

Hong Kong Studies: *A Beginning*

Tammy Ho, Michael O’Sullivan, Eddie Tay and Michael Tsang

Why *Hong Kong Studies*?

The first time we discussed starting a journal on Hong Kong Studies came in early 2016, when some of us clearly felt rather helpless in locating the latest research on Hong Kong in different fields. At a time when one could still smell in the air the excitement and tension left over from the Umbrella Movement (2014) and the Fishball Revolution (2016), we could begin to see that Hong Kong issues were gaining more attention in the international media. We all felt that Hong Kong deserved the new attention it was getting. It had almost become cliché to say Hong Kong was “Asia’s world city,” a city where “East meets West,” and yet at the beginning of what many commentators were describing as the Asian or the “Chinese century,” Hong Kong was still without an academic journal of its own that could help it reappraise such an important identity. For it is true that Hong Kong is quite unique in its blending of East and West cultures; it is also the city in the world whose evolution over the next 30 years will test more than any other the soul and the resolve on the world stage of this century’s superpower, China; it is a city of 7.6 million people with an international currency dating from 1937 that is older than the Chinese renminbi, the euro, and the Australian dollar; it is one of the few Asian cities with internationally acclaimed film and pop industries.

And yet, despite all this and much more besides, we felt we could not leave it to others or to the wheels of international academia to build on this newfound international media attention. It was up to us, researchers who care about this city, to gather our efforts and provide a focused platform both for existing researchers and researchers of the next generation to discuss their ideas and publish their work, and for international academics to have a journal at their fingertips that does precisely what it says on the label. In educational terms alone, Hong Kong is ranked joint 3rd, behind London and Los Angeles in joint first place, in the *Times Higher Education (THE)* best university cities list of 2017 (“The Best University Cities”), and it is uniquely positioned geographically, politically and institutionally to draw from academic trends in Asia, China and in the English-speaking scholarly community in Hong Kong. As a research field, Hong Kong Studies has seen several developments in recent years. Professor Stephen Chu Yiu-wai of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) has established a Hong Kong Studies

undergraduate program at HKU. Professor Lui Tai-lok and Dr Brian Fong are leading the Academy of Hong Kong Studies at the Education University of Hong Kong, and editing Palgrave's Hong Kong Studies Reader Series. The Society for Hong Kong Studies was recently founded and is affiliated to the Association for Asian Studies. And yet, there has been no academic journal solely focusing on Hong Kong that has made a profound impact.

Therefore, we the editors of *Hong Kong Studies* felt it was important culturally and academically to fill this gap. The time is ripe to establish a journal specifically on Hong Kong, to assemble promising research in this field, and to facilitate exchange between different disciplines and viewpoints in relation to the city and wider region. *Hong Kong Studies* appears at a time when there is a resurgence of interest in Hong Kong not only as the ever popularized "gateway to China," but also in its own right as an academic and cultural hub. We seek to bring together in one journal the disparate voices writing on Hong Kong at this time; we aim to provide a platform that serves as both a source and node for the somewhat scattered state of present research on Hong Kong, which has had to rely on special issues on Hong Kong found in other journals in various fields. Our intention is that our journal will help maximize the synergy of discussion by providing a focused and supportive environment.

Having a journal dedicated to Hong Kong Studies will, we believe, attract a global readership. Already, several top universities in the United Kingdom have East Asian Studies programs, such as Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Leeds, Newcastle, and The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). The London School of Economics has a reputed Asia Research Centre, and the University of Bristol has started a research project specifically on Hong Kong history. Asian studies is also becoming one of the two main growth areas at Trinity College Dublin. Recently, the University of British Columbia has established a Hong Kong Studies Initiative. It is our aspiration that scholars in Asian and East Asian Studies, Area Studies, Chinese and Taiwanese Studies, would need look no further than this journal to find timely research and perspectives on Hong Kong.

As literary scholars we are well aware of the difficulty of looking for research in social science outlets, and as scholars in English Studies and related fields (Education Studies, New Media, Creative Writing, Life Writing and other fields) we also understand that there are often more vibrant discussions on Hong Kong in Chinese-language scholarship. For these reasons, we specifically wanted *Hong Kong Studies* to be a bilingual multidisciplinary journal, believing that a more meaningful and inclusive forum can only be forged by also giving space to scholars who write in Chinese, and from intersectional and cross-disciplinary dialogues that demonstrate thematic, conceptual and methodological connections with other fields. Our advisory board clearly reflects this

design, as we have been blessed and honored to have received widespread support from eminent scholars working in Hong Kong, Australia, the UK, the US and elsewhere. These are experts in various academic fields, from language and literature, education, history, gender studies, sociology, and international relations. In the meantime, we have tried our best to strike a balance in terms of gender, Hong Kong Chinese academics and non-Chinese academics, and those who are based in Hong Kong and those based overseas. On this last point, we also hope to publish comparative research that both recognizes Hong Kong's specificity and identifies its potential contribution to regional and global issues.

Hong Kong's State of Being

At this point we should perhaps outline the visions we have set for the journal within and against Hong Kong's state of being at the current historical juncture. Hong Kong's present state of in-betweenness can appear as borrowed time, a space before the end to get one's papers in order, set out one's will, leave a legacy. For sure, living on borrowed time is nothing new in Hong Kong; it is the essence of its emergence, evolution, and existence. Legally time-bound conventions—from the Treaties of Nanking and Peking to the Sino-British Joint Declaration—shaped Hong Kong's lease and rent mentality. In this identity Hong Kong grew. Bookended by dates legally circumscribed in articles and clauses, a presentism took root in Hong Kong that afforded neither the space for imagining—and providing for—a cultural legacy, nor the consolation of drawing from cultural memory.

