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An Overview of the Hong Kong Philosophy Café's Legacy: The Public Impact of Eighteen Years of Free Philosophical Discourse

Stephen R. Palmquist*

Abstract: After tracing the historical origin of philosophy cafés, as part of the worldwide philosophical practice movement, this article explains how the Hong Kong Philosophy Café was founded and describes a typical meeting. During its first year of existence, an Executive Committee was formed, which oversaw the setting up of eight different branches over the next ten years. Following sections that describe the work of the Executive Committee and the distinctive features of eight different branches, the article concludes with a summary of the current situation and reflections on how recent developments in social media are likely to affect the way such public meetings are organized, as well as their continued impact on the social and political engagement of Hong Kong citizens. An appendix provides the complete text of the Constitution that was approved by the Hong Kong Philosophy Café's Executive Committee.

Key words: Philosophy Café; philosophical practice; philosophical counseling; insight; rigor; public philosophical discourse; social-political awareness

* Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong
E-mail: stevepq@hkbu.edu.hk

1. The Founding and Format of Philosophy Café Meetings in Hong Kong

Over the past 25 years, the evolution of the phenomenon of *philosophy cafés* has coincided with a wider movement, often called “Philosophical Practice”, promoted by professional philosophers in an effort to make philosophy more relevant to the way ordinary citizens live by encouraging them to engage in the social and political issues of the day. The origin of Philosophical Practice as a well-organized, international movement can be conveniently dated to 1994, when the First International Conference on Philosophical Practice (ICPP) was held in Vancouver, sponsored by the University of British Columbia.¹ The series of almost annual conferences that followed in its wake—in 2018 the 15th ICPP will be held in Mexico—covers a wide spectrum of topics ranging from philosophical counseling and consulting to teaching philosophy in pre-university schools and conducting philosophical retreats or philosophy cafés for the

¹ See Lou Marinoff, *Philosophical Practice* (San Diego: Academic Press, 2002), pp. 206, 356. Marinoff explains that he and Ran Lahav (a philosophical practitioner who then worked in the Netherlands) co-organized the First ICPP. The idea of philosophical practice as a distinct approach to philosophy was upheld by various isolated individuals prior to 1994, though the various strands of the movement can each be traced back to different origins. For a good overview of the history of the movement, see Ran Lahav and Maria da Venza Tillmanns (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Counselling* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995). They cite Gerd Achenbach as “the founder of the philosophical counselling (or philosophical practice) movement in Europe” (p. xvii). Achenbach opened a clinic in the early 1980s and encouraged others (including Lahav) to do likewise over the next few years. The first of Achenbach’s relevant books on the subject is his *Philosophische Praxis* (Cologne: Jürgen Dinter, 1984). For more on this early history, see Maria da Venza Tillmanns, “The Early Days of the Philosophical Practice Movement”, an excerpt from her dissertation, *Philosophical Counseling and Teaching: “Holding the Tension” in a Dualistic World* (1998), online at philopractice.org/web/history-maria-tillmanns. The publication, *Philosophical Practice: Journal of the APPA* (2005 to present) also contains many relevant articles on the topic.

general public. I have an interest and have myself dabbled in several aspects of the philosophical practice movement; but this article will focus on the philosophy café movement, as this is where I have had by far the most involvement. While philosophy cafés do not necessarily function as a form of philosophical counseling per se, they are often organized by philosophers who also see philosophy as a form of counseling or public “consolation”.² As will become evident as we proceed, philosophy cafés perform a vital social service by employing a *preventive* form of (group) philosophical counseling: they effectively encourage members of the general public to be more thoughtfully engaged in the important task of understanding both themselves and their society.

In what follows, I use the term “philosophy café” to refer to an intentionally scheduled, organized meeting that is open to the public, and will therefore normally be held in a public place such as a restaurant or pub, and whose primary purpose is to discuss a particular, pre-announced philosophical topic. This definition is broad enough to include many different styles of meetings, including those that have a pre-assigned person to introduce the topic and those that do not, those that announce the topic days in advance and those that choose the topic just before the discussion begins, those that are intended for a particular *portion* of the public (e.g., French speakers) and those that welcome all members of the general public, and those that may also have some important *secondary* reason for meeting, such as providing a meaningful social activity to those whose options may be limited (e.g., inmates in a particular prison or residents of an elderly care facility). But it is also narrow enough to exclude quite a few different types of meeting that might be deemed to be similar to philosophy cafés yet have some crucial difference. For instance, spontaneous meetings of friends (or for that matter, of strangers) that happen to turn into a philosophical discussion are

² On the philosophical use of this term, see B. Alain (2002). A title that goes back to a book by Boethius.

not philosophy cafés, because they were not pre-arranged and open to spontaneously interested newcomers. Full length public lectures that are delivered by experts and followed by a Q&A session are also not philosophy cafés, even if the topic happens to be philosophical.³ And if a philosophical counselor were to call together a specific group of clients to discuss a particular philosophical problem in a local café, this would not count as a philosophical café meeting either, because a genuine philosophy café meeting (as I have defined the term) is not arranged by special invitation only.⁴

The first known occurrence of a philosophy café meeting, given the foregoing definition, was organized in December of 1992 by Marc Sautet, a philosophy teacher in Paris who had recently set up a private practice in philosophical counseling. One Sunday morning—so I have been told by someone who participated in these early events⁵—Sautet was holding a group

counseling session in a restaurant, conversing on a typically philosophical topic. Ironically, he *intended* it to be a private event. However, as the participants wrapped up the discussion and prepared to leave, they agreed to meet again at a specified time and place to discuss another philosophical topic. A reporter for a local radio station, who was sitting nearby, overheard the intriguing conversation and wrongly assumed that the meeting he had just observed had been open to the public; assuming that the next one would also be open, he advertised it on his radio programme, prompting a group of uninvited participants to show up for the next discussion. The rest is history.

My resolve to start a philosophy café in Hong Kong came in May of 1998, when a colleague put a photocopy of a New York Times article in the mailboxes of everyone in my department.⁶ The article described the recent mushrooming of philosophy cafés in Paris, where, within just a few years of that first accidental meeting, at least 18 loosely affiliated “Philo Cafés” had sprung up, with around 100 groups meeting in various parts of France. The article noted that the movement was now spreading to other countries. Above the article my colleague penned a rather cryptic note; I was unsure whether he was poking fun at the movement, implying that such meetings would never flourish in money-hungry Hong Kong, or whether he was perhaps encouraging us to ride the wave by setting up a philosophy café here. Regardless of my colleague’s intention, the article itself intrigued me; moreover, it reminded me of the more detailed knowledge of the philosophy café movement that I had obtained by attending the Third International Conference on Philosophical Practice in New York (July, 1997).⁷ I thus set myself the goal of establishing Hong

³ In 2013 someone started organizing “Café Scientifique” meetings in Hong Kong; these resemble philosophy café meetings in many ways. However, whereas anyone can, in principle, introduce a philosophy café topic for discussion, the speakers at Café Scientifique meetings are always experts in a particular field relating to science or technology. As a result, the main talk is essentially a public lecture and the discussion during the Q&A session that follows is rarely critical of the speaker’s claims; in any case, the speaker and the audience are never on an equal level, as in philosophy café discussions, where everyone is presumed to have equal access to reason. Even if the speaker at such an event happened to be addressing a genuinely philosophical question, the nature of the event does not fit the parameters of a philosophy café meeting as defined here.

