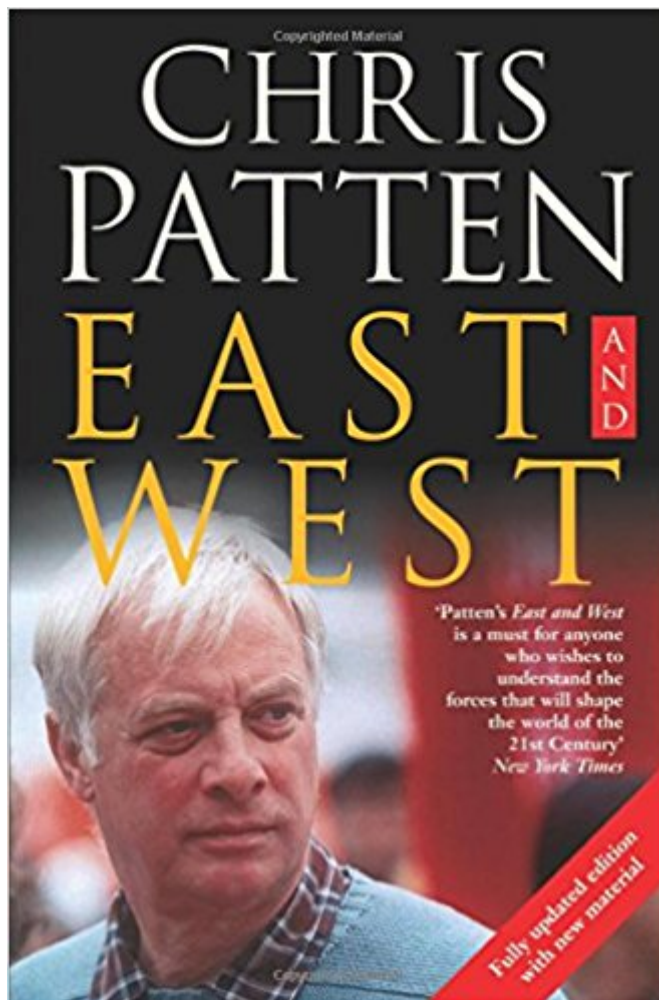


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East And West



Synopsis

In June of 1997, over a century and a half of British rule in Hong Kong came to an end. Chris Patten writes about his experiences as the last governor of the colony of Hong Kong. He explains why he adopted the stance that he did, and how he fought his battles.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Excellent!

An American friend in Beijing once said that anyone who has spent time among the Chinese eventually concocts a "grand unified theory of China." To a remarkable extent, Chris Patten didn't. Patten was the last British governor of Hong Kong, and during his five years there he gained a reputation as a combative opponent of the Chinese Communist government and as a champion of Hong Kong's nascent democracy. One might expect, therefore, that his book would be another example of the "China-bashing" so popular among those Western opinion-makers who relish a fight with Beijing. Instead, Patten offers calm, non-alarmist advice, with the wise observation that we would be better off not treating China as a special case. "The alleged uniqueness of China," he says, "blurs comprehension and mangles policy-making." He notes that one side of the how-to-deal-with-China debate is dominated by appeasement-minded "Old China Hands," while the other features hardliners who see China as "the last evil empire." Both outlooks are wrong, Patten says: "We are lured into thinking that there is a special, an exact way of dealing with China - which turns out on close examination to be one part correct and four parts mumbo-jumbo." While both the

confrontational and appeasement mindsets distort Western policy, what is even worse is the Western tendency to oscillate between the two approaches. Patten observes that "one minute we sell arms to Taiwan and stamp our feet about human-rights abuses, the next we are prepared to eat the humblest of pies and even curtail our own civil liberties (trying to segregate demonstrators, for example, lest they are seen by a visiting Chinese leader) to accommodate Chinese Communist prejudices." This gives the hard men in Beijing the opportunity to play the two sides off against each other, particularly during the ludicrous annual debate in the U.S. Senate over China's "most-favoured-nation" trade status. Patten sarcastically describes how senators bluster about China having to shape up, whether on human rights, arms proliferation, property rights or market access. The Chinese respond with a few symbolic gestures and muse about buying their new jetliners from Europe's Airbus rather than Boeing. Meanwhile, business interests furiously lobby the senators and worry publicly about losing access to the "world's biggest market." The senators eventually endorse the status quo for another year and the Chinese come away with all their cynicism about Western "values" intact. Patten recommends a different approach, tougher than the Old China Hands might like but not overtly confrontational. Simply put, he says China should be treated like any other country, held to the same standards. If China mistreats political dissidents, the West should be as critical as it was regarding the Soviet Union and South Africa. On trade, Chinese access to Western markets must be matched by openness and transparency in the Chinese economy. Sensibly, Patten recommends delinking trade from political issues so China cannot play its usual game of releasing a few dissidents in return for trade concessions. There are weaknesses in East And West, including long sections of political boilerplate and a studied unwillingness to confront the legacy of Western imperialism in China. But Patten displays admirably clear thinking on the current situation and good counsel regarding future dealings with Beijing's red mandarins.

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