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A Student’s Portfolio Report for the Course
“Experiencing China”

Alexander John Dunn

Department of Public and Social Administration,
City University of Hong Kong

2011
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**Introduction 简介**

I have decided that I will be approaching my personal portfolio for the module ‘Experiencing China’ from a unique perspective that mostly incorporates primary sources that I have collected myself. I feel that the best way for me to illustrate my experience of China is to use personal experiences and not rely solely upon those of other commentators. I will of course use the traditional sources such as journals, academic articles, books and the Internet, but I will focus my writing primarily upon site visits, current news articles and my own impressions as an exchange student in the crazy city of Hong Kong. Hopefully by utilising this approach to the project I will be able to create an insightful, interesting and relevant portfolio that portrays my own observations of living, studying and experiencing China.

**About Me 关于我**

My name is Alexander John Dunn and I am an Englishman. I am 20 years old and am currently in my third year of studying for a degree in Politics and History at The University of Hull, Yorkshire, UK.

I was born in Wakefield, Yorkshire, to Yorkshire-born parents Dr John Dunn and Sharon Dunn, but have lived in the new town of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire for the majority of my life. Many of my friends and family find it ironic that I have done a full
circle and ended up back in Yorkshire for university study. Milton Keynes is situated about half way between London and Birmingham and also, about half way between Oxford and Cambridge, so it is in a prime location for visiting the most famous areas in England, with very convenient transport links. It is a great place in which to grow up, with new and modern facilities such as an indoor ski slope, a huge shopping centre and many other entertainment attractions. It is also a very green city with an abundance of parks, trees and lakes. In England, Milton Keynes is perhaps best known for its roundabouts (of which there are many) however it certainly has far more to offer!

An aerial image of the indoor ski slope and ‘Theatre District’ in Milton Keynes

As I stated earlier, I study Politics and History. I have always enjoyed debating with my friends and I saw studying politics as the perfect way to further my communication and debating skills. I became really involved with British politics during the last General Election in 2010 where I worked for the Liberal Democrat Party, helping them win enough votes to be elected to Government through a coalition with the Conservative Party. My association with the Liberal Democrat Party has created many opportunities for me, including the chance to work in the House of Commons for two Members of Parliament, in their Parliamentary offices. I worked for Ian Swales, backbench MP for Redcar and Assistant Government Whip Mark Hunter MP. Some of my tasks whilst working in Westminster included writing letters, meeting with constituents, arranging schedules, monitoring political coverage in the media, advising on policy issues, attending Select Committee meetings, monitoring Bills, tabling Parliamentary Questions, tabling Amendments and preparing briefings. My experience of working in the UK Parliament was one of the most fulfilling and interesting periods of my life and I felt that it has helped me develop as an individual in a professional and personable way.
As well as national politics, I have also been heavily involved in my local political scene. In my own right, I campaigned for election as a Liberal Democrat to the council in Kingston upon Hull in the 2011 local elections, and have served as an elected executive member of the national Liberal Democrat Youth Organisation. I am also an ambassador for the Hull University Politics and International Studies Department and show prospective students around the beautiful leafy ‘Redbrick’ campus.

Even though politics is a very big part of my life, it certainly is not my only interest and I have many other extra-curricular interests. Sport is very important to me. I have played ice hockey since I was young, representing my local Milton Keynes team for many years and now I am honoured to be playing as a defenceman for the Hull/York Universities Ice
Hockey A team. As well as sport, I am also a keen musician – I am a grade 8 guitar player and have played in bands for the majority of my life.

The Hull/York Universities Ice Hockey A Team after coming in third place at the UK Universities national ice hockey tournament

I believe that an international outlook and experiencing different cultures as a student is vital to the development of ideas and the sharing of knowledge between countries in this era of mass globalisation and interdependence. I wanted to study abroad as I knew it would be such a great learning opportunity. However, although at first I wanted to go to the USA, I decided instead that I would prefer to study in Hong Kong for a number of reasons, but mostly because I knew that it was a “unique fusion of Eastern and Western cultures where the old and the new live side by side”\(^2\). I wanted to study here because of the world-class higher education institutions: City University of Hong Kong has recently been ranked by the QS World University Rankings as the 110\(^{th}\) best university in the world\(^3\). I believe that doing an exchange in Hong Kong will allow me to gain an understanding of the Chinese culture, forge relationships with students of all nationalities and strengthen the links between the University of Hull and City University Hong Kong. This will help reinforce the mutually beneficial and vital partnership that Britain and Hong Kong have historically shared for so long, bringing increased prosperity to the communities of the UK and Hong Kong, in terms of job markets and the sharing of knowledge and ideas that leads to understanding and respect between our two countries.

Another major reason for me coming to study in Hong Kong is the fact that I have never

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been to the Far East. By studying here it is easily possible for me to visit Mainland China and other destinations around South East Asia such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. According to the Hong Kong Tourism Board: "Hong Kong has long been the primary gateway to China; home to an ancient and rich culture as well as stunning natural beauty. Travel to China is better and easier than ever before. Frequent air links from Hong Kong’s international airport, efficient rail services and some of the world’s largest fleets of high-speed and overnight ferries make China and other destinations easily accessible". I currently have trips planned to Beijing, Guandong Province and Taiwan.

The final and probably most important reason for my choosing to come to Hong Kong was to study Politics from a Chinese perspective. As China becomes an ever-greater world power, I feel that it is important that Westerners learn more about Chinese political culture, internal politics and the governance of their institutions. In an era of mass globalisation, it is vital that the West pursues a successful working partnership with China through diplomatic relations, so that mutual benefits such as trade agreements and cultural exchanges arise as a consequence. The best way for me to learn about the contemporary Chinese political situation was to come and study in China and experience it! I believe that the knowledge I will gain from living and studying Chinese politics in Hong Kong will benefit my future career aspirations to represent the British Government diplomatically, as it will give me a good understanding of the Chinese culture that has created one of the most important international political powers and the fastest growing economy in the world.

