

ASIA BEAT



MACAU

Harald Bruning

Museum piece

In surprising, but refreshing, defiance of the current Sars scare, thousands of locals and tourists thronged to Macau's museums last Sunday to commemorate International Museum Day.

Even though free admission on that day might have contributed to the welcome crush, its symbolism was certainly not lost on anyone, considering the multitude of cancelled events and scarcely attended functions that have become all too common since the outbreak of Sars.

Macau's flagship museum on Fortress Hill logged more than 4,000 visitors. However, much to the chagrin of motor-racing buffs and vinticulture aficionados, the Macau Grand Prix Museum and Wine Museum remained shut because both are part of the Macau Tourist Activities Centre, which has been requisitioned by the government's Sars control taskforce.

Museology has become a vital part of Macau's internationally recognised efforts to preserve its multicultural heritage. Most of its 16 museums opened in the 1990s, when heritage preservation became the leitmotif for the government's efforts to consolidate the enclave's fragile identity vis-à-vis the colossal mainland and Hong Kong's Anglo-American clout.

Two more museums, a Science Centre designed by world-renowned Sino-US architect Ieoh Ming Pei, and a Telecommunications Museum, are to be opened over the next two years.

The current range of museums, most of which are publicly owned, reflects, to a certain extent, the city's multifarious heritage of seafaring, cultural, religious and political activities. They include a memorial house dedicated to the founder of modern China, Sun Yat-sen, and a hall honouring 19th century China's heroic opium-buster, Lin Zexu.

Oddly enough, a museum showcasing Macau's famous gambling industry – its first gaming houses were licensed by the government about 150 years ago – continues to be conspicuously absent. The Macau Grand Prix Museum is in urgent need of a thorough facelift and, hopefully, extended premises. After all, the race will celebrate its 50th anniversary in November.

The Macau Museum and the Maritime Museum are fine examples of visitor-friendly and well-stocked facilities. Even diehard casino gamblers are known to prise themselves away from the gaming tables to visit the two museums.

The preservation of cultural heritage will gain further importance as a buffer against future Las Vegas-style casino resorts and convention centres. Ideally, Nevada-style kitsch and Macau's Sino-Latin culture will be able to merge in an attractive environment benefiting Macau as a whole.

Macau's future world-heritage listing by Unesco will redouble the city's international exposure as a destination for cultural tourism. The deplorable sight of the neglected, mid-19th century Dom Pedro V Theatre, the oldest European-style theatre in China, is a sad reminder that without the government's strong hand in heritage preservation, culturally important edifices might be allowed to rot away by their tight-fisted private owners.

One can only hope that the handsome theatre will soon open its gates again for daily visitors. Its spacious vestibule would be ideal for a mini-museum presenting its colourful history.

SEOUL

B. J. Lee

Friends and enemies

Being president must be the toughest job in South Korea. Previous office-holders have met tragic ends, being jailed, assassinated, exiled and humiliated. President Roh Moo-hyun, too, seems to be feeling the heat: he confessed this week that running the country was much tougher than he had expected.

The past weeks have been particularly cruel. While he was in America for his crucial summit with US President George W. Bush, South Korea's cargo transport system was paralysed, as trucks went on strike to demand more money. The dispute may be over, but it made Mr Roh – a former lawyer who defended workers' rights – realise that his old allies are no longer on his side.

He faced further humiliation when he returned from the United States. Students protesting his non-confrontational diplomacy in Washington blocked his entry to a cemetery to commemorate the deaths of activists during a 1980 pro-democracy civil uprising. Mr Roh was forced to use a back entrance and flee afterwards.

Mr Roh won the presidential race largely on the back of anti-US sentiment among young voters. But after taking office, he offered an olive branch to officials in Washington to seek support in resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis. It was a realistic choice – but try telling that to the young radicals.

Mr Roh's other challenge comes from a different group of old friends – young, liberal teachers who supported his election campaign. Following the recent suicide of an elementary school principal – after he was severely harassed by a teachers' union dominated by younger teachers – the union came in for sharp public criticism.

