

to China demonstrates that “[t]he wider interest of the British government and the state of Sino-British relations outweighed the importance of shifting popular sentiment in the policymaking process” (p. 256). However, it is clear from Mok’s case studies that the increased political transparency and reduced hostility and apprehensiveness towards officialdom during the 1970s made people more willing to stand up for their rights and express their grievances publicly. Against the larger diplomatic context of Governor MacLehose’s attempts to foster civic pride and a sense of belonging among the people of Hong Kong to strengthen the UK’s bargaining power in the forthcoming negotiations with Beijing over the future of Hong Kong, growing political activism prompted the colonial government to become “increasingly responsive to public opinion” (p. 255). Not dissimilar to the situation in other societies, there were always politically conservative groups among the Hong Kong population. Alongside its central argument about the prevalence of political activism, the book also offers a balanced account of the persistence of political conservatism in Hong Kong. In the case of late-colonial Hong Kong, the government’s secretive polling and surveillance exercises revealed that the well-off were likely to support the status quo, whereas the grassroots were generally indifferent to politics unless their jobs and livelihoods were adversely affected. The young were politically active and keen to speak out. The middle class and the educated were politically informed, and yet had little inclination to take to the streets unless their or their children’s interests were directly at stake.

Timely and provocative, Mok’s deeply researched and compellingly argued book is a wake-up call to those politicians and academics who still embrace the erroneous “myth of political apathy and stability in Hong Kong” (p. 257) and fail to understand Hong Kong’s political culture through its ongoing history of political activism. *Covert Colonialism* is essential reading for those interested in Hong Kong history and politics, as well as in the evolving nature of colonial governance and decolonization during the 20th century, the effects of which can still be felt today.

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Hong Kong Public and Squatter Housing: Geopolitics and Informality, 1963–1985

Alan Smart and Fung Chi Keung Charles. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2023. xviii + 320 pp. HK\$300.00 (pbk). ISBN 9789888805648

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Hong Kong Public and Squatter Housing explores, through extensive examination of Hong Kong colonial government documents, how the government’s policies towards squatters evolved between the 1960s and the 1980s. As the book’s preface states, “After four decades of failing to end new squatting after the Second World War, and with their numbers climbing to over 750,000 in 1982, the colonial government finally succeeded after 1984” (ix) in solving this problem. This book explores how the colonial government succeeded in this effort, arriving at a solution that appears more haphazard than deliberate, but that nonetheless was effective.

Squatting – occupying an area of land that one does not own or have legal permission to use – bedevilled the postwar Hong Kong government. It tried several approaches to eradicate squatting, including simply destroying the structures and, after 1954, demolition followed by resettlement,



but neither of these were effective in stemming the ongoing flood of new squatters. Alan Smart and Fung Chi Keung Charles reveal in their introduction that the eventual solution to the problem was the SOS, the Squatter Occupancy Survey in 1984–1985, which registered the residents of squatter areas rather than focusing on their structures alone, enabling an exact elucidation of who deserved resettlement and who did not. The task the book sets for itself is to explain how and why this policy was formulated, a surprisingly difficult undertaking given the gaps in relevant documents in Hong Kong government archives; even by book's end this cannot be conclusively answered without a degree of surmise.

Chapter two explores informality and how it permeated Hong Kong in postwar decades. The massive influx of immigrants from mainland China in 1949 marked the beginning of widespread squatting in Hong Kong, with neither the private sector nor the government able to provide sufficient housing, a situation which continued for decades thereafter, even after public housing was established in the 1950s. Chapter three considers geopolitical explanations for the emergence of public housing and the ending of the squatting problem in the 1980s, such as the common interests of London, Beijing and Hong Kong as Hong Kong's return to China was being negotiated, but finds no conclusive archival evidence for this explanation. Chapter four examines Hong Kong's situation in the early 1960s, including the contested clearance of the large Diamond Hill squatter area; chapter five considers the riots in Hong Kong of 1966 and 1967 and the reforms that took place thereafter, particularly in the growth of public housing, due in large part to pressure from London. Chapter six, using the framework of "policy mangles," explores the government's discussion of allowing squatters to obtain title to the land they occupied, and construct formal dwellings; chapter seven examines how "public housing and squatter control policies adopted in the 1970s created serious imbalances in supply and demand," particularly for temporary public housing (p. 128), exacerbated by natural disasters to which squatter areas were prone, such as fires and landslides.

