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## Regional Profile: Hong Kong SAR

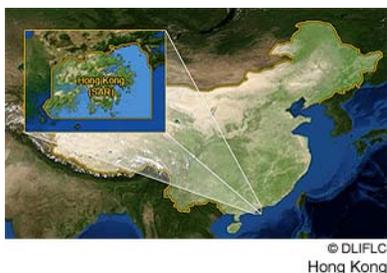
### Introduction

Hong Kong, which means “fragrant harbor” in Chinese, is a teeming, commercially vibrant metropolis where both Chinese and Western influences are evident. Highly dependent on international trade for its prosperity, the former British colony became a special administrative region of China in 1997. Its predominantly ethnic Chinese population has increased steadily over the past decade, reaching about 6.9 million by 2004. Composed of 236 rocky islands as well as Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories on the mainland, the population density is very high with an average of 14,250 people per square mile.

### Area and Climate

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) is situated next to the South China Sea. It shares a border with mainland China to the north and is surrounded by water on its three remaining sides.

This large metropolis has an area of 1100 square km (421 square miles), approximately six times the size of Washington, D.C., and lies below the Tropic of Cancer. It includes the New Territories (a portion of mainland China adjacent to Guangdong Province), Kowloon Peninsula, two large islands (Hong Kong and Lantau), and more than two hundred smaller islands.<sup>1</sup>



Hong Kong enjoys a subtropical climate, milder than surrounding inland areas due to its proximity to the South China Sea. Its summers are prone to warm, humid weather, with an average temperature of 29°C (84° F), while wintertime averages hover around 16°C (60°F). Over half of the annual rainfall (approximately 225 cm/88 in.) occurs during the muggy summer months. Most of this can be attributed to typhoons originating in the North Pacific and South China Sea, of which Hong Kong may see five or six in a season that lasts from June to October.<sup>2</sup>

### Major Urban Centers

#### *New Territories*

The largest area of the entire Special Administrative Region, the New Territories envelopes 952 square km (368 square miles) of land and islands, including Lantau and other islands. The New Territories ranges from the area of the eastern Mirs Bay to Deep Bay in the west and is connected to the Chinese mainland. Though this land is

<sup>1</sup> *CultureGrams2005 World Edition* (2004). Ann Arbor, MI: Axiom Press, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> “Hong Kong,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9106286>

predominately mountainous, its scattered valleys provide some of the region's most fertile farmland.<sup>3</sup>

### *Lantau Island*

Part of the New Territories, Lantau, the largest island in the SAR, lies roughly 10 km (6 miles) west of Hong Kong Island and is accessible by ferry. Though a number of rice and vegetable farms dot the coastline, most of the existing farmland has been engulfed by residential developments. To the southwest are both the Shek Pik Reservoir and Chap Lap Kok International Airport.<sup>4</sup>



© sxc.hu  
Morning traffic in Hong Kong

### *Kowloon Peninsula*

Kowloon is also part of the Chinese mainland, but it extends into Victoria Harbor from the New Territories. This area, especially the vicinity around Mong Kok in central Kowloon, is one of the most densely populated regions in the world. Having rivaled Hong Kong Island as a center for industry and tourism since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kowloon's deep harbor allows for vital access for both cruise and container ships.<sup>5</sup>

### *Central*

Central is situated on the northern shore of Victoria Harbor on Hong Kong Island. This is the administrative and cultural center of Hong Kong, as well as its commercial and financial hub. Central is connected to the mainland by ferry, subway, and several harbor tunnels, used by cars and mass transit vehicles.<sup>6</sup>

### **Major Rivers**

Hong Kong lacks any major river system, except the Sham Chun River which flows into Deep Bay in the North. The Sham Chun marks the boundary with China's Guangdong province. Though the Sham Chun does provide for several reservoirs, 75 percent of Hong Kong's fresh water is supplied by China.<sup>7</sup> The Pearl River (*Zhu Jiang*) extends down from the southern Guangdong Province and runs along the northwestern border between China and Hong Kong.<sup>8</sup>

### **Major Topographical Features**

Less than 15 percent of Hong Kong is developed due to its rugged terrain.<sup>9</sup> The small amount of land that was tillable has given way to residential developments. Land reclamation from Victoria Harbor on both the Central and Kowloon sides has allowed

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<sup>3</sup> "New Territories," Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9055517>

<sup>4</sup> "Lantau Island," Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9047135>

<sup>5</sup> "Kowloon Peninsula," Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9046166>

<sup>6</sup> "Victoria," Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9075254>

<sup>7</sup> "Water Fact Sheet," World Wildlife Fund Hong Kong. <http://www.wwf.org.hk/eng/>

<sup>8</sup> "Hong Kong," Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9106286>

<sup>9</sup> "Chinese History," ibiblio, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/chap15.html>

Hong Kong to grow both literally and economically in the area of greatest economic vitality.<sup>10</sup>

The heavy rainfall that the SAR receives washes away much of its soil's nutrients, thus it is generally thin, of poor quality, and inappropriate for concentrated agriculture. The majority of the original forests were long ago cut or burned and replaced with grass or trees. Now, about one fifth of the land area is made up of wooded hills, and over one half consists of grasslands, badlands, and swamps.<sup>11</sup>

### *Victoria Harbor*

Victoria Harbor is surrounded by Lantau Island, Hong Kong Island, and the Kowloon Peninsula. A naturally deep and sheltered port, it is the center of marine transport for Hong Kong. It is one of the busiest ports in the world, accommodating over 220,000 ships per year for trade industries and tourism. The panoramic views which are offered from Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula are spectacular and a huge draw for tourists.<sup>12</sup>

### *Mountains*

Hong Kong's rocky terrain provides for a very mountainous topography. The highest point in all of Hong Kong is Mount Tai Mo (*Tai Mo Shan*), which rises to 957 meters (3140 feet) and is located in the center of the New Territories.<sup>13</sup> The second highest point, Lantau Peak on Lantau Island, is 934 meters (3064 feet) high. Hong Kong Island has two mountains: Victoria Peak, which is just over 551 meters (1810 feet) tall, and Mount Parker, at approximately 531 meters (1742 feet) in height. In northeast Kowloon, rising to 602 meters (1975 feet), is Kowloon Peak, also known as *Fei Ngo Shan*.



© sxc.hu  
Boat in Victoria Harbor

### *Lowlands*

The lower-lying areas account for less than one-fifth of the entire land area of Hong Kong and include floodplains, river valleys, and reclaimed land. Most of this is situated north of Mount Tai Mo in the New Territories, although Victoria Harbor is sandwiched between two smaller areas of lower elevations that are somewhat level.

### **Plants and Wildlife**

A surprising variety of plant life flourishes in Hong Kong's tropical, temperate climate though much of its original vegetation has been destroyed due to centuries of deforestation. Approximately one-eighth of the land remains forested, much of which can be attributed to post-war programs which have worked to restore some of Hong Kong's

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<sup>10</sup> Ramzy, Austin, "Still Losing Harbor," in *Time Asia*. June 28, 2006.  
<http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/article/0,13673,501060626-1205413,00.html>

<sup>11</sup> "Chinese History," ibiblio, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.  
<http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/chap15.html>

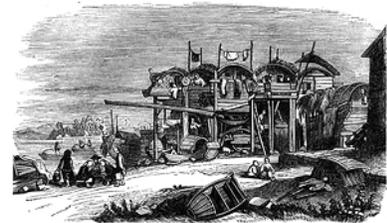
<sup>12</sup> Hong Kong Port Development Council. <http://www.pdc.gov.hk/eng/home/>

<sup>13</sup> "Chinese History," ibiblio, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.  
<http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/chap15.html>

native flora. The most prolific forest genus is *Pinus*, including the South China red pine. Other prosperous tree species include eucalyptus, banyan, casuarina and palm. *Bauhinia Blakeana*, or the Hong Kong Orchid Tree, was used on colonial stamps and coins, and can currently be found on Hong Kong's flag.<sup>14</sup> Approximately 26,000 hectares (64,274 acres) of land are protected in Hong Kong, which includes natural monuments, species management areas, protected landscapes, and seascapes.<sup>15</sup>

There is not much native wildlife left in Hong Kong. Occasionally, there are sightings of the South China Red Fox and the Chinese Leopard, but larger predators are no longer found there. Two species of non-native monkeys (rhesus macaque and long-tailed macaque) do flourish, but otherwise, local fauna consists of small mammals, reptiles, about 260 species of birds,<sup>16</sup> and the very rare pink dolphins that inhabit the waters near Hong Kong.<sup>17</sup>

In association with the World Wide Fund for Nature, Hong Kong maintains a marsh preserve for birds: the Mai Po Marsh. This is located along Hau Hoi Wan (Deep Bay) and the river boundary with Guangdong. The preserve is an important stopping point for birds migrating between Siberia and tropical Southeast Asia and Australia.<sup>18</sup>



© clipart.com  
18th-century depiction of a Hong Kong fishing village

## History

According to archeological discoveries, the earliest human habitation in what is now Hong Kong began in the Paleolithic era, as far back 39,000 years ago.<sup>19</sup> Scientists believe that the indigenous population, the Yue, were interacting with dynastic China by the time of the Qin dynasty (221-207 BCE). Records reveal that imperial rule over the region had been established by the Han dynasty (200 BCE-220 CE). The Cantonese, pushed by population pressure, settled in the area around 100 BCE, followed by the Hakka, a group that had migrated from the Yellow River Valley in the north, who were later followed by the Hoklo in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Early 19<sup>th</sup> century Hong Kong, home only to a small fishing population, did not offer much in terms of fertile land or a fresh water supply, and was known to be frequented by pirates.<sup>20</sup> A census in 1841 put the inhabitants on the island at about 7500.<sup>21</sup> The British,

<sup>14</sup> "Hong Kong flag," Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9403967>

<sup>15</sup> Earthtrends 2003 Country Profile: Hong Kong.

