

Foreword



One of the things that I learnt at University, where I was taught history by an outstanding Marxist historian of the English Civil War and member of the Communist Party, was that it is possible in life to have disagreements with people without these differences of opinion turning into a quarrel.

Nobody could ever have been in any doubt that Jasper Tsang and I were on different sides in some of the major debates about the future of Hong Kong, but I never doubted his sincerity. He showed passionate commitment to a cause which I could understand, even whilst not agreeing with it. I am sure that Jasper was motivated, principally, by his ardent patriotism and by his belief that what he was doing was in the best interests of the people of his own city, Hong Kong.

The public life of Britain often contains relationships like that between Jasper Tsang and myself. I managed to have perfectly cordial relationships with some Republican politicians in Ireland and in the House of Commons. One of my best friends was a member of the Labour Party.

I think it is particularly admirable when a busy public servant makes it part of his job to learn to speak other languages well.

It shows, amongst other things, a sense of courtesy. I always felt a little guilty that whilst I lived in Hong Kong I had neither the time nor intellectual energy to learn more than a smattering of Cantonese. Jasper's English was extremely good, grammatically correct and with a rather formal resonance.

I was always impressed by those Hong Kong citizens, or those on the mainland who spoke very good English. That was true of my opposite number Lu Ping and even of Zhu Rongji, the Premier of the People's Republic of China who clearly managed to improve his English whilst running the biggest country in the world. So there are not really many excuses for someone like me.

Anyway, I hope others, particularly young people, will take at least this linguistic leaf out of Jasper Tsang's book, whether or not they agree with everything he argues and stands for. At the end of the day, you can be strongly principled without being bitter or prejudiced.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Patten', written in a cursive style.

Chris Patten
May 2016