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LEAVING HONG KONG?: THE ROLES OF ATTITUDE, SUBJECTIVE NORM, PERCEIVED CONTROL, SOCIAL IDENTITY AND RELATIVE DEPRIVATION

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ABSTRACT. *This article reports a study of Hong Kong people's intention in 1992 to leave after the 1997 Transition. Seventy-one employees in a medium sized organization in Hong Kong responded to measures based on theories of planned behaviour, social identity, and relative deprivation. Identification was associated with status evaluations of Hong Kong rather than perceived personal benefits from living there. Intention to leave was associated with attitudes and subjective norm but not with other variables. Perceived control moderated the relationship of anticipated deprivation to frustration and identification. Among respondents with low control, but not those with high control, anticipated deprivation was associated with greater frustration and lowered identification. We distinguish between leaving the group physically vs psychologically. The results are interpreted as being consistent with a Social Identity Theory perspective on social change and intergroup boundary permeability. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.*

KEY WORDS. *social identity, relative deprivation, perceived control, Hong Kong, planned behaviour.*

July 1st 1997 heralded the end of 156 years of British colonial rule over Hong Kong. The Transition to a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (hereafter referred to simply as the Transition) represents fundamental changes in the legal, institutional and economic situation for the people of Hong Kong (DeGolyer, 1993). The aim of the present article is to explore some aspects of the

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psychological implications of these changes. Prior to the Transition, in 1992, we conducted a study of intentions to leave Hong Kong following the Transition. The study examined predictions based on the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1989), self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987), and current theories of relative deprivation (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984).

From a mainland Chinese perspective Hong Kong was always considered as having been acquired illegitimately by Britain. Therefore, the Transition involved the restoration to a legitimate and just situation. From this view, positive aspects of Hong Kong, such as its relatively strong economy and international profile, are attributes that rightly should have benefited China. The outcome of the Transition for the collective identity of Chinese people on the mainland should reinforce China's role as a major international power.

From a Hong Kong perspective the situation has been rather more complex. For example, to non-Chinese people in Hong Kong the situation might have seemed quite daunting, as the British-run infrastructure was about to be transformed to one with a different political and cultural basis. In contrast, Hong Kong people of Chinese origin or with strong cultural and family ties within China may have viewed Hong Kong as a high status minority state within the larger Chinese Republic. While most were unconcerned about the differences in the political regimes that have dominated the two countries and viewed the Transition in 1997 positively (Bond & Hewstone, 1988), many may well have been concerned about changes in personal and collective status that would follow the Transition. While many anticipated a post-transition role as mediators of modernization between mainland China, Hong Kong, and the West (Bond & Hewstone, 1988), they may also have been concerned that political and business figures from the mainland would usurp their positions. Alternatively they may have viewed the situation as an opening up of opportunity, a chance for the skills and expertise of Chinese Hong Kong people to take advantage of the new opportunities in the Chinese market place (Hong Kong Transition Project, 1996). It is this group, the Hong Kong population of Chinese origin, that is the focus of the study reported in this article.

As the Transition had been anticipated and planned for some time, it is likely that residents sought ways to protect those aspects of being a Hong Kong resident that they most valued. For many, there were personal and social ties that made it difficult or undesirable to attempt to leave Hong Kong, while for others practical constraints may have made it difficult to do so. Beyond this, people may have had varying levels of psychological commitment to Hong Kong, and there may have been great uncertainty about the relative advantages of moving elsewhere.

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