ABSTRACT

This article documents discursive and social change currently taking place in contemporary Hong Kong during the transitional period leading up to the change of sovereignty from Britain to China. It does so by means of a detailed analysis of a political meeting, involving the British Hong Kong governor, Chris Patten, and members of the Hong Kong public. The meeting took place in October, 1992, a day after Patten introduced proposals to widen the democratic franchise. Patten used the meeting, the first time a Hong Kong governor had made himself openly accountable to the public at large, to demonstrate the sort of democratic discourse for which the reform proposals were designed to create a framework.

The analysis focuses on two main ways Patten highlighted the democratic nature of the discourse: the use of *mise en abyme*, or a "play within a play" structure, and the downplaying of overt markers of hierarchy and power asymmetry. Although Patten's aim was to demonstrate openness and accountability, his ultimate control of the discourse belied the democratic agenda he ostensibly promoted. The analysis consequently also focuses on the manipulative dimension of Patten's discourse. The conclusion considers to what extent the meeting might mark a real shift to a more democratic order of public discourse in Hong Kong. (Discourse analysis, power and language, social change, indexicals, involvement, manipulative discourse, *mise en abyme*, order of discourse, political discourse, turn-taking).*
based on a corpus made up of recordings and transcriptions of various types of language events in which Patten has participated, mass media reports and accounts, and interviews.

The approach of this article is based on Fairclough's ideas (1992) on the reflexive relation between discourse and social change. For Fairclough, changes taking place in society may be reflected in changes in the structure and function of discoursal events. At the same time, changes in the structure and function of such events may be reflected in changes taking place in society in general. The methodology here employs a range of discourse analysis techniques developed over recent years in the overlapping fields of political discourse analysis (e.g. Atkinson 1984, Wilson 1990, Gastil 1992), critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fowler et al. 1979, Hodge & Kress 1979, Fowler 1988, 1990, Fairclough 1989, 1992, van Dijk 1993), and interactional sociolinguistics (e.g. Brown & Levinson 1987, Lakoff 1990, Tannen 1984, 1989, 1990, Schifffrin 1987). The detailed text analysis is especially influenced by Tannen's work.

As the long period of colonial rule draws to an end, particularly since the appointment of Patten as Governor in 1992, Britain has tried to implement greater (although still limited) democracy in Hong Kong. The reforms which the colonial government has been trying to introduce are most notably, and controversially, in the constitutional and political arenas. But reforms of a broader nature, affecting the overall order of public discourse (Foucault 1984, Fairclough 1989, 1992) - designed to "democratize" public discourse, to use the term of Fairclough 1992 - are also being attempted. This case study focuses on both dimensions: political reform and democratic discourse, but with emphasis on the latter.

**Political Background**

At midnight on June 30, 1997, sovereignty over Hong Kong, a British colony for some 150 years, will pass to China, in accord with the Joint Declaration - the document signed in 1984 by Britain and China, which sets out the terms of agreement over the change of sovereignty - and the Basic Law, the mini-constitution according to which Hong Kong will be governed after 1997. By these provisions, Hong Kong will enjoy a high degree of autonomy under Chinese rule. The Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, has stated the slogan, "One country, two systems"; in accord with this, Hong Kong will retain its present way of life, with its capitalist economy, common-law system of justice, and free press. The Hong Kong government, led by a Hong Kong person as chief executive, will be accountable to a Legislative Council which, as stated in the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law, "shall be constituted by elections."
In the years following the signing of the Joint Declaration, there was much (usually secret) negotiation between Britain and China over the interpretation of the term “elections” in the Joint Declaration and Basic Law, and over the pace with which representative government should be introduced. Britain favored a wider franchise and faster development of representative government than did China (cf. Cottrell 1993, Cradock 1994, Roberti 1994). In spite of this disagreement, Britain’s policy between 1984 and 1992, when Patten was appointed, was one of trying to ensure “convergence” of her administration of the territory with China’s own plans for post-1997 Hong Kong. According to some commentators, adherence to the policy of convergence led the British to make considerable sacrifices of both “principle and experience” (de Golyer 1994:77) in their administration of Hong Kong, particularly in their attempts at developing the political reform process. In 1992, as a result of these compromises – which were becoming increasingly unpalatable to the British government, and in particular to its leader, John Major – British policy toward Hong Kong changed, and the then governor, Sir David Wilson, a career diplomat, was replaced by Chris Patten, a professional politician, an ex-government minister and chair of the Conservative party (cf. de Golyer for a more detailed account of these developments).

The main plank of the new British policy, under Patten’s guidance, was to quicken the pace of democratic reform, even if this meant angering China. During the period of British rule, Hong Kong has been administered by colonial bureaucrats; there has been only token democratic representation of the approximately 98% ethnic Chinese population, mainly through selected appointees. Elections and public political debate have not been a part of the Hong Kong way of life. It is ironic that Britain should show so much interest in developing democracy at this late stage in its rule, given that it had done very little to develop democracy in Hong Kong before the signing of the Joint Declaration (see Miners 1991 for reasons for this lack of democratic development in Hong Kong). Be that as it may, in October 1992, Patten presented proposals for reform, designed to promote democratically elected representation and accountability during the transitional period and beyond. The proposals were controversial because the Chinese government judged them to be too radical, and in contravention of the Joint Declaration and Basic Law; China preferred a slower pace of reform.¹

This study focuses on a public meeting held in Hong Kong on October 8, 1992, chaired by Patten. The meeting, “Question time with the Governor,” took place on the day following the Governor’s annual policy speech, in which he set out his proposals for democratic reform. The primary purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposals for reform, but also other topics raised in Patten’s speech. The meeting is particularly worthy of study because Patten’s aim in holding the meeting – the first of its kind in Hong

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Kong, as he makes clear at several points during the meeting – was to exemplify political participation and accountability of politicians to the public, of the sort for which the reforms set out in his policy speech were designed to provide a framework.

CHRIS PATTEN

For an understanding of the discourse of “Question time,” it is important to know something about the background of the main protagonist. Before coming to Hong Kong, Patten had been chair of the British Conservative party; he had just succeeded in getting his party re-elected to government, against what many commentators thought were impossible odds. (Ironically, in the process, he lost his own parliamentary seat, thus leaving him free to take up the Hong Kong posting.) He thus has a reputation as a highly skilled professional communicator and persuader.2

As a professional politician, Patten’s background is one of accountability to the public, on whose votes he has depended throughout his career in order to stay in office. The political instinct which guides Patten’s behavior thus directs him toward gaining popular support. Although he does not owe his position to the votes of the people of Hong Kong, he is trying to institute democratic reforms, and thus needs to promote himself as accountable. This approach to what Goffman (1959) calls “impression management” contrasts strongly with the image projected by the previous governor, Sir David Wilson – who, like his predecessors, was a government servant. As such, he preferred to keep a fairly low profile, and did not particularly concern himself with public opinion or accountability. One commentator described Wilson as “a functionary, not a leader” (Roberti 1994:186). Thus Wilson held no public meetings such as the one which is the focus of this study.

In terms of impression management (an important dimension of which is the use of language), certainly in the context of “Question time,” Patten must be judged as highly effective. Although his approval ratings have recently declined considerably,3 a number of indicators of Patten’s successful impression management during his first year of office are as follows.

Patten’s popularity with the people of Hong Kong was high. At the point of the “Question time,” it was at 81%, according to one poll, conducted on behalf of the Hong Kong Standard (Free 1993).4 He was considered by the majority to be close to the people of Hong Kong. After one year of office, 84% of those polled responded “Yes” to the question “Is he [Patten] close to the Hong Kong people?,” in a poll conducted on behalf of the South China Morning Post (Anon. 1993). He created a positive image through his use of the media. Thus the local legislator, Emily Lau, commented in an interview (Thomas 1995):
When Chris Patten came out here the British reputation was very bad for selling Hong Kong people down the river ... Nothing has changed fundamentally – the British are still abandoning us and handing us back to communist rule in 1997 – but just by proposing what I call a "drop" of democracy, he has turned the image around and mesmerised the media. I think he's a skillful operator.

