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**Book Reviews : Larry Chuen-ho CHOW and Yiu-kwan FAN (Eds.), The Other Hong Kong Report 1998. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press 1999. xxvii + 411 pp., with tables, maps, figures, references and index. ISBN: 962-201-829-7 (pbk). Price: US\$30.00**

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that other cultures should not be forced into accepting any one definition of human rights.

Part III contains chapters by Abdullahi A. An-na'im, Norani Othman, Suwanna Satha-Anand, and Joseph Chan. These selections all point to common threads of human rights concepts that run through virtually all cultures and societies. An-na'im presents the case for human rights in Muslim societies. While Othman argues that shari'a law does not inherently restrict women's citizenship rights, Satha-Anand argues that Buddhism in Thailand has been used by men to support prostitution without there being a solid foundation in Buddhism. Finally, Chan's chapter looks at human rights from a Confucian perspective. Chan finds that, while not everything in Confucianism coincides with the Western notion of human rights, human rights are evident in the spirit of Confucianism.

The final section, Part IV, is composed of contributions by Yash Ghai, Kevin Y.L. Tan, Dorothy J. Solinger, Mab Huang, and Benedict Kingsbury, who raise particular development issues in the context of human rights. Ghai's piece focuses on the legal and constitutional efforts to support social justice in the era of globalization. Tan deals with legal reform and human rights in Singapore and Taiwan — two very different cases. Solinger analyzes human rights issues in mainland China in the context of internal migration and economic reforms. Mab examines the environmental movement in Taiwan, and Kingsbury analyzes the legal concept of "indigenous peoples" in Asia.

Since the end of the Cold War, human rights scholarship has focused on the divide between universal and relativist concepts of rights and this volume, which presents a dialog between both sides, makes a valuable contribution to the literature. It goes beyond the often heard rhetoric presented by government officials and touches on the very real concerns of human beings. Isn't that what human rights is all about? The authors display attention to detail, precision of argument, and great sensitivity to the dialog between the cultures discussed. This excellent and wide-ranging collection is eminently suited for graduate and advanced courses, as well as for anyone interested in Asia, human rights, and comparative and international studies.

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**Larry Chuen-ho CHOW and Yiu-kwan FAN (Eds.),** *The Other Hong Kong Report 1998*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press 1999. xxvii + 411 pp., with tables, maps, figures, references and index. ISBN: 962-201-829-7 (pbk). Price: US\$30.00.

This is the tenth volume, and the first after the 1 July 1997 handover of Hong Kong from British to Chinese rule, in the excellent series of publications under the same title. This volume continues the aim, through commissioned chapters prepared by experts, to provide an alternative set of views from those "spun out" by the official

annual reports produced by the Hong Kong Government or, as John Waldren states in his "Compiler's Notes" in the always interesting Calendar of Events, "to counteract official misrepresentation" (p. ix). In other words, the essays are critical appraisals of the events, issues, policies and personalities of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) during the transitional period from early 1997 to around mid-1998.

The volume is divided into five sections with chapters focusing on politics, the economy, population and labor, social welfare, infrastructure and the environment. The contributions are briefly summarized by the editors in the introductory chapter, with attention drawn to those which they deemed to have taken "a very critical, bordering on harsh, view of the SAR Government" (p. xxix). The editors correctly point out that before the handover many people believed that Hong Kong would continue to enjoy economic prosperity, but they were less sanguine about its political future. Events during the period, they say, revealed that the opposite was true, with the political transition being unexpectedly smooth whereas the SAR suffered its worst economic slump since the early 1980s. Indeed, thematically the book reflects a widespread preoccupation with the impact of and responses to the Asian currency crisis in a Hong Kong which has now found itself in recession and with high unemployment.

Contributors suggest that Hong Kong is still groping for ways to establish a workable and efficient political framework. Contributors such as Lee Ming-kwan, Michael DeGolyer, and Christine Loh pick up on this theme, convincingly arguing that there are serious structural defects, dualities, disjunctions, and other problems in the political domain which demand fundamental review and reform. These include a presidential-like — and, for a time, rather aloof — Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Tung Chee-hwa, who has no political party to back up his policies and has fostered a poor relationship between the legislative and executive branches of government; a failure by government officers to properly read and respond to public opinion; and an executive-led system fraught with administrative weakness in overseeing a civil service which is seen as less than efficient and is unable to anticipate and make timely responses to domestic difficulties or external challenges. The last point reflects the failure of the emphasis Tung's policies placed on efficacy over representativeness so far as the civil service is concerned. One could also mention the diminishing accountability, at least perceived, of officialdom and the quiet erosion of key elements within the rule of law system.

As Lee Ming-kwan bluntly notes, "[t]here is every sign that our government is weak: unable to lead, drifting, and losing touch with the people" (p. 23). DeGolyer, in one of the best analytical chapters in the volume, draws upon detailed and rigorous survey data as well as his own acute political observation to evaluate the crucial role of the civil service under Tung's leadership. He suggests that consideration be given to adopting either a presidential- or ministerial-style Executive Council (Ex-co). Christine Loh lists a number of serious human rights failures or abuses and expresses some concern that "conservative forces" who might somehow benefit from a narrower notion of civic society are strategically locating themselves in the political system and biding their time.

