BOOK REVIEW
Wen Liu, JN Chien, Christina Chung, and Ellie Tse, eds., *Reorienting Hong Kong's Resistance: Leftism, Decoloniality, and Internationalism.* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022)

Gina Anne Tam, Trinity University

Reorienting Hong Kong's Resistance, an exciting new volume edited by Wen Liu, JN Chien, Christina Chung and Ellie Tse, begins with a scene from the 2021 G7 summit. In the volume's foreword, longtime activist Au Loong-yu describes how the meeting saw the world's most powerful nations flatten Hong Kong's current struggles into nothing more than fodder for their own political agendas—from the G7 members, who collectively raised criticisms about human rights abuses in the People's Republic of China (PRC), to the PRC government, which clapped back with criticisms of Western colonialism, a violent history wrought largely by G7 members. Au's opening anecdote highlights just how difficult it is for Hong Kongers fighting for their future to escape the legacies created by Western colonialism at every turn. To be heard, many Hong Kong activists felt as though they had to repackage their own goals to fit globally-comprehensible narratives, leading some protestors to express nostalgia for British colonialism or even, in one extreme example, wave Trump flags to publicly appeal to the former President of the United States to "save Hong Kong." Simultaneously, Hong Kongers' very ability to exert influence within the territory was and is still being violently curtailed as Beijing uses British-era colonial laws to support their crackdowns on political opposition and reinforce their heavy-handed rule.

It is this global reality—a reality in which the many legacies of global colonialism have severely limited the kind of autonomy Hongkongers have been able to pursue and the kinds of narratives they have the power to shape both within Hong Kong and outside of it—that has made it easy for powerful players in the global community to ignore the complexities of the recent 2019 protest movement and portray it as nothing more than a rejection of the PRC and all it supposedly represents: Communism, authoritarianism, or anti-capitalism. Leftism, to many global spectators, was at best irrelevant to the Hong Kong protest movement, and at worst, explicitly opposed to its goals. Indeed, within this narrative steeped in Cold War logics and implicit white supremacy, Hong Kong's entire history is reformulated to represent a bastion of anti-leftism against the looming threat of "Red China."

But, as the editors of *Reorienting Hong Kong's Resistance* remind us, Hong Kong has a long tradition of indigenous and transnationally-informed leftist and decolonial ideologies and practices. These ideologies and practices were defined, in part, by an explicit rejection of British colonialism but, more importantly, an explicit rejection of the structures the British created to keep Hong Kongers "powerless and disenfranchised" even after British rule ended. As such, leftism still plays a critical role in shaping Hong Kong's present. It is this continued relevance that constitutes the focus of *Reorienting Hong Kong's Resistance*: an exhumation of Hong Kong's history of decolonial struggles with the purpose of bringing to bear leftist thought on the recent Hong Kong 2019 protest movement and its violent repression. By "identifying" the presence of these decolonial practices within Hong Kong's social movements, the editors seek to "establish the city's contributions to a larger, global discourse on leftism and decoloniality" (xvii).

The book explicitly and implicitly critiques several narratives that have dominated discourse on the movement so as to persuade their sympathizers to consider more leftist alternatives. Their first and most explicit foil are those who label leftist ideals as

out of touch or irrelevant. To confront the local accusations of leftism as "lei dei" (離地) literally off the ground, or jor gau (左膠) or "left plastic," terms that depict leftist approaches as too academic, unrealistic, or elitist (xix), the authors ground their analyses in material realities of Hong Kongers' struggle so as to show how and why leftism remains relevant to building a better future for all Hong Kongers, not just those with the freedom or means to pursue transnational connections. The second audience that the book hopes to persuade are those within the 2019 protest movement who have been "seduced" by global right-wing forces (xviii). Clearly discomforted by Hong Kongers who instinctively found solidarity with the United States Republican Party or peddlers of colonial nostalgia, the authors in this volume instead seek to highlight "alternative" wellsprings of support for the movement that are less destructive. And their third and final foil are those who dismiss the significance of leftism within the Hong Kong movement out of an instinctive belief that leftism is best represented by the PRC—this includes those we might call "tankies," who presume that to be anti-China is to by default be pro-US imperialism.