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4 Hong Kong Tourism Board, *Why come to Hong Kong?* http://www.discoverhongkong.com/uk/index.jsp (2011)
As a Westerner, the atrocities of Tiananmen Square, the personality cult of Mao Zedong, the abuses of human rights as defined by the United Nations, the authoritarian rule of the Chinese Communist Party, the Cultural Revolution and the censorship of the media, have all informed my perception of Chinese politics. These things have created a picture in my head of a system of political governance that is solely defined by the existence of a one party state. However, coming to Hong Kong and reading Chinese newspaper articles, as well as listening to university lectures has completely undermined my ill-informed ideas and taught me that the current Chinese political situation is actually in the process of drastic reform and is defined by many complexities. I have discovered how contradictory and confusing the politics of China actually are. As a Westerner, it is very hard to understand how Hong Kong, supposedly “the freest economy in the world”\(^5\), is theoretically under the control of the authoritarian CCP.

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\(^5\) Keith Joseph, *Address by the Rt. Hon. Sir Keith Joseph to members of the Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce* - [http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:HKJO/view/17/1700951.pdf+keith+joseph+hong+kong+freest&hl=en&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESh1SmZRHPSd6laNxQ7KFonEM130QoYXkc3xNQPlwXHuFe42JkXo6o87nFr8jAToKsLLOVu9bfiT6MmdnrOFSAtpu3H3i6g5dEfoXa1DnZ010wzjkbSUD4w2xPzwSilv_gjnsxso&sig=AHIEtbS6WYacMOu1rPEpuZrGMYjKWUWJYRQ](http://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:H4_R_o2J0esj:sunzi.lib.hku.hk/hkjo/view/17/1700951.pdf+keith+joseph+hong+kong+freest&hl=en&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESh1SmZRHPSd6laNxQ7KFonEM130QoYXkc3xNQPlwXHuFe42JkXo6o87nFr8jAToKsLLOVu9bfiT6MmdnrOFSAtpu3H3i6g5dEfoXa1DnZ010wzjkbSUD4w2xPzwSilv_gjnsxso&sig=AHIEtbS6WYacMOu1rPEpuZrGMYjKWUWJYRQ) (Hong Kong, HKCC, 1981)
I will not be able to cover the entirety of sub sections within Chinese politics in such a short review, so I have decided to focus on three key areas of China's internal politics – the Communist Party, recent political reforms and human rights.

**The Communist Party of China**

Although the politics of China are changing rapidly I will firstly discuss the Chinese Communist party, which is still the main source of political control within China. The Communist Party of China is the largest political party in the world with astonishingly more than 80 million members. The CPC "maintains a unitary government centralising the state, military, and media" with its legal power guaranteed by the constitution of the People's Republic of China.

During the over half a century of CPC rule, the party has vigorously stuck to the pursuit of its "long-term objective to successfully materialise socialism and ultimately communism in China". The official website of the Chinese Government states that "the CPC is the vanguard of the Chinese working class, the faithful representative of the interests of the Chinese people of all ethnic groups and the core of leadership over the socialist cause of China". Although contemporary Chinese politics has been, and is still, heavily influenced by socialist ideology, it has certainly evolved since Deng Xiaoping carried out reforms and opened up China's economy following the policy of creating "socialism with Chinese characteristics". This evolution shows the continuing dedication by the CPC leadership to upholding its ideology and clearly portrays one of the defining aspects of Chinese politics - the informing of Government policy by ideological beliefs.

The organisation of the CPC is complicated and bureaucratic in its nature, adhering to Lenin's principal of 'democratic centralism'. The structure of the organisation was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, although it was rebuilt under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping and retains the same model to this day. The diagram below depicts the spread of power throughout the CPC.

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The official line of the CPC is that it “derives its ideas and policies from the people’s concentrated will and then turns that will into State laws and decisions which are passed by the National People’s Congress of China”\textsuperscript{11}. In theory, power is supposed to be spread from the bottom of the system to the top, dispersed throughout various units ranging from the local to National Party Congress level. However, what has become ever clearer to me whilst studying the City U module ‘Contemporary Chinese Politics’ is that power is actually concentrated in a few party elites at the top of the Communist Party within the Standing Committee of the Politburo, with absolute power focused in the General Party Secretary, who is currently Hu Jin Tao. Richard Bush, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, argues against the official party line that the CPC is organised by a bottom-up model, instead suggesting it is a dictatorial "top-down approach, with the real decision-making powers actually lying with the nine men of the Standing Committee"\textsuperscript{12}.

**Recent Political Reforms**

Although Chinese politics is usually wholly defined in the West by the authoritarian rule of the CPC, due largely to a lack of information and understanding, many observers from both within and outside of China have argued that the CPC is taking gradual steps towards reform which will eventually lead to the adoption of true democracy and transparency in the governance system. Indeed Deng Xiaoping himself stated, “Without political reform, the economic reform would remain purely superficial, and might even turn out to be a failure”\textsuperscript{13}. This gradual undermining of the Chinese political model can be explained by “the improvement of people’s living standards and educational levels, the progress in mass media and information communication, and the closer exchanges and

\textsuperscript{10} Jie Gao, *City University Hong Kong Contemporary Chinese Politics Lecture 2: The Communist Party – The CCP’s Power Pyramid* (Hong Kong: City University, 2011)

\textsuperscript{11} Zheng Caixiong, *China Daily Article: The Modern Chinese Communist Party* (2011) -


\textsuperscript{13} Liu Ji (citing Deng Xiaoping), *Address to Europe-China Forum: The reform of the Chinese political system* (2003)
integration between China and other parts of the world”\textsuperscript{14}. What is becoming ever clearer to me from discussions with Mainland Chinese students is that the younger Chinese generation is more and more attracted by participatory democracy.