Chapter eight considers the emerging sense of Hong Kong identity in the 1970s, and the growing resentment of long-term Hong Kong residents on the waiting list for public housing against mainland immigrant squatters thought to be "jumping the queue"; new government policy was formulated to favour the former over the latter, garnering public support in Hong Kong. Chapter nine considers the Squatter Area Improvement programmes in the early 1980s; chapter ten, finally, turns to the Squatter Occupancy Survey itself. The Survey effectively identified who actually lived in squatter areas in Hong Kong, involving a full census, and enabled the government to enact a policy that only those squatters who were identified in the survey as long-term residents could be considered for resettlement in permanent public housing in the future. This policy effectively ended new squatting in Hong Kong. Chapter 11 looks at the example of Hong Kong as compared to the management of squatting in other cities in Asia, including mainland Chinese cities, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Indian cities. Chapter 12's conclusion reflects upon the squatter problem as being like a balloon, where squeezing one area resulted in expansion in another, and emphasizes that while the SOS and ensuing government policies led to success, "no single explanation manages to account for the road to formalization" (p. 253). Today there are still many remaining squatters in Hong Kong, the chapter notes, but very few new squatters, despite Hong Kong having the world's highest rental prices per square meter in private housing and a wait of many years for public housing.

I found this book somewhat difficult to read because of its extended treatment of so many government policy discussions in the 1960s and 1970s, most of which never came to fruition; the non-specialist in Hong Kong housing and government policy may get lost at points within it. However, the book is quite valuable in its outlining of the complex ways in which policy unfolds – not through concerted and decisive long-term planning, in this case, but through conflicting policies, plans and pressures that in this case led to the right moment for a solution in 1984–1985. This is no doubt how policy very often unfolds in governments around the world, although we often may not be fully aware of it. Smart and Fung have done us a service in exploring the complex and

convoluted processes of how squatter management policy evolved in Hong Kong – their portrayal has relevance beyond the immediate topic of this book.

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A Chinese Rebel Beyond the Great Wall: The Cultural Revolution and Ethnic Pogrom in Inner Mongolia

TJ Cheng, Uradyn E. Bulag and Mark Selden. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2023. 410 pp. \$99.00 (hbk). ISBN 9780226826844

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The authors' observation in this book that "The Inner Mongolian casualties and deaths were by far the largest number recorded in any province or autonomous region during the Cultural Revolution, and local accounts suggest that the official figures are gross underestimates" (p. 4) is well known, but the work's autobiographical report is new and riveting. Cheng Tiejun, a Han Chinese who moved from North China to Inner Mongolia as a teenager at the outset of the Great Leap Forward of 1958–1962, witnessed the destruction and murders during the Cultural Revolution. His first-hand account is invaluable. Most of this book consists of a chronological account of Cheng's involvement in and observations of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. In the last chapter, the three authors analyse Chinese Communist policies toward minorities in the past and at present.

It is painful and sobering to read about the violent struggles between so-called loyalists, often consisting of Communist cadres and their leaders, and the so-called rebels, frequently composed of students and Red Guards who challenged the hierarchy. Torture generated false confessions from innocents; harassment and beatings led others to commit suicide; and "ferreting out traitors" campaigns contributed to anarchy. Cheng watched a parade of trucks with ten men and women travelling through the city streets to the execution grounds. On another occasion, he saw a firing squad botch an execution, and their commander then ordered them to shoot the victims at point blank range. So-called poisonous books were burned, although brave librarians saved duplicates of some such works. A printer who erroneously placed a black mark, an indication of traitorous behaviour, on the wrong leader, was imprisoned for some time, even though the mistake was corrected before the work was published.

In the last chapter, the three authors take note of the circumstances that faced China on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. The USSR was no longer an ally; the US had half a million soldiers in Vietnam; and China was increasingly isolated. The authors do not excuse the violence, but they explain the international context for some Chinese Communist concerns or, some might argue, paranoia.

Cheng points out that, during the Cultural Revolution, leaders encouraged teachers and students to spy on their peers and to report on "capitalist roaders." They also demanded a torrent of self-criticism from individuals with "feudal" or "bourgeois" backgrounds. A teacher who wrote a Big Character poster antagonized a leader, who then had him beaten and jailed. Leaders frequently prevented the accused from defending themselves. Cheng's university was closed and instead he had to listen to interminable speeches about bourgeois traitors and splitters.