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Gary Chi-hung Luk (Ed.). *From a British to a Chinese Colony? Hong Kong before and after the 1997 Handover*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California Press, 2017.

Hong Kong has come a long way from its colonial past. The British takeover of the territory in the early 1840s, as Julia Lovell details in *The Opium War* (2011), brought sweeping changes: “Brick and stone warehouses replaced the wooden shacks that lined the northern shorefront; opium poured into the new storage space...; the place bustled with facilities, with roads, barracks, hospitals, hotels, sailors, brothels, cookshops, opium dens, banqueting houses, a newspaper, a casino..., [and] theatres.” Although once a British base for the sale of opium to Chinese consumers, Hong Kong’s “fragrant harbor” (*Xiang Gang* 香港) has evolved into a vibrant financial center, a place that Prince Charles once called “one of the most successful societies on Earth.” But since the lowering of the colonial flag and the raising of the *Bauhinia blakeana* (洋紫荊)—Hong Kong’s emblematic flag—at the 1997 Handover, anxieties over Hong Kong’s future under the watchful, panoptic gaze of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) have grown from discomfort to outright public protest, notably with 2014’s Umbrella Movement (*Yusan Yundong*, 雨傘運動), a political movement that emerged alongside public protests demanding freer democratic elections. Recent developments have made studies such as *From a British to a Chinese Colony? Hong Kong before and after the 1997 Handover*, edited by Kent Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Saskatchewan, Gary Chi-hung Luk, all the more important for our understanding of Hong Kong’s storied past, complex present, and uncertain future. While the volume’s focus is more broadly on Hong Kong-Britain-China relations, each of the work’s contributors tackles an aspect of that trilateral historical relationship on micro and macro scales, shedding overdue light on the complexities of British Hong Kong, the 1997 Handover, and the lasting reverberations in the years afterward.

The volume proceeds in chronological order, consisting of nine chapters across three parts. Luk’s introduction opens the book with a critical evaluation of the extant literature on British decolonization in Hong Kong. In his assessment, the argument that Mainland China maintains a form of “internal colonialism” over Hong Kong—that China has “(re)colonized” the territory as a function of its presence there since 1997—is untenable (p. 5). The introduction effectively explains how British colonial heritage reflects colonialism in Hong Kong itself and examines the role of lasting colonial legacies in shaping the post-1997 actions of both the PRC and Hong Kong Special Autonomous Region (HKSAR), respectively. Part one then begins, continuing with the theme of lasting colonial legacies. In chapter one, Kaori Abe argues that nineteenth century compradors served as an “archetype” of present-day Hong Kong elites, fulfilling similar socioeconomic roles as intermediaries between Chinese and foreign companies (p. 53). Sonia Lam-Knott, meanwhile, focuses on politics and language. She contends that although language management was a process of governmentality of the ruling Brits and, post-Handover, the Mainland Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese had considerable agency in how they used languages (through “code-mixing”), with identity and socioeconomic factors, among other social drivers, pushing Hong Kong Chinese toward language cultivation (pp. 93, 104). Carol Jones’ chapter highlights how the British attachment of its subjects to the “rule of law” became a marker of differentiation between Hongkongers and Mainlanders, with the former holding a rule of law ideology as a core value (*hexin jiazhi* 核心價值), which ultimately posed a significant obstacle to PRC rule in Hong Kong (pp. 25, 135).

Part two explores agency and autonomy in Cold War Hong Kong and closely examines, “from unconventional perspectives” (p. 15), Hong Kong’s changing trilateral relationship with Britain and Communist China. Zardas Shuk-man Lee opens the section with an analysis of Cold War tensions through the scope of British Hong Kong state film censorship. Chapters five and six, by David Clayton and Leo Goodstadt, respectively, explore economic dependency in Hong Kong-Mainland China affairs. Clayton examines “water diplomacy” and Hong Kong-Guangdong mutual economic dependency in the 1950s and 1960s, highlighting the costs of regionalism, with present-day Hong Kong locked in a system of “suboptimal water management” that ties it inextricably to local and regional institutions (p. 182). Goodstadt shifts the balance of dependency, tracing Hong Kong’s financial importance to Mainland China. He details the fiscal and financial autonomy that Hong Kong enjoyed from its metropole before the Handover, with Beijing begrudgingly accepting Hong Kong’s colonial past for the sake of “national interest” (p. 186). Indeed, Hong Kong’s status as an international financial center, as Goodstadt points out, rescued Communist China from crippling sanctions during the Mao years, supported Deng Xiaoping’s reform and opening, and is, ultimately, “in little danger” of re-colonization in any capacity, at least until the Mainland’s financial sector develops more fully (p. 207).