The Chinese Government has already introduced many radical political reforms, which should be applauded. Since 1978, China’s Party elders made great efforts to introduce a retirement system, a system of fixed tenures and a system of collective leadership, so there was no possibility of absolute power being focused in one individual, as was the case with Mao. In 1997, lawmakers passed the amendment of Criminal Procedural Law at the National Congress, abolishing the principle of presumption of guilt and replacing it with the Western idea of “innocent until proven guilty”\textsuperscript{15}. Also, with the rapid growth of private businesses, the party is no longer able to manage people’s social and economic life directly, meaning that citizens are now able independently to choose their “place of residence, education, healthcare and everyday entertainment and consumption”\textsuperscript{16}.

Finally, another major development in political reform worth noting is the emergence and flourishing of grassroots democracy at the village and local area level.

Political reform is clearly on the agenda with the current party elites, as illustrated by Premier Wen Jibao’s continuous discussion of the topic on international media outlets. In a recent television interview on CNN, Premier Wen stated, "I believe I and all the Chinese people have such conviction that China will make continuous progress and the people’s wishes and need for democracy and freedom are irresistible. I hope you will be able to gradually see the continuous progress of China.”\textsuperscript{17} He went on to argue, “without political restructuring, economic restructuring will not succeed and the achievements we have made in economic restructuring may be lost\textsuperscript{18}. This sentiment sounds promising to democratic campaigners. However, as ‘Atlantic’ reporter Damien Ma suggests, "It has become something of a cyclical pattern to be captivated by certain moments of potential political change in China, only to be disappointed later when little to nothing happens"\textsuperscript{19}. It is certainly arguable that Premier Wen, whose Premiership is drawing to a close in less than two years, is simply using such announcements to “cultivate his legacy as reformer rather than actually being one”\textsuperscript{20}. But whatever the Premier’s real intentions, at least he is bringing the issue to the forefront of worldwide discussion. What has become clear to

\begin{itemize}
  \item Lai Hairong, \textit{China.org article: A spotlight on China’s political reforms} (2011)
  \item Wen Jibao, \textit{Telegraph article: Wen Jiabao promises political reform for China} (London: Telegraph, 2010)
  \item Damien Ma, \textit{The Atlantic article: The Winds of China’s Political Reform} (2010)
  \item Wen Jibao, \textit{BBC article: Chinese Premier calls for political reforms} (2010)
\end{itemize}
me about political reforms in China, after reviewing current media sources, is that the Chinese Government does not want to be forced to reform and is certainly not responsive to commentators calling for abrupt change that could possible result in a loss of the stability that has benefitted so many Chinese citizens, gaining them much better relative living standards.

**Human rights**

I have been brought up in a Western liberal democracy and am an active member of the British Liberal Democrat political party; I believe that participation, representation and liberal values are important to the existence of a free and fair society. Western Governments are constantly criticising the Chinese regime for its lack of adherence to the ‘United Nation's Declaration on Human Rights’; in fact, during Premier Wen Jibao’s recent diplomatic visit to Britain, he was said to have been “furious”\(^1\) at the British Government’s and media’s approach to discussing the issue. However, even though I have been brought up to respect liberal and democratic values, I believe that it is important to analyse the complicated nature of this issue and examine the reasons for the Chinese Government’s refusal to sign up to the United Nations convention.

The position of the Chinese Government’s stance on human rights is the result of a clash of ideologies between Western and Eastern ideologies. The imperialist institutionalism and Maoist social order that has defined the governance of China throughout its history remains a strong influence on the Chinese Government’s view of what formulates human rights. Instead of such a focus on the rights of the individual, China’s Government argues, “The welfare of the collective should always be put ahead of the rights of any individual”\(^2\). Deng Xiaoping also endorsed this sentiment when he stated, “Of all China’s problems, the one that trumps everything is the need for stability”\(^3\). The CCP continues to argue for a wider all-encompassing definition of human rights to include economic and social rights and not only civil and political rights. As China is a developing country with different social systems and varying cultural traditions, it does not make sense for a universal “one size fits all” definition of human rights. The Chinese Government’s desire to include economic and social rights within the framework of human rights is very attractive, given the success China has had in lifting its citizens out of poverty – an astounding 300 million in the past five years. A recent article in ‘The People’s Daily’ (the CCP daily newspaper) argued against the adoption of international human rights by stating “For a starving man, which should he choose bread or ballot, if

\(^{1}\)Wen Jibao, *Telegraph article: China is building a better future for all* (London: Telegraph, 2011)


\(^{3}\)Deng Xiaoping (cited), *World Savvy Monitor Issue 2 – Modern China: The Promise of an Emerging Superpower Ch.2 The Chinese Communist Party* (2008)
he is supposed to choose only one? The ballot is of course important. But he must feed himself with the bread before he can cast a ballot"24. It does not make sense for the Chinese Government to introduce this form of human rights, if it could lead to instability, consequently resulting in the slowing down of the pace of growth therefore keeping a large percentage of the populous in poverty. The Chinese Government also finds criticism of its human rights regime very hypocritical due to Western abuses of the doctrine, including the continued existence of Guantanamo Bay and the illegal invasion (according to international law) of Iraq in 2003.

Although the Chinese position on the human rights issue is understandable, during my time of living in Hong Kong it has become clear to me that the adoption of greater political and civil rights is important for many citizens. There is the ‘City University free speech wall' next to the library that has many anti-Chinese Government messages; I have seen stalls next to Central station with anti-communist party campaigners and have spoken to many local and mainland students who are dissatisfied with the status quo. I was also recently given a newspaper by a ‘Falun Gong' supporter that had an article about how a woman’s legal rights defender in China has been sentenced to nine months in jail with the official reason for her imprisonment given as "for provoking trouble"25. I have attached the article to the Portfolio. Capital punishment, the Taiwan and Tibet issues, regulation of the press/internet and the one child policy seem indefensible to me and therefore, for many issues it is important that international pressure is applied to the Chinese Government to reform. However, I do not agree that a universal definition of human rights is the correct way as Chinese society has developed differently from Western countries, adopting different values and norms into their governance situation. What has become clear to me is that the Chinese approach to this issue is in a state of flux, involving a desire to change and adopt reforms but with a culture of authoritarian stability prevailing overall. Perhaps further globalisation and integration of the Chinese market economy into the international system will naturally facilitate the reform process of China's political and civil rights regime.

