lui, 那似曾相識的七十年代, 21.
11. King, Administrative absorption of politics, 433.
12. Ibid., 434.
13. Tsang, *A Modern History*, 190; John M. Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007, 159; Scott, *Political Change*, 107–10.
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32. Ibid., 433.
33. Hong Kong Record Series (henceforth HKRS) 394/27/9, Town Talk, memo from A. K. Chui to all C.D.O., 24 February 1975, 2.
34. Ibid., 1.
35. HKRS 925/1/1, MOOD: Movement of opinion direction, 13 March 1975, 1.
36. HKRS 394/27/9, Town Talk, 3.
37. Ibid.
38. The circulation rate of MOOD varied throughout the 1970s, ranging from 153 to 169 copies. They were only sent to policymakers and high-ranked officials, usually the secretaries and heads of each department, such as the Chief Secretary, the Secretary of Local Intelligence Committee and the Director of Information Service.
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43. FCO 40/1002, Precious Blood Secondary School, telegram from C. M. MacLehose to FCO, 31 May 1978.
44. FCO 40/1002, The Golden Jubilee controversy, 5.
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49. HKRS 394/27/9, D. S. Whitelegge to A. K. Chui, 6 April 1977.
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51. Ibid., 3.
52. HKRS 394/27/9, D. S. Whitelegge to A. K. Chui.
53. HKRS 394/27/9, Town Talk, 1–3.
54. The information about the chain of command and the estimated size of the unit is extracted from HKRS 925/1/1, Information paper for recipients of MOOD: How MOOD is produced, MOOD, 5 May 1977, 2–4. There are no data available regarding the budget of MOOD.

55. Ibid., 2–3.
56. HKRS 394/27/9, Town Talk, 1–2.
57. HKRS 394/27/9, Extract from minutes from Governor's Committee, 21 March 1975.
58. HKRS 925/1/1, MOOD, 1; According to the government censuses, the estimated total population of Hong Kong was 4,045,300 and 4,402,990 in 1971 and 1976, respectively. This number (2500) was about 0.0618% and 0.0568% of the estimated total population in 1971 and 1976. See Census and Statistics Department, *Hong Kong Population and Housing Census: 1971 Main Report*, Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1972, 9; and Census and Statistics Department, *Hong Kong 1981 Census Main Report Volume 1: Analysis*, Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1982, 15.
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61. HKRS 925/1/1, MOOD, 1.
62. HKRS 925/1/1, Information paper for recipients of MOOD, 4.
63. Ibid., 1–3.
64. HKRS 394/27/9, Memo from Christine Chow to Lam Chow-lo, enclosed in MOOD review paper, 6 January 1977, 2.
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66. Ibid., 1.
67. Ibid. There is no additional information on these methods in the Hong Kong archives or in the public domain.
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72. Ibid.
73. HKRS 394/27/9, Note of a discussion on improvement on the MOOD methodology held on 17.5.79 at 3.00 p.m., Home Affairs Department, 21 May 1979.
74. HKRS 394/27/9, Some observations on MOOD methodology, 1.
75. Ibid., 3.
76. Census and Statistics Department, *Hong Kong 1981 Census Main Report Volume 1*, 63.
77. HKRS 471/3/2, MOOD methodology, MOOD, 10 April 1980.
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