

***The Dragon and the Crown: Hong Kong Memoirs***

by Stanley S.K. Kwan with Nicole Kwan  
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This book is a personal memoir by a key functionary in Hong Kong's economy, retired banker Stanley Kwan (1925-2011), a third generation Hong Konger. The contents of his volume span almost a whole century, from the 1910s (when his uncle began work in a Chinese native-bank, "yinhao", in the then British colony that started the family tradition of banking service that engaged both his father and himself, and later his niece), through his own experience of growing up and working in Hong Kong (punctuated with a 1942-45 interlude of service in mainland China during the Pacific War), to 2009 that closes with his reflections on new life as an immigrant in Toronto, Canada since 1984, upon retirement from the Hang Seng Bank in Hong Kong and 13 years ahead of the city's 1 July 1997 retrocession to Chinese sovereignty.

An earlier Chinese language version of this volume was published in 1999 by the University of *Toronto-York University Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies*. *With the collaborated* of his niece Nicole Kwan (who previously worked in Hong Kong banking upon obtaining her BA and MA degrees in the US), an updated and much expanded English version, the volume under review here, appeared a decade later, as the 6<sup>th</sup> title in the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Studies Series published by the Hong Kong University Press.

Readers of this volume are treated to a bountiful feast of continuously forward moving sequences of richly textured and very directly personal, first hand narratives of people, places, events, institutions, processes and, circumstances not only of colonial Hong Kong but China mainland and the East Asian Pacific region as a whole that shaped the life and work of himself and that of his extended family--grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, siblings, cousins, in-laws and other close relatives who have been dispersed overtime across the continents. Popping up through the pages are his friends, classmates, wartime comrades, American allies, Hong Kong banking colleagues, and even, yes, Beijing's united front functionaries and "handlers" (his mainland tour guides). More than viewing specific developments and sweeping trends from the perspective of the author's own individual or family experience, Kwan's storylines are often framed in a considerable broader historical context of modern China's tumultuous transformation from the late Qing period through

the republican years to drastic twists and turns under Communism of the Maoist phase, the Deng Xiaoping reform era and China's current global ascendancy.

To provide ample background, Kwan's account starts from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Opium Wars that yielded, among the other effects of assaults from Western imperialism-world capitalism, British colonial rule over Hong Kong in 1841, through wars (the Sino-Japanese War, World War II's Pacific War phase, the Chinese civil war, and the cold War) and revolutions (of the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communists), to his own 1984 migration to Canada upon retirement from Hong Kong ahead of the domain's 1997 retrocession to China, to conclude with his life as an actively engaged retiree in Toronto until 2009. His Canadian experience was punctuated with visits to both post-colonial Hong Kong and to mainland China that has been extensively reshaped by the PRC's reform and opening for modernization, marketization and globalization in the past three decades. Much more than simply telling his own life story or presenting a genealogical record of the Kwan family spanning four generations over one and a half century, Stanley Kwan's book is a delightful album of faces, sites, sights, sounds, happenings, comings and goings of people, institutions, movements, ideologies from a well-informed collective vantage of his own generation of Hong Kongers caught in the whirlpool of historical forces, as manifested in regime changes, monumental undertakings, galvanizing popular sentiments, and shifting epic dynamics beyond Hong Kong's shores.

What makes this volume much more than a recollection narrowly confined to Hong Kong is the extensive coverage devoted to the author's own inland China sojourn during the Pacific War and his two younger brothers' mainland experience since late 1949.. As told in Chapter 2 (esp. pp. 39-63), half a year after Hong Kong fell to the invading Japanese forces on Christmas Day 1941 to endure three years and eight months of harsh military occupation, Stanley Kwan and a cousin made their way into Southwest China where he served in the Chinese Nationalist army as an interpreter for the American forces in the China Theatre, making good use of the English proficiency he had acquired as a student in King's College, one of Hong Kong's top government high schools. Such frontline service for China's and the Allies' war efforts came natural to many young Hong Kongers of his generation who readily and easily embraced this patriotic cause without much hesitation simply as Chinese from Hong Kong.

