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*Seeing (Exactly) Like a State: Knowledge/Power in the Beijing–Hong Kong Relationship*¹

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Abstract

Four decades after radically reinterpreting global relations of knowledge and power, what can *Orientalism* tell us about the relationship between Beijing and Hong Kong today? Drawing upon recent studies that critique Said's exclusive focus on the East-West binary to re-envision Orientalism as one of multiple grammars of identification operating across multiple binaries, this paper expands Said's knowledge/power framework to analyze academic studies of Hong Kong from today's metropole, Beijing.

I examine three examples of Beijing's Hong Kong-ology, arguing that each constructs and reproduces the People's Republic of China's (PRC) colonial mythologies across the Hong Kong–Beijing nexus. The first, a book by Jiang Shigong, argues that the brilliance of One Country, Two Systems proves the superiority of the PRC political system, thereby rendering the maintenance of two systems unnecessary. The second, an article on localism in the official journal of the Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macau Studies, places Hong Kong on the psychoanalyst's couch to construct the city as an irrational child in need of guidance from Beijing. And finally, a third article provides this guidance, imposing the Party–state's hegemonic ideology of economic development as a universal panacea.

Beijing's Hong Kong-ology constitutes a closed, self-referential, and self-reproducing system divorced from realities on the ground, presenting predetermined self-glorifying tropes as academic analyses. While fundamentally misrepresenting reality, this nexus of ignorance and power nevertheless has real effects on Beijing–Hong Kong relations, promoting misunderstandings, fostering misguided policies, and thereby further escalating tensions.

On the fortieth anniversary of its publication, what can Edward Said's *Orientalism* tell us about the relationship between Beijing and Hong Kong today? *Orientalism* originally provided a paradigm-shifting analysis of the relationship between academic studies of "the Orient" and

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the colonization of “the East,” revealing the ways in which the construction of ostensibly objective knowledge of others served the interests of imperial powers. Yet within this innovative analysis, Said’s myopic focus on the East–West binary has resulted in this same binary’s eternal return in ostensibly anti-Orientalist analysis, ignoring knowledge/power relations, othering, and colonial dynamics internal to the East. Building upon recent analyses that argue for a structural reading of Orientalism as one among multiple grammars of identification operating across multiple binaries, this chapter adapts *Orientalism’s* knowledge/power framework to analyze academic studies of Hong Kong produced in today’s metropole, Beijing.

I analyze three samples of Beijing’s Hong Kong-ology via Said’s critique of Orientalism to argue that each is fundamentally disconnected from realities on the ground, and primarily serves the purpose of constructing or reproducing particular mythologies of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and its political system. The first, a book by Central Government Liaison Office researcher Jiang Shigong, employs the framework of One Country, Two Systems, designed to acknowledge and protect the unique strengths of Hong Kong’s system, to argue for the inherent superiority of the PRC political system and thus the lack of any need to actually protect Hong Kong’s system: the idea of two systems thereby becomes an argument for encompassment via one system. The second, an article on localism in the official journal of the Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macau Studies, places Hong Kong on the psychoanalyst’s couch to construct the city as an irrational child other trapped in the past, thereby relationally constructing Beijing as the sole mature political player. The third and final article, also from this official journal, appeals to the Hong Kong people to develop a new consensus focused on economic development in the aftermath of the political reform controversy of 2014. This self-referential appeal to non-existent readers in Hong Kong flattens complex realities to present the hegemonic state ideology of economic development as a universal panacea.

Drawing upon these three examples, I argue that Beijing’s Hong Kong-ology constitutes a closed, self-referential, and self-reproducing system divorced from realities on the ground, presenting predetermined self-glorifying tropes as academic analyses to an audience imagined to already know the solution to all problems: producing power through the illusion of knowledge. While fundamentally misrepresenting realities, the resulting ignorance/power has a real effect on the realities of Beijing–Hong Kong relations, intensifying tensions through the promotion of misunderstanding and resulting misguided policies.

Toward a Structuralist Orientalism

In his now classic *Orientalism*, Said employs a Foucauldian framework of knowledge/power to argue that the academic study of “the Orient”

contributed to and even enabled European power over and colonization of “the East.” Said defines Orientalism as a discourse that “places things Oriental in class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgement, discipline, or governing” (Said 41) toward “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 6). The production of this discourse of domination meant that colonial rule of “the Orient” was, in Said’s interpretation, “justified in advance by Orientalism” (Said 39), as was the perpetuation over time of unequal relations across the East–West binary.