The union is now at odds with older teachers and education authorities over a national plan to computerise the administration of education. Despite the claims of young teachers that it will infringe on privacy, Mr Roh is tilting towards the idea. In doing so, he is slowly turning his teacher allies into enemies. But that is politics. Once in power, a political leader has to make choices, and that means making both friends and enemies. Perhaps he can find some comfort in the irony of turning some old enemies into friends.

ANATOMY OF AN OUTBREAK | WILLIAM MEACHAM

How Hong Kong ignored weeks of signals that Sars was coming

Sars taught China a bitter lesson. The virus refused to be swept under the carpet. Ultimately, tremendous popular pressure and international opprobrium brought drastic action, and a new openness.

The Hong Kong government has thus far escaped the intensity of criticism directed at the mainland. But there are serious questions over its handling of Sars that call for thorough investigation, by a Legco Select Committee or an independent commission.

This is not only a matter of determining who made mistakes. It is likely that there was a systemic problem as well, bound up in the Hong Kong way of governance. It is ironic to consider that the Hong Kong special administrative region (SAR) – surely a name change is now required – may prove less self-corrective than the mainland regime.

The Hong Kong government's reaction to a new infectious disease next door in Guangdong was probably negligent. This deadly outbreak did not suddenly appear out of the blue; it had been brewing and spreading in Guangdong for three months. I will focus on the early sequence of events, and what could or should have been done.

This "incubation period" can be divided into four phases: the "invisible phase" mid-November to January 2; the unofficially reported phase January 3 to February 9; the period from February 10, when an official announcement was made in Guangdong, to February 22, when Sars arrived in Hong Kong; and the lurking/infiltrating phase, February 23 to March 12.

For each phase, one might ask, Watergate-style: What did the Hong Kong government know and when did it know it? An even more important question is: What strenuous efforts did the government make to obtain more information on the disease? The full truth will only be known if a formal inquiry is conducted.

The first case of Sars reportedly occurred in mid-November in Foshan, near Guangzhou. By mid-December, two other cities were seeing outbreaks – Heyuan and Shunde. Ironically, on December 12, a spokesman for Hong Kong's Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) was asked about the possibility of a new bird flu arising in Guangdong. He said, "the Hong Kong government is in close liaison with mainland authorities".

The *New York Times* reported that the Heyuan outbreak stemmed from a chef who fell ill in Shenzhen. If this report is true, Sars was already at Hong Kong's doorstep in mid-December. It is frustrating to contemplate that the Guangdong authorities may have withheld this information for two months. Did the Hong Kong government have no inkling of this new disease, from official channels, word-of-mouth or private submissions?

On January 3, the *Yang Cheng Evening News* of Guangzhou reported the outbreak at Heyuan. Rumours abounded about a new type of deadly pneumonia; panic buying of drugs was taking place; a team of researchers had been dispatched to Heyuan. The story was published in Hong Kong newspapers the next day. One of these, in a terrible foreshadowing, described the spread of the virus to doctors and nurses in Heyuan.

Since pneumonia was one of the complications in patients who contracted the bird flu virus in 1997, the situation in Guangdong should have set off very loud alarm bells within Hong Kong's HWFB, the Department of Health, the Hospital Authority and its Infectious Diseases Taskforce. It appears, however, that strenuous efforts to

obtain information were not made. Complacency and bureaucratic lethargy are probably to blame.

On January 17, the *New Express Daily* of Guangzhou reported an outbreak in Zhongshan. Twelve patients had symptoms similar to those seen in Heyuan; isolation procedures were being adopted after seven doctors and nurses were infected. This report also ran in Hong Kong newspapers the next day. The alarm bells had become air raid sirens. One would suppose that, surely, after these new reports, vigorous efforts would have been made to acquire information.