Albert Chen more cheerily argues that there is a basic continuity of the rule of law system in the SAR and that civil society is alive and well. Who could have predicted that this would be put in question by the most recent decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress to overturn the SAR Court of Final Appeal decision on the right of abode in Hong Kong for all mainland-born children of SAR parents. Frank Ching concludes that China has allowed Hong Kong to exercise a genuinely high degree of autonomy and has bent over backwards to accommodate the SAR, although he notes that until the Legislative Council and the CEO are chosen by universal suffrage it would be difficult to argue that the people are running Hong Kong in the fullest sense of that concept.

Whilst most authors interpret Hong Kong's economic difficulties as being largely a spin-off of the Asian currency crisis, in a most interesting and articulate chapter Ho Lok-sang contends that "[o]ne could easily blame the Asian turmoil spilling over to us, but this is really not convincing" (p. 139). He makes the case that the SAR Government had departed from the time-tested recipe of economic success under the previous "policies of positive non-interventionism" and instead had adopted "misguided interventionism", particularly in the property market. For him, the economic downturn has been primarily a home-grown tragedy, which was made all the worse by "administrative-led inflation". At the minimum, as DeGolyer similarly observed (p. 76), "the effects of the Asian crisis were deepened in part by administrative disarray and the lack of an alert watchdog to sound the alarms early, loudly, repeatedly, and authoritatively". Some authors actually saw some "benefits" coming out of Hong Kong's economic miseries. For example, the bursting of the property market "bubble" (with prices sometimes plummeting 50 percent!) and the plunge in the stock market would bring long-overdue price corrections that would aid Hong Kong's longer-term competitiveness. The crisis would also strengthen economic integration between the SAR and the mainland.

Many other important issues are treated solidly by contributors, and many — but still not enough — both clearly identify problems which demand attention and proper discussion in the community and go on to make constructive policy-related recommendations about them. Y.C. Jao supports the continuation of the present USD-HKD linked exchange rate regime. Siu Yat-ming argues that new arrivals from the mainland are less likely than the rest of the SAR's population to take up highly skilled and more prestigious occupations (thus contradicting the government's claim and putting at risk Hong Kong's competitiveness as a center for technically advanced services). On this point, Larry Chuen-ho Chow and Lam Pun-lee say that whether Hong Kong should continue to serve as a financial and business center or should transform into an information technology center are vital choices.

Several authors, including Ng Ching-fai, contend that the Chinese-as-the-medium-of-instruction educational policy has been confused, inconsistent in implementation, and, one might add, misguided in terms of preparing a workforce which can positively function in an outward-looking, cosmopolitan manner. Wong Koon-kwai and Man Chi-sum make the pointed remark that "[n]o one in the SAR Government, including the Chief Executive, has the vision to offer us a sustainable blueprint for the 21st century that will protect our environment for future generations, and do so

in a practicable and understandable way" (p. 399). They contend that in Hong Kong there is no real public or private support favoring the development of postmaterialist and environmental values, and that Hong Kong remains materialist. Thus it is not surprising that environmental issues excite little political passion. Ng echoes this (and perhaps similar sentiments held by colleagues in Beijing) by stating that young people growing up in the materialist culture of the SAR become shortsighted, looking for quick money to enrich their own material lives, with declining moral values and civic awareness. They stress their rights but not their obligations to society. Education should therefore go beyond the school.

There is an absolute wealth of information and informed, critical discussion in this volume. One would hope that those in officialdom in Hong Kong and in Beijing will give this volume a serious read. If the volume has any shortcomings it is the rather poor quality of English in some chapters and the fact that this was not detected in the editing processes.

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**Ralph N. CLOUGH**, *Cooperation or Conflict in the Taiwan Strait?* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 1999. xi + 154 pp., with annexes, bibliography, index and notes. ISBN: 0-8476-9325-2 (hc), 0-8476-9326-0 (pbk). Price: US\$54.00/£39.00 (hc), US\$21.95/£16.95 (pbk).

The central issue separating Taiwan and mainland China is unification or independence. When ROC President Li Denghui responded to a German reporter's question on 9 July 1999 by stating that "special state-to-state" relations should guide ROC-PRC relations, he created a political and diplomatic crisis with the potential to become a military confrontation involving not only Taiwan and China but the United States as well. This book provides the context for understanding how President Li's statement may change relations between the two sides and why it is an important departure from the prickly status quo that held through much of the 1990s. This book contains a brief but complete account of recent relations between the ROC, the PRC and the United States. Additionally, substantial portions are devoted to Taiwanese domestic politics and to cross-Strait economic interdependence. Ralph Clough is a veteran US Foreign Service Officer known for his work on Taiwan affairs; he teaches at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.

President Li's 1995 visit in an unofficial capacity to the United States for a reunion at Cornell University is the set-piece event that begins the book. This trip and what it intimated about Taiwan's international status provoked PRC military exercises intended to influence voters away from Li's candidacy in the March 1996 presidential election. The exercises failed; they led to the worst Chinese-American military crisis since the offshore crisis of 1958 and contributed to President Li's substantial victory. The PRC failed to understand Taiwan's political consciousness and its democratic politics. The second chapter is a historical review of PRC, ROC and US political and economic interests and the "values" of each. While containing