

Conjecturing Hong Kong's Future: Lam Hang-chi's Editorials from the Hong Kong Economic Journal, 1975–1984. By Lam Hang Chi. Edited and translated by J. S. Kung. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2018. 500pp. Hardcover. ISBN: 9789629968373

Reviewed by Ng Meng-hin

Although China and Britain had their “tacit consent” to exclude representatives from Hong Kong from the Handover negotiation process in the 1980s, ruling out a so-called “three-legged stool” scenario, such exclusion did not stop numerous local prediction of the city’s future from emerging. Lam Hang-chi’s *Conjecturing Hong Kong Future*, a collection of his editorials from the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* from 1975 to 1984, provides a consistent account with a comprehensive temporal scope that encompasses a critical period in which China was formulating its Hong Kong policy and the British were preparing their retreat. Originally published in Chinese in 1984, this volume is translated by his daughter, J. S. Lam, so as to provide English-speaking readers a way to understand Hong Kong through Lam Hang-chi’s lens: As the founder of one of the major professional-oriented newspaper, Lam witnessed in the 1980s how Hong Kong came to embrace its political fate in times of uncertainty.

Among the numerous predictions for Hong Kong’s future, Lam’s empirical concern was to preserve Hong Kong’s “status quo” (xviii), as he wrote in the book’s introduction. By status quo, Lam did not mean the continuation of British colonization, given the expiration of the New Territories’ lease in 1997. Instead, Lam’s writing explores ways to sustain the existing economic model of Hong Kong with minimal political turbulence, and is distinctive from other contemporary accounts that discussed different political initiatives and their leverage on resisting the imminent Chinese retrocession (such as democratization or various “New Hong Kong” projects which sought to rebuild a new Hong Kong elsewhere). In this sense, Lam’s stance could be considered a liberal “pro-British establishment” one, which regarded economic utility the key to Hong Kong’s survival.

In his editorials in the late 1970s, Lam predicted that Hong Kong’s irreplaceable economic position could keep off China’s claim of sovereignty since China benefited from the situation. This was based on his view that Hong Kong was an important source of China’s foreign exchange given the country’s economic reform and the city’s role as a major trading partner, as seen in his editorial on May 2, 1975 (2). In the meantime, Lam also realized that whether Hong Kong’s economic value could successfully become a bargaining chip for its political future depended on the unpredictable Chinese political climate (16; May 5, 1976). In case China decided to take back Hong Kong, Lam proposed

several solutions in his writings, including forming a transitional government under British administration (19; June 21-25, 1976), merging the neighboring Shenzhen Special Economic Zone with New Territories, or signing a lease extension (67; September 14, 1979). Whatever the scenario, Lam was adamant that Hong Kong's stability could only be ensured if it could prove itself "useful"—and even then, Hong Kong would suffer from a gloomy future if China's policy on Hong Kong was unclear and ambiguous (68; May 21, 1979).

The question of Hong Kong was still not on the agenda even as Britain and China entered a so-called honeymoon period for their diplomatic relationship in the early 1980s, the result of several meetings between Chinese and British officials and the commencement of China's economic reform. Lam's editorials in this period recorded various local events that illustrated the uncertainty of Hong Kong's future, including a 1980 proposal of the district system that hinted at the preparation for an autonomous Hong Kong government (92; June 10, 1980) and the significant outflow of capital in the following year (136; April 10, 1981). Witnessing such changes in Hong Kong, Lam on the one hand considered China's denial of the legitimacy of the New Territories lease detrimental to both China and Hong Kong (124; March 25–April 7, 1981). On the other hand, local political reform could provoke turbulence and incite instability in Hong Kong, which in the long run might be destructive to the economy—pivotal to the city's future survival. In Lam's view, Hong Kong could continue to be "useful" to China only when it serves the interests of both Britain and China, and when China also acknowledges Hong Kong's advantage under British rule (125 & 147; March 25–April 7, July 14 1981).

The breakthrough of the Hong Kong question in 1982 when China and Britain officially began their negotiation triggered another wave of conjecture on Hong Kong's future. Although public opinion in Hong Kong preferred the status quo of continued British administration after 1997, the passing of the British Nationality Act in 1981—which categorized Hong Kong citizens as British National Overseas without the right to abide in the UK—together with the amendment of Article 31 of the Chinese Constitution concerning the establishment of Special Administrative Region (SAR) hinted Hong Kong's fate. To Lam, these respective incidents indicated that Britain was prepared to abandon Hong Kong people, and China had already formulated its future political arrangement for Hong Kong. Later, China announced that it would reclaim Hong Kong's sovereignty and proposed the idea of *gangren zhigang*, or "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong." Lam however did not perceive such idea as a practical one to maintain the status quo, since he felt that Chinese intervention would be inexorable. Rather, he believed that a free society that retains English law and takes care of Chinese interest was Hong Kong's ideal future (167; February 17, 1982), and only when Britain and China cooperated could a political

solution be found that would uphold such ideal and allow Hong Kong to serve both sides' interests. However, he was against the idea that Hong Kong people should take part in this process, since he believed that the idea of democratization was something Hong Kong could not afford, and that democracy would both ruin Hong Kong's rule of law and freedom and provoke China at the same time (188–89; July 22, 1982).