On February 10, the Guangdong authorities made a public announcement that was reported around the world: 305 people were infected and five had died. Six of the infected were in Shenzhen. Now it was official. There should have been persistent, strenuous and urgent efforts by Hong Kong officials to obtain all available information on the new disease, even raising the matter with the central government in Beijing if rebuffed by Guangdong. Anything less would constitute incompetence, since it should have been clear to anyone that the disease would soon turn up in Hong Kong. In fact, Hong Kong would be free of Sars for only 12 more days.

The Department of Health announced a



letter had been sent to the Guangdong authorities, saying Hong Kong might send somebody to investigate the outbreak. It is not clear if this was done. *Next* magazine did send a team of reporters to Guangzhou and published a disturbing cover story on February 13.

Senior officials in the Hong Kong government know very well how the mainland system works, and they should have assumed from the start this new disease would be downplayed. A fact-finding team should have been arranged immediately to visit Guangzhou – with confidentiality assured, not to delve into the "state secrets" of how many cases or deaths had really occurred – to collect medical information about the disease. The assistance of Hong Kong laboratories could have been offered in the search for the pathogen. Were any such proposals made to the Guangdong authorities, with urgency and high-level backing? If not why not?

By mid-February, medical researchers in Guangzhou had become aware of the highly infectious nature of Sars, especially once patients were in hospital. Zhong Nan-shan of the Institute for Respiratory Disease in Guangzhou has described the learning process, and changes officials made to ventilation, isolation procedures, protective garments and other measures.

Did health officials in Hong Kong seek to acquire such information in the critical days that followed February 10? Did they seek out university researchers who might have obtained information from their mainland colleagues? Were emergency grants offered to

compile a dossier on the disease? A leading university microbiologist informs me that he knows of no such inquiries or suggestions from officials at the time.

A "world-class city" like Hong Kong should have been on top of the situation, especially since its handling of the 1997 bird flu crisis won international commendation. Hong Kong had seven weeks to prepare for its first case of Sars, between the first press report on the outbreak on January 3 and Hong Kong's first Sars hospital admission in the third week of February. Since the disease was known to be highly contagious to medical workers, one would have expected biological-warfare protective suits to have been prescribed for staff and strict containment procedures for the first patient.

Instead, what happened can only be described as an unmitigated disaster. Infections of staff occurred in several hospitals. In an article in the British journal *Lancet*, two doctors at Prince of Wales Hospital describe in painful detail how the index patient, admitted on February 22, set off generations of infection that led ultimately to 156 hospital staff and family members, patients and visitors falling ill with Sars. In retrospect, there must have been massive failure in the acquisition and communication of medical data about the new disease.

Neither Kwong Wah Hospital nor the Department of Health asked the index patient – a Guangdong doctor – where he had stayed in Hong Kong. The Metropole Hotel was not identified as the nexus of infection until reports came in from Singapore and Toronto.

In late February, after two cases of suspected bird flu, epidemic-response plans were discussed at inter-departmental meetings. Officials said surveillance of all pneumonia cases had been stepped up. And yet the outbreak of Sars was not officially recognised in Hong Kong until March 12. Why?

Clearly, many errors and lapses occurred, and a formal inquiry should delve into each of them. It should not be distracted by the preferred Hong Kong remedy of throwing money at the problem, in the form of an expensive Centre for Disease Control or other fancy remedies.

Individual complacency, arrogance or incompetence should be identified and appropriate action taken. Related evils such as cronyism, reluctance to remove incompetents, packing advisory bodies or taskforces with compliant or mediocre people, and failure to involve the private sector should be considered as possible factors.

In 30 years of dealing with various government departments in Hong Kong, I have seen many similar examples of maladministration. They seem to occur in clusters in certain departments. As the Legco investigation into the blood bank revealed, several years ago, they thrive when a work culture countenances complacency and stagnation.

Perhaps among the lessons that Hong Kong must learn from the Sars experience are that government should at long last discard the remnants of the old crony/yes-man advisory system; it needs to come up with better ways of identifying and removing incompetent civil servants, and it must find more creative ways to draw upon the great wealth of knowledge and experience available in the community.