Four decades on, it goes without saying that Said’s work provides an indispensable framework for thinking through representations of others and knowledge production in colonial contexts. One component central to this framework is the presumed “ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (Said 42): the assumption, in sum, that the other is not only essentially different but also in this difference essentially inferior. These ideas have no original correspondence with reality (Said 5), but in turn play a determinant role in shaping reality. This then brings us to the second component of this framework: strength is not only a matter of military or technological dominance but also of knowledge, or rather the production thereof, such that the hegemony of particular ideas in turn shapes reality itself. Knowledge/power, in constructing this binary distinction of a strong and dynamic West and an inferior and unchanging East, in turn reproduces this distinction over time by framing thought and thus reality (Said 43): in Said’s phrasing, Orientalism creates a situation in which “the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action” (Said 3).

Yet, for all of his contributions to our understanding of global power relations, Said’s exclusive focus on the relationship between West and East produces a myopic image of relations of domination. His analysis can be read—and often is read—in an essentializing mode that constructs an inherently benevolent East in relation to an always colonizing West and thereby constantly reproduces the East–West binary even in its critique, generating an ontological orientalism in reverse (al-Azm). Noting this dilemma, Gerd Baumann in his “Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach,” develops a structuralist framework of selfing/othering, wherein relations of domination are detached from the arbitrary signifiers to which they have come to be assumed to be inherently linked. Critiquing what he calls Said’s “baby grammar,” which “only uses the simplest of oppositions and exploits them to maximum contrast” (Baumann 20), Baumann proposes three distinct discourses ordering relations between selves and others, namely Orientalizing, segmentation, and encompassment, operating across infinite binaries.

- ◆ **Orientalizing**, in Baumann’s analysis, is not a phenomenon that emanates solely from the West, directed solely toward the

East. Rather, Orientalizing is one of the primary structural grammars through which people across the world relate to others. “The Orient” is furthermore not only a site of inferiority, but also an imaginary object of desire for what has been lost, and can exist across multiple axes unrelated to the geographical area usually recognized as “the Orient” (Baumann 20). We can see such processes in, for example, Han imaginings of Tibet, which are split between racialized denigration and romanticism.

- ◆ **Segmentation** reveals identity as a multi-layered structure, including such components as race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, local identity, political leanings, and personal experiences. Different levels or segments of one’s sense of self become salient in particular contexts, determining who one is at any particular moment, such that the line between self and other is not always clear. We can see such processes in, for example, people’s distinct readings of and responses to a broad cultural idea of Chineseness versus the politicized use of Chineseness as an attempt to naturalize allegiance to a particular regime as national destiny.
- ◆ **Encompassment**, by contrast, is an act of selfing by co-opting (Baumann 25). Like segmentation, encompassment is also based on levels of identity: yet rather than emphasizing different aspects of the self in different contexts, encompassment subsumes lower level differences into higher level commonalities, and thereby expresses ownership over that which is encompassed. Encompassment is thus always hierarchical: “the self-styled others are but a subordinate part of an encompassing Us” (Baumann 26). We can see similar processes in, for example, the all too familiar declaration that “we are, after all, all Chinese (*dajia dou shi Zhongguoren*).”

Baumann’s analyses show that processes of othering exist not only along the axis of West to East, and that the operation of these grammars of identification can be far more complex than envisioned in Said’s framework. This more nuanced framework for thinking through knowledge production, representation of others, and the relationship of these representations to the exercise of power, can also shed significant new light on other under-discussed colonial situations. China, for example, although undeniably part of “the Orient” and a victim of Western colonization, is also an expansive colonial power (Fiskesjö, “Legacy”) with its own deployments of knowledge/power to rationalize its domination of others. China’s obsessively delineated century of humiliation at the hand of colonial powers does not in turn erase the humiliations and injustices forced upon its own colonies.

Both official and popular representations of ethnicity in China today produce an Orientalist binary between the Han majority and the so-

called minority nationalities, with the former constructed as normal, modern, and masculine precisely through the image of minority others as exotic, primitive, and feminized: inevitably singing, dancing, bathing, and posing in the nude (Gladney). Mainstream Han representations of the other are thus orientalizing (premised on exoticism), encompassing (forcefully incorporating the other as a member of the Chinese nation), and segmented (insofar as diversity or unity, sameness or difference, become salient in different contexts). Louisa Schein, working with the Miao of Southwest China, has more directly called such official and popular representations of the other a form of “internal Orientalism,” highlighting “a relation between imagining and cultural/political domination that takes place interethnically within China” (Schein 73) at once othering while encompassing.