[http://www.earthtrends.org/pdf\\_library/country\\_profiles/bio\\_cou\\_344.pdf](http://www.earthtrends.org/pdf_library/country_profiles/bio_cou_344.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> "Chinese History," ibiblio, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/chap15.html>

<sup>17</sup> "Learn About the Dolphins," Hong Kong Dolphin Watch. <http://www.hkdolphinwatch.com>, Retrieved June 30, 2006

<sup>18</sup> "Chinese History," ibiblio, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/chap15.html>

<sup>19</sup> "Discovery rewrites Hong Kong's prehistory," *People's Daily Online*, January 12, 2006. As cited on History News Network. <http://historynewsnetwork.com/roundup/entries/20400.html>

[http://english.people.com.cn/200601/12/eng20060112\\_234751.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200601/12/eng20060112_234751.html). Retrieved July 13, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> "Hong Kong," Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9106286>

however, anxious to augment their opportunities along the key trade routes of the Far East, became interested in the commercial and strategic potential of its harbor. Thus, by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were using it as a naval re-supply point.<sup>22</sup>

Tea was a very popular import among the British, and in an attempt to balance trade between the two countries, they sought to sell opium from India to the Chinese. While this was successful, opium's addictive effects on its people was not well received by the Qing government, which then blocked the British from selling opium. This led to the First Opium War (1839-1842). With the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, China ceded Hong Kong Island and adjacent small islands to Britain in perpetuity, thus ending the war. Clashes over the treaty, as well as other events, led to the Second Opium War (1856-1860), in which the British were again victorious. The Treaty of Tianjin (1860) ceded 10 square km (4 square miles) of the Kowloon Peninsula to the British. Finally, in 1898, the British acquired a 99-year lease for the New Territories, predominately to assure Hong Kong's future defensibility.<sup>23</sup>

While it had grown somewhat slowly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hong Kong's population exploded during the 20<sup>th</sup>. A number of factors led to this increase: instability due to the Republican Revolution of 1911, followed by World War I (1914-1918), caused more Chinese to leave their homes and head for the island.<sup>24</sup> There did follow a period during which the population decreased drastically, when the Japanese attacked and occupied Hong Kong in 1941. During World War II, commerce was dramatically reduced, food was scarce, and many people fled to mainland China.<sup>25</sup> However, the trend of growth continued with the Communist takeover of China (1949), which caused hundreds of thousands of people, particularly farmers from neighboring Guangdong Province, to flee to Hong Kong during the famine-induced Great Leap Forward (1958).<sup>26</sup>

Though a United Nations trade embargo seriously affected the island's trade with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and North Korea (1951-53), Hong Kong's economy continued to grow. Further industrialization continued into the 1950s and 60s, when this economic boom, dependent upon cheap labor, precipitated social unrest and internal labor disputes.



Courtesy of wikipedia.org  
Japanese soldiers in Hong Kong, 1941

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<sup>21</sup> Wong, Richard. "Hong Kong Growing as Part of China: A Historical Perspective," The Asia Society Conference. <http://www.asiasociety.org/speeches/wong.html>

<sup>22</sup> "Chinese History," ibiblio, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/chap15.html>

<sup>23</sup> "Chinese History," ibiblio, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/chap15.html>

<sup>24</sup> "Chinese History," ibiblio, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/chap15.html>

<sup>25</sup> "Hong Kong," Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9106286>

<sup>26</sup> "Chinese History," ibiblio, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/chap15.html>

The 1967 riots were initially triggered by an industrial dispute that escalated into violent clashes between laborers and the police over a period of six months.<sup>27</sup> This was during the height of the Cultural Revolution in China. Youthful followers of Chairman Mao besieged Government House, the official residence of the British Governor, which was guarded by a handful of British soldiers. All mainland-Chinese-owned buildings were placarded with anti-British slogans. The Bank of China's loudspeakers poured out the same type of revolutionary propaganda that was coming over the airwaves in China.

The British were able to reassert control while maintaining good relations with the PRC. Afterwards, committees and departments were instated by the colonial government: crime-fighting committees, a housing authority, a land development corporation and the like. The aim was to transform the British Crown's last remaining colonial subjects, many of whom were one or two generations removed from toiling in the rice paddies of southern China, into "modern" citizens.<sup>28</sup>



Courtesy of wikipedia.org  
Government House in Hong Kong

Not having introduced direct suffrage weakened the British negotiating position when bilateral talks about the future of the territory opened in the early 1980s.<sup>29</sup> After several years of negotiations, on December 19, 1984, Britain and the People's Republic of China agreed that Hong Kong (comprising Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories) would become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China as of July 1, 1997, when Britain's lease expired. Declaring a policy of "One Country, Two Systems," China agreed to give Hong Kong considerable autonomy, allowing its existing social and economic systems to remain unchanged for a period of 50 years.<sup>30</sup>

The 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in Beijing, where the People's Liberation Army opened fire on unarmed pro-democracy demonstrators, inspired fears among Hong Kong residents. They had had no voice in the handover negotiations, and were apprehensive that China would not respect Hong Kong's autonomy. Over the next several years, many business people left and established residence elsewhere, increasing doubts about the territory's future. In 1991, Hong Kong's first direct legislative elections (which accounted for about 30 percent of the seats) were won almost entirely by liberal, pro-democracy candidates. No pro-China candidates were elected.

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<sup>27</sup> Yin, Wong Cheuk. "The 1967 Leftist Riots and Regime Legitimacy in Hong Kong," Hong Kong Culture and Society Program, University of Hong Kong.

[http://www.hku.hk/hkmsp/ccex/ehkcss01/issue3\\_ar\\_lawrence\\_wong.htm](http://www.hku.hk/hkmsp/ccex/ehkcss01/issue3_ar_lawrence_wong.htm)

<sup>28</sup> Chiu, Fred Yen-liang, "Whistling in the Dark: Statist Self-Encouragement and Civil Society in Hong Kong," Paper Abstract, The Association for Asian Studies.

<http://www.aasianst.org/absts/1997abst/china/c174.htm>

<sup>29</sup> The Chinese communist government always maintained that the treaties ceding land to the British had been foisted on the Qing imperial government. It made no demands for their return until the New Territories lease expired and then it wanted all of Hong Kong back even though the island had been ceded in perpetuity.

<sup>30</sup> Hong Kong Joint Declaration, International Information Programs, US Department of State.

[http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east\\_asia\\_pacific/china/hong\\_kong\\_joint\\_declaration.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east_asia_pacific/china/hong_kong_joint_declaration.html)

In 1992, Britain introduced a number of democratic measures which were denounced by China since they had not been agreed to in the joint declaration. Talks between the two governments proved fruitless, and in 1994, Hong Kong's legislature codified further democratic reforms in defiance of strong Chinese objections. In subsequent elections, pro-democracy candidates received about 60% of the popular vote.

Upon Hong Kong's return to Chinese control, Beijing followed through on its threat to abolish the democratically elected legislature set up in the waning years of British rule. Beijing has steadfastly emphasized the primacy of the Chinese central government in any decisions regarding future administrative reform, including direct elections.

### **Government**

On July 1, 1997, sovereignty over Hong Kong was restored to China, ending more than 150 years of British colonial control. Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China, with a high degree of autonomy in all matters except foreign and defense affairs. According to the Sino-British Joint Declaration (1984) and the Basic Law, or mini-constitution, Hong Kong will retain its political, economic, and judicial systems and unique way of life for 50 years and continue to participate in international agreements and organizations as a dependent territory.

The SAR government is represented by the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, who is not directly elected. Rather the position is appointed through an electoral college whose choice is ratified by the Chinese National People's Congress in Beijing. The law-making body is a legislative council (LegCo).<sup>31</sup> Elections were held in 1998, with pro-democracy parties taking 16 of the 20 directly elected seats. The rest of the 60 seats were chosen mostly by professional constituencies that had demonstrated an allegiance to Beijing.

Since Hong Kong's reversion to China, much of the focus of LegCo has been on implementing the Basic Law. In particular, Article 23 stipulates that the SAR shall enact laws to protect national security. The proposed legislation, which covered sedition, met with a groundswell of public opposition, including several large demonstrations over the specific provisions which would allow, for example, the government to tap telephones.<sup>32</sup> The legislation was subsequently withdrawn and shelved indefinitely.

The first appointed Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa, resigned in 2005. Health concerns and stress from his work schedule were cited as the official reasons he was unable to complete his second term. But many believe he may have been dismissed due to the failure of the anti-subversion bill.<sup>33</sup> In June 2005, Donald Tsang, a former civil servant popular with the Hong Kong public, was elected to serve the final two years of Tung Chee-hwa's term.

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<sup>31</sup> Hong Kong. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition, 2001-2005  
<http://www.bartleby.com/65/ho/HongKong.html>

<sup>32</sup> Overholt, William H. "Getting Beyond Boundaries," South China Morning Post, July 16, 2003. As cited on <http://www.rand.org/commentary/071603SCMP.html> Retrieved August 9, 2006

<sup>33</sup> "Hong Kong's leader Tung resigns," BBC News, March 10, 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4335061.stm>

## Economy

With a mountainous terrain lacking water and fertile land, Hong Kong's only natural asset is its sheltered anchorage. Its key strength is its people. A favored destination for Shanghai industrialists in the late 1940s, it was a manufacturing outpost by the 1960s, and—less than two decades later—a marketing economy of global stature. Throughout these transitions, the territory's prosperity has been widely ascribed to a merging of Chinese entrepreneurship with efficient laissez-faire British managerialism that allowed free-for-all capitalism to flourish.

Over the past 20 years, the territory's economy has undergone a fundamental shift as manufactures have taken a back seat to services. This reflects the relocation of labor-intensive manufacturing to southern China, particularly neighboring Guangdong Province, where costs are lower. Some 92.2 percent of Hong Kong's GDP was generated through the service industry in 2004, compared with 3.4 percent for manufactures. While manufactures account for around 75 of Hong Kong's import-export trade, these are primarily re-exported to or from China.<sup>34</sup> Manufactures still produced in Hong Kong are largely specialized, high value-added and technology-intensive niche products. This includes computers, electronic parts and components, industrial machinery, optical and photographic equipment, designer label clothing, and jewelry.



Hong Kong's future economic prospects depend heavily on its links with China, its role as a trade and service center for the PRC, and a financial center for the region. In the past decade, the Hong Kong and Chinese economies have become increasingly integrated, partly due to Hong Kong's structural shift away from manufacturing and toward services.

