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Roger Buckley. *Hong Kong: The Road to 1997*. Cambridge (England) and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. xxi, 232 pp. Hardcover, ISBN 0-521-47008-0. Paperback, ISBN 0-521-46979-1.

Roger Buckley states that this book is a “survey” by an “outsider” for “other outsiders” (p. xvi). He promises first to provide a summary history of and an accounting for Hong Kong’s metamorphosis from an obscure fishing village into a major business hub, and second to “offer estimates” on the fate of the former British colony after reunification (p. xvi). “Synthesizing” the findings of authors of existing academic works (p. xiii), Buckley has done a fair job of delivering on his first promise. Critics, to be sure, may argue whether too much credit is given to the foresight of the British governors and the efficiency of their administrations. In any case, distrusting China as he does (like many other contemporary Western observers), Buckley’s “fortune-telling” for Hong Kong is hampered by his inability to understand China’s policy priorities or the complexity of Hong Kong-related issues in spite of his having lived there for a year. He has clearly made an effort to understand, from the way he appears to have consulted many relevant sources, but whether he could effectively have utilized Chinese-language sources as well is less certain. Although there is already an abundance of literature on Hong Kong’s success, its assumed imminent doom, or the now obsolete Patten-China confrontations, Buckley’s year in Hong Kong does seem to have made some difference in his ability to contribute to this literature, and his book still has its deserved place. To begin with, unlike many who have stopped just short of voicing their opposition to Hong Kong’s reversion (although he does display a similar fear and distrust of China), he is nonetheless able to offer observations that are more balanced than can be found in other books on Hong Kong.

Buckley attributes Hong Kong’s phenomenal success to British “arms,” “voices,” and “administrators” (p. 167) and even to the “Victorian ethos” (p. xvii), rather than to the usually credited Confucian ethics. Yet he is one of few who is able to see, and dare to speak out on, what has been obvious all along—that during their tenure, the British repeatedly neglected opportunities for implementing either democracy or autonomy in Hong Kong. He bluntly points to the fact that, until the very end, Hong Kong remained no more than “a British colony,” and that “it serves no historical purpose to disguise this reality” (p. 165). Buckley mercilessly brushes aside all the diplomatic language that may have been used to justify or whitewash this delay of democracy and autonomy under British rule, and dismisses the loudly heralded changes implemented on the eve of the changeover as “largely cosmetic” (p. 166).

Like many of his Western contemporaries, Buckley distrusts China and predicts no brighter future for Hong Kong after its reversion. He laments that in spite of the change of masters, its colonial status will continue "against its volition" (p. xii). Also, like his fellow Westerners, Buckley believes that salvation for Hong Kong means either independence or autonomy. He refers to Hong Kong as a "local state" (p. 180) or a "city-state" (p. xii). Cynical readers may marvel at his enthusiasm for independence for Hong Kong after already admitting that he has found that "no internal demand for independence" has arisen there (p. 170). He worries about "an overly strong Chinese state presence" and frequent "oblique suggestions from the North" (p. 180), yet he does not seem to mind that Hong Kong will continue to "leave its domestic administration in safe expatriate hands" instead of those of the Hong Kong people (p. 173)!

Perhaps Buckley differs most from other Western commentators on Hong Kong in his pragmatic attitude toward China, and in his readiness to offer the people of Hong Kong advice as opposed to rhetoric. He does not, for example, advocate confrontation, struggle, or nonacceptance of change since he realizes that "China and Chinese power simply could not be wished away" (p. xiv). He warns the people of Hong Kong against "provocative acts" that may insult China and its leadership, or the burning of the Chinese flag, or "stamping on effigies of the great patriarch," and so forth (p. 182). Moreover, instead of fanning the flames of a Hong Kong egoism and a refusal to accept Chinese sovereignty, he reminds Hong Kong that it must take its place as a local region of China. He urges that there be good will on both sides and that the "great experiment" of sharing power with the central government should "have a chance to prove itself" (p. 183). Also, instead of trying to convince the people of Hong Kong of their economic superiority over the mainland, Buckley points to the fact that it was the territory's strengthening of its ties to the China market that helped to bring about Hong Kong's phenomenal economic growth in the 1990s (p. 177).

The main shortcomings of the book are perhaps the way it has been put together and the appended materials—or lack thereof. A serious reader would be most annoyed to find that there are no footnotes or endnotes. The "Select Bibliography" is too short to be useful; it excludes all non-English sources and omits journals—including local periodicals, which should be one of the most important sources. Appendix 7 is a real mystery: it consists of a one-page report/commentary filled with lopsided criticism and accusations directed at Hong Kong's Chief Executive. There is no hint as to the source of this document, and Buckley provides no assessment of its authority, objectivity, or trustworthiness. The unsuspecting reader might take it as a credible and authoritative report of the facts or an unbiased appraisal of Hong Kong's top leader. This kind of negligence,

unfortunately, tends to undermine Buckley's effort to produce a balanced description and analysis.

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