Although academia in “the West” contributed significantly to the Orientalism that Said critiques, in the four decades since *Orientalism’s* publication academics in “the West” have critically engaged with racial, colonial, and Orientalist discourses to work toward overcoming the problematic assumptions and power dynamics behind them. By contrast, unaffected by this critique, or indeed primarily employing this Western-centric critique to distract from the PRC’s own colonial engagements, academic work on the so-called ethnic question in the People’s Republic of China has been and remains a primary driver and reproducer of the state’s knowledge/power frameworks. Rather than critically engaging with and deconstructing structures of power in Chinese society, the lack of academic freedom and rewards for towing the official line mean that far too much academic work in China today buttresses the state network of power to ideologically legitimize an expansive Han-dominated state: in a process of not only seeing like but speaking for the state, the state’s goals shape Chinese state scholars’ analyses of ethnic relations, which then in turn all too often reinforce the state’s same goals.

For example, in his *The Buddha Party: How the People’s Republic of China Works to Define and Control Tibetan Buddhism*, John Powers analyzes how “Tibetology with Chinese characteristics” reduces Tibetans to fixed, predetermined roles that are unrelated to their actual existence, but are rather determined in advance by Han nationalist narratives of Tibet as a natural and eternal part of China whose Orientalized residents benefit from their encompassment within the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*). Revealingly, Powers notes that anachronistic Marxist models of society, based in fixed narratives of class struggle, peasant rebellions, and historical materialism, largely discarded elsewhere in Chinese academia, remain central to Han academic analyses of Tibet to this day (Powers 130). Such a framework leads naturally to a social evolutionist narrative wherein societies (meaning here ethnic groups) are arranged along different stages in history (Powers 138), with Tibetans constructed therein as “living fossils” from an earlier era still alive in the present, with their outdated religious beliefs and customs. Tibetan Buddhist teachings

on cause and effect, for example, are analytically stripped of their depth and nuance and then vaguely assumed to have paralyzed development by leaving Tibetans unaware of the central role of economics in society (Powers 155): an analysis that circles back to “the economy” and “development” as the primary legitimizing forces in China today (Yeh).

In these ideological rationalizations disguised as academic research, the conclusions are predetermined by current Party dictates, and any genuine discoveries that deviated from Party orthodoxy would be unable to be published (Powers 150). The stridency that Powers notes in these studies derives not only from sensitivity about the topic of sovereignty, but more fundamentally from the emptiness of the analyses themselves: in this stridency, we can detect the anxiety characteristic of all colonial discourses (Powers 157), insofar as these discourses are ideologically constitutive of a grand narrative of superiority and inferiority that is divorced from reality.

Baumann’s framework shows how Orientalism and knowledge/power are considerably more intricate than indicated in Said’s original analysis, while the othering of Tibetans as Orientalized “living fossils” in need of guidance from an encompassing China shows how official and academic representations of the other in the PRC today contribute to a grand narrative of a Han-led Beijing-centric modern nation overseeing an unstoppable rise to which all others must yield. Seeing how Chinese researchers use frameworks of othering, encompassment, and knowledge/power in the service of PRC state colonization, a question of particular relevance to people concerned about the Hong Kong–Beijing relationship today is: how is the ostensibly autonomous region of Hong Kong discursively constructed in official PRC studies, and what are the implications of this knowledge/power structure for understanding PRC policy toward Hong Kong? Based in the idea that 1997 was a year of significance only insofar as it made the operations of colonizing power more difficult to discern, I analyze three examples of Beijing’s Hong Kong-ology to begin to understand the dynamics of knowledge, power, and identity construction therein.

Dialectics of Hierarchy in China’s Hong Kong: When Two Systems Become One

Being such a vast country, governing a tiny spot like Hong Kong, presents China a great many difficulties. To a great extent, that is because we have lost our voice in the face of western ideas like human rights, rule of law, democratic elections, and lost in the war to win back popular support. The battle for hearts and minds is not a competition

in economic benefits. It is ultimately a cultural war, a mind war.

—Jiang Shigong, *China's Hong Kong*, 69²

The regime in Beijing, devoid of such standard modes of legitimation as elections or transparent opinion polls, is constantly anxious about its own legitimacy and seeks legitimation via other non-transparent means. One of the most frequently employed modes of legitimation since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 has been the exercise of sovereign control over areas classified as other, beyond the territories traditionally considered China. Just as Orientalist studies constructed an East ripe for Western colonization and exploitation, so official Chinese portrayals of the nation's peripheries construct others, such as Tibet, in dire need of the Chinese Communist Party's guidance: a prime tool of symbolic legitimation for the center, and by extension a source of pride for nationalists. By constructing communities as existing behind Beijing's (Han) way of life on an imagined social hierarchy, and thus by extension exercising control over and development of so-called younger brother nationalities (Fiskesjö, "Rescuing"), Beijing's rule is binarily constructed as properly advanced and legitimate in a way that its own undemocratic and non-transparent politics remains very much unable to express.