⁴ In February of 2016 I did arrange a one-off meeting of one of the branches of the Hong Kong Philosophy Café as a one-off, invitation-only event. However, this was in response to a special request from Christine Cushing, who used the event to film part of an episode of her *Celebrity Chef* program, called “Confucius Was a Foodie”. See www.confuciuswasafaodie.com/the-show/. In that situation, the participants were more like actors, pretending to have a philosophy café meeting—though we did manage to stage a surprisingly accurate imitation!

⁵ The French philosopher in question told me this story over lunch when he visited me in Hong Kong in the 2000s.

⁶ The article, dated May 2nd, was entitled “Thought for Food: Cafes Offer Philosophy In France” and can be viewed online at: www.nytimes.com/1998/05/02/arts/thought-for-food-cafes-offer-philosophy-in-france.html.

⁷ The paper I presented at the 3rd ICPP described a new approach to philosophical counseling that employs Kant’s table of 12 categories in a way similar to how Jung’s theory of psychological types might be used. The

Kong's first philosophy café.

Just a month later, in June of 1998, a former student of mine who works as a journalist for Hong Kong's leading English language newspaper interviewed me for a full page feature article about philosophy in Hong Kong, most of which was based on the interview. During the interview, as reported in the article, I described the budding Philosophical Practice movement and expressed my hope of starting a philosophy café in Hong Kong.⁸ Several people who read that article contacted me to express interest, and I began arranging a preliminary planning meeting; it was eventually held on 13 June 1999 and included about 10 participants. We agreed to set up an informal group called the "Hong Kong Philosophy Café" (hereafter "HKPC"), and to hold regular meetings in "Open Kitchen", a café located inside the Arts Centre in Wan Chai, starting in September of 1999 and continuing monthly at first, but more frequently if there was sufficient demand. We decided that the first HKPC meeting would focus on the topic "What Makes a Family?" The event transpired as planned and was a great success, as can be seen from the report that was published online after the meeting.⁹

paper was eventually published as: Stephen Palmquist, "Kant's Categories and Jung's Types as Perspectival Maps To Stimulate Insight in a Counseling Session", *International Journal of Philosophical Practice* 3.1 (Summer 2005), pp.1ff.

⁸ See "The New Age Sage Rage", *South China Sunday Morning Post*, 5 July 1998, Agenda Section, p.2. The full page article begins: "If Stephen Palmquist had his way, Hong Kong would be full of cafes where philosophers and ordinary citizens met to discourse on the meaning of life. Instead of Prozac and psychotherapy, troubled people would go to philosophers for counselling and learn dialectic to resolve their problems rationally." A copy of the full article can be read at: sites.google.com/site/thephilosophicalcounselingweb/the-new-age-sage-rage.

⁹ A complete list of meeting topics and a detailed summary of each discussion held during the first four years (for the meetings I organized) can be accessed at: staffweb.hkbu.edu.hk/ppp/HKPC/. After the initial 13 meetings held at Open Kitchen, my newly formed "Kowloon Branch" (see below) held meetings at "Curtain Up", a café located inside the iconic Hong Kong Cultural Centre, from October 2000 to March 2002; from April 2002 onwards we met

Throughout the twelve months that followed, we continued to hold monthly meetings at the same venue: following a similar format (see below), we discussed topics that ranged from "Can we ever really be free?" and "Are there any absolutes?" to "Can love be measured in time" and "What makes work meaningful?" Summaries of 40 meetings that took place during the first four years of the HKPC's life can be viewed on a website that was used for publicity during those early years (see note 9).

From those early meetings at Open Kitchen until today (see section 4, below), the standard format for most HKPC meetings has been as follows. We typically begin at 7:30pm with informal chatting. Shortly before 7:45pm, the moderator welcomes everyone, briefly explains the evening's procedure (if newcomers are present), then states the speaker's name and the previously advertised title of his or her introduction. (Occasionally, if no topic was advertised in advance, these first few minutes are devoted to the task of collecting suggested topics and deciding which one to discuss, as in the typical French-style Philo Café.) The designated speaker then spends between five and twenty-five (but usually about twenty) minutes introducing the stated topic. A question and answer session follows, lasting for 40 to 50 minutes. During this core portion of the meeting, all discussion is to be directed to the introducer; cross-discussion between participants is discouraged. (When adopting the French-style format, by contrast, the whole meeting, following the decision on the topic, consists of cross-discussion between participants.) In most cases we divide at this point into small groups for informal discussion of the topic, which lasts about half an hour; but on the rare occasions when less than 12 people are in attendance, we take a 10 minute break instead. After the small group discussions (or the short break), the remaining time is devoted to a final plenary

at the Museum Café, in the Hong Kong Museum of Art; and in the final year or two of its operation (see section 3), the branch met at several other cafés in Kowloon. The above website includes summaries of 40 meetings that took place from September 1999 to June 2003.

session, during which the moderator encourages participants to share more casually any fruitful ideas that came up during their small group discussions. This final session is less formal and, as long as nobody is behaving disruptively, the moderator welcomes cross-discussion; while participants at this point should still respect the parameters of the discussion as outlined in the introduction, they need not direct their comments explicitly to the introducer, and the sharing of new approaches or ideas is encouraged. Meetings typically close at or shortly before 10pm, after the introducer has the option of making a final statement. If possible, the moderator may also attempt to summarize any general conclusions or areas of broad agreement that have come up, though in many cases this proves to be difficult if not impossible to do.

During the first year of the HKPC's existence, the final task that we dealt with, at the very end of each month's meeting, was to brainstorm among ourselves regarding what topic would be selected for the next month's meeting, who would introduce the topic, and what the exact date would be. By dealing with these logistical matters while the evening's discussion was still fresh in the participants' minds, the level of motivation tended to be high, and someone would usually volunteer to introduce whatever topic was deemed to be most appropriate for the next month's gathering. We adopted this practice as an alternative to the typical procedure followed in French philosophy café meetings, where such matters are decided at the *beginning* of each meeting, because we thought Hong Kong people in general are too busy to risk attending a meeting if they do not know in advance what the topic will be. We discontinued our alternative approach after the first year, mainly for practical reasons (i.e., shortness of time); nevertheless, the legacy it left has remained, and a key principle for HKPC meetings is that we normally do not bring in outside speakers, but rather we encourage those who attend to step forward and volunteer to serve as potential introducers for an upcoming meeting's topic. Normally I moderate the meetings that I organize; but when I am not available on the scheduled date, the

meeting will continue without me, one of our regular participants taking over as moderator. Because a very few trained philosophers other than myself attend the meetings, this policy means that nearly all meetings are introduced by ordinary people, not by experts, and this gives most HKPC discussions a relevance and applicability to the concerns of daily life that is not often found in the more intellectual context of (for example) an academic lecture.

