

Hong Kong, day by day

Gérard Henry, Deputy Director at the Alliance Française in Hong Kong and editor-in-chief of the magazine *Paroles*, recently published his first book *Chroniques hongkongaises*, a colourful and perceptive journey into the lives of Hong Kong citizens over a 10-year period, from 1997 to 2007.

What led you to write this book?

Since 1997, I have had the opportunity to share my observations on urban life, the people, places, ideas and trends shaping Hong Kong, Macau and China in a weekly radio program on Radio Suisse Romande. While the idea to publish a selection of those weekly recordings had crossed my mind, it wasn't until I was actually approached by an editor last year that the project really started to move ahead. One of the challenges of putting this book together was selecting only a fraction of the recordings produced during this 10-year span.

Also, I had recently come to realise that, aside from traditional travel guides and a few history books, little had been published about Hong Kong lately, especially in French. I felt this was a good opportunity to put together a book that provides an inside account of Hong Kong life after the Handover.

What does the book say about Hong Kong?

The book spans a tumultuous decade during which Hong Kong lives through a deep regional financial crisis, bird flu, SARS, the march of half a million people opposing a new security bill called Article 23 and the recent rise of a civil movement, to name but a few events. All



Gérard Henry

After living in Hong Kong for 26 years, Gérard Henry (above) has never ceased to enjoy learning about its fascinating people.

the while, Hong Kong has had to redefine its relationship with China, one that is filled with conflicting emotions.

While the book addresses such major issues, it also provides glimpses into a variety of topics ranging from Hong Kong's movie industry to its family life to its culinary culture. I did not want the book to provide a removed description of Hong Kong's past decade, but rather a variety of local perspectives on current events and daily life that have helped shape this city into what it is today.

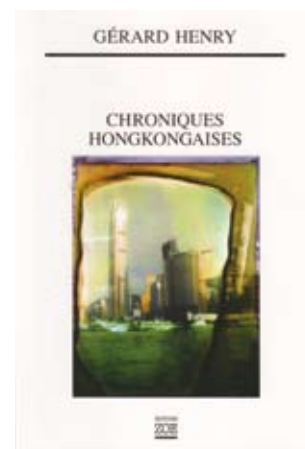
How were you able to gather those local perspectives over time?

After living in Hong Kong for 26 years, I have never ceased to enjoy learning about its fascinating people. I still go out on walks in the middle of the night and witness the nocturnal action! I also learnt Mandarin shortly after my arrival here and got the opportunity to practice it extensively while working as a journalist for a travel magazine that focused exclusively on China. Also, as editor-in-chief of the bi-monthly cultural magazine *Paroles*, I get the chance to meet a variety of writers and artists based in Hong Kong

and Mainland China. It also allows me to stay in touch with the latest happenings in the arts community.

Have you got any feedback from your readers so far?

A number of Hong Kong residents and non-residents have told me that the book has taught them a lot about Hong Kong. I know it's not easy to learn about the local culture here as a foreigner, so I am glad that *Chroniques hongkongaises* is giving people a chance to discover more about the city they live in. **E**



The book is available at Parenthèses Bookstore, 2/F Duke of Wellington House, 14 Wellington Street, Central. Members of the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Hong Kong enjoy a 10% discount on the books reviewed in this column.