Mainland Chinese citizens can now travel to Hong Kong much more easily than in the past. PRC nationals can visit visa-free if they arrive via air from a third country. Tourism, which ranks as the third largest source of foreign exchange earnings in Hong Kong, is now actively promoted by both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. Mainland Chinese tourists mitigated the economic impact of the 1997 East Asian financial crisis here since China was largely unaffected, in contrast to other countries in the region. The 2003 SARS epidemic also had a severe impact on tourism in Hong Kong. Here, too, mainland tourists were among the first to return in large numbers.<sup>35</sup>

## Media

As a global center for international trade and finance, Hong Kong enjoys an extremely developed, urbanized communications environment. There are four local TV stations in

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<sup>34</sup> "Hong Kong Brief, January 2006," Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. [http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/hong\\_kong/hong\\_kong\\_brief.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/hong_kong/hong_kong_brief.html)

<sup>35</sup> Enright, Michael and Vincent Mak. "Mainland Chinese Travel Liberalisation and Hong Kong's SMEs in Late 2003," (Abstract). *Harvard Business Online*. [http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/b01/en/common/item\\_detail.jhtml;jsessionid=XZJ1RLEAYKGLYAKR GWDSELBQKE0YIISW?id=HKU307](http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/b01/en/common/item_detail.jhtml;jsessionid=XZJ1RLEAYKGLYAKR GWDSELBQKE0YIISW?id=HKU307)

Hong Kong, all privately owned. Two broadcast in English and two offer predominately Cantonese programs with some Mandarin content. Many of the programs that are produced in Hong Kong are for local viewing and command large followings across the border in China. 1.7 million Hong Kong residents have broadband subscriptions, and another 8.6 million have mobile phones. There are over sixty newspapers representing various languages from around the world with numerous competing publications in Chinese. Hong Kong has a fully established publishing and printing industry and is considered a safe heaven by those filing stories from neighboring countries where official censorship exists.<sup>36</sup>

This does not mean, however, there is no cause for concern. Some journalists have complained that the pressure to avoid harsh criticism of China has increased steadily since the 1997 handover. This is because the owners of most of the territory's print and broadcast outlets have business or political interests in China. But other journalists note that China continues to have little day-to-day control over media operations.<sup>37</sup> There is widespread agreement, however, that self-censorship is prevalent as a result of Hong Kong's reversion to China.<sup>38</sup>



© Jesse Warren  
Reporter and news crew

## Peoples

Hong Kong's population is estimated to be at 6.9 million as of July 2006.<sup>39</sup> While 95 percent of the people are ethnic Han Chinese, little more than half of its population was actually born in Hong Kong.<sup>40</sup> A large number of the Chinese population immigrated from Guangdong Province in China; a smaller percentage – fewer than 10 percent – are from other areas of China, particularly Fujian, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Taiwan.<sup>41</sup> The remaining 5 percent come from foreign countries, or have ancestors who came from overseas, particularly South Asia.<sup>42</sup> A mix of Filipinos, Japanese, Indonesians, Canadians, Americans, British, Australians, New Zealanders, Pakistanis, Indians, and Singaporeans, along with various other nationalities, makes up the rest of this heterogeneous population.<sup>43</sup>

There are a small number of distinct ethnic groups who can be traced to their original settlement in Hong Kong. These are the Tanka, or "Boat Dwellers," the Hoklo, the Punti, and the Hakka.

<sup>36</sup> "Hong Kong," Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9106286>

<sup>37</sup> "China," Committee to Protect Journalists <http://www.cpj.org/attacks04/asia04/china.html>

<sup>38</sup> Simon, Mark. "How the Market Muzzles Hong Kong's Media," The Jamestown Foundation. [http://www.jamestown.org/publications\\_details.php?volume\\_id=18&issue\\_id=645&article\\_id=4617](http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=18&issue_id=645&article_id=4617)

<sup>39</sup> "Hong Kong," The CIA World Factbook. <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/hk.html>

<sup>40</sup> The younger generation prefer to view themselves as Hong Kong-born citizens, rather than Han Chinese.

<sup>41</sup> "Hong Kong," Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9106286>

<sup>42</sup> "Chinese History," ibiblio, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/chap15.html>

<sup>43</sup> "Hong Kong," Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9106286>

### *Tanka* (“Boat Dwellers”)

Tanka is actually a derogatory term meaning “egg people.” The Tanka are supposedly descendants of General Lu Tsun, who staged a revolt against the emperor, and upon the general’s death, his people were persecuted and sent offshore. As a result they distanced themselves from the land-based population; all of their daily activities took place on boats, and they only went ashore when absolutely necessary (e.g. major boat repairs or to sell their catch). They took special care to avoid getting into trouble while on land. Although most have come ashore to dwell, there are still members of the older generation who prefer the traditional way of life and can be seen in their junks, or boats, off the waters of Aberdeen, Yau Ma Tei (near Kowloon), and Tai O, off the northwest tip of Lantau Island.<sup>44</sup>



© Steve & Tanja Butcher  
Tanka fisherman in Tai O

### *Hoklo*

The Hoklo people are native to Fujian and are primarily fishermen and manual laborers. They are alleged to have been the first people to show commercial interest in Macau as a trading center for the southern provinces. Nowadays, they celebrate the birthday of the sea goddess, Tin Hau, on the 23rd day of the third moon by decorating their boats with colorful ornaments and sailing to her temples to pray for protection at sea.

### *Punti*

The Punti (“local people”) migrated to Hong Kong in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and settled in the fertile plains. They included the Five Great Clans who began settling in the area during the 12th century: the Tang, Kat, Hau, Pang, Lui and Min. Some of their walled villages can still be seen today in places such as Kam Tin and Fanling.

### *Hakka*

The Hakka, meaning “newcomers” or “guest people” in Cantonese, began to settle in what is now Hong Kong in 1648. Because the most fertile areas had already been settled, they had to occupy the poorer land found in the hilly areas. They sometimes lived in walled villages, built to protect their inhabitants from both wild animals and pirates. Tsang Tai Uk, now a museum, is an excellent example of a Hakka village. Traditionally farmers, they grew sweet potatoes, rice, and vegetables. They are still identifiable by their unique clothing: black or blue loose-fitting work clothes known as *shanfu* (“shirt and trousers”) worn by both men and women. While originally worn while working in the fields, women can still be seen wearing their *liangmao* (“cool hat”) today. Women took care of the household in addition to working in the field where they do all the jobs men do.

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<sup>44</sup> “Welcome to Hong Kong,” Oriental Travel & Tours S/B.  
[http://www.marimari.com/content/hong\\_kong/general\\_info/people/main.html](http://www.marimari.com/content/hong_kong/general_info/people/main.html)

When they were not farming, the Hakka made mud bricks and did cloth work and handicrafts.<sup>45</sup> Today, the Hakka can be found living in Yuen Long, Kam Tin (north of Tai Mo Shan), in the New Territories. The Hakka language is a member of the Sino-Tibetan, Chinese language family.<sup>46</sup> Examples of Hakka walled villages can be seen at the Sam Tung Uk Museum and the Sheung Yiu Folk Museum.

## Language Groups

Cantonese (*Yue*) and English are the two official languages of Hong Kong, though the former is by far the more prominent. With the departure of the British, the use of English drastically decreased. By contrast, the number of Mandarin speakers is growing due to Hong Kong's reversion to China where Mandarin, or *Putonghua*, which literally means "common language," is the official language. Public service broadcasts in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin have been common. There are also a number of widely spoken native dialects. These include, Hakka and Shanghainese.

### *Cantonese*

Cantonese (*Yue*) is classified as a member of the Sino-Tibetan language family, and is the most widely spoken Chinese dialect in Hong Kong.<sup>47</sup> It is the medium of instruction, business, media, and government. Cantonese has appeared in its written form since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has two standard written forms, one formal, the other colloquial. The formal form is different from spoken Cantonese, but comparable to Mandarin Chinese, *Putonghua*, literally common language, and can be understood by Mandarin speakers without too much struggle. The colloquial form, on the other hand, is closer to spoken Cantonese and is therefore incomprehensible to Mandarin speakers unless the sentences are simple and related to daily life. In Hong Kong, colloquial Cantonese is written with a combination of traditional Chinese characters as well as over one thousand extra characters created expressly for Cantonese.<sup>48</sup> Other Yue dialects spoken in Hong Kong include Tiosanese (Seiyap or Siyi) and Teochiu.



© sxc.hu  
Busy street in Hong Kong

### *South Asian Languages*

A visible community of Indians and Pakistanis, estimated at 0.05 percent of the population, has been living in Hong Kong for several generations and have permanent residence status. They speak fluent Cantonese and English, besides their own dialects. Many are the descendents of the soldiers brought over by the British to fight the Opium Wars against China in the 1800s.

<sup>45</sup> "The Hong Kong Story" Exhibition Materials, The Hong Kong Museum of History [http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/Museum/History/en/ex\\_permanent.php](http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/Museum/History/en/ex_permanent.php)

<sup>46</sup> "Hakka," Ethnologue: Languages of the World. <http://www.ethnologue.com>

<sup>47</sup> "Yue," Ethnologue: Languages of the World <http://www.ethnologue.com>

<sup>48</sup> "Cantonese," Omniglot. <http://www.omniglot.com>

# Religion

## Introduction

Hong Kong's Basic Law protects its citizens' freedom to practice religion. Reflecting its diverse population, many religions are practiced in Hong Kong. These include Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Judaism.<sup>49</sup>

The two religions with the most adherents are Buddhism and Taoism. Buddhism originated in India in the sixth century BCE. A core tenet of Buddhism is that a being will be reincarnated continuously until it has reached *nirvana*, or enlightenment, at which point it is finally free from the suffering that is part of human existence. Named for its founder, Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, Buddhist teachings include the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path (rules to live by).<sup>50</sup> Buddha is the revered main figure, who is venerated as one who has already achieved enlightenment. Buddhist gods include Kwan Yin (*Avalokitesvara*), the goddess of mercy, and Kuan-Ti, considered the Protector of Buddhism.<sup>51</sup>

Taoism, which is indigenous to China, is believed to be the philosophy of Lao-Tse, who lived in the sixth century BCE. The *tao* (way, or path) is considered the source of all creation and the force behind all of nature. Taoism asserts that it is through living in harmony with nature and without excess concern for money and material possessions that we can lead better lives.<sup>52</sup> Major Taoist deities include Tin Hau, Queen of Heaven and protector of all seafarers, who embodies the importance of sea to the people of Hong Kong, and Pak Tai, the god of the sea.<sup>53</sup>



© sxc.hu  
Buddhist statue

The Christians of Hong Kong are divided among Catholic (about four percent) and over fifty Protestant denominations. There are approximately 80,000 Muslims in Hong Kong, more than half of whom are Chinese. The Hindu community numbers around 12,000, and there are also practicing Zoroastrians and Jews.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "Hong Kong SAR: Religion," Philanthropy and the Third Sector in Asia and the Pacific, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia. <http://www.asianphilanthropy.org>

<sup>50</sup> Boeree, C. George, "An Introduction to Buddhism," Shippensburg University, PA. <http://www.ship.edu/%7Ecgboree/buddhaintro.html>

<sup>51</sup> Buddhist Deities and Bodhisattvas. Buddha Dharma Education Association, Inc. <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/deities.htm>

<sup>52</sup> Berling, Judith A. "Background Essay: Taoism." 2005. <http://www.askasia.org/teachers/essays/essay.php?no=40/>

<sup>53</sup> "Buddhist and Taoist Communities, Meeting Your Needs," Hong Kong Tourism Board [http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/travelneeds/faith/mk\\_fait\\_budd.jhtml](http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/travelneeds/faith/mk_fait_budd.jhtml)

<sup>54</sup> "Hong Kong SAR: Religion," Philanthropy and the Third Sector in Asia and the Pacific, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia <http://www.asianphilanthropy.org>

## Discussing Religion

Hong Kong is an open-minded community when it comes to religion. Conversations centering on religion are not common, but when they occur will generally not lead to arguments. Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists, Taoists, Hindus, and Muslims co-exist amicably, each with their own full-fledged organization, leaders, churches, temples, and mosques.

