

## Book Reviews

***Hong Kong 20 Years after the Handover: Emerging Social and Institutional Fractures after 1997.*** Edited by Fong Chi-hang Brian and Lui Tai-lok. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 347 pp. Hardcover. ISBN: 9783319513720.

Reviewed by Kwong Ying-ho

In the two decades since Hong Kong's Handover in 1997, the implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle reflects ups and downs in China–Hong Kong relations. In the first five years (1997–2002), Beijing adopted a policy of non-intervention in Hong Kong affairs. But the 2003 July 1<sup>st</sup> protest against the proposed national security law triggered a change in policy direction. Since then, Beijing has embarked on assimilation policies so as to speed up economic and social integration and incorporated state-building nationalism in policies on local affairs. Measures such as the Closed Economic Partnership Arrangement and the Individual Visit Scheme were initially welcome for their economic benefits. Later in 2008, statistics showed that the Beijing Olympics brought about a peak in Hong Kong people's positive attitude toward the central government and recognition of the Chinese national identity. However, as time passed, Hongkongers became skeptical of the impacts of increased incorporation strategies as a way to subject Hong Kong to greater control over the political, economic and ideological realms. In response, Beijing's assimilation strategies have resulted in various resistance movements in Hong Kong. How can we understand such a trajectory in Hong Kong politics—from harmony to confrontation—from a macroscopic and historical perspective? What factors helped shape Hong Kong's contentious politics in recent years? At the Handover's twentieth anniversary, Brian C. H. Fong and Lui Tai-lok's edited volume is a timely and extensive account of how center–local conflicts give rise to collective mobilization in post-1997 Hong Kong. Experienced researchers will find the book enlightening, whereas new readers of Hong Kong politics will find it a comprehensive introductory text.

Divided into three parts, the book concisely explains Hong Kong's contentious politics on three major fronts, namely institutional, social, and cultural frictions. The first part (Chapters 1–5) focuses on the constitutional and institutional conflicts, which can be fundamentally attributed to controversies on the constitutional design of the HKSAR government. Importantly, these conflicts are not only confined to the issue of democratic reform, but also extend to the weak cohesion among the governing elites and parties. Poon Kit (Chapter 1) summarizes that

Hong Kong's political confrontation was a clash between the central government, which insisted on stricter control on the Chief Executive Election, and the city's opposition, who believed in and fought for free and competitive elections. Ma Ngok (Chapter 2) re-examines the executive-led system and argues that its fragmented nature not only concerns the lack of popular election on the Chief Executive, but also the lack of a reliable governing party for engineering political support. Brian C. H. Fong (Chapter 3) extends Ma's argument and further contends that the disconnection between the executive and the legislature is the result of Beijing's resistance to the development of party politics, which leads to the uneasy partnership between the non-partisan Chief Executive and pro-government parties. Lam Wai-man (Chapter 4) explains the changing features of political activism by highlighting the rise of youth activism, localism and radicalism. Alex Chan Wo-shun (Chapter 5) adopts the repeated failures of healthcare reforms as case studies to demonstrate the weak governing capacity of the HKSAR government to negotiate with major policy stakeholders.

But contentious politics in Hong Kong is not only political in nature. The chapters in Part II (Chapters 6–9) point out that economic inequality and social resources (re)distribution are issues that also pertain to rising social hostilities. Lee Kim-ming, Benny To Ho-pong and Yu Kar-ming (Chapter 6) explore the financialization of public services and point out that public housing and the retirement scheme are two fundamental reasons for the rise of economic inequality, especially among the middle class in the younger generation. Chan Chi-kit and David Ho Wai-lun (Chapter 7) examine social inequality through analyzing statistical data in Hong Kong's employment structure and conclude that the upper echelon of the job market is relatively secure compared to the working class even in the midst of global and regional financial crises. Yau Tze-ken (Chapter 8) discusses how Hong Kong's housing shortage and housing problems, which are some of the main social conflicts in the city, are caused by the neoliberal-minded HKSAR government. Kwan Chi-kin and Ernest Chui Wing-tak (Chapter 9) examine the relations between the welfare sector and the HKSAR government and argue that co-financing the welfare model is the source of tensions for even community service-providers.

The third and final part of the book (Chapters 10–13) concentrates on central–local tensions and identity struggles, which highlight the various challenges and problems surrounding China–Hong Kong relations. Ray Yep (Chapter 10) traces the evolution of Hong Kong autonomy under the British colonial era and draws lessons about the autonomous status of current Hong Kong by comparing the different strategies and positions between Britain and China. Peter T. Y. Cheung (Chapter 11) reviews the growing confrontational relations between China and Hong Kong when Beijing resorted to adopting the “incorporation” policy. Chan Chi-kit (Chapter 12) analyzes survey data

on Hongkongers' ambivalence towards China as their nation and "top-down" state-building nationalism. Lui Tai-lok (Chapter 13) examines the changing nature of employment in Hong Kong and argues that due to China's maturing economic system, talented young people of Hong Kong working in mainland China can no longer gain the same level of economic benefits as the previous generation who went north in the 1980s and 1990s. Tensions inevitably exist when local political and economic leaders are insistent in encouraging Hong Kong talent to work in China.

A notable strength of this volume is the attempt to offer more innovative and first-hand research data on tensions in Hong Kong. Some remarkable examples are C. H. Brian Fong's (Chapter 3) and Chan Chi-kit's (Chapter 12) chapters. Fong's chapter importantly explores the legislative success rates in the HKSAR by comparing the administration of Tung Chee-hwa, Donald Tsang and Leung Chun-ying, demonstrating a growing disconnection between the executive and legislative branch (56–57). Such empirical figures provide evidence to substantiate existing arguments on the dysfunction of the executive authority. In Chan's chapter, content analysis and first-hand interviews are adopted to analyze discourse in local newspapers, including pro-democratic and pro-government ones, on the "Chinese benevolence policy." The findings provide an innovative insight to consolidate the argument that "economic integration" was originally welcome for their economic benefits, but the prolonged competition of social resources between Hongkongers and Mainlanders brought a series of rifts among them. The aggravated conflicts further result in the rise of sub-national Hong Kong identity against the national Chinese one.

In addition, the unique merit of this collection of chapters lies in the editors' and authors' novel interpretations and reinterpretations of Hong Kong contentious politics within a comprehensive framework. While constitutional and institutional conflicts as well as central–local tensions have been widely reported and explored by international media and scholars, social and economic fractures (Part II) are not yet abundantly discussed in international academic research. As Fong and Lui ask, "post-1997 Hong Kong has witnessed growing social tensions and conflicts over questions that have long been unduly neglected – are ordinary people benefitting from the current state of socio-economic development?" (xxii). Throughout this volume, the answer is resoundingly negative. Economic inequalities brought from the financialization of public services (Chapter 6), economic cycle (Chapter 7) and housing policies (Chapter 8) are always important concerns exposed by news reports, and they are all significant topics that deserve academic exploration in order to comprehend the underlying source of conflicts. In particular, the state–business co-financing model for the non-profit sector (Chapter 9) has been a significant concern among the social service sector, but academic scholarship seldom touches on these

popular debates. This book thus expands available research directions and is an essential reference work for those interested in understanding Hong Kong's contentious politics through comprehensive perspectives.

As for constitutional, institutional, and center–local fronts, this edited volume makes an important attempt in redefining Hong Kong political studies from “democratization” to “undemocratic autonomist.” Existing literature has long placed Hong Kong politics in the field of democratization for examining its undemocratic political systems, such as in terms of the Chief Executive election and Legislative Council election. As pointed out by Fong and Lui in the epilogue,

In post-Umbrella Movement era, there are even signs that the opposition movements in Hong Kong are extending from counter-mobilizations aimed at defending against Beijing intervention into more organized campaigns in pursuit of self-determination and territorial secession. These growing conflicts point to the tensions between an authoritarian central government and the supposedly highly autonomous Special Administration Region. (342)

The most important contribution of this book, then, is to emphasize that Hong Kong's undemocratic political system is only one indicator of the concept of autonomy. To put it differently, given the undemocratic political system, Hong Kong politics should be recalibrated to an understanding of “undemocratic autonomist” henceforth. The actual practice of “One Country, Two Systems” points to a need to extend the scope of study, and for Hong Kong, the term should not only be limited to political reform, but should also encompass decisions of economic development, cultural and education policies, and even rights of self-determination. It is with this understanding that Fong and Lui conclude with this remark: “how to define the HKSAR's autonomy will probably become the most important item on Hong Kong's political agenda in the coming years” (342).

***Boys' Love, Cosplay, and Androgynous Idols: Queer Fan Cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.*** Edited by Jamie Zhao Jing, Yang Ling and Maud Lavin. Hong Kong: HKU Press, 2017. 249 pp. Hardcover. ISBN: 9789888390809.

Reviewed by Chris Chien

Though the field of queer Asian fan studies is steadily growing, much of this existing work appears only as sections within larger queer ethnographies or analyses of specific queer cultural production. This was a sign that queer fan studies methods and research had become