

# **The CATSKINNER**

**By rcheydn**

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## **Introduction**

In the middle part of the 1980s the political future of the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong was outlined in a document agreed between the People's Republic of China and Her Majesty's Government that would herald the transfer of sovereignty after a century and a half of British rule. It was hailed as a triumph of international diplomacy.

It was decreed in this *Joint Declaration* that in 1997 Hong Kong would revert to Chinese sovereignty but remain largely autonomous; the famous "One Country, Two Systems" concept of the all-powerful Communist Party Chairman, Deng Xiaoping.

This decision-making process that involved the government of Hong Kong on the periphery was often referred to as the *Three Legged Stool*. But serious doubts were expressed about the ability of such a stool to stand for long.

In 1987, with only a decade remaining before the world as Hong Kong people knew it was to change, a fourth leg appeared.

Instead of ensuring stability it posed a unique danger to the lives of five and a half million local inhabitants, and set in train a series of devastating events which threatened to shift the path of Hong Kong history forever, challenging regional and world security – and awakening the beast in the dragon.

## **About the Author**

rcheydn worked as a journalist for newspapers and magazines throughout Europe, Australia and the Far East for a decade before entering the world of public relations.

For the next twenty-five years he was a senior PRO in the United Kingdom, Australia and, for almost 20 of those years, in Hong Kong.

Then he established his own public relations company in London which is regarded as one of the most dynamic and innovative agencies of its kind.

*The Catskinner* is his first foray into the political thriller genre.

His next book, a crime novel set in the United Kingdom, *The Feathers*, will be published soon.

Crime or political thriller writing are not his exclusive interests. He is also the author of a children's book *Keepers of the Deep*.

## **Cover Image**

Cover image by "Tony A. Tan ([ketanbakar.com](http://ketanbakar.com))".

## Disclaimer

In the dying years of the 1980s the political system of Hong Kong was undergoing changes as outlined in a *Joint Declaration*, that crucial document based on an agreement between the governments of the People's Republic of China and Her Majesty's Government in London that would return sovereignty over the territory after 150 years of British rule.

At the same time, aggravating an already tense situation, there was a huge influx of Vietnamese boat people that was taxing the Administration and legislators alike. A financial crisis did erupt as described.

There was at the pertinent time an Office of Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils (Omelco) and there is an excellent English language newspaper the South China Morning Post.

Hong Kong did at the time have all the relevant government officials referred to, though not those mentioned by name here, and since the reversion to Chinese sovereignty the territory's civil service has undergone changes to its structure.

The author has invented all the officials in this work; they bear no resemblance to real people, and if they do it is mere coincidence.

Martin Lee is, however, very real. He did make the statements attributed to him in these pages – but only those attributed to him directly. His supporters mentioned by name also are real.

Hong Kong is a vibrant city that is rightly the envy of much of the world. Its people are honest, hardworking. If there is anything, therefore, in this work that denigrates them in any way it is sincerely regretted. They deserve only admiration.

The same applies to the territory's Administration. It would be disappointing if the reader was to draw any unfair conclusions. Like the everyday people of Hong Kong they do their utmost for the wellbeing of the territory and its inhabitants.

And as everyone knows Hong Kong is a successful Special Administrative Region of China, has an enviable rule of law record, and remains a major economic power.

Yet, the reader is reminded, the *Catskinner* is a work of fiction.

## **Dedication**

For Gabrysia and Nikk

## Epilogue

The aircraft appeared to hover above the clouds, the giant hulk seemingly defying the laws of nature. Over the internal communications system the chief steward's voice drew everyone's attention: "Ladies and gentlemen, we will soon be arriving in Hong Kong Kaitak International Airport."

Jason Teller squeezed his wife's hand and turned to smile at her. She did not smile back. Their young son Alexander slept drugged in the window seat wrapped in the beige Qantas blanket as his wife continued to stare through the double glass at the emptiness outside.

"Come on love," he said. "It's not so bad. We'll be alright."

"I'm alright," she replied impatiently. "Just leave me be please."

Through a break in the cloud cover a handful of lights flickered. Then they were gone again. Teller knew from experience they were not yet from buildings on land. They were from container ships anchored outside the western approach to Hong Kong's fragrant harbour, awaiting their turn to enter and disgorge their contents at the massive Kwai Chung terminal, the world's largest. Some were also fishing junks.