However, these mainland links and once unquestioned pro-China sentiments among many Hong Kong Chinese would take many sharp twists and turns in the post-World War II years as the Chinese civil war intensified that led to the

Communist victory on the mainland and the Kuomintang regime's exile to Taiwan in autumn 1949. The drastically altered the mainland China realities that colonial Hong Kong must confront and live with as a neighbour, trade partner, consumer of food supply, and above all, a final destination or a transit hub for multitude of mainland immigrants. Spilling into Hong Kong, the Chinese partisan strife also divided local families, including the Kwans. In autumn 1949, Stanley Sze Kwong Kwan's younger brothers, Tse Kwong and Yuan Kwong, had chosen to embark on a very different path from him by crossing the border to join the Chinese Communist revolution in the mainland, and despite the Maoist era ups and downs, both had remained to raise their own families.

A particular strength of Kwan's memoirs is the finely textured and carefully detailed account (pp. 72-83) of the underground Chinese Communist operations in colonial Hong Kong as seen in the cases of his two younger brothers during the late 1940s whose seemingly innocent initial enrolment in music classes and attendance at lectures conducted by "progressive" bodies that turned increasingly "patriotic" (pro-Beijing). Such ostensibly cultural contacts eventually led to their political conversion to embrace the Chinese Communist cause that led to a five-decade mainland odyssey. The 23 years old Tse Kwong left Hong Kong in September 1949 to become a member of the team that took over Guangzhou after its Communist liberation on 14 October 1949, when the newly arrived Yuan Kwong, age 17, was among the troupes that performed songs and dances on the city street to welcome the Communist troops. Nearly a quarter of a century later, after he had risen through the ranks at Hang Seng Bank, the largest local Chinese bank in Hong Kong, Stanley Kwan himself became a target of the Chinese Communist united front efforts among the local banking circle as he was treated to a tour of the mainland in mid-1973. (pp. 133-168) By then he had attained some prominence as the creator of the now globally known "Hang Seng Index" (HSI, of the trading price level of listed shares in the Hong Kong Stock Exchange) that debuted on 24 November 1969.

These real life stories of the Kwans as unfolded in both Hong Kong and mainland China not only have stretched the geographical scope of this volume, but more crucially they have injected a very keenly felt and nearly omnipresent "China Factor" into the Hong Kong narratives. In fact, this mainland-connectedness has added a thick layer of complexities essential to any informed and more nuanced appreciation of Hong Kongers' individual and collective identities, politico-ideological allegiance, business strategies as well as life and career decisions, especially in making the hard choice between staying put in

Hong Kong or exiting for safer havens overseas in response to the widespread fear of uncertainty and popular crisis of confidence as the 1997 retrocession loomed closer. To enjoy his sunset years in a secured environment under the rule of law with guaranteed constitutional rights and personal freedom. (p.173), Stanley Kwan opted for relocation to Toronto where his two daughters attended university and settled. His decision undoubtedly was impacted by his mainland siblings' life under Chinese communism, just like many mainland-born Hong Kongers who had joined the pre-1997 overseas exodus for the same reasons, forsaking the colony to become once again an "migr" to escape communist rule.

As a whole, this book is a splendid example of recent volumes by, for and on Hong Kongers from the pen of authors who have been enriched with non-local experiences and informed by external perspectives far beyond Hong Kong. The authors of this volume have been quite effective in their attempts to remember, observe, analyze and portray a Hong Kong, both historical and contemporary, for their readers, including Hong Kongers residing in & outside of the city. The Hong Kong that has emerged through the pages of this Hong Konger's life story is a city fast changing amid densely woven fabrics of people with their hopes and fears and conflicting sentiments and divergent perceptions. Indeed, this volume has penetrated Hong Kong's popular veneer as an ideal gateway to China, a thriving economic hub-financial center and a glamorous tourist destination to offer another Hong Kong that is filled with fascinating facets, darker undersides, hidden dynamics, rarely magnified realities and unwelcome truths as well as unique personal insights to yield a vividly engaging, three-dimensional, real-life Hong Kong story that is embellished with a heavy dosage of warmly human sensitivity and reflective personal poignancy. This is an informative and entertaining volume that both local and global readers would enjoy and should benefit from.