Such an analysis of Beijing's relationship with its peripheries, I must add, is not only relevant to minority regions: it also speaks to the symbolic legitimation via sovereign control inherent in Beijing's aspirations for Hong Kong and Taiwan. Although Beijing's goals of dominating Hong Kong and Taiwan are generally understood through the rubric of territorial nationalism and the perceived need to defend "every inch of land" supposedly handed down by "the ancestors," Beijing does not in fact enact such a consistently unyielding approach to territory (Fravel). Rather, in my analysis, the goal of the symbolic legitimation of political systems through domination plays a far more critical role than supposedly sacred territory itself. The real matter at hand is imagining other social and political systems actively yielding to Beijing's control in a mode of expansionist legitimation: if, for example, Beijing is able to effectively exercise control over these two territories with distinct political systems (Hong Kong's division of powers and transparent rule of law, Taiwan's democratic system), these territories' submission would then signal the strength and by extension the imagined appeal and superiority of the PRC system. This is, we must note, a fantasy for Beijing's rulers that could not be reached otherwise: the feigned

² All quotations from Jiang's book are taken from the 2017 English-language edition published by Springer, and have been preserved in their original form, regardless of their fluency.

superiority of the PRC system over democratic and rule-of-law based systems.

There is however one notable exception that would initially seem to go against this trend of symbolic legitimation through political domination: the notion of One Country, Two Systems as originally applied to Hong Kong. First proposed in the 1980s, a period in which living standards in Hong Kong were notably higher than in the People's Republic, and in which Hong Kong capital was playing a central role in the development of China's very recently opened markets, the idea of One Country, Two Systems and the promise of five decades of complete non-interference could be read in the 1980s as an indirect acknowledgement by Beijing of the strength and indeed superiority of the sociopolitical system in place in Hong Kong under British rule. And yet with the passage of time, as China's economic and indeed political power has grown ever stronger, there has been an ideological inversion of this initial humility. Rather than an acknowledgement of the unique strengths of the Hong Kong system that are thus in need of protection, a new reading of One Country, Two Systems portrays the formula as a symbol of the unique strengths and inherent superiority of the PRC system, thereby rendering the very systems that the formula claims to protect obsolete through encompassment.

No one has contributed more to this self-glorifying rewriting of the history of One Country, Two Systems than Jiang Shigong, a Beijing-based New Leftist intellectual. Between 2002 and 2007, Jiang was a researcher in the Central Government Liaison Office in Sai Wan. Upon completing his tenure there, Jiang published a collection of his reflections on Hong Kong as *China's Hong Kong (Zhongguo Xianggang)*, subsequently translated into English and published by Springer, a willing academic collaborator in PRC censorship (Bland), in 2017.

Jiang's book traces the history of Hong Kong from its inception as a colony through the political controversies of the 2000s. Jiang's approach throughout is nothing if not consistent, and readers looking for nuanced historical narratives that reflect the complexity of identity and experience in Hong Kong will find themselves greatly disappointed. Reviewing colonial history, Jiang asserts that everything that Britain did in the city from the 1840s through the 1990s was, at the end of the day, nothing but a trick. Opening the Executive Council and Legislative Council to Chinese participation was a trick "to make Chinese elites attach themselves to the Governor" (Jiang 8). Establishing the Chinese University of Hong Kong was not an attempt to provide education in Chinese and promote Chinese culture, but rather a trick "to control Chinese culture," making it "a cultural weapon against the Mainland's political influence" (Jiang 38). The development of social services such as public housing was a trick to "nurtur[e] their [i.e. local residents'] loyalty to the British Hong Kong government as a way of getting them to resist Communist China" (Jiang 53). And finally, Chris Patten's political reform package, undoubtedly the

biggest trick of them all, was not an expansion of political participation and suffrage, but rather, “with the support of the United States,” a tactic for “turning Hong Kong into an independent or semi-independent political entity through democratic political reform, or cultivating opposition and separatist forces in China” (Jiang 162). In this final trick, according to Jiang, “Patten successfully turned the political contest between Britain and China into the contest between Hong Kong citizens and the central government” (Jiang 167). On a decidedly unflattering note of extreme othering, Jiang asserts that “we may rate the British empire as the most shameless empire in human history and the most deficient in a moral sense” (Jiang 56). A not so subtly implied message here is the problematic nature of preserving such “tricks” disguised as sociopolitical institutions via a system distinct from the PRC: the Hong Kong people’s desire for self-rule and self-determination are, in short, nothing but a sign of cultural corruption resulting from colonizers’ dirty tricks, just as delusional as Tibetans’ supposedly primitive self-understanding.