Borrowed time might suggest a death sentence for a culture, but can such a sentence be stayed, can a pardon be granted? In the current epoch of in-betweenness, when a whole people must understand their community according to the vagaries of the ever-shifting interpretations of "One Country, Two Systems" and the Basic Law, Hong Kong can appear as everything and nothing at the same time. And with no clear internationally recognized atrocity, persecution or ethnic cleansing, the nature of the autonomy Hong Kong people wish to preserve as part of SAR status and the process for sustaining such autonomy remain ill-defined. And yet there is the persistent sense that a culture is being destroyed, a way of life is being airbrushed from history. It then becomes difficult to define exactly what Hong Kong is; as Tammy Ho Lai-ming asks, "Can We Say Hong Kong?"

Every person with some emotional investment in Hong Kong feels at times a tug in their heart when the brute reality of the temporal procession towards an uncertain endgame makes itself felt. Can a whole culture be assimilated to the point of being killed off? What, if any, can be done?

If questions about identity or the prospect of political alternatives are ever to be grounded on more than just knee-jerk reactions to political incursions into Hong Kong civic life or the betrayal of the “One Country, Two Systems” model, then they need to be grounded on in-depth discussions of key motivations and principles of Hong Kong’s history, values, and community.

Hong Kong Studies is established to act as a forum for such inquiries into issues that are key to the city-state. We believe the journal can assist in the process of drawing from Hong Kong’s social, political, and cultural memory so as to enhance the imagination of its present and the future. For it must be remembered that there is yet no clear administrative and political vision for post-2047 Hong Kong. Hongkongers are therefore staring into a future where there is no line on the horizon, no safety net, no program for government post-2047. Never before has such an entrepreneurial and resourceful people strolled so casually towards the brink; never before has such a proud civic community failed to channel almost two centuries of toil and city-building into a program for sustaining its hard-fought identity. A people who transformed a rocky island into a world-leading financial hub with world-leading institutions stares blankly at a future only three decades away that it can still shape.

The First Issue

Thus 2017 marked the end of Hong Kong’s second decade under Chinese sovereignty, with only three more decades to go before the supposed expiration of “One Country, Two Systems” in 2047. If the first decade after the Handover demonstrated Hong Kong’s “exciting post-colonial metamorphosis” as suggested in the edited volume *China’s Hong Kong Transformed: Retrospect and Prospects Beyond the First Decade* (2008), the second decade has been marked by high-profile socio-political activism and protests, demonstrating a nuanced reservation about this exciting possible reinvention of Hong Kong. We set the theme of our inaugural issue on this turbulent decade, hoping to receive essays that articulate the changes and “transformations” as well as to interpret their significance in Hong Kong culture, society, and politics in the post-Handover period.

In the end we selected a diverse range of articles that either suggest new approaches to understand the challenges Hong Kong faces currently, or read deeply into creative expressions for the statements they make on Hong Kong’s future, or analyze socio-political phenomena that form a major illustration of Hong Kong in the last two decades. Hong Kong, as Ackbar Abbas points out, “is a subjectivity that is coaxed into being by the disappearance of old cultural bearings and orientations” (11). **Samson Yuen and Edmund W. Cheng’s** co-authored piece opens our issue with a useful framework for examining

Hong Kong's contentious politics in recent years. Combining both social science and humanities perspectives, their piece is a good example of cross-disciplinary research, and offers insight on how our analysis of Hong Kong could proceed. **Nicholas Gordon** continues with a social science-based inquiry, proposing various tests on Hong Kong's post-Handover state of affairs. Our only Chinese-language piece in this issue, **宋子江 Chris Song's** article then offers a meaningful overview of post-1997 poetry translation in Hong Kong. Also adopting a post-1997 angle, **Dorothy Lau** identifies how singer Denise Ho intervenes in the Cantopop culture with her social activism. **Winnie W. C. Lai's** article is also related to music, but focuses specifically on the use of birthday songs and other seemingly nonsensical songs in the Umbrella Movement. The last two articles keep in mind Hong Kong's remaining three decades before "One Country, Two Systems" supposedly runs out. **Agnes Tam** provides some insightful research on the legal rhetoric of the agreement in light of a controversial and censored artwork that evokes the year 2047 when the "One Country, Two Systems" promise expires. **Carlos Rojas** closes the issue by arguing that such anxiety for 2047 is sometimes found in the most unlikely of places: the Fruit Chan film *Kill Time* which has little to do with Hong Kong ostensibly.

Looking Forward

Editing this first issue has been an invaluable learning curve for all of us editors, and we are grateful for the support and advice we received from every party involved with this journal. We would like to thank our advisory board members for their time and guidance, office staff at The Chinese University of Hong Kong's Department of English for administrative support, Ms Kimberley Clarke and Mr Dylan Cao for their proofreading work, our colleagues at Chinese University Press for their professional assistance in realizing our vision, our peer reviewers for the time and effort they have spent in ensuring our academic standards, those who submitted their work to us for their confidence, and all our readers for their interest.

As Hong Kong begins the third decade of its post-Handover era, here is wishing that this will be the first of many meaningful issues of *Hong Kong Studies* to come. We hope that this journal will become part of the reason people can say proudly that Hong Kong exists.

References

Abbas, Ackbar. *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997. Print.

"The Best University Cities of 2017." *Times Higher Education World University Rankings*. 13 Feb. 2017. Web. 19 Feb. 2018.

Chan, Ming K., ed. *China's Hong Kong Transformed: Retrospect and Prospects Beyond the First Decade*. Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2008. Print.

Ho, Tammy Lai-ming. "Can We Say Hong Kong?" *The Offing*. 17 Jan. 2017. Web. 18 Feb. 2018.