

Abstracts for Unknown Futures

Keynote 1: The Role of Digital Media in Large-Scale Protests in Hong Kong

Francis Lee, Professor, Chinese University of Hong Kong

Much has been written in the past two decades about how digital media could facilitate and empower social protests, whereas more and more scholars have also noted how digital media could undermine social protests either because of problematic online phenomena or because of the state's capability of appropriating the Internet for political control. This talk will review the experience of Hong Kong throughout the 2010s, examining Umbrella Movement, June 4 Commemoration, and the Anti-Extradition Protests. In the case of the Umbrella Movement, the digital media strengthened social mobilization yet also introduced forces of decentralization, leading to a "tactical freeze" that hampered the movement in the end. On collective remembering of the 1989 Tiananmen student movement, digital media served not only as a channel for mobilization but also a memory archive. But at the same time, the state also perpetrated their narratives through online platforms. The result is memory balkanization and polarization of attitudes toward the Tiananmen Incident. In the Anti-Extradition Bill protests, digital media became even more central to an even more decentralized formation, but digital media also contributed to the spread of rumors, the practice of doxxing, and the perpetration of prejudices. The problems became particularly conspicuous when the movement started to lose momentum.

Panel 1

The Censorship of Politics in Hong Kong Cinema: Past, Present, and Future

Kristof van den Troost, Chinese University of Hong Kong

After decades of seeing barely any changes, the practice and legislation of film censorship in Hong Kong underwent a major overhaul in 2021, with the Hong Kong government publishing new censorship Guidelines in June and formally amending the Film Censorship Ordinance in November. This overhaul formalized the increasing de facto (self-)censorship practices of the preceding few years, which had already further accelerated following the introduction of the Hong Kong National Security Law in June 2020. Building on my past research on the history of Hong Kong film censorship, this presentation will place the recent changes in historical context and asks how the amended censorship ordinance compares to previous legislation, especially regarding the censorship of politics in films. I will also consider how filmmakers have coped so far with the rapidly changing environment as well as with the momentous events of 2019-2020, by looking at a few fiction films released in Hong Kong since 2020 that implicitly commented on the territory's political predicament and turmoil. Finally, drawing on recent interviews with Hong Kong filmmakers, I will assess the prospects for the Hong Kong film industry.

Filming the Individual and the Collective:
The 2019 Pro-democracy Movement in Hong Kong Independent Documentaries
Judith Pernin, independent scholar

Between June and December 2019, Hong Kong became the stage of large-scale pro-democracy protests, during which more than a dozen documentaries were filmed. Following the evolution of Hong Kong's political situation and the shifting of local protest strategies, one could expect marked differences in the filmic treatment of these protests compared to the Umbrella movement, just five years earlier. When opposition to the proposed extradition bill erupted massively on the streets in June 2019, protests and the actors behind them had drastically changed. Furthermore, during the half-year of the 2019 pro-democracy movement, protest modes kept on evolving, constantly adjusting to intensifying police tactics and government reactions. What kind of documentaries have been produced on this movement, and how do these documentaries translate the evolution of protest modes and Hong Kong's rapidly changing political context? This presentation examines the evolution of filmmaking practices and protest representations in a body of seven shorts and long features made collaboratively or collectively and released shortly after key moments in the protest.

Cinema of Death: Youth and Necropolitics in Hong Kong
Chun Chun Ting, Nanyang Technological University

Focusing on the death of Hong Kong youth as a political reality and cinematic trope, this paper seeks to address desperation as a structure of feeling in contemporary Hong Kong. While the wave of disqualification of young politicians from office following the Umbrella Movement has signalled the political death of Hong Kong youth, the protest movement in 2019, with its shocking number of unknown death and the mass imprisonment that followed, has made clear the regime's exercise of biopower and its targeting of young people as the disposable population. I argue that this form of "necropolitics" (Achille Mbembe) targeting the young is closely reflected in Hong Kong cinema. In 1997, Made in Hong Kong portrays the death of the young as a metaphor of the city's demise after the handover and of the decadence and escapism of the grown-up world. Looking at a series of films and documentaries, including Ten Years (2015), Mad World(2016), Lost in the Fumes (2017), G Affairs (2018), Inside the Red Brick Wall(2020), I examine how Hong Kong cinema portrays its young people and address the issue of death. It is my argument that these films' engagement with death is not limited to the diegesis, as youth's idealism, struggle, and sacrifice to resist the demise of their city. The engagement is also embodied by the production condition, as these emerging filmmakers' tenacious and persistent effort to reinvent Hong Kong cinema when death looms over the local industry.