Not content with solely demonizing Hong Kong’s system, Jiang proceeds to apotheosize the PRC’s system. In opposition to the morally corrupt British Empire, China in Jiang’s construction is by contrast an eternal political and moral superpower, and the true home of the people of Hong Kong. Jiang revealingly characterizes the PRC’s dictatorial system as a symbol of the “independent nature of China’s political development, without dependency on the West” (Jiang 182). The PRC’s political system is without a doubt other in relation to “the West,” or rather in relation to global standards of good governance, but as a result is imagined by Jiang to be better, having preserved an imagined five millennia of governing wisdom. The politics that admittedly create a sense of distance between the people of Hong Kong and Beijing—to be more precise, the ongoing censorship, repression, and generally hardline anachronistic political policies of the current regime—are, in Jiang’s interpretation, simply misunderstood attributes of Chinese tradition that, due to colonial influence in Hong Kong, people in the city have been tricked into fearing. The political system in Beijing is not in fact something of which people should be afraid, much less critical. Rather, in Jiang’s construction, the PRC political system is a declaration of independence from the western world, and thus a declaration of its own superiority, of which all independent-minded people should be proud: endless, arbitrary one-party rule that denies the most basic rights guaranteed in its own constitution is a symbol of cultural uniqueness to be preserved, part of the “struggle for autonomy of civilization and cultural leadership” (Jiang 183).

Having established via othering (the only plausible path available) the sheer greatness of the PRC political system, Jiang proceeds to narrate the development of One Country, Two Systems through this greatness. In Jiang’s telling, the origins of One Country, Two Systems are not found

in the relative strengths of the Hong Kong model versus the China model in the 1980s. Rather, One Country, Two Systems, according to Jiang, is at once a symbol of the boundless “political imagination” of the Beijing leadership, as well as a revitalization of, according to Jiang, traditional Chinese forms of governance. Jiang includes a number of laudatory comments on Deng’s solution to the so-called Hong Kong issue via One Country, Two Systems, declaring that “we cannot fail to be impressed by the farsightedness that Deng displayed” (Jiang 82). Yet this farsightedness, according to Jiang in a particularly convoluted section of his argument, extends back to Mao’s thinking on “the Tibet question” (Jiang 92), and even further back to the Qing’s decentered rule of disparate peoples (Jiang 93), while even supposedly embodying elements of ancient Confucian political philosophy (Jiang 128) that Jiang never actually specifies. Beijing has mastered not only the present, but also the past, and looms imposingly over the future. The accuracy of any of these claims is highly doubtful—after all, Tibet is not exactly a promising example of real autonomy, and is a decidedly odd choice for anyone who wanted to provide reassurances to the people of Hong Kong today. Yet, in Jiang’s self-referential ideological bubble, the political formula originally designed to protect Hong Kong’s unique way of life for at least fifty years must instead be understood primarily as a symbol of the unique greatness of the Chinese Party-state: in a story that will be easily recognizable to anyone who has followed the non-autonomous fates of the PRC’s various supposedly autonomous regions, Beijing’s wisdom in proposing the idea of One Country, Two Systems proves the superiority of Beijing’s system over its other and thereby via encompassment renders the very idea of two systems obsolete.

Jiang’s book reads as if it was written in the Liaison Office: this is most likely because it was, while he was working there as an official researcher. The endpoint of Jiang’s narrative of One Country, Two Systems is then always the superiority of the Chinese system: politics itself is only possible for the people of Hong Kong after the end of British rule, he claims (Jiang 2), and yet this politics remains in typical Party-state fashion highly constrained insofar as “the hope of the Chinese nation and Chinese civilization lies in the mainland” (Jiang 121). There is, then, nothing to protect, and nothing to preserve via One Country, Two Systems, insofar as its own invention eclipses the Hong Kong system, highlighting the fundamental superiority of the Party–state. Jiang’s study provides a thorough rationale for a hardline policy in Hong Kong, and has seen a hardline policy implemented in its wake, including a national education program designed to naturalize “the China model,” intransigence on and eventual abandonment of long delayed political reforms, and growing pressures on freedom of speech and association: the rapidly accelerating disappearance of two systems. On account of the commonalities between Jiang’s vision and recent state policy, as well as considering the proximity of Jiang and his knowledge constructions to

the center of power in Beijing, many Hong Kong nationalists and democrats with whom I have spoken in recent years see *China's Hong Kong* as an initial rationalization of, and an outline for, a second unification of Hong Kong: One Country, One System.

