

Major Events in History of Hong Kong

214 B.C.

During the Qin Dynasty Hong Kong and Macau, inhabited by Tai people, come under Chinese rule for the first time as part of the new province of Nan-Hai (“South Sea”).

1513

The Portuguese bring the first post-medieval European embassy to China. They sail past Hong Kong and Macau on way to Guangzhou.

1821

British opium dealers use Hong Kong for the first time as a base for smuggling drugs into China.

1839

Lin Weixi, Chinese official, is murdered by British seamen on the island of Hong Kong. This event is one cause of the first Opium War.

1842

Britain wins First Anglo-Chinese War (Opium War) and obtains Hong Kong Island from China.

1843

Following the Treaty of Nanjing, the island of Hong Kong (population 6,000) is proclaimed a British Crown Colony on June 26.

1849

Hong Kong population reaches 22,000. Hong Kong becomes the most important emigration port in East and Southeast Asia.

1860

China cedes the Kowloon peninsula to Great Britain after the Second Opium War. Hong Kong’s population reaches the 100,000 mark.

1898

The New Territories, north of Kowloon, and 240 islands, which constitute over 90 percent of present-day Hong Kong, are leased to Britain for 99 years.

1901

The first official census of “Greater Hong Kong” announces that population is now 400,000. This includes 380,000 Chinese and 10,500 British military.

1937

Second World War breaks out in the Pacific. Japan invades China. Mass exodus to Hong Kong. Hong Kong’s population passes the million mark.

1941

Japan occupies Hong Kong from December 25, 1941 to September, 1945.

1949

Communist victory in China’s civil war. Mao Zedong founds the People’s Republic of China. Hundreds of thousands flee to Hong Kong. Hong Kong’s population of 600,000 in 1945 reaches 2.2 million by the end of 1949. Mao’s isolationist policies force Hong Kong to promote industry as a supplement to trade.

1950s

Hong Kong struggles for survival. Influx of people brings many problems but also a large labour force, industrial technology.

Early 1960s

Hard work, especially in textile development, helps people attain a stable livelihood.

1966

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution overflows into Hong Kong and Macau. Riots and economic crisis almost cripple Hong Kong.

1970s

Hong Kong continues rapid economic development

1978

Deng Xiaoping's policies of economic modernisation and the establishment of special economic zones find Hong Kong's industrial production gradually shifting back to the PRC.

1979

Sir Murray Maclehoose, governor of Hong Kong, while in Beijing, raises the question of Hong Kong's future by focusing on land leases expiring in 1997.

1982

In September, Margaret Thatcher and Deng Xiaoping open diplomatic channels for the first phase of negotiations.

Second phase of negotiations begins on July 13. Twenty-two rounds of talks follow.

1983

In October, Beijing sets September 1984 as deadline for reaching an agreement. Without such an agreement China will proceed on its own.

1984

April 20: Sir Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, announces that the British administration of Hong Kong will come to an end in 1997.

August 1: China and Britain agree to set up a Sino-British Joint Liaison Group to monitor the agreement up to the year 2000.

September 26: Publication of White Paper: "The Draft Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of China on the future of Hong Kong", later called the "Sino-British Joint Declaration".

December 19: Mrs. Margaret Thatcher flies in from London to sign the agreement. China and Britain sign the Joint Declaration: Hong Kong will revert to Chinese rule on July 1, 1997.

1988

The Joint Liaison Group made up of five representatives from both China and Britain is set up to reach agreement on a number of technical and important issues and to effect a smooth transition of power.

July 1: Joint Liaison Group meets for the first time.

Beijing appoints The Basic Law Drafting Committee (BLDC). Group includes people from Hong Kong and the Mainland. The first draft is published.

1989

February: Publication of the second draft of the Basic Law or Mini-Constitution.

May-June: The Tiananmen Square incident shatters the trust of the Hong Kong people in China. More and more Hong Kong residents seek to emigrate.

1991

July 4: Britain and China agree on a Memorandum of Understanding which, in reality, was another edition of the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984.

September 15: Hong Kong holds its first direct Legco elections. The Liberals win all but two of the 18 contested seats; the United Democrats of Hong Kong win 11 of these.

1992

July:

Chris Patten the last British governor of Hong Kong arrives.
Publication of the final version of the Basic Law.

1997

July 1: Hong Kong reverts to China's sovereignty as a Special Administration Region of the People's Republic of China.

(Information gathered from Asian Report, Jan. 1997, pp. 10-11, The Far Eastern Economic Review, as well as various other sources.)

Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of Great Britain and Zhao Ziyang, Chinese Premier, after signing the Joint Declaration, December 19, 1984. Deng Xiaoping applauding in background.