The book’s most compelling section, part three, places focus on decolonization, retrocession (*huigui* 回歸), and Mainland (re)colonization in Hong Kong from the Second World War to the present. Felicia Yap opens the section by examining three “non-colonizing” communities, including the Portuguese (mostly born Macanese), Eurasian, and Baghdadi Jewish inhabitants of British Hong Kong. She argues persuasively that the Japanese occupation and 1967 Riots forced all three communities, which had for decades occupied “the ambivalent middle strata between Europeans and Asians,” to disperse for good, with their remaining vestiges absorbed by broader Hong Kong society (pp. 22, 217). Next, in a riveting chapter eight, Law Wing Sang examines “reunification discourses” by intellectuals and students to shed light on the social and cultural meanings of 回歸 (*huigui*, retrocession/return) from the 1960s to 1980s. Since the time of the Handover, Law notes, pro-PRC historians have maintained—if not demanded—a narrative that emphasizes Hong Kong’s cultural “return,” or *huigui*, and embracing of the PRC over the former ruling Brits on grounds of cultural and national sameness. Continuing with this theme, and rounding out the section, Kevin Carrico presents an ethnographic inquiry into the National Education Centre (NEC, est. 2004 in Tai Po District; shuttered in 2017) in the aftermath of anti-government protests in Hong Kong. Carrico analyzes the NEC’s endeavors to promote an orthodox national identity in Hong Kong primary and secondary school education to show how Beijing “enacts a colonizing process of national identification under the guise of decolonization” through its tireless promotion of a singular, “‘patriotic’ and purely Chinese form of identity” (pp. 28, 260).

Overall, Luk and company have effectively blended macro and micro histories to produce a volume that casts Hong Kong history as one betwixt and between, yet not without its inhabitants exhibiting considerable agency over shaping their terrain—cultural, economic, social, and/or otherwise. Yet the volume is not without its shortcomings. In his discussion on whether the Hongkonger is an ethnic group, Luk mentions that the extant literature on the topic has demonstrated that ethnic grouping “is not a rigid classification but rather a malleable, socially constructed category” (p. 29). However, the notion of ethnicity as a social construction, as Rogers Brubaker notes, “is today too obviously right, too familiar, too readily taken for granted, to generate the friction, force, and freshness needed to push arguments further and generate new insights.” Certainly, post-Handover anxieties over PRC rule were indeed a force behind Hong

Kong Chinese embracing “Hongkonger” as a “separate identity” (*zuqun* 族群) (p. 30). The book’s decision *not* to approach Hongkonger ethnic identity without invoking bounded groups and explaining it as, for instance, processes and categories institutionalized from above and internalized from below, leaves a critical gap in the volume. For instance, might “Hongkonger” be an example of “groupness”—a tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis—in which Hongkonger identity has as much to do with identity formation in Hong Kong as socioeconomic class does? Or, in Law’s chapter, might “Hongkonger” represent an (intentional) negative identification and reference to Otherness, of an *un-Chineseness*? In both chapters, an exploration of this nature seems like a missed opportunity. The volume also could have merited from a more dynamic discussion of “decolonization” as a conceptual terrain. To state simply that Hong Kong is one such case wherein decolonization is “a dynamic and multifaceted process that involves both macro- and micro- politics”—noting factors of metropole/periphery, colonizer/colonized, government/society, *inter alia* to cover British decolonization in Hong Kong more fully—obfuscates a much more complex set of forces at work in decolonization. Finally, scarce mention of the effects of global capitalism in Hong Kong, a locale that at once boasts simultaneously the highest per capita income and greatest inequality gap, is a disappointing omission. So too is the absence of engagement with Frantz Fanon’s concept of decolonizing minds (*i.e.*, that “imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove from our land and from our minds as well”), thereby rather conveniently sidestepping issues of de-(neo)colonization, class difference, and identity formation in the fragrant harbor.

These issues aside, *From a British to a Chinese Colony* is ultimately a thoughtful compilation that succeeds in throwing light on Hong Kong history and its relations with its two world power metropolises. Broad in scope and, especially in part three, bringing new histories into focus, the volume tells new stories and does so well. The work is a solid introductory reader and companion piece for anyone intrigued by colonial history in Asia, past and present.

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