Because some introducers and moderators needed guidance on how to complete their task most effectively, I eventually drafted two short documents giving guidelines for each of these tasks. The Guidelines for Introducers covers four topics: (I) *why someone is invited to introduce a meeting topic* (in short: they must have attended at least one past HKPC meeting, should have an interest in the topic, and need not be an expert); (II) *how to prepare an introduction* (in short: either defend a point of view on the announced topic or explain why you choose not to defend one, do some research on what past philosophers have said on the topic, and prepare a meeting blurb and/or a handout *if* this is needed to help participants follow the argument); (III) *how to present the introduction* (in short: stay within the prescribed time limits, keep the focus on the philosophical aspects of the topic, and speak loudly and clearly); and (IV) *what to do after the introduction* (in short: follow the moderator's directions, be available for follow up discussion of the topic [e.g., immediately after the meeting, or on the online forum, if any], and submit any handouts or a summary of the talk for posting on the website). The Guidelines for Moderators also covers four topics: (I) *controlling the timing*, which includes preparing the venue, governing the meeting procedures, and ending the meeting; (II) *maintaining order*, which includes keeping the discussion properly focused, politely discouraging any impolite behavior, and gently guiding the flow of discussion so that it does not dwell too long on any one point; (III) *contributing insight*, which includes clarifying comments that are ambiguous (or asking the speaker to clarify them), pointing out connections between

comments made by different participants, and sharing one's own ideas (sparingly, taking care not to dominate the discussion); and (IV) *concluding/summarizing*, which includes reminding participants of proper procedures as needed, restating a previously made point when it was initially unclear or if others appear to have forgotten or neglected it, and closing the meeting with a brief insightful remark.¹⁰ Drawing up these guidelines was one of the first initiatives that followed the first major change in the HKPC's historical development, to which I shall devote the next section.

2. The HKPC Executive Committee

After I had been organizing monthly HKPC meetings in the Arts Centre for about nine months, and with the numbers growing slowly but steadily each month, two of the most regular early participants, Guy Lown and Roy Butler, suggested to me that I should set up an Executive Committee (hereafter "ExCo"), so that the workload of organizing the meetings could be shared. Recognizing that attendance at our monthly meetings was already nearing the capacity of the corner of the café that Open Kitchen reserved for our use, I was eager to see the HKPC grow into an organization with more frequent meetings (perhaps run as multiple branches), so I welcomed this suggestion and proceeded to invite about seven of the most regular participants to join this new committee. A few months later, the numbers attending the regular HKPC meeting jumped markedly: the meeting held on 11 September 2000, our last meeting in the original venue, had about 60 people crammed into a space designed for only about half that number to sit comfortably; many were forced to stand on the sidelines, barely able to hear. Clearly, the need for a new venue and/or some kind of change in organizing the meetings was

¹⁰ Copies of these documents (and any others mentioned in this paper) can be provided, upon request, by contacting the author.

urgent.

During the first few months of ExCo's existence, we focused quite a lot of attention on very practical issues, such as finding a venue that would be more suitable than Open Kitchen and attempting to iron out differences of opinion regarding how the meetings should be conducted. At a crucial ExCo meeting held in late July of 2000, committee members became aware that we were working with two very different ideas of the committee's purpose: some members assumed ExCo's purpose was to *make decisions* about the month-to-month operations of the existing HKPC meetings. One particularly vocal member expressed dissatisfaction with the way HKPC meetings were being organized and wanted all key decisions—about speakers, timing of meetings, venues, etc.—to be made by the whole committee. I saw this as a recipe for disaster, as decision-making would then take much longer and the problem of the increasing number of participants might not be effectively addressed. Rather than exercising *control* over individual HKPC meetings, I saw ExCo's key role as one of *overseeing the creation of multiple branches*. Indeed, the whole point of setting up ExCo, I explained, was to offer the people of Hong Kong *more options* for discussing philosophy: having multiple branches would decrease the chances that one branch would be overburdened with far too many participants, as we ended up experiencing just a few weeks later. I threw down the gauntlet: either *branch autonomy* would be instituted as a key operating principle for ExCo, or I would resign and allow the others to carry on. But I expressed the hope that, instead of taking the latter course, anyone who disagreed with the way meetings were being organized would simply start a new branch, organize it in the way he or she wished I was organizing the existing group, and thereby give philosophy lovers a choice between different styles of meeting as well as different dates and locations. Fortunately, ExCo agreed that branch autonomy should be respected. In the two months that followed, Roy and I therefore each set up a distinct "branch": Roy called his the "Fringe Branch" (because it met—and to this day still meets—at

Hong Kong's stylish Fringe Club, in the Central District) and mine became known as the "Kowloon Branch". More will be said about these (and other) branches in the next section.

Once this initial hurdle was overcome and ExCo's purpose was clarified, the committee devoted its main focus for the remainder of the first year of its existence to the task of writing a Constitution. After making numerous drafts and revisions, we reached a mutually agreed text for the Constitution in July of 2001. That text (the most up-to-date version of which is included in Appendix I, below) begins with the following Preamble:

The Hong Kong Philosophy Café was founded in June of 1999 on the conviction that philosophy belongs not only in the Academy but also in the public square. Its goal is to promote free and open discussion of philosophical issues by arranging regular meetings in local venues open to the general public. An Executive Committee was formed in July of 2000 to oversee the development of the organization beyond a single set of monthly meetings. This led to the establishment of multiple branches, providing the public with a variety of choices as to location, meeting dates, language, and philosophical style. This Constitution was formally adopted in July of 2001 to provide a consistent set of procedures and guidelines for quality control in the future expansion of the organization.

Following a list of concise definitions of twelve key terms, the document then has separate sections devoted to explaining "the powers and responsibilities of ExCo" (with paragraphs on: drafting a Constitution and other guidelines as needed; approving the set up of new branches; ensuring that existing branches are operating consistently with the Constitution; intervening in any exceptional circumstances where serious problems may arise; assessing the need to register with the Hong Kong government as a society; overseeing publicity for the branches; and avoiding all financial commitments), the nature of and terms for ExCo

membership (with paragraphs on: the number and derivation of *ex officio* members and members co-opted from the branches; appointment of officers; length of service and method of resigning; frequency of meetings; definition of a quorum; taking of minutes; selection of decision-making method; and status of email communications); and other issues (with paragraphs on: ownership of assets; and winding up ExCo). The Constitution also includes an appendix that gives guidelines on the procedure needed to set up a new branch. After the initial approval of the Constitution in July of 2001 (just over a year after ExCo was initially formed), the document went through several minor revisions over the following 12 years, until it reached its current form.