## Places of Worship

Local temples in Hong Kong often include shrines of differing belief systems. For example, Buddhist temples may also contain shrines to Taoist deities, as well as the other way around. Other services are also offered at temples. These include fortunetelling, *feng shui*,<sup>55</sup> and funeral and memorial services. Hong Kong's Chinese tend to use religion as a way of increasing their success in personal and business endeavors, which includes communicating with and appeasing the spirits of their ancestors. *Feng shui* and the Chinese Zodiac are consulted when choosing dates for virtually any new undertaking or important event such as a wedding or funeral.<sup>56</sup>

There are over 600 places of worship in Hong Kong.<sup>57</sup> One of the most famous temples is the Wong Tai Sin Temple on the Kowloon Peninsula. This Taoist temple is well known not just in Hong Kong, but in Chinese communities all over the world. The Wong Tai Sin Temple recently began to offer wedding services, which is highly unusual for this type of location.<sup>58</sup> Its Confucian Hall (where Confucius is honored), Three Saint Hall (where Kwan Yin is worshipped alongside two saints), and Po Chai Hall (Chinese Herbal Clinic offering free consultations and medicines to the public) together well illustrate the eclectic religious and spiritual nature of Hong Kong worshippers in general.<sup>59</sup>



© Tommy Wong  
A woman lights incense at Wong Tai Sin Temple

Another popular temple is Che-Kung Temple in the New Territories in the rural area of Tai Wai. This temple was named after a famous general who helped stop a rebellion in Southern China around 1000 CE. While its inner, older temple is not open to visitors, the modern outer building is. Many people visit this temple on the third day of the Chinese

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<sup>55</sup> Feng shui is the Chinese art or practice of positioning objects, especially graves, buildings, and furniture, based on a belief in patterns of yin and yang and the flow of chi that have positive and negative effects. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, by Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000.

<sup>56</sup> "Windows on Asia," Asian Studies Department, Michigan State University  
<http://www.asia.msu.edu/eastasia/HongKong/religion.html>

<sup>57</sup> "Religion in Hong Kong," South Island School, Hong Kong  
[http://departments.sis.edu.hk/re/religion\\_in\\_hong\\_kong.htm](http://departments.sis.edu.hk/re/religion_in_hong_kong.htm)

<sup>58</sup> "A Pilgrimage to Wong Tai Sin," Hong Kong Tourism Board  
[http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/mustknow/hkstory/hk\\_stor\\_wong.jhtml](http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/mustknow/hkstory/hk_stor_wong.jhtml)

<sup>59</sup> Sik Sik Yuen's Wong Tai Sin Temple, [http://www.siksikyuen.org.hk/ssy\\_en/page/wongtaisin.php](http://www.siksikyuen.org.hk/ssy_en/page/wongtaisin.php)

New Year to wish General Che “happy birthday,” as well as to have good luck bestowed upon them for the coming year.<sup>60</sup>

The draw of the Po Lin (Precious Lotus) Monastery on rural Lantau Island is the 200-tonne (220-ton) seated Buddha (or *Tian Tan*). It is the largest seated Buddha statue in the world. This bronze statue is 34 meters (112 feet) high, took ten years to complete, and was made public in 1993.<sup>61</sup>

Within Chinese temples, visitors burn joss sticks and red candles in respect to the gods or goddesses. Worshippers might place their palms together and shake them a few times before statue. The devout might bow or even kneel down and *kowtow* (touch their forehead to the ground). As they shake their hands, they whisper to the gods or goddesses, asking for blessings in such matters as family health, prosperity, success in business, or even for luck at the horse-racing track.

**Exchange 1: May I enter?**

Soldier:	May I enter?	ohoya leymah?
Civilian:	Yes.	hoyee

Temple etiquette requires that one not raise one’s voice while inside, and no gambling is permitted within the premises. Feeding temple animals such as turtles or fish in their ponds is not allowed. While it is not mandated, it is usually customary and polite to offer a small donation (in a designated box) when visiting a temple. Tipping temple staff is not permitted.<sup>62</sup>

**Exchange 2: Do I need to take off my shoes?**

Soldier:	Do I need to take off my shoes?	oyoo cho haaimah?
Civilian:	No.	m-hoyee

**Cemeteries**

Because space is at a premium, Hong Kong’s burial plots are among the most expensive in the world. Due to these high prices as well as the savings in both land and natural resources (wood for coffins), the government strongly encourages cremation. Cremation also allows a family to take their loved one with them should they move overseas.<sup>63</sup>

Open funeral processions are not allowed in Hong Kong, so funeral ceremonies are held indoors. The actual rites



© Lama Jey Tsong Kapa  
Hong Kong cemetery

<sup>60</sup> “Che Kung Temple,” Hong Kong Tourism Board  
[http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/touring/hkiidistricts/ta\\_dist\\_sha](http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/touring/hkiidistricts/ta_dist_sha)

<sup>61</sup> “Giant Buddha,” Hong Kong Tourism Board  
[http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/touring/hkiidistricts/ta\\_dist\\_isla](http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/touring/hkiidistricts/ta_dist_isla)

<sup>62</sup> “Rules and Regulations,” Sik Sik Yuen’s Wong Tai Sin Temple  
[http://www.siksikyuen.org.hk/ssy\\_en/page/wongtaisin/rules.php](http://www.siksikyuen.org.hk/ssy_en/page/wongtaisin/rules.php)

<sup>63</sup> “Rites of passage: China.(expensive rituals for the dead outlawed in China and cremation is recommended).” *The Economist* (US) 335.n7910 (April 15, 1995): 34(2).

are contingent on the religious traditions of the family. They are attended by family and close friends who traditionally honor the deceased by bowing three times in front of the body. Selecting a date for the funeral and a site for the grave or shrine will usually involve *feng shui* and the Chinese Zodiac. It is not standard practice to send a note expressing condolences, but offering them directly to the bereaved family is acceptable.

**Exchange 3:** I would like to offer my condolences.

Soldier:	I would like to offer my condolences to you and your family	ogan hong ley to maai ley kah yen ching-oy
Civilian:	Thank you.	to che

**Religious Holidays**

*Birth of Buddha*

The most significant religious holiday in Hong Kong is the birthday of Buddha, which is celebrated on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month and usually falls in May. This festival is a time for worshippers to revere Buddha. The day is usually spent in temples and monasteries around Hong Kong, where monks prepare by cleaning in and around the temples and washing statues of Buddha.<sup>64</sup>

*Chung Yeung Festival*

This Taoist holiday is celebrated on the ninth day of the ninth month of the lunar calendar, which means it falls in October. Its origins go back to a folktale in which a devil was wreaking havoc on some villagers. An old Taoist master told a boy named He Jing how to defeat the devil. The day before the devil was supposed to reappear, the master sent the boy off with a package of leaves and liquor-soaked chrysanthemums. He Jing instructed the villagers to climb to the top of a nearby mountain with leaves pinned to their clothes and glasses of liquor in their hands. When the devil surfaced, it became dizzy from the scent and He Jing was able to kill it with a sword. The villagers held parties and drank chrysanthemum liquor to celebrate. The next year, they climbed the mountain and did the same, giving rise to the annual celebration of this festival. Both are popular ways to celebrate the Chung Yeung Festival in Hong Kong today.<sup>65</sup>



© Owen Rodda  
Buddha statue

<sup>64</sup>Hong Kong Tourism Board <http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/heritage/festivals/>

<sup>65</sup> American Chamber of Commerce [http://www.amcham.org.hk/hongkong/public\\_holidays.html](http://www.amcham.org.hk/hongkong/public_holidays.html)

## Traditions

### Greetings

Shaking hands is common in the business communities between males, but it is best to take your cue from your host. Male and a female hand shaking is becoming increasingly acceptable, though it is still not common in the business circles. Chinese are not accustomed to hugging, even among family members. It may be considered wild and unbecoming.

Greetings are usually verbal and generally refer to food, such as “Have you eaten yet?” The appropriate response is “Yes,” whether true or not, because the question is akin to being asked, “How are you doing?” by an acquaintance.

#### Exchange 4: Good morning!

Soldier:	Good morning!	jaw san!
Local:	Good morning.	jaw san

People in Hong Kong are not inclined to initiate discussions with strangers, even if they are neighbors. Children are taught from a very young age not to talk to strangers. This may be a holdover from earlier times, when traditional beliefs held that involvement with strangers and their problems would create troubles for your own family. In contrast to Americans who may greet strangers on the street, Chinese in general avert their eyes, or look down when they see a stranger approaching. They usually reserve greetings for acquaintances or friends.



© Alex Winter  
Flower vendor

#### Exchange 5: Good afternoon!

Soldier:	Good afternoon!	mown!
Local:	Good afternoon.	mown

Use titles in a business environment when greeting or addressing people. Titles are considered an important way to show standing and rank. If they don't have a specific title, then Mr. or Mrs., or Ms. should be used with a surname.

#### Exchange 6: Are you doing well? (Informal)

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. ____.	ley ho, ____ sin sahng
Local:	Hello.	ley ho
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	ley ho mah?
Local:	Yes.	ho

It is important to address the oldest or most senior person first, respectfully asking about their well-being.<sup>66</sup>

**Exchange 7: How are you?**

Soldier:	How are you?	bey homah?
Local:	Fine, thank you.	ho, yaw sam

People in Hong Kong are generally friendly and outgoing once they have been introduced.

**Exchange 8: Good evening.**

Soldier:	Good evening.	mah non
Local:	Good evening.	mah non

As a result of the years of British colonial rule, the residents of Hong Kong are familiar with western culture, traditions and behavior. Men and women are allowed to interact as they wish. There are no social conventions prohibiting men from speaking to women.

**Exchange 9:**

Soldier:	Good night.	tso taw
Local:	Good night.	tso taw

**Hospitality**

Hospitality is informal; calling before visiting is not necessary, only perhaps to confirm the host or hostess is home. Be careful not to wear blue or white clothes. These are considered colors of mourning.

Before entering the home, take notice of whether you should remove your shoes. If the host is in plastic indoor sandals then take off your own shoes and you will probably be provided with a pair of guest sandals to wear inside.

**Exchange 10: I appreciate your hospitality.**

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	ngah dzan haai daai ho do dzeh ney ge eed tseung dzyu doy
Local:	You're welcome.	imsey hah hey

When visiting, it is usually expected that a small gift be brought along for the host, such as fruit, flowers, candy, or wine. Not having something to offer would be thought of as impolite, especially on the first visit if a meal has been prepared on your behalf.