The aircraft was approaching from the eastern end of the territory and would fly well south of the island before turning north. The lumbering giant bird would float high above the Po Toi Islands and the larger Lamma Island and then cross the south western tip of Lantau Island. From there it would veer to the east and point its nose to the Kowloon mainland, dropping height rapidly and giving passengers the impression it was gathering speed. It would be at this point that it would shed itself of the clouds and break free into the open, revealing the myriad lights for which Hong Kong was famous.

Teller was excited, and worried, at the prospect of beginning life again in the territory, not because of the tense political situation but for entirely personal reasons. He and his new wife had flown out in late 1988 and vowed never to return. Now here they were, ten minutes away from touching down. Ten minutes from starting their life over again.

Below them it was crowded, dirty, smelly, rude, exciting, invigorating, challenging. It was frightening in the sense that while he did not fear his own ability to adapt, he worried about his wife and child. Would they ever be happy in their new home? Could they?

His thoughts were much the same as when they had departed for New Zealand. That too was their new life. It was the unknown and at a trying time for them. They had gone because they considered it an ideal place to raise the child they adored and because they had friends there who were prepared to help out with employment and care. And it had worked.

He had been hired by a newspaper as a senior reporter where the job was not too demanding, allowing time for the family. The way of life, the standard of living, the friendliness of the people and the climate combined to reinforce their decision.

But then had come the offer of a job back in Hong Kong. No, they had replied without hesitation; they were settled with the peace and pace of New Zealand and had no intention of giving it up for the pressure cooker, impersonal and materialistic world of Hong Kong.

But the offer was repeated and increased until finally they agreed on the understanding it would be for a limited period. Three years. No more. Their shipment was crated, the house was rented, and here they were coming in to land in Hong

Kong. Their time away in New Zealand seemed an age and his previous years in Hong Kong seemed but a month as the adrenalin pumped and the anticipation rose. The jumbo jet dropped and turned sharply eastward and the twinkling lights of Victoria filled the window.

It is still beautiful, he said to himself, never doubting it would have been different. Despite the upheavals that had occurred during the last half of the decade the excitement appeal of the territory from a height of three thousand meters at night would remain forever unchanged. With the South China Sea at its tail the aircraft descended lower and Teller recalled the oft claimed story of skid marks on the rooftops of housing estates in Shekkipmei and Mongkok.

They dropped into the flight path to the landing strip stretching into the harbour like an extended finger and a million lights flashed past the windows on both sides. Hazy fairyland communities filled the outside and there was a thump as the wheels made contact and the engines roared in reverse. The young child woke and began to cry.

“Ssshh,” soothed his mother. “There, there. It’s alright. Everything is alright.”

“Of course it is,” joined Teller. “There’s nothing to worry about. We’ve just arrived at our new home that’s all.” He patted his son’s head and stroked his warm cheeks. Nothing would go wrong, he repeated to himself. Not this time. What was past was past. He must not look back. He must look to the future.

As he peered through the window a drop of water splashed on the glass, followed by another, and then many more.

“It’s raining,” said his wife and turned anxious eyes on him. “It was raining then, and it was raining when we left.”

Teller gripped her tiny hand firmly and kissed her lightly on unresponsive lips. “It’s not the same rain my darling,” he murmured. “This is fresh, clean rain. The other has gone. Forever.”

## Chapter One

“Christ, look at that lightning.” The man gazed out over the harbour from his balcony. His wife sat quietly inside the flat, hunched near a standing lamp reading a newspaper from the previous day. She did not hear him, and in any event he had been speaking more to himself than to her. If she had caught the comment she would in all probability have had a ready remark for she was at that moment reading how the temperature two days ago had been above thirty-two degrees Celsius with humidity an energy sapping eight-four per cent. Just the conditions necessary for a typical torrential downpour.

Not a typhoon, though one had ripped through Taiwan and South Korea earlier in the week, and another was building up out at sea, threatening to launch itself. More than a hundred had perished in the southern cities of Korea. Eight had died in Taiwan. It was early in the season, being only mid-July, so the big wind had ignored Hong Kong this time. But all the same, the British territory was now being drenched in a fierce downpour that flattened crops in the patchy rural areas of the new Territories and sent drains and sewers spewing in the crowded residential suburbs of Kowloon and on the island.