25 Author Unknown, *Falun Gong Today article - Jailed for their beliefs: How Falun Gong became China’s largest group of prisoners of conscience* (Hong Kong: Falun Gong Today, 2011)
Review: Chinese Art 中国艺术

Prior to coming to Hong Kong, I always admired the complexity and extravagance of Chinese calligraphy, but apart from this I never really thought much about other art forms in China. However, from further reading and numerous visits to the abundance of galleries in Hong Kong, I have come to understand that so much more defines Chinese art, ranging from painting to sculpture and from architecture to music. I have even been to a Chinese modern art film in the cinema called 'Tulpan'. I decided early on in the course that the best way for me to learn about Chinese art would be to visit the galleries; so far I have had the chance to experience the University of Hong Kong Museum and Art Gallery, The Hong Kong Arts Centre and the Hong Kong Museum of Art. I collected leaflets from each of my visits, as well as programmes of events and exhibitions, and have attached them in the portfolio appendix. What has struck me whilst being in Hong Kong is the Government and community desire to invest in and develop the arts. These art galleries are thriving, with many people visiting and there are new cultural arts areas springing up all over the city, including the 'Kowloon Cultural District', which is set to become one of the central hubs of artistic creativity in Asia.

To give a holistic review of Chinese art, I have decided to discuss an often-used Chinese artistic subject matter – animals, a famous Chinese artist – ‘Li Yanshan’, and perhaps the most traditional of all Chinese art – ceramics.

The iconography of animals in Chinese art

A painting of three sheep, from the Sung Dynasty, paint on silk
The animal symbol is probably the one of the most significant and endearing images of all Chinese art. In the West everyone has seen examples of Chinese dragons for example, whether it be on clothing, as a tattoo, ceramics or paintings. Animal symbols have been prominent in Chinese art from the prehistoric cave paintings in Gansu of the Neolithic age (C. 7000 – 2100 BC) to the fine arts of the Qing dynasties (1644 - 1911) and the modern era, in which a range of animals were adopted to represent emperors and officials of varying ranks and honours.

From further research it has become clear that “animal images probably held a spiritual significance for early men and women who lived in close proximity to animals and whose lives were deeply interdependent with the natural world”26. This spiritual significance has been passed down to subsequent generations to become one of the most memorable images in Chinese art, because by worshipping and respecting animals through imagery, artists “wish to seek divine protection and guardianship”27.

I was lucky enough to visit an exhibition on this topic at the Hong Kong Museum of Art entitled ‘Fantastic Animals in the Arts of China’, where I got to witness how the iconography of animals has been prominent in artistic works throughout history. The aim of the exhibition was to “explore how animals permeate art and custom of the ancient Chinese to become emblems of social rank and status, auspicious symbols and protective spirits of people”28. Walking around the exhibition, I got to learn that the dragon and the phoenix are the most significant divine creatures that are frequently depicted in the art of China, as they have traditionally represented divine authority. In fact, during the Ming and Qing dynasties the monarchy adopted these images, continuing this ancient tradition: the phoenix became a symbol of the empress and the dragon a symbol of the emperor. Animal images are constantly used as symbolic images in Chinese art, for example a leaping fish that transforms into a dragon is one of the most common themes in ceramic culture, which mythologically represented rising in officialdom and success in imperial ventures.

It was fascinating for me to browse the exhibition, witnessing the array of elaborate depictions of animals in so many different forms of art, including pottery, paintings and clothing and to see a continuation of traditional animal imagery throughout the history of China.

28 Hong Kong Museum of Art Exhibition: Cruising the Universe – Fantastic Animals in the Arts of China leaflet (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2011)
A passion for tradition: the art of Li Yanshan

This section has been inspired by the exhibition of the same name currently on display at the Hong Kong Museum of Art that features about one hundred Chinese landscape, flower and bird paintings by Li Yanshan, on loan from his family and other private collections. Li Yanshan (1898 – 1961) was one of the key associates of the Guangdong Chinese Painting Research Society and the principal of the Guangzhou Municipal College of Fine Arts in the 1930s. The exhibition was compiled to be a “good reflection of Li’s art and life, as well as the time he spent as part of both the Guangdong and Hong Kong art scenes”29.

The first thing that I immediately noticed when walking around the exhibition was the continuation of the same subject matters, stylistic characteristics and creative method throughout Li’s life. Like so many Chinese artists, Li developed his unique style by studying an amalgam of traditional paintings, in particular the works of the Yuan and Ming masters. Through further research of traditional Chinese techniques, it becomes ever clearer that the “vigour and robustness arising from Li’s dry-brush texture strokes is largely indebted to the work of original masters Huang Gongwang and Shen Zhou”30. He was obviously clearly influenced by traditional principles, vigorously endorsing and defending them throughout the entirety of his career. The vast majority of the collection is on scroll canvasses, in an ink medium and simply illustrates images of flowers, birds and countryside landscapes, a world away from the bustling city of Hong Kong. Art critic Chen Zhiding described Li’s passion for tradition as “emulating Yuan masters, returning to nature and majestic landscapes”31. It seems to me that Li used his simplistic and traditional style to protest against the constant development and subsequent destruction of the natural landscape of Hong Kong. The painting below is very typical of Li’s style and clearly displays his successful “attempt to blend archaic interpretation with real landscape for a style that is truly his own”32.