On many occasions, Patten has been touted as a possible future British Prime Minister (cf. Blyth 1995, Braude 1995, Wallen 1995). On visits overseas he has been received by important leaders, including the US president, Bill Clinton, and Emperor Akihito of Japan – people to whom the previous governor did not have access. He has also been interviewed on the well-known "Larry King Live" show on CNN international television.

**DISCOURSE, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND DEMOCRATIZATION**

The analysis of the discourse of "Question time" highlights what Fairclough 1992 has indicated as the reflexive relation which changes in discoursal practice have to social and cultural changes. An understanding of changes in discoursal practice must be grounded, for Fairclough, in an understanding of changes in society. At the same time, changes in society, if they are to be fully understood, require the study of how these changes are instantiated in discursive events.

In terms of social change, Patten's main goal in the years until the handover has been to promote limited democratic reform in Hong Kong. Promotion of democracy for Patten does not only mean electoral reform (although this is important, as shown by the subject matter of "Question time)," but also "democratization" in the sense that Fairclough 1992 uses the term, in relation to processes taking place over recent years in contemporary Britain and elsewhere. Democratization, according to this formulation, refers to "the removal of inequalities and asymmetries in the discursive and linguistic rights, obligations and prestige of groups of people" (201). In attempting to bring about such a change in the discourse practice of Hong Kong, Patten is trying to bring about a shift in what Foucault 1984 and Fairclough 1989, 1992 refer to as *order of discourse*.

Gastil (1992:472) has outlined the discursive characteristics of an ideal democratic order of discourse:

(a) Collective choices must be made in a deliberative way.
(b) The members of the "demos" must have equal opportunities to participate in the deliberative process.
(c) The ideal "demos" aims to arrive at a rationally motivated consensus.
(d) Members of the "demos" should discursively acknowledge one another's autonomy and mutuality.

In this connection, Patten consistently stresses that government needs to be fair, open, and accountable, and that the rule of law needs to be strengthened.\textsuperscript{5}

Various social changes since Patten's arrival in Hong Kong illustrate democratization in Fairclough's sense. Early in his tenure as governor, Patten appointed a number of much more critical and radical legislative councillors; these have been vocal in their attacks on the government, and have promoted many anti-discrimination causes relating to gender, age, race, and press freedom, as well as other social issues such as the environment. Since Patten's arrival, two radical newspapers which regularly attack the Hong Kong government, China, and Britain, have been launched: Apple Daily (Chinese) and Eastern Express (English). Government departments are much more accountable than they were in the past, with officials having to undergo critical, public cross-examination in the Legislative Council. Government departments which deal with the public have adopted "performance pledges"; they must commit themselves to provide service within minimum time limits, and they must provide information when it is requested by the press and public. The "Code on access to information" (cited in MacPherson 1995) "authorises and requires civil servants, routinely or on request, to provide information unless there are specific reasons for not doing so ..." Patten has strongly promoted proposals for an old-age pension, something which Hong Kong has not previously had. Most importantly, the proposals for electoral reform which were the focus of the "Question time" meeting have now been put in place, and the first fully elected Legislative Council has been created. On September 17, 1995, following an active public campaign,\textsuperscript{6} elections returned pro-democracy legislators with a large majority. These legislators are outspoken in their criticism of China, Britain, and Patten.

The overall trend toward more open government and public participation has been noted in the press, as shown by the following quotation from an editorial in the Eastern Express, which regularly criticizes Patten and his government:

One of the battle cries of the tenure of the Governor, Chris Patten, has been his drive towards a more open society. An administration in which there is ready public access to information, and where administrators are held fully accountable for their actions is self-evidently desirable, and slowly Hong Kong has been progressing towards that goal. (Anon. 1995a)

Reporting on the aftermath of the elections, an editorial headed "The climate changes," in the South China Morning Post, the highest-circulation English language Hong Kong newspaper, stated:

Something unusual is happening in Hong Kong politics. It is as if the LEGCO [Legislative Council] elections of a week ago freed the imagination of politicians ... Now even the most immovable elements in the
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territory’s future are being questioned ... the changes in the territory’s political system have encouraged at least some people to question what had been laid down for them to accept without demur. That is what happens with democracy: elected representatives think they have – or should have – the power to change things. (Anon. 1995c).

Of course, Patten has not brought about these changes single-handedly. Some of them may have been motivated by outside forces. The world-wide information explosion – through satellite television and the Internet, both of which are readily available in Hong Kong – may be partly responsible for promoting a demand for greater accessibility to information. The large numbers of Western expatriate professionals in Hong Kong, the large numbers of Hong Kong people returning from education overseas in Western countries, and the very large numbers of Hong Kong people who have relatives who have emigrated to Western countries – such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the US – are also likely to have contributed to an acceptance of these ideas. Nevertheless, Patten has certainly acted as a catalyst in bringing about these changes.

These changes in the social order and the order of discourse are reflected in Patten’s style. On his arrival in Hong Kong, he was the first governor to shun the traditional colonial dress of cocked hat and sword, in favor of a lounge suit. In going out into the territory and meeting the people, he has had a much higher profile (perhaps because of his very active publicity machine) than the previous governor. As a sign of his democratic style, he gave up chairmanship of the Legislative Council (which was an important duty of previous governors) in favor of appearing once a month to answer questions, thus leaving councillors to conduct their legislative business without interference from him. When he does appear in the Legislative Council, he has shunned the throne-like governor’s chair positioned on a raised dais, in favor of a simple desk on the same level as the councillors. These are just some of the non-linguistic semiotic systems used by Patten to reflect his more democratic and informal style. His style was summarized by one commentator as follows:

The new Governor brought with him to Hong Kong a populism which was a world away from Wilson’s fastidious discretion. Patten declined the customary knighthood, discarded the white ceremonial uniform, and drew crowds so large and enthusiastic on his early “walkabouts” that the police could barely secure his route. (Cottrell 1993:192)

Of course, the creation of this image may be cosmetic (Fairclough 1992), and the cosmetic dimension of Patten’s democratization of discourse is one of the foci of this article. Although Patten has instituted limited electoral reform, in accordance with Hong Kong’s so-called executive-led system, power still
remains largely in the hands of the governor. The primary role of the elected Legislative Council is to vet legislation, not to introduce new laws of its own. Legislation is initiated by an Executive Council, which is appointed and led by the governor. Patten’s electoral reforms, therefore, have only limited real impact on the way Hong Kong is governed. In addition, for many people, other aspects of Patten’s reform program, such as it is, have been too slow. Many have demanded that some of Hong Kong’s outdated colonialist press laws be repealed and that a Human Rights Commission be set up – calls which Patten has resisted. Although Patten has continued to defy the Chinese government in insisting that his political reforms should continue beyond 1997, he has done this in the knowledge that the British government has avoided a confrontation with China over its repeated statements that his reforms will be scrapped following the handover, and an alternative system of appointing the legislature adopted (Anon. 1995e, Yeung 1995). Finally, some have claimed that Patten has become less open and more reclusive since his early days. However, this may result more from force of circumstance than choice. As the transition draws near, the focus is inevitably turning more toward China, the incoming sovereign – and away from Patten, the representative of the outgoing ruler, Britain. In addition, having set his reforms in place, Patten may prefer that Hong Kong develop under its own steam (Anon. 1995b) and that Hong Kong’s elected representatives do more of the running (Yeung 1995).7

Mention was made earlier of Fairclough’s claim that social change can only be studied by investigating how it is instantiated in discursive events, and vice-versa. In selecting events on which to focus, Fairclough suggests that “moments of crisis” – by which he means moments where things are going wrong – provide particularly suitable targets for study. The contention here, however, is that critical moments might also be times when things are going particularly as they should. Such is the rationale for selecting “Question time” as a reflection of the changes being undergone in contemporary public discourse in Hong Kong. The “Question time” meeting, as the analysis shows, is particularly suitable for selection as a “key” event, in that it highlights how Patten is able to model the discourse to represent the sort of democratizing social change that he wants to bring about.

ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING AS A DISCURSAL EVENT

The context of “Question time” is that it follows a day after a policy speech in which Patten set out his legislative agenda for the coming year. The most controversial aspect of his speech dealt with the arrangements for political reform; but he addressed a range of other issues concerning, for example,
the economy, education, and social welfare. Questions in the meeting focused on these issues.

The meeting took place in the “City Hall,” which is located in Central, the main business district of Hong Kong. Tickets to the meeting were issued at various locations throughout the territory, on a first-come, first-served basis, and were free of charge. The meeting was thus open to the complete cross-section of Hong Kong society – although its venue, in the main business district, might have meant that an above average number of more educated and better-off members of the public attended. To judge by their dress, a fair cross-section of social classes were represented at the meeting. The fact that the meeting was televised “live” in Hong Kong created further broad access to the meeting for the public, at least as observers.

As mentioned earlier, the meeting was the first language event of its kind in Hong Kong. Its basic form of questions from the floor, calling a politician to account, invites parallels with the House of Commons and public election meetings in Britain. The title of the meeting, “Question time with the Governor,” suggests parallels with “Prime Minister’s question time” in the House of Commons; and given that the meeting was televised, Patten and his advisers may also have been thinking of the British television program, “Question time,” when they planned their program.

An important complicating factor in the turn-taking of “Question time” is created by the dual code of English and Cantonese used in the meeting. Although English is the official language of government and the law in Hong Kong, and is used widely in business, the mother tongue of the vast majority of Hong Kong residents is Cantonese. Since the signing of the Joint Declaration, the Hong Kong government has gradually introduced measures to allow for the increasing use of Cantonese in government and the law. The proceedings of the Legislative Council, for example, are now conducted in a mixture of English and Cantonese; legislators choose whichever language they prefer, and simultaneous translation is provided. Ng & Bradac 1993 note that in colonialist systems the language of the dominant minority group, the colonialists, is imposed on the majority, the colonized. While there are also other reasons for the use of English in Hong Kong – deriving from its growing importance as an international center for trade, banking, communications, and information – it is the case that the vast majority of Hong Kong people are more at ease in Cantonese than English.

Given Patten’s espousal of democratic ideals, it was important that those attending “Question time” should have the opportunity to participate in their language of choice, Cantonese. Because Patten does not speak Cantonese, his remarks had to be translated; and the questions asked in Cantonese had to be translated into English. (Some questions were asked in English, but these also had to be translated, for the benefit of the non-English-speaking
The use of consecutive translation had a number of possible effects on the proceedings. First, it may have drawn attention to the colonialist dimension of the meeting, given that the reason for translation was the Governor's inability to speak Cantonese. Second, consecutive translation certainly had the effect of making things rather slow, thereby possibly detracting from the positive image of democratic discourse in action that Patten wanted to project. A third effect of the need for translation was that, because Patten was able to control the pauses for translation during his delivery, he had the chance to pace himself, and give himself time to think. When a question was asked in English, Patten also benefited from thinking time during the Cantonese translation which preceded his reply. However, when questions in Cantonese were very long, it was difficult for Patten to cut people off at an appropriate point, as he would not have been able to follow what they were saying. In 1995, for the first time, a similar "Question time" meeting made use of simultaneous translation, although the hall only had a capacity of about 450 people. On this basis, perhaps Patten and his advisers decided that the disadvantages of consecutive translation outweigh the advantages.

THE FUNCTION OF THE MEETING AS AN INDEX OF DEMOCRATIZATION

Perhaps the most striking instantiation of the reflexive relation between discourse and social change is Patten's own overt references to how he sees the meeting as an exemplar of the sort of democratic discourse which the political reform program he is proposing is designed to produce. In the structure and function of "Question time" itself, Patten wants to demonstrate to the people of Hong Kong (and the world at large) his conception of democratic discourse in action, and the ability of Hong Kong people to participate in such a form of discourse. Patten conceives of the meeting as a "play within a play," or an example of what French literary theorists, following André Gide in his novel The counterfeiter, refer to as mise en abyme ("in the form of an abyss"; Wales 1989). Gide erroneously saw a parallel in heraldry, where the outer design of a coat of arms was repeated or reflected, en abyme, in the inner design. Just as in Gide's novel, the author casts himself as the main protagonist who is writing a novel very similar to The counterfeiter. So does Patten, the author of "Question time," cast himself as main protagonist in a meeting, the discourse of which is very similar to the sort of discourse which the political reforms outlined in his speech a day earlier were designed to promote.
Patten's most overt reference to this structure is in his closing remarks, when he makes the point that the meeting can be viewed as an indication of the political maturity of the people of Hong Kong. In this, he reveals, by means of his use of the play within a play, that the whole purpose of the meeting has been to promote his goal of democratic reform:

(1) but what it does show is that anyone who's interested whether here or elsewhere is that the people of Hong Kong whatever their views can be trusted to talk about their future the future of their families and their community in a responsible and intelligent and mature and restrained way and that is how we're going to show to the whole world what a sophisticated demo and democratic political community this can be

In terms of speech acts, from Patten's point of view, the whole meeting can thus be seen as one macro-speech act (van Dijk 1977) designed to express the political maturity of Hong Kong people.

Patten makes overt reference to mise en abyme not only in his closing remarks, but also at the beginning (thus creating a neat framing structure which emphasizes the importance of the device) and at various points during the question-and-answer part of the meeting. Patten's opening remarks invoke it as follows:

(2) part of that way of life [of Hong Kong] is that we have free and open meetings like this and I believe that one result of meetings like this is that the decisions that I have to take and others in government have to take are better if we have to go and explain our decision to you that's what accountability and what greater democracy means I have to know when I make a decision that at some stage I may have to stand in front of the legislative council or stand in front of you and explain myself and that I can tell you has a great effect on political leaders

As an example of the invocation of the play-within-a-play structure during the question-and-answer time, at one point a questioner challenged Patten on his reform proposals; it was suggested that they were in contravention of the Basic Law and Joint Declaration, that they would weaken the government, and that they would jeopardize a smooth change of sovereignty. In rebutting this question, Patten turned around the questioner’s claim, using it as an opportunity to invoke mise en abyme, by stating that the proposed reforms would not weaken the government. On the contrary, governments that are willing to answer questions in meetings such as “Question time” are not weaker for being more democratic, but stronger:

(3) I don’t believe that the proposals that I’ve made would in any way weaken the government is it a weaker government that comes before a meeting like this this evening to try to explain what it is doing I happen to believe that where government is accountable it is stronger precisely because it has a stronger relationship with the community that it serves

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I don’t believe that you are more likely for example to encourage political stability by preventing people expressing their views I think you’re more likely to have political stability if people are able to express their views even if they’re critical of the government