The lightning snapped like a sheet, lighting the harbour from the distant anchorage for container vessels in the west to the narrower outlet to the open sea in the east. Buildings on both sides of the murky waterway, whose lights were dimmed by the slanting rain, were momentarily caught in a silvery glow, giving them a deathly appearance, like monolithic tombstones. Then they dimmed again leaving only their grey outlines imprinted in the memory.

Ten seconds lapsed and there was a shattering clap of thunder. It did not start in one corner of the sky and roll across, but rather split the entire heavens at once and the man jumped involuntarily, making it seem that the tall skyscrapers on the Wanchai waterfront of the island had been the ones to move.

“Christ,” he repeated in a whisper, and turned back inside through the glass sliding doors. As he entered and pulled the doors together behind him he added: “We’ve got a real storm out there. The rain is pelting down and the wind is blowing like crazy.”

His wife answered with some distracted comment, deeply involved as she was in a news article which to the writer was long dead. The wind whistled into the room through a gap beside a recently installed air-conditioner and there was another flash of sheet lightning that raised the spectre of the tombstones once more.

Two miles away in Wanchai many were unaware of the real power of the storm as they dined behind sturdy doors in upper floor restaurants, or drank shielded from the angry elements in basement bars where they received the close attention of bare breasted young women, ever ready to listen to a tale of a misunderstanding wife or absent girlfriend, so long as their tumbler of expensive cold tea remained at least half way to the brim.

The old world of Suzie Wong had long disappeared. It put its first foot in the grave with the end of the Vietnam war and the demise of Hong Kong as a rest and recreation port for American and Australian soldiers hungry for sex and alcohol to escape the horrors and boredom of being part of the most fruitless and divisive conflict of the century. Inviting bars with their cheerful and cheap girls had been replaced by seedy and expensive topless nightclubs interspersed with upmarket businesses of all kinds.

An old timer who remembered the sixties would blink in disbelief at the plethora of banks, offices and exclusive shopping outlets that now lined both sides of the once notoriously lively Lockhart Road. An era had passed, and a new more profitable and durable one had already grown to maturity.

But a block nearer the harbour life appeared to never change. The narrow Jaffe Road cut its way along the length of the waterfront to Causeway Bay, a squalid manmade canyon hemmed in by crumbling tenements where dirty curtains hid furtive low lights and on top of which squatted thousands of families who lived their lives in shacks made from discarded timber, cardboard and corrugated iron. When the typhoons struck the squatters barricaded themselves in their flimsy shelters and rode out the winds and the rain. Or most of them did. Some lost their roofs and part of the meagre possessions, but for a few it would inevitably be the end of their world too.

However, a storm such as the one this night, though unexpectedly wild, was not the sort to cause undue concern. It was a sudden inconvenience, nothing more. In the morning it would have passed and the cleanup would be only a brief interlude before the families set out in their pursuit of more dollars.

There was yet another crack of lightning and a cat froze on the tin roof of a hut, trapped in the silvery flash. Its paws had selected the corrugated ridges avoiding the rivulets of water and the occasional sharp rusty nail, and its fur in parts looked to have been eaten in rings by mange though actually it was heavy drops of rain that mostly mottled its tabby coat. With the flash of light the cat whipped its head to the side and blazing eyes searched the mishmash of rustic structures behind it. In the dark of the night the cat knew every square meter of tenement rooftop. It had prowled the territory countless times in its hunt for food, and the expansive flashes of light only increased its senses rather than aiding it in its foraging. Shapes look on more imposing dimensions and noises were louder warnings. The animal was at its peak alertness, tensed more by the gnawing hunger deep in its belly.

The rooftop was generally a larder of rodents and cockroaches and scraps of rotting food. Because of this the cat, and numerous others like it, kept within its own declared boundaries and saw out its years on the horizon and not on the ground. But since early morning it had been raining on and off and since late afternoon Hong Kong had been on the receiving end of a thorough drenching. So the usual food supply had been washed away or had sensibly gone indoors, leaving the cat without a meal since the night before when a slow rat and assorted piles of hardened yellow rice had provided an essential repast.

Now the animal was hungry and becoming agitated as its sides pressed in on its hollow, shrunken gut. In the darkness once more it growled low and cautiously continued its stalking. It crossed from one roof to the next, head swivelling from side to side, peering into cracks and crevices, and then moved onto the next roof, and the next.

