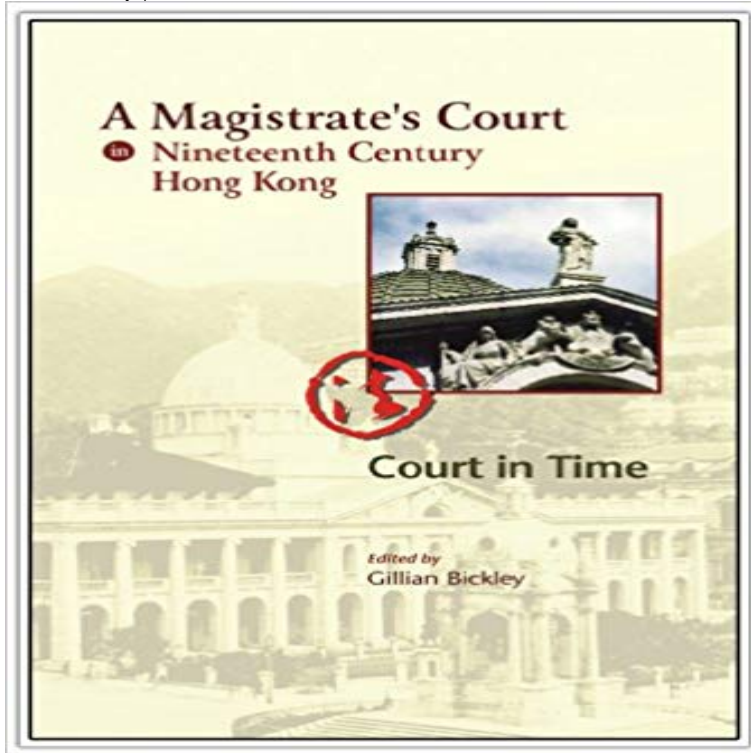


A Magistrates Court in Nineteenth Century Hong Kong: Court in Time



A Magistrates Court in Nineteenth Century Hong Kong: Court in Time offers a picture of a Hong Kong magistrates court and its frequenters in the early 1880s. It also shows, from the personal perspectives of professionals variably involved (a magistrate, a retired senior police officer, a barrister, a journalist, a socio-linguist, a social historian), some aspects of police matters as well as of the Hong Kong magistrates court in the second half of the twentieth century. Court in Time draws us into the tense and touching world of the magistrates courts at two distinct periods of time, and through this, into localities and lives we otherwise might never know and certainly never guess at. The magistrate whose court is the subject of Court in Time is British and Scottish long-term Hong Kong resident, Frederick Stewart, whose significant and admired work in education is the main subject of several scholarly articles and of a biography published in 1997. In Court in Time, that part of Frederick Stewart's work as Police Magistrate, which was reported in The China Mail, is brought forward for consideration, supplemented by information from the other daily newspaper of the time, The Hong Kong Daily Press. This provides a basis for a different focus, on Stewart's work in the Hong Kong courts, while at the same time contributing to our knowledge of Hong Kong society. These two objectives are the reason for the present publication. Reports of over seven hundred of the cases that Frederick Stewart heard during the period 26 July 1881 to 29 March 1882 have been gathered from surviving archived copies of the contemporary newspaper, The China Mail. About one hundred and twenty of these reports, relating to about one hundred cases, have been included, selected and grouped by subject with introductory essays and explanatory notes. The variety of people is considerable: sailors, soldiers,

police, teachers, men of the cloth, wives, husbands, amahs, cooks, widows, protected women, sons, adopted daughters, burglars, denizens of the domestic scene, prostitutes with their associates and clients, kidnappers and traffickers in human beings, children, students, gamblers, informers and pirates. There is variety of scene also: urban life, country life, and life at sea. In the first part of *Court in Time*, professionals and academics, distinguished in their own separate fields, with a lively interest in the history of Hong Kong and with well over a century of Hong Kong residence among them, join Stewart's biographer in contributing essays, which explore, from their individual points of view, the full set of court reports, giving a variety of historical perspectives. Some give explicit comparisons with their own, more modern, experience. Taken together, and addressing modern and general readers, their work contributes significantly to an understanding of what these court cases have to tell us. It helps us to understand both the nineteenth and present day Hong Kong social and cultural background, and the happily arcane world (for most of us) of the police and magistrates courts in Hong Kong. Behind this book lies a controversy between those who think that, in Jan Morris's words, On the whole, with many lapses and exceptions, British government in Hong Kong [was] good government, and those who believe that the early modern state had to resort to violent and exemplary punishment to demonstrate [its] monopoly of authority [Samson Chan, in an unpublished UK doctoral thesis quoted here]. In this stand-off, Bickley, a Hong Kong poet and academic of long standing, is on the whole on the pro-British side. Her lengthy introduction, however, is a masterly and impartial survey of her subject-matter. Bradley Winterton, *Taipei Times*. The contributors have written with insight and understanding . . . a most readable book. Sir T. L. Yang.

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