

INSIGHT

The peacemaker

Stephanie Cheung likens Hong Kong's dispute with Beijing over democratic reform to a family quarrel between father and son. Hence the need for the chief executive in the role of mediator

This year, the Hong Kong SAR turns 18, an exciting age when the world is at one's feet, and all tomorrows are filled with possibilities. New ideas abound, with the inexhaustible energy to make dreams come true. Eighteen is when the gawking and diffident teenager comes of age, to take on the mantle of adulthood, make contracts and vote.

Now is the time to see how the infant has grown under protective parents into a young man eager to make his own decisions, and try out his own ideas instead of having them foisted upon him.

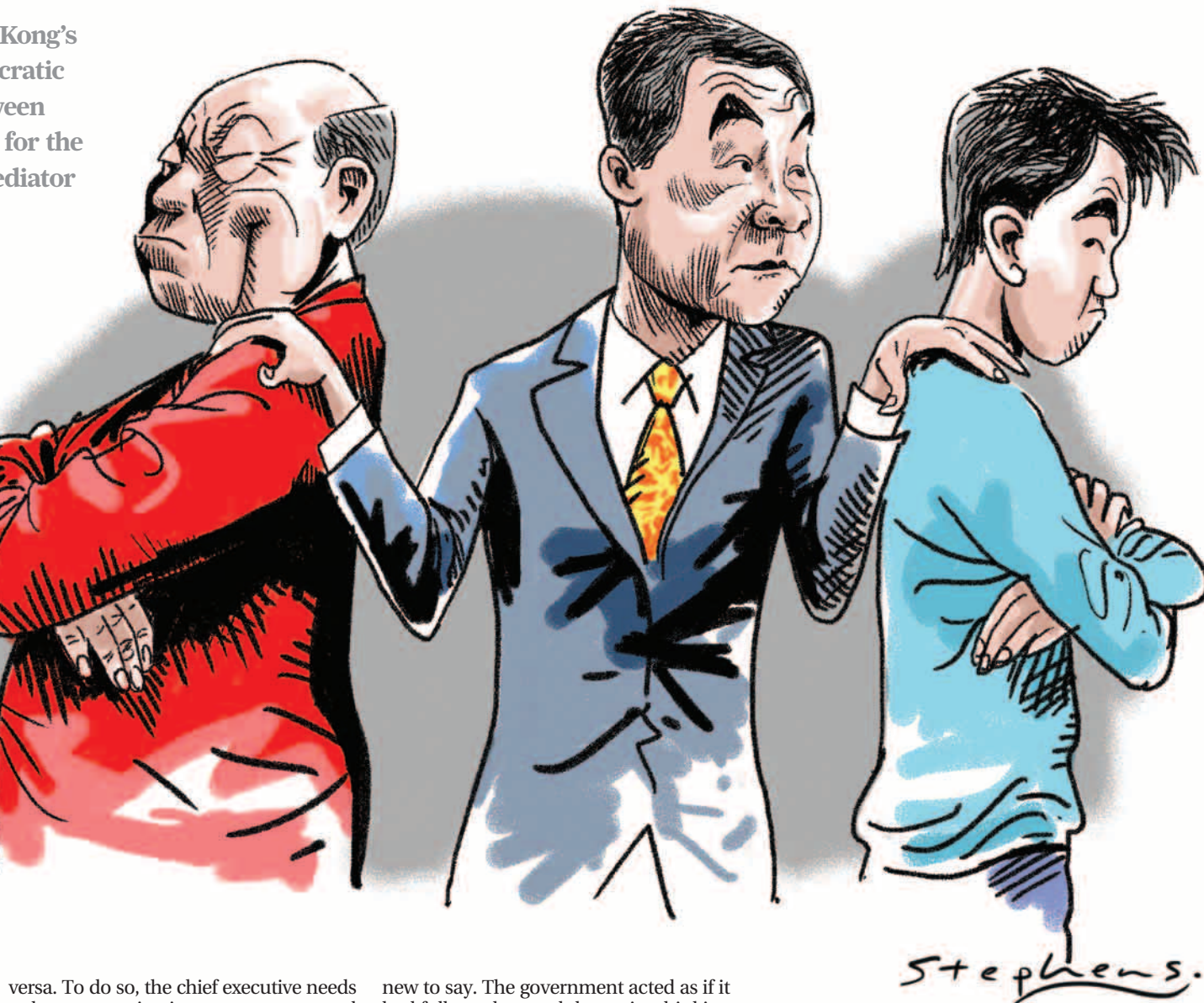
The Federation of Students has repeatedly explained that the Occupy protesters are seeking self-determination, not independence. Action speaks louder than words. A delegation from the federation sought an audience with the highest authorities from Beijing to discuss constitutional reform. Such a move can only be consistent with acceptance by the federation (and the supporting protesters) of Beijing's sovereign rule over Hong Kong.

