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Yin-wah Chu



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- 1 The handover of Hong Kong to China continues to attract much attention. Politically, the experiment with the “one country, two systems” arrangement affects the well-being of close to seven million Hong Kong people and its outcome influences the prospect of China’s unification with Taiwan. Academically, the experiment provides the context for the study of governance and legitimacy, economic development, cultural identity, among other topics.
- 2 The volume edited by Ming K. Chan and Alvin Y. So is one of the books that have been published in the last few years to address issues concerning post-1997 Hong Kong. It contains 15 informative and cogently argued essays, most of which were first presented at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in December 2000. The authors have diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including economics, history, journalism, legal studies, political science, sociology and urban planning. Some authors have relied on survey data, but most have utilised primary and secondary documents to write up their analyses.
- 3 The book has three major parts, with three chapters addressing broadly economic issues, four on culture and the media, and six dealing with political-institutional matters. Among the three economic essays, two argue that the Basic Law and Hong Kong’s prevailing legal framework have bound the hands of the government in intervening into the financial market, introducing changes in disclosure practices and taxation, as well as modifying the land use policies. The legal approach to economic matters is fresh and the arguments promising. The chapters on cultural matters have laid bare the political and economic demands made of the media and institutes of higher education, the distorted debates on and unsatisfactory solutions to the language policy, as well as the tension-ridden attempt to craft a new cultural identity for Hong

Kong. These issues have often been overshadowed in the discussion of post-transition politics; that the essays have brought out so capably their significance is highly satisfying. Finally, the chapters on political-institutional matters have analysed the election outcomes, civil service reforms before and after 1997, constitutional positioning of major politico-legal institutions, realignments within the democratic camp, as well the emergence of partisan politics. The essays have detailed the tensions, cleavages and reorganisation in the political-institutional domain and, together, generated insights into the multifarious crises that have inflicted Hong Kong since the handover.

- 4 Compared with similar works, such as *Hong Kong in Transition*, edited by Robert Ash *et al.* (2003), *The First Tung Chee-hwa Administration*, edited by Lau Siu-kai (2002), and *Political Development in the HKSAR*, edited by Joseph Y. S. Cheng (2001), the present volume has little to say about the financial market, economic integration with China, and has nothing on welfare and health policies. However, it excels in the detailed account of oppositional politics, nuance analysis of cultural issues, and fresh examination of economic matters.
- 5 The essays do not have a unitary viewpoint. The editors, however, have put forth the provocative argument that Hong Kong has encountered five crises, handled them with five transformations, and moved toward what they call soft authoritarian developmentalism. Specifically, post-1997 Hong Kong has undergone democracy crisis, constitutional crisis, governability crisis, developmental crisis and legitimacy crisis. The internal division and weakening of the Democratic Party have alleviated the democracy crisis and the constitutional crisis has been resolved as the Court of Final Appeal back off from defending Hong Kong autonomy. The government's attempt to introduce political accountability has helped to contain the governability crisis; its belated experiment with developmentalism represents an effort to tackle the economic crisis, whereas its restraint in deploying oppression has toned down the legitimacy crisis. The outcome of all these has been to concentrate power into the hands of the Chief Executive.
- 6 Alvin Y. So and Ming K. Chan's effort to present a panoramic overview of Hong Kong's post-1997 situation is admirable. However, they appear to have overestimated the steadiness of the so-called soft authoritarian developmentalism and the enormity of the Chief Executive's power. First, they have paid surprisingly little attention to the political and legal institutions. So long as the civil service and the legal institutions remain intact, they continue to contain the move towards authoritarianism. Second, the five crises have been alleviated only because the circumstances have required all parties to compromise. Had the circumstances been changed or the actors chosen otherwise, the delicate balance would have been disrupted. Indeed, social and political groups in Hong Kong have emerged and realigned during the twenty years since Sino-British negotiations began. As Susanne Pepper has argued in her chapter, the post-1997 effort to pluralise political cleavages and weaken the opposition has also weakened the political institutions' ability to articulate and channel public opinions. The tensions thus built up have led to mass frustration and cynicism on the one hand and mass protest that erupted on July 1, 2003 on the other hand. The crises have neither been fully resolved nor the Hong Kong society thoroughly transformed into "soft authoritarian developmentalism".