In general discourse terms, the function of the play-within-a-play structure is to heighten awareness of the overall structure and/or function of the text
within which it is embedded. *Mise en abyme* has been studied more frequently in works of literature (Hutcheon 1980, Rimmon-Kenan 1989) than in public discourse. The plays of Shakespeare, many of which contain a play within a play, are notable examples in literature. The contemporary novel, with its emphasis on reflexivity, frequently makes use of the device. Novels such as Fowles’s *The French lieutenant’s woman* (1969), or many of the works of the so-called French new novelists, are good examples.\(^{10}\)

In terms of political discourse, Patten’s use of this textual structure in a public meeting is unusual. *Mise en abyme* in the context of “Question time” would seem to represent an instance of what Bhatia (1995:15) calls “genre mixing,” that is, “a deliberate mixing of communicative purpose, embedding one generic form within another.” Patten takes a discourse strategy more familiarly used in one genre, and introduces it into another where it is not usually employed. Thus Patten’s use of the play-within-a-play structure is an example of his individual skill as a communicator, rather than a conventional feature of the genre of political meetings. As Bhatia (16) would have it, Patten exploits the “tactical freedom [available] to expert members of the discourse community in question to manipulate generic resources and conventions to express private intentions within the framework of socially recognised communicative purposes.”\(^{11}\)

**THE REMOVAL OF OVERT MARKERS OF HIERARCHY AND POWER ASYMMETRY**

An important feature of the democratization of discourse for Fairclough (1992:203) is “the elimination of overt markers of hierarchy and power asymmetry in types of institutional discourse where power relations are unequal.” Traditionally, when the Hong Kong governor came into contact with the people, it was in formal situations, where the discourse acted as a clear index of the power relation between governor and governed. These encounters would include inaugurations of public works, opening ceremonies of shows and exhibitions, official visits to factories and places of business, occasional press conferences, meetings of the Legislative Council, and New Year addresses on TV and radio.

One feature of Patten’s governorship has been his attempt, on the one hand, to reduce the markers of hierarchy in these encounters, and on the other hand to create opportunities for new sorts of encounters, in which inequalities are intrinsically less evident. The “Question time” meetings, of which Patten has each year held a series, are an example of this new sort of less overtly unequal discourse event. The very act of organizing a meeting in which members of the public have the opportunity to question the governor represents a reduction in inequality.
A number of features in the “Question time” meeting illustrate this attempt to remove overt markers of hierarchy and power asymmetry.

**Informality**

Patten’s general demeanor and delivery could be described as relaxed and informal. Fairclough 1992 points out how informality is one of the strategies for democratizing discourse. In linguistic terms, this informality is reflected in Patten’s use of first names to refer to colleagues and members of the audience. He peppers his discourse with reference to “Michael,” “Elsie,” “Chris,” and others.

Informality is also reflected in Patten’s use of humor. He consistently pref- aces his answers to questions with some sort of humorous remark, even if the questions are serious. Thus he uses humor to introduce his very first answer – indicating, jokingly, how he signals when he wants to pause for translation:

(4) the first thing that I said yesterday in my speech to the legislative council is that it's very important - what you'll notice is that whenever I move my hand raises hand - laughter - cantonese translation - watch this - raises hand - cantonese translation - laughter

As part of his informality, Patten plays down his status as governor. One questioner points out that Patten has never been to a temporary housing area; to this he replies, reversing the normal hierarchical relation between governor and ordinary citizen, that if the questioner has time, he will go to a temporary housing area with him:

(5) I'll do a bargain with you if em you've em got a day off sighs or can spare an afternoon I'll go to a temporary housing area with you

**Accountability and consensus**

Patten’s emphasis on accountability has already been referred to earlier (ex. 2). He promotes consensus, as well as the role of the community and the Executive and Legislative Council, in referring to his duties with regard to developing political reform:

(6) those are problems which I have to address on the community's behalf and with the help of the executive and legislative councils

On this question of political reform, Patten again stresses the importance of consultation and consensus:

(7) the proposals that I set out yesterday they are proposals but they're proposals to discuss er with China they're proposals that I'll discuss as well with the Legislative Council and the community.

Patten emphasizes the role of the community as a whole, in making decisions that affect the community, and the importance of democratic procedures in general. In answering an aggressive questioner who complained about the
eviction of residents from an area scheduled for redevelopment, note how Patten responds by emphasizing various democratic phenomena, in a lexical chain:

(8) in every community including this one the community as a whole decides from time to time that a particular area for one reason or another should be redeveloped ... it is only right in the first place residents and businesses should be consulted in the second place there should be compensation if the plan goes ahead that is what has happened in the case of the walled city [the area where the redevelopment had taken place] with for example a right of appeal to the board ... that you describe in less than flattering terms er appeal to a board ... but it will always be the case in any community particularly in one that's growing and expanding and thriving that one has to redevelop parts of it from time to time and make I hope adequate and generous compensation payments as a result

In answering a question about pornographic material, Patten responds in terms not of his own reactions, but that of the community:

(9) you mentioned em some of the material which I know causes people great offense when they see it on public display in shops and so on where their children and families and wives and loved ones can go in and see it

In presenting his solution to the problem of pornography, his recommendation is presented as a mere hope and appeal to the community spirit of those who deal in such material:

(10) I do hope that retailers will be very careful about what they have on display I don't think that any of us are prudes but all of us think that there is some material which is offensive and should be kept out of the way of children and families

Notice here too how Patten tries to integrate himself into the community as a whole, with his rather presumptuous “I don’t think that any of us are prudes but all of us think ...” It is as if Patten and the community at large are of one flesh and blood, at one in attitude and thought.

Involvement

In integrating himself into the community as a whole, Patten is using a strategy which Tannen (1989:12) refers to as “involvement,” described by her as the creation of “an internal, even emotional connection individuals feel which binds them to other people ... as well as to places, things activities, ideas, memories, and words” (cited also in Johnson 1994:210, Maynard 1994:236). Patten uses a whole range of devices to create involvement, as described in the following sections.

Turn-taking. Reference has already been made to the structure of the meeting, with its alternation of turns between questioners and the governor.12 This of course creates an immediate impression of involvement. But Patten increases the feeling of involvement and equal participation on the part of the audience in the way he allocates the turns. First, there are eight
microphones spread around the hall, and Patten makes great play of ensuring that questions are distributed equally among these different microphones:

(11) what we have to do now is to follow a policy of being fair to microphones otherwise I'll get into trouble but judging by the number of hands that are going up and the limited time available we can have more of these meetings em four five two and then eight

(12) number eight number eight is asking a question there are three people who want to ask a question at number two and they'd better sort out between themselves who it's going to be I suggest you draw lots

Notice how, in these turn allocations, Patten emphasizes at every opportunity the democratic nature of the exercise – with his reference to getting into trouble if he is not fair, to questioners drawing lots, and to members of the audience working out among themselves who will ask a question.

Second, Patten makes many references to his desire that as many people as possible have a chance to ask questions:

(13) the lady there number three can I suggest if people can conceivably restrict their questions to one em it will enable if they ask three questions three times as many people to get in

(14) can I just say em in order that we can get questions from the three microphones which haven't had questions yet that is number eight number seven and number two that any further questions really must be brief otherwise it won't be fair on people who haven't had a chance to get to a microphone

Attending to personal details. In selecting questioners, Patten makes individual members of the audience feel involved, with his many references to personal details. As Tannen 1989 notes, reference to insignificant details may be valued for the rapport and sense of caring it creates. These details may refer to dress:

(15) there's a gentleman in a yellow shirt
(16) the gentleman who's wearing the interesting headgear
(17) there's a gentleman with a striped shirt at number four then there's somebody right at the back putting their hand up
(18) if we start with number three then there's a gentleman with a striped shirt at number four

Or they may refer to actions:

(19) there's somebody right at the back putting their hand up near number six all right if we start with number three and six number three
(20) oh right well number five since you've been so vigorous em you can have a go after the chap at number four but number three

In one case, a potential questioner says that his name is Chris, and Patten makes great play in drawing attention to this person and anyone else in the audience who shares the name of Chris:

(21) perhaps next we can have em the em gentle questioner near microphone six and then can we have the gentleman down here your name's what if your name's Chris you can certainly have a question laughter first of all number six first of all number six and then everyone in the audience called Chris
Building a sense of community. Apart from turn-taking and the allocation of turns, another device Patten uses to create involvement is to create a sense of community. This emphasis was touched on in the section on accountability and consensus (exx. 6–10). A general sense of community is developed throughout the meeting through lexical choice. During the meeting there are 44 references to Hong Kong, 28 to the people, 15 to the community, and 12 to the family or family members.