In the same way, a young man may wish to decide whether to attend college, and what degree course to take, even against his father's wishes. But that does not mean he wants to sever his relationship with his family. Nor does it necessarily imply a lack of love, or disrespect for his dad.

As a parent, we at times feel upset when our children do not follow our advice, which we believe to be correct and wise. Sometimes, we feel the child is being inconsiderate and we brand him spoilt and selfish. The hurt to us as parents can be very deep, and threatens to break the family relationship. That is when it would be important to have a sensible third party to remind us of the love for the whole family, and to put the differences into context instead of exaggerating them further – to see the bigger picture for the benefit of all.

This third party may be a family member or a trusted friend, who holds the best interest of us and the child at heart and who cares enough to let go of his/her own preconceptions to try and understand both the son and father. In other words, a person like a mother.

In Hong Kong's case, such a role should be played by the chief executive, who is in the unique position to explain the Hong Kong son to the Beijing father, and vice



versa. To do so, the chief executive needs to have a genuine interest, concern and empathy for the son, namely, the people of Hong Kong, and take the time and effort to understand his motivations, underlying thoughts and aspirations. It is not enough to stand on the side and speculate about how he feels and thinks.

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During the protests, the chief executive merely delegated responsibility for meeting the protesters to his three-member group on constitutional reform. They held one meeting, and then even rejected a letter, claiming the students had nothing

new to say. The government acted as if it had fully understood the entire thinking and aspirations of the Umbrella Movement. With such thinking, how could the mother properly explain the son to the father?

Also, if the mother merely repeats to the son what the father says, she cannot be a competent intercessor. To do so would be a disservice not only to the son, but also to the father, who needs a go-between who understands how to communicate his views. Therein lies the value-added for having a chief executive.

It is tempting for the father to want his wife to fully understand his views, but he must not forget that she must also be a good translator. She can only be such if she speaks the language of the son as well.

The present striving for genuine democracy to choose the chief executive results from the poor track record of those chosen by Beijing to intercede between the father and son.

It is understandable for Hong Kong to be getting impatient to choose someone who can fulfil that role. After all, if the 2017 election is not done properly, we would

need to wait until 2022. The best news recently came at the turn of the year, when Rao Geping, a Chinese delegate of the Basic Law Committee, said on December 30 that the pledge of 50 years without change could be extended if the disparity between the mainland and Hong Kong was still apparent in 2047.

Even 100 or 200 years of transition to "one system" would not, in his view, be abnormal, as long as it is understood to be a transitional system. It's not known how much Rao's views represent mainstream Beijing, but it is at least an indication not lightly made.

With the potential for a new lease of life beyond 50 years, we can then say, "Take it easy, son. Let's put aside our differences and work together to get Hong Kong right – for the benefit of the whole family."

Stephanie Cheung participated in the student movements in the 1970s, and is currently a solicitor and mediator, and volunteer in youth work and education

Blurred lives

Kelly Yang says our human tendency to portray a better, happier self on social media must be reined in, before we lose all sense of reality



We've all done it – exaggerated how awesome we feel about our #bestdayever. According to the latest study, a fifth of young people say their online profile bears little resemblance to reality. That's a lot of people lying about relationships, promotions and holidays.

Who can blame them when we live in a world in which every good thing that happens to anyone is Facebooked, tweeted, WhatsApped, and YouTube'd before it's told to a single person directly? The last time I posted a plain photo – as in, I did not adjust the colour balance and add a filter or two – was in 2009.

It turns out that we're getting so good at fooling others that we're starting to fool even ourselves. Studies show that what we post on Facebook can actually distort our memories of reality to the point where we can no longer recognise our actual experiences. We remember the lies, not the reality.

There's more. Feelings of guilt and distaste enter the mix when this distorted reality happens and, then, we start to feel miserable. In other words, after we lie about how great we feel, we hate ourselves.

