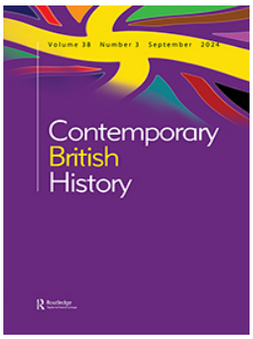

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Dalton Rawcliffe

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# A successful transnational cold war intervention? Revisiting the Heung Yee Kuk's "goodwill" tour of Britain's Chinatowns, 1967–1970

Dalton Rawcliffe

History Department, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

**ABSTRACT**

Most ethnic Chinese living and working in Britain in the late 1960s were from Hong Kong's New Territories. Many of these British migrants blamed the Hong Kong government for importing cheap foodstuffs and driving farmers off the land to build new infrastructural projects. In 1967, Hong Kong experienced a wave of social and political unrest commonly referred to as the 1967 Leftist Riots. The unrest spread to parts of Britain's Chinatown, where a leftist movement emerged in sympathy with the anti-colonial rioters. In response, the Heung Yee Kuk, a legal advisory organisation that represented established interests in the New Territories, proposed to send a 'goodwill tour' to Britain's Chinatowns to demonstrate that the Hong Kong government was committed to their welfare. The unlikely alliance proved politically expedient as both had good reason to foster the political loyalty of Britain's migrant Chinese. In particular, both parties understood the economic necessity of quieting the unrest to ensure the continued flow of remittance back to the colony. The detailed report of migrant Chinese grievances with the British and Hong Kong governments produced by the Heung Yee Kuk delegates led to welfare reforms for the Chinese communities of Hong Kong and Britain.

**KEYWORDS**

Britain; Hong Kong government; Transnationalism; Chinatown; Heung Yee Kuk

## Introduction

This article explores the Heung Yee Kuk's (鄉議局, *Xiāng yì jú*) (hereafter 'the Kuk') role in aiding the Hong Kong government to quell the Maoist agitation in Britain's Chinatowns and shore up colonial support in the New Territories. The Kuk, this study contends, were engaged in what some scholars have called transnationalism from below. The transnational agenda of the Kuk relied on its organic connection to the migrant community and the use of its grassroots reputation to exert political control and, more specifically, ensure the continued flow of remittance back to the homeland. Most of Britain's ethnic Chinese migrants kept regular contact with family and friends in the homeland, and many routinely maintained economic, political, and cultural communications and affiliations with Hong Kong, including with the Kuk. Similarly, a variety of state agencies had a vested interest in the grassroots mobilisations and projects of the Kuk, leading to the gradual sponsorship of the organisation

**CONTACT** Dalton Rawcliffe rawky117@hotmail.com History Department, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

and a deepening of shared interests to improve the welfare of both Chinese migrants and the kin and community who remained in Hong Kong. The Kuk/Hong Kong government coalition is reminiscent of similar grassroot organisation and state government collaboration, including in China's migrant grant initiatives and Mexico's Three-for-One Program.[1] Based on a critical analysis of the archival documents pertaining to the Kuk and Hong Kong government's 'Good Will Tour' of Britain's Chinatowns, this paper argues that the Kuk successful catapulted the hardships faced by the ethnic Chinese in the New Territories and in Britain to the attention of the authorities. Ultimately, the Kuk helped the British and Hong Kong government quiet dissension among Britain's Chinese migrants by encouraging the adoption of significant welfare reforms.

This article challenges the tendency to see the 1967 Leftist Riots and the British response it provoked as being primarily an urban-centred problem in the colony. The Kuk represent a grassroots rural organisation that served as a powerful force for political change, both at the local level and, transnationally, as a mediator of Britain's ethnic Chinese community. The Kuk's initiative to tour Britain's ethnic Chinese community in partnership with the Hong Kong government led to meaningful change in the political landscape for the Chinese communities in both Britain and Hong Kong. The Kuk's tour revealed how Chinese communities felt alienated from the British authorities and how their discontent had led some Chinese migrants to dabble in left-wing anticolonial politics. In turn, the Kuk's tour helped prompt a renewed commitment from the British and Hong Kong governments to allay this discontent and contain left-wing radicalism. This commitment led to improved government communication, welfare, and services that continue to impact both Chinese communities to this day. The first section of this paper contextualises the transnational influence the 1967 Leftist Riots had upon the Britain's ethnic Chinese community and how the unrest back home necessitated the need for the Kuk and Hong Kong government to cooperate on a joint approach to the local and transnational issues of greatest concern in Britain's Chinatowns. The second section explores the Kuk's 'goodwill tour' of Britain's ethnic Chinese community. The tour represented a grassroots initiative to demonstrate the renewed commitment of the British and Hong Kong government to the ethnic Chinese community. The tour listened to the needs and grievances of the migrant community and recommended a variety of important policy solutions. The final section of the paper reveals how the British and Hong Kong governments renewed their commitment to the welfare of their Chinese communities. The Kuk's tour led to lasting political reforms. These reforms sought to stem the tide of Chinese Communism and have had a lasting impact on the Chinese communities of Britain and Hong Kong to this day.

Hong Kong has been an important centre for importing and exporting goods between China and the world and a critical transient hub for human labour since the late 1840s.[2] In particular, modern Hong Kong developed a robust transnational economic network of family remittance. The remittance flow from Chinese migrants abroad was crucial to Hong Kong's commercial prosperity.[3] The abolition of slavery in Britain, France, and the United States increased the demand for cheap labour for capitalist ventures such as gold mining and railway construction in the United States, Canada, and Australia and tin mining and rubber plantations in Southeast Asia. As a result, from 1851 to 1872, the total number of Chinese labourers shipped to the Americas, Australia, and Southeast Asia from Hong Kong amounted to over three hundred thousand.[4] The growth of overseas trade and Chinese migration proved to be an essential component in the economic development of the

American West and the settler states of the British Empire.[5] Nineteenth-century Chinese emigration also provided a flow of capital to Hong Kong and China and initiated a transnational network that wedded Chinese emigrants and the established Chinese diaspora with their ancestral homeland.[6] Until the second half of the twentieth century, Europe was not a destination for large-scale transoceanic immigration. Instead, the small Chinese emigrant populace that found itself in Europe was typically confined to the seafaring trades and was thus concentrated around major European ports. While their numbers were small, the early Chinese emigrants of London and Liverpool played a role in establishing networks amongst the global Chinese diasporas and laid the groundwork for the Britain's Chinese communities of the twentieth century.[7]

