

...In line with Beijing's demands and business sentiment, Britain's colonial administration in the 1980s resisted local pressure for a more democratic political system. No changes were contemplated to the policymaking and executive functions, which were firmly in the grip of senior civil servants reporting to the British-appointed governor. The relatively powerless Legislative Council ('Legco') was all-appointed until 1985, when functional constituencies – commercial, professional or other interest groups with very limited franchises – were allowed to elect some members. Two years later, Governor David Wilson's administration blatantly rigged a public consultation exercise to give the impression that the population was undecided on the timing of further reform. Such stalling became untenable on June 4, 1989, when hundreds of students demanding democracy and an end to corruption were massacred around Tiananmen Square in Beijing and a million Hong Kong people marched in the street in protest. Even many of Beijing's supporters in Hong Kong's business world and China-funded pro-communist media openly expressed their horror.

The Tiananmen massacre created a deeper rupture between much of the Hong Kong public and the Chinese government. In Hong Kong, morale slumped as people wondered what would become of China's promises about their post-1997 freedom and prosperity. The greatest fear, however, was in Beijing. Hong Kong had played an important role in aiding the student movement and smuggling dissidents out of the mainland. The city became, in the eyes of China's leaders, a potentially subversive threat. They have never trusted it since.

China's pronouncements after the massacre, and the purge of its own officials in Hong Kong, made it clear that the regime was not in the mood to admit wrong. It became especially unrepentant as communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed later in the year. Hong Kong businessmen and pro-Beijing politicians soon knuckled under, while the broader middle class community did not. An annual June 4 vigil was to become a firm tradition. It is from this time that a clear division took place between pro-democracy and pro-Beijing camps, illustrated by the split between what subsequently became the Democratic and Liberal parties. Few in the pro-Beijing camp ever energetically embraced the official line that action was necessary on June 4 to put down a counter-revolutionary uprising; but many went on to point out that stability in China since 1989 coincided with a period of remarkable economic growth in the mainland, accompanied by more social freedom. And many loyalists, notably the first post-1997 chief executive of Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, took the position over time that Tiananmen was historical baggage you should drop, since carrying it around marked you as an untouchable in the eyes of Beijing...