

Lord Patten (Chris Patten Speech)

Video address transcript for The Society of Publishers in Asia (SOPA) 2017 Awards for Editorial Excellence on June 15th, 2017

First of all I should apologize for not being with you in person today. The reasons changed a bit. Originally, I was supposed to be hosting a reception and dinner as chancellor of Oxford University for a group of our Oxford Olympians, people who have performed in the Olympics who have got gold and silver and bronze medals and so on. But I am not doing that now. Instead of that I am going to be in hospital for what I hope will be a fairly routine operation, one that I have had before. And I hope I will be out reasonably quickly. Anyway, I apologize for having to do this by video link.

I am constantly surprised by the number of people who ask me if I miss Hong Kong, as though I might just have left. It's actually 20 years since I left Hong Kong. A taxi driver the other year, the other day, when I told him how long it had been, said with surprise, "Good Lord," he said, "Am I that old?" And I am afraid it's true for all of us, in the sense in which memory murders time. So it's 20 years and I have tried during that period not to become a day-by-day commentator on everything that happens in Hong Kong.

Do I miss it? Well, it was, I suppose, the happiest period of my life and my family's life, certainly the most interesting in that great bustling, cheerful, successful city. But as I say, I have tried not to answer questions about everything that is happening in Hong Kong because I can't obviously keep up with every event and it's, anyway, not very helpful. But the fact is that because I have thought it such a special place and because Britain has so many obligations to Hong Kong, I do comment from time to time because I want to try to ensure that Hong Kong remains what it is today, one of the most free cities in Asia and one of the most successful cities in the world.

The handover was, in many respects, unique. It was the handover of a great city and territory around it, and by one of the world's oldest democracies to a country which, however you describe it, it is not a democracy. Whether you say it's authoritarian, or the other end, totalitarian, or just a strange mixture of Leninism and capitalism, it's very different from what Hong Kong was becoming. And that was something that we try to secure and that is the future of Hong Kong through negotiating with China, the Joint Declaration which was supposed to ensure that Hong Kong remain free and autonomous within the sovereignty of mainland China for 50 years. It was originally Deng Xiaoping's great idea of course, "One Country, Two Systems." If you look back to the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping said over and over again how capable people in Hong Kong were of running their own affairs. It was an important point to make because nobody could conceivably continue to try to justify colonialism running Hong Kong or taking a part in the running of Hong Kong from thousands of miles away. It's not a

very 20th or 21th century thing to do, we know the history of Hong Kong and why it happened.

So, the future of Hong Kong was underpinned by the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. And what they secured was the Hong Kong system. I want say more about that in a moment.

How has Hong Kong done in relation to the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law since then? Well, the Taiwanese for, doubtless their own reasons, claim that there have been, I think, it's a hundred and sixty, a hundred and seventy breaches of the Joint Declaration. That, I slightly raised my eyebrow at that. There are obviously reasons for that argument. But you can observe three things that have happened over the years.

First of all, the suggestion that the government in Hong Kong, both the chief executive and the administration, should within a tripartite system breaking down executive, legal system and the systems of legislative control. The legislature within that has gone backwards. It's not more democratic as one hoped it would be. And Hong Kong people, despite the promises that were made by officials, by foreign ministry and others back in the 1990s, Hong Kong people have not been allowed to determine the way in which their democracy should be managed, and I think that is a pity. And if you deny intelligent moderate people control over their own destinies, it's not surprising that they sometimes become a bit immoderate.

Secondly, as I think we saw the other day with the speech by Zhang Dejiang, who had previously been rather a moderate voice on Hong Kong affairs, member of the politburo, senior official responsible for Hong Kong, there has been a steady tightening of grip on Hong Kong's windpipe, on Hong Kong's autonomy and on its ability to do things for itself. You've seen that, I think, in the extent to which Beijing's offices in Hong Kong try to get involved in every branch, every aspect of government - you've seen it in the attacks on the judges and the rule of law. I sometimes wonder whether Chinese officials actually understand what the rule of law means. You've seen it as well in attacks on the way in which the rule of law works, with the Beijing authorities actually intervening in a law case being held quite properly before Hong Kong courts. You've seen people being snatched from Hong Kong's streets by mainland people. And there's been a sort of subtle campaign, I think, to raise questions about the autonomy and independence of educational institutions, and of course for free press. Nothing quite as bad as the machete attack on Kevin Lau, a brave journalist. But things that give the impression that perhaps the way Shanghai operated in the 1930s and 40s hasn't been entirely forgotten.

