

**HONG KONG'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS:
AMBIGUITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF
CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY**

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Executive Summary

1. Despite possible benefits to China in some ways, the power to exercise ‘external affairs’ in Hong Kong remains ambiguous. For example, while Hong Kong’s external security role may have been allowed for the anti-terror campaign, obtaining approval on other fronts from the PRC could be difficult, especially in times of poor China-US relations.
2. With Taiwan, informal agencies on Hong Kong-Taiwan communication are unlikely to make independent decisions over ‘external relations’. Prospects on pure economic cooperation between both territories are also doubtful.
3. A remarkable achievement during Tsang’s administration was the official visit of Russian President Medvedev to Hong Kong in 2011, which fostered economic cooperation between Hong Kong and Russia. Yet further ties would require diplomatic elements that Hong Kong cannot resolve alone.
4. Local activists defending the Diaoyutai Islands have highlighted another gray area where civil activities are seeking diplomatic results at the national level. Given the increasing trend of activist movements, it may not be sufficient to handle these cases by exploiting technical rules.
5. During the Manila Hostage Crisis in 2010, Hong Kong Chief Executive Donald Tsang attempted to make direct phone calls to the Philippine President, which was seen as stretching the limits of Hong Kong’s external relations. The crisis had caught the general public’s attention over the ambiguity of ‘sub-sovereignty’.
6. The Congo Case in 2011 reflected a dilemma faced by Hong Kong court system in handling sovereignty-related issues. On one hand, a court ruling that is contrary to Beijing’s interests can be regarded as a loophole in Chinese diplomacy; on the other hand, relying on Beijing’s constitutional interpretation

in every ambiguity would jeopardize the integrity of Hong Kong's legal system.

7. While the Hong Kong government would do well to develop an external relations strategy, Beijing should also design a clear foreign policy that could gain the trust of Hong Kongers as well as fully explore the island's external relations for its own benefit.