The lightning flickered and flashed and the crackling thunder shook the night skies. Each time the cat froze. Another half an hour and it had reached a broken wooden door that swung back and forth and led to a dank and unlit stairway down five flights.

The animal was reluctant to enter as it was unfamiliar and spilled onto the lane which was far beyond its own boundaries. Also, it knew instinctively there was little likelihood of any food being found on the staircase itself. It was the only access in and out of the building and creatures that might have been suitable as morsels would be aware also it was not a place to dally.

Added to that was the worry that it might confront a street sleeper who on nights such as this moved indoors to comparative comfort. They were not usually killers but they were human and humans could not be trusted.

Despite these innate fears the cat warily stepped in through the door and very slowly began the downward climb. The steps were littered with pieces of sticky toilet paper, empty drink cartons and bottles, and large and small indiscriminate coils of faeces. In the light the walls would have been seen to be covered in mould and peeling paint. On each small landing a bucket of sand stood in a corner with an overflowing refuse bin beside it. Lining the corridors grimy wooden doors were protected by strong metal grilles and shutters. From behind them came disjointed snatches of television programmes.

On the first landing the cat stopped, sniffed the rubbish and listened carefully to the distant sounds from inside rooms, before moving off and venturing down the second flight of fourteen concrete steps. On the next landing it did the same and repeated it each time until it came to a stop at the top of the last set of steps. There it stood its ground and stared straight ahead, its eyes unblinking and its ears twitching nervously. Its tail snaked out behind in sharp impatient swishes and once more it growled from deep within its gut. Finally, confident of its next move the cat almost gracefully descended to the bottom where it again paused, motionless, listening for warning noises. Sensing there was none, other than the heavy rain beating down and the wind blowing a torn awning across the street, the cat slowly padded to the doorway and looked outside.

The lane was strewn with rubbish, lying scattered in windswept piles or floating soaked in puddles of filthy water. A crate of broken slabs of concrete with protruding wires stood against the wall of the building next door, and adjacent to that an old refrigerator had been blown onto its side. The lane was deserted though there were a number of cars, a van and lorries parked at various intervals, abandoned by some owners who were no doubt waiting out the storm in the colourful interiors of nearby night spots.

The cat gingerly stepped out of the doorway and, after a moment, bounded across the lane and under the van. When it emerged on the other side it headed straight for a heap of plastic garbage bags, all tied at the top but at least one which had burst its sides and spewed its reeking contents against the wall of a tenement almost identical to the one it had just left.

It had gone barely three meters and had just passed the rear of the van when it instinctively stopped, wheeled and hissed into the darkness, its teeth bared and its fur bristling on its arched back. But its defensive manoeuvre was to no avail as a club was brought down swiftly, cracking the cat's skull open and killing it instantly.

As blood ran into the puddles of rain water two hands reached down and the one holding a short curved skinning blade began slicing the animal from under its chin the length of its belly.

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To the casual observer there is nothing in Caine Road in the island's Mid-levels district which would excite interest. Unless one lives in one of the flats there, works in one of the few struggling corner shops, or attends the Hong Kong University, the road is just a means of passing between the Central area and points to the west or around to the south.

Unlike so many of the streets in Hong Kong one heads to for a purpose, Caine Road is a long, winding transport route one proceeds along to get somewhere else. You either live there or work there or you generally don't stop there. Amelia Tse lived there. In a sixty-five square meter fourth floor flat that had one bedroom, a small bathroom, a functional kitchen and a step-up lounge-dining room that featured large windows looking out on to the buildings opposite and through a gap in the high-rises to a postage stamp stretch of harbour in the distance. It was the uncharacteristically large windows that had attracted her to the place and which kept her there though she would have preferred somewhere higher up the mountain with a better view of the harbour. But she would never be able to afford what she wanted so she made do with what she had.

It was tastefully decorated in rattan, with pink covers on the sofa and chairs, a glass-topped table that seated six at a pinch and dozens of pot plants which brought the life and freshness of the outdoors inside. A tall bookcase in one corner was crammed with publications, including two dictionaries one English the other Chinese, photographic magazines, journals and periodicals and political essays by local and foreign writers. There was only the occasional novel, and a pile of untidy newspapers was dumped on the floor to the side. There was also a wine rack perched under the window sill with four bottles in it. In the morning there had been six, but one was empty and protruded upended from the bin in the kitchen. The other stood half empty on the table between Amelia and Michael Wong.