Early Chinese migration and the first permanent settlement in Britain began in the late eighteenth century. Their numbers slowly expanded into the early twentieth century, especially when the Great War increased British demand for commercial seafarers to replace British sailors conscripted for war service.[8] Following the First World War, the ethnic Chinese community sharply declined in the 1930s to less than six thousand due to economic contraction caused by the Great Depression, restrictive immigration legislation, and integration into the British population. Britain's Chinatowns would have all but disappeared had it not been for the renewed British war demand for Chinese seafarers during the Second World War.[9] The British Chinese population only rebounded after 1945, as Britain relaxed its immigration laws to citizens within the Commonwealth to help meet its labour demands.[10] In Hong Kong, the native born were considered British subjects and held a distinct advantage over those who had only recently arrived as mainland refugees from Communist China. While the high cost of passage and employment in Britain meant that many Chinese could not migrate, the ex-sailors who remained in Britain following the First World War provided a crucial foothold for the first wave of large-scale emigration from Hong Kong. The primary industry for the new arrivals from Hong Kong was no longer shipping or laundromat service but the exponential growth of the Chinese restaurant trade. Before the Second World War there were less than a dozen Chinese restaurants in Britain, but their numbers proliferated in the post-war era. The restaurant 'revolution' was associated with changing British views of cuisine, and the return of British soldiers, colonial officials, and others from the Commonwealth who had developed an appetite for both Indian and Chinese cuisine. With the end of food rationing in 1954, Chinese restaurants became even more popular as they offered low prices and large portions. In addition, the American presence in Britain during the war introduced to the British the conception of takeaway, which Chinese restaurants were among the first to embrace.[11]

The New Territories, Hong Kong's largest region, held its most productive farmlands; they were both economically and strategically important for the British colony.[12] The New Territories were acquired by the British colony with the signing of the Second Convention of Peking in 1898, expanding the colony by an additional 950 square kilometres of north of Kowloon, as well as over 200 smaller islands, under a 99-year lease. Until after the Second World War, the Hong Kong government considered the New Territories a buffer of defence between the mainland, Kowloon, and Hong Kong Island. However, by the 1950s, Hong Kong's hinterlands experienced fundamental changes that would transform rural life and the economy. The influx of migrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the advent of industrialisation in urban regions required the Hong Kong government to intervene more directly in the New Territories. Appropriate New Territories land was

expropriated and developed for infrastructural projects, providing space for new industrial and residential towns. A combination of an expanding urban market and demand for vegetables led to a wholesale conversion of paddy land to vegetable plots. The Hong Kong government encouraged the growth of the vegetable revolution so as not to be as dependent on imports of foodstuffs from the PRC. The vegetable market proved so profitable that many New Territories farmers switched from rice to vegetable cultivation. During this period, imported cheap rice from Thailand would come to dominate Hong Kong's rice market. Scholar James Watson found that the collapse of the traditional economy of the New Territories' village of San Tin came as the result of its inability to compete with the cheap imported Thai rice and the inflationary wage demands of agricultural labourers. Kwee Choo Ng's interviews with New Territories' emigrants reveal that many left the region in the post-war period due to the difficulty in finding suitable work in Hong Kong and the poor quality of the remaining farmland in the villages northwest of Sai Kung. Gregor Benton suggests that most New Territories' farmers blamed their low margins and economic woes on the Hong Kong government's policy of importing cheap foodstuffs from Thailand and the PRC.[13] Unable to find employment in Hong Kong, many New Territories residents made the decision to try their luck elsewhere and some chose Britain as their destination. Most Chinese who arrived in post-war Britain were ethnic Cantonese and Hakka-speaking villagers of traditional farming clans from the New Territories. They relied on contacts who had already established themselves in Britain to find employment. While poorly educated, the ethnic Chinese migrants brought determination and willingness to work and were able to send back to the New Territories a steady flow of remittance.[14]

Even with the pressures of industrialisation and urbanisation in Hong Kong, the New Territories remained largely rural and maintained its traditional peasant culture. The Hong Kong government followed a social policy of non-interference with the region's indigenous population. Instead, the British relied on the Kuk, a powerful organisation representing established interests in the New Territories. However, the steady influx of PRC refugees placed a burden on the British colony's housing supply and exposed its paltry social welfare policy throughout the 1950s.[15] Much of the New Territories economy during the post-war period relied on remittances from emigrants who had relocated across the globe. However, this transnational economic network and the flow of sterling to the New Territories was threatened when the PRC's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) spilled over into Hong Kong and led to anti-colonial demonstrations against British rule during the 1967 Leftist Riots. This unrest would soon spread to elements of Britain's ethnic Chinese community who sympathised with the Hong Kong Leftists.

Scholars have overlooked the impacts of the 1967 Riots and the Cultural Revolution within the largely rural New Territories in favour of the tumult within the urban areas of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island.[16] Most ethnic Chinese living and working in Britain were from the New Territories. Many of these emigrants connected their exile (and a perception that a colonial cheap food policy had forced them to look elsewhere for employment) with some of the grievances articulated by those who participated in the 1967 Leftist Riots. In 1967, Hong Kong was hit by social and political unrest. The unrest spread to parts of Britain's Chinatowns, where a leftist movement emerged in sympathy with the anti-colonial rioters. In response, the Kuk proposed to send a 'goodwill tour' to Britain's Chinatowns to investigate the grievances of the Chinese migrants and to recommend

policy that would improve the reputation of the British and Hong Kong governments. Although the relationship between the Kuk and the Hong Kong government evolved in their years of coexistence, their unlikely alliance proved effective in winning over the political loyalty of the New Territories people residing in Britain.