William Meacham is honorary research fellow at the Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, and was chairman of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society 1985-1996

OBSERVER



Frank Ching

Define your terms

Like all columnists, I want to be read. And the only way I know that I am being read is when I receive feedback. I have received my share of hate mail and, while it is unpleasant, it does reassure me that I am being read. The worst thing is to get no feedback at all to a column. It is as though it was never written, never existed.

And so I was happy to see a letter from James O'Neil, deputy solicitor general in the Department of Justice, commenting on my recent column on the Hong Kong government's proposal for implementing the "state secrets" provision of Article 23 of the Basic Law. Mr O'Neil must have been writing in an official capacity, since he cited his title in the letter. That being the case, the contents would have been approved by the Justice Department. That is to say, the views expressed are those not just of an individual but of the Department of Justice.

To recap, I had pointed out that the Hong Kong government has carefully avoided using the term "state secrets" in the national security bill because of the mainland's notoriously loose definition of the term. However, I said, if the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress were to issue an interpretation of Article 23, Hong Kong's efforts would be for naught because the Standing Committee would not doubt apply the mainland's concept of state secrets.

I do not see how the mainland's definition of state secrets can be avoided, once the Standing Committee is involved. Article 23 uses the term "theft of state secrets", and the special administrative region (SAR) says it is implementing Article 23, so clearly the concept of state secrets is central. No doubt, the Standing Committee would employ the mainland's definition of state secrets to interpret Article 23, even if the term itself is missing in the Hong Kong legislation.

After all, the Basic Law is a national law, while the Official Secrets Ordinance is merely a local law. It is not possible for a local law to override a national law.

If the Justice Department and Mr O'Neil think that my position is "far-fetched" and "fanciful", I wonder if it would be willing to make a binding commitment that the SAR government would never, under any

circumstances, seek an interpretation of Article 23 from the NPC Standing Committee. That is the only way to ensure that the scenario I put forth will never occur.

Mr O'Neil says the Official Secrets Ordinance was approved by the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group before it was enacted in 1997. That is to say, it was endorsed by both the British and Chinese governments.

Perhaps he means China has already endorsed the existing Official Secrets Ordinance as the implementation of the "state secrets" part of Article 23. That, if true, would be good news. But that would mean there is no need for Hong Kong to take additional action. Why are we being asked now to pass new national security legislation?

There is another problem. Article 23 says Hong Kong shall enact such legislation "on its own". Having legislation approved by Britain and China is clearly inconsistent with the idea of Hong Kong drafting such legislation "on its own".

Presumably, the bill before Legco was drafted entirely in Hong Kong by the SAR's own legal draftsmen, and has not been approved by the central government, since Hong Kong is meant to enact the legislation "on its own". Or perhaps I am mistaken. Perhaps the central government has already approved the draft.

If it has, then Hong Kong would have violated the Basic Law injunction to draft such legislation "on its own" instead of getting the central government's approval. If it has not, then it is irrelevant that the Official Secrets Ordinance in 1997 received central government approval.

If the Department of Justice wants to ensure that the national security legislation currently being considered by Legco will be treated as a piece of Hong Kong law, not subject to mainland interpretation, it has only one choice.

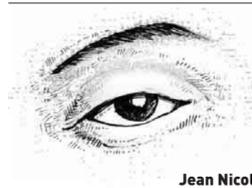
It will have to make a binding public declaration, preferably in Legco, saying the SAR government would under no circumstances either ask the Court of Final Appeal to seek an interpretation from the Standing Committee; or, as it did in 1999, ask the State Council to ask the Standing Committee for an interpretation of the relevant provision of the Basic Law.

If the SAR government is willing to make such a declaration, I am sure it would set the minds of many people at ease. If it is not, then I am afraid that the significance of letters written by officials of the Department of Justice will not amount to much more than a hill of beans.