This book is both methodologically and ideologically distinct from other recent books on the Hong Kong protest movement, from scholarly inquiries Jeff Wasserstrom's *Vigil* or Ho-Fung Ho's *City on the Edge*, to journalistic and first-hand accounts like Karen Cheung's *The Impossible City*, Holme's and Chan's edited volume *Aftershock*, and Louisa Lim's *Indelible City*. This is an ideologically situated book, something the authors are quite upfront about. And while the world the authors describe as possible is foregrounded in a rich literature emanating from global human experiences, it is not controversial to say that their vision is radical. This is something the authors repeatedly acknowledge, offering empathy for those Hong Kongers who understandably find hope in the global capitalist markets or nation-state structures that the authors here seek to transform. But what makes this volume exciting is that it fully embraces the idea that we can, and should, push the boundaries of what we think is possible to build the kind of world we want to live in. Our futures are infinite, but so too are our pasts. This book brings to bear a different kind of past so we can imagine a different kind of future.

This book is also quite innovative in that it brings together scholars and activists into one volume so as to create a dialogue between those engaged in academic research and those engaged in on-the-ground activism. Historical analyses of the inherently decolonial practice of reclaiming public space in recent Hong Kong protests or the decolonial vernaculars present in the history of Hong Kong television are published alongside interviews with Taiwanese activists on Jeju island and observations from important advocacy groups such as Midnight Blue, a non-governmental organization that advocates for the safety, dignity, and equality of Hong Kong sex workers. This, to me, is perhaps the book's most powerful response to the critique that leftism is both elitist and unrealistic. The book itself is a testament to the conviction that theory has real-world application, and that leftism provides solutions to real world material problems that the most oppressed and disempowered among us regularly face.

The essays are organized into three themes. The essays of the first section focus on the coloniality of state governments. Offering a wide range of critiques on topics ranging from unionization, policing, embodied performance and national identity, this section explores the decolonial possibilities Hong Kong might pursue. The second section, titled "Material Life," explores how movements whose goals are generally laudable from the perspective of the authors of this book intersect with the often complex, often contradictory, material realities of various communities in Hong Kong. The final section, "Internationalism From Below," places Hong Kong's struggles in conversation with other current events in the region. In this section, the looming global power of the United States takes a back seat, as authors draw theoretical parallels between Hong Kong and other spaces such as Taiwan and Jeju island, or show how Hong Kong's present is tied through shared stakes to the histories and presents of places like the Philippines.

This is an empirically rich volume, and each essay could inspire several questions for future studies. Yet

there are three points raised by the volume as a whole on which I have been meditating, and on which I am deeply interested to hear the editors' thoughts. The first concerns definitions. The authors offer theoretically thoughtful definitions of colonization and coloniality that engage with a robust literature emanating from liberation struggles around the world. Yet "leftism" feels less clearly situated. This might, in part, be due to the sheer number of topics covered in this volume, from labor rights to international relations to land ownership, each of which inspire unique critiques. Moreover, sometimes a calcified definition of something like "leftism" may do more to limit the authors of the volume than offer clarity. Yet, to me, the potential pitfall of a lack of a working framework is that the largely Anglophone audience might read into the volume a version of leftism informed by the experiences of the United States rather than, as I believe the authors are aiming for, a more transnationally-informed definition. As such, I would be curious to hear from the authors a sense of what about leftism unites this volume, even if it is a set of guiding questions or core values.