Other than drafting its Constitution, the biggest issue faced by ExCo in its first year of existence was whether or not the HKPC should register as a Society with the Societies Office, run by the Hong Kong Police. One of our ExCo members was a police officer and he explained that societies such as ours, especially ones that have no financial dealings, typically apply for an *exemption* from registering; but this still constitutes a kind of government oversight of the organization. After a great deal of discussion, ExCo finally agreed that, as a group devoted solely to the purpose of discussing philosophy, we had no *reason* to establish a relationship with the Societies Office, even in the form of going through the process of applying for official "exemption" from registering—a paradoxical administrative procedure if ever there was one. As a perpetually ad hoc group, we have never encountered a situation over the past 18 years in which this decision has raised a problem.

The first draft of the Constitution included not just a single appendix, setting out guidelines for setting up new branches, but also three other appendices, offering guidelines for the conduct of introducers, guidelines for the conduct of moderators, and guidelines for the selection of appropriate venues. These three additional appendices were later dropped, however, when ExCo realized that some new branches had formats and procedures that

made some portion of one or more of these latter three documents irrelevant. The decision was not to scrap the other three appendices to the Constitution altogether, but to treat them as optional guidelines, which new branches could adopt (or adjust), depending on their relevance to the branch's preferred format.

Another initial "requirement" of ExCo that did not stand the test of time was an exit questionnaire that was circulated to participants at the end of each meeting in order to solicit feedback. Summary reports on the responses to each branch's questionnaires were tabled at ExCo meetings, to enable the committee better to assess any potential adjustments the branch might need to make. After employing this tool for several years, however, ExCo recognized that its potential cons (e.g., annoying participants with a request to spend their time doing something that might distract them from the philosophical focus of the meeting, and giving branch organizers the impression that ExCo had a *policing* role rather than a *facilitating* role) outweighed its potential pros (e.g., letting participants know that feedback is welcome, and providing concrete data to enable organizers to assess their branch's level of success); once the fledgling branches reached a more mature level of development, as sketched in the following section, the exit questionnaire was eventually dropped altogether.

3. The Rise and Fall of HKPC Branches

When Roy Bulter first set up the Fringe Branch, in October of 2000, the original HKPC meeting simultaneously moved to a new venue (as mentioned in section 2) and officially became a "branch" of the HKPC, under the new name "the Kowloon Branch"—because the official branch prospectus stated that all meetings were to be held somewhere in the district of Hong Kong called Kowloon. Other than holding their meetings in different parts of Hong Kong (the Fringe Club, where the Fringe Branch met and continues to meet, is located in the district called Central,

which is across the harbor from Kowloon), the main difference between the format and style of these first two branches was that the approved prospectus for the Fringe Branch stated that its meetings would aim at "rigor", while the approved prospectus for the Kowloon Branch stated that its meetings would aim at "insight". On various occasions, however, participants who had attended meetings of both branches commented that they found no significant difference between the two branches. In hopes of examining this issue philosophically, the Kowloon Branch sponsored a jointly introduced meeting in March of 2001, at which Roy and I jointly introduced the topic "Rigour vs. insight: Two perspectives on philosophising".¹¹ As the meeting summary indicates (see note 11), Roy's main worry was that he believed the Kowloon Branch was treating insight as the proper goal or *outcome* of doing philosophy, whereas in his view reaching a rational *conclusion* is philosophy's proper outcome and for that, rigor is essential while insight is not; but I clarified that in my view insight is the *starting point* of good philosophizing (without which one's conclusion might be technically correct but meaningless), while rigor is indeed an essential factor that is needed in order to reach a correct conclusion.

In the same month (March 2001) ExCo also approved the opening of a third branch, which was set up for the main purpose of conducting monthly HKPC meetings in Chinese. It was initially organized by a small committee headed by Ella Cheng and Edmond Kung, but one by one the committee members stepped aside, and ExCo eventually found it necessary either to search for a new branch organizer or close the branch. With no other volunteers available, I took over as organizer of the Chinese Branch in July of 2003. While I did not manage to arrange meetings as often as once a month, I did organize several meetings, including one that I moderated (reverting to English when my Cantonese proved inadequate). But having an organizer

¹¹A summary of that discussion can be read at: staffweb.hkbu.edu.hk/ppp/HKPC/rigour_vs_insight.html.

who was not fully fluent in the language that was defined in the branch prospectus as the branch's official language proved to be unsustainable. After the branch's last meeting, in November 2004, ExCo decided that the Chinese Branch would become "dormant" as it awaited a new volunteer organizer. Over the next few years, two or three suitable people expressed interest in taking over this role, but none of them followed through on the plan, so after several years of searching and with no viable prospects in sight, ExCo formally closed the branch.

After the opening of the Chinese Branch, the next major development for the HKPC came in December 2003, when two new branches were formally approved: the French Branch, held at Alliance Francaise in the district of Hong Kong called "Jordon", was founded by Eric Sacher and later organised by Jean-Michel Sourd for the purpose of conducting philosophical discussions in French; the Happy Friday Branch (because it always meets on the last Friday of the month), held initially at Zenses, a café in Central, and subsequently at Café O and several other locations in Central or the nearby district of Sheung Wan, was founded by Clifford Setyono. Like Roy, Clifford was one of those who participated in the earliest ("preliminary") meeting to discuss how the HKPC should be set up and organised.

The French Branch has always held its meetings less regularly than the other branches: sometimes two meetings have been scheduled in the same month, while at other times several months have gone by without any meetings. This is mainly because the organizer has often waited to organize a meeting until a French philosopher who happens to be visiting Hong Kong can be invited as a guest introducer. Of all the branches that have come under the auspices of the HKPC, this one has varied most radically from the norm, not only because introducers were typically not selected from the regular participants, but also because many of its meetings were not held in a café or pub, as is typically the case, but in the library of a private organization. The organizers did serve refreshments, in hopes of fostering a more café-like atmosphere. But the fact that meetings are conducted in

French has tended to mean that the number of participants is usually rather low in comparison to most of the other branches.

As the name suggests, the Happy Friday Branch was designed as a more informal discussion group than the other branches: the organizer announces a topic, writes it on a piece of paper, and places it on the designated table(s) at the café. As people arrive for the meeting, they begin to discuss the topic casually, with little or no moderation. Participants are free to come and go as they wish, though most who attend end up staying until the end, as the conversation generally gathers momentum. Clifford's only stated rule is the "three minutes rule": if anyone talks for more than three minutes, he may interrupt the person so that no one participant monopolizes the conversation. In April 2005 Clifford started another branch, which operated on similar principles but was called the "Meal Branch", because participants had to purchase a meal in order to attend.¹² Sometimes a film was shown during the Meal Branch meetings while participants ate dinner, and discussion then focused on a pre-announced philosophical issue raised by the film. During their heyday (roughly 2006-2012), Clifford's branches usually held meetings weekly, and often twice (or occasionally even three times) per week.