Panel 2

Tactical Choices of Moderate Violence and the Escalation of Nonviolent Movements: Evidence from Hong Kong

Myunghee Lee, University of Copenhagen

When do protesters adopt violent tactics? Studies on civil resistance suggest that when dissidents have capabilities to exercise violent tactics and when nonviolence is unsuccessful, dissidents tend to use violent tactics. However, studies that closely trace processes in which a nonviolent movement turns into a violent movement are limited. This study examines the two democracy campaigns in Hong Kong--the Umbrella Movement and the Anti-extradition Bill Movement--and uncovers the escalation process. I find that dissidents accept violent tactics strategically when the previous nonviolence was fruitless and when they are confident that their campaign goal and the use of certain levels of violence will gain public support. I also find that in facing an “invincible” target, dissidents adopt moderate levels of violent tactics to draw sustained domestic and international attention in the hope of making the target government accountable to those pressures to certain degrees.

Global circuits: Hong Kong, Protests, and Anglophone Mediascape in 2019

Dušica Ristivojević, University of Helsinki

The introduction of the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill in March 2019 triggered a growing wave of protests in Hong Kong. Texts, images, concerns and initiatives which started to circulate globally in 2019 continue to influence globally diverse engagements with Hong Kong until the present day.

This paper will examine globally circulating representations of the protests and its context in some of the most influential global opinion-making English language media outlets: Hong Kong Free Press and the South China Morning Post; China-based the Global Times; the US ‘newspaper of record’ New York Times; the Guardian; and the German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle in English. The analysis of this ‘institutionalized’ anglophone media space will be enriched by the discussion of circulating messages disseminated via ‘unmediated’ information-sharing space of social media (Facchinetti, 2015).

In doing so, the paper will first elaborate on the importance of looking at anglophone and not ‘Western’ meaning-making platforms, practices, and circulations. It will then move to the discussion of four main themes which dominated media representations of the dynamics of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, namely Hong Kong-China relations, violence, business, and international support to the protests. Lastly, the paper will look at the affective dynamics of textual and visual representations which the paper identifies as constitutive of the media narratives, and end by suggesting related directions for the future research.

Images of the Frontliner – The Hong Kong Protests 2019

Mai Corlin Frederiksen, University of Copenhagen

The 2019 protests in Hong Kong were remarkably visual, with hundreds of protest wall complexes across the territory and massive amounts of visual material spread on digital platforms. The protest posters produced by the movement ranged from hand-drawn slogans calling for rebellion, drawings of protesters as manga cartoon characters and superheroes, memes ridiculing the government, ironic Mao-quotes, prints with graphic depictions of police violence, popular culture references, educational pamphlets, infographics and so much more. The explicit use of visual protest material as an intrinsic part of the protest movement in Hong Kong, has (once again) shown us just how central the visual is to the formation of political imaginaries – thus making it all the more important to analyze these images to understand the imaginaries at play. In this talk, I will show how the image of the front line protester was used actively by the protesters to at once imagine *and* enact their Hong Kong. Here I am thinking the image in terms of “doing,” as something that not only reflects and represents a particular political standpoint, but that images, as Callahan suggests “provoke new and different social, political and economic dynamics” (Callahan 2020, 19).

Keynote 2: Hong Kong's Struggle in Historical and Comparative Perspective

Jeffrey Wasserstrom, University of California, Irvine

As unique as Hong Kong is in many specific ways, this presentation will argue that we can sharpen our understanding of key features of the city's turbulent past and tragic present by putting it beside other unusual places. There is no *perfect* analogy for the acts of resistance and repression that have made Hong Kong's recent history so full of drama, but there is considerable value in using several different decidedly *imperfect* analogies as lenses through which to view specific events of the 2010s and early 2020s. Moving from Chinese cities during the first decades of the twentieth century, to Tibet and the Soviet Bloc during the Cold War, to various Asian and non-Asian settings during the opening years of this new millennium, this talk will make the case for the careful deployment of comparisons even when dealing with a place that in certain regards deserves to be seen as incomparable.

Panel 3:

Hong Kong in the World; the World in Hong Kong; Reading Dung Kai-cheung's *Hong Kong Type* Allegorically

Michael Tsang, University of London

Hong Kong writer Dung Kai-cheung's latest novel, *Hong Kong Type* (*Hoeng Gong Zi*; 2021), is ostensibly about a set of lead movable type blocks created and manufactured by ministers of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the 19th century at its headquarters in the secondary school Ying Wa College in Hong Kong. These lead types kickstarted Hong Kong's printing industry for the Greater China region and had since been lost in Hong Kong, but a copy has been kept in the Netherlands. Its history was "recuperated" and presented to the Hong Kong public through the exhibition "Between the Lines—The Legends of Hong Kong Printing" held at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum in 2020-2021, which was also the exhibition that inspired Dung to pen the novel.