The second question I would like to pose regards connections between and among these essays. This volume juxtaposes essays regarding high level ideals about citizenship and belonging with descriptions of real oppression faced by migrants who are being oppressed not just by structural inequality in the abstract, but by actual relationships with people who presumably are pro-protest and pro-leftism. Certainly, the edited volume as a genre lends itself to implicit, rather than explicit, connections, asking its readers to consider the various linkages between and among different essays. But now that the volume is published, I would love to hear from the editors some areas in which perhaps further connections might be drawn. As one example, I am interested in how we might make plainer the significance of racism and Han Supremacy that is implicitly discussed throughout the volume. How might the editors suggest we integrate the works of Angela Davis and Franz Fanon with the very real Han supremacy we see in the essay on the oppression faced by migrant domestic workers?

My final question is methodological. In being deliberate in bringing academia and activism together, this book implicitly critiques some of academia's worst impulses. Academia has a tendency to equate personal distance with scholarly objectivity, an exercise that often ends up replicating society's most destructive power inequities. To put it another way, by presuming that scholarship is an entirely different practice than activism, we end up reinforcing the idea that scholarship by those with personal stakes in challenging the status quo—those who are not white, not men, not cisgendered or heterosexual, not able bodied, or not from powerful white-majority countries—are immediately suspect or not "real." Of course, many people engage in scholarship that ends up being meaningful to activists, but this volume is unique in the way it gives equal space to those who see themselves primarily as activists. My question is, then, what do the authors hope this will inspire in the academy? How might they see academia transform by following their example?

Ultimately, this volume should be required reading for anyone wanting to understand the 2019 Hong Kong protest movement and the historical precedents that gave it structure and meaning. The book's unique ideological approach means that it highlights marginalized voices that have been largely lost in the sea of discourse dominated by more powerful players. It also, I hope, provides a model for a new kind of scholarship that can break down the hierarchies within the academy that erase and delegitimize critical sources of information and knowledge.

Response

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We are grateful for Dr. Gina Tam's generous and thoughtful engagement with our edited volume, *Reorienting Hong Kong's Resistance*. In the following response, we will address the questions that were raised in the review and also take the opportunity to elaborate on some other ideas that were put forward in our book. The leftist position that we adopt differs in ways from the leftism that Anglophone readers may be more familiar with in Western contexts. Our iteration of leftism takes a coalitionist, or "broad tent" approach, which draws from leftist traditions across different geographical locations and lineages to respond to the urgencies of our time. As E. Tammy Kim observes in her article: "Transnationally Asian: A new media neighborhood for an emerging world", the current moment has inspired a form of transnational politics and writing that seeks to articulate how competing empires and nationalisms have coalesced to produce interconnected socio-political conditions across our world (2020). While this approach may not be entirely new in the Western leftist tradition, many in that milieu have historically engaged in reductive homogenization of what leftism and communism has meant in Asia. This has taken the form of either idealistic apologism for the wrongs of communist parties, or the reduction of leftist history to the influence of a handful of popular figureheads. These Western analyses are also often hampered by oversimplified or orientalist ideas that gloss over the complex histories and nuances of power at work across the continent and its diasporas in order to present the region as a radical foil to the domination of Western empires. In contrast, the efforts in our book follow in the vein of writing produced by a new generation of online publications such as *New Bloom*, *The Owl*, *Lausan*, *New Naratif*, and *Heung Coalition* who have carefully identified the complex transnational webs of power that undergird socio-political movements and phenomena in Asian contexts, in order to write against simplistic, binary narratives of Asia that are often replicated in mainstream media and even in academia.