So that's all been a bit unsettling. Why has it been happening? Well I suppose it reflects in a way what has been happening in the mainland, the crackdown on dissidents under President Xi. I think it also reflects the fact that, 20 years on from

1997, there are some in the Chinese government who think that the rest of the world won't care what happens in Hong Kong anyway, whereas in 1997, in Hong Kong, with around 7 million people represented I think 17 percent of Chinese GDP, that's come down to about 3 percent, not because of any failure in Hong Kong, but because China has been doing so wonderfully well economically. And I think that probably encourages some people in the mainland to think that they can, and they're wrong about this, that they can do without Hong Kong's success.

And I suspect also 20 years on, people wonder whether the rest of the world really cares about Hong Kong. Well, it does and it should. Certainly Britain does and should. I am quite alarmed by the number of times the Joint Declaration is referred to by Chinese officials as though if it were simply a gift in Beijing's hands. It was actually a treaty agreement between Britain and China with guarantees for the way of life of the people in Hong Kong, guarantees which the United Kingdom was responsible for before 1997, and guarantees which the mainland is responsible for after 1997.

And it doesn't seem to me unreasonable to ask this question - If Beijing breaks its word on Hong Kong, how much are we going to be able to trust, in Britain, in America, in Europe, China's word on other things? People used to say to me that, while the Chinese were difficult to negotiate with - and I can vouch for that - but once they reach an agreement with you, they kept to it. I hope that doesn't turn out to be a faith-based proposition. I hope it continues to be sustained by facts.

You know we use over the years the suggestion that "One Country Two Systems" guarantees Hong Kong until 2047, and that mantra has been used again and again by Chinese officials and others. Sometimes I wonder whether people actually think to themselves what Hong Kong's system actually is. Hong Kong's system is rule of law, is accountability, is free press, is all the other freedoms we associate with a free and plural society. And it is of course still Chinese, Hong Kong is a Chinese city, but it's a Hong Kong-Chinese city, it is a city with its own sense of citizenship and I think people recognize how that sense of citizenship underpins Hong Kong's success, and underpins Hong Kong's attractions. And it would be very nice when president Xi Jinping visits Hong Kong, probably later in the summer, if he would underline that point.

Now just two other thoughts. First of all, what Hong Kong represents in terms of its management of the economy. What it represents is a liberal, open, free-trading approach to economics and economic welfare. And that's been very much under attack, under assault in recent years by people who oppose globalization, in rust belt America, in rust belt Europe. But it's not globalization which threatens jobs. What threatens jobs is the way that governments in America and governments in Europe actually respond to competition from others. For example, in America, whereas in other comparable countries about 0.6 percent of GDP goes on re-trading, in America the figure is 0.1

percent. So I don't blame Chinese economic success, which I hope will continue, for the problems in Michigan and Pennsylvania which helped to elect President Trump. I think there're failings in the American system and you could say the same about Europe.

The other point I would just make is this. We know that the environment for the media is changing very rapidly. As a business model, newspapers have a tough time. Circulation falls, advertising falls and there's more and more competition from other forms of, particularly the internet and the social media, other ways of getting the news. I hope that doesn't drive newspapers into becoming not journals of record but ideological drum-thumpers. There's a bit of a sign of that in the United Kingdom. Circulation's falling, so you try to prevent it by increasingly extreme headlines. I also hope that we can see off the competition from people like Breitbart and the Identitarians, who want to focus so much of what is happening around the world on attacking external critics or opponents or they called 'the other'. Tom Stoppard, the great playwright, once said he was passionately in favour of freedom of the press, it was just one or two newspapers he didn't like. And I think that the more newspapers there are, and the more news agencies there are, which try to tell things as they are, rather than indulge in fake news or in excessively extreme tabloid headlines, the more likely it is that we will be able to have an electorate citizenry which is well informed and is capable of dealing with the challenges which lie ahead. Those challenges are going to be for Hong Kong as for others. And there is a part of me which thinks that Hong Kong is right at the centre of a lot of the biggest issues that we will have to face in the 21st century.