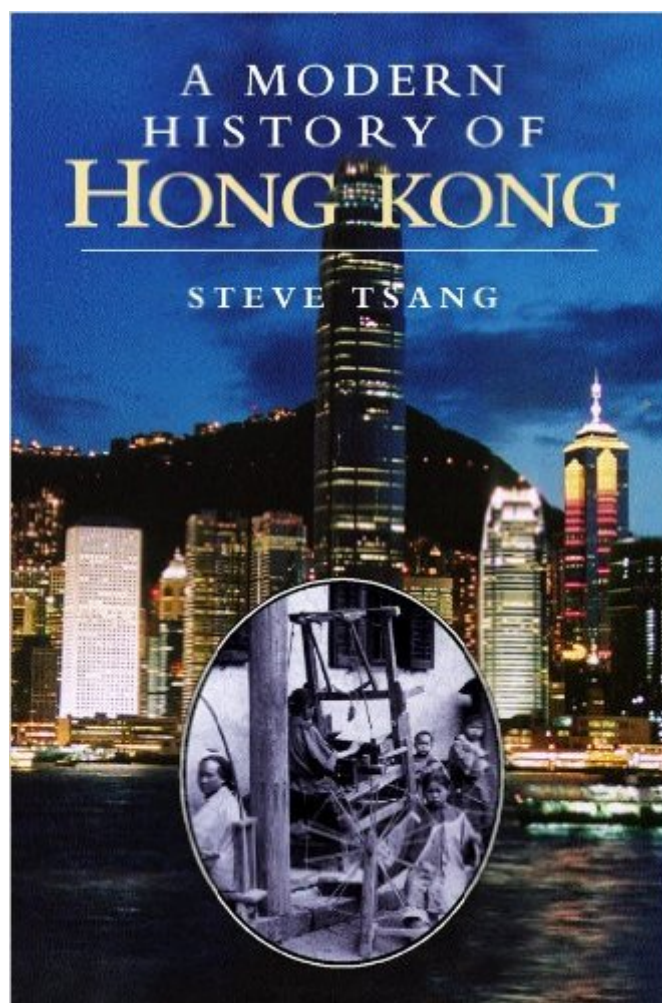


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Modern History Of Hong Kong, A: 1841-1997



Synopsis

This major history of Hong Kong tells the remarkable story of how a cluster of remote fishing villages grew into an icon of capitalism. The story began in 1842 with the founding of the Crown Colony after the First Anglo-Chinese war - the original "Opium War". As premier power in Europe and an expansionist empire, Britain first created in Hong Kong a major naval station and the principal base to open the Celestial Chinese Empire to trade. Working in parallel with the locals, the British built it up to become a focus for investment in the region and an international centre with global shipping, banking and financial interests. Yet by far the most momentous change in the history of this prosperous, capitalist colony was its return in 1997 to "Mother China", the most powerful Communist state in the world. Steve Tsang, drawing on a vast array of official and private sources, both Chinese and European, traces the development of the classic Crown Colony government with its Governors, elite Administrative Officers and non-elected Executive and Legislative Councils, and British-based legal and education systems. Whilst this structure sheltered and nurtured the astounding economic take-off, the vital engine of this development was the mass-immigration of Chinese - hard-working, entrepreneurial, quick to absorb Western ideas while retaining Chinese traditions - blending with expatriate European business interests. The author goes on to examine the effect of the trauma of invasion and defeat at the hands of the Japanese in the Second World War, the stirrings of democracy, the beginnings of Hong Kong identity and the growing influence of China. The story culminates in the saga of the end of the empire with the emotional hauling down of the Union flag and the raising of China's colours.