What could have been a straightforward historical retelling is complicated by Dung, however, as he layers that history with two other plotlines, one of which involves a girl recovering the story of Hong Kong Type in 2020. The timing is key here, as the novel opens with the girl having lost her memory after a failed suicide attempt, as a strongly suggestive result of having faced trauma in the 2019 anti-extradition protests. Thus, although the novel is not overtly about the protests, the novel's form, structure and setting are all situated in that context, allowing us to explore what the story of Hong Kong Type can mean for a post-protest Hong Kong.

It is in this vein that I will perform an allegorical reading on the novel, arguing that the set of movable types can be read metaphorically as Hong Kong people – "type" here becoming a pun that also means "category" or "kind", i.e. "Hong Kong type" meaning "a type/kind of people called Hongkongers". Just as the movable types ended up in the Netherlands, so have this "type" of Hongkongers been emigrating outwards in many "Western" countries, highlighting a diasporic Hong Kong community currently in formation as well as emphasising the connection to Hong Kong culture, history, and indeed, language.

Objects and Matter as Affect: Revisiting the Storied Matter of Hong Kong's 2019 Social Protest

Winnie L. M. YEE, University of Hong Kong

Hong Kong people shocked and inspired the world in the year 2019, not only because of the determination of the protestors but also because of the way ordinary objects were used to transform public spaces into theatres of political expression. This paper re-examines the social movement by looking at the ways these mundane objects have been documented, represented, and commemorated, and, in particular, the affective emotions they provoke. This attempt to reconnect objects such as helmets, face masks, and bricks with emotion and affect does not in any way minimize the power of the protestors as collective agents. My interest is

in moving beyond the anthropocentric paradigm of narration and reconsidering objects as matters of affect, medium, and society.

Such a conception asks us to revisit the stable distinction between nature/culture and human/object. Citing Niels Bohr's quantum physics model, Karen Barad argues that things are not necessarily static and clearly bounded; instead, the boundaries of things are created in the process of intra-actions. Adopting a perspective shaped by theories of intra action, vibrant power, and storied matter, this paper will focus on the ways objects can represent a social movement and inspire visions of the future. It will also explore the ways that the presentation and reception of objects in a specific urban space can expose the intricate relationship between cultural identity, social movements, and global phenomena. Citing examples from literature, painting, and urban design, my inquiry into the 2019 social movement and its immediate aftermath shows the often neglected impact of the non human in shaping the cultural imagination. My focus on the aesthetic, infrastructural, and epistemological dimensions of objects highlights not only their agency but their role in rewriting the collective story of the city, taking into account its continuous "becomings" and conflicting relations.

Serpil Oppermann has described storied matter as an "an ontological performance of the world in its ongoing articulation" (149). It is created by narrative trends that focus on evolution and dissolution, and open up possibilities for non-hierarchical, cross-scale ecological engagements and interactions between people and other entities and forces. The events of 2019 were intended to give the city the agency to pursue a more equitable future. The artists and protestors involved registered the complexities of the upheaval and its situation in a larger context. By analysing the function of the objects and the materiality of the space associated with the protests, this paper shows that the traumatic memories of these events are entwined with the cultural memories and history symbolized by the urbanscape and objects of Hong Kong.

[Haunted Habitat: Invisible Protesters in Dorothy Tse's Fictional Hong Kong](#)

Astrid Møller-Olsen, Lund University and University of Stavanger

In many ways, Hong Kong occupies a between-space with, as Kwok-kan Tam notes, "neither a precolonial past, [nor] a postcolonial future"¹; a space of transition defined by a culture of disappearance² and populated by writers who work between standardised and local versions of English and Chinese languages.³ In Tse's fictional Hong Kong, citizens likewise dwell between illusion and reality, memory and forgetfulness: "This city sits at the conjunction between dream and wakefulness. When the past flashes before your eyes, it creates a moment

¹ Quoted in Tsang, "Hong Kong as a test case for world literature," *Sanglap* 4 (1), 2017: 13.

² Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and Politics of Disappearance*, U. of Minnesota Press, 1997.

³ Tsang, 12.

and in that phantom image, you feel that you can approach those barely audible but sustained calls, so long forgotten.”⁴

In her stories, the acute presence and imminent disappearance of Hong Kong identities and ways of life produce narratives haunted by the present rather than the past. Because the protests have defined the cityscape one week only to be forcibly erased the next, their afterlives in memory and text combine the real and the ephemeral. In Tse’s stories, the tangible absence of erased protests produces a state of half-wakefulness, of collective amnesia haunted by snatches of memory, like the faint cries of diseased or imprisoned protesters removed from local reality.

⁴ Tse, *Yingtoumao yu yinyuexiang nühai* 鷹頭貓與音樂箱女孩 [Eagle-headed Cat and the Music Box Ballerina], Aquarius Publishing, 2020: 252.