But with social media playing an ever more important role in our lives and careers, it's hard to give it up. Recruiters I talk to tell me that when applying for a job, having an online presence is important. A study recently commissioned by CareerBuilder revealed that almost half of the companies surveyed said they looked up job applicants' social media profiles to look for red flags. Indeed, a lot of job applicants these days don't even bother to send me their resumés; they just send me their LinkedIn profile.

It's not surprising, then, that there are currently 864 million daily active users on Facebook alone. Once we're on, we tend to mimic what we see. Last year, Facebook revealed that a positive post yields an additional 1.75 positive posts among friends and a negative post yields 1.29 negative posts. That posts are so contagious has to do with human nature. When we see a post about an old classmate's new house, we can't help but scrutinise every detail, comparing it to our own home. Even if we haven't seen or called the person in years, we still do it.

The fact that people lie about their jobs, holidays and relationships is nothing new. That's what dinner parties are for. The only difference is, at dinner parties, we could exaggerate over a glass of wine and the next day, nobody's really quite sure what we said. But now, with Facebook, it's all there on record – emoticons, hashtags, photos and all. Hence the guilt.

So how should we operate in this brave new world? We should treat Facebook like a dinner party. In real life, if we're tired of hearing a friend brag constantly, we skip his or her dinner party. Similarly, on Facebook, we should click on the arrow in the upper right corner of their post, and select "Unfollow but stay friends".

Facebook's given us an easy, free and always available arena to stay connected. It's up to each of us how we use this arena. Choose wisely, for how we decide will have ramifications for years to come.

Kelly Yang teaches writing at The Kelly Yang Project, an after-school centre for writing and debate in Hong Kong. She is a graduate of UC Berkeley and Harvard Law School. www.kellyyang.edu.hk

Today's China proves the wisdom of the normalisation of Sino-US relations

Jerome A. Cohen says Cubans should realise the shift can help improve human rights over time

President Barack Obama's recent agreement to establish diplomatic relations with Cuba proved a double surprise. He gave little warning that, after so many false starts, this overdue, highly desirable achievement was about to occur and, within hours, this earthquake in international relations produced an unexpected aftershock. Many of Cuba's long-suffering human rights activists protested against the US decision to "normalise" relations without first extracting guarantees that the Castro dictatorship would empty its prisons of political dissidents and allow its people democratic freedoms.

Unless commitments are obtained, some activists hope to block the anticipated elimination of obstacles to American trade, investment, travel and cultural, educational and sports exchanges with Cuba. They fear the Castros have learned from China, as Vietnam did, that a clever Communist government can have it all – strengthening its hold on power through business and other forms of cooperation with the world's leading capitalist state without permitting political and civil rights.

These events make veteran China-watchers recall Washington's heated 1970s debate over China policy. President Richard Nixon's stunning 1972 visit to the People's Republic broke the logjam that had marked Sino-US relations for over two decades. Yet Nixon did not immediately establish formal diplomatic

relations. He left the most difficult issues, including the relevance of Beijing's human rights abuses, to be resolved after his re-election. The Watergate scandal, however, disrupted Nixon's second term, and in its wake his successor, Gerald Ford, was too distracted to focus on China.

Thus, the challenge of Sino-US normalisation fell to Jimmy Carter, whose successful presidential campaign against Ford had emphasised the greater weight he planned to

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give human rights considerations in the formulation of foreign policy. Yet his most immediate China problem was the future of Taiwan. What would be the island's legal status? What would the US do about its defence treaty with the Chiang Kai-shek dictatorship? Mainland human rights took a back seat in negotiations.

Nevertheless, some opponents of normalisation argued that, before reaching agreement, Washington had to concern itself with mainland freedoms. Like today's Cuban

rights activists and their American supporters, they maintained that the US should insist on explicit promises that Deng Xiaoping's (鄧小平) government would adopt international human rights standards. Others went beyond that, advocating that the Carter administration should await tangible evidence to show that Beijing had actually abandoned harsh dictatorship and arbitrary practices.

Such arguments were not new in 1978. Similar ones had been made before President Franklin D. Roosevelt agreed to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1933, and they were heard again a decade after Sino-US normalisation when Washington and Hanoi finally buried the hatchet of the Vietnam war.