29 Hong Kong Museum of Art Exhibition: A Passion for Tradition – The Art of Li Yanshan guide (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2011)
30 Hong Kong Museum of Art Exhibition: A Passion for Tradition – The Art of Li Yanshan guide (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2011)
31 Chen Zhiding, Hong Kong Museum of Art Exhibition: A Passion for Tradition – The Art of Li Yanshan guide (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2011)
32 Hong Kong Museum of Art Exhibition: A Passion for Tradition – The Art of Li Yanshan guide (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2011)
For thousands of years, the preservation of artistic tradition was one of the main priorities for the Chinese literati. "It is a sad thing that the same tradition should have been brutally attacked and denounced by the intelligentsia in the past century" through the Cultural Revolution. Nowadays in China there is a huge effort to revive its beautiful and historic traditions so it is a shame that Li Yanshan is not alive today to witness the current era and the excitement that surrounds the contemporary art scene in China.

**Chinese Ceramics**

China is globally synonymous with producing the best quality porcelain in the world; in fact porcelain is often called 'China' in the English-speaking world. William Burton stated in his famous work on porcelain - 'Porcelain, Its Nature, Art and Manufacture' that "China's skilful transformation of ordinary clay into beautiful objects has captivated the imagination of people throughout history and across the globe". Perhaps one of the main reasons for China's constant development of artistic ceramics is the fact that China's natural environment is richly endowed with the necessary material for production – clay.

My knowledge about the art of China’s ceramic industry comes from personal experience of using and admiring Chinese porcelain, as well as visiting an exhibition in summer at the British Museum named the ‘Sir Percival David Collection’ that showcased over “1,500

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33 Yu Shaosong, *Hong Kong Museum of Art Exhibition: A Passion for Tradition – The Art of Li Yanshan guide* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2011)

examples of the finest Chinese ceramics in the world, dating from the 3rd to the 20th century"\(^35\). I learnt from studying this magnificent collection that Chinese ceramics were by far the most advanced in the world throughout the majority of history and were made for differing purposes, including for the Imperial Court, the domestic market or for export. In my opinion, the most beautiful piece in the collection that I saw was a small moon-shaped flask from the Yongzheng period, because I thought the details of the handle complimented the traditionally drawn birds of the design beautifully.

![Moon-shaped flask with birds, Yongzheng mark and period, AD 1723-35](image)

Like the rest of the arts, the quality of Chinese porcelain declined during the political tensions of the end of the Qing dynasty and subsequent political instability. However, the "Chinese contribution to ceramic art is one of uncontested brilliance"\(^36\), defined by artistic refinement, aesthetic diversity and global impact and is certainly being revived as part of the Chinese Government and society initiatives to revitalise China as the artistic cultural centre of the Asia Pacific region\(^37\).

\(^{35}\) British museum, Sir Percival David Collection (London: British Museum, 2011)
\(^{36}\) David Whitehouse, Chinese Porcelain in Medieval Europe Pg. 38 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)
\(^{37}\) Hong Kong Museum of Art Exhibition: Gems of Chinese Ceramics leaflet (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2011)
Review: Observations of Hong Kong as an Exchange student

I will be supplementing my observations of Hong Kong by discussing what I have learnt through trips, films, periodicals and books, as well as discussing my direct interaction with Chinese society through my time living and studying in the Chinese Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong.

Apart from the blistering heat after stepping out of Hong Kong Airport, my first reflection on arrival was how busy and over-populated the city is. It took me a couple of weeks to become settled and get over the sense of claustrophobia that I experienced and would probably have taken longer if I hadn’t spent so much of my life visiting London. Indeed according to official Hong Kong government statistics the population has exceeded seven million\(^{38}\) and is well on the way to reaching the same population levels of those of New York and London, whilst being confined in a much smaller land mass.

One of the first things I did after arriving was take a walk down to the ‘Festival Walk’ shopping centre, where I was amazed to find an interior of such grandeur, with a permanent indoor ice rink and countless luxury shops. After two months of living in Hong Kong it has become ever clearer that money and capital is a very important aspect of modern Hong Kong culture. Throughout the city there are numerous luxurious malls such as Harbour City at TST, The One at TST and the IFC Mall at Central that are all crammed full of customers from Hong Kong, and increasingly Mainland China, buying the latest designer clothes and state of the art technologies. The Western perception of East Asia being poor is totally undermined by the skyline vista of Hong Kong being littered by high-rise skyscrapers and huge shopping malls, as well as the decision of every major company and financial provider in the world to set up business in the city. A recent IMF report stated, “Hong Kong SAR has a long established track record as Asia’s premier center for cross-border financial transactions. Further financial opening of China is likely to consolidate Hong Kong SAR’s leading position as Asia’s international financial center for the medium term”\(^{39}\).


Hong Kong’s Harbour Skyline

The small leafy redbrick campus of the University of Hull is immensely different from the modern polytechnic of City University of Hong Kong, not only in terms of its architectural exterior, but also in its administration and learning methods. I have certainly enjoyed the contrasting learning experiences of the two institutions and have come to love the architectural style of the campus. Some observations of City U that I have noticed are how studious the undergraduates are (especially the Mainland Chinese), the willingness of the professors to meet with me and discuss my progress, and the huge sense of school spirit that is purveyed by the numerous societies meeting in AC1 every day. Again, one of the biggest problems with the university (like the city) is space – it can feel very crowded and claustrophobic. In fact, a professor told me recently that “money is not a problem for the university: if a project needs financial assistance then it can usually be facilitated. However, space is a major issue with departments constantly lobbying for further extensions”. But this problem shows just how popular the University is and I am proud that I am studying at a university with one of the fastest growing academic reputations in the world which was ranked this year by the QS World rankings as the 110th best university in the world and the 13th best in Asia40. During this past quarter of a century, City University has “grown from relatively humble beginnings to become a high-ranking world university with a talented team of international and local scholars and an energetic campus community”41.