Leaders from the great clans gathered to form the Kuk in 1926 in the wake of the Hong Kong government's attempt to impose a tax on building permission and the Guangzhou-Hong Kong Strike of 1925. The Kuk established itself to defend 'traditional' local governance and to negotiate with the Hong Kong government to promote the welfare of the people of the New Territories. The Kuk consisted of three political layers: village heads, rural committees, and the council.[17] The local elite dominated the New Territories' people's formal advisory and representative body. Before the Second World War, the Kuk was not a very powerful organisation as the colonial District Officers hardly mentioned them in their reports. Then, in 1950, the Kuk reformed itself from an 'autonomous voluntary association' into a 'society of village representatives' that divided the New Territories into seven electoral districts. This transformation made it a rival political organisation to the colonial state and successfully increased the Kuk's sphere of influence across the region. From then on, the Hong Kong government could no longer ignore the Kuk's opinion.[18] The Kuk's relationship with the colonial government ebbed and flowed in their years of existence. After the 1957 Kuk election was exposed as having been rigged, the Hong Kong government withdrew recognition of the Kuk. However, two years later the government enacted the Kuk Ordinance, which granted it the power to acknowledge the Kuk as a representative of rural opinion provided the state was satisfied with the Kuk's composition and political processes.[19] By the 1960s, the alliance between the Kuk and the Hong Kong government deepened as both had an interest in the economy and development of the New Territories, the prevention of the spread of Communism at home and abroad, and the well-being of the Chinese community in Britain.

The Hong Kong 1967 Leftist Riots are widely considered a landmark in the colony's history wherein a local identity emerged that was distinct from the mainland.[20] Hong Kong would not experience a demonstration of similar scale again until the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2020 protests following the introduction of the controversial National Security Law.[21] Initially, the riots were triggered by an industrial dispute at an artificial flower factory in San Po Kong in May 1967. The dispute escalated into violent clashes between workers and the police. Local Leftists used the opportunity to mobilise all pro-communist and PRC-owned businesses to join the rioting flower factory workers and to direct their animus towards the Hong Kong government.

There are two competing arguments regarding the roots of the Leftist Riots. Some scholars provide evidence to suggest that the Leftist Riots were inspired by local conditions and were the result of mobilisation by local Leftists who drew on the organic internal social contradictions and discontent among the Hong Kong people. Other scholars suggest that the Leftist Riots were primarily led by outside agitators, particularly agents of the PRC's Cultural Revolution, and that these provocateurs received little in the way of local support.[22] What most of the scholarship has missed is the extent to which the 1967 Leftist Riots reverberated beyond Kowloon and the urban centres of Hong Kong Island, especially within the New Territories where the border between Hong Kong and the PRC was often porous. Where scholars have examined the wider impact of the 1967 Leftist Riots, they have typically focused on border skirmishes between the British Gurkha forces

and Hong Kong police force with the Chinese militia, such as that at the Sha Tau Kok Incident on 8 July 1967.[23]

Several historians have elaborated on the transnational role Maoism and the 1967 Leftist Riots had Britain's ethnic Chinese community. Gregor Benton has acknowledged how the British-Chinese Community kept alive the memory of how the Communist East River Column (*Dōngjiāng zòngduì*, 东江纵队) fought against the Japanese occupation of the New Territories. Benton also provides evidence that discrimination and poverty in Britain made for fertile ground for pro-Red Guard sentiment in Britain's Chinatowns. Dalton Rawcliffe builds upon Benton's work and elaborates on the effectiveness of Maoist propaganda on the ethnic Chinese in Britain. Rawcliffe also offers further insight into how the British and Hong Kong governments surveyed and responded to Red Guard agitation in Britain's Chinatowns.[24] In light of newly available archival sources from the National Archives and the Hong Kong Public Records Office, Benton and Gomez and Rawcliffe's work needs to be reappraised to further elaborate on the effect pre-1967 conditions in the New Territories had upon Britain's ethnic Chinese. While Benton and Gomez argue that the Red tide in Chinatown would have subsided with or without the Kuk, they overlooks the Kuk's role in aiding the Hong Kong government to reform its policy towards the Chinese community not only in Britain, but also in the New Territories.[25] And, where Rawcliffe's work revealed the top-down transnational response by the British and Hong Kong governments in quelling the Maoist agitation in Britain's Chinese community, the release of new archival sources suggest that the role of the Kuk and grassroots organisation had in securing the loyalty of the New Territories migrants in Britain has been underappreciated in the existing scholarship.

## Trouble in britain's chinatowns

It was inevitable that the British colony of Hong Kong would become embroiled in the PRC's Cultural Revolution, given its anti-imperial and anti-capitalist critique and analysis.[26] What began as a strike at an artificial flower factory became a significant anti-colonial movement led by local Leftists. Beijing's state newspapers praised the Leftists' activities, labelling the colonial government's actions as 'fascist atrocities'. Excessive violence punctuated life in Hong Kong for the next seven months as the Leftists and Hong Kong police clashed with one another, escalating into a Leftist bomb campaign designed to discredit the Hong Kong government.[27] Both sides recognised the importance of propaganda, and the press and the education system became areas of conflict utilised by both camps. The Leftist media continuously produced material that not only denounced British imperial rule but that also tried to legitimise the Cultural Revolution to the people of Hong Kong through the distribution of Mao's *Little Red Book*, images of the Chairman, and revolutionary songs and films.[28] Initially hesitant, London eventually authorised the Hong Kong government's request to ban the Leftist press and ordered right-wing newspapers to distribute pro-colonial material as a countermeasure.[29]

