

DT019 - Patten the last Hong Kong governor

What some of us strongly suspected from the start has now become abundantly clear. It was not a good idea to appoint Chris Patten, a professional politician who had just lost his parliamentary seat, as the last British Governor of Hong Kong. What Hong Kong desperately needed at that point was a wily, experienced practitioner from the diplomatic service; ideally an old China hand, hardened in oriental ways.

The inexperienced Mr Patten has boasted continually of not wearing chicken feathers. Translated, this means he thought himself too clever to don the traditional dress of a colonial Governor. In fact he was not clever enough. Over the years seasoned Colonial governors have known very well that it was not what they wore that mattered (much), but how they behaved to neighbouring powers. Their traditional dress simply conveyed that they would act in the well-trying and long understood ways of professional diplomacy.

The grossest mistake of Mr Patten was to think that if he quickly installed a democratic system in Hong Kong it would survive and flourish under Chinese rule. The reality, as any China hand would have warned him (and many did), is that from 1 July 1997 onwards China will regard Hong Kong as merely a small part of its vast Communist territories, to be ruled accordingly. This is what the Foreign Office, following Cavour and Bismarck, calls *realpolitik*.

All we can do now is tender apologies to Beijing, and serve the former colonial population in the best way left open to us. Sadly, it does not give much scope for assisting them in the future.