This form of transnational leftism is emerging and evolving in real time and, as such, lacks the clear contours of the socialist leftism of mainland Chinese or Euro-American provenance, despite drawing from those traditions in ways. A few positions can still be delineated at present. The leftism that is professed in our book is decolonial in nature, meaning that it does not simply stand against one specific colonial entity or form of coloniality, but instead it is opposed towards all forms of coloniality. This approach allows us to account for places such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea, in which multiple forms and legacies of colonial power are simultaneously at work and must be parsed altogether to fully discern the socio-political landscape and dynamics at hand. This "decolonial left" therefore does not seek to ally with hegemonic colonial powers (as numerous Western-aligned Hong Kong activists do) nor does it aim to foster 'anti-colonial' forms of nationalist power (as many pro-Beijing leftists do), since these binary options and their dependence on the state ideology of territoriality tend to replicate coloniality instead of deconstructing it. Instead, this leftism aims to form transnational solidarities among peoples and regions experiencing the same (though different by degrees) impoverishment and exploitation under global capitalism and seeks to establish liberatory coalitions that address the interconnected structures of oppression that lie at the root of each respective social crisis. This means that both intersectional and transnational analyses are foundational to this form of leftism, which we view as taking shape "from below." We formulate our reading of history from this position, which casts focus on marginalized positions over geo-political games at the global level, in order to seek new internationalisms and to foster the co-creation of solutions and coalitions that can

forge decolonial futures that would no longer rely on colonial power or structures like the nation state.

Since the leftist position that we adopt in our book is explicitly aligned with decolonial theory, a few questions naturally follow: What does decolonial theory offer towards the analysis of Hong Kong? Why decolonial theory and not postcolonial theory? What can be gained by developing decolonial theory from the position of Hong Kong? While we may not be able to fully address all of these questions in depth on this occasion, a few points can still be made to serve the purpose of sketching out the contours of this "decolonial left."

Hong Kong's political predicament has been historically analysed through the lens of postcolonial theory. However, many of its key theorists have noted Hong Kong's anomaly status within this field, since there has never been a "post" to its colonial conditions. Whereas decolonization in terms of flag independence has commonly occurred in other postcolonial territories, Hong Kong did not follow such a trajectory as its sovereignty was handed over directly from the British to the PRC on the occasion of the 1997 handover. Its colonial status and its status as a global financial hub retain deep entanglements with British, mainland Chinese, and U.S. colonial power. This material reality calls for an analytical framework that can better illuminate the multiple histories and formations of hegemonic power that are operating in the city. Through conceptualising coloniality as a "matrix of power," decolonial theory offers such a robust analytical framework that grounds us in the work of identifying and articulating the intersecting networks of power that undergird a place like Hong Kong.

With this in mind, one connection that we would like to make more explicit is our conceptualization of the decolonial in relation to Hong Kong as well as our intervention in engaging with decolonial thought across various disciplinary formations. Decolonial theory that stems from the work of Anibal Quijano (2000) also illuminates how modernity is intrinsically tethered to coloniality, which prompts us to interrogate the rhetorics of modernity that has not only been touted by state power in Hong Kong and mainland China, but also by Hong Kong's people themselves. The latter is particularly pertinent, since we believe it is equally salient to critique state politics as it is to critique individuals who have utilised the rhetorics of modernity to justify nativist, localist, and ethnonationalist positions that claim superiority over their mainland Chinese counterparts. The conceptual offerings of decolonial theory thus inform a critical position that is foundational to our conception of the "decolonial left": that all forms of coloniality—operating at all scales—must be contended with. This means that a decolonial future for a place such as Hong Kong must entail not only a fundamental change in its overarching political structure, but also a fundamental change in the ways of being at the level of the individual.

Our application of decolonial theory towards Hong Kong also represents an opening for interventions in the field of decolonial theory itself. Since decolonial theory has historically been developed from and applied towards Latin America (with relevance to other parts of the world), developing decolonial theory from the position of Hong Kong exposes some gaps in the field that calls for an engagement with other fields such as Sinophone studies. As Shu-mei Shih notes in her essay, "The Concept of the Sinophone" (2011), a prevailing "fetishization" of Western empires and the Western "oceanic" mode of colonial expansion has occluded academic attention towards the colonial encroachment and imperialist ambitions of places such as China. This critique certainly applies to the field of decolonial theory, as far less writing has been dedicated towards analysing coloniality that has emerged from Asia itself and how it has both clashed and coalesced with Western coloniality. Bringing fields such as Asian diaspora studies and Sinophone studies together with decolonial theory will be a generative move to not only enable further decolonial research on Hong Kong but also on other Asian locations that bear similarly complex and non-linear colonial legacies.