The Hong Kong 1967 Leftist Riots proved to be a transnational event that deeply impacted overseas Hong Kong Chinese, specifically those who had migrated to Britain. In the summer of 1967, members of pro-Beijing Chinese associations protested in London against British imperialism in Hong Kong. The Kung Ho Association displayed Mao Zedong's portrait on their building alongside the maxim 'the east wind prevails over

the west wind'. The Chinese Mutual Aid Worker's Club performed model operas in London, Liverpool, Manchester, and Edinburgh. The Tai Ping Club banned gambling and mah-jong, posted newspaper clippings of the PRC's 'tremendous progress' under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and stocked its shelves with communist literature. The headquarters of the Kung Ho Association in London became an important centre for the distribution of left-wing Hong Kong newspapers, including *Wen Wei Po, Ta Kung Pao*, and the *New Evening Post*, across Britain's Chinese community. While the British and Hong Kong governments did not make any effort to inform the ethnic Chinese of the events in the colony, the left-wing Hong Kong newspapers proved popular. The leftist press did much to educate the community about the 1967 Leftist Riots, albeit from a biased perspective.[30] As sympathy for the riots grew, young leftist Chinese workers and students collected money for the All-Circle Struggle Committee (*Gang ying pohai douzheng weiyuanhui* 港英迫害斗争委员会), the primary Leftist organisation in Hong Kong, to support the fight against British colonial rule. Historians agree that Chinatown's Red Guard demonstrations were minor compared to the 1967 Leftist Riots. Most ethnic Chinese in Britain remained neutral or at the most sympathetic, but not committed, to the leftist cause in Hong Kong.[31] Still, the British and Hong Kong governments were concerned with how and why an element of the British Chinese community could demonstrate support for the Hong Kong Leftists. The Kuk too were equally concerned with how the Maoist disruption in the New Territories and Britain's Chinatowns could upset the flow of remittance to the colony and disrupt their rural authority.

## The kuk's united front strategy

The Kuk always maintained a strong interest in Britain's Chinese community, as they were beneficiaries of the remittance flow back to the New Territories. When the popularity of the Leftist Riots and sympathy for the Cultural Revolution within Britain's Chinatowns threatened the Kuk's rural authority and the New Territories economy, the Kuk responded. On 9 October 1967, H.T. Woo, the head of the Liaison Office under the Hong Kong Government Office (HKGO) in London 1967, reported to the Colonial Secretary that many British customers were boycotting Britain's Chinese restaurants. He explained that the boycotts were not caused by the ill-treatment of British diplomat Peter Hewitt by mainland Chinese following the closing of the British Mission in Shanghai on 24 May, or the burning of the British Mission that threatened the safety of Donald Hopson and staff on 22 August. Instead, it was the clash between the London Chinese Mission staff and London police in what came to be known as the 'Battle of Portland Place' on 29 August, that had raised the ire of British patrons of Chinese restaurants. Since the clash, Woo reported, numerous Chinese restaurants were practically empty of customers.[32] Fights, thrown bricks, verbal insults, and threats to Chinese restauranteurs in London, North England, Midlands, and Scotland disrupted the Chinese restaurant trade for weeks.[33] The Kuk held many contacts and was invested in many business dealings in Britain's Chinatowns. The chairmen of various Kuk Rural Committees, including Tai Po (Stephen Wong Yuen-cheung), San Tin (Man Ching-to), Sai Kung (North) (Wong Chun-wai), and Sha Tau Kok (Li Yuen-kwuen), often travelled to Britain to visit the restaurants they owned. While there was an economic incentive for the Kuk to aid in quelling the Maoist sympathy in Britain's Chinatowns and restore the Chinese restaurant trade, the idea of an official Kuk visit also presented an opportunity to expand the Kuk's

contacts with the Chinese community and retain a measure of control over the New Territories and Britain's ethnic Chinese migrants.[34]

As the recognised spokesman for the indigenous community and as an adviser on New Territories affairs, the Kuk had always sought to promote goodwill with the Hong Kong and British governments to push advantages, protect, and enhance its status in the face of change. The outbreak of riots in the colony and the disruption of remittance from Britain's Chinatowns presented the Kuk with an opportunity to deepen its alliance with the Hong Kong government, promote its interests with the British authorities, and deepen its authority over the development of the New Territories.[35] The Kuk proposed to the Hong Kong government to send a delegation to visit Britain's major city centres and engage with the ethnic Chinese with the objectives to 1) demonstrate the Hong Kong government's concern for their well-being; 2) to counteract the effects of the Chinese communist press; 3) to give a first-hand, anti-Communist account of the 1967 Leftist Riots; 4) explain the colonial government's policies; 5) establish a better liaison in Britain; 6) reveal to the British public that not all Chinese are Communists; and 7) submit a thorough report of their findings to the Hong Kong government upon the Kuk's delegations return.

The Kuk suggested that the delegation would consist of four senior representatives, Pang Fu-wah (Chairman of the Kuk till mid-1968), Cheung Yan-lung, Chan Yat-san, and Tang Nai-man. All four members were prepared to pay for their board and lodging, but they requested assistance from the Hong Kong government to meet their travelling expenses, consisting of flight tickets at HK$4,800 each and HK$8,000 for miscellaneous commitments. While this was a hefty expense for both parties, the Hong Kong government cautiously welcomed the Kuk's proposal on 31 October, with the Information Services Department fully funding the Kuk's expenses. Finally, the committee agreed that the Kuk would arrive in Britain on 19 January 1968, and tour and liaise with the Chinese community for five weeks. The British and Hong Kong governments welcomed the Kuk's suggestion of a 'goodwill tour' as they calculated that the Kuk's position as an entity separate from the colonial apparatus and its grassroot connections to Britain's ethnic Chinese community would give it more credibility and respect among the migrant community. The Kuk's plan received the enthusiastic support of the New Territories District Commissioner K.Y. Yeung, who, like the Kuk, wanted to shore up the migrants' homeland ties and ensure the continued flow of over £2 million to the New Territories.[36]

The Kuk's delegation would not travel alone as the Hong Kong government instructed David Lai, Assistant Secretary for Chinese Affairs, to work alongside the Kuk in the planning stage and in the actual tour. Lai was assigned to formulate a survey of Britain's ethnic Chinese to investigate the level of sympathy towards the 1967 Leftist Riots within the community and report back to the government. In a preliminary meeting with the heads of the Kuk on 27 November, Lai outlined his mission to determine the extent communism had grown among the British Chinese and his mandate to examine the organisation of the Liaison Office. At the meeting, Lai invited advice and suggestions from the members of the Kuk.[37] Ho Cheun-yiu, former Chairman of the Kuk, said he had recently spent five months in Britain and gained the impression that most Hong Kong Chinese were not aware of the existence of the Liaison Office, particularly those who resided outside of London. Nevertheless, he shared that the office was overwhelmed and was backlogged with over two hundred outstanding cases due to a shortage of office staff. Ho also shared that in London copies of the left-wing press, such as *Ta Kung Pao*

were more readily available and up-to-date than right-wing newspapers, such as the *Hong Kong Times Daily*. Pang Fu-wah noted that the Chinese Mission in London was far more capable of offering liaison work for Britain's ethnic Chinese community than the Liaison Office, which, he said, agreeing with Ho, was understaffed. Pang and Wong Chun-wai, Chairman of Sai Kung (North) Rural Committee, suggested that the Liaison Office should be partly staffed by members of the Kuk since the people of the New Territories would feel more comfortable with the Kuk rather than government officials. This proposal was an attempt by the Kuk to assert its influence upon the Liaison Office and, in turn, upon the Chinese migrants and outmanoeuvre the Hong Kong government's authority in Britain. Lai ignored their suggestion of direct Kuk involvement in the Liaison Office, but he agreed that the current two staff members of the Liaison Office were insufficient. Finally, the meeting concluded with Wong insisting that the pressing problem to be tackled was to counteract the Chinese community's Maoist influence and to stop the British boycott of Chinese restaurants.[38]