The last of the eight branches to be formally approved by ExCo was the Lamma Spirit Branch, set up by Tavis du Preez for the purpose of conducting philosophical discussions on Lamma Island. (Many expats live on Lamma, an island that is within sight of Hong Kong Island, the main island in this Special

¹² Although he never formally confirmed the details, Clifford apparently made an income from organizing meetings of his two branches. At one ExCo meeting, members confronted him with the fact that the Constitution forbids the HKPC from being involved in any financial dealings. However, after considerable discussion, members agreed that the principle of branch autonomy meant that branch organizers could make arrangements whereby they earned money from organizing the meetings; the Constitution only forbids ExCo from having financial dealings, not branch organizers. At that meeting, Clifford declined to share any details about his "business plan"; so I am not sure how he actually managed to make money.

Administrative Region of China, and residents often refer to the “Lamma spirit” that gives life there a distinctive “feel”.) The word “Spirit” in the originally proposed name of the branch was eventually dropped, and it became known as simply the “Lamma Branch”. The inaugural meeting was held on 3 October 2010, with an invited speaker introducing her recently published book on the topic of “Centering Prayer”. At first meetings were held on the first Sunday evening of each month, but the timing later changed, and Tavis handed over the office of branch organizer to another committed participant.

Before the Lamma Branch began operating, ExCo approved the prospectus for a new “Youth Branch”, proposed by an existing ExCo member, Jean-Michel Sourd; its aim was to organize philosophical discussions for secondary school students. However, after holding a trial meeting in November of 2005, Jean-Michel decided not to implement his plan any further, and the branch never really began active operation. By the time the Lamma Branch was established, the Chinese Branch was also no longer functioning, so the highest number of concurrent *active* branches that the HKPC has ever had is six.

Amidst all of these new developments, the fate of the two original branches took a somewhat surprising turn. Roy set up a small committee to assist him in organizing the Fringe Branch, and when he left Hong Kong in July of 2006, Alan Taylor became the new branch organizer. Meanwhile, the Museum Café was no longer a viable venue for the Kowloon Branch after they changed their opening hours following the April 2007 meeting, so a variety of other venues were tried over the following couple of years. In September 2009, when Alan stepped down as organizer of the Fringe Branch, I took over and passed on the challenge of finding a suitable venue for the Kowloon Branch to another courageous volunteer. However, over the next several years, the Kowloon Branch held only a few meetings, and was finally closed down a few years ago. As will be explained further in the next section, other branches have also waned in recent years, to the point where I now find myself in the ironic position of being

the organizer of the only fully active branch, which exists mainly because its founder did not like the way I organized meetings in the early days! Fortunately, the actual participants do not seem to have noticed any significant change in format or style in the years since I took over: Fringe Branch meetings still aim to be as rigorous as they ever were, and still thrive on sharing insights just as they did under Roy’s able leadership—despite his disdain for the term “insight”!

4. The Path to the Present and Beyond: Social Engagement through Public Discussion

Not long after ExCo agreed that the HKPC would consist of various branches, the committee also decided to set up a single mailing list for the purpose of sending out meeting announcements. Aside from the existence of ExCo itself, the joint mailing list was to be the next most important tool for linking the various branches to each other. All branch organizers were encouraged to collect email addresses from any newcomers who wished to be informed about details of future meetings, and by adding these addresses to the central list, participants who typically attend meetings of just one branch would nevertheless automatically be informed whenever any other branch had organized a future meeting. This increases the likelihood that participants will visit other branches from time to time. Initially, we managed the list using the now defunct “MSN Community” platform, which included an online discussion group that participants could use to discuss philosophical issues prior to and/or following up on the face-to-face meetings. However, ExCo soon became dissatisfied with the online discussion option, because it proved to be very difficult to prevent certain people from being rude and/or from monopolizing the online conversation; some people’s use of the discussion list did not always seem to have the best interests of philosophy in mind. (Indeed, some members of the mailing list even stopped attending

the face-to-face meetings as a result of feeling offended by what had been written in the online discussion.) Eventually, ExCo therefore decided to close down the whole MSN account; we started the process in mid-2001 by migrating the mailing list portion of it to a YahooGroup, with the option for online discussion *disabled*. We still use the same YahooGroup to this day as the main platform for informing participants of upcoming meetings; through December 2017, 761 messages (mostly meeting announcements) have been posted to that list, though the first 46 messages are somehow no longer accessible.¹³ Currently the list has over 925 members.

Aside from the online mailing list, we have used several other methods of publicity down through the years. On several occasions, I or other branch organizers have appeared as guests on various local radio shows.¹⁴ I have also written an op-ed article

¹³The url for the HKPC's Yahoo Group is: groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/HKphilosophycafe/. To subscribe, send an email to: hkphilosophycafe-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. One problem with the policy of having a single, shared mailing list is that some of the branches preferred to use their own, more limited mailing list to advertise their meetings. Given the principle of branch autonomy (see section 2, above), there was of course nothing to prevent branch organizers from using their own mailing lists as their primary way of keeping in touch with participants who mainly attended their branch's meetings. However, it did eventually give rise to a problem: although technically ExCo required every Branch Organizer to send out a meeting announcement using the joint list in addition to using their own list (if any), some branch organizers sometimes ignored this requirement. As a result, at several ExCo meetings, some committee members were surprised to find that a branch that the rest of us assumed had been dormant since our previous ExCo meeting had, in fact, held several meetings.

¹⁴ A partial list of these appearances is as follows: I have appeared twice on Hugh Chiverton's "Hong Kong Today" program, aired on RTHK's Radio 3, 1 8 July 2000 (see www.rthk.org.hk/rthk/radio3/hongkongtoday/20000718.ram) and 1 March 2001 (see www.rthk.org.hk/rthk/radio3/hongkongtoday/20010301.ram); and once on Melanie Homer's "Lunch beat" program (also on Radio 3), on 10 April 2002. Excerpts and clips from various interviews were also aired on Jace Au's program, "Ngau Oi Saai Gaai" ("I Love the World", Radio 1), in September 2000.

on the HKPC for *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong's leading English-language newspaper, and they have run several shorter news articles from time to time, in addition to including information about many of our meetings in their weekly "Listings" section that highlights interesting events intended for the general public.¹⁵ From time to time we have also had meetings announced in various magazines or online forums, such as Hong Kong Heartbeat.

