

# **Hong Kong Reintegrating With China**

## **Political, Cultural and Social Dimensions**

**Edited by Lee Pui-tak**

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# About the Contributors

- Catherine CHIU      Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong
- CHOI Po-king      Associate Professor, Department of Educational Administration and Policy, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- Clive DILNOT      Professor of Design Studies, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- John FLOWERDEW      Professor, Department of English, City University of Hong Kong
- Jonathan S. GRANT      Honorary Associate Professor, Department of History, The University of Hong Kong
- Judith HOLLOWS      Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Hong Kong Polytechnic University
- HUNG Ho-fung      PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology, John Hopkins University
- Graham E. JOHNSON      Professor, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of British Columbia
- KUAH Khun-eng      Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, The University of Hong Kong
- Graeme LANG      Associate Professor, Department of Applied Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong

- LAU Siu-kai Professor and Chairman, Department of Sociology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- LEE Pui-tak Research Officer and Honorary Lecturer, Centre of Asian Studies, The University of Hong Kong
- NG Sek-hong Reader, School of Business, The University of Hong Kong
- Mary PANG Assistant Professor, Department of Management, City University of Hong Kong
- Lynn T. WHITE III Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Studies, Princeton University
- WONG Siu-lun Professor and Director, Centre of Asian Studies, The University of Hong Kong

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# Introduction

The handover of Hong Kong to China was completed when the Hong Kong Special Administration Region was established on 1 July 1997. Hong Kong has always had close ties with the Mainland, whether it is in politics, society, economics, or culture. In fact, the process of reintegration started long before the handover in 1997. The psychology of Hong Kong people towards reintegration is complicated. On the one hand, Hong Kong had been a British colony for more than 150 years; the city as a free port, had enjoyed individual rights, freedom and privileges under the law. However, unlike Taiwan, Hong Kong's geographical proximity to the Mainland never allows her to ignore the existence of China. It is therefore interesting to see how Hong Kong, a well-established and Westernized society, could transform herself to integrate with her motherland. I do agree that Hong Kong people are realistic, more than being idealistic, particularly when they learn that Hong Kong is neither Gibraltar nor Taiwan. Hong Kong people realize that in order to survive, the territory has to strike a balance between China and Britain, just as she had balanced between the East and the West over the last 150 years.

In her short history as a Special Administrative Region of China, Hong Kong has experienced her hardest times in the last two decades. Several sagas, such as the bird flu crisis, the new Chek Lap Kok airport's chaotic opening day, and scandals involving civil service integrity, exposed the weakness of the new SAR government. The Asian financial crisis damaged not only the local economy, but also the new SAR regime. Grievances towards the government came from almost every walk of life. The controversy resulted from the Court of Final Appeal's ruling on the right of abode of mainlanders in Hong Kong disclosed the worsened executive-legislative relations, and there was often political confrontation between the elected legislators and the government. Nevertheless, optimistic and pessimistic speculations about the future of Hong Kong after the handover,



not the reintegration, are linked more closely to the economic development of the two regions. There have been countless business opportunities for Hong Kong, particularly after China declared its intention to join the World Trade Organization. Hong Kong has become the largest external investment of China since she started her economic reforms in the late 1970s. Following Hong Kong's 'northbound' economic activities, her consumer culture has been assimilated in almost every part of the Mainland.

This book is a systematic analysis of Hong Kong's political, social (or socio-economic) and cultural relations with China. It is divided into three main sections: the development in Hong Kong; her relation with China; and a combination of the above two, placing Hong Kong in the context of China's political, economic and social issues.

Lynn White examines the political appeal of all Hong Kong political parties. In his chapter, White emphasizes the importance of approaches adopted by different parties. Different governors of Hong Kong had different ruling strategies. In addition to commenting on Tung Chee-hwa, it is interesting to see how Tung is compared to other governors in history. John Flowerdew's chapter on public discourse in transitional Hong Kong offers a detailed account of how Chris Patten spent the last few years of British rule in Hong Kong to implement political reforms which favoured the majority pro-democracy faction and the opening up of the polity. Flowerdew's analysis is supported by his findings in personal interviews with Patten. Lau Siu-kai, in his chapter, advances detailed and persuasive arguments related to public opinion polls, and outlines an analysis of the position and performance of the Hong Kong SAR government vis-à-vis both the external and internal political environments. He emphasizes that the ruling strategy of the SAR government within Hong Kong is to build a loose 'ruling coalition' of the upper and lower strata, which will have depoliticizing effects on society, while the strategy vis-à-vis the external political environment aims at avoiding trouble. To what extent the strategy of the government will succeed, however, depends on factors that are not easily within the government's control. Ng Sek-hong reviews the history of labour law formulation in Hong Kong in the postwar years and traces its shifting contours in logic and approach during the last four decades. He argues that the use of labour law formulation as a political weapon by the government and diverse political groupings in these post-transition years before 1997 has unwittingly distorted labour law and labour relations in Hong Kong. He criticizes the government of the 1990s as being 'neurotic' under Chris Patten.

Graham Johnson raises issues about the economic, political, social, and cultural character of Hong Kong's links with China and the world over the last century. He chronicles the trajectory of Hong Kong's economic

transformation after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and discusses the wider social, political and cultural consequences which saw, somewhat by default, the city developing a character of her own and becoming in herself the centre of a vibrant regional economy that is crucial to China's economic growth and external links. Judith Hollows and Clive Dilnot discuss how the economic reintegration of Hong Kong with the Mainland since the 1980s has induced structural changes which may affect the choice of Hong Kong firms. As South China possesses a ready supply of cheap labour and land, Hong Kong firms simply move northward, without giving any structural incentives to upgrade production technology and labour skills to justify the level of labour cost in Hong Kong that has increased in line with the benefits of Hong Kong's economic growth. Graeme Lang investigates the impact of de-industrialization following Hong Kong's economic reintegration with the Mainland, which has seen the relocation of many Hong Kong factories to the Mainland. He focuses in particular on how this 'transfer' has exerted impact on woman workers in terms of job displacement, family life cycle, and family roles.

Jonathan Grant analyses the formation of Hong Kong identities through state policies, social and economic transformation. Grant asks whether the formation of Hong Kong identity has been disrupted, or conversely, reinforced by the constraints, anxieties and opportunities created by the territory's political reunification with China. Hung Ho-fung's chapter complements Grant's chapter on identities by highlighting other indigenous identities in Hong Kong. Hung argues that the postwar formation of a unitary, metropolitan Hong Kong society was at the expense of the rural communities. He notes that the process of formulating local identity is full of tension; predominantly, it is the tension between the rural and the urban population of Hong Kong. This rural-urban tension has persisted since the last few decades of economic boom, and will continue as one of the most essential dynamics in the formation and reproduction process of local identity. Kuah Khun-eng and Wong Siu-lun analyse the significant role played by dialect associations (*tongxiang hui*) on cultural reproduction and the maintenance of their own cultural identity within the wider Hong Kong society. They also explore how these organizations assist new immigrants to adapt to and function in contemporary urban Hong Kong society, and how the associations help create links between their members and their ancestral village in the Mainland. Choi Po-king examines the women's movement in the context of the construction of local identity in Hong Kong. She gives a useful historical account of the evolution of the local women's movement and the related identity debates, which is supported with interview research.

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