

Generations of Hongkongers” (an article in response to Liu Tai-lok’s infamous book that bears the same title as the article points to cultural differences caused by the generational gap as the reasons for myriad conflicts in Hong Kong society. Rather than a purely economic analysis, Fan calls attention to the rise of social media and the contrarian essence of being a Hongkonger (which has become more salient in the face of hegemonic integration into China) as the potential reasons that led to the deep level of youth commitment in resistance. Another point that suggests that the economy is not the only factor in young people’s discontentment is that students from the city’s sub-degree programs also joined in recent protests, even though, according to the authors, students from that group are likely to have received salaries that are congruent with their expectations.

The questions that remain unanswered about the relationship between young people’s financial frustrations and other cultural concerns suggest the need for a sequel to the current monograph with simultaneous attention paid to the youths’ psyche, including their political desires and collective identifications, as they intersect with the city’s socioeconomic realities during its period of transition. Still, for now, Augustin-Jean and Cheung’s application of Piketty’s work to Hong Kong offers a convincing explanation for the role of income inequality in denying opportunities to Hong Kong’s young people and encouraging them to participate in the Umbrella Movement.

The Appearing Demos: Hong Kong During and After the Umbrella Movement. By Pang Laikwan. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020. 228pp. Paperback. ISBN: 9780472037681.

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With the Anti-Extradition Legislation Amendment Bill protests of 2019 and the direct introduction of the national

security law in Hong Kong in 2020, writing about the Umbrella Movement seems outdated. However, in her latest book, *The Appearing Demos*, Pang Laikwan, the Chinese University of Hong Kong Professor and Chair of the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, demonstrates that the 2019 protest was an inseparable continuance of the 2014 Umbrella Movement. This is because for Pang, “[f]rom the Occupy experiences people learned that the real challenge of, and hope for, democracy, is co-rule—instead of the formation of a top-down hegemonic discourse that unifies all” (5).

The Appearing Demos documents Pang’s intellectual journey in processing Western political theories, especially that of Hannah Arendt’s concept of “appearing,” in the context of the Umbrella Movement, based on qualitative interviews she conducted with thirty protestors. Arendt’s theory of appearing points out that rather than just *being*, human existence in a space is also *appearing* through a series of actions, which in Hong Kong’s case is protest in a public space. Arendt sees public space as arising out of the actions and speeches of individuals. The space, a creation from a collection of actions, is therefore fragile, volatile, and exists only in the actualization of the performance. Interpreting Arendt’s theory in the context of Hong Kong, Pang coins the term *politics of appearance* and interprets the appearance of the Umbrella Movement in the sense of “the slow and largely ineffective process of negotiation, deliberation, self-expression, and mutual understanding among equal political actors to form our political consciousness” (11).

Pang’s main argument advocates for Arendt’s proposal of cohabitation, where humans have the responsibility to live together with those we would not choose. Humans cannot choose with whom they cohabit, as that would lead to genocide. Cohabitation, as a conviction, is a protection for those who are vulnerable. Pang sees cohabitation in the context of Hong Kong as emphasizing the plurality of cohabitants in society (demos), rather than homogenizing groups in order to dichotomize friends and foes (populism). The title of the book is Pang’s response to

Wendy Brown's argument that neoliberalism hollows out democracy by undoing the demos: Pang understands the idea of *democracy* to be precisely the slow work of arbitration and the swift coalition of an actual group of people *appearing* in the streets as seen in the Umbrella Movement.

Pang's research aims are: 1) to understand the individual and collective occupiers; 2) to construct political subjectivity through intersubjective relations; and 3) to assess the viability of Hong Kong to form a political community. Like any qualitative research that involves interviews, Pang's monograph necessarily tells a specific viewpoint, which is that of the protestors. She has made it clear that she has "not interviewed those Hong Kong people who are pro-establishment—there are many. They will be part of the background of [her] analysis, but it is not [her] mission to present an objective analysis of Hong Kong society as a whole. [Her] concern is with the appearing demos" (14).

The first part engages with theoretical dimensions of Occupy movements around the world and the specificities of the Hong Kong's movement in the global context. Chapter 1 is an investigation of the unstable nature of Occupy protests as a practice of cohabitation and an analysis of the protests as a form of political participation that facilitates "the articulation of individuality without falling into the trap of individualism" (24). Chapter 2 provides an account for the Umbrella Movement through Hong Kong's historical and political contexts. Using the stories of several individual protestors, Pang emphasizes the idea of change and the collective entanglement between the individual and the movement. In setting up this theoretical framework, Pang urges her readers to understand Occupy movements not only as a form of protest, but also as an event of appearance: protestors appear in a public space for the purpose of discussing and deliberating matters of public concern, and their appearance thus shapes the socio-political narrative and understanding of the city.

Adopting a cultural studies perspective, the second part of the book discusses different aspects of interacting with the Umbrella Movement and ways to record the culture born of the movement. Pang regards the movement as an attempt to develop a new common language and understanding in the Hong Kong community, as demonstrated through the cultural expressions created during and after the movement. Chapter 3 establishes that the use of social media in relation to the Umbrella Movement reveals “the relationship among the private, the social, and the political” (67). In Chapter 4, Pang delves into Arendt’s reflection on productive relations between judgment and politics, and connects it to artistic works produced in the movement, which she believes has changed the cultural economy of Hong Kong fundamentally. Analyzing the many documentaries produced during and for the movement, Chapter 5 argues that documentary films are powerful and important forms of political engagement between producers and spectators because these recordings “[help] us understand the open-endedness of these [political] actions” (115) in the movement.