Given the variety of branches that the HKPC has sponsored over the past 18 years and the fact that I have been directly involved in organizing only half of them, it is difficult even to estimate the total number of meetings that the HKPC has sponsored up to now, much less to provide a complete list of all past topics. What I can confirm is that, since March 2003, when the current records for our Yahoo Group's postings begin, approximately 650 different meetings have been advertised on that list. If we round to the nearest five, the totals for the various branches are: 410 for Clifford's two branches, 155 for the Fringe Branch, 35 for the French Branch, 25 for the Kowloon Branch, 20 for the Lamma Branch (whose meetings were sometimes advertised only on the branch's own separate list), and 5 for the Chinese Branch. If meetings held prior to March 2003 are included, then the total number of HKPC meetings held to date would be somewhere between 725 and 750. Because summaries of 40 early meetings are available on the internet (see note 9, above, for a link to a partial list of the 50 to 75 meetings that took place *before* March 2003), I will reluctantly resist the temptation to summarize any of the discussions here. However, anyone who reads those summaries, or even simply browses through that list

¹⁵ See Stephen Palmquist, "Time we quenched that thirst to find what makes us tick", *South China Morning Post* (30 April 2002), p.14. (For a prepublication draft of the article, see: www.hkbu.edu.hk/~ppp/srp/SCMP.) See also Kate Whitehead's article, "Coffee and Conversation Is the Philosophy of Fun", *South China Morning Post* (26 May 2001), Education Section, p.3; the same newspaper published several other articles on the HKPC during the first several years of its operation.

of meeting topics or those in the announcements posted to the YahooGroup (see note 13, above), is bound to be struck by the extent to which conversations held at HKPC meetings tend to promote deep reflection on personal issues, as well as encouraging participants to engage in serious reflection on a wide variety of social and/or political issues.

At present, the HKPC does not make much use of the most up-to-date social media: although we do have a Facebook account (see www.facebook.com/HKPhilosophyCafe), we so far have not use tools such as Twitter and MeetUp.com to publicize our meetings. Indeed, the ease with which people can now set up meetings using these new tools (see below) calls into question whether an organization like the HKPC *needs* to be governed by an Executive Committee with a formally approved Constitution in order to further ExCo's own stated goal: facilitating open and free meetings for the purpose of discussing philosophical issues in a public space. Moreover, after the reshuffling of branch organizers in 2009, mentioned at the end of the previous section, the Kowloon Branch soon became dormant and was formally closed several years ago; the French Branch, the Lamma Branch, and the Happy Friday and Meal Branches have also all been dormant recently, and ExCo has not met for over two years—due mainly to the fact that there have been no proposals for new branches and no other pressing matters that needed to be discussed. For the past year and a half, the HKPC has, in effect, returned to being a “one branch” organization, so for the foreseeable future ExCo will meet only occasionally, if/when a problem arises or a Committee member has business that requires ExCo's attention, such as a proposal to set up a new branch or revive one that has recently been dormant.

Perhaps one reason that no new branches have been set up recently is that over the past few years quite a few other (sometimes quite similar) meetings have been set up in the region, many of which do use social media such as MeetUp.com as their primary publicity tool. Many of these have been started by people who have attended HKPC meetings and sought to follow its

general format. Four brief examples will suffice to illustrate the extent of the HKPC's impact on this mushrooming trend. First, several years ago David Young, who often attended HKPC meetings before he passed away earlier this year, established a monthly discussion group called “Skeptics in the Pub”. Many participants of those meetings have also attended HKPC meetings, and vice versa. Second, a few professors at Macau University, knowing about the success of the HKPC and wanting to reap some of its benefits for their students, set up a regular meeting that they call a “philosophy café”, which caters mainly to the academic community. One of the professors there once told me he was considering setting up such a group as a new branch of the HKPC; eventually it was determined that such an affiliation was not necessary. Third, a student at Hong Kong University recently set up a local branch of a group called “Nerd Nite”, which shares some features with philosophy cafés, though their topics are not necessarily philosophical: at each monthly meeting, two or three speakers each give a brief introduction, followed by a very short Q&A session; with (usually) three talks per night, this approach caters very much to the modern tendency to prefer short, quick messages (like Twitter) to longer, more thoughtful ones (like email). Fourth, a new group that calls itself “Philosophy, Politics, and Big Ideas” has started monthly meetings at a local café; I was invited to introduce a topic in September 2017 and was intrigued to find that their format is almost identical to that of a typical HKPC meeting (see section 1, above) and that many who have attended HKPC meetings also participate in this group. See also note 3, above, for details about a similar group that focuses on science topics.

Based on my extensive experience in organizing philosophy café meetings and in helping others to organize them over the past 18 years, I can testify to the fact that they can and do serve a crucial function in today's fast-paced society. They give ordinary citizens an opportunity to experience what the ancient Greeks used to call the “public square”: these meetings offer one of the few contexts that remain in the twenty-first century where people

can meet face to face in order to explore and consider what Habermas famously called “the unforced force of the better argument”. Moreover, on a personal level I can attest to the crucial role they have played in my own academic research: of the 26 topics that I have introduced at meetings sponsored by various HKPC branches over the past 18 years, at least 12 have evolved into articles that have eventually been published in professional academic journals. The feedback I receive on a new insight, whenever I subject it to the scrutiny of a philosophy café discussion, inevitably provides me with a wealth of new ideas as to how my argument can be developed and defended more rigorously.

In a day and age when far too many people are resorting to violence in order to express their disagreement with the status quo, those who attend philosophy café meetings have an opportunity to disagree with others in a peaceful and rational manner. Like both psychological and philosophical counseling, philosophy cafés can function as a kind of “talking cure” for what ails us. Because topics are normally introduced not by professional philosophers but by ordinary citizens who regularly attend the meetings, our discussions tend to be down-to-earth and relevant to life in the twenty-first century. Whether the discussion topic is related to personal issues (such as how to deal with abusive relationships or a myriad of other topics relating to love and sex) or economics (such as how to understand the nature of wealth or the status of money in the age of bitcoin) or psychology (such as the nature of dreams) or religion (such as whether more than one religion could be true, or whether science is compatible with belief in God) or politics (such as when revolution is justified or whether we should care about being “politically correct”), we always end up discussing topics for which philosophical research can and does have a real impact on the way ordinary people live. While some types of personal problems definitely need the kind of one-on-one care that only a counselor can provide, it is arguably the case that an effective way to nip such personal problems in the bud, before they develop to the

point where such intervention is needed, is to encourage more people to take the preventive medicine of regularly participating in meetings sponsored by their local philosophy café.

Appendix I: Constitution of the Hong Kong Philosophy Cafe

**(As revised at the 34th Exco Meeting,
held on 24 October 2012)**

Preamble

The Hong Kong Philosophy Cafe was founded in June of 1999 on the conviction that philosophy belongs not only in the Academy but also in the public square. Its goal is to promote free and open discussion of philosophical issues by arranging regular meetings in local venues open to the general public. An Executive Committee was formed in July of 2000 to oversee the development of the organisation beyond a single set of monthly meetings. This led to the establishment of multiple branches, providing the public with a variety of choices as to location, meeting dates, language, and philosophical style. This Constitution was formally adopted in July of 2001 to provide a consistent set of procedures and guidelines for quality control in the future expansion of the organisation.

I. Definitions

- 1. HKPC:** "HKPC" (Hong Kong Philosophy Cafe) refers to a loose confederation of branches whose purpose is to implement the goals stated above in the Preamble of this Constitution.
- 2. Branch:** "Branch" refers to a distinct series of organised HKPC meetings whose proceedings are based on an approved

prospectus and whose ongoing operations are monitored by the HKPC Executive Committee, with due regard to the Guidelines provided in Appendix I.

