

## Book Review

Joseph Y.S. Cheng (ed.), *The Second Chief Executive of Hong Kong SAR: Evaluating the Tsang Years 2005-2012*, Kowloon, Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2013, 503 pp. + xxxi.

When Sir Donald Tsang Yam-kuen 曾蔭權 was charged with two counts of misconduct in public office on 5th October 2015 by Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC, 廉政公署), it has been three years since he ended his second term as the Chief Executive of Hong Kong under the cloud of ICAC investigation on allegations of corruption including receiving preferential allocation of a luxury apartment post-retirement in exchange for the granting of a broadcasting licence, and the final outcome of this investigation will represent a closing chapter of what Audrey Eu Yuet-mee 余若薇, founding leader of the Civic Party and a former member of the Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (LegCo, 香港特別行政區立法會), details as “how the civil servant of over 40 years ended his career mired in the embarrassing array of lavish entertainment in private yacht, jet, posh hotels and questionable arrangement for his retirement penthouse” in her foreword, “Donald Tsang’s greatest debt to Hong Kong”, to Professor Joseph Yu-shek Cheng 鄭宇碩’s 2013 edited volume, *The second Chief Executive of Hong Kong SAR: Evaluating the Tsang years 2005-2012*. From Eu’s flashbacks thus begins this voluminous evaluation of over 500 pages on the performance of the

administration of the second Chief Executive of Hong Kong since the “Handover”. While without breaking down into two sections, the book apparently consists of a first segment, after Professor Cheng’s introductory overview in Chapter 1, from Chapter 2 to Chapter 8 focusing on the Tsang administration’s mode of governance from the overall perspective of politics, public policy and policy of economic development, and a second, from Chapter 9 to Chapter 16 giving more detailed coverage of various specific sectors of public policy implementation – health system, urban planning and renewal, housing policy, transport system, environmental protection, and labour, employment and social welfare. A final chapter, Chapter 17, on Hong Kong’s external relations completes this book’s critical evaluation of the Tsang administration, followed by an epilogue by the editor.

Whether seen in the context of general mode of governance or from the perspective of different aspects of public policy implementation, this book paints a grim picture of the seven years of a Hong Kong under Tsang. Standing out from this grim picture is Tsang’s almost single-handed destruction of the post-1997 Accountability System for Hong Kong’s civil service – his honouring of the new post-colonial principle of political accountability “in breach rather than in practice” – as analysed in Chapter 2. There is the “absence of economic policies” which continued under the Tsang government after what Professor Joseph Cheng referred to as “a lost decade”, i.e. the first ten years after “Handover”, attributed in Chapter 8 to various factors such as policy inertia stemming from dogmatic adherence to economic non-interventionism, the inability of the civil bureaucracy to lead R&D-based development initiative partly due to the bifurcation between political appointees and career civil servants, the failure of the executive-legislature and government-society interfaces to aggregate divergent interests. The last one was aggravated by blatant government-business

collusion as witnessed in the last months of the Tsang administration (cases including Tsang's Shenzhen apartment, and corruption charge against former Chief Secretary Rafael Hui Si-yan 許仕仁 who was later convicted in December 2014 for misconduct in public office and bribery) that throws doubt on, given the strong vested interests of government officials, the will of the government administration to formulate long-term strategic development policy that would potentially threaten the hegemony of Hong Kong's big real estate developers who are more concerned with short-term interests and returns to their investments. A change in the political system is necessary, as Chapter 8 posits, "to accommodate strong civil society surveillance of the government-business collusion" which stands to thwart any government attempt to plan for developmental transformation.

Similarly Professor Joseph Cheng in his editorial foreword highlights that an evaluation of the performance of the Chief Executive is "complicated and many factors have to be taken into consideration, including the Chinese leadership's Hong Kong policy and the global economic environment", and yet in his epilogue (Chapter 18) the readers are reminded that the "challenges facing Hong Kong at this stage require a paradigm shift in policy making" but the "absence of democracy and the exacerbating social and political polarisation deprive the administration of the legitimacy to push for reforms." Looking back at the volatile sociopolitical conflicts in Hong Kong in recent years till 2014's Occupy campaign / Umbrella Movement and 2016's "Fishball Revolution", it is not difficult to see how true this observation is not only concerning the Tsang years but also today, and the continued severity of the effect of such "legitimacy deficit" on the effectiveness of governance in an environment where discontent and grievances continue to be accumulating at the community level despite the composite efforts of the United Front (統戰) work at economic integration, political cooptation,

and legal and constitutional containment. Such discontent and grievances at the community level stems from various sources, as observed in this book on the Tsang administration, including the lack of major progress in health system reform especially in financing and care structure (Chapter 9) and the docility in addressing the issue of trade union recognition and collective bargaining rights (Chapter 14), urban renewal presenting itself as a major policy problem (considered “political and social rather than physical and financial” in Chapter 10) amidst continued planning controversies (Chapter 12) coupled with a lack of long-term strategies and commitments for a sustainable transport policy (Chapter 13), the failure in implementing environmental policies (Chapter 16), and the extreme inertia in housing policy during the earlier years of the Tsang administration that may have aggravated later efforts in solving the problem amidst heightened “social and political awareness among intellectuals and at the grassroots [that] has fuelled growing antagonism against the ostensible land powers” – the real estate interests towards whom the administration’s housing policy was skewed (Chapter 11). On the social welfare front, as Tsang admitted in a LegCo question-and-answer session on 14th June 2012 towards the end of his seven years of governance, his administration “had failed to narrow the wealth gap and was not decisive enough in tackling high property prices to curb the rise in the private housing market” while Hong Kong’s poverty rate had soared from 17.3 per cent in 2005 to 18.1 per cent in 2010 with the poverty figure, defined as having half of the median monthly domestic household income, standing at 1.26 million (Chapter 15).

