

the Chinese press was lifted. Mixed marriages were less frowned upon and more local Chinese were recruited into the government apparatus. The result was a much more fluid society. Certainly, British institutions underpinned a general and very considerable rise in prosperity. Yet by the end, the British themselves hardly mattered at all.

Much of the broader history, such as the ways in which Hong Kong mattered to Britain, Japan and, not least, those fighting for China's independence, has been recounted elsewhere, though perhaps not with Mr Snow's talent for the telling detail or anecdote. Where he comes in, to its own, is in his use of Japanese and Chinese as well as British sources, which offer a much more nuanced picture than has appeared before in English of life among Hong Kong's different communities before and during the Japanese occupation.

Reaction to the Japanese was ambivalent; this was a place, after all, whose businessmen had petitioned earlier in the century for the adoption of the yen. For some, such as triad groups and other vigilantes, the Japanese coming was a boon. For the colony's 5,000-odd Indians also, the invasion meant an abrupt elevation in their social status, at least at the beginning. Indians believed Japanese assurances of support for their own cause of independence, though that was not to last.

For the great mass of the Chinese population, the author makes clear, life during the occupation was far more brutal even than for the western internees in the Stanley concentration camp. In the orgy that followed victory, Japanese soldiers murdered and pillaged; an estimated 10,000 women were raped. Very soon, and despite heroic kindnesses of some individual Japanese, Hong Kong came to be regarded simply as a depot for refuelling an imperial war machine that was fast running out of steam. Many Hong Kong Chinese starved, if they were not first bayoneted or beaten to death.

After the war, most evidence of the Japanese occupation was scrubbed out. Those born to rape victims in September and October 1942 were quietly absorbed into the local population. The chief reminders today of the Japanese are the elegant improvements to Government House undertaken by Governor Isogai, and the vicious dogs in Hong Kong's country parks, descendants of the Japanese army masdoffs let out as their masters fled.

Largely forgotten, too, is the collaboration of the local, mainly Eurasian, business elite with the invading Japanese. Was there much to blame them for? Some of the British thought so. Yet what "the gentry", as Mr Snow calls them, wanted was to get back to running their businesses—and to do their best to protect Hong Kong's interests. During the war, the gentry did much

to help the starving Chinese, founding Hong Kong's first central welfare agency, for instance, and setting up a company to supply subsidised rice. Ordinary folk could not have been helped without collaboration with the Japanese. Britain's new administrators of Hong Kong swept aside the charges of treason that were levelled against the gentry, and co-opted them back into colonial structures.

Echoes of that decision could still be heard half a century later. Chris Patten and his outgoing administration used to express contempt for those co-opted gentry, often the children of the post-war elite, deemed to be trading too readily to Beijing. If this was no longer treason, the carpenter said loudly enough to be heard by those they were criticising, it was at least disloyalty. Yet one thing the colonial administrators those not always to understand was the sentiment, best summed up by one senior Hong Kong Chinese official, who told *The Economist* at the time: "Let's face it, our loyalty has never been to the Queen. But it has been to Hong Kong." ■

Piano manufacturers

Making the sound of music

A tale of three piano makers

MUSIC lovers in Berlin and New York have a choice of recitals this month as Steinway, Blüthner and Bechstein—three of the world's five top piano makers—celebrate their 150th anniversaries.

Since 1853, artists have praised their instruments. Claude Debussy remarked that piano music should only be written for Bechsteins. For Wilhelm Furtwängler, Blüthner was best. "Blüthner pianos can really sing, which is the most wonderful thing you can say about a piano," Martha Argerich, an Argentinian-born artist, believes a Steinway sometimes plays better than the pianist—"a marvellous surprise".

In business terms, the three fared very differently. Blüthner's factory near Leipzig was destroyed during an air raid in 1943. The Russian occupying forces allowed the family to rebuild it after the second world war, and the Blüthners retained a quarter of the company until 1972 when it was put under state control with Ingbert Blüthner-Haessler staying on as the factory manager. After 1989, the family bought back the company, which is now managed by Mr Blüthner-Haessler and his two sons.

Helene Bechstein, one of that manufacturer's co-owners, was a great supporter of the Nazis, which is why part of the Bechstein firm was confiscated during the de-

nazification of corporate Germany at the end of the war. The family eventually sold out completely, but Bechstein's decline could not be halted and a decade ago it had to be rescued from bankruptcy by the city of Berlin. Only in the past ten years has Bechstein begun to regain some of its early strength: last year 3,000 new Bechsteins were built, compared with just 650 in 1993.

Meanwhile, Steinway thrived in America, establishing a near-monopoly in concert grands. Most attribute Steinway's success to clever marketing as well as to the quality of its pianos. It takes about a year to build a Steinway from 12,000 components and eight different kinds of wood including maple, birch, spruce and poplar. Each year Steinway's factories in Astoria, New York, and Hamburg, Germany, produce about 3,000 grand pianos—priced at up to \$100,000 and 1,500 uprights, roughly the same production rate as a century ago.

Steinway is also skilful at marrying pianists to the brand, and there is an official roster of about 2,300 "Steinway artists", from Alfred Brendel to Billy Joel. Musicians must own a Steinway to become a member of the club; in return, the nearest local salesroom will provide a piano wherever they are performing.

Even so, Steinway's top spot is hotly contested. Asian pianos have always been cheaper; now their quality is improving fast. And then there is Fazioli, a tiny piano maker founded in 1978 in the northern Italian town of Sialice. The Fazioli factory is close to the cradle of the piano. In Padua, not far away, an instrument builder called Bartolomeo Cristofori invented the piano 300 years ago. Steinway, Blüthner and Bechstein may not agree, but some artists believe that Fazioli now makes the best pianos in the world. ■