© Stuart Mills  
Accept and give gifts with both hands

<sup>66</sup> “Business Etiquette in Hong Kong,” Executive Planet.  
[http://www.executiveplanet.com/index.php?title=Hong\\_Kong](http://www.executiveplanet.com/index.php?title=Hong_Kong)

**Exchange 11: Did you make this meal yourself?**

Soldier:	Did you make this meal yourself?	tsahn fahn haai ley dzee gey jan so jee gah?
Local:	I did.	hayo, jee gah

Be careful not to compliment any particular object in a host's home – they may feel compelled to offer the item to you as a gift. However, thanking your hosts for their hospitality is always a nice gesture, and compliments on the cooking are always welcome.

**Exchange 12: The meal was very good.**

Soldier:	The meal was very good.	tsahn fahn tsani ho sey
Local:	Thanks.	to che

**Giving Gifts**

Giving gifts is customary in Hong Kong. It is a somewhat ritualized process. If you receive a gift, you will want to return the favor. When you receive a gift, it is important to accept it with both hands to show respect. Do not unwrap it in front of person that gave the gift, but thank them and set it aside to open later. Opening it immediately implies greed and impatience, and also can set up a potentially awkward situation if the gift is not well-liked. Giving a gift that is not wrapped is a sign of bad manners.

Welcome gifts include things from your own country, such as folk art, candy, wine, or flowers. It is also acceptable to host a banquet as a gift and it is expected in return if one was hosted on your behalf.

Items that may offend as gifts are as follows:

- Clocks (imply death)
- Books (thought to bestow a losing curse)
- Blankets (believed to decrease your wealth)
- Green hats (very offensive gesture signifying a man's wife is unfaithful)
- Gifts wrapped in blue (blue represents mourning)

**Dress Code**

Dress codes in Hong Kong are progressively more relaxed. For men, a suit and tie is no longer always necessary for office attire. For women, it is acceptable to wear slacks to the office.

However, sandals, which are traditionally worn inside the house, and shorts, which are considered vacation wear, are not appropriate for formal occasions or as professional dress—no matter what the temperature outside. Women can wear fairly short skirts and expose their shoulders, but men should not remove their shirts in public except in beach and swimming situations.

## Celebrations

The Basic Law in Hong Kong provides for 18 holidays, 12 of which are statutory. This means that the employers are required by law to give the day off with pay to those who have worked for them longer than three months. Lunar calendar holidays are celebrated according to moon phases, thus they fall on a slightly different date each year.

### Exchange 13: Will you celebrate the festival next week?

Soldier:	Will you celebrate the festival next week?	lee wihing juk hah go lah baai gey heng dee mah?
Local:	Yes.	hoo-oy

### *Official Holidays*

When Hong Kong was a colony of Britain, it observed the same public holidays as the United Kingdom, including, for example, the Queen's birthday. After reversion to China, some of these holidays were replaced by PRC holidays such as National Day. This holiday is observed on October 1<sup>st</sup> but is an official two-day holiday.

### *Western Public Holidays*

Christmas is celebrated in Hong Kong as is the British holiday the day after, Boxing Day, also making it a two-day official holiday. People have parties and go out in the city to see the lights. Whereas in the United States and Europe Christmas is a family affair, for Hong Kong Chinese it is a public holiday which calls for enjoying a nice meal at a restaurant.<sup>67</sup> Easter also remains an official holiday in Hong Kong, as does Good Friday.

### *Tomb Sweeping Day*

Called *ching ming* (clear and bright), this is the day when the living pay respect to their departed ancestors by visiting and tidying their graves, burning joss sticks, and offering food and prayers. Traditionally held on the third day of the third Chinese lunar month, when spring returns in Hong Kong, *ching ming* is now held annually on April 5th except in leap years, when it falls on April 4th.

### *Lunar New Year*

Lunar New Year, usually falling between late January and the middle of February, is the most important Chinese holiday. In Hong Kong, as in China, the first three days of the new year are official holidays. Almost all businesses are closed, though festivities go on for two weeks. Many Hong Kong Chinese take their annual vacation during this time. Returning to the ancestral village in China is common for older people while the young may go abroad. Traditionally, it is a time to visit family and friends while exchanging gifts among the adults. *Lai see* (lucky money) is given to children and single adults. Cursing or speaking of bad luck is forbidden as the new year dawns.



© Tommy Wong  
Little girl at the  
Mid-Autumn Festival

<sup>67</sup> Government of Hong Kong SAR of the PRC. <http://www.info.gov.hk>

The festivities can be traced back thousands of years, and involve a series of colorful legends and traditions. One of the most famous legends is that of *nian* (year), an extremely cruel and ferocious beast that the ancients believed would devour people on New Year's Eve. *Nian* was said to fear the color red, the light of fire, and loud noises. To ward him off, red-paper couplets were pasted on door frames, torches lit, and firecrackers set off throughout the dark hours of the night. As the sun rose, feelings of triumph and renewal filled the air for successfully keeping him at bay.<sup>68</sup> The most popular Cantonese New Year's greeting is *gong hey*, meaning "congratulations" or *gong hey fat choi*, meaning "congratulations and prosperity."

Visitors that are staying in Hong Kong for Chinese New Year can present red envelopes with money (*hong bao*) to the children of the locals they interact with professionally. The money should always be presented in an even amount and consist of fresh bills.<sup>69</sup>

### *Dragon Boat Festival*

The Dragon Boat Festival (*tuen ng*), which usually falls in mid-June, honors the sacrifice of Qu Yuan, an ancient Chinese poet who took his own life by jumping into a river to protest against the emperor, with whom he disagreed. When the news spread that he had drowned, people threw rice balls into the river to prevent the fish from eating his body. Dragon boat races are held to commemorate the day and people eat rice dumplings wrapped in lotus leaves.

### *Mid-Autumn Festival*

Usually falling in late September, Mid-Autumn Festival celebrates the overthrow of Mongolian rule over China and the establishment of the Ming Dynasty. Rebel leaders who sought to get rid of the Mongols coordinated their attack by hiding messages inside moon cakes. The plan worked, and to celebrate the success of the rebellion, on the 15th day of the eighth month, Chinese families gather to eat moon cakes, put up colorful lanterns and watch the full moon. Moon cakes, which have red bean paste inside, resemble thick cookies. The cakes made by professional bakers usually have Chinese characters stamped on their flaky surface and are for sale everywhere before the holiday.

## **Food**

Hong Kong enjoys a well-deserved reputation as a locale that offers a wide range of Chinese cuisine as well as Western and Indian food to suit all pocketbooks.

### **Exchange 14:** Are you still serving breakfast?

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast / lunch / dinner?	dzong hah ee giyu dzo tsahn / m tsahn / mahn fahn mah?
Local:	Yes.	ta

<sup>68</sup> "About Hong Kong," American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong.  
[http://www.amcham.org.hk/hongkong/public\\_holidays.html](http://www.amcham.org.hk/hongkong/public_holidays.html)

<sup>69</sup> "Business Etiquette in Hong Kong," Executive Planet.  
[http://www.executiveplanet.com/index.php?title=Hong\\_Kong](http://www.executiveplanet.com/index.php?title=Hong_Kong)

One of the most popular Cantonese customs involving food is *dim sum*, which literally means “point from the heart” or “pick one’s food according to one’s wishes.” *Dim sum* are dumplings filled with pork, beef, shrimp, chicken, or vegetables. On Sunday mornings, it is quite common for restaurants serving *dim sum* brunch to be packed, with guests waiting at the entrance for their tables. They are seated according to numbers assigned as the guest arrived. After being seated at a traditionally shaped round table, the waitress first offers tea or other beverages.



© Simon Choy  
Chopsticks

**Exchange 15:** I’d like tea.

Soldier:	I’d like tea.	o song yuboy chah
Local:	Sure.	ta

**Exchange 16:** Do you have any more water?

Soldier:	Do you have any more water?	ley chong ya moo sayah?
Local:	Sure.	yahwu

Then, there is wait staff pushing their trolleys with a variety of small dishes, which include steamed dumplings or desserts. Each dish generally costs the equivalent of about one to two US dollars.

**Exchange 17:** I’d like some soup.

Soldier:	I’d like some soup.	oh song ye win taahng
Local:	Sure.	ta

In contrast to other regional Chinese cuisines, Cantonese food is not spicy.

**Exchange 18:** Do you have any dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have any dessert?	leyo mo faain haw tee banah?
Local:	Yes, we have tapioca pudding.	odeya saai mah bodeen

The person who issued the invitation should pay the bill.

**Exchange 19:** Can you get me my bill?

Soldier:	Can you get me my bill?	m-gam aaidahn?
Local:	Sure.	ta

Chinese restaurant staff would be unfamiliar with the concept of separate checks.

**Exchange 20:** Put this all on one bill, OK?

Soldier:	Put this all on one bill, OK?	jang cheun boy eh gaai maai yed jang jang dan do dag mah?
Local:	OK.	ta

A gratuity may be added in the case of a large party. Leaving a small additional tip would be appreciated, but be sure to place it in a prominent location on the table.

In addition to *dim sum*, the following are traditional Cantonese dishes:

- Sweet and Sour Pork (This is fried pork covered with a sweet and sour sauce. It is also a favorite dish among Westerners.)
- Beef in Fried Noodles (This is a very popular and inexpensive dish.)
- Steamed Fish (This is also very popular and relatively expensive. Fish used in this dish comes from the sea or rivers and ponds in mainland China.)
- Drunken Shrimps (Live shrimp are cooked in liquor in front of the guests.)
- Fried Noodles (The noodles are deep fried to become crispy, together with shreds of pork, mushroom, and green onion.)

Fried pigeons, chickens, and ducks are popular delicacies in Cantonese cuisine. Buns with BBQ pork (normally three pieces on a dish) are also well liked, especially by children.

### **Guns and explosives**

In the entire Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, it is against the law to have, own, or stock firearms or explosives of any type. This includes firecrackers even for special celebrations or on festival days. The sale of firecrackers was banned in Hong Kong after the 1967 riots. Any public celebrations using firecrackers sponsored by the government or private corporations for New Year's or any other holiday must receive special permission.<sup>70</sup>

### **Offensive Language**

Offensive language has almost disappeared in public. Refrain from using it. You may even be legally prosecuted if you direct foul language at a woman.

Also, refrain from vocalizing your opinions too freely, asking about others' opinions, or asking where they are going. Too much information or asking about personal information is considered vulgar and can make Chinese uncomfortable. Do not speak of the political situation in China; it is not considered polite conversation.

### **Do's and Don'ts**

- Do be aware that Chinese personal space may be smaller than what is customary in the United States.
- Do bring some sort of small gift for the host/hostess when making social visits.

