

people in Hong Kong lived in poverty,” yet the “government’s spending on social services has declined from 70% to about 50% of total expenditure—especially on housing and education” (319). It is important to remember that the paltry amount of funding for social services, especially housing, in the colonial days was a major factor causing the high rates of morbidity and mortality as well as deep social malaise. Hopefully, history is not going to repeat itself.

Hong Kong Popular Culture: Worlding Film, Television, and Pop Music. By Klavier J. Wang. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. XXI, 523 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 978-981-13-8817-0.

Reviewed by Hercules Chu Kok-yin

The culture of Hong Kong was famous worldwide for its unique mixture of different elements, such as using mass media to promote Kung Fu to the world. However, previous analyses of Hong Kong culture mainly focused on individual industries or sectors without discussing them in tandem or holistically. Klavier J. Wang’s book ambitiously draws out the core features of Hong Kong culture while giving readers spectacular insight into the local community. The book provides a comprehensive overview of the development of Hong Kong popular culture and the reasons for its rise to become one of the most influential cultures in the Asia-Pacific region and among Chinese communities around the world.

In this book, the author discusses three aspects or industries of Hong Kong popular culture: Film, Television, and Pop Music. In each, she discusses how each of these aspects grew and interacted with the world, while offering thoughts on their future development under the influence of the Sino-sphere. Wang draws on major companies in each industry to discuss how they contributed to the birth and growth of Hong Kong popular culture. Particularly valuable are several extensive interviews that show how “cultures” were created by certain visionaries who then helped promote Hong Kong to the world. While it might have been difficult for Hong Kong to go beyond the Chinese influence due to its geographical location, Hong Kong culture did spread to the world successfully thanks to the work of many people and industries. The book shows us new insight into Hong Kong studies, especially the revival of Hong Kong’s culture.

The chapters on Hong Kong’s film industry show that Hong Kong films benefited from the Southeast Asian market and the larger diasporic

Chinese communities. Due to political changes in mainland China, Hong Kong replaced Shanghai and became an international financial and trading center in the Asia-Pacific region. Entrepreneurs such as the Shaw brothers were willing to invest in Hong Kong's film industry. This helped the industry grow consistently to its biggest size in the 1980s with a "New Wave" of Hong Kong films driven by Hong Kong-born film directors and workers. However, the industry's growth became weaker with China's economic reform and Open Door policy. Nonetheless, Hong Kong films continued the "worlding" approach: they export Cantonese opera to Cuba and import Southeast Asian cultures into Hong Kong films.

Continuing with the ideas of "making" and "worlding" developed in the chapters on the film industry, the author considers contributions from mass media and the government when it comes to television. She first starts with the radio industry, which preceded the growth of the television industry. Different from the market-oriented film and pop music industries, the government was more willing to engage with television to improve its governance. Rediffusion (later Asia Television Limited, ATV) and Television Broadcast Limited (TVB) demonstrated different methods towards market development, with TVB being more successful over the years and able to monopolize the market eventually. However, recent resentment towards this monopolization of TVB also reveals the frustrations of Hongkongers towards a lack of choices. This lack of choices was also TVB's gift in its ability to "world" Hong Kong's television, as it was able to fill a leisure gap for overseas Chinese communities in the twentieth century. This significant advantage, however, diminishes with the invasion of foreign broadcasting services and the internet—the fact that broadcasting is considered public service in Hong Kong may have contributed to TVB's lack of flexibility. However, the government's support for the television industry seems limited due to its neoliberalist economic ideas, restricting the spreading of Hong Kong television to within the Chinese market.

This idea of the standstill also applied to the pop music industry. Hong Kong's pop music industry was one of the most admirable. Many record companies, such as Polygram, Universal Music, Rock Records, and others, set up their offices in Hong Kong and have made many stars since the 1970s, such as Sam Hui, Alan Tam, Leslie Cheung, and Anita Mui. As the industry climaxed with the Heavenly Kings and Queens in the 1990s, a turning point was brought to the industry as owners of the record companies began to explore their business in mainland China, leading to an industry decline until a recent rebirth in the 2020s. Wang also highlights that in its heyday, Hong Kong's pop music was able to absorb

influences from other countries and regions, such as Japan, South Korea, Southeast Asia, and so on. This is one of the few academic studies that focuses on the worldwide coverage of Hong Kong's pop music.

The big question, of course, is how we can revive Hong Kong culture, something that has given pleasure to not only Hongkongers but many Chinese people around the world. Wang asks many stakeholders this question, and many agree that Hong Kong still owns certain advantages, such as internationalization and market strength, but many also say that the government needs to improve on its policies and the industry needs to improve on public engagement and technological advancement.

Overall, Wang's book offers encyclopedic perspectives on Hong Kong's popular culture and opens the door to adopting different methodologies to produce more analyses. One area that needs strengthening is producing an analysis of Hong Kong's market and business environment. A key piece of the puzzle for the success of Hong Kong's cultural industries may have been the United States' growth and expansion of its influence towards the Asia-Pacific region at the time, which allowed Hong Kong to capitalize on European and American (e.g., Hollywood) pop culture's entry to Asia thanks to its international status. Also, the book can provide a stronger analysis of how the world's cultural trends progressed as Hong Kong developed its own unique path. Finally and theoretically, perhaps Wang could bring Hong Kong's cultural industries and their development into closer dialogue with the work of the Birmingham School, such as the writings of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams.