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Hong Kong more miserable than many of its neighbours, index shows

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Hong Kong, billed as Asia's World City, is more miserable than many other places in the region - including mainland China - according to an American think tank. But it is still one of the least miserable places on earth, research by the libertarian Cato Institute found.

A Hong Kong economist laughed off the findings, saying the study relied too heavily on economic rather than social indicators such as freedom and democracy.

City University economics professor Dr Li Kui-wai said it was too simplistic to link misery with economic performance.

"The index takes into account mainly economic indicators," Li said. "But we should not overlook other social factors such as freedoms and democracy when we judge if a place is miserable or not."

On the index, the higher the rating, the greater the misery.

Researchers gave Hong Kong a rating of 10.1, making it less miserable than 75 other surveyed regions, but more so than mainland China, whose 7.9 rating put it in 83rd place.

Least miserable of the 90 nations and territories ranked was Japan (5.41), followed by Uzbekistan (5.7) and then Taiwan (6.13) in 88th place.

Worst off was Venezuela, with a rating of 79.4.

Factors taken into account in assessing the misery score included the rates of joblessness, lending and inflation, and growth in gross domestic product.

The researchers attributed Hong Kong's misery to the high cost of borrowing, while the mainland's annual GDP growth, at 7.7 per cent last year, had made it a more cheerful place.

"For most people, quality of life is important," index researcher Steve Hanke, a professor of applied economics at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland, said.

"[They] prefer lower inflation rates, lower unemployment rates, lower lending rates and higher GDP per capita."

High inflation was cited as the big problems for Venezuela and the next most miserable country, Iran. Serbia and Argentina also ranked poorly.

Even protest-wracked Thailand, with 6.83, was ranked as more cheerful than Hong Kong. Other cheerier Asian nations included Singapore (6.38), South Korea (6.77) and Malaysia (7.88).

This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as A leading position HK takes with a heavy heart