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<sup>70</sup> Bilingual Law information System. Government of Hong Kong SAR of the PRC.  
<http://www.legislation.gov.hk/index.htm>

- Do not wear blue or white to social gatherings. These colors are associated with death and bereavement.
- Do not give a gift that is not wrapped.
- Do not touch a person. Touching, like patting the shoulder or putting your hand on someone's arm is not acceptable; most Chinese do not appreciate overly familiar contact from strangers.
- Do not point with your fore-finger – use your entire hand.
- Do not beckon with your fore-finger crooked; instead use your whole hand – palm down.
- Do not cross your legs when sitting if you are a male. Instead, keep your feet planted firmly on the ground. Only females may sit cross-legged. Regardless of gender, keep your hands in your lap when sitting down.
- Do not be too noisy or forceful. Chinese culture appreciates modest behavior in all facets of life.<sup>71</sup>
- Do not take your shirt off, even in the hottest weather. This applies to women and men.
- Do not write anyone's name in red ink. Only the names of dead persons are written in this manner.

## Urban Life

### Pattern of Urban Settlement

Land in Hong Kong is owned by the government and renewable leases are granted or sold via public auction, tender or (in special circumstances) private treaty to real estate developers. Leases are valid up to 2047 for land in all areas of the Special Administrative Region. There is some uncertainty about the future of these leases after 2047 vis-à-vis China's land policy.

The housing pattern and ownership system are the consequence of large squatter settlements comprised of mainland refugees who flooded into Hong Kong during various times over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Such living conditions posed both fire and health hazards for which



© sxc.hu  
Run-down apartment complex

<sup>71</sup> "Business Etiquette in Hong Kong," Executive Planet. <http://www.executiveplanet.com/etiquette/Hong+Kong.html>

public housing was seen as the solution.<sup>72</sup> Initially, living conditions in public housing were very basic, with several families sharing communal cooking facilities. Today large public housing towers offer single family apartments which are small by western standards, usually ranging from 350 to 1500 square feet, at a subsidized rent.

The territory's ever-increasing population means demand for housing remains strong. And this in turn has pushed rents up to very high levels, so families in Hong Kong have little choice but to buy property as a means to protect their savings. This was particularly true during the waning years of British colonial rule when Hong Kong experienced a real estate market bubble.

While there are no real class distinctions owing to the fact the rapidly expanding economy has offered the prospect of upward mobility to everyone, property ownership divides Hong Kong society into "haves" and "have-nots." The ever-widening gulf which separated them became a cause for government concern.<sup>73</sup> Since the handover in 1997, government policy has been to promote home-ownership through various "visible hand" schemes. Despite extremely unfavorable price-income ratios, a slight majority of Hong Kong residents now own their own homes.<sup>74</sup>

The issue has not been entirely resolved, however. Rising property prices have implications for a whole range of public sector policy initiatives. The burgeoning number of retirees, for example, increasingly find their pensions and savings inadequate to support the lifestyle they had planned for during their years in the workforce. So they lobby the government for public assistance and old-age social security support.

### Daily Life in Urban Areas

Professional life in Hong Kong is similar to that in the West. Typical work days are Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with a one-hour lunch. It is not unusual for someone to work overtime when needed, such as a half day on Saturday, or every other Saturday.



© sxc.hu  
Construction in Hong Kong

Men and women are considered equals whether at work or at home. And the presence of nearly 100,000 live-in Filipina domestic workers has enabled many married women with young children to join the workforce.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Hong Kong Housing Authority.

<http://www.housingauthority.gov.hk/en/residential/prh/housingfamilies/0,,00.html>

<sup>73</sup> Wong, Richard. "Hong Kong Growing as Part of China: A Historical Perspective," Asia Society Conference. June 15, 1998. <http://www.asiasociety.org/speeches/wong.html>

<sup>74</sup> Davis, Deborah and Kin-man Chan, "The Consequences of Home Ownership in Post-Handover Hong Kong," 2003. [http://research.yale.edu/sociology/faculty/docs/davis/davchan\\_homeown.pdf](http://research.yale.edu/sociology/faculty/docs/davis/davchan_homeown.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> "Migrants in Hong Kong: Experience, Problems and Responses," Philippine Consul General of Hong Kong, April 6, 2006. Hong Kong Baptist University. <http://www.philcongen-hk.com/media/speech040606.htm>

**Exchange 21: Do you have a job?**

Soldier:	Do you have a job?	ley yaw mokung chawah?
Local:	Yes.	yahwu

**Sanitation**

Streets and alleys in Hong Kong are kept clean, and the sewage system works well, even in spite of the summer monsoons. It is usually safe to drink the water, but to be extra cautious, it is normal to boil it before drinking.

**Exchange 22: Where is the bathroom?**

Soldier:	Where is the bathroom?	sezo gahn haai bing do?
Local:	Over there.	go bing

**Banking and Telecommunications**

Traveler's checks are almost obsolete in Hong Kong. Banks charge a substantial fee to change them and the rate offered by private money changers is not good. It's best to use a debit card because ATMs can be found everywhere, including transportation hubs like the airport and train station. They operate on a 24-hour basis and are part of the international "Plus" and "Star" network, so withdrawing money, which will be Hong Kong dollars, against an American bank account is easy.

Local telephone calls are cheap and often free from hotel lobbies and other places frequented by international visitors.

**Exchange 23: May I use your phone?**

Soldier:	May I use your phone?	hoyee zey madee wadah mah?
Local:	Sure.	hoyee

Note that telephone numbers in Hong Kong have eight digits. If you need to call someone, here's how to ask for their phone number.

**Exchange 24: What is your phone number?**

Soldier:	What is your phone number?	ley gey ho deen wah ah?
Local:	My phone number is 2132 5477.	ngah geh deen wah ho mah haai e eyed sahm ee m sey tsad tsad

**Education**

Education is free and compulsory for all children ages 6 through 15. Over 90 percent of Hong Kong's population is literate and most people have completed, at the minimum, a primary school education.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, US Department of State Background Notes.

**Exchange 25: Do your children go to school?**

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	ley dee saai lo yahmo fong howah?
Local:	Yes.	yahwu

Pre-school is optional, begins at age three, and lasts for three years. Elementary, or primary, school begins at age six and lasts for six years. After that, students will attend five years of junior secondary education, where the first three of those years (Forms 1, 2 & 3) are spent on general subjects. The next two years (Forms 4 & 5) are spent preparing for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE), which is similar to the British Ordinary Level Examinations. Most students stay on for Forms 4 & 5, while some choose to take vocational training full time instead.

**Exchange 26: Is there a school nearby?**

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	foo gahn ya mo ho hawah?
Local:	Yes.	yahwu

Only a small percentage of high school graduates attend college or university on a full-time basis. There are seven colleges and universities, including two that are poly-technical, as well as the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts, which offers studies in dance, music, theater, and technical arts. Additionally, there are more than a dozen technical institutes, colleges, and teacher-training colleges with large numbers of part-time students.

The University of Hong Kong uses English as the medium of instruction while Chinese University uses Cantonese. Mandarin is widely heard on both campuses since mainland Chinese nationals who have completed advanced studies outside China have been recruited as faculty members. Institutions of higher education in Hong Kong have strong connections with their counterparts in commonwealth countries which were forged under British colonial rule.

**Shopping**

Purchasing from street vendors is legal. They are called hawkers in Hong Kong. However, they are forbidden by law to sell smuggled cigarettes, soda, food prepared elsewhere, pornography or counterfeit goods. What they typically offer are household items, clothing, small appliances, etc. It is perfectly acceptable to negotiate over the price of whatever is being sold.



© Alex Vinter  
Street vendors in Hong Kong

**Exchange 27:** I can give you this much money for this.

Soldier:	I can give you this much money for this.	hoy tsee hoyey peyley komtashi maai koy
Local:	No.	m-da

Most shops in Hong Kong are open on average about 12 hours a day. They usually open around 10:30 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. and do not close until 10 p.m. or 11 p.m.

**Exchange 28:** Will you be going to the market today?

Soldier:	Will you be going to the market today?	ley gam yed woi m woi heoy gaai see ah?
Local:	Yes.	woyi

Credit cards are accepted at most shops; however a minimum purchase amount can be set by the shopkeeper. Haggling over prices is okay and is in fact the norm at tourist-type street shops, but not at finer shops that sell brand name goods or luxury items.

In markets where street vendors gather together to pull in as many customers as possible, only the Hong Kong dollar is accepted – not credit cards. Before purchasing anything, it is important to find out which types of pay the vendor will accept.

**Exchange 29:** Do you accept credit cards?

Soldier:	Do you accept credit cards?	ley saw m saw sun yeung kad ah?
Local:	No.	m-saw

Stanley Market, located in the original fishing village settlement on Hong Kong Island, is a particularly popular place for international visitors to go.

**Exchange 30:** Is the market nearby?

Soldier:	Is the market nearby?	ko kaai see kam gan jalee dogah?
Local:	Yes.	kahn

The merchants at Stanley have ample supplies of clothing in Western sizes.

**Exchange 31:** Do you have this in a different size?

Soldier:	Do you have this in a larger / smaller size?	ley yong yaw mo daai dee / saaidee gecek china?
Local:	Yes, we do.	yahwu

Merchants are usually well stocked as far as color and style are concerned.

**Exchange 32:** Do you have this in a different color?

Soldier:	Do you have this in a different color?	ley lee yang yey yaw motaai ko ahn sing ah?
Local:	Yes.	yahwu

It is acceptable to handle clothing and examine it closely before purchase.

**Exchange 33:** May I hold this and inspect it

Soldier:	May I hold this and inspect it?	hoyee chah chee koy ley gem chaya hama?
Local:	Sure.	to ying hoyee

Occasionally, they may be out of an item you want to purchase.

**Exchange 34:** Do you have any more of these?

Soldier:	Do you have any more of these?	ley dzong yaw mo do dee ley dee yeh ah?
Local:	No.	mow

Bustling night markets dot the landscape all over the SAR after the sun sets.

**Exchange 35:**

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	ley dzong woi haai ley daw geh loy ah?
Local:	Three more hours.	sang wichaw ga teem

Here, too, one would need to use Hong Kong dollars to make a purchase.

**Exchange 36:** Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	lehoi yee chaw bahn ching bey omah?
Local:	No.	m-hoyee

Some sell snack items, which is legal as long as cooked food is prepared on the spot.

**Exchange 37:** Is this food fresh?

Soldier:	Is this food fresh?	ley dee zing ma sam san zing-ga?
Local:	Yes.	san seen

If in doubt about its edibility, ask before purchasing.