At every opportunity, Patten creates a positive picture of Hong Kong, and praises the people of Hong Kong for their part in making the territory successful. To give just some examples of this positive image of Hong Kong and praise for the Hong Kong people, Patten praises Hong Kong people for the economic success of the territory:

(22) because of our economic success

For Hong Kong's growth and dynamism:

(23) a community that is growing and expanding and thriving

For their treatment of the Vietnamese boat people:

(24) a problem which the people of Hong Kong have handled with considerable generosity of spirit and great competence

For the improving quality of life in general, and cultural life in particular:

(25) as Hong Kong's way of life and quality of life improve so it is true to say that Hong Kong's cultural life has improved as well

And, as we have already seen, for their mature political outlook:

(26) a sophisticated demo and democratic political community

Patten even praises Hong Kong businessmen for building up the economy of Vietnam so the boat people can go back:

(27) the Vietnamese economy is beginning to improve and many Hong Kong businessmen are playing a significant part in that

In creating this sense of a successful community, Patten makes himself a part of it by the consistent use of the indexicals we and our. We is used by Patten 70 times in the meeting, and our is used 16 times. The following extract illustrates this usage:

(28) we all know that one of the biggest reasons for high property prices in Hong Kong is that we are short of land and we have an awful lot of housing to provide and that as economists would tell you or produces the pressures that lead to higher prices or one reason why I'm keen that we should get ahead with building the new airport is that it would produce a great deal more land which would help us with some of our social needs

This use of the indexicals we and our will be reviewed later, in the section on manipulation. Here I will just note that is an important feature of involvement.
**Demonstrating trust in the community.** As well as building a sense of community, Patten expresses his trust in the community. This expression of trust can be seen in exx. 1–3. Ex. 29 repeats part of ex. 1, highlighting the section where Patten expresses his trust in the community:

(29) the people of Hong Kong whatever their views can be trusted to talk about their future the future of their families and their community in a responsible and intelligent and mature and restrained way

**Confiding in the audience.** Another way in which Patten creates involvement with his audience is by taking them into his confidence. In the following extract, he explains in some detail the negotiations which had gone on between the foreign ministers of Britain and China:

(30) when the British foreign secretary saw his Chinese colleague opposite number in New York er two weeks ago tomorrow er he em he raised with him the question of the number of directly elected seats in the Legislative Council in nineteen ninety-five he pressed him to accept er an increase in the number of directly elected seats arguing that if China was to accept that it would be good for Hong Kong and redound greatly to China’s credit throughout the world the the Chinese foreign minister replied in I think terms with which the community is familiar here that China did not believe that that would be sensible and that it would contravene the Basic Law and was therefore not accepted

This involvement strategy is particularly significant in the context of Sino-British negotiations, because negotiations between Britain and China concerning Hong Kong had before the time of Patten always been conducted in great secrecy, with Hong Kong not even being officially represented (cf. Cottrell 1993, Cradock 1994, Roberti 1994).

**Presenting a caring attitude.** One way in which Patten tries to make himself sympathetic to his audience, and thereby encourage their involvement, is in showing a caring attitude toward the Hong Kong community’s less privileged members. In various answers, Patten refers to his government’s plans to increase social welfare spending. In the following extract he mentions an overall spending increase, with specific plans for increased provision for the mentally ill, the disabled, the elderly, and single-parent families:

(31) we’ve announced in my speech that over the next five years we’ll increase expenditure on social welfare provision by about twelve and a half percent . . . we will be able to do a great deal more for the mentally ill for the mentally handicapped er for the handicapped generally for the disabled and so on that will result next year for example in the employment of I think between three and four hundred additional social workers

At other moments in the meeting, Patten refers to increased public assistance for the unemployed, to an increase in the number of government social workers and school teachers, and to an increase in the construction of public housing (with emphasis on provision of housing for the disabled, the mentally handicapped, and the elderly). Further social improvements that Patten mentions, which can be expected to evoke the audience’s sympathy and involve-
ment, are plans to strengthen the judiciary, with an emphasis on localization (i.e. the replacement of expatriate lawyers by locals), and plans to increase the size of the police force.

**Highlighting a personal contribution to the community.** In building the sense of community, Patten demonstrates his own personal contribution, as in the following reference to promotion of the arts:

(32) I think we have to support further cultural enrichment in our community both by private subsidy and by public subsidy and I hope that I’ll be playing my own part in the next few months by the support we give for a series of concerts given by the excellent academy of performing arts

**Referring to activity in the community at large.** As well as this personal contribution to the life of the community, Patten refers to his activities out and about in Hong Kong:

(33) I’ve visited most of many other parts of Hong Kong and have visited squatters’ areas and other difficult housing areas

Tannen refers (1989:135) to the capacity of details and images to create involvement: “Through images created in part by details,” she states, “a hearer or reader imagines a scene.” In extracts like the one cited, Patten probably stimulates the imagination of his audience to recall the television and press coverage of the numerous public “walkabouts” he conducted during his first months in Hong Kong. This coverage showed Patten consistently being mobbed by very enthusiastic crowds of local people who wanted to greet him. Such references to Patten’s activity among the Hong Kong community thus have the capacity to make a powerful contribution to the sense of involvement on the part of the audience.

**Standing up for Hong Kong.** In the years leading up to the appointment of Patten as Hong Kong governor, British policy with regard to China and Hong Kong had been essentially one of accommodation. An important part of Patten’s strategy of winning over the Hong Kong public during his governorship has been to emphasize his willingness to stand up for the interests of Hong Kong, even in the face of Chinese criticism. In the following extract, Patten refers to criticisms of his proposals for political reform. The source of the criticisms to which he is referring, as everyone at the meeting was aware, was the Chinese government. The extract is notable for the strong rhetoric and emotive force directed at the Chinese government and its officials (referred to as others and people):

(34) it is for others if they disagree with me to point out where my proposals are inconsistent and to put forward their own proposals it’s not enough for people to criticize people have if they disagree to put forward their own proposals for the nineteen ninety-five elections I didn’t invent the fact that we have to produce an election committee in nineteen ninety-five I didn’t invent the fact that we have to put together new functional
constituencies those things are all consequences of the joint declaration and the basic law and those are problems which I have to address on the community's behalf and with the help of the executive and legislative councils

CANTONESE TRANSLATION (INTERRUPTED BY APPLAUSE AT ONE POINT)

APPLAUSE

**Demonstrating commitment and creating emotion.** In her discussion of political rhetoric, Tannen (1989) discusses the way emotive language can evoke involvement on the part of audiences. One powerful rhetorical figure that she discusses is that of repetition and parallelism, which are notable in the previous extract, repeated here:

(35) I didn't invent the fact that we have to produce an election committee in nineteen ninety-five
I didn't invent the fact that we have to put together new functional constituencies

Further repetition is employed in the language leading up to ex. 35. Notice how, in ex. 36, not only the parallel structure of the phrase *were entirely consistent with*, but also the complements of this repeated phrase – *district boards, functional constituencies, election committee, the voting age* – create a lexical chain of hyponyms relating to the (unmentioned) superordinate, "democracy." Notice too how this chain is held between the twin superordinates *in every particular*, which precedes it, and *in every part*, which follows it.