## The kuk's 'goodwill tour'

Even before their arrival, the Kuk delegates knew a challenging task lay ahead of them. There were extensive preparations to be made in a short time, including making contacts with Chinese communities in all the major cities, the booking of cinemas, the arrangement of meetings with the British authorities, setting up publicity, and, most important of all, figuring out how to best make a thorough assessment of the political situation within the Chinese community. Fortunately, some leaders of the Kuk's Rural Committee already had personal contacts among the restauranteurs in Britain, such as past Vice-Chairman Man Chu-shek, who owned Chinese restaurants in Middlesex and was well-known by the San Tin villagers working in Britain.[39] Since the Hong Kong government had done little to interact with the Chinese migrants, the news of a goodwill tour by the Kuk received mixed feelings from surprise and excitement to suspicion.[40]

The Kuk intended to arrive in Britain on 18 January and spend four days in London, four in Bristol, four in Birmingham, four in Manchester, five in Liverpool, five in Edinburgh, four in Newcastle, and return to London for seven days. Within this packed itinerary, the Kuk planned to screen popular Cantonese films, host dinner banquets and tea parties, book press conferences, and arrange more intimate gathering with local Chinese community members.[41] British officials scheduled to confer with the Kuk included Lord Shepherd, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and George Thomson, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs on 21 February. A day later the Kuk were booked to meet the head of the HKGO, Patrick Sedgwick, for a cocktail party. The Kuk delegation had also hoped to have an audience with Queen Elizabeth II, as a symbol of Britain's commitment towards the people of the New Territories. This request was denied by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as they were concerned this would unnecessarily aggravate the PRC and strain PRC-Hong Kong relations, as the Kuk represented delegates from a territory leased from China. Nonetheless, Lord Shepherd agreed to receive the Kuk on the Queen's behalf.[42]

The first obstacle the Kuk's tour faced was from Hong Kong Leftists who did everything possible to keep the Kuk away from the mission and discredit the delegation members. Telephone calls 'advised' restaurant owners to boycott the delegation. Pang received numerous messages 'suggesting' that he and his colleagues should stop jeopardising the

struggle against the British and cease being 'puppets' of the Hong Kong government. Although these telephone calls were from unknown sources, there was no evidence to suggest they came from the members of the Chinese Mission. It is likely these threats were made by members of pro-Beijing associations, which according to owner Stephen Wong of the Lan Chow Restaurant in Norwich, had initiated a campaign among restauranteurs to raise funds for their Leftists counterparts in Hong Kong back in 1967.[43] Likewise, Hong Kong's All-Circle Struggle Committee delivered a letter purported to be a New Year's greeting to many Chinese restaurants across Britain before the Kuk's arrival. The letter condemned the Hong Kong government for its atrocities, and the members of the Kuk were accused of being 'traitors' and 'running dogs' of imperialism.During the Kuk delegation's tour, Leftists staged Maoist propaganda films as a counter attraction near many of the Kuk's public events.[44] Although the Kuk did not experience any outright defiance or hostility during their visits to hundreds of Chinese restaurants, there were occasions when their reception was met with dismissal from migrants who viewed the Kuk as pawns of the Hong Kong government. Those with Maoist sympathies naturally considered the Kuk's visit with distaste. In addition, some restauranteurs did not receive the Kuk delegation as they did not wish to offend their workers who had Maoist sympathies.[45]

The relationship between the Kuk and the Hong Kong government was not without tension. Frustrated that they were denied an audience with the Queen, the delegation was doubly disappointed after Thomson announced in mid-January that he needed to cancel his appointment with the delegation as he had been called away to the 1968 Swaziland Conference, which eventually led to the independence of Swaziland (now Eswatini).[46] Archival documents indicate that both Pang and Chan were 'very angry'. They stated that if they could not see Thomson or anyone higher, the Kuk delegation would refuse any reception from the British government.

Tensions between the Kuk and British officials increased after Lai warned against the Kuk's desire to solicit funds to start a non-government subscription newspaper, as to do so without official sanction would only play into the hands of the Communists.[47] Governor David Trench agreed with Lai and insisted that any distribution of a non-government Chinese newspaper in Britain could wait until the Kuk's return to Hong Kong.[48]

On 3 February, Governor David Trench wrote to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office stating that it would be desirable for the Kuk delegation to meet with Thomson, if only briefly, to demonstrate Britain's commitment. Furthermore, Trench believed such a meeting would avert political disaster, as it was in Britain and colonial Hong Kong's best interests to maintain the support of the Kuk. Belatedly, Thomson agreed to squeeze in a fifteen-minute meeting with the Kuk on 21 February to be followed by a lengthier interview with Lord Shepherd.[49] In addition to the symbolic importance of this meeting, it was planned that the Kuk would take this opportunity to share some of their findings on unrest within Britain's Chinatowns and the frustrations of the people of the New Territories.[50] Although relations between the Kuk and the British and Hong Kong colonial government were sometimes strained, all parties sought to accommodate each other as they shared the common goal of securing the political loyalty of Britain's Chinatowns.

Scheduling conflicts and intergovernmental/Kuk tensions notwithstanding, the Kuk tour aroused widespread interest among the Chinese people and British public. Kuk visits to each of the major cities garnered wide publicity in the press, radio, and on television.

