In 1978 the British perceived an opportunity to approach the Chinese government in an attempt to secure the future of Hong Kong from 1997 onwards. The immediate concern was the expiry of leases to land in the New Territories and the loss of investment and confidence as 1997 approached. Various solutions were discussed, including changing leases from a fixed to an indeterminate term. Could this be done without local legislation? Was a new Order in Council required? And could legal changes be made for Hong Kong without overt approval from China? A subtle mix of law and politics and international relations determined British decision-making on what was a crucial initiative for the future of Hong Kong.

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