Hong Kong on the Psychoanalyst's Couch: The Child Psychology of Political Activism

If, according to Jiang, politics is only possible for the people of Hong Kong after 1997, this vision of politics remains confined within Beijing's very narrowly delineated parameters. On August 31, 2014, the National People's Congress Standing Committee reminded the city of this fact with the announcement of its framework for the 2017 Chief Executive election, effectively ruling out free and open elections by requiring all candidates for Chief Executive to be approved in advance by Beijing. The elections for which the Hong Kong people had been waiting, and in many cases fighting, for decades now appeared to be nothing more than a Beijing-controlled sham.

To put it in the mildest of terms, the assumed inherent superiority of Beijing's proposed electoral system was not acknowledged by the people of Hong Kong. First, people came out onto the streets in September of 2014 and launched Occupy Central, voicing their discontent with the National People's Congress decision (Kong). Then, after the clearance of the various protest sites in November and December, a localist-nationalist movement emerged that fundamentally re-envisioned the relationship between the city and the People's Republic of China. Rather than beseeching the central government for open, direct elections as so many had done for decades, the emergence of localism signals, among other factors, increasingly widespread exasperation with the central government's endless delay and control tactics, losing hope in Beijing and advocating for an independent Hong Kong truly run by Hong Kong people (*Gangren zhiang*).

The rapid rise of localism and the Hong Kong independence movement, proceeding from a subculture in 2011 to a substantial electoral force in the 2016 elections, took many by surprise. In 2016 and 2017, numerous articles in *Hong Kong-Macau Studies*, the official journal of the Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macao Studies, reflected this surprise by attempting to provide explanations for the movement's emergence and rapid growth. A representative sample of this literature and its shortcomings is "A Psycho-Social Perspective into the Radical Nativism in Hong Kong" by Zhu Jie and Zhang Xiaobin of Wuhan University. In this brief six-page article, the authors promise to "explain the psycho-social background of radical nativist discourses" (Zhu and Zhang 4). The result, however, is a crude attempt at psychoanalyzing the presumed deep motivations behind a complex and

diverse movement- apparently without having even engaged in any interviews or dialogue with supporters.

Zhu and Zhang present a predictable Sinocentric narrative of arrogant Hong Kong residents attempting to cover over supposed economic, cultural, and political marginalization through a Hong Kong chauvinist movement: the “lost child” of 1997 return-to-the-motherland narratives (Callahan 158) has grown into a moody and unpredictable teenager in dire need of intensive counseling. According to Zhu and Zhang, the rapid economic development and improvement of living standards in Hong Kong in the 1970s led Chinese residents who once viewed the city as solely a temporary site of residence to identify ever more deeply and closely with Hong Kong as their home (Zhu and Zhang 5). These economic accomplishments, combined with the relative impoverishment of the mainland at the time, produced an initial sense of Great Hong Kong-ism or Hong Kong chauvinism (*da Xianggang zhuyi*). Such chauvinism, according to the authors, was only further bolstered when the launch of reforms in the mainland in the late 1970s and early 1980s mimicked Hong Kong’s economic utilitarianism and strove to attract Hong Kong-based capital, technology, and management expertise (Zhu and Zhang 6) for China’s development.

Yet whereas the PRC had much to learn from Hong Kong in the 1970s and the 1980s, the authors argue that “since Hong Kong’s return, the gap between Hong Kong and the Mainland has gradually shrunk” (Zhu and Zhang 6). Emphasizing a solely quantitative approach that grants a certain natural advantage to a country of 1.4 billion people versus a city of seven million, the authors assert that the Chinese economy has grown rapidly in recent decades, and now stands as the second largest economic entity in the world; at the same time a number of cities across the mainland are reportedly threatening to overtake Hong Kong economically, replacing the city as Asia’s financial center (*ibid.*). As we saw in Jiang’s analysis above, even the decision to maintain Hong Kong’s system after 1997 is a symbol of the superiority of the Beijing system. The authors are thus insistent that the hierarchy of the past has been reversed: China no longer has much to gain from the city of Hong Kong, which is now supposedly surviving on life support from the national economy.

Despite the all too obvious nature of this inversion to PRC academics and officials, the authors assert (without providing any evidence, referring only to unspecified “scholars”) that the majority of Hong Kong people’s thinking remains trapped in the 1980s: continuing to envision Hong Kong as fundamentally “better” than the Mainland. The authors comment:

Scholars have pointed out that “Hong Kong chauvinism” has not disappeared. Rather, with the dramatic rise of China’s economy, this chauvinism is left with a little less pride and a lot more

ostracism and fear [...] due to the continued assaults against their sense of self. (Zhu and Zhang 6)

Here we see the familiar trope of the “living fossil” commonly used to other the peripheral peoples of the PRC. Yet whereas groups like Tibetans are imagined as historical remnants of earlier stages of “primitive” social development preserved in the present, the Hong Kong people’s thinking contains historical remnants of obsolete hierarchies, remaining trapped in their now outdated pride from the 1980s.