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41 Way Kuo, City University President’s Welcome - http://www.cityu.edu.hk/cityu/about/welcome.htm (2011)
Despite the diverse and increasingly modern appearance of Hong Kong, culture, tradition and history still play a very important role in contemporary Hong Kong society. Early Chinese history, as well as the more recent British colonial history and film history of Bruce Lee and Run Run Shaw, is preserved in the abundance of museums, statues and cultural centres across the city. Hong Kong may be known by most commentators as the financial hub of Asia, but this is a simplified impression that does not incorporate the vast history of the area which ranges from the liberation movement of Dr Tsun Yat Sen to the “Shanghai business entrepreneurs bringing skills and capital from the Mainland, which consequently led to the vast growth that turned Hong Kong into a business centre”42.

I feel that coming to study from late August to December at City U is the perfect time to see Hong Kong celebrate festivals. From the traditional eating of moon cake on Mid-Autumn Festival and the Victoria Harbour fireworks of China National Day, to the dressing up on Halloween and gift giving of Christmas, Hong Kong people certainly know how to hold celebrations. I had the chance to visit Victoria Park with friends to witness the huge paper lantern fish and other exhibitions, which made for a truly magical evening and gave me a different perception of Hong Kong that is completely opposed to the hustle and bustle of the big city. Whilst speaking to a local Hong Kong student, I found out that Hong Kong has enthusiastically adopted celebrating the Western festivals of Christmas and Halloween. She told me that the streets of Lan Kwai Fong are crowded with young people dressed in scary costumes and that "Hong Kong people go crazy for Christmas even though they are not Christian". Indeed, I witnessed some of this

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42 Patricia Lim, Discovering Hong Kong’s Cultural Heritage pg.17 (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2002)
fanaticism when I visited Disneyland in early September to find that it was already decorated with Halloween themes well over a month in advance of the actual holiday!

*Chinese Lantern Fish during Victoria Park's Mid-Autumn Festival Celebrations*

Hong Kong's historical past means that its people have developed different cultural, political and social values to those of Mainland China. The governance settlement is difficult to understand as, even though theoretically the CCP does hold absolute sovereign control over Hong Kong, the SAR region's internal governance situation has retained much of its original law-making authority, devoid of issues of defence. Under the unique principle of 'One Country, Two Systems'\(^43\), Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty on 1 July 1997 as a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. “This arrangement allows Hong Kong to enjoy a high degree of autonomy, retaining its capitalist system, independent judiciary and rule of law, free trade and freedom of speech”\(^44\). Sow Keat Tok, a researcher at the China Policy Institute at Nottingham University, argues, “Nothing has changed, except the flags and the post boxes that are now green instead of red. There have been very few observable changes for ordinary Hong Kongers”\(^45\). To many people, there is a romantic ideal about Hong Kong being a unique place, which should mean it is classified as separate from China. However, with the further economic integration of China and Hong Kong and the continued ascendancy of China as a great power, it seems that more and more residents are classifying themselves as Chinese.

My concluding observation of Hong Kong is that it is a unique blend of eastern and


\(^{44}\) Roger Buckley, *Hong Kong: The Road to 1997* pg. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

western influences, with a diversity of attractions and stunning countryside, world class learning institutions and a unique historical and traditional culture that have made it into 'Asia's world city' of today. It can be crowded, claustrophobic and tiresome at some times; however these bad points are over ridden by the opportunities and excitement that permeate through the city in the 21st century.

**Reflection Note - The Road to 1911: A Visual History**

Having the chance to witness firsthand the traditional culture of the Sheung Wan district and visit the 'Road to 1911: A Visual History' exhibition at the prestigious University of Hong Kong was definitely one of the highlights of the 'Experiencing China' Course.

Starting the day off at a Dai Pai Dong with a breakfast of congee and fried dough gave me a great insight into the less well-known traditional eating habits of Hong Kong people. Being in a bustling environment with waiters shouting and having the chance to sample such exotic food really was a treat. I was upset to hear Professor Wong state that the Hong Kong Government does not want to preserve these traditional eateries because they consider them to be unhygienic and out of touch with modern Hong Kong society, which is a shame as I had a fascinating experience.

![](image)

*Traditional "Congee" at the Dai Pai Do in Sheung Wan*

When our class arrived at the University of Hong Kong, I was immediately struck by the grandeur of this prestigious institution; I knew that the exhibition was going to be something special.
The exhibition is part of a programme to celebrate the centenary of founding of The University of Hong Kong, as well as the centenary of the Wuchang Uprising in Wuhan that toppled the Manchu Dynasty of Qing and resulted in the founding of the first republic in Asia. The 85 photographs featured in the exhibition, collated together for the first time by Liu Heung Shing, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photo-journalist, date from the revolutionary period of 1860 – 1920 and "provide an insight into the origins of modern China, in which Hong Kong played a key role."

Further reading about this revolutionary period has enlightened me about the anger that the majority of Chinese felt at the Qing Government due to corruption of the powerful, the weakness of the Qing to protect against the intervention of foreign forces and the resentment of the majority Han Chinese about being governed by the Manchu ethnic minority. However, even though the Qing emperor was ousted from power, the new nation was not defined by a peaceful transition to a functioning democratic republic, becoming instead an anarchic battleground for authority between factional revolutionaries, warlords and loyalists that was not resolved until the installation of the Communist Government in 1949.

