

# Academics keep eye on changes

HONG KONG STANDARD

- 5 MAY 1991

ACADEMICS in Hongkong are watching the changes in the civil service with keen attention.

One of them is Dr Don McMillen of Hongkong Baptist College.

He says it is natural that the civil service is one of the first places to manipulate in any transfer of sovereignty.

"It's an information-seeking exercise," he said. "I think what Beijing is trying to do now is figure out what kind of civil servant can function and be trusted in a Hongkong environment."

He says the exchanges between civil servants in Hongkong and China, which are increasing in frequency, are educative, but wonders how much of that is educative and "how much is it that they want to run Hongkong according to their way."

McMillen says he does not think mainland civil servants are efficient and managerially effective to cope with Hongkong.

"In a functional sense it ends up being manipulative rather than educative for them."

He forecasts that there will be a searching period before the civil servants figure out what their new roles will be in the Special Administrative Region Government.

"As that new ethic is searched and identified, there will be a time of uncertainty, and there will be a chance that many of them will turn to politicking in their own ways. It may be the only way they know to make the adjustments necessary to their jobs.

"The Hongkong people in the public service are not going to be fully trusted by the Chinese, because they have been nurtured in a colonial environment. China is a bit schizo."

He says he sees China taking a great interest in the public sector in Hongkong as 1997 approaches.

Lecturer Jane C Y Lee of the Department of Public and Social Administration at City Polytechnic of Hongkong says senior civil servants have an unhelpful sense of superiority.

"They tend to be very defensive if you challenge them."

But she says important business people tend to have access to information that the average citizen does not.

She says they would also handle your request very well if you were a department head.

"But if you are just a district board member, you go to the information counter, and sorry, it's five o'clock, come back tomorrow morning."

A characteristic of Hongkong, she says, is the lack of separation between the Executive and the Legislative councils, with members overlapping.

She argues that the political culture of the Hongkong Chinese in the civil service is oriented towards a sense of apathy, and non-involvement in politics.

Also, in Hongkong politics, there is no party system and no politics in the conventional sense.

"The whole ethics of the civil service should change from the top to the lowest level," she says.