Finally, in a very simplistic psychoanalytical formula, the authors assert that the tension between Hong Kong’s ego ideal as more advanced than the PRC and the cruel reality of the city’s gradual (quantitative) eclipse by China has left residents feeling the need to present an ever more (falsely) inflated confidence, even going so far as to reject that which is part of them yet also in Zhu and Zhang’s narrative fundamentally better than them. Precisely such a self-inflating self-hatred, the authors claim, is manifested in the localist movement that rejects Hong Kong’s innate Chineseness: feigning superiority while subconsciously facing a nagging sense of inferiority in relation to a rising China. The authors thereby psychoanalyze the localist movement as essentially an irrational collective act of self-aggrandizement, feigning centrality when faced with the city’s growing marginalization in relation to a rising China. Zhu and Zhang thus conclude their article with quite predictable prescriptions. First, wherever Hong Kong independence rears its ugly head, it must be struggled against. Second, the energies that some Hong Kong residents are currently directing toward localist movements need to be redirected to healthier political causes, such as building a “community of shared destiny (*mingyun gongtongti*) for the Mainland and Hong Kong” (Zhu and Zhang 6).

Said defines Orientalism as a discourse that “places things Oriental in class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline, or governing” (Said 41) toward “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 6). In the discourse analyzed here, the people of Hong Kong are placed on the psychoanalyst’s couch, a framing that affirms in advance the authors’ and by extension Beijing’s authority and rationality. The analysts are destined to find their patient mentally ill, not because he or she actually is, but rather because their main task is after all to reaffirm the sanity of the system for which they work and the fundamental insanity of other options. The colonizer always knows what is best for the colonized, and perhaps with the proper amount of “correct” guidance, they hope, Hong Kong’s political energies might be redirected in the “correct” direction: toward a community of shared destiny that was always already the solution.

Conclusion: from knowledge/power to ignorance/power

Such great, glorious, and correct (*weida, guangrong, zhengque*) guidance is available in abundant supply from the official journal *Hong Kong–Macau Studies*. Yet, in its correctness, such guidance often overlooks a number of pressing realities in Hong Kong today, and as a result seems to serve the sole purpose of communicating its own greatness, glory, and correctness to its own readers: fellow official academics and policy makers in China.

A 2015 article in *Hong Kong–Macau Studies*, under the catchy title “Consolidate Consensus in Hong Kong via Economic Development and Livelihood Improvement,” portrays a one-dimensional image of Hong Kong, along with a correspondingly one-dimensional solution to all of the city’s problems. 2015, as described in the previous section, was a complicated year: the last Occupy protests sites were cleared at the end of 2014; as 2015 progressed, the localist–nationalist movement grew rapidly; a series of tests showed that water supplies at numerous public housing estates and schools contained excessive levels of lead; and as the end of the year approached, the PRC’s cross-border kidnapping of the Causeway Bay booksellers changed publishing in the city forever. “Consolidate Consensus,” however, mentions none of this complexity, floating comfortably above reality in a self-reproducing ideological bubble. Indeed, in its call for a new consensus in a “new era” in Hong Kong, the article resembles more a *People’s Daily* editorial than a journal article based on academic research.

The authors, based at Guangzhou’s Sun Yat-sen University, begin with the all too familiar narrative of Hong Kong’s descent from a rapidly developing economy in the twentieth century to an economy in a new era still trapped in its long-gone heydays; from a politically stable global financial center to a politically divided city that has scared away investors; and from a central investor in and beneficiary of China’s rise to an increasingly marginal player in this inexorable process. Things have changed, as our colleagues in the Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macau Studies never hesitate to remind us: as Hong Kong continues to “fall” while China continues to “rise,” the authors confidently declare that Hong Kong needs a “new consensus” in this new era that they call the “post-political reform era.” And because supreme ideological confidence is a basic qualification for any PRC-based Hong Kong-ologist, the authors do not shy away from telling us all precisely what this consensus must include: setting aside political disputes to focus on the people’s livelihood, enhancing regional cooperation to provide “more space” for Hong Kong’s development, employing Hong Kong’s strengths in finance to support the Belt-Road Initiative, and expanding Hong Kong’s role as a global Renminbi (RMB) trading center (Chen and Li).