The scope of subject matter in the photographs is impressive, ranging from Han Chinese revolutionary soldiers to British imperialist invaders, and from young Hong Kong school children to factory workers in Quandong province. Despite the contrasting stories within the photos, the collection is harmonious and beautifully "illustrates the social conditions and attitudes of the era, the atmosphere inside the imperial court in the dying days of the Qing Dynasty, the lives of the mighty and the poor, and various events that helped shape the transition of China." Some of my favourite photos in the exhibition include ‘Peace Negotiations between North and South at Shanghai, 1919’ and ‘Young

46 Liu Heung Shing, The Road To 1911: A Visual History Exhibition leaflet (2011)
47 Liu Heung Shing, The Road To 1911: A Visual History Exhibition leaflet (2011)
Revolutionary Soldiers at Hankou, 1911’, both portraying the sense of change and uncertainty of the times. However, perhaps the most recognisable photo in the exhibition was the haunting 'Young School Boy, 1860s’ (below), which will certainly endure in my memory for years to come.

Exhibition Photo: Young School Boy, 1860s

Reflection Note – Cadres and Masses 群众

From reviewing academic literature, reading newspaper reports and participating in the relevant ‘Experiencing China’ lecture, I have formulated strong opinions about the current relationship between the Cadres/Officials and the Masses in contemporary Chinese society. In Mainland China today, the title of Cadre refers to an "official that holds a responsible or managerial position”\(^{48}\), with anyone in a sensitive political office definitely having to be a member of the CCP. The original system of Cadres under Chairman Mao underwent a grand restructuring after Deng Xiaoping took office, aimed at “transforming the bureaucracy into an effective instrument of national policy”\(^{49}\). This reorganisation replaced a system of old revolutionary officials with a civil service of educated and young professionals reflecting the efficiency and effectiveness of China’s modernisation programme. However, from reading recent news articles it seems that the bureaucratic and over-centralised nature of the Government system of Cadres is still endemic, causing much public complaint and inducing party leaders to call for greater

\(^{48}\)Linda Wong, City University of Hong Kong Lecture: Experiencing China – Cadres and Masses (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong, 2011)

productivity. Chinese Premier Wen Jibao recently argued for reforms “that would allow more public scrutiny to address the problem of over-concentration of power with ineffective supervision”\textsuperscript{50}.

Perhaps the most prominent complaint about Cadres from the Masses is the systemic pervasiveness of corruption at all levels of the managerial framework, which stems from factors such as a capitalist materialistic incentive prevailing over moral values, inadequate supervision, little fear of being caught and great opportunities to pursue personal gain. However, there are some commentators, namely Xiaobo Lü in his book ‘Cadres and Corruption’, who argue that corruption is not solely “caused by purely economic incentives in the emerging marketplace, rather, it is the result of a long process of political developments and the manner in which the regime has evolved”\textsuperscript{51}. Bribery is regularly used by members of the public seeking influence over issues of local government and recent revelations about the luxurious Cadre lifestyle have caused mass controversy amongst the public. It does seem that the Chinese Central Government is bowing to public pressure over the issue as they recently engaged in “an anti-graft campaign that has outlawed expensive banquets, visits to karaoke bars and precious gifts for senior officials”\textsuperscript{52}. Perhaps the most shocking story has been the recent revelation of the incompetence of local Cadres in halting the practice of illegally recycling waste gutter oil into cooking oil for restaurants and the subsequent murder by unidentified assailants of Li Xiang, the journalist who wrote the story\textsuperscript{53}.

During the lecture on this subject, the class was given the opportunity to watch the controversial film ‘Petition: The Court of Complainants’. The film was very emotive in its

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A desperate women
dancing for justice in a
scene from the movie
‘Petition’
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\textsuperscript{50} Wen Jibao (cited), \textit{Independent Article: China Cracks down on Corrupt Golfing Cadres} (London: The Independent, 2011)


\textsuperscript{52} Clifford Coonan, \textit{Independent Article: China Cracks down on Corrupt Golfing Cadres} (London: The Independent, 2011)

\textsuperscript{53} AsiaOne News, \textit{Chinese Reporter Killed After Gutter Oil News} (Singapore: AsiaOne, 2011)
exposure of the disgraces and injustices committed by the Chinese local authorities in their intimidation of petitioners who go to Beijing to seek assistance from central Government. To me, it is almost incomprehensible why so many people are willing to live in make-shift shelters next to Beijing Southern Railway Station, waiting for months or even years to obtain justice for simple compensation claims.

Perhaps, the most chilling conclusion that I make after researching this topic is the willingness of the Chinese people to live within the governance framework of a single party state. The film especially made me realise that the Chinese population are not concerned with overthrowing the current system but just simply want basic rights, protection and assistance from the central Government. In fact the CCP is more popular than ever, with more members than ever before and many young Chinese students studying hard to become the next generation of officials: an example of this is the controversy recently over the huge percentage of elementary school pupils in China who want to be in positions of representation and power in their classes.

*The next generation of the Politburo?*
Film Review 电影审查 – Echoes of the Rainbow

As this was the first Hong Kong movie I have watched that did not star Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan, I was not sure whether to expect much from ‘Echoes of the Rainbow’. However, I was happily surprised by the emotionally heart-wrenching story and the quality of the cinematography.

‘Echoes of the Rainbow’ is a semi-autobiographical film about director Alex Law's childhood growing up in 1960s Hong Kong. The film is narrated through the eyes of an eight-year-old child named Big Ears (acted by the fantastic Buzz Chung Siu To and based on the director), which adds an interesting dynamic to the movie's presentation.

The plot concerns a poor Hong Kong family and their daily struggle to make ends meet. The father, Mr. Law (Simon Yam), a shoemaker, likes to instill discipline into his two sons and believes there is pride and honour in working hard and running a self-made business. Mrs. Law (Sandra Ng Kwan Yue) on the other hand is the happy-go-lucky mother who believes everything is possible in life and displays the wonderful negotiating skills that bring a comedic aspect to the film. The narrative follows the adventures of two brothers, with privately educated, athletic and aspirational Desmond (Aarif Rahman) courting the innocent Flora - and Big Ears wearing a fish bowl on his head, dreaming of becoming Hong Kong's first astronaut at a time when Neil Armstrong had just walked on the moon.
Although the family in the film are poor, they are seemingly happy and just as the audience begins to believe nothing could go wrong, uncontrollably a typhoon threatens to destroy their modest home and shoe shop, turning the film into a full-blown, somewhat predictable melodrama – in the veins of the traditional 1950s Cantonese tearjerker. However, even though the plot after the tycoon scene seems a bit ridiculous and over the top, it is “thanks to the strong ensemble work of the actors, both veterans and newcomers, that the film doesn’t capsize in a sea of sentimentality”\(^{54}\).

