A Chinese Melting Pot: Original People and Immigrants in Hong Kong’s First ‘New Town’ traces the transformation of Tsuen Wan from a poor and marginal district of agricultural villages, culturally distinctive in that all were Hakka. Like others present in the New Territories in 1898, they enjoyed special privileges under British colonialism as ‘original inhabitants’. This study is focused, in part, on one of their villages: its history, lineages, relationships among and through women, and their songs and laments. In the aftermath of the Japanese occupation and revolution in China, the town, with its daily coastal market, rapidly grew into a major industrial area and assumed an intense, if chaotic, urban form. Its industries attracted enormous numbers of immigrants from China, who created a large variety of voluntary associations to ease their adaptation to the new environment, while the original inhabitants, as property owners, benefited financially from the immigrants’ need for housing, and politically from continuing government support. In the 1980s, changes in economic policies in China led to Tsuen Wan’s present post-industrial form. The original inhabitants remain as a small fragment of the population, their villages intact, although re-sited away from the town centre as part of greatly increased government intervention in creating a planned ‘new town’. Their language and traditions are disappearing as they, like the immigrants, are absorbed into the wider Hong Kong lifestyle.
This book examines the often overlooked role of gossip and rumor in creating power in small Melanesian communities. The Kwanga of the East Sepik Province of Papua, New Guinea think that malicious gossip is almost as dangerous as sorcery, and spend hours in community meetings, looking into rumors about sorcery, adultery, and other sources of trouble. To understand how “talk” can create and ultimately destroy the position of Melanesian leaders, the book follows discussions of particular situations over time, and suggests that gossip and rumor are just as central to shaping and shifting power relations as are the public meetings which are more often studied. Kwanga community leaders build reputations by spreading rumors and dropping hints that they are confidants of sorcerers, but ultimately, the same men who build reputations through gossip and innuendo find themselves victimized in turn by malicious gossip. The book suggests that our understanding of both Melanesian leadership and the power of words to construct social reality is greatly enhanced by attention to gossip and rumor: words are dangerous weapons, which can have consequences the original speaker neither anticipated nor desired.

The Decline of Community and the Roles of Big-men
Mattison Mines

in Public Faces, Private Voices: Community and Individuality in South India
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This chapter shows how the forces that wed neighborhood and community have determined the organization and character of George Town and other parts of Madras City. It describes the evolution of George Town since the nineteenth century lawsuits and describes the major changes in community leadership associated with changes in the meaning of civic individuality. These include the period of gumbuhal, the period of a looser form of leadership, and the decline in the community role of “big men.”

Gossip and Politics
Karen J. Brison

in Just Talk: Gossip, Meetings, and Power in a Papua New Guinea Village
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This chapter argues that rumors reflect a situation in which unsubstantiated stories can have far-reaching consequences socially and in politics. In Kwanga villages, and in small, relatively egalitarian communities everywhere, no one can automatically command respect or obedience, and autocratic attitudes tend to arouse resentment. Consequently, people try to prompt others toward certain conclusions and courses of action without seeming to do so, by casting interpretations of recent events in public meetings or in private conversations. They suggest that their rivals are lazy and ignorant, or that they are involved in nefarious secret plots. In this way, individuals try to influence others but avoid the appearance of ordering them around. It has been clear since Bronisław Malinowski's work on the Trobriand Islands that there is a close link between sorcery, magic, and leadership in many areas of lowland and insular Melanesia.

**Leadership, Authority, and “Egalitarianism”**

Karen J. Brison

in Just Talk: Gossip, Meetings, and Power in a Papua New Guinea Village

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This chapter examines principles of hierarchy and mechanisms of equality in Kwanga society, and also reexamines some of the literature on leadership in Melanesia. The relative “egalitarianism” of Melanesian societies is often noted, but the concept is ambiguous and takes on different meaning in different contexts. Leadership achieved through demonstration of superiority had intrinsic constraints and was unlikely to last even for an individual's lifetime. Expanding his dominance involved the big-man in increasingly large prestations and was likely to alienate his supporters, whose harvests he tapped; this also became increasingly difficult as his physical strength waned with age. It was only where an ambitious individual “came to power” by attaining an “office” of legitimate leadership with associated sanctions, that power could be consolidated over time and space.
Some 91 leaders, both original inhabitants and immigrants, were interviewed using a standard questionnaire over a period of nine months in 1969. There were clear differences between village-based leaders and those representing immigrant groups. The gulf between the two kinds of leaders resulted from a colonial policy of granting political access to village representatives and their Rural Committee, which continued in a context that was industrial and much changed from the immediate post-war world when the system of access to government had been created. The gulf between the two populations suggested a need for political change. The ability to mobilize both groups and cooperate for political action was marked by a dispute and its resolution when changes were made to ferry schedules from Hong Kong to Tsuen Wan.

Conclusion

Mary Margaret Steedly

The conclusion, “The Sense of an Ending,” brings the historical arc of this story to a stopping point, before the end of the struggle, with a monologue on the nature of leadership and responsibility by Eben Hezer Sinuraya. This leads to further reflections on subsequent events leading up to and beyond the 1998 Reformasi movement that led to the fall of General Suharto’s thirty-year New Order regime.