The third and final part of the book covers Hong Kong’s political situation in a larger context as a postcolonial city in the current global conditions, and argues for “seeing the Umbrella Movement and thereafter prodemocracy movements as symptoms of a larger set of social conditions and a call for change” (135). After setting the scene in the first two parts talking about the history of Occupy movements and the different aspects of the Umbrella Movement, Pang engages with how *universal* values interact with the specificity and locatedness of Hong Kong. She proposes to challenge the confines of the current nation–state system, arguing for a city-based rather than a state-based democracy. In Chapter 6, Pang considers how Hong Kong handles the contradictions of being receptive to China and the rest of the world while maintaining its own local development in civil society and cultural identity as a unique *polis* and refugee city. Chapter 7 illustrates how liberalist values from British

colonialism and neoliberal governance from China interact in Hong Kong society, and community building emerges in the midst of such interaction. Chapter 8 sees Pang wrestle with the tension between civil disobedience and the rule of law, where she argues that Hongkongers need a more sophisticated reading of civil disobedience in the face of a failing democracy. Through this chapter, she discusses how Hong Kong can keep law open in order to avoid its subjection to nation–state’s neoliberalism, and how Hong Kong ought to be committed to institution–building despite the risk of law being in the grasp of state powers, citing Michel Foucault’s concepts of sovereignty and biopolitics and Arendt’s *bios politikos*.

Pang tells a compelling narrative in this book with her careful borrowing of selected Western ideas and thoughtful application to a Hong Kong context. In addition, the inclusion of photos in supplement of the written text helps readers visualize what happened during the Umbrella Movement. Her documentation of websites in discussing social media in Chapter 3 and of artwork in Occupy areas in Chapter 4 are particularly important for future researchers, since at the time of writing this review, several websites are no longer accessible, and most of the artwork in public spaces have been dismantled. The timely documentation will make this research accessible to future generations.

Pang addresses possible questions on whether grounding her analysis on Arendt’s (Western) theory is appropriate, to which she responds that “[t]here are clear reasons motivating scholars to emphasize Asia-based theories to study Asian problems, but setting up rigid boundaries between Asian methods and non-Asian ones yields other types of exclusion” (15). I agree with Pang’s assessment, since it is impractical to simply remove any British colonial influence in Hong Kong’s intellectual pursuit, as this would be akin to removing the ladder on which we are standing. Instead, as a constructivist–interpretivist, I would argue that a suitable course of action is to acknowledge both the British colonial past and

Chinese cultural influence in addressing our “Asian problems.”

Pang aptly points out the Chinese state’s linking of economics and politics. It is a common argument made by the pro-establishment camp that Hongkongers should focus on financial advancement enabled by China, rather than striving for the abstract notion of democracy. To this, Pang proposes “to differentiate the political and economic meanings of regional autonomy” (8) and aims to demonstrate that democracy is not a zero-sum power game as China interprets it.

Nonetheless, when I read this book, I could not help but wonder who Pang’s intended audience is. Perhaps other Hong Kong studies scholars who advocate for democracy? In her argument proposing cohabitation rather than populism, the pro-establishment camps appear excluded from this consultation. If Pang is trying to mediate with the government in order to promote subnational level democracy, it is unlikely she would be heard the way she intends. Her proposal of a city-based democracy at a subnational level rather than independence will be heard differently by different parties. Pro-establishment parties may see this proposal as subversive, and pro-democracy parties may also regard it as a betrayal of democratic ideals. In divisive situations such as those in Hong Kong, proposing what looks like a middle ground can be equally controversial. While innovative and perhaps actionable, Pang’s proposal may fall on deaf ears since it is a consultation for a long-term future.

Academic publications are not usually calls to action, but scholarly debates. Yet, Pang’s monograph seems to try to achieve both. Pang calls “to reconceptualize the meanings of territorial boundary and spatial practices, and [Hong Kong’s democratic movements] remind us that city democracy can run in parallel with state democracy on the one hand and with international governance on the other” (10–11). Notwithstanding obvious questions to be asked, such as who will have the authority to moderate this negotiation or how will this negotiation be accepted by the state, it remains unclear how Pang’s proposal of

subnational level democracy can be implemented, given that the citizenship of many Hong Kong people is ultimately linked to the Chinese state. How can Hong Kong people separate their pledge of allegiance to Hong Kong from China the country? This is a difficult question to which Pang replies, “[m]ost democratic operations might need institutions to take place, but its source of power comes from the boisterous streets” (200). The reply explains why Pang studies the ‘streets’ of the Umbrella Movement in this book: to understand where the source of power of change emerges, and where that power can go next.

Finally, the subtitle, *Hong Kong During and After the Umbrella Movement*, does not do the book justice. As the movement is a landmark event that precedes so many other key protests since 2014, the subtitle hides the relevance and significance of Pang’s argument in the current context. As a doctoral researcher whose research project also includes ‘the Umbrella Movement’ in its title, I have received many comments that I should give up on investigating the Umbrella Movement, since it is now a thing of the past, and should instead base my research on the Anti-Extradition Legislation Amendment Bill protests. The same comments could have been made on *The Appearing Demos*, even though Pang makes a strong and constructive case in the book that the Umbrella Movement is applicable in Hong Kong’s here and now. She does address the Anti-Extradition Legislation Amendment Bill protests in the book, which is clearly no easy task. Part of working on social topics is acknowledging that it changes as one writes about it, and Pang demonstrates excellent sense in knowing where to draw a line in covering ongoing events. In the context of quick-to-market publications on this topic, *The Appearing Demos* is a refreshingly weighty and much-needed in-depth reflection and proposal on Hong Kong’s current climate.