There are two points to note about this self-declared new Hong Kong consensus. First, whereas the year 2015, in the aftermath of the Occupy

protests, was a year in which ever more Hong Kong residents became exasperated with Beijing's increasingly heavy-handed rule, every aspect of this proposed consensus envisions Hong Kong primarily as an appendage to the People's Republic of China: enhancing regional cooperation, supporting the Belt-Road Initiative, and expanding the RMB trade. To propose a consensus amid all of the sociopolitical complexity in Hong Kong in 2014 and 2015 is, one must admit, no simple task. However, on closer reading, this seemingly complex task in fact becomes quite simple if one is able to do so based solely in simplistic top-down state ideologies that have no direct relationship to the complex realities on the ground: such realities are presumably easier to ignore from Guangzhou, or indeed from inside the Liaison Office, than they are on the streets of Hong Kong. A lack of on the ground knowledge may then make boiler-plate analysis easier.

In a second point derived from the first, every element of this post-political reform consensus is focused on economics, completely ignoring the social and political controversies that have been at the forefront of concern in Hong Kong for at least the past decade and a half. I have argued elsewhere that even with the fading of the totalizing Maoist vision, all-encompassing ideology remains alive and well in the People's Republic of China, shifting from the idea that politics precedes all other matters to the idea that economics precedes all other matters: whereas the Maoist ideal citizen was to be politically engaged and economically disinterested, in a revealing inversion, the ideal citizen of the reform era is to be economically active and politically disengaged (Carrico). Such a deployment of economics as ideology and indeed as identity has preserved the Party-state in China amid the wide-ranging social changes of recent decades that have swept away other one-party systems. This ideological-economic formula has also been deployed in Tibet, where leaders remain confident that just a little more development will resolve ethnic tensions (Yeh), and in Xinjiang, where the inexplicable arbitrary detention of millions in concentration camps is perplexingly explained away as a type of "vocational education." Everything is flattened into economics, and economic development becomes the solution to all problems, while only those who renounce the promised yet forbidden fruits of self-rule and political participation will be able to reap economic development's full benefits.

Is such a forced consensus, drafted outside of and without direct reference to realities in Hong Kong, likely to present the elusive solution to Hong Kong's fundamentally misread problems? Anyone who has spent even a few moments outside of the confines of the Liaison Office will be highly skeptical of such a formula. Yet Beijing's Hong Kong-ology is not assessed on its novel insights or its accuracy. Rather, analysts are rewarded for providing the "right" answers, which were always already there in the crudest patriotic slogans and simply needed to be articulated in a properly academic style: scrapping protections of Hong Kong's

system to integrate the territory further into the PRC, reaffirming the Party as the sole reasonable political power capable of guiding Hong Kong, and focusing on economics and livelihood over supposedly troublesome political debates. Nor is any of this really intended to send a message to the people of Hong Kong: Hong Kong residents can be forgiven for not knowing at all about this new consensus that has been put forward for them, as this journal's audience is strictly fellow PRC Hong Kong-ologists and policymakers. Locals are as always to be only supporting actors in a master narrative of China's rise, the script always composed in Beijing (Callahan 154). Beijing's Hong Kong-ology is then a closed, self-referential system of knowledge/power which demonstrates its own power precisely by making not particularly knowledgeable statements about Hong Kong that in turn have real effects.

Whereas these Hong Kong-ologists' analyses are radically divorced from realities on the ground, their analyses nevertheless have real impact on the ground. Jiang Shigong's book, for example, provided a chilling preview of the increasingly hardline policies that we see coming from Beijing: ever greater integration in all areas of life, proceeding in step with the gradual stripping away of the various protections ostensibly provided by One Country, Two Systems. The analyses by Chen and Li, or by Zhu and Zhang, with their construction of a pathological adolescent in need of guidance toward a new consensus of economics as ideology, are precisely the types of studies that might lead an official to think that an idea like the Greater Bay Area could be the solution to all of Hong Kong's issues. Beijing's Hong Kong-ology is then an important addition to the study of Orientalist literatures and the interplay of knowledge and power, which occurs not only along the East–West binary, but also in colonial situations (in the broadest sense of the term as used by Chun 2012) around the world.

And even more importantly Beijing's Hong Kong-ology reminds us that "knowledge" is not always informative: the ignorance/power demonstrated in these PRC-based analyses of Hong Kong indicate that a seemingly complete lack of on-the-ground knowledge can also be combined with power to have real world effects. Ignorance, when matched with state power, may be even more powerful than knowledge, continually reproducing the very problems that it aims to resolve, and thereby perpetually reproducing the illusory necessity of its own power.

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