
Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Grant Evans and Maria Siu-Mi Tam (eds.), *Hong Kong: The Anthropology of a Chinese Metropolis*, Honolulu: University of Hong Kong Press, 1997, 335 pages, \$35.00 (cloth).

Reviewer: *Yuen-fong Woon*
University of Victoria

Written by specialists from different disciplines, this is an excellent collection of articles which addresses two major themes in Hong Kong in the late transitional phase (1984-97): that of political anxiety and cultural retention amidst rapid social change and imminent political changeover.

The first theme is the focus for chapters 2 to 6 and 13. Contributors to this volume argue that as political, education and kinship systems all encourage passivity and paralysis, Hong Kong people tend to express their anxiety over political uncertainty in the cultural realm. This takes the form of increasing homogenization of ethnic identity in Hong Kong (Guldin), revival in folk culture such as herbal tea shops (Cheng Sea Ling) and selective use of traditional geomantic principles to interpret the building design of the new Bank of China (Christina Cheng). In a more postmodern form, political anxiety is reflected in the emergence and popularity of avant-garde theatrical groups such as the Zuni (Lilley). By mounting performances that are uniquely Hong Kong in style and content, these cultural workers seek both to provide a theatrical platform for the politicization of the Hong Kong public and to undermine assumptions about the aesthetic and linguistic superiority of Western and Chinese high cultures. Much along the same line, the incipient challenge to linguistic dominance of Mandarin and English in Hong Kong can be seen in the success of local triad films, comic books and comic television shows in promoting the spread of Cantonese "bad" language to polite society in Hong Kong in the form of popular slang (Bolton and Hutton).

The second theme—that of cultural retention amidst rapid social change in Hong Kong—is the focus for chapters 7 to 11. This theme represents recent scholars' critique of modernization theory that the emergence of a rationalized world will banish premodern thinking and practices to the sidelines. Through their separate examinations of Hong Kong's kinship realm, Selina Chan and Eliza Chan both find that rural women in the New Territories did not resort to Western concepts

such as equity, natural justice and human rights in their fight for inheriting their fathers' property. Instead, they re-interpreted Chinese customs in a way that would not undermine patrilineal tradition—a tradition that had been frozen by the Colonial regime for over a century. In her study of Hong Kong women, Martin finds that despite rapid modernization, urban Chinese families have not ceased to be adult-centred—as in the past, children are to adapt to adults' lifestyle. Unlike the West, there is no emphasis on the psychological importance of closeness between mother and young children and therefore no guilty feelings among urban women who returned to full-time work shortly after childbirth. In examining the religious realm, Scott finds that the practice of offering ritual material for the dead has expanded and evolved with modernization. This reflects the continued importance of filial piety, as well as the ongoing belief in the existence of the underworld and the continuity of the dead and the living. Similarly, Lang finds that folk religion has not declined even amidst rapid land redevelopment. In response to economic unpredictability and an uncaring government, the people of Hong Kong look to religious establishments in their various guises to provide a place of quiet retreat, a sense of community, a source of charity, a source of invisible power and a museum for housing cultural memories.

Elements of both themes in this book—political anxiety and cultural retention—converge on chapter 13. Here, Evans focusses on Hong Kong people's ready acceptance of metaphysical explanations offered by traditional religious practitioners of a rumour that child ghosts appeared in a Chinese advertisement. According to him, the belief in ghosts has always been pervasive in Hong Kong. Lacking democratic political channels, Hong Kong people tend to displace their deep anxiety over rapid modernization, political uncertainty and the rising tide of children's suicide onto the traditional supernatural realm.

Taken separately, each article is of high quality. However, I find Robertson's piece somewhat difficult to understand; some theories and assumptions put forward by Martin (pp. 209-210); Scott (p. 236), and Evans (p. 291) seem to me *ad hoc* and unsubstantiated. In addition, I am of the opinion that this diverse collection of articles could have benefited from a conclusion chapter which provides some speculations

to the key question: What does it mean to be a Hong Kong Chinese?