Wong did not live or work in Caine Road, but he did go there frequently. He was a successful surgeon, and with his wife and two children shared a luxurious four-bedroom apartment in Kowloon. Like most other people he usually used Caine Road to get from one place to another. But every week, or whenever he could, Wong went to Amelia's flat. They were political allies. They were also lovers.

"Is it becoming too difficult?" asked Wong, leaning back in his chair and sipping the dry Golden Hill from his glass. Californian wine was too sweet, and for some reason the French, German and Italian whites also were not to his liking, whereas Australia's climate produced grapes of just the right quality for his palate. He was a thin man, tall for a Chinese, with grey in his hair, adding to his distinction but also betraying his forty-seven years. His jacket hung on the back of the chair next to him with his tie tucked into the top pocket. Only two buttons of his shirt were fastened and he wore leather slippers on his feet.

"Not really," Amelia replied. "Not yet anyway. He knows of course, but so far he's allowed me to get on with it."

She was sitting with her elbows on the table, rolling her empty glass between her fingers. Her black silk gown was open to the waist revealing her tanned skin. She was short with a plump, sober figure and she wore her hair teased. Her features were smooth and unlined as was common for an Oriental in her thirties, but her forehead creased as she raised her eyebrows. "I don't think we have anything to worry about just yet."

"Good," said Wong, pushing his spectacles back up onto the bridge of his nose. "Good. We need a little more time. Then we'll be able to make the move."

The target of his enquiry and the subject of her answer was the Chief Editor of the newspaper she worked on. She was a senior writer for the South China Morning Post, the leading English-language newspaper, and her specific beat was as special correspondent on Hong Kong's political affairs.

Ten years ago such a position would have merely taken her to meetings of the Urban and Legislative Councils once a fortnight where she would have been asked to

collect speeches and then turn them into reasonable news items for the inside pages. Even five years ago she would not have been expected to do much more. But not today. That attitude was a generation in the past.

Already in its last decade of colonial rule Hong Kong was going through a political revolution at least equally significant to the move from being the world's largest producer of cheap and shoddy products to being an international leader in finance, fashion and high-tech, among other things. Amelia's position was now far more arduous and certainly more exciting. Her readers expected exclusives, political analyses and hard-hitting commentaries which took the Administration to task or forced it to justify its actions.

Leadership was demanded by the people. She saw her job as ensuring the government lived up to its promises of 1984 when the *Sino-British Joint Declaration* was signed, handing the territory back to China in 1997 "lock stock and barrel". In that historic document Hong Kong had been assured of a continuation of its capitalistic lifestyle, or as was stated time and time again the maintenance of its prosperity and stability. Britain had guaranteed it, the People Republic of China agreed not to change it for 50 years or until at least 2047, and the people of Hong Kong expected nothing less.

Another clause in the Declaration stipulated that the political system would not be interfered with by the new Communist masters, and that the legislature on the date of the handover would be – at least partially – constituted by election.

"Have you actually set a date?" asked Amelia.

"Not the day," answered Wong as he leaned forward to the table and refilled his glass. Slowly he stood and walked to the window. It was still raining and dark heavy clouds over the peninsula were growing more ominous. Without turning he added: "Probably the second week in October."

"That soon? Are you sure we can do it all by then?" She was as anxious and as determined as he was to ensure the plan was a success, but the journalist in her was not convinced such a rapid timetable was right. Their vision of Hong Kong's future depended on the right move at precisely the right time. If they were wrong, if they miscalculated, all hell could break loose and there would be little anyone could do to prevent the consequences that might shatter the illusions of all those who had worked so painstakingly for so long to protect the wellbeing of the small overcrowded territory's people.

The surgeon sipped at his wine as he watched the worsening weather. Amelia knew better than to press the point and instead filled her own glass with the last of the contents from the bottle and joined him at the window. She put her arm around his waist, the silk gown parting. Resting her cheek against his shoulder she whispered: "It's miserable out there. What time do you have to go?"

"I think it's going to come down very heavy indeed," said Wong, putting his glass on the sill. "I also think it's going to set in for quite a while so we have a choice to make. We can either open another bottle and listen to the patter of the rain on the glass, we can think of ways to make your bloated Australian boss lust after you more, or you can take me next door and show me again why it is I find you the most sensuous woman I have ever known."

