

## **Konferenzberichte / Conference Reports**

### **Hongkong und China auf dem Weg in das pazifische Jahrhundert (Hong Kong and China on the Eve of the Pacific Century)**

April 24 and 25, 1997, in Rostock, Germany

A two-day conference, from April 24 to 25, 1997, with a great diversity of topics presented in three blocs ("Hong Kong before July 1st, 1997", "China before the turn of the Century", "China's Neighbors") and with more than fifteen speakers cannot be summarized easily. But if there was one message common to most of the lectures presented at the conference, it was the following: The first of July, 1997, when Hong Kong is reintegrated into China, does not mark the end of the success story of the former British crown colony. With their conference the four organizers, the "Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung" (Rostock), the "Institut für Asienkunde" (Hamburg), the "Institut für Politik- und Verwaltungswissenschaften, Universität Rostock" and the "Lehrstuhl für Allgemeine Betriebswirtschaftslehre, Bankbetriebslehre und Finanzwirtschaft, Universität Rostock" were successful in balancing the more pessimistic picture of Hong Kong's future, painted by large sections of the public media.

Daniel R. Fung, Solicitor-General of Hong Kong, was the first to present his arguments in favor of an optimistic scenario: Hong Kong plays an important role as an international center for trade and investment and as a bridge between East and West from which China is interested to profit. It is not only Hong Kong's external relations, but also its domestic constitution that attracts the attention of Chinese politicians. Especially Hong Kong's legal system, Fung argued, is likely to serve as a model for China. Chinese lawyers are already trained in common law by Hong Kong lawyers, judges and public prosecutors, and in some of the Chinese provinces model courts have been established to demonstrate common law in practice.

Citing various international surveys, Peter Y. Lo, Special Representative of Hong Kong to the European Communities (Brussels), confirmed Fung's generally bullish outlook for Hong Kong's economic future. According to Lo, China has a vested interest in a smooth transition in Hong Kong.

Sebastian Heilmann (Hamburg) left off where Lo and Fung had started, when he predicted that the time of positive non-intervention, granted to Hong Kong by China, will come to an end after a few years. But this will

not have too many negative effects for Hong Kong, since the former crown colony has already adjusted to the Chinese rules of the game. In the 1980's politicians and businesspeople alike started to turn to their giant neighbor, seeking opportunities in trade and services.

The discussion following Heilmann's presentation focused on China's economic development as a precondition for its acceptance of the formula "one country - two systems". One of the more than 100 participants from all over Germany wanted to know what would happen with China and Hong Kong in the event of a recession in China. Heilmann's answer: "That would be a catastrophe for Hong Kong." The optimistic scenario assumes an annual economic growth of 7 to 8%. If China fails to keep up this level, which, according to Heilmann, is very unlikely, the effects will be severe, both for China and Hong Kong.

The following two lectures, which concluded the first section on "Hong Kong and July 1st, 1997", provided in-depth analyses of Hong Kong's financial and political situation. Guido Eilenberger (Rostock) spoke about Hong Kong as Asia's financial hub. He, once more, argued in favor of the optimistic scenario, presenting the following arguments for his thesis that China has an interest in retaining Hong Kong's financial role: the favorable location of the former crown colony; low taxes that attract investors; a multitude of international relations; know-how in finances, etc. Bert Becker (Rostock) presented Hong Kong as an exceptional case of democratization and decolonization. His predictions for the future of Hong Kong were similar to those outlined before: 1. Hong Kong's executive-led government will be kept; 2. The former crown colony will develop along the lines of its basic law; 3. It is very likely that the formula "one country - two systems" will not only become true for the economic, but also for the political sphere.

The afternoon of the first day was dedicated to China. The first speaker, Joachim Glaubitz (Chemnitz), discussed China's foreign policy. Hegemony can still be called the fundamental principle in Chinese foreign policy, he stated, but more and more it conflicts with the growing importance of cooperation and multilateralism in the international system. China combines these two conflicting principles by accepting cooperation if it does not restrict its national sovereignty and is based on mutual respect. Economic growth and military capability are the two most important preconditions for this foreign policy strategy, and one of the consequences Glaubitz sees evolving is the growth of Chinese nationalism. It is not too difficult to predict, Glaubitz concluded, that China is going to be an even more difficult member of international society than in the past.

Monika Schädler (Bremen) deviated from the generally optimistic scenario painted by most of the speakers. Although she did not question the

impressive growth rate and the possibility that it might continue for some decades, she highlighted the pathologies emanating from China's development: 1. China's population grows by 13,5 million annually, leading to serious problems in food supply; 2. There is no social security system in China comparable to Western standards, which means there is only insufficient care for the growing number of the poor, ill, aged and un- and underemployed; 3. Migration is a phenomenon and problem in China unimaginable for European observers: 100 to 120 million Chinese have left rural areas for the cities in their search for a livelihood; 4. The environmental problems resulting from modernization are growing fast. By the year 2025 China will be the world's largest producer of CO<sup>2</sup>.

Per Fischer (Mainz) confirmed Schädler's scepticism. The rapid economic growth has many negative effects on the Chinese population, effects for which the communist ideology can no longer compensate. Chinese politicians desperately try to replace ideology with patriotism and nationalism as a glue that may help bind the nation together. But under the onslaught of a process of modernization it will be very difficult for them to overcome the growing contradictions within the country.

The first day ended with a keynote speech by the Minister for Economic Affairs of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Jürgen Seidel. Asia in general, and Hong Kong and China in particular, are of great importance to this region in the northeast of Germany, he emphasized. But one has to be realistic: This *Bundesland* is one of the poorest in Germany, with little industry and a high unemployment rate, and, what is perhaps even more important is that its mainly medium-sized businesses are not able to afford going to Asia.

On the second day, China's neighbors were the focus of the conference. Kay Möller (Ebenhausen) discussed China's relationship with Taiwan. According to Möller, the situation is very problematic: Both countries are unwilling to accept the status quo, but, on the other hand, are not able to come to a solution concerning reunification. A third player would be needed to solve this, but the U.S., for instance, does not want to get involved and, despite its good relations with Taiwan, is clinging to her "one-China policy".

ASEAN's perceptions of China are changing and contradictory. With this observation Jürgen Rüländ (Rostock) began his presentation. There are two schools of thought within ASEAN. According to the first, China definitely has ambitions to dominate the region, as it has done in the past. Adherents of this view see China as a military and economic rival that has to be balanced, if not contained. The second school opposes this perception. For them China is no danger, since it needs a safe environment in order to prosper economically and since it has not yet got the military capacity to domi-

nate the region. ASEAN's policy towards China bears witness to this difference in perception, Rüland went on. It can be characterized by endeavors to integrate and contain China at the same time and may be called a "policy of multiple precautions".

"Competing coexistence" is how Manfred Pohl (Hamburg) characterized the Japan-China relationship. Japan accepts China's desire to be a strong power, both militarily and economically, and it can understand that China rejects foreign interference in human rights issues. But at the same time Japan views China's hegemonic ambitions very critically and is concerned about the recent rapprochement between China and Russia.

Xue Gu (Freiburg) provided a comprehensive analysis of Russian-Chinese relations. He spoke of a surprisingly intensive exchange between the two countries since the end of the Cold War and said that relations have never been better since the disagreement between Mao and Khrushchev. Gu explained this with a multitude of common interests and the fact that ideology has lost most of its meaning and function. Gu did not, however, fail to mention some of the problems between Russia and China, too, like border disputes and migration of Chinese to Siberia.

The Indian-Chinese relationship has always been characterized by conflicts - this was the main argument of Christian Wagner (Rostock). The two countries are regional powers that fight over influence in Asia. In addition there is a dispute over their common border, a conflict that calmed down in 1993 when they agreed to accept the ceasefire-line as the frontier, though it has not really been solved yet. Despite common interests in the region, such as nuclear proliferation, fear of economic sanctions imposed by the West and human rights issues, China and India do not cooperate and continue to pursue their rivalry.

As on the first day, the second was concluded with a look at Germany, a comparison between "Greater China" and Germany, to be more precise. Werner Pfennig ("Arbeitsstelle Politik Chinas und Ostasiens, Freie Universität Berlin") made quite clear what the main difference between the two entities is: China is a traditional nation state whose first priority is to be independent and powerful; Germany, in contrast, is a country highly integrated - economically, politically and militarily - in the EU and other international organizations. It would be wrong, however, Pfennig explained, to call "Greater China" a nation or a league of nations. Instead it is the term for an economic and ethnic-cultural unit, referring to all the Chinese living in and outside of China (in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao; in other foreign countries and in Chinatowns). Whereas to foreign observers 'Greater China' seems to be an artificial construction, it is something natural and of great importance for the People's Republic of China.

It was a journalist, Hans W. Vahlefeld (Hamburg), who gave the concluding presentation and, not surprisingly, he did so with a more pessimistic outlook. Vahlefeld reminded the participants of the relevance of human rights as an issue about which the West should always be concerned, and he regretted that questions of morality are excluded in almost all the economic discourses concerning China. The future of Hong Kong as a democracy may not be too bright, and Vahlefeld concluded by warning: "Perhaps one day the West will be confronted with the accusation that it did nothing for Hong Kong's liberty."

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### **Lifestyling in Southeast Asia**

Workshop at the Sociology of Development Research Centre  
(SDRC), University of Bielefeld, 12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1997

The workshop was chaired by Prof. Dr. Hans-Dieter Evers, Director of SDRC, and Alexander Horstmann, Research Fellow.

Presentations at the workshop included:

Dr. Solvay Gerke, SDRC (Bielefeld): 'New Approaches to Lifestyling, Consumerism and Social Inequality'; Prof. Chua Beng-Huat, National University of Singapore: 'Consuming Asians: Ideas and Issues', Dr. Mark Hobart, SOAS (London): 'A Very Peculiar Practice, or the Unimportance of Penguins'; Alexander Horstmann, SDRC (Bielefeld): 'Lifestyling as Empowerment: Strategies of Social Actors in Time and Space'; Dr. Mark Hobart, SOAS (London): 'Consuming Passions. Overinterpreting Television-Viewing in Bali'.

Dr. Solvay Gerke highlighted some fundamental aspects of her theory of Lifestyling as applied to her studies on the new Indonesian middle class. Globalisation and mass consumption make available a large range of expensive, but mass produced consumer items. Stressing the symbolic value of commodities, Gerke argued that the new bureaucratic middle class in Indonesia is involved in symbolic consumption as a way of life. Without the economic means of leading a middle class life the lower middle classes engage in what she called virtual consumption and lifestyling. Virtual mid-