On the question of drawing out the complexities of Han supremacy, we believe that understanding how race operates in Hong Kong requires highlighting not only the site-specific context of colonial racialization in the region but also how it overlaps with global racial capitalism and neocolonialism, which is where the trenchant analyses of Angela Davis and Frantz Fanon can prove useful. It is in this overlap that we

can understand how modern Han supremacy and White supremacy align in casting Black as "criminal" and the Muslim as "terrorist." The U.S. and China's mutual involvement in the neocolonial "scramble for Africa" and its vast mineral resources, as well as the latter's "People's War on Terror" theorized in the mold of post-9/11 U.S. warcraft (Byler 2021), prove just how harmonious both forms of ethno-racial supremacy can be. As a form of Chinese racialized nationalism, Han supremacy underlies the PRC's governance of its multiethnic subjects. Like many of its Western peers, the Chinese state's rosy rhetoric surrounding non-Han ethnicities does not result in material self-determination for minority groups but rather party-sanctioned multiculturalism and token representation—forms of inclusion that reproduce the state's authority in practice. Even still, Han Chinese have been promoted since the Republican era as the dominant and representative ethnic group of "China" over other minorities because of their presumed cultural superiority, as scholars such as Chenchen Zhang have suggested (2020). This ideology is used to justify Beijing's annexation of peripheral territories including Xinjiang and Tibet, and to discipline pro-democratic activism in Hong Kong as a form of "separatism."

In the case of Hong Kong, one helpful lens for addressing Han supremacy in greater depth would be to consider the social landscape riven by what should more accurately be viewd as competing Han ethnonationalisms. Many of the most prominent public proponents of the latest iteration of "Hongkonger" identity have emphasised its core feature as a local brand of Han identity—distinct from the mainland—as a political-cultural identity that stands above other racialized and ethno-linguistic groups in Hong Kong. The politicized nature of these competing Han ethnonationalisms allows the discourse of "democracy versus authoritarianism" to remain up front, while pushing the detrimental effects of Han supremacy on minorities out of sight. This helps to explain why migrant worker voices and rights have been ignored in Hong Kong, both before and during the 2019 movement. It also illuminates the invisibilized material foundation upon which Hong Kong society rests. For example, even during the height of the protests, migrant workers' invisibilized carework of feeding and cleaning the household was critical to enabling protesters to stay out on the street late into the night, yet they were penalized by employers for disruptions due to those same protests (Joles and Chu 2019).

On the question of what impact we hope our collection may have on more expansive academic work, our goal with this volume has been not only to highlight marginalized and overlooked voices within the 2019 Hong Kong protests but to bridge what is commonly seen as a divide between academic research and activist analysis and practice. One way to do this is to highlight the self-generated ideas and practices of political actors themselves, from protesters to sex workers and migrant workers, who often are considered mere objects of study in the academy. Our goal in featuring the chapter from migrants solidarity committee, autonomous 8a, a radical collective in Hong Kong that works closely with migrant domestic worker activists, was to highlight migrant workers' self-organizing, which 8a strives to facilitate with resources rather than charity or an imposed political program. In short, they are already doing the work of advocating for themselves, in ways that resonate with their own experience. Creating more space for critical conversations between academics and organizers within and beyond the academy—as well as fostering more practice-based application of research by "scholar-activists"—are different ways that we hope this volume can contribute to the groundswell of these ongoing efforts. These generative practices are already taking place across the academy today. For example, aside from academic research articles, journals such as *Feminist Studies*, *Signs*, *Amerasia*, *Critical Ethnic Studies*, and *Journal of Asian American Studies* encourage roundtables and submissions from community organizers and activists that include creative works and articles that are written with accessibility and a wider, non-academic readership in mind.

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