**Exchange 38:** Did you prepare this food?

Soldier:	Did you prepare this food?	ley dee song haai m-haai ching-gah?
Local:	No.	m-haai

Bargaining is the norm though there may be signs listing a selling price as the negotiating starting point. Discounts normally come with multiple purchases. Also, where American merchants will list a discount as “30% off”, in Hong Kong merchants would offer the same discount as “70% of the original price” which can cause confusion.



© Keith Rock  
Stanley Market

Beggars are rare in Hong Kong and most Hong Kong Chinese do not wish to encourage them by providing hand-outs.

**Exchange 39: Give me money.**

Local:	Give me money.	bey ching-ga
Soldier:	No - I don't have any.	m-da, ho mo chin

It's best to discourage what appear to be unlicensed hawkers.

**Exchange 40: Buy something from me.**

Local:	Buy something from me.	pom oh maai dee yeh
Soldier:	No. Go away.	m-da. chaw hoi

**Traffic**

Roads are limited and not adequate for such a large population. As a result, the government has put restrictions on car ownership, in the form of high import fees, and encourages residents to use public transportation.

**Exchange 41: Can I rent a car from you?**

Soldier:	Can I rent a car from you?	ngah haw ee tong ley dzo gah tseh mah?
Local:	No.	m-hoyee

Finding a gas, or petrol, station is easy, should one have the need to drive.

**Exchange 42: Is there a gas station nearby?**

Soldier:	Is there a gas station nearby?	foo gahn yah mokaai yaw tsah mah?
Local:	Yes.	yahwu

Many of those who have imported cars have imported luxury models, so a full range of auto repair services exist.

**Exchange 43: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?**

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	foo gan yaw mo yed ko lek keytaai kaai ah?
Local:	Yes.	yahwu

**Exchange 44: Do you know how to fix this?**

Soldier:	Do you know how to fix this?	ley seg dag saw ley keoy mah?
Local:	No.	m-sey

### Transportation

Most people in Hong Kong use public transportation as part of their daily routine. Cheap and reliable service is available almost everywhere in the territory. There is an extensive network of buses, a subway system called MTR, and an electric railway, which goes from Hung Hom in Kowloon through the New Territories to the Chinese border at Lo Wu.

#### Exchange 45: Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	foo gan ya mofow che jahmah?
Local:	No.	mow

When traveling on the bus, you will need exact change in local currency. Fares are posted on the bus stop signs.

#### Exchange 46: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	bah see haai m haai ho faai dzaw do ah?
Local:	Yes.	haai

Hong Kong also has an extensive ferry system. The best known is the Star Ferry which, every seven minutes, makes the 15-minute one-way trip across Victoria Harbor from Central on the Hong Kong Island side to Tsim Sha Tsui on the Kowloon side and then back for a nominal fare. Ferries and hovercraft serve all the outlying islands, as well as Macau and various cities in Guangdong province, from which increasing numbers of Hong Kong residents make a daily commute owing to the cheaper living costs.



© sxc.hu  
Hong Kong rush hour

Hailing a cab in Hong Kong can be done from the sidewalk in less densely populated areas and at designated places at the Kowloon and Central ferry piers.

#### Exchange 47: Can I get a cab around here?

Soldier:	Can I get a cab around here?	ley do foo kahn hoyee chee dodig seemah?
Local:	Yes.	hoyee

There is no negotiation of cab fare in Hong Kong though the fare will increase beyond what the meter reads for travelers with accompanying luggage. If that is the case, the driver will go over the additional costs, which can be verified by the laminated written material he will show you.

**Exchange 48: Which direction to the airport?**

Soldier:	Which direction to the airport?	beeng gaw fong heung heoy fey gey cheon gah?
Local:	That way.	ka been

Tips are always appreciated and usually take the form of “keep the change.” Fixing or fiddling with the meter is illegal and is rare; but it is still a good idea to be aware if the trip is an exceptionally long one.

Jaywalking is illegal in Hong Kong and the police can issue tickets to those caught in the act. However, it is still a fairly common practice in Hong Kong at pedestrian crossings when the light is red.

**Exchange 49: Can you take me there?**

Soldier:	Can you take me there?	ley ho ee daai ngah heoy gaw do mah?
Local:	Yes, I can. Follow me.	hoyee, kanoley

Because Hong Kong follows the British protocol of driving on the left, one should exercise caution in crossing the street.

**Health Care**

Public health care in Hong Kong is comparable to that of most developed nations. Hospitals and clinics are available in all areas of Hong Kong.

**Exchange 50: Is there a medical clinic nearby?**

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	foo gahn ya mo yeemo so-wah?
Local:	Yes, over there.	yaw, haai kobeen

Locals pay just token fees for medical consultations and treatment. The government sponsors public support and awareness of preventative medicine and believes that no one should be denied healthcare.<sup>77</sup>

**Exchange 51: Do you know what is wrong?**

Soldier:	Do you know what is wrong?	le jeedo moyem m-tomah?
Local:	No.	m-jee

The infant mortality rate is decreasing and was down to 2.3 per 1000 live births in 2003. Longevity is increasing with the average life expectancy for males at 78 and 84 for females. These statistics are a good measure of the availability and quality of healthcare in a country or nation.

<sup>77</sup> “Hong Kong,” Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9106286>

**Exchange 52:** Is there a doctor here?

Soldier:	Is there a doctor here?	ley do yah mo-ee sahng ah?
Local:	No.	mahwu

It would be a nice gesture to offer help to someone who seems to need assistance.

**Exchange 53:** Do you need my help?

Soldier:	Do you need my help?	le yoo abong saw mah?
Local:	Yes.	yiui

**Safety**

Because urban Hong Kong is so densely populated, one must be alert to pick-pocketers. There is, however, a *triad* gang problem. Particularly after midnight in some sections of the city, such as Mongkok, there are many young adults hanging out, some of whom will end up in some form of disagreement. It's best to avoid involvement in disputes that don't concern you.



© zam@flickr.com  
Mongkok street scene

**Exchange 54:** Did these people threaten you?

Soldier:	Did these people threaten you?	ladee yan yaw mo waai hivley deyah?
Local:	No.	mahwo

**Different Ways of Life**

The territory's Indian community was granted permanent residence status after Hong Kong reverted to China. Among the first Indians to arrive were soldiers serving in the British army. The Indian soldiers were mostly Sikhs and Sunni Muslims. Particularly visible in Kowloon's tourist enclave of Tsim Sha Shui today, they have retained their own cultural identity. A large mosque is located in Tsim Sha Tsui, and the worshippers are descendants of the Sunni Muslim soldiers and later traders.<sup>78</sup>

The Indian Sikhs remain a distinct presence in Hong Kong. With long beards, turbans, and curved knives, they have traditionally been employed as police, guards, watchmen, and doormen. Some Chinese tombs even have a pair of sculptured Sikh guards. And in the paper houses burned at Chinese funerals, often a small Sikh paper guard can be seen inside the house.

Although they constitute just 0.5 percent of the territory's population, Hong Kong residents of South Asian descent are reputed to control 8 percent of its exports.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Pluss, Caroline, "Transitional Identities: The Hong Kong Indians." 2000. [www.socialcapital-foundation.org/journal/volume%202000/issue4/pdf/pluss.pdf](http://www.socialcapital-foundation.org/journal/volume%202000/issue4/pdf/pluss.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> Bhagat, Chetan. Review of "Co-prosperity in Cross-Culturalism: Indians in Hong Kong by Kirti Narain and Kwok Siu-Tong." July 16, 2004. [www.asianreviewofbooks.com/arb/article.php?article=424](http://www.asianreviewofbooks.com/arb/article.php?article=424)

## Rural Life

### Agriculture

The soil in Hong Kong is not very fertile and is fairly acidic, except in the Deep Bay region where the Pearl River empties out into the Bay. Lacking decent farmland, agriculture in Hong Kong is minor in terms of production and exports, as only five to six percent of the land is considered arable. The few crops that are grown include vegetables, fruits, and flowers. These are mainly for regional use and not for export.

The fishing industry is much more productive. Residents make use of not only the surrounding seas, but the many fish ponds. One can still see traditional fishing villages on Lamma Island.



© Peter Morgan  
Lone fisherman

**Exchange 55:** How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	yaw gey do yen haai ley gahn okto chiyah?
Local:	Ten.	sapkaw

The third largest island in Hong Kong, Lamma Island has a population of approximately 10,000. It is a popular weekend getaway for Hong Kong Chinese seeking a respite from high density urban living. It is well known for its seafood restaurants.

**Exchange 56:** Is there lodging nearby?

Soldier:	Is there lodging nearby?	foo gahn yaw moo lak kakadey fonga?
Local:	Yes.	yahwu

It is also possible to find pockets of rural life in the New Territories, the vast area stretching from densely populated Kowloon to the Chinese border.

**Exchange 57:** Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	lee gey kayen haayi ley do jeymah?
Local:	Yes.	haai

Although almost half of Hong Kong's population resides here in huge satellite towns, the opportunities to hike in the mountains and enjoy other outdoor recreational opportunities attract those looking to escape the city.

**Exchange 58:** Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	lee haai maai ho so ley koy dey gah?
Local:	Yes.	haai

## Food Procurement

Because of Hong Kong's small size relative to its large population, almost all of its food is imported, mostly from China. Livestock raised in Guangdong Province is sent via train to Hong Kong where it is slaughtered. 80 percent of vegetables sold in Hong Kong are also imported from China.

It is forbidden to eat dog and cat and wild animals in Hong Kong, the latter of which has been identified as a high risk source of disease. While food preparation standards are high, there is still cause for concern. Outbreaks of avian flu have resulted in large numbers of poultry being slaughtered. Vegetables have also been found to have higher pesticide levels than are considered safe under international standards.<sup>80</sup>



© sxc.hu  
Most vegetables are imported from China

## Land Ownership

The British acquisition of the New Territories was inherently different from that of Hong Kong since it was leased and not ceded land. For administrative purposes, however, it suited Britain to administer the whole territory as a colony rather than to regard leased territory as a form of protectorate. In 1899, the Governor issued a proclamation emphasizing his government's intention to safeguard the landed and commercial interests of all residents who lived on the newly acquired land.

Today there are approximately 700,000 indigenous inhabitants. They are the descendants of the established village clans which had already settled in the New Territories in 1898. They hold title to the land their ancestors inhabited at the time the land was leased to Britain.

### Exchange 59: Do you own this land?

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	ley dee taai haai maai ley gah?
Local:	Yes.	haai

As a result, they have retained a more traditional way of life which was reinforced by British deference to Chinese customary law that emphasizes the authority of local elders.<sup>81</sup>

### Exchange 60: Does your leader live here?

Soldier:	Does your leader live here?	ley geh at haw haai do jeui mah?
Local:	Yes.	haai

<sup>80</sup> "Hong Kong Tightens Import Checks After Latest China Food Scare," April 21, 2006.  
[http://www.headlice.org/lindane/new/050406\\_hongkong.html](http://www.headlice.org/lindane/new/050406_hongkong.html)

<sup>81</sup> Loh, Christine. "Inheritance Rights of Indigenous Women of the New Territories." "  
<http://www.citizensparty.org/law/inherit.html>

Should one visit such a community, one should interact with the residents in a more traditional way.

