

## *Tung Chee-hwa* *Chief Executive Designate Hong Kong* *Special Administrative Region*

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**T**ung Chee-hwa, C.H. Tung, was born on May 29, 1937 in Shanghai. He is the oldest of 5 children, with one brother and three sisters. His father was a shipping clerk who married the boss's daughter. The family moved to Hong Kong in 1949 when Tung was 12. He married Betty Chiu Hong-ping in 1961.

Tung studied Mechanical Engineering in the United Kingdom. He then worked in the United States of America. This experience gave him a good mastery of English and overseas exposure. In 1969 he joined his father's shipping business and helped the company as it weathered some hard times. The family business, Orient Overseas, has expanded into insurance, property and many other interests. In October 1996 to avoid a conflict of interest, he resigned as chairman and chief executive, handing control to his brother.

As a prominent businessman, Tung was appointed by Beijing as a member of the Basic Law Consultative Committee. This gave him a say in drafting the Basic Law which will take effect on July 1, 1997. In March 1993 he was named a deputy to the Eighth Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.



His chances of becoming the first Chief Executive of the S.A.R. were considerably enhanced on January 26, 1996, when Jiang Zemin gave him a "magic handshake" and appointed him a vice-chairman of the Preparatory Committee. On October 18 he formally announced his candidacy. He spent several weeks touring all parts of the territory to

meet the people of Hong Kong. When the 400 electors of the Selection Committee voted on Wednesday, December 11, Tung had a clear lead in the first ballot. On the second ballot, he was elected with 320 votes, compared to 42 for T.L. Yang and 36 for Peter K.C. Woo, the other two major contestants. There were also 2 invalid ballots.<sup>1</sup>

Xinhua News Agency called the selection process "democratic, fair and open".<sup>2</sup> However Martin Lee and other Democrats were not impressed. Independent legislators, Emily Lau and Leung Yiu-chung were arrested along with 27 others who demonstrated outside the Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wanchai, Hong Kong, during the election. The government later decided not to press charges.

What authority will Tung have? Since the Hong Kong S.A.R. will be directly under the central government, just as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing are, he will certainly be high in the pecking order. Whether he ends up on the politburo or gets the lesser rank of state councilor is quite immaterial. What will matter is whether he in fact has more clout in Beijing than the director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, and the director of the Xinhua [New China] News Agency in Hong Kong. During the last decades of British rule, Xinhua has acted as China's de facto "ambassador" to Hong Kong.<sup>3</sup> Tung has joined the upper circle of the Chinese leadership, whose ups and down provide endless material for China watchers.

Tung is rich enough not to need frequent flier miles, but he will certainly pass through the Beijing airport often. He met with President Jiang Zemin, Premier Li Peng, and Vice-Premier Qian Qichen on December 18. He then started 1997 with a 25 1/2 hour visit on January 4-5 to see Qian and Lu Ping, the Director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office regarding the provisional legislature.<sup>4</sup> Since "One Country, Two Systems" includes "Hong Kong people running Hong Kong" and "a high degree of local autonomy," too many trips to the capital will raise questions about Tung's freedom to maneuver. But as a successful businessman, he has shown considerable autonomy and initiative throughout his career.

On Saturday, December 28, Mr. Tung announced that Anson Chan Fang On-sang agreed to stay on after July 1 as Chief Secretary. Chan is the top civil servant in Hong Kong. She adds a reassuring element of continuity to the administration of the upcoming S.A.R.

This is especially important at this time when an unknown number of top civil servants will be retiring early and/or returning to the United Kingdom. The *Sunday Morning Post* called this a “dream team” in its lead editorial.<sup>5</sup> She is a Catholic.

Earlier in Hong Kong’s colonial history, the various Public Order and Societies Ordinances were quite draconian, even if seldom invoked. Proposals to reinstate them, and to weaken the local Bill of Rights, have generated controversy and even an appeal from the US State Department to protect civil liberties after July 1.<sup>6</sup> Tung wants prosperity, economic growth and stability, and civil liberties are not at the top of his priority list.

There is a lot of planning to be done in the first half of 1997. The Provisional Legislature will inherit the offices of Legco and meet in them on July 3, after the four day holiday marking the transition. Tung and his legislators are already busy with the details ranging from the appointment of more officials to next year’s budget surplus.<sup>7</sup> As Christopher Patten is still officially in charge through June 30, some people have questioned how legal any of this is, and even the National People’s Congress is looking into this question.<sup>8</sup>

Tung Chee-hwa is not afraid of controversy. We are reminded of U.S. President Harry Truman who, half a century ago, when asked about the pressures of the White House, said, “If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.”□

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *China Daily*, Th. Dec. 12, 1992, p.2.

<sup>2</sup> *China Daily*, Fri., Dec. 13, 1996, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> “A question of authority,” by Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *South China Morning Post*, Wed., Jan. 8, 1997, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *SCMP*, Monday, Jan. 6, 1997, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Sunday Morning Post*, Dec. 29, 1996, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>6</sup> *SCMP*, Th. Jan. 23, 1997, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *SCMP*, Wed., Mar. 12, 1997, p. 1, 4.

<sup>8</sup> *SCMP*, Sat. Feb. 1, 1997.