The screening of Cantonese films met with overwhelming praise. Speeches from the Kuk leadership were particularly sought after by Chinese audiences who wanted an account of the 1967 Leftist Riots and reassurance that peace had returned to Hong Kong. Overall, the Kuk successfully preached the 'gospel' on behalf of the Hong Kong government over their five-week tour and reassured the roughly 5,000 Chinese migrants that the British and Hong Kong governments were prepared to accept greater responsibility to the community. The Kuk delegation felt satisfied they had accomplished their goals and had made inroads to pacify the dissent within Britain's ethnic Chinese community.[51]

## The kuk's findings on the grievances within britain's chinese community

On 21 February 1968 the Kuk shared a memorandum of their preliminary findings from their broad survey of Britain's ethnic Chinese with Secretary of State Thomson and Lord Shepherd. The memorandum highlighted that a key issue among Britain's ethnic Chinese migrants was the clauses within the Commonwealth Immigration Act (1962) that removed the automatic right of Commonwealth citizens to resettle in Britain and that regulated the flow of migrants from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. The Act's overall immigration quota of 8,500 to all Commonwealth countries, of which 1,000 were reserved for the Maltese and another two-thirds to skilled and professional migrants left only 2,500 spots potentially available to Hong Kong Chinese migrants, and, even then, most would only be approved provided they had obtained an employment voucher for a specific job obtained from their future employer. Between 1962 and 1968, Hong Kong Chinese received only 1,867 vouchers.[52] The Kuk argued that demand for Chinese restaurant workers was outpacing the migrant supply, and that migrants entering this work were not competing for jobs that were the typical preserve of British-born citizens. The Kuk argued that Hong Kong, as one of the few remaining colonies, should have preferential immigration status compared to the Commonwealth countries that had declared their independence. Finally, the Kuk stressed that the law-abiding nature of the Hong Kong Chinese made them ideal candidates for immigration.[53] The Kuk memorandum conveniently overlooked the frequency in which Chinese restaurant owners took advantage of a loophole in the Act that allowed all male Chinese migrants to claim their wives and any children under 16-years-old as dependents without requiring a labour voucher. This loophole had become the backbone of the Chinese restaurant labour force by the late 1960s.[54]

The second major issue raised in the Kuk's memorandum was grievances around Britain's lack of support for the education of their children in the Chinese language (Cantonese). Throughout the Kuk's tour, many Chinese expressed their wish to have their children educated in both English and Chinese. Parents understood the importance of fluency in the English language for their children's career prospects, but they also cared deeply about ensuring their children maintained their cultural connections and remained fluent in their mother tongue. A similar cultural preservation concern was the lack of recreational facilities in Britain for Chinese migrants. Gambling dens were no replacement for cultural centres. The positive reception of Cantonese film screenings during the Kuk's tour had underscored the lack of cultural offerings, especially compared to the frequency of Maoist propaganda films showing at the Chinese Mission.[55] The third major issue, reported the Kuk, was the Chinese community's language barrier. The only media sources that provided timely coverage of the 1967 Leftist Riots in the Chinese language came from

the Hong Kong left-wing media press, including the *Wen Wei Po*, *Ta Kung Pao*, and the *New Evening Post*. Finally, the Kuk shared their concern that Britain's Chinese community was lacking non-Communist leadership, apart from a handful of individuals who sporadically served as spokespersons, presented grievances, and sought assistance from the British and Hong Kong governments.[56]

The Kuk also presented reforms they believed Britain should implement in the Hong Kong colony that could act as bulwarks against future unrest, both among Chinese migrants in Britain and at home. First, the Kuk recommended that Chinese, alongside English, become the official language of Hong Kong to be used simultaneously at formal meetings and in government correspondence.[57] While there had been no law that officially designated English as the sole official language of Hong Kong, since 1840, government officials and businessmen from Britain spoke English, while the Eurasian populace played important mediator and translation roles between English and Chinese speakers.[58] Since most Hong Kong citizens, especially in the New Territories, spoke only Cantonese, the Kuk's suggestion would make it far easier for inhabitants to communicate and express their views to the government. Secondly, the Kuk called for political reforms that would grant one to two seats to representatives of the New Territories on Hong Kong's Executive and Legislative councils. Furthermore, local Chinese, the Kuk argued, should be offered posts in the civil service. Adding Cantonese as an official language and granting Hong Kong Chinese greater representation in government, the Kuk insisted would do much to show the government's desire for inclusivity, enhance communications, and quiet unrest following the 1967 Leftist riots.[59] The Kuk believed lack of political and social representation caused many people, specifically those from the New Territories, to view the Hong Kong government as, at best, an alien entity that cared little about their needs and, at worst, as a distant menace that hampered their way of life.[60]

Finally, the third Hong Kong-based reform the Kuk recommended was for the colonial government to adopt land policy reform in the New Territories. Since 1842, the Hong Kong government had essentially monopolised all construction of housing and urban facilities and become the de facto landlord of virtually all property. Even before the Second World War, Hong Kong faced a housing crisis which the Kuk believed was caused, in part, by a restricted free market in real estate. The massive influx of refugees from the PRC after the war only exacerbated Hong Kong's housing crisis.[61] From 1950–1964 the number of squatters throughout Hong Kong ranged from 250,000–650,000. These squatters lived in shanty housing built illegally on Crown Land.[62] Despite the relaxation of plot ration control in the 1950s and the construction of large tenet buildings to cope with the influx of Chinese refugees, the Hong Kong government released land for lease at a slow rate. Government restrictions had slowed development, created the conditions for shanty towns, and frustrated the economy and the development of the New Territories.[63] The Kuk argued that if the Hong Kong government failed to reform its Land Policy, Communists would capitalise on its failure to solve the housing crisis. At the very least, the Kuk believed the government should provide greater compensation to property owners when they expropriated their land. They cited the example of the government's purchasing HK$0.90 per square foot of land in the centre of Yuen Long when the property value was typically anywhere between HK$10–20 per square foot. Likewise, the Kuk argued that the premium charged by the government for converting a piece of land from one specified purpose

to another (for example, from agriculture to industry) needed to be lowered, as it made surveyors and developers reluctant to bring forward a rezoning application. Finally, the Kuk stated that the government should remove restrictions on private development plans. They provided the example of Fanling, which had its development delayed for twenty years, leading residents to blame the government as the leading cause of its community's lack of development.[64] The Kuk believed that by spurring development through greater free market mechanisms in the New Territories would undermine Communist criticism and would have the added benefit of easing concerns among Britain's Chinese community about the living conditions for their families and kin back home.