How should we view the opposition stance in light of the Chinese experience of the past 36 years? Were those of us wrong who, in 1978, predicted that normalisation would help promote human rights as well as other aspects of China's relations with the world? Certainly, at that time, we did not hear from China the kind of criticism of normalisation that we have just heard from Cuban activists. I lived in Beijing for the first 2½ years immediately following normalisation and was in frequent contact with activists, intellectuals, law reformers, scholars and progressive officials.

During the brief period when the Democracy Wall was allowed to flourish, I listened to

many courageous speakers. Activists sometimes voiced their disappointment at the insufficiently vigorous protests by the US Embassy and State Department against their government's continuing human rights abuses, but I don't recall anyone questioning the desirability of normalisation.

The situation is not very different today. To be sure, despite China's enormous economic, social and educational progress – progress that normalisation spurred – civil liberties and political rights are severely suppressed. The Xi Jinping (習近平) government has proved the most repressive the country has had in a generation and has eight more years to run. Yet, few of the many Chinese who are not free to comment would question the wisdom of Carter's decision.

Normalisation is only a first step, but a crucial one, in setting in motion complex forces that will increasingly improve the chances for eventually realising political and civil rights, as well as other human rights. Cubans should not condemn it, but make the most of it.

Jerome A. Cohen is professor and co-director of the US-Asia Law Institute at New York University School of Law and adjunct senior fellow for Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations. See also www.usasialaw.org.

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Despite the setbacks, Google must not give up on China

G. Bin Zhao calls on the company to work with regulators to regain access

The blocking of Gmail in China has caused heartbreak and despair for hundreds of millions of Chinese users. I know this because I am one of them. I started to use Gmail at the invitation of a Spanish friend in 2004, having become familiar with Google, based on a recommendation from a professor in Canada, about two years earlier.

Such memories have become an indelible part of my life. Today, it is extremely difficult if not impossible to access Gmail in China. In fact, in the past year, it has often been a very painful process to log in, or even to use Google. So, in the hope of changing things, I write an open letter to the CEO of Google, Larry Page:

Dear Larry, *Ni hao!* This open letter comes from an ordinary Chinese Gmail user. It is hard for me to accept the reality that I cannot use Gmail in China any more. This problem can only be solved through sincere communication with the Chinese regulators, so Google has a decisive role to play.

Whether the communication could be effective largely depends on Google's attitude towards the Chinese market. I would like to bring the following points to your attention, with the hope that Google will not give up on the Chinese market.

First, although Google has been extremely successful, completely giving up on the Chinese market would be irresponsible to your shareholders. Being isolated

from the world's second-largest economy, as well as 20 per cent of the global population, means that many future opportunities would be missed.

A recent news report in *The Wall Street Journal* might provide some perspective – the net profit of General Motors in China is expected to account for 58 per cent of the company's entire net profit in 2014. Think about what it would mean to your shareholders if Google could be as successful as GM in China. Perhaps the possibility of

Completely giving up on the Chinese market would be irresponsible to shareholders

an increase in wealth is of little significance to you, but what will shareholders think?

Second, I am sure you know that although Google ranks first among all global internet companies according to market value, there are four Chinese companies among the top 10. Oh, wait, my mistake – the recent US\$45 billion valuation of Xiaomi Technology now means that number could be five.

This huge market, which Google seems willing to abandon, is giving birth to some of the world's most dynamic internet companies.

In other words, you will not only miss a great opportunity, but you will also hand the opportunity to your competitors. What does this mean for Google?

Third, please use this opportunity, while Gmail is blocked, to re-examine your China market strategy, and seize this occasion to turn things around.

Although Google announced its retreat from China in early 2010, I would like to remind you that the new leadership, which came to power in China in early 2013, has launched the most ambitious reform programmes in more than 30 years, reforms which are intended to provide businesses, especially internet companies, with a more relaxed and friendly operating environment.

Fourth, for the future of Google, and for loyal users like me, please come to visit China at a convenient time. Public information seems to show that you have never been here, and if this is true, it is simply unbelievable.

This may also be one of the reasons for the poor relationship between Google and the regulatory authorities – it simply seems that you are not paying enough attention to the country which could be your second-largest market.

Best wishes, Bin
G. Bin Zhao is executive editor at China's Economy & Policy, and co-founder of Gateway International Group, a global China consulting firm, and an alumnus of the Kellogg School of Management