Amelia lifted her face to him and smiled, her head on one side. "No problem doctor. I diagnose a severe case of sexual starvation. If you will follow me to my consulting room I am sure I can prescribe a remedy."

He bent and kissed her gently, and gathering her in his arms he carried her to the bedroom. As he said, it looked like they were in for a storm and he would have to

telephone his home and leave a message for his wife that he had an urgent and probably lengthy conference to attend. It was only six o'clock and he would not leave for hours.

"In this case," he said unbuttoning his shirt, "the patient is right. Administer away as you will."

Later, after the appetites of both had been sated, Amelia slept on his arm as he lay on his back staring at the ceiling. A loud roll of thunder sounded above, interrupting his thoughts. He glanced at his sleeping mistress and carefully eased himself off the bed without disturbing her. He gathered his clothes and walked silently into the sitting room, closing the door after him. Bending down beside the pile of newspapers on the floor he picked up the telephone and punched a Kowloon number. When it answered he spoke softly but clearly into the instrument just six words: "The three of them October seven."

Wong put the telephone back on the floor and slipped into the bathroom where he washed and dressed. He had one more instruction to relay but he would do that in person. He had not been to Wanchai for some time and the storm now raging outside would provide the cover he sought.

Without looking in on Amelia he let himself out of the flat and took the lift to the deserted street level. His car was parked around the corner and he would have to sprint if he was to avoid being soaked through. As he ran with his head lowered and his coat pulled up over his ears he did not see the figure standing in the darkened doorway across the street. Nor did he notice as the shape stepped out of the shadows into a nondescript black sedan which pulled into the curb and then followed the surgeon's car as it headed east along Caine Road.

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Seated at the table were three men and one woman.

At the head was Robert McNamara, Chief Secretary and for the past week and another two days Acting Governor while the Queen's official representative was in London on a duty visit. It was one of the peculiarities of the British Foreign Service that colonial governors returned to be debriefed only months after assuming office. Sir Hubert Morris had been sent to Hong Kong in April. Three months later he was back in Whitehall reporting to his masters and receiving further instructions.

"What are the latest figures?" McNamara asked the man on his left.

"Up to nine this morning the Survey Office has received two thousand five hundred and thirteen submissions," replied James Wong. "Most of them from groups, but there have been quite a few individuals writing in as well."

Wong held the relatively new post of Personal Assistant to the Chief Secretary, but he had been a civil servant for many years, the last five envied by colleagues as a handpicked highflyer. His present job called on him to be expert in preparing for, and evaluating, developments affecting the run-up to the 1997 handover.

"What's your forecast?" McNamara kept his eyes on Wong.

The Chinese sat leaning back in his chair rather than hunched over his files on the table, which were so bulky they almost concealed him at times. The information incorporated in the hundreds of pages had been devoured and Wong was thoroughly prepared as usual.

"At the present rate, and making allowances for a late rush, I'd estimate around fifty thousand. Maybe more." Educated in Hong Kong but with an Oxford

degree as well, Wong spoke impeccable English. "Offer me an encouraging reward," he added, "and I'll try putting a precise figure on it."

McNamara did not smile. "Fifty thousand's near enough. Anyway that's not the real point as we know."

The man on the other side of table put down his coffee cup. "Just the same, how does it compare with 1984? Higher, or around the same?"

Wong glanced at the Political Adviser who had been in office just a year. Everyone seemed to be new, he thought.

Immediately after the signing of the *Joint Declaration* some of the top officials had retired. Immense pressures were building up, and when decisions had to be made that would shape the future of nearly six million people, all the faces seemed unfamiliar.

"For the 1984 *Green Paper*," he said, still not referring to his files, "we had under three thousand. At the time we considered that quite good."

Gail Jones opened a loose folder in front of her and removed a sheaf of stapled papers. She handed them to Roger Gould. "This is the summary of the report on 1984," she said with a smile. "It covers the lead up to it, the survey itself and the conclusions drawn. Detailed statistics are in appendix three."

McNamara nodded to her. She had been his secretary in a number of previous posts and when he had been appointed Chief Secretary he had had no hesitation in asking her to follow him. She had no hesitation in accepting.

