

**Steve Tsang, *Hong Kong - An Appointment with China*, London, I. B. Tauris, 1997, 188 p.**

*An Appointment with China* covers the history of Hong Kong as part of the British Empire from 1843 to 1997. An ethnic Chinese and native of Hong Kong, who later studied at Cambridge University, Steve Tsang possesses the perfect background for the task attempted. Unsurprisingly, he manages to do an impressive job and provide unique insights, both from an international perspective and from a local perspective, for how 154 years of Hong Kong as a British colony culminated with the territory's return to China.

Based on thorough archival and historical research, the author explains how the territory today generally referred to as Hong Kong better suits the description of a collection of territories, each of which the British acquired at different times. This may surprise the non-expert in Chinese and/or British history; however, Tsang provides a plethora of evidence for why treating all of Hong Kong as one unit is inaccurate from a historical perspective. He notes that while the initial cession by China to the British Empire contained the words "in perpetuity", the later inclusion of the New Territories and the Kowloon Peninsula was not achieved under the same conditions. In consequence, incorporating these latter territories as part of the same colony became the Achilles' Heel for the British Empire's control of Hong Kong. These later territories did not enter the British Empire forever, but as the Convention of Peking stipulated, they were only a 99-year lease. This 99-year lease triggered Britain's deadline with China in 1997, as Tsang suggests. Without the expansion of Hong Kong in 1893, this territory might have remained a Crown Colony for longer.

After the focus on what pre-determined Hong Kong's return to China, Tsang covers the history of the territory during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, giving particular attention to the Second World War, a time when both sides raced to liberate the city from Japanese occupation. With some American backing, the British emerged victorious. Towards the end of the book, the detailed and slow negotiation and transfer process of Hong Kong between Britain and China becomes the focus. Tsang skillfully describes and analyses the details of an extremely complicated negotiation, one which had to take into account not only the views and interests of Britain and China, but also those of the local population from Hong Kong and not in the least, the multiple international financial interests that existed in the city. He did an excellent job at informing the reader about the tensions that existed between the Chinese and the British when it came to the political

system that the territory would have in the aftermath of the transfer. The author ends with 1997, the year of the book's publication and of the de facto return of Hong Kong to China. He notes that the future of Hong Kong remains an open book, but that the return of the territory to its former owner was meant to affect great changes for all sides involved.

With its simple writing style and straightforward vocabulary, Steve Tsang's book makes for easy reading. The uninitiated reader in Chinese and British history will find the work enlightening and self-contained. At the same time, Tsang's unique perspective on the historical events analyzed in his book should not be overlooked by experts with an interest in British, Chinese or East Asian history. The decolonization of Hong Kong was a moment of great importance, not only for the United Kingdom, but also for all of Western Europe, as it was considered by many a symbol of the end of European colonialism. Hong Kong was, as Tsang argues, the last significant territory that any former European colonial empire, and the United Kingdom in particular, had outside of Europe. Reading Steve Tsang's book can make one understand the devolution of European power and influence outside the European continent in the final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While the history of Hong Kong and Sino-British relations provide the focus of the book, glimpses of British and Chinese history also abound.

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