(36) the proposals that I made yesterday
proposals for discussion with china
were entirely consistent with the basic law and the joint declaration
they were consistent with the basic law and the joint declaration in every particular
they were consistent with the basic law and the joint declaration in what that said about
district boards
they were consistent in what they said about functional constituencies
they were consistent in what they said about the election committee
they were consistent in what they said about lowering the voting age
they were consistent in every part

Repetition is also notable in ex. 3. Patten uses repetition in this way when he wants to demonstrate commitment and emotional involvement.

**MANIPULATION**

In the preceding discussion of features which index efforts to democratize the discourse of “Question time with the Governor,” and to downplay overt markers of hierarchy and power asymmetry, Patten’s strategy has been taken more or less at face value. However, as Fairclough notes (1992:203), “It is ... arguable that as overt markers become less evident, covert markers of power asymmetry become more potent, with the result that power asymmetry becomes more subtle rather than disappearing.” Patten’s democratization of the discourse of “Question time” may to a greater or lesser degree be cos-
This section focuses on this cosmetic dimension – on the extent to which Patten manipulates the discourse to achieve his own ends.

The supreme irony of “Question time” is that Patten, a non-elected colonial governor, uses the meeting to promote democracy (with a big $D$) and democratic (with a small $d$) discourse. There must be suspicions on the part of Hong Kong people of a representative of a colonial power which, on the verge of sovereignty reverting to China, suddenly decides to increase the pace of democratic reform, when for some 150 years there was little attempt to promote democracy at all (see Miners 1991 for background).

The need to overcome these severe difficulties makes necessary, it can be argued, the heavy emphasis on downplaying markers of hierarchy and power asymmetry, and on maximizing strategies of involvement in the discourse of the meeting. To what extent, then, are these discourse strategies manipulative?

_Structuring of the discourse event_

The most obvious cosmetic device is the overall structuring of the discourse event. The title “Question time with the Governor” places emphasis on the role of the audience, of the questioners. The meeting is an opportunity for the people of Hong Kong to put questions to the governor, one would think. However, in actual fact, the meeting is structured in such a way that control of the floor (with a few exceptions, when questioners take temporary control) is always with the governor. From the governor’s point of view, the main function of the questioners is, arguably, to provide him with a platform from which to put over his message, and to further manipulate the audience with his superior language power.

During the meeting, which lasted 90 minutes, only 11 Questions were asked. Questions, with their canonical form of single interrogative clause, tend by their nature to be shorter than answers. Wilson 1990 reviews a number of quantitative studies of political interviews and parliamentary questions and answers, all of which show answers to be considerably longer than questions. In “Question time,” a measurement of the time taken by questions and answers (Table 1) shows that Patten’s answers took up approximately 50% more time than did the questions; 22 minutes and 35 seconds of the turn-taking phase were taken up by Patten’s answers, as compared to 15 minutes exactly for the questions. In addition, Patten demonstrated his dominance by prefacing and concluding the question and answer part of the meeting with lengthy statements, which took up a further 4 minutes and 16 seconds and one minute and 23 seconds, respectively.

In addition to this quantitative dominance, Patten controlled the turn-taking in terms of quality: By not allowing the right of reply, he ensured that he always had the last say on any issue. One questioner was so frustrated by this situation that he walked out of the meeting, in order to demonstrate his dissatisfaction with Patten’s answer to his question.

TABLE 1. *Time taken up by different phases of the meeting*  
*(not including translation)*

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<td>Questions</td>
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<td>Answers</td>
<td>22' 35&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opening statement</td>
<td>4' 16&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closing statement</td>
<td>1' 23&quot;</td>
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<td>Total Patten</td>
<td>28' 14&quot;</td>
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Perhaps the most striking power asymmetry in the meeting concerns the need for translation. English would not have been used in the meeting, and translation would not have been necessary, if the meeting had been chaired by a Hong Kong person who spoke Cantonese. The use of English draws attention to the fact that Patten, in spite of his role as a promoter of democracy, is essentially a colonialist, requiring the people he is addressing to use an alien language in their own country.

*Mise en abyme*

Another manipulative feature of the meeting is Patten’s use of the play-within-a-play structure or *mise en abyme*, as outlined above. Whatever the audience may think of Patten’s plans for political reform, or his more global ideas on the democratization of discourse in Hong Kong, Patten forces them to be protagonists in his play-within-a-play of democratic discourse. Van Dijk 1993 talks of the “resistance, reproduction, and joint-production” of individuals in relation to the exertion of language power by elites. Whichever of these roles the audience of “Question time” might prefer to take in relation to Patten’s discourse, they are forced in “Question time” to participate in its joint production.

It might be argued that members of the audience, through their opportunity to ask challenging questions, at least have one opportunity to “resist” (to use van Dijk’s term) Patten’s elitist discourse. This may be true to a certain extent. Some questioners did demonstrate considerable language power of their own, and asked quite challenging questions. However, even here they were, in a way, playing into Patten’s hands. It was the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan (one of Patten’s Tory forebears) who realized that, when interviewed on television, he would present a better image if he engaged in debate with a strong opponent rather than a neutral television commentator (reported in Atkinson 1984). Macmillan astutely realized that strong opponents, themselves exerting considerable language power, may, ironically, help politicians rather than hinder them. A politician who can better a strong
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questioner surely creates a superior image to a politician who merely counters weak opposition.

It seems that Patten has also learned this lesson. A close study of the meeting reveals that Patten’s most eloquent and emotive responses are to those questions which are themselves most eloquent and emotive. Evidence from this is in the heavier use of rhetorical devices, most notably repetition. Exx. 3, 35, and 36 are examples of the increased language power applied by Patten in response to powerful questions. Notice also how these responses, marked by a heavy use of repetition, evoke applause from the audience. Patten seems to be aware of another lesson of political oratory (reported by Atkinson 1984), namely the potential of repetition and listing to elicit applause.

Involvement and sense of community

Another feature of Patten’s use of discourse, the sincerity of which might be called into question, is his concern to develop involvement and a sense of community. Again, his status as a colonial governor provides the rationale for calling him to account here. Many aspects of Patten’s position and background mark him as an outsider, and not a member of the community. He is not ethnic Chinese; he does not speak Chinese; and by his own admission, he has little knowledge of Chinese history and culture. At the time of the meeting he had only been in Hong Kong for a few months, and his commitment to Hong Kong must end with the reversion of sovereignty to China in mid-1997. This background makes Patten’s use of certain involvement strategies particularly suspect.

Use of indexicals

One cosmetic strategy which stands out is the use of indexicals. When Patten uses we or our, there are a number of possible interpretations as to whom these items refer. We could mean Patten and the audience present at the meeting; or it could mean Patten and the people of Hong Kong in general; or it could mean Patten and the Hong Kong government. In ex. 11, Patten is referring to the audience present in the hall. In ex. 28, he seems to refer to the people of Hong Kong in general. In the following extract, Patten seems to refer to himself and his government:

(37) the decisions that I have to take and others in government have to take are better if we have to go and explain our decision to you that’s what accountability and what greater democracy means

None of these uses is a case of untruth, but neither do they present the whole truth. More blatantly, on occasions, Patten refers to past events or states of affairs resulting from past events or policies before he came to Hong Kong. Here Patten does seem to be claiming credit for things with which he had nothing to do:
(38) I think low taxes is one of our successes
(39) [referring to progress in repatriating Vietnamese boat people] . . a number [of Vietna-
inese] are going under the orderly repatriation scheme which of course we played a very
significant part to negotiate
(40) the transformation of housing in Hong Kong has been a very important reason for Hong
Kong's stability and social harmony . . . in our management of public housing

None of these policies was instituted by Patten; they were all in place before
he came to Hong Kong. Patten also refers to the future, beyond 1997 and
the handover of sovereignty. The following extract takes us up to 1997 −
when, it is true, Patten will still be in Hong Kong (at least until the end of
June) − but the implicature must be that the people of Hong Kong, if not
Patten, will be living in Hong Kong and making up its community beyond
the hand-over:

(41) I do think that by 1997 that we should be able to be living in a community in which about
sixty percent of people are owning their own homes

To what extent Patten can be said to be "living in the community" − when
he shares his time between his official residence and his country lodge, and
makes frequent official and unofficial trips overseas − while the majority of
Hong Kong people live in extremely crowded conditions, is also debatable.

