China Perspectives

2009/2 | 2009

1989, a Watershed in Chinese History?

Louis Augustin-Jean and Florence Padovani (ed.), Hong Kong Économie, société, culture

Paris, L'Harmattan, 2007, 495 pp.

Nicolas Douay

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/4830>

DOI: 10.4000/chinaperspectives.4830

ISSN: 1996-4617

Publisher

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2009

Number of pages: 131-132

ISSN: 2070-3449

Electronic reference

Nicolas Douay, « Louis Augustin-Jean and Florence Padovani (ed.), Hong Kong Économie, société, culture », *China Perspectives* [Online], 2009/2 | 2009, Online since 01 June 2009, connection on 24 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/4830> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.4830>

This text was automatically generated on 24 September 2020.

© All rights reserved

Louis Augustin-Jean and Florence Padovani (ed.), Hong Kong Économie, société, culture

Paris, L'Harmattan, 2007, 495 pp.

Nicolas Douay

- 1 en years after the reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, this collective work, under the direction of Louis Augustin-Jean and Florence Padovani, sets out to assess this period of transition. Building on the work assembled by journals such as *China Perspectives* (2007/2) or *The China Review* (Spring 2008), the book tests the reality of Deng Xiaoping's "one country, two systems" concept by attempting to dispel a series of ambiguities in relation to Hong Kong's role in China's economic and political arena. The interest of this book lies in its compilation of works from different subject areas and disciplinary fields concerning the question of Hong Kong's identity: what does this identity encompass, and in particular, how has it changed since the handover of the territory to China? The work is structured in two sections: the first deals with economic and political questions, while the second looks at social and cultural identity. The work as a whole thus provides a broad overview of the current situation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.
- 2 The first part of the book deals with politics and the economy in the post-1997 period, analysing a whole series of "persistent uncertainties." Florence Padovani, by way of introduction, traces the political events that have occurred since Hong Kong was handed over, tackling in particular the question of elections and the emergence of political parties. She observes that since the re-election of Donald Tsang, the political landscape has become more stable, even though numerous questions concerning individual liberties and the adoption of democratic reforms remain unresolved. In Chapter 2, Beatrice Leung returns to a discussion of the political game of the China-British negotiations over Hong Kong, particularly in the post-Tiananmen context, which led the citizens of Hong Kong to question their future. In Chapter 3, Florence Padovani analyses how Beijing views Hong Kong. An analysis of preparations for the

handover ceremony suggests that this ceremony was part of an extensive nationalist campaign in response to the “insult” inflicted on China through the “unequal treaties.” In the following chapter, Michael Martin looks at the development dynamic in Hong Kong’s economy since its beginnings, and puts forward two scenarios concerning the territory’s prosperity. The optimistic version sees Hong Kong as having become globalised, its future prosperity no longer focused on its own territory but rather outward. The second, more pessimistic hypothesis portrays Hong Kong as needing to confront new rivals and declining in competitiveness. Y.C. Jao takes this idea further in the next chapter, concentrating on the role the city plays as an international financial centre, and also outlining the prospects following reunification. In the sixth chapter, François Gipouloux discusses Hong Kong in the context of the East-Asian maritime corridor and emphasises the changing status of the territory from depot to hub. Louis Augustin-Jean makes Hong Kong’s spatial development the focus of his piece. His historical approach shows that since the 1950s, Hong Kong’s various administrations have sustained the competitiveness of the metropolis in international markets through planning policies and an interventionist approach to housing. George Lin continues this argument against a larger backdrop, the Pearl River Delta. He analyses the relations between Hong Kong and Guangdong Province, in particular through the example of Dongguan, which illustrates the way in which the metropolis has secured the development of its hinterland.

- 3 The second part of the work looks at the question of Hong Kong’s identity through society and culture. Graham Johnson opens this section with a consideration of the New Territories, which he depicts as being the past, present, and future backstage for Hong Kong. In the following chapter, Tiksang Liu portrays Hong Kong’s popular religions and observes how they have incorporated practices brought from mainland China. Beatrice David focuses on the dynamic of rural and urban ethnicity through the kaleidoscope of Hong Kong identities. She describes the survival of traditions despite successive waves of immigration and the process of modernisation and globalisation. Gregory B. Lee pursues this idea in Chapter 12, which deals with the building of Hong Kong’s identity during the period of late colonialism through the subject of “authenticity.” Mark Bray focuses on education and colonial transition. He thus compares Hong Kong’s experience to that of other former British colonies and notes that, despite the handover to China, demand for education in English is still significant, even though the coloniser’s language is no longer able to provide the cultural cement for a population that is more than 98 percent Chinese. In Chapter 14, Louis Augustin-Jean analyses the growth of restaurant advertising in Hong Kong newspapers between 1969 and 1999 to highlight the changes in food consumption patterns, and also the patterns of consumption of the cultural media. Next, Maria Barbieri looks at cultural identity through the practice of censorship in art. Stephen Teo devotes the following chapter to Hong Kong cinema from its origins to the 1980s. He discerns, for example, the use of Mandarin, Cantonese, or other dialects to conquer the Asian market, but concludes by connecting the adoption of Cantonese in films to the assertion of a true Hong Kong identity. Joanna Lee continues this theme on the level of the musical landscape, and deals with the changes that have occurred in matters of politics and musical education. She emphasises the transition from an education centred on classical western music in the 1960s to a more diversified situation that attaches greater importance to Chinese music. She also emphasises the emergence of a hybrid culture that became the vehicle for the anti-Beijing protest movement following the events in Tiananmen Square. In

the last chapter, Christina Cheng discusses architecture. She sees the city's Chinese identity asserted through a combination of postmodernism and feng shui, as exemplified by the Bank of China Tower designed by the Chinese-American architect Ieoh-Ming Pei.

- 4 In conclusion, this volume is noteworthy less for the originality of the works it contains (since these are sometimes re-workings or translations of previously published pieces) than for the diversity of approaches and use of the French language. As a result, the limitations of this collection are a certain lack of coherence and harmony; other than the introduction, which sets out the work's structure and objectives by briefly outlining the content of the different sections, there is no overview or conclusion that puts the contributions by the various authors into perspective. This is a pity, as the subject of identity is central to the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of Hong Kong's development. The metropolis occupies a very distinctive place in China and within the global system. It would have been interesting, therefore, to put these different dimensions into perspective through a multidisciplinary approach, for example, to the post-colonial question or indeed the question of neo-liberalism. In the end, the main interest of this work lies in its serving as a comprehensive manual that provides the French readership with an opportunity to learn about Hong Kong and its identity through a very broad survey of the situation.
- 5 Translated by Peter Brown

AUTHOR

NICOLAS DOUAY

Postdoctoral Researcher at the University Paris Diderot and at the CEFC, Hong Kong.