It is not the plot but the director’s attention to cinematographic detail that makes this movie fun and interesting to watch. Soaking up the atmosphere of the Sheung Wan district’s Wing Lee Street’s 1950s Hong Kong architecture (the last of its kind in the city), “cinematography is dreamily lush, softened by frequent dissolves and emotive close-ups”\(^ {55}\). Images of magic and poetry, such as the typhoon that tragically destroys the neighbourhood and the colourful double rainbow of the closing scene portray the central messages of the movie with grandeur.

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The movie's nostalgic mood of Hong Kong in days gone by is further enhanced by Law Kai Yu's inclusion of many catchy Sixties pop songs, especially those of the Monkees, that Desmond loves to listen on his state of the art transistor radio.

The movie has been criticised by some commentators for being too romanticised and ignoring some of the key political issues of the period, for example, major events like the 1967 pro-China riots in Hong Kong are not depicted in the film. However, "there is some reflection of the social milieu, such as the prevalence of corruption, as seen in a British policeman's demand for bribes on numerous occasions"\textsuperscript{56}.

Even though the film's plot may be viewed by cynics as predictable, and in some cases ridiculous, this misses the point of the movie. It is a simple and beautifully shot traditional melodrama, which depicts life in Hong Kong during the period with great detail and illustrates the hardships of poor families during the period with innocence and wonder. The movie is a very enjoyable watch and I would recommend it to anyone who is going to visit or stay in Hong Kong. I award the film \textbf{7.5/10}

**Conclusion 结论**

Even though all of my knowledge about Mainland China has come from secondary sources, I have learnt a great deal through researching and arranging this portfolio, subsequently changing my perception of many aspects of Chinese society today. I am certainly looking forward to undertaking the trips I have planned to Beijing, Biaowan and Taiwan to get a more practical experience of other parts of China, as opposed to the solely theoretical knowledge I have currently.

Chinese politics is in a state of flux, with many people calling for further reforms, but the Chinese Communist Party still legitimately governing with relatively little dissent. I have learnt that even though the West condemns China over human rights abuses, corrupt Cadres and lack of democracy, the Chinese Communist Party has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and pragmatically introduced reforms, without undermining stability, to suit the mood of the nation. But China, like other nations, is not perfect and it certainly should introduce further policies to counteract the huge rising inequality and other pressing issues that may undermine China’s economic miracle and could lead to regime security and societal instability.

Being brought up in the UK, which values the European artists of the Renaissance and of the Modernist and Impressionist schools, made discovering the art of China so much more fascinating for me. I originally thought Chinese art simply compromised of fine calligraphy and ceramics, but couldn’t have been more wrong. Visiting the Hong Kong Museum of Art to witness the beautiful and traditional simplicity of the art of Li Yanshan has introduced me to a school of art I would never have discovered otherwise. And seeing the Hong Kong cultural scene flourish as it currently is, with an abundance of galleries and the new West Kowloon Cultural Centre, has made me aware of how China is regaining its pride in its artistic institutions after the horrors of the Cultural Revolution.

Perhaps this Portfolio would have been better entitled ‘Experiencing Hong Kong’ because although I have read vastly about China in academic articles, periodicals and books, I feel that I have not experienced China itself. Hong Kong certainly does not seem to me to be under the jurisdiction of the brutal authoritarian regime that I had previously read and heard so much about and this has led to an increasing awareness on my part of the way propaganda is used in the West. The endless shopping centres, world class higher education facilities, the diverse workforce, numerous skyscrapers and devotion to capitalist consumerism would certainly seem to an outsider to be a mile away from visions of Mao’s Communist China, indeed allowing more freedoms than in many Western countries.
Hong Kong is considered by most observers to be the centre for financial companies in the Asia Pacific Region. Having the opportunity to visit Hong Kong attractions such as Disneyland, Ocean Park, Star Ferry harbour tours and The Peak all have undermined my impression of Hong Kong being solely a financial city. Also, making visits to Lamma Island, numerous city parks and Lantau Island has proven to me that much of the region's natural beauty is still preserved despite the rapid industrialisation and modernisation that Hong Kong has undergone. Being here has also exposed me to Hong Kong's vast history and culture that ranges from British colonialism to Bruce Lee Movies.

I am grateful for the opportunity to undertake the module ‘Experiencing China’ as it has been such a unique learning experience incorporating a trip to an art gallery, film appreciation, a restaurant meal with peers and best of all, the fast-approaching field trip to the Sunbeam Children's Village in Baiwan in Guandong Province. This unusual programme format has benefited my academic understanding of contemporary Chinese society and my overall Hong Kong experience immensely.

Taking the course has changed my perception of China immensely. Learning about all the different social groups in China has shown me how vastly different the population is, as opposed to the rigid and socially ordered idea of China that I had before. Also, hearing the talk from Willy Lam has given me a chilling glimpse of how much power governments wield if they control the internet and other media forms.

Finally, having the opportunity to study at City University of Hong Kong has been a riveting, enjoyable and exciting learning opportunity. Aside from the courses, simply living in Hong Kong has exposed me to a starkly contrasting cultural experience from living in the UK. I have made so many friends, had some fantastic lecturers and had the chance to visit so many attractions and interesting sites. There is so much to do and see here, I wish I could have stayed here for longer than one semester, but will leave nevertheless knowing that I have been on a life-changing journey.
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