Such dismal performance record indeed has wider implications further than just seven years of misrule, and concomitantly this weighty edited monograph carries a far wider significance beyond an evaluation of one of the Chief Executives of post-1997 Hong Kong. As Professor Joseph Cheng sums up in the editorial epilogue, while the British

administration in colonial Hong Kong could claim to have secured legitimacy by performance results, both the Tung Chee-hwa 董建華 (C.H. Tung) and Donald Tsang administrations “have gradually squandered that legitimacy and the HKSAR government now suffers a legitimacy deficit” as being leaders unelected by the people, they did not have a clear mandate and essential support from the people and hence the political will for policy implementation. So would future leaders so-called “elected” through a fake democratic electoral system that denies genuine competition with an entire candidate list undergoing screening by an ensured pro-Beijing elites-controlled Nomination Committee. Like the recent disappearances of the five Mighty Current Media Company Limited ( 巨流傳媒有限公司 ) / Causeway Bay Books ( 銅鑼灣書店 ) owners and staff (including the kidnapping of Gui Minhai 桂民海 in Pattaya, Thailand, and Paul Lee 李波 in Hong Kong), that would be a mighty mockery of “One Country, Two Systems”. The writing is on the wall and the telling signs have already been evident during the seven-year rule of the Tsang administration, as Professor Cheng’s edited monograph conveys to us through the early chapters on Tsang’s years of governance, leadership, legitimacy, party politics and the nature of the HKSAR regime (Chapters 3-7).

The crux of the problem probably lies in the question whether Hong Kong’s Chief Executive should “be a political leader, in its full sense” who is sworn to play the leadership role in upholding and defending the Hong Kong values – the “soft power of Hong Kong in areas such as freedom, democratic rights and openness” – or just an administrator and loyal servant taking orders from his “*laoban*” ( 老板 , boss) in Beijing (Chapter 6). The latter is a scenario so ominously reflected in an incident narrated in Chapter 6 regarding “a resident, who was wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with ‘June 4’ message, being taken away by police officers when he took a walk in a residential estate” where Li Keqiang 李克強

(then vice-premier of China), who was visiting Hong Kong, was paying a home visit in August 2011, leading to the ridicule that the Hong Kong police force, once described as Asia's finest, have become more like Mainland China's *gong'an* 公安 (public security officers) dutifully at the political behest of the ruling party. At the end of the day, as Audrey Eu sums up her foreword to the monograph, admittedly Hong Kong is just part of the "One Country", but if the region's Chief Executive is not there to defend Hong Kong's systems and Hong Kong's values under "One Country, Two Systems", "we the people, have to take up the fight."

Published just after Donald Tsang left office, replaced by Leung Chun-ying 梁振英 (C.Y. Leung), Professor Joseph Cheng's voluminous edited monograph represents the results of the effort of a team of academics formed to offer an initial evaluation of the performance of the Tsang administration. As Professor Cheng cautions in the editorial foreword, given the complexity of interrelated factors surrounding the deep-seated problems of Hong Kong, one "should not just blame the Chief Executive" and later retrospective studies will likely provide a more comprehensive and balanced evaluation of the Tsang years. Nevertheless, as observed earlier, while focusing on the Tsang administration as a case in point, the significance of this weighty volume extends far beyond into a multi-faceted critical analysis of the socioeconomic and sociopolitical challenges Hong Kong is facing since the 1997 "Handover". Readers who have been following closely Hong Kong's social, political and economic developments since 1997 and her intricate relationship with Mainland China will definitely find this engrossing book an indispensable reference and compelling read.

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745 pp. + xxi, ICS, 2013), “Political governance and strategic relations: Domestic-foreign policy nexus and China’s rise in the global system” (article, *CCPS*, 2016), “The writing on the wall: National and global implications of the ruling Chinese Communist Party’s domestic and foreign policies” (article, *CCPS*, 2016), “From Dungans to *xinyimin*: China, Chinese migration and the changing sociopolitical fabric of Central Asian republics” (article, *CCPS*, 2015), “Nationalism, historical consciousness and regional stability: Rising China as a regional power and its new assertiveness in the South China Sea” (book chapter, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), “中國 — 東南亞關係：中國能源安全政策的區域安全戰略分析” [China-ASEAN relations: analysis on regional security strategy of China’s energy security policy] (book chapter, Wu-Nan, 2014), “Literacy and education in contemporary China: Daunting challenges amidst rapid economic development” (article, *CJAS*, 2014), “The long shadow of Tiananmen: Political economy of State-civil societal relations in the People’s Republic of China twenty-five years on” (article, *IJCS*, 2014), “Poverty reduction, welfare provision and social security challenges in China in the context of fiscal reform and the 12th Five-Year Plan” (book chapter, Routledge, 2014), “Taiwan and Mainland China: Impacts of economic progress and international environment on political trajectory in comparative perspective” (article, *IJCS*, 2013), and “Evolving agencies amid rapid social change: Political leadership and State-civil society relations in China” (book chapter, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). His latest research projects include the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education/University of Malaya High-Impact Research (HIR) Grant project “The China Model: Implications of the contemporary rise of China” (2013-2016, principal investigator) at the Department of Administrative Studies and Politics, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, and Suntory Foundation/University of Tokyo international research grant project “Beyond ‘China threat theory’: Dialogue with China experts on the rise of China” (2014-2015, Malaysian component). <Email: [yeohkk@um.edu.my](mailto:yeohkk@um.edu.my), [emileyeo@gmail.com](mailto:emileyeo@gmail.com); website: <http://emileyeo5.wix.com/emileyeoh>>

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