The confidentiality of the negotiation process, accompanied with the promotion of the “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” idea concept by the Xinhua News Agency (the *de facto* Chinese representative in Hong Kong), had led to a certain shift in public opinion in Hong Kong to support the idea of a transfer of sovereignty to China. Lam worried that such Chinese United Front tactics would produce an illusion to Hong Kong people; for instance on May 16, 1983, he criticized the “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” concept in how the reclamation of sovereignty threatened Hong Kong's prosperity and the system could not remain unchanged (260).

Eventually, the future of Hong Kong was settled in 1984, and Hong Kong people changed their preference from sustaining British administration to pursuing democratic reform in the transitional period in order to weave their “safety net” after 1997. Witnessing this sudden turn in the negotiation, Lam advocated local mobilization to resist this imposed decision. On February 6–7, 1984, he called on the unofficial Chinese councilors of the Executive Council to resign as a gesture in order to represent the interest of Hong Kong people (337). In the following month on March 20, he also appealed to Hong Kong people to voice their own opinion (350). After Britain announced Hong Kong's post-1997 arrangement in May, Lam suggested ways for Hong Kong people to express disapproval, including emigration (370; May 2–4, 1984) or fighting for a written, binding document for the Special Administrative Region (374; May 7, 1984). He also envisaged potential meddling from the Chinese side both during the transitional period and after the 1997 Handover. Though pessimistic on Hong Kong's future, Lam nevertheless concluded in the preface of this book's Chinese version that, Hong Kong's status quo could only be safeguarded through Hong Kong people's collective effort to preserve Hong Kong's value.

The empirical implication of Lam's writing lies not in whether his conjecture is “correct” or “wrong,” but in how Hong Kong people located and understood themselves and their city in times of uncertainty. The book is not a retrospective reconstruction of history, but a contemporaneous account of how Hong Kong people's subjective experience resonated with the political unpredictability presented in front of them. In historical sociology's term, Lam's editorials reflected how Hong Kong people's agency were shaped by the time-varying political structure. Although the exclusion of Hong Kong representatives from the negotiation indicated the inability of Hong Kong people to actually influence the political decision, it was this

exclusion that created a new sense of agency among Hong Kong people. In other words, it was the transformation of Hong Kong people's political attitude, and not their action, that structured the political system. Both Britain and China had to consider Hong Kong people's collective will, which directly shaped the framework of the SAR. In this sense, Lam's editorial is valuable in the sense that it recorded, and participated in, the making of contemporary Hong Kong history.

Although Lam's writing may not be considered academic or "theorized" in a strict sense, his analysis nevertheless touches upon several critical issues vital to Hong Kong studies, from Britain's legacy in contemporary Hong Kong, China–Hong Kong relations, to Hong Kong people's political attitude. The publication of this collection in 2018 makes it a timely read, when political uncertainty is emerging again in this city. In addition to covering the period that was the direct cause to Hong Kong's recent concern, Lam's political stance as a pro-local, liberal yet conservative commentator interestingly resembles some localist perspectives today, and it is in this potential connection with what is going on in Hong Kong in the present that lies the empirical implication of his writing three decades ago.

Hong Kong and Bollywood: Globalization of Asian Cinemas.

Edited by Lee Tse-hei Joseph and Satish Kolluri. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016. 300 pp. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781349949311.

Reviewed by Romi Jain

This edited volume powerfully captures the dynamics of Asia's "cinematic giants"—the Hong Kong film industry and Bollywood—in the 21st century in terms of styles, norms, themes and practices. The editors, Joseph Lee Tse-hei and Satish Kolluri, set the ball rolling in the first chapter by situating both cinemas as "new cultural forces" in the global cinematic zone, following which a stream of analyses and observations emerges with the overarching themes of politics, crisis, and aesthetics. Interestingly, by bringing together an array of international scholars from multiple disciplines such as history, communication studies, sociology, and management, this 15-chaptered book is the first of its kind to place the two industries in a mutual dialogic mode, representing the "broad analytical categories of urban cinema" (1).

The curtain lifts up with tracing the evolution and growth of Bollywood lyrics from the pre-independence era to the post-independence period. To those who have ever sung or murmured these songs might experience a nostalgic whiff. It may be noted that Ali Mir and Raza Mir concede that the movies, referenced in Chapter 2, are not necessarily representative of distinct periods. Nevertheless, their