Frank Ching is a Hong Kong-based journalist and commentator frankching1@aol.com

The pitfalls of the retirement myth

THE INNER EYE



Jean Nicol

Can two people who have held down jobs and made it through the ups and downs of a lifelong marriage enjoy a blissful retirement together? Probably not. Hence the retired-couple cliché, with its undercurrent of boredom and blame.

Retirement is as full of myth and misconception as that other post-industrial social perversion, the "happy" nuclear family, especially now that women have careers. To make matters worse, men and women do not have the same reactions or needs at this stage in their lives.

Fortunately, most baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1964) sense that their own post-career future is going to set a new pattern, and in some respects hark back to one that has been suspended for a few generations. Most do not expect ever to retire completely, surveys show, but rather to move on to a different productive activity rather than simply leisure.

Yet, while they are concerned about their future health and happiness, the vast majority make no plans beyond contributing to a pension fund. Presumably they think they will just deal with it when the time comes. This is a choice that takes its toll on marriages and increases the chances of premature mental and physical decline.

There is no longer organic community support for this major transition. That dried up when cradle-to-grave welfare became a matter for governments. Nor would today's retirees necessarily want the kind of community which existed in their grandparents' day, when there were few choices in the average person's life path. However, the alternative of finding your own way requires constructive involvement and, in the case of couples, serious negotiation.

For women, a harmonious marriage is the key to retirement bliss, according to a Cornell University study of how post-retirement employment affects quality of life. For men, it is activity.

At first, career-oriented men go through a retirement "honeymoon" in which they enjoy

the freedom from work pressures. They delight in doing all the things they have put off for years such as reading, playing sports, travelling and so on. However, if they have not anticipated their longer-term reactions and planned accordingly, depression often sets in. In this respect, jobs with less power seem to prepare a man better for retirement because his identity, ego and energy tends to be less tied up in what he does for a living.

In every couple involved in one study, the lowest morale and highest rates of depression occurred among the men who decided to retire permanently – even if they were already in semi-retirement. The highest morale and lowest rates of depression were among men who had retired from demanding careers but were re-employed by choice. Tellingly, however, this was the case especially if their wives remained at home and if the couple followed traditional gender role patterns. This was true regardless of age, income and health.

Women, on the other hand, tend to miss out on the retirement honeymoon, although in the longer term they often cope better with retirement than men because they are more able to deal with the lack of structure in their lives. Initially, however, they feel the loss of a job role and are more likely to be depressed in early retirement, particularly if their husband continues to work. Indeed, as in other areas of life, relationships play a greater part in women's lives during the retirement

transition. Women's well-being and morale are less strongly linked to work or retirement status than to the quality of their marriages. Men are the opposite. True, they report a lower sense of well-being if their marriage is full of conflict. But they are not necessarily happier if their marital satisfaction is high. In other words, researchers say, a man's employment status is more predictive of his well-being, but the quality of a woman's marriage is more indicative of hers.

Unsurprisingly, then, retirement is a challenging transition for couples and requires considerable adjustment on the part of both spouses. Couples fight more during the retirement transition period. And because men and women perceive conflict differently, this in itself can cause further strife. In other words, retirees can expect their spouse to have issues and reactions quite different from their own.

Research suggests that it helps for people to anticipate having to cope with a change of identity, a relative lack of structure and issues of territory at home. They should be developing additional interests and steadily shifting to other sources of self-esteem before they are forced to. One option many psychologists recommend is retiring in stages, by reducing working hours gradually. But even if cold turkey is your only option, mental preparation is the key. Workers benefit most from retirement when they take the time to explore their own aspirations for the future and decide on the ways they want to invest their future energy and concern.

Finally, flexibility is crucial. Do not be dead-set on playing golf, for instance, in retirement as this plan could be ruined by an injury. Diversity and balance is as important in an activity plan as it is in an investment portfolio. And do not forget, it pays to make fresh emotional investments in your marriage.

Jean Nicol is a Hong Kong-based psychologist and writer everydayspsychologist@yahoo.com