3. Prospectus: "Prospectus" refers to a document setting out the specific approach to fulfilling the goals of the HKPC to be adopted by a branch. (See Appendix I for details.)

4. ExCo: "ExCo" (Executive Committee) refers to the governing body of the HKPC, whose powers, responsibilities, membership, and procedures are outlined in the HKPC Constitution.

5. Constitution: "Constitution" refers to this document and its Appendices, including any amendments or supplements that may subsequently be approved by ExCo.

6. Member: "Member" refers to a duly appointed participant in ExCo.

7. Organiser: "Organiser" refers to the person appointed by ExCo to be primarily responsible for arranging the details of meetings sponsored by a branch (see Appendix I, section I.A). If not already a member, the organiser shall become a member at the time of appointment. The organiser shall have autonomy within the parameters defined by the branch prospectus and by the Constitution.

8. Adviser: "Adviser" refers to a person appointed by ExCo to assist an organiser with the work of organising a specific branch and to report to ExCo periodically on the operations of the branch (see Appendix I, section II). If not already a member, the organiser shall become a member at the time of appointment.

9. Attendee: "Attendee" refers to any person who has been present at one or more previous HKPC meetings.

10. Moderator: "Moderator" refers to an attendee who is designated by the organiser to chair the discussion at a branch meeting.

11. Introducer: "Introducer" refers to a person (normally an attendee) who is designated by the organiser to present ideas to initiate a discussion at a branch meeting, with due regard to the branch prospectus and/or any other guidelines that may have been set up by the relevant branch (see paragraph 14).

12. Venue: "Venue" refers to the location of a branch meeting and shall be selected by the organiser, in consultation with the adviser (if any), and with due consideration for feedback from ExCo.

II. Powers and Responsibilities of ExCo

13. Constitution: Having composed the present constitution, ExCo is responsible for considering proposed amendments that may be deemed necessary as the situation changes. Adoption of any such amendments will require a consensus shared by at least two-thirds of all ExCo members.

14. Guidelines: ExCo is responsible for drawing up and amending (as needed by the changing situation) a set of HKPC Guidelines for Setting Up New Branches, included as Appendix I to this constitution, and any other appendices that may subsequently be deemed necessary. The power to amend these Guidelines rests solely with ExCo. Each branch is encouraged to set up its own, more specific guidelines, to assist introducers and moderators (if any) in performing their duties.

15. New Branches: One of the central functions of ExCo is to make periodic assessments of the need for forming new branches. If a new branch is deemed necessary, ExCo should invite a

prospective organiser to submit a prospectus. Guidelines for ExCo's approval of a prospectus for a new branch are presented in Appendix I.

16. Existing Branches: ExCo's ongoing function of overseeing the activities of existing branches is fulfilled primarily through the Advisor system described in Sections II-III of Appendix I. Under normal circumstances, ExCo's overseeing role should involve various forms of encouragement, such as sharing information and resources or offering constructive criticisms, but should not involve direct intervention in the planning of specific meetings.

17. Exceptional Intervention: The general practice of not intervening in issues relating to branch organisation may be excepted only in cases where a branch and/or its organiser are deviating significantly and repeatedly from the HKPC Constitution and/or approved guidelines. If the problem proves to be irresolvable by negotiation, ExCo may respond to such a situation either by (a) asking the offending organiser(s) to discontinue the use of the name HKPC, in cases where the branch's attendees appear to be supporting the organiser(s); or (b) replacing the offending organiser(s), in cases where the branch's attendees wish to remain part of HKPC. A third option, in cases where the branch does not have a committed core of attendees who wish to continue meeting, is to close down the branch and encourage any remaining attendees to attend another existing branch. Implementing such measures will require a consensus shared by at least two-thirds of all ExCo members, not including members directly affiliated with the offending branch.

18. Political Status: ExCo is solely responsible for deciding, should the need ever arise, the proper relationship between HKPC and the Hong Kong Government, for example, in connection with the Societies Ordinance. Whatever is decided must take into account that HKPC is not a club, a fee collecting society, or any

other type of political organization.

19. Publicity: ExCo is responsible for representing HKPC branches to the general public, including adequate publicity of branch meetings through email and/or other means. Members should take care when officially representing HKPC to the public to distinguish clearly between their personal views and views that accurately reflect the agreed positions of ExCo.

20. Finances: ExCo shall have no treasurer and no responsibility for or jurisdiction over any money-related issues. Normally, HKPC branch meetings should charge no fees, so they too should have no need to keep any financial accounts. If such a need does arise in exceptional cases, however, the sole responsibility for all financial matters shall rest with the organiser(s) of the branch concerned.

III. ExCo Membership

21. Ex Officio Members: ExCo shall consist of the organiser (or one of the organisers, in the case of branches run by an organising committee) and the adviser for each branch.

22. Co-opted Members: In addition to the members defined in paragraph 21, ExCo shall co-opt some members chosen without respect to their affiliation with any particular branch. The number of such co-opted members shall be at least two and not more than the total number of existing branches.

23. Appointment of Members: (a) *Organisers* shall normally be selected by ExCo either prior to or in conjunction with the consideration of a prospectus, as specified in Appendix I. (b) *Advisers* shall normally be selected by ExCo within the first three months of a branch's operation, from the attendees who have

demonstrated a regular commitment to that branch. (c) *Co-opted members* shall normally be selected by ExCo on the basis of long-standing commitment to any (or several) HKPC branch(es), including prior participation in leadership roles, such as serving as introducers or moderators for HKPC meetings. All these appointments shall require a consensus shared by a majority of all ExCo members.

24. Length of Service: All Co-opted members shall be appointed for a two year term and may be reappointed for further two year terms, thereafter, at Exco's sole discretion. Organisers and Advisers will continue to serve indefinitely until such time as they resign, their branch closes, or Exco decides by a two thirds majority to terminate their appointment to their branch.

25. Resignation: A member wishing to resign from ExCo should normally give one month's notice. Resignation entails giving up all ExCo offices held. A resigning organiser should normally recommend a replacement organiser. If ExCo regards the branch as no longer viable, the organiser should make suitable preparations for its discontinuation. A resigning adviser's place on ExCo should be filled as soon as possible by the procedures specified in paragraph 23.

26. Pre-Constitution ExCo: ExCo was initially established by the founder of HKPC, Stephen Palmquist, who invited six other attendees to serve as initial members. The first ExCo meeting was held on 13 July 2000. During the initial year of its existence ExCo oversaw the development of the HKPC into three distinct branches and the writing of this constitution. The minutes of the ten ExCo meetings held during the first year shall constitute the official record of its decisions and actions during the year prior to the approval of this constitution, ending 30 June 2001. This constitution shall supersede any rulings in those minutes that may be deemed to conflict with the contents of this constitution. The ExCo members approving the adoption of this constitution at the

meeting held on 4 July 2001 were: Rose Allender, Roy Butler, Austin Caffrey, Grace Chan, Ella Cheng, Edmond Kung, Steve Palmquist, and Pia Wong.