On 21 February 1968, the members of the Kuk met at the HKGO to have a follow-up meeting with Lord Shepherd, members of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Liaison Office for further discussion about the development of the New Territories and Britain's Chinatowns. Pang began by reinstating to Shepherd that he hoped to see a change in policy in governing the appointment of unofficial members on Hong Kong's Executive and Legislative Councils. Representation, he argued, would be key to both the development of the New Territories and to quieting the unrest that lingered following the 1967 Leftist Riots. Shepherd stated that it was impossible to introduce parliamentary democracy due to Britain's limited colonial lease. Although Shepherd did not oppose democracy in Hong Kong, he argued that any political reform would have to wait until 1997 to avoid antagonising the PRC. Shepherd assured the Kuk that the British were aware of the pressing issues faced in Hong Kong and that reforms would be made gradually to ensure the safety of the populace. The Kuk delegates responded they understood the complexity of British colonial rule and its precarious position within the Cold War political environment. The meeting concluded with a general acceptance that any reforms in Hong Kong would be gradual with the understanding that any reforms made in the colony would further shore up the political loyalty of Britain's Chinese community.[65] The Kuk did successfully impress upon the British statesmen the concerning level of Maoist propaganda with in the migrant Chinese population. Following the meeting, the delegation returned to Hong Kong.[66]

With their mission complete, the Kuk awaited the release of Lai's survey of Britain's Chinatowns, on 16 April 1968. Lai's report confirmed many of the Kuk's findings and provided a list of recommendations to improve British policy in relation to the ethnic Chinese living and working in Britain. Lai concurred with the Kuk that the Liaison Office needed to be better funded and promoted within the community. Like the Kuk, Lai stressed the need to provide Cantonese language entertainment and pro-colonial news media outlets to counter Communist propaganda. He also stressed that reforms in the New Territories would bring satisfaction to many Chinese migrants.[67]

On 15 July, the Kuk's new Chairman, Chan Yat-sen, sent a preliminary message to K.S. Kinghorn, District Commissioner, New Territories, reminding him of the Kuk's findings, and stressed the importance of introducing pro-colonial media in Britain's Chinatowns. Chan stated that the Hong Kong government should make every effort to strengthen its publicity campaign and increase its supply of cinematographic entertainment to Britain's ethnic Chinese populace. Furthermore, Chan argued that since the Kuk effectively controlled anti-Communist public opinion in the New Territories, the Kuk should be funded and commissioned to publish a monthly journal reporting on the government's rulings,

housing construction and welfare development, and the social affairs of the New Territories for Britain's ethnic Chinese audiences.[68]

The District Commissioner entertained the idea of the Kuk producing a monthly journal. Governor Trench believed that his recent May tour to Britain's Chinatowns was made easier by the Kuk's recent goodwill tour. However, Kinghorn made it clear that if the government was to financially back the Kuk, it required details on the journal's contents before publication and an estimate of the production cost.[69] In September, the District Commissioner received an estimate from the Kuk that their proposed journal would cost close to HK$9,000 a month (HK$1,440 to print, HK$500 cost of binding, HK$2,350 for postage, HK$2,800 for staff salaries, HK$200 for travelling expense for staff, and HK$1,000 for miscellaneous expenses).[70] A month later it became clear that the Kuk's proposal had been abandoned. The District Commissioner met with the Kuk to confirm that all government policies, ordinances, and any developments concerning the New Territories would be published in the *News Digest*. The *New Digest* as the Hong Kong government's conservative paper, would be mailed free of charge to Hong Kong Chinese across Britain. Four of its pages would be devoted to news arising from the New Territories.[71] While the Kuk did not get the funding for their proposed paper, their tour proved an effective strategy for both the Hong Kong government and the Kuk and helped shore up support for the British and Hong Kong governments in the aftermath of the 1967 Leftist Riots.

## Government reforms and kuk's legacy

In the years that followed many of the Kuk's recommendations arising from their 'goodwill tour' were enshrined in British and Hong Kong government policy. The HKGO was overhauled with extra funds allocated to the budget, the number of full-time staff increased, and more Liaison Offices added. These reforms served to cultivate broader leadership within Britain's ethnic Chinese community. On the cultural front, the Hong Kong government regularly sent popular Cantonese films and newsreels about Hong Kong for screenings across Britain. The British and Hong Kong governments also subsidised non-Communist Hong Kong newspaper distribution in Britain to promote the colonial viewpoint on matters surrounding the colony and to counter the Communist press. All of this pro-colonial dissemination perpetuated the narrative that the colony's free market, political stability, and Cold War security were the positives of British rule and capitalism.[72]

Lai believed the Kuk's mission had done much to placate Britain's ethnic Chinese. The Kuk had rejected Communist anti-imperialist critiques and gave the migrant population a reason to believe that the colonial government cared about their welfare as well as their family and friends back in the New Territories.[73] Likewise, the District Commissioner, New Territories, and W.V. Dickinson, Principal Assistant Colonial Secretary, credited the Kuk's preliminary report in developing the British and Hong Kong government's reform policy for the HKGO and encouraging a renewed commitment towards the Chinese community.[74] The colonial government also appreciated how the Kuk had organised patrols that provided security and intel against the Struggle Committee, the pro-Chinese Communist Party organ that carried on the anti-colonial struggle in the wake of the 1967 Hong Kong Leftist Riots.[75] Rather than acting as rival authorities in the New Territories, in the post-riot era, the Kuk were willing participants in the colonial government's initiatives to maintain social and political control over the population.[76] The Kuk's loyalty to the

colonial government was rewarded by the 1968 announcement of the Colonial Secretary of the expansion of district offices, including six in Kowloon and four on Hong Kong Island. These district offices, in lieu of direct democracy, created greater communication between the government and the people. This was the first step in transforming the Hong Kong government from an old-fashioned Crown colony system into a modern administration responsive to public opinion. In turn, the district offices would eventually lead to the creation of the district boards under Governor Murray MacLehose in 1982. The Kuk welcomed these transformations as they also came with an increase in the number of elected seats that allowed the Kuk to further its authority in the New Territories.[77] While the Kuk had to wait until 1982 for increased representation, they did welcome the granting of more extraordinary powers awarded the Legislative Council to address grievances within the colony in the immediate wake of the riots.[78]