Manipulation of topics and facts

Finally, as an example of Patten's manipulation and insincerity, we can see
how he manipulates the topics and facts which are referred to in the meet-
ing. An earlier section of this article, "Presenting a caring attitude," high-
lighted the range of positive topics that Patten chose to mention in the
meeting: provision for the elderly, disabled, and otherwise disadvantaged
members of the community, and the measures being taken to improve their
lot. For every topic on which he chose to focus, there are of course other top-
ics which he chose not to mention. In one sense, therefore, the selection of
topics which show Patten and his government in a good light is manipula-
tive. Why did he choose topics which show him in a good light, but not more
contentious issues?

In theory, in a democratic discourse, this is where the role of the question-
ers should come in. They have an opportunity to raise topics which might
challenge the image that Patten wants to project of himself and of his gov-
ernment. But even here, Patten exerts control. One questioner asked him two
questions, one concerning his political reforms, the other the government's
treatment of illegal immigrants from China. Patten chose to answer the first
question, which suited him well, given that his major purpose in the meet-
ing was to promote his reforms. The second question, which might have been
more difficult to answer convincingly, he ignored.

Even where Patten is unable to avoid a challenging topic, he is able to
manipulate the facts to present a positive image. Such is the case with regard
to the Vietnamese migrants in Hong Kong. Hong Kong has many tens of
thousands of Vietnamese migrants housed in detention camps, while the Hong Kong government negotiates with Vietnam over their repatriation. It is probably true to say that the majority of Hong Kong people resent the presence of these migrants, who were accepted in Hong Kong by the British government, but who are paid for by Hong Kong taxpayers. Patten answers a question on this issue as follows:

(42) er first of all I didn't mention Vietnamese boat people er in my speech because in my judgment that is in the last few years we now have a situation in which largely because of voluntary returns home the er number of Vietnamese in our camps has fallen to below fifty thousand and each month about another thousand return voluntarily in addition a number are going under the orderly repatriation scheme which of course we played a very significant part to negotiate so the problem is becoming I am pleased to say less acute we are going to be able for instance to close a camp shortly which will allow us to put another two hundred policemen and policewomen on our streets which is an important step forward and we will continue to press for a successful conclusion to the policy what will make the greatest difference in my judgment is as it becomes clear to those in the camps er that the Vietnamese economy is beginning to improve and many Hong Kong businessmen are playing a significant part in that I hope that it's possible to see further improvements

Patten's manipulation on this issue is suggested in a number of ways. First, the reason he gives for not referring to the Vietnamese question in his policy speech is perhaps disingenuous. The Vietnamese migrant issue is of considerable interest to Hong Kong people; regular coverage is given to it in newspaper articles, and on TV news and current affairs programs. The issue would therefore merit a place in his policy speech. More likely it was omitted, perhaps, because of its controversial nature and the unpopularity of the Hong Kong government's policy on the Vietnamese migrants issue – a policy dictated by Britain and Britain's place within the United Nations. Certainly, inclusion of this topic, with its overtones of infringement of human rights, would have put the proposals for greater democracy, which were the main focus of the speech, in a poor light.

Second, Patten's portrayal of a regular and orderly return of Vietnamese is misleading. The images that would spring to the mind of most Hong Kong people with regard to Vietnamese migrants would probably be, on the one hand, of violent riots put down by armed riot police, using tear gas and wielding clubs and shields, and on the other hand, of migrants being forced onto aircraft returning them to Vietnam against their will. These are the images which were most consistently appearing in newspapers and on television in the time leading up to the "Question time" meeting. Patten's claim that each month another thousand go, with its suggestion of a regular flow, is also misleading: The repatriation program was fraught with problems, and did not run anywhere near as smoothly as this expression suggests. The Hong Kong government consistently had difficulty in persuading volunteers to return to Vietnam; and even for those who did agree to go, there were difficulties in getting the Vietnamese government to accept them.
Third, the reference to voluntary repatriation is misleading. Those migrants returning "voluntarily" only did so because they would otherwise have been forced to go under the terms of the so-called orderly repatriation scheme.

Fourth, Patten is manipulative in his suggestion that the closure of a camp will lead directly to the addition of two to three hundred police officers on the streets of Hong Kong. Obviously there is no such clear causal relation.

Fifth, the term orderly repatriation scheme is itself manipulative. The adjective orderly is a euphemism for "forced." Repatriation under this scheme was carried out under duress, and was usually accompanied by violence between police and migrants. The term repatriation suggests returning to one's homeland; but the migrants' goal was to escape from their own country, and to find asylum under a more hospitable regime.

CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed a key public discourse event in contemporary Hong Kong, during its transitional period from British to Chinese sovereignty. It has shown how the organizer and principal protagonist in the event, Chris Patten, the Hong Kong governor, uses "Question time" to promote "democratic" development in Hong Kong – not only in terms of political reforms, but also, and more significantly for this study, in terms of order of discourse. The meeting is symptomatic and catalytic in Patten's agenda of shifting the order of public discourse in Hong Kong, in preparation for the change of sovereignty and the greater autonomy promised for Hong Kong post-1997.

Two principal strategies have been identified in Patten's use of discourse: the use of mise en abyme, i.e. making the meeting a "play within a play," to reflect the sort of democratic discourse that Patten wants to promote in Hong Kong; and the removal of overt markers of hierarchy and power asymmetries within this discourse, by means of rhetorical devices such as informality and involvement.

In promoting his democratic ideals, the analysis has shown how Patten's use of discourse is at the same time manipulative; his removal of overt markers of hierarchy and power asymmetries, by means of devices such as informality and involvement, may be cosmetic. While promoting democracy and democratic discourse, Patten ironically undermines it, thereby highlighting the impossibility of arriving at a true democratic discourse, in terms of Gastil's four criteria for an ideal democratic order of discourse (1992). In particular, Gastil's criterion that members of the "demos" must have equal opportunities to participate in the deliberative process, in an ideal democratic order of discourse, is manipulated by Patten. On the surface, there is participation by the members of the public, but in reality this participation is rigidly controlled by the governor.

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To conclude, consideration should be given to the question of the extent to which Patten has been successful in acting as a catalyst of social and discursive change in contemporary Hong Kong. Some indication of social and discursive change which has occurred since "Question time" was given earlier in the article. But the true test will only come after the change of sovereignty in 1997.