Once more she had stepped in at the right moment. Gould should not have had to ask about the result of the survey carried out three years before. Even though he was not in the territory at the time, he had been close to the Hong Kong Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in King Charles Street in London and should have recalled the numbers. It showed a weakness and McNamara noticed that Wong also picked up on it.

"Right," said the Chief Secretary. "So far our PR efforts seem to be working. But don't let it slip James. I don't want fifty thousand, I want a hundred."

He let it sink in. When there was no response from around the table he asked: "No comment?"

"What can I say?" said the Chinese. "I reckon we'll receive about fifty thousand. And that's good, excellent, to be quite honest."

He pushed himself up to the table and the pile of files reached almost to his chin. Carefully he brushed them to one side. "We'll step up the APIs and double the press adverts. GIS will have to put their thinking caps on. If we can get the Financial Secretary to approve more funds maybe we can boost the final number by five thousand or so."

"Forget the FS. I'll see to it there's no trouble from that quarter. Just get the written submissions up."

"Are they still running about equal" enquired Gould, "or have the radicals been drumming up more support lately?"

This time Wong opened the top file. "Marginal," he said. "At close of play yesterday it was one thousand two hundred and seventy-three for, and one thousand two hundred and forty against. Of the twelve hundred and forty only forty were against elections altogether. The other twelve hundred wanted them, but not in 1988. Most favoured 1991 or 1992."

That was what the *Green Paper on Representative Government* had boiled down to. While there had been nearly four dozen options outlined, not unexpectedly the one to draw almost exclusive interest was whether there should be direct elections

to the Legislative Council in 1988 or later. The Administration had continued to exhort people that they should speak out on all aspects, but while some other views were expressed there was no doubt the real question was the one being pushed by the so-called radicals who wanted elections to the colony's parliament in 1988 and no later.

And that was where the real dilemma lay. On the surface the people of Hong Kong were generally saying they wanted direct elections and it seemed a good number of them were saying they wanted them in 1988. And the government had stated many times they had no preconceived intentions, thereby intimating that if sufficient numbers favoured the quick move to greater democracy then they would support it. But since the election bandwagon had begun to roll and gather momentum, the Chinese authorities had been putting their interpretation on the salient clauses of the *Declaration*, interpretations that did not accord with those perceived in more liberal quarters. No one believed they were correct, but many realised that right or not, the communist leaders in the north were not about to sit by quietly while a political system was established in Hong Kong that might in ten years prevent them from interfering as they wished. Cadres had been hard at work rallying action on the left and if reports were to be believed they were using frightening tactics against some of those of those on the right. By the end of September the public consultation period would be over and recommendations would have to be relayed to London. The numbers game was therefore of paramount importance.

"The two significant polls will be finished in September," McNamara was saying. The other two men silently agreed. "So get those written figures up James. We're going to need them when we go public."

"Of course," said the assistant. He knew as well as anybody the point his boss was making. He also well knew it was going to be easier said than done.

"What about the Lees and their followers?" he pressed.

Gail Jones put down her pencil. Notes were not required on the comments being voiced at the moment. She topped up her own coffee and blew on it before raising the blue and white china cup to her lips and sipped tentatively.

The Lees, as they were often called, were certainly seen by some to have had a serious influence on the Legislative Council. Martin Lee was their leader. A successful lawyer and therefore a most eloquent and effective advocate, he delivered speeches at public forums much as he might address a jury in a courtroom trial of a little old widow facing a shoplifting charge. He used reason and legal precedent as the backbone of his arguments, but his strength lay in his ability to bare the passion in his heart and make the listener believe it burned in his own just as fiercely whereas minutes earlier he had been merely inquisitive. Cynics doubted the depth of his true feelings and some openly accused him of playing to the gallery to achieve his ends, ends that were his own personal goals and which had little to do with the future of those he constantly claimed to be fighting for.

Be that as it may, when Martin Lee rose to speak, people listened. He had fought the Administration on a number of issues since his elevation to the legislative body in 1985. Some he had won. Others he had badly lost. But he was never entirely defeated. Even when outvoted he managed to salvage some of the wreckage and perhaps even a few new admirers of his courage and sympathisers to his cause.

Martin Lee was the unchallenged leader of the unofficial opposition and, as with all underdogs, he had ranks of followers cheering him on. This extended to the council chamber itself. Hence the reference to the Lees as though they were one big family. In reality they were not and two groupings had emerged. One was led by

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