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Customer Reviews

A Modern History of Hong Kong presents a supremely well-balanced history of this former British imperial possession. Steve Tsang's meticulously researched historical narrative duly recognizes the efforts of both Hong Kong's industrious and civic-minded local Chinese population and the expatriate British who held the bulk of the administrative power over Hong Kong during its tenure as a crown colony. Tsang's work demonstrates that Hong Kong's ethnic Chinese inhabitants played an essential and dynamic role in the creation of the former colony in that they constituted its economic, industrial, and infrastructural workforce from the beginning, and came to develop their own unique Hong Kong identity as the population stabilized culturally but exploded in number in the decades following the Second World War. Tsang's historical account never strays far from what students of Marxist theory would likely refer to as Hong Kong's material conditions, in that the book portrays Hong Kong's cultural development within the context of its economic and political circumstances. The work puts forth a history of Hong Kong in which the colony's unique social and cultural characteristics were established as a result of the relatively minimalist legal and political framework that was provided by the British colonizers in order to ensure Hong Kong's capitalistic success. Students of history, English, postcolonial studies, comparative literature, and other academic disciplines will find this book to be a fascinating primer for further studies into both Hong Kong's history and the colonial and postcolonial initiatives of Britain and other Eurasian countries. General readers and academics alike who are interested in Hong Kong's history will find Steve Tsang's book to be a lively, entertaining, and fair treatment of the forces and events that led to the formation of this former colony and to the creation of its current identity as a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.

This is by far the best book on Hong Kong I have ever read. It is clearly written, balanced, and insightful. My family and I have lived in Hong Kong for years and it is nice to read a book that describes a place one knows well in beautifully written prose. It is fair about both the British and the local Chinese communities. When I read the chapter on the rise of a Hong Kong identity I know this is really good. It rings true. Most highly recommended.

This history is well balanced, thoroughly researched and very readable. It covers the period from the Opium Wars when the British obtained the rocky island referred to as "fragrant harbour" (Hong Kong) to the handover of one of the world's preeminent trading and financial centres to the PRC. The strength of the text is that it makes very clear that Hong Kong's existence was a function of the relative power of China and Britain. As China disintegrated in the 19th Century and European powers took little pieces for themselves, Britain was the leading European in the area, and (after serving itself) even sought to protect China against its European competitors. When the costs of World War II and the Japanese Empire broke the back of Europe's colonies in Asia, a new chapter began in Hong Kong as well. Prof. Tsang shows a Hong Kong that somewhat resembles the United States in that it is a refuge for immigrants from troubled foreign countries, although in the case of Hong Kong almost everyone came from China. Tsang does not shy away from depicting the racist and elitist practices of Victorian England towards the Chinese refugees who made up Hong Kong's population, but stresses that what the colonial masters had to offer (particularly the rule of law and civil service) was much better than what these people could expect from their Chinese homeland. This portrait of the people of Hong Kong is extremely sympathetic, even endearing. They appear as enterprising refugees who had no real power to defend themselves against either Imperial Britain or Communist China except making Hong Kong such a special (and wealthy) place that the power current overshadowing them would look favorably to giving them space to breathe. This is not only a captivating and informative history, but also an excellent study of colonies generally and culture: it shows how and the extent to which a Western economy and society can develop in a culture that remains completely Chinese.

As we travel, I like to read the history of a country or area before we go there. I find that it is difficult to find a factual history that is easy to read, let alone enjoyable. Tsang has a writing style that makes history interesting. He discusses the roles of Chinese government, the British government and the Chinese who immigrate to Hong Kong. He also has a very good understanding of the role of government and the economic forces at work. He is very objective and does not have an "agenda". I feel that this book has given me a very accurate description of the history of Hong Kong and will make our trip to Hong Kong, on which we leave in three days, much more enjoyable.

This is an extremely thorough history of Hong Kong which can make the reading a bit tedious at times, but always informative. Not only is the book well researched, but I believe that the narrative is

very well woven on top of the details. Tsang does a good job of explaining the rise of Hong Kong in the context of a weak China, especially in the run up to WWII without burdening the reader with an excessive amount of Chinese history (which, although fascinating, would dilute the story of Hong Kong).

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