The lack of space does not allow spelling out other minor problems with style, layout and terminologies and phraseologies used by various authors. I shall focus on two problems associated with the Yale system of Cantonese transliteration here. First, there are examples of inconsistency in its usage in the book. The term "jou" (ancestral land trust), to take one example, sometimes appears as "zu" (p. 156) and also as "tso" in the text (pp. 183-184). Second, and more significantly, the use of Cantonese transliteration at once narrows the audience of this book to Cantonese native speakers or English readers proficient in written Chinese. This is unfortunate. Though a Cantonese chauvinist myself, I think that place names should have followed those used in standard maps. Relatively well-known terminologies such as Chinese kinship terms, popular gods, annual festivals and religious and cultural practices, should have been accompanied by Mandarin transliteration inserted in parenthesis in the text or glossary section.

Anne M.O. Griffiths, *In the Shadow of Marriage: Gender and Justice in an African Community*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, x + 310 pages, 16 halftones, 4 maps, 4 line drawings, \$50.00 (cloth), \$18.95 (paper).

Reviewer: *Michael D. Levin*
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In a neat visual metaphor, Anne Griffiths' sums up the range of procreative relationships of Kwena women and men. By implication, all other forms of marriage, compared to the statutory form (registered marriages), are somehow incomplete. Marriage under the statute, whether civil or religious, is legally consequential, and in a legal sense, is an ideal. This form of marriage has full and explicit obligations. Marriages under customary law are also legal, but more difficult to confirm and uphold as they require a series of visits between families accompanied by traditional agreements, exchanges and rituals. Other forms of procreative relationships, as Griffiths makes clear, also exist. It is these latter forms, respecting support of children, which rest in the shadow of marriage. Griffiths' study is of negotiations and legal efforts made by mothers to secure support for their children from the children's fathers and move the social definition their procreative relationships, past or current, closer to the fullness of "marriage." At issue is whether marriage was promised or established by the *patlo* ceremony, whether support was ever paid, whether support was sought and paid for the first child in a relationship and so on. These negotiations may evolve into marriage, or into legal contests over whether support obligations exist.

Griffiths gives the reader a full sense of the complex range of relationships women and men form around sex and

procreation in Bakwena communities. (Bakwena is one of the traditional Tswana polities. Griffiths' field work concentrated on Molepolole, a village, in southeast Botswana, within 100 kilometres of Gaborone.) The tension and fluidity in procreative relationships including marriage, the place of marriage and children in the broader context of family histories, the social expectations of families in the "salarial" and the "peasant" (terms for emerging classes) and the inconsistent impact of the legal system on social life, are themes of the central ethnographic chapters. Bracketing the four ethnographic chapters are four chapters of arguments about the legal theory. Conceived as a feminist critique of conventional legal theories and a contribution to legal anthropology in the scholarly lineage born of Isaac Schapera's 1938 classic *Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom* Griffiths' argues that her field work studies of how people actually experience the law demonstrate the social context of law. Griffiths makes the claim that her analysis is "in tune with the strong or new form of legal pluralism . . . which undermines a centralist account of law within its own jurisdiction [and] . . . that an analytical model of pluralism can and should be developed out of the normative systems that inhere in social life." Her analysis she claims, moreover, diverges from pluralism in maintaining "the specificity of law without endorsing the image or model of the centralist account" but like a pluralist account examines "a whole range of . . . points of connection across social and legal domains" (p. 236). Many claims are made in these introductory and concluding chapters, but the connections between them and the ethnographic field work that is said to support them are asserted rather than demonstrated. In the absence of integration of the theoretical argument and the ethnographic narrative the reader has difficulty in assessing Griffiths' theoretical contribution.

Griffiths' work may not match her theoretical goals but it does show how the legal system reflects increasing class differentiation in Botswana. It also gives an overall sense of the centrality of the legal system in social life. Griffiths, as a lawyer, argues for the social context of law, but she shows that the law is also a kind of code—more than its statutes and records, against which moral and interpersonal questions can be judged and standards tested. Is this legal pluralism? She does not make clear how the theoretical differences affect the understanding of the family histories or cases. The major contribution of this work may be to enlighten Botswana in general, and the legal community there in particular, to the gender biases of Bakwena and Tswana customary and the Botswana common-law legal system(s).

Griffiths makes the case very clearly that inadequate support of children and financial disadvantaging of Bakwena women in property settlements after marriage is clearly a product of customary and formal legal system(s) of Botswana. This reality, though a severe injustice, is not a surprise. As evidence of injustice, however, this book will provide ammunition for those with a concern for the welfare of children to advocate change. Indeed, the advance of the social welfare of