Book reviews

CHENG, Edmund 鄭煒, and Samson YUEN 袁瑋熙 (eds.). 2018.
社運年代, 香港抗爭政治的軌跡 *(Sheyun niandai, Xianggang kangzheng zhengzhi de guiji, An Epoch of Social Movements: The Trajectory of Contentious Politics in Hong Kong).*
Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

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Conventionally portrayed by scholars as one of the most politically stable cities in Asia, Hong Kong has in fact witnessed numerous protests, social movements, and even periods of civil unrest over the past one hundred years, with its supposedly politically apathetic citizens taking to the streets to demand rights, freedoms, and better governance from both the colonial and post-colonial governments. The 79-day Occupy Central Movement in 2014, which became popularly known internationally as the Umbrella Movement, followed in the footsteps of, among other events, the large-scale strikes of the 1920s, the Nationalist-led 10 October riots in 1956, the Communist-incited 1967 riots, the 1977 educators' protest (known as the Golden Jubilee Incident), and the 2003 demonstrations over a national security bill, which are widely believed to have prompted Hong Kong's first post-colonial Chief Executive to step down. In academia, the Umbrella Movement renewed global interest in studying the politics of Hong Kong, leading to the publication of numerous scholarly books and journal articles. However, very few academic works on the movement have been published locally by Hong Kong scholars. *An Epoch of Social Movements: The Trajectory of Contentious Politics in Hong Kong* thus makes an important contribution to academic discussion of this most significant instance of civil unrest in post-colonial Hong Kong. It brings together the work of Hong Kong scholars, mostly political scientists, who actually witnessed the Umbrella Movement as the streets were being occupied, surveyed the occupiers after tear gas had been fired at them, or were even occupiers themselves, and hence were arrested and detained on the 79th day of occupation.

As noted in the introduction by co-editors Edmund Cheng and Samson Yuen, the book's aim is to reveal *plebeian experiences* of political protests and social movements in Hong Kong. The book is divided into four parts, each comprising four chapters. In the first part, *Narrating and Framing Social Movements*, Ngok Ma begins by arguing that Hong Kong's liberal autocracy model encourages politicians to value their seats in the Legislative Council, and thus distances them from the plebeian experiences of protesters on the ground. Wing-sang Law highlights the dilemma of social movement activists in determining whether to follow the political leadership or the mass of protestors in directing movements such as the Umbrella Movement. Edmund Cheng, in his chapter, notes that such decentralisation and a bottom-up approach to mobilisation have served to solidify localism and a local identity among young people in post-Movement Hong Kong. However, Kin-ming Kwong points out that awareness of a local identity as Hongkongers actually appeared as early as the 1940s in the city's major English-language newspaper, the *South China Morning Post*. He uses the sinophonic ideas of Shu-mei Shih to argue that Hongkongers' Chineseness, like that of their Singaporean and Malaysian counterparts, differs from that of the mainland Chinese. The distance in Chineseness between the Hong Kong and mainland Chinese communities has only widened in the wake of the Umbrella Movement, he contends.

Thirteen of the book's 16 chapters concern analysis of the Umbrella Movement. However, three of the chapters in the second part, *Heterogeneity and Diversity of Issues and Spaces*, introduce other important social movements in Hong Kong history. Chris Chan traces the trajectory of the labour movement in Hong Kong from the 1980s onwards. He argues that in the post-Umbrella Movement era, the labour movement, which used to work closely with democratic activists, has encountered two new difficulties: increased intervention by Beijing and a rising localism movement sceptical of Hong Kong's traditional democratic parties. Agnes Ku details how Hong Kong's history and collective memory and values have been constructed to sometimes drive and sometimes constrain movements calling for the preservation of historical relics such as Queen's Pier and the Central Police Station Compound. Joseph Tso, Lucetta Kam, and Yuen-ki Lai in their chapter detail the difficult journey of the homosexual and transgender communities in fighting for their rights in post-colonial Hong Kong. Whilst they have benefited from liberal court judgements and new legislation recognising equal rights among citizens of different sexual orientations, owing to the absence of a gender recognition law they still lack full rights, particularly a full right to identity, which continues to face fierce opposition from religious and parents' groups. In the final chapter in this part, Sampson Wong returns to the Umbrella Movement, highlighting the way in which the creative arts expanded the space for and sustainability of that social movement. Visual arts in the form of painting, sculpture, and mini-architecture, for example, can foster collective joy and experiential politics among protestors, Wong argues.

The third part of the book, *Experiences and Constraints in the Practice of Democracy*, contains analysis of survey results from Umbrella Movement activists and occupiers. Jie-ying Wang conducted in-depth interviews with social movement organisers in both Hong Kong and Taiwan, and in reporting the results reveals the role played by traditional and new media in the mediatisation of politics. In particular, speed, visibility, and conciseness form the core competences of political message dissemination and narrative formation in the social media age, she contends. Although those who proposed the Occupy Central Movement are being criminally prosecuted for inciting a public nuisance as this review goes to press, Gary Tang's survey of close to 500 occupiers informs us that the majority (55.8%) actually joined the occupation after the police met the initial occupiers with tear gas. Tang's

chapter also reveals another important truth: despite the growing importance of new media in social movement mobilisation, most of the occupiers he interviewed had received news about Occupy Central from traditional TV news reports. Wai-yin Chan's survey of 1,681 occupiers echoes Tang's findings, showing that the majority joined the protests after 28 September owing to their discontent over the police handling of the demonstration. These surveys confirm the spontaneity and bottom-up nature of the Umbrella Movement.

Government, Organisation and Repercussion of Citizens is the title of the book's final part. Ray Yep, an expert on the 1967 riots in colonial Hong Kong, compares and contrasts the commonalities and differences between those riots and the Umbrella Movement. He identifies the commonalities as the dispersal of a mass-scale occupation through police force, the prosecution of rioters/occupiers under the name of the rule of law, and the shifting of blame to foreign influence. A major difference was the stricter adherence of the post-colonial Hong Kong government to central government policy in dealing with the movement, whereas the colonial governor in 1967 had greater leeway to follow a policy in disagreement with his London superiors. Samson Yuen goes on to argue that the post-colonial Hong Kong government adopted a strategy