IV. Conduct of ExCo Meetings

27. Frequency: Regular ExCo meetings should take place two times per year (preferably February/March and September/October), or more/less often if deemed appropriate by the members. A meeting may be called either by the Chairperson or by any two members who present a request to the Chairperson.

28. Election of Officers: Officers shall normally serve a two year term, renewable. Prior to the meeting when an election for the office of Chairperson or Secretary is to take place, names of members willing to be considered for either office shall be circulated to all members eligible to attend that meeting. At the meeting the officer(s) serving for the following two years (starting from the next meeting) shall be elected from and by the members. There being no financial responsibilities for ExCo (see paragraph 20), no Treasurer shall be appointed. Other officers (or temporary replacements for existing officers) may be appointed from time to time as deemed necessary by a majority of the current members. Elections of officers shall be conducted by secret ballot, unless all members agree to some alternative method.

29. Quorum: Decisions approved at an ExCo meeting shall be binding only if the number of members present is more than half of the total number of current ExCo members. Decisions approved when the number of members present is fewer than this minimum must be ratified subsequently, when more than half of the members are present. Absence of any officer from a meeting (or vacancy of the office due to resignation or any other reason) shall not be held to invalidate the proceedings. In such cases, the

officer shall appoint a deputy, failing which a temporary replacement shall be selected by the members present at the beginning of that meeting.

30. Minutes: Minutes shall be taken by the Secretary (or by another member temporarily designated by the Secretary) at every ExCo meeting. The format shall be determined by agreement between the Secretary (or the Secretary's designate) and the Chairperson. Draft minutes should be sent to all members, preferably by email, well in advance of the next meeting. Members should provide feedback to the Chairperson prior to the next ExCo meeting if possible. Under normal circumstances, the minutes will be approved at the beginning of the next ExCo meeting. Approved minutes will be signed by the Chair.

31. Decision-Making Method: Before a new Chairperson is selected by ExCo, any persons willing to serve in this office shall explain to ExCo their approach to decision making (e.g., majority vote, consensus, dictatorship, etc.). The selection of a Chairperson shall therefore include the selection of an approach to decision making, and this approach shall be deemed authoritative for the duration of that Chairperson's term, except that the method in question must not contradict any of the methods stated elsewhere in this Constitution for specific types of decisions.

32. Email Communications: ExCo members will be expected to have email accounts and to check them regularly. Most between-meeting discussion of issues (if any) is likely to take place in this manner. Members wishing to circulate a document by email should normally do so at least one week prior to the ExCo meeting at which it is due to be tabled. If a decision is made by email circulation, any member(s) may object to the use of this method by providing reasonable grounds, such as insufficient notice being allowed. In any case, all decisions made in this manner should be tabled at the next ExCo meeting for formal

confirmation and inclusion in the minutes.

V. Other Issues

33. Ownership of Assets: (a) Ideas expressed at HKPC meetings are considered to be in the public domain. (b) All electronic media connected with the HKPC, such as email discussion forums, email address lists and web sites, are owned by ExCo, except in the case of material (such as meeting summaries) that relates only to one branch and is posted on a web site owned by an individual member or attendee. (c) Documents produced by ExCo members for use by ExCo and/or the HKPC in general remain the property of ExCo and should not be employed for other uses without the permission of ExCo.

34. Winding Up: Permanently dissolving ExCo and/or the HKPC will require a consensus shared by at least two-thirds of all ExCo members. If one or more HKPC branch meetings continue to be held after that point, then this Constitution will no longer be deemed authoritative over their proceedings.

Appendix II: Guidelines for Setting Up Branch Meetings

I. The Organizer and Prospectus

A member of the HKPC who wishes to set up and organize a "Branch" of any type should in the first instance approach the Executive Committee (ExCo) by submitting a prospectus outlining the details of his or her request. ExCo shall evaluate the suitability of the prospectus and the person to serve in this role, based on the following criteria.

A. A branch organizer should ideally have:

1. attended meetings sponsored by the HKPC for at least nine months, including not less than four meetings. (A shorter time period may be allowed for members who have shown an exceptionally high level of commitment.)
2. participated actively in the discussions at such meetings, and demonstrated leadership potential.
3. moderated and/or introduced topics (or the equivalent) on at least two occasions, with good results.
4. a good working knowledge of a significant range of philosophical ideas and/or literature, as demonstrated either by traditional academic qualifications or by some other means.

B. Among other details, a prospectus should include:

1. A suggested meeting venue.*
2. A statement of how meeting dates will be selected (e.g., constant or variable days/weeks).*
3. A statement of how meetings should be carried out, specifying (for example) details concerning choice of topics, introductions/introducers, moderation/moderators, and reports of meetings.
4. A description of any distinctive features of the Branch. (*Note: In assessing proposed venues and meeting scheduling, ExCo should give due consideration to the ideal of having venues in various districts and meetings on different days and weeks.)

II. Adviser

Once an organizer has been identified and his or her prospectus approved by ExCo's consensus (or by a two-thirds majority vote, if necessary), one ExCo member (other than the organizer, if he or she is already an ExCo member) shall be assigned to advise and oversee the initial stages of setting up the Branch. This shall

include advice on the following areas:

- A. Selection and or assessment of venue.
- B. Effective use of moderator(s).
- C. Effective use of introducer(s).
- D. Effective publicity and reporting back to ExCo.

As soon as possible following the approval of the new branch, the branch organizer will recommend an adviser who need not be an existing ExCo member.

III. Reporting to ExCo

From the time of approval onwards, new Branch Organizers will be given autonomy in deciding how their meetings will operate and who will be chosen to fill various leadership positions (such as moderators and introducers). The Adviser's job (like ExCo's as a whole) is not to make such decisions but to provide assistance and encouragement. The Adviser shall report on the progress of a new Branch at each ExCo meeting during the Branch's first year. The Organizer will supplement the Adviser's report, as needed. ExCo members should provide feedback on any concerns raised in the report.

IV. Closing a Branch

Although Branch Organizers should be allowed to be innovative, care should be taken to insure that the central aims of the HKPC are not breached by the meetings—namely, that the meetings continue to promote open and informal public discussion of philosophical issues. If any question arises as to the suitability of the procedures being followed by any Branch, these should be reported to ExCo immediately. Guidelines are just that: guidelines. They are designed to encourage Branch Organizers to fulfill the HKPC goals, not to restrict them from being creative in doing so. However, if a Branch Organizer begins to ignore or

significantly reinterpret the Constitution, so that ExCo regards the resulting meetings as lying outside the proper functioning of the HKPC, then the Branch Organizer shall be asked to cease advertising his or her meetings under the auspices of the HKPC and/or a new Branch Organizer shall be appointed (see Constitution, paragraph 24).

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