**Exchange 61:** Can you take me to your elder?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your elder?	ley hoi yee tay ho keen ley at haw mah?
Local:	Yes.	ta

This includes asking a senior member of the community for assistance.

**Exchange 62:** Respected elder, we need your help.

Soldier:	Respected elder, we need your help / advice / opinion.	ataw oday soyoo ley ga bong saw / dzee dim / yeegen
Local:	Yes.	ta

**Environmental Issues**

Until the late 1960s, conservation was largely unknown in Hong Kong. Since then, the importance of restoring and maintaining the natural environment has received greater recognition. As a result, seven million trees have been planted since the 1960s. In 1948, 2 percent of Hong Kong was forested; by the late 1990s, it was 21 percent.<sup>82</sup>

This means heavy monsoon rains do not result in the massive flooding and mudslide damage which occurs in other places with similar terrain.



© Tommy Wong  
Pollution is a growing problem

Other problems have proved more difficult to address. The “fragrant harbor” from which Hong Kong takes its name, for example, is often cloaked in toxic smog. Experts lay the blame for Hong Kong’s worsening air pollution on China, which according to the World Health Organization has seven of the world’s ten most polluted cities.

Most of the pollution shrouding Hong Kong is generated by coal-fired power plants and smokestacks in Guangdong Province’s newly industrialized south as well as exhaust fumes from the territory’s own auto-congested streets. China’s leaders are aware of the environmental price of breakneck growth but their top priority is to ensure a strong economy. There is also no denying that Hong Kong businesses have relocated across the border in droves to take advantage of laxer environmental standards. To address the problem of regional air pollution, the Hong Kong SAR government and the Guangdong provincial government have set a reduction emission target for sulphur dioxide in the Pearl River Delta by 40percent in 2010.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> “Beyond Hong Kong's City Walls," *Action Asia Magazine*. Oct/Nov 1999. <http://www.actionasia.com/actionasia/Articles/index.jsp?aid=749>

<sup>83</sup> Hunt, Katie, "China's Energy Crisis Blankets Hong Kong in Smog," Planet Ark Environmental Foundation, September 20, 2004. <http://www.planetark.com/avantgo/dailynewsstory.cfm?newsid=27209>

## Border Crossings

Foreigners and citizens alike are permitted to journey among the areas and districts of Hong Kong; there are no permanent internal checkpoints. There are two land-crossing border checkpoints to enter China: Lo Wu and Huanggang.



© Lucy Lu  
Hong Kong-China border crossing

### Exchange 63: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	dzeoy kan geh keem tsah dzahm haai been dow ah?
Local:	It's two kilometers.	leung gong ley ngeoy

Lo Wu, by far the busiest checkpoint, is the final stop on the train which runs from Kowloon's Hung Hom station through the New Territories to the Chinese border town of Shenzhen in Guangdong Province. It is fenced, but there are no landmines.

### Exchange 64: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	lee gotey koye mutey laygah?
Local:	No.	m-hoyee

For citizens of the United States it is possible to get a visa to enter the PRC on the spot at Lo Wu crossing, but the cost will be higher than getting it through a travel agency in Hong Kong. Travel agency prices vary depending on whether a visitor wants expedited one-day service or can afford to wait for several days before collecting the visa. If the latter option is chosen, keep in mind you will be without your passport into which the visa is stamped.

Hong Kong residents are required by law to have their Hong Kong-issued identity cards with them at all times. They typically enter China with a travel document issued by the Chinese government to Hong Kong compatriots. Upon returning home, they reenter with their identity cards.

### Exchange 65: Is this all the I.D. you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the I.D. you have?	ley dee dzo haai ley soyo gasan fan jin ling kin mah?
Local:	Yes.	haai

Waiting time at the Lo Wu crossing can be substantial, depending on the time and day of the week. If one seeks to go farther into China than Shenzhen, an alternative is to take a through train and use the immigration facilities at Hong Hom station.

## Checkpoints

Occasionally local law enforcement or armed forces may set up roadblocks. Their objective is to prevent drug



© Andrew Tse  
Security checkpoint in Hong Kong

trafficking, intercept illegal immigrants, or crack down on illegal car racing.

**Exchange 66:** Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	ching lee hang chicha
Local:	OK.	ta

Once stopped, the routine would be the same one carried out by law enforcement officers in the United States.

**Exchange 67:** Show us the registration

Soldier:	Show us the (car) registration.	bingo ley teyah ley gehey che tang hey ching
Local:	OK.	ta

Of course there would be a question about firearms, which ordinary Hong Kong citizens are prohibited from carrying.

**Exchange 68:** Are you carrying any guns?

Soldier:	Are you carrying any guns?	leya mo taai chaw haai senah?
Local:	Yes.	yahwo

Finally, if criminal activity was established, there would be a question about previous incidents of the same behavior.

**Exchange 69:** Do you do this very often?

Soldier:	Do you do this very often?	lee haai m-haai hoto see tokem jawgah?
Local:	No.	m-haai

## Family Life

### Status of Family

Modern Chinese families are not as cohesive as they were half a century ago. Though youngsters still look up to the elders, this esteem is not as strong as in earlier times. And elders no longer have the control over the younger generation, which they did in the past.

The younger Hong Kong-reared generation, for example, is on the forefront of changing social mores. Public displays of affection, which are still viewed as inappropriate by more traditional Chinese, have gained acceptance among twenty-somethings.

As families get smaller, children have fewer extended sets of elders. Additionally, because living space is tight in Hong Kong, elders are increasingly sent to live in old age homes where the children pay for their lodging fees. With younger members of the family immigrating to countries like America, Canada, Australia and England,



© Frank Chan  
Young family in Hong Kong

senior citizens can find themselves living alone without regular family contact.

### Addressing Family Members

Elders are addressed by relation and name, such as “Uncle so and so,” where elders address those younger than themselves by their first name.

#### Exchange 70: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers or sisters?	leya mo hing daai jing moyah?
Local:	Yes.	yahwo

Grandparents have different names depending on whether they are maternal or paternal. Each Uncle and Aunt will also have a different designation depending on status. If a man has several older brothers, his children will address their wives as “First Older Uncle’s Wife,” “Second Older Uncle’s Wife,” etc. The wives of younger uncles will be similarly numbered though the word for “Uncle” will be different.

#### Exchange 71: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	ley dee yan haai m-haai lekey okeya yahn ah?
Local:	No.	m-haai

### Marriage and Divorce

Marriages are no longer arranged and parents do not have much influence over the marriage partners their children select.

#### Exchange 72: Congratulations on your marriage.

Soldier:	Congratulations on your marriage.	kong hey ley san fan faai law
Local:	Thank you.	to che

Weddings involve at least one banquet in which the couple circulate from table to table as their guests, who give them money as a gift, toast to their future happiness.

#### Exchange 73:

Soldier:	I wish you will both love each other forever.	kung cho ley law bahkto do lo
Local:	Thank you.	to che

As Hong Kong society evolves away from the Chinese norm of family as sacrosanct, divorce has become increasingly common. This is particularly true among younger age groups, where the stigma their elders would have felt for ending a marriage has receded. And, as increasing numbers of married women remain in the



© Adam Schorsch  
Bride and groom accepting a present

workforce, financial dependence considerations lose their relevance.

**Exchange 74:** Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	ley gah yan leuy been haai m-haai dzeng haai ley yaw geung dzo ah?
Local:	No.	m-haai

**Cross-Border Families**

Immigration from China has been a touchy issue in Hong Kong since the late 1970s, when numerical quotas replaced the “dry foot” policy, which had allowed any Chinese national who made it to Hong Kong to remain.

**Exchange 75:** Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	ley haai m-haai lee do daayga?
Local:	Yes.	haai

The reversion to Chinese sovereignty heightened concerns about the possibility of opening a floodgate to the flow of mainland immigrants, many of whom are from rural Guangdong Province, into post-industrial Hong Kong.

**Exchange 76:** Are you and your family planning to move?

Soldier:	Are you and your family planning to move somewhere else?	ley tong mah leyke okey yahn haai m-haai?
Local:	No.	m-haai

Uncertainty about the number of cross-border families only adds to this anxiety.<sup>84</sup>

**Exchange 77:** Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	levey jaw fen meyah?
Local:	No.	mey

The typical cross-border family is one in which an aging Hong Kong bachelor of modest means has married a younger Chinese woman from the countryside, who then must apply for the right to join him in Hong Kong.

**Exchange 78:** Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	leygo haai m-haai ley taai taaya?
Local:	Yes.	haai

Some families are comprised of both mainland-born children and younger Hong Kong-born siblings.

<sup>84</sup> Suen, Wing, "A Two-Track Immigration Policy," The Hong Kong Centre for Economic Research, September 1997. <http://www.hku.hk/hkcer/articles/v46/suen.htm>

**Exchange 79: Is this your entire family?**

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	ley do haai m-haai ley cheun bo geh ug key yahn ah?
Local:	Yes.	haai

In this situation, children who have been brought to Hong Kong illegally have no right to schooling. They can only enroll after their status has been legalized which, of course, could be when they are already in their late teens.



© Matt Chan  
Family picture

**Exchange 80: Are these your children?**

Soldier:	Are these your children?	leydee haai m-haai lega saw lojaaya?
Local:	Yes.	haai

The government's response has been to emphasize its commitment to ensuring immigration into Hong Kong will be orderly. But it faces the same problems as other countries coping with illegal immigration motivated by family reunification.

**Naming Conventions**

Chinese names usually consist of three words or characters. The first word or character is a family name (surname), the middle name is generational, meaning that all of the brothers or sisters in the family have that same middle name, and the third is the individual name. Because the family is so highly revered and respected, most people are addressed by their family name, such as Mr. Chan and Miss Wong. In public or social situations, addressing others by their personal given name is almost non-existent. The personal name is used within the family by relatives and close friends.

Traditionally, Chinese women did not change their surnames upon marriage, instead retaining their three-character, or in some cases, two-character birth names. In Hong Kong, the British introduced the Western tradition of women using the surname of their husband upon marriage. Anson Chan Fang On Sang, the first ethnic Chinese and female to hold the second highest position in Hong Kong's government, is a representative example. "Anson" is a name she chose which can be easily pronounced by non-Cantonese speakers, who may address Hong Kong Chinese by their Christian names after an introduction. Chan is her husband's surname. Fang is her own surname and On Sang her given name.