The Kuk request for the relaxation of immigration controls for Hong Kong residents seeking to relocate to Britain was less successful. Immigration controls proposed in 1971 did not support greater avenues for Hong Kong Chinese migration. The use of the loophole granting sponsorship of dependents continued to be the primary vehicle for increases to Britain's Hong Kong Chinese population. The migrants of the late 1960s and into the 1970s supported the continued growth of family-run Chinese restaurants and takeaway shops.[79] More successful was the Kuk's appeal for greater support to sustain the Cantonese language and culture. The Hong Kong government did adopt Cantonese as an official language in Hong Kong in 1974.[80] The colonial government also shipped gramophone recordings of English and Cantonese lessons to its British migrants following the Kuk tour.[81] The Kuk's request for public education was also adopted in the colony when Trench introduced six-year compulsory primary education in 1971. His successor, MacLehose, increased this to a mandatory nine-year education. MacLehose added to the number of schools across the colony and increased the education budget.[82]

The Kuk also proved influential in pushing the colonial government to adopt land and development reforms post-1967. Shortly after the riots, the Hong Kong government launched another stage of new-town developments and housing projects for rural areas in the New Territories. Another key Kuk requested reform was realised with the revival in the private property market in 1968–1969 which led to the reinstatement of the annual programme of Crown land sales in 1969 that helped spur new town projects in Tsuen Wan, Sha Tin, and Tuen Mun. That said, much of the post-riot development projects were devoted to urban areas around the harbour, and not in jurisdictions where the Kuk held sway. Perhaps the Kuk's greatest victory came in 1972 when the Hong Kong government announced the Small House Policy, an idea long championed by the Kuk. The idea of the Small House Policy was to provide housing for 1.2 million people in the New Territories and end the reliance on unregulated shanty towns. Under the Small House Policy, indigenous male villagers who could prove a line of male descent to at least 1898 were entitled to one concessionary land grant to build a three-storey house of up to 700 square feet for each floor.[83] Rather than the Small House Policy causing the Kuk to lose influence, as some scholars anticipated, it actually allowed indigenous villagers to transfer their land rights to property developers and the Kuk proved to be one of the policy's largest beneficiaries. Through these land rights transfers, the Kuk became a leading developer and maintained a firm hand over much of the land development in the New Territories. The Kuk continues to benefit from this arrangement. The Small House Policy was

a necessary overture from the colonial government to the Kuk in recognition of the need to shore up pro-colonial support within the New Territories and in appreciation for the Kuk's support during and after the 1967 Leftist Riots.[84]

The British and Hong Kong governments rewarded the Kuk for their support during the 1967 Leftist Riots and for their 'goodwill tour' of Britain's Chinatowns in 1968. The Kuk was granted visits to officials in 1973 and 1977 to push for more 'clout' with the District Administer in the New Territories, and for improved compensation for land expropriated for development. This is most evident with the Kuk's influence on the British drafting of paragraph two, Annex III of the Joint Declaration that details the right of lessee before 1997 may extend their leased period up until 30 June 2047.[85]

## Conclusion

This article contributes to understanding the influence the 1967 Leftist Riots and the Cultural Revolution had on Britain's ethnic Chinese community. With the outbreak of riots in Hong Kong, Maoist-inspired agitation emerged in Britain's Chinatowns. The transnational nature of this unrest, and the fact that it reached the heart of the Commonwealth, made British and colonial authorities anxious to stifle any further insurrection. Thanks to the intervention of the Kuk, a grassroot organisation of business interests within the New Territories, government authorities chose to foster goodwill among its subjects, including Britain's ethnic Chinese. The Kuk initiated this approach by approaching the colonial government for support to send a 'good will' delegation to visit Britain's Chinatowns to promote cultural connections and investigate migrant grievances in Britain's Chinatowns. Although the Kuk and the Hong Kong government's relationship diverged whenever their interests conflicted, an alliance was formed between the two, with both wishing to retain a measure of political loyalty from Britain's Chinese community and to ensure the flow of remittance back to the colony. Likewise, the British and Hong Kong governments realised they could not merely engage with the Hong Kong Chinese migrant community in Britain alone. The Kuk offered the optics of New Territories' representation so that the ethnic Chinese community were not put off by top-down colonial intervention. Consequently, the Kuk served as a vital interlocutor between the migrant community and the British and colonial authorities. The Kuk's tour of Britain's Chinatowns represents a transnational project wherein grassroots organisations and government officials alternatively competed and cooperated, each seeking to extract maximum advantage from their engagement with the migrant community.[86] Both sides understood the need to support Britain's Chinese populace following the 1967 Leftist Riots to secure goodwill, the continue remittance flow back to the New Territories, and political loyalty. The historian Benton has argued that the 'Red tide' in Britain's Chinatowns would have subsided, with or without the Kuk, who never got far among the Chinese migrants.[87] This article suggests that the Kuk's goodwill delegation accomplished far more than has been previously recognised. The very fact that it was the first 'goodwill tour' sponsored by the colonial government to intervene in the affairs of the British Chinese community is significant. The Kuk helped to expose, not only the extent of Maoist propaganda within Britain's Chinatowns, but also how the state had offered little in the way of cultural and/or social and welfare services within these communities, or, for that matter, for their family and friends back in the New Territories. By raising awareness of these issues, the Kuk's

goodwill tour led to a variety of state interventions, from cultural supports, anti-Communist media dissemination, and even property reform back in the New Territories. In other areas, like immigration and democratic reform, the Kuk proved less successful. The Kuk represented an important grassroots organisation that helped spur renewed commitments from the British and Hong Kong governments to address the many grievances the ethnic Chinese of Britain and the New Territories faced living under British rule. The Kuk deserves some of the credit for many of the significant reforms following the 1967 Leftist riots that proved to be of benefit for both of these Chinese communities.

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## Disclosure statement

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