

Foreword¹

The Toy Boys – as my dictation software has it – purports to be an account of the recent trial and conviction in the High Court of one Raphael Hui, former Chief Secretary, at the moment of writing behind bars, together with that of his co-conspirators, Thomas Kwok and their two "bagmen". But the book might more accurately be called a scathing indictment of the upper reaches of present-day Hong Kong.

The author is clearly qualified to write an in-depth exposé of the problems besetting the current regime. With degrees from British and Hong Kong universities in languages and literature, in education and in law, he is fluent in three or four languages and highly cosmopolitan.

Much analysis of Hong Kong from a Chinese perspective tends to be monolingual, monocultural, pitifully parochial and noisily neo-colonialist – in a word vitiated by a myopic and conformist intellectual and cultural tradition. Similarly the Western perspective on Hong Kong and China often falls down due to an insufficiently hands-on, streetwise, practical experience of life here. The acutest writings, then, emanate from those familiar with the world both within and without the depressingly convoluted byways and twisted alleys of the modern PRC, those able to skin a cat from either end or even inside-out, those rare "bananas" and "eggs" endowed with a West-East parallax vision.

The practice of law in any given country is much closer to an art than a science, for its rigour derives from language and rules of thumb, rather than from any "scientific" codification. Certainly common-law judges and lawyers must refer to the mass of previous cases, but their skill lies in detecting often elusive similarities and differences, in applying a mixture of intuition, humanism and probabilistic deduction. Perhaps the best legal training is in literature, for competence here requires textual interpretation, experience in the field, common sense, a good memory and the ability to communicate cogently.

Practitioners in and commentators on the law should approach legal communication as a subset of literary discourse, to produce in turn observations that are informed, entertaining, narrowly focused and wide-eyed – in a word as readable as the best genre literature. *The Hui*

¹ George Adams agreed to publish the present foreword to his forthcoming book *The Hui Boys*. However, he then censored part of it (highlighted below) and published the mutilated form. It therefore appears integrally here for the first time.

Boys fits the bill with its beginning, middle and end, strong narrative line, vivid heroes and villains, wide supporting cast, plenty of dialogue in a variety of styles and final triumph of good over evil.

The author often appears to be providing a mere camera-eye perspective, an objective description, even to the point of sometimes conveying tedium and mind-boggling complexity of detail. But in fact he selects, interprets, synthesises, moralises and politicises, for such is the nature of language and the individual consciousness. And the whole is leavened with many personal, social, socialist tending towards the anarchist, even philosophical asides and developments. Indeed one might wonder to what extent the blogger strayed over the unclear line protecting the ongoing court proceedings, meant to be *sub judice*. Certainly the members of the jury, the assorted lawyers or the judge could have been affected by any reading of Dr Adams's daily outpourings.

Another question raised by this book is whether Chinese culture and civilisation can be compatible with modern, international legal and political systems. If one were to listen to the scholars or establishment figures on the mainland and increasingly in Hong Kong, with their arguments based on an exceptionalism rooted in many thousands of years of glorious civilisation, one would be tempted to believe that "with Chinese characteristics", like baguettes or Highland air, cannot travel well, that only those born and exclusively educated in an uncontaminated Middle Kingdom milieu should be permitted to apply them, or in the limit are able to understand them.

The paradox of Hong Kong resides in the belief that justice and hence morality are universal concerns, that even "evil foreigners" (my own translation) can sometimes be competent in the matter, and can go so far as to judge, both in the legal and everyday senses, matters steeped in Confucianist, Lee Kwan Yew-style, ineffable and almost inchoate "Asian values". Such a belief is at the heart both of the local legal system and of the ICAC, the heroine of the hour, together with judge Andrew Macrae and lead prosecutor David Perry. But, judging from the appeals to national solidarity, with their increasingly chauvinistic and racist overtones, such values are not appreciated by the mass of the population or those who rule us.

Corruption may indeed flourish more easily in a society based more on collectivist than individualistic values, one based on shame more than guilt, where not being caught is all that matters. The strength of

the author's approach is to blend the theoretical and the pragmatic, to make the leap from otherwise trivial misdemeanours to the existential crisis besetting modern Hong Kong. Do Raphael Hui and his ilk represent the dark corners of lingering European colonialism or the soft white underbelly of Pekinese neo-imperialism? Do his evident competence, affability and culture mean that only the in-betweens are being found out, that his less visible peers, subordinates and civil society at large are pullulating with layer upon layer of dishonesty and immorality? Can any sort of viable future be envisioned for such a Hong Kong?

It is to be hoped that the author will leverage his knowledge of both the upper and lower echelons to produce a sequel where everyday personal experience and high politics blend to produce *The Great Hong Kong Book*. This tiny piece of land and sea is, after all, the most civilised part of an uber-nation determined to become the centre of the universe. The barbarians pouring through the gates might even learn from our experience.