At the time of writing, the signs are that this change may well be reversed. China has repeatedly stated that it will dismantle Patten's political reforms when it takes over, on the grounds that they are in contravention of the terms of the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. A provisional legislature will be appointed in its place. There are signs that China will arrange an electoral system which ensures that candidates more sympathetic to China are elected or selected.16

The discourse change which has accompanied the political reforms may perhaps be more enduring. It is China's intention that Hong Kong will remain an international center for trade, banking, communications, and information. Hong Kong people will continue to travel for business, education, and contact with their relatives living overseas. This will encourage the free flow of ideas. In addition, China wants to use Hong Kong as a model, applying the "One country, two systems" format to reunification with Taiwan. Any repression of free speech in Hong Kong would not encourage Taiwan to go down this road. However, when the legislature, which was due to remain in office beyond the transition, is replaced, then the majority pro-democracy legislators elected in the 1995 elections will be denied a platform. One of those legislators, Emily Lau, has expressed her pessimism regarding the future. In a BBC "Any questions" radio program, broadcast from the governor's residence in Hong Kong (Hong Kong 1995), a panel of local personalities, including Governor Patten, was asked: "Could you hold 'Any questions?' in this building in such a free and frank manner after 1997?" Lau's answer specifically alluded to "Question time" meetings, as follows:

The answer is no. I don't think there will be freedom of expression after 1997 and I don't know whether the future Chief Executive will choose to live here. But whoever it is, I don't think they will allow to have such a lively discussion session here and neither will, I think, the future Chief Executive do what the Governor does right now and that is every year, after delivering the policy address, he will go to the Town Hall to answer questions from the public ... I think we are going to have quite a closed society ... So definitely they will not tolerate free speech.

So the immediate signs are that public discourse will become less open after the change of sovereignty, but only time will really tell.
DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN HONG KONG

NOTES

* The research reported in this article was funded by City University of Hong Kong Strategic Grant no. 7000336. I thank the following people for their help and/or advice: Eddie Leung, David Li, Barry Low, Clara Mak, Ron Scollon, and Mark Wong.

1 According to previous agreements, 20 of the 60 Legislative Council seats were to be elected by popular franchise. Patten added nine seats, representing broadly defined “functional constituencies” (defined by occupation); and he extended the right to vote in the other 21 more narrowly defined functional constituencies. The remaining 10 seats are elected by an “electoral college” made up of elected District Board members. This means that all seats are now elected, although the representativeness of electorates varies considerably. In many cases people have two votes: one in their “functional constituency,” according to their occupation, and another in their directly elected constituency, according to where they live (Hong Kong 1992).


3 There are a number of possible reasons for this more recent decline in Patten’s popularity. One, most politicians enjoy a honeymoon period following their taking-up of office; but then they experience a decline. In Patten’s case, the decline might result from the strained relations which he and his government have experienced with the incoming sovereign power, China, and from the Hong Kong public’s nervousness about the impending transfer (Anon. 1995d). Another reason might be the recent relatively less positive economic situation, with rising unemployment a big worry for many people (Ho 1995). An additional reason might be that the public, thanks in large part to Patten’s emphasis on openness and accountability, has become more sophisticated and less ready to accept politicians at face value (Yeung 1995).

4 There are unfortunately no figures available for previous governors with which to compare Patten. The fact that opinion polls relating to the personal standing of the governor and his policies have only been instigated since the arrival of Patten are another indication of the emphasis Patten puts on accountability.

5 Patten’s 1992 policy address (Hong Kong 1992) is where this commitment is formally stated for the first time.

6 Time magazine, with its usual hyperbole, described the lead-up to the elections as follows:

In the past few amazing weeks, interest and participation have surged in a sphere that never before concerned the Hong Kong people: politics. Famously apathetic about local elections – there weren’t many, and the results were largely meaningless – Hong Kong is suddenly alive with public debate and civic concern . . . In Hong Kong’s narrow, neon-lit, urban caverns, a lusty little democracy is aborning. A canny, articulate and startlingly responsible-talking political class has emerged from law offices, newsrooms, brokerage firms and family businesses to lead a sophisticated public debate on the issue that concerns all: how to deal with China. That is the first surprise. The second is the support being shown these neo-politicos – many with accents acquired at Oxford and Stanford – by members of the factory and clerk class who finally see a chance to seize their future.

The result is an almost new Hong Kong, taking on politics as it took on fresh industries and economic competitors in the past. “We were never given the chance to participate,” says Suen Leung, a 65-year-old retired taxi driver who turned up to query candidates at one of the many public forums held across the territory. “Now we have the chance, and we’re going to go for it.” (Spaeth 1995:27)

7 Writing in the South China Morning Post, Yeung 1995 said:

For the first time in colonial history, the administration is faced with a most unpredictable LEGCO (Legislative Council), which is the price Mr. Patten has been, and is, ready to pay for his adventurous strides towards wider democracy. A more assertive LEGCO could pose a greater challenge to the authority of the executive-led government at a time when the territory enters its most sensitive phase before the handover of sovereignty to China.

8 It is interesting to note that, as more legislators are elected to the Legislative Council, as opposed to appointed (and therefore are more accountable to the electorate), more and more of them now choose to use Cantonese.
There is no way of knowing the balance of the two kinds of monolinguals and bilinguals in the audience. However, on the basis of the laughter and applause, these were more often in response to the Cantonese versions of questions and answers (whether they were originally in Cantonese or a translation into English). Laughter and applause were also longer in response to Cantonese. Of the questions, seven were asked in Cantonese, as against four in English.

Mise en abyme can also be found in certain public discourse genres, especially where there is a didactic or promotional purpose involved. Television advertisements are a promotional genre which often exploit this textual structure. A typical example would be an advertisement for soap powder in which, embedded within the overt promotion of the product, would be an interaction between two homemakers who use the soap powder. The discourse of the embedded interaction will highlight the merits of the product – merits which will be more overtly promoted in the segments of the advertisement coming before and after the interaction.

In “Question time,” Patten’s use of mise en abyme has both a didactic and a promotional function. The didactic function is in demonstrating to the people of Hong Kong how democratic discourse operates. The promotional function is in demonstrating – to Hong Kong people, to the international press, and especially to China – that Hong Kong people are sophisticated enough to participate in such discourse.

Fairclough 1992 refers to this type of discourse phenomenon under the heading of “intertextuality.”

Key references to turn-taking are Sacks et al. 1974 and Schenkein 1978. Fairclough 1992 notes that turn-taking is not always built around equal rights and obligations.

Although no statistics are available for meetings comparable with “Question time” – in relation to, say, political interviews – one might have expected the ratio of time taken up by Patten, compared to that of his questioners, to have been higher. However, the reason for this is not that Patten was relatively concise. Rather, it indicates how, compared with the similar speech events with which parallels can be drawn (such as the “Question time” television program, or Prime Minister’s Question Time), some questions were more lengthy than might have been expected. Some questioners asked more than one question, while others took the opportunity to make statements of their own. Patten was clearly unsettled by the relatively long questions, as he asked the audience many times to make their questions shorter.

The reasons for the relatively long questions are not clear. The most obvious possible reason is that questioners wanted to undermine Patten’s control of the meeting, and so held the floor for longer than Patten would have liked, to make their own political statements. Another reason might be that questioners were not familiar with a genre which was new to Hong Kong, and so did not realize that they should keep their questions short. A third possible reason is cross-cultural: in Chinese cultures, a degree of “face-work” is often required before the topic of an interaction is announced (Scollon & Scollon 1991).

Times cited here do not include time taken up by translation, which took approximately the same amount of time as the original statements.


One of the sticking points in discussion between Britain and China over Hong Kong has been how to define the term elections. The Joint Declaration and Basic Law simply state that the Legislative Council shall be “constituted by elections.” However, there are great differences in the meaning of elections in the democratic West and in China, where only one candidate is approved by the Communist party for each seat. According to some sources, there was no time to specify the exact meaning of the term elections when the issue was raised at the end of the negotiations leading to the Joint Declaration. According to others, however, China refused Britain’s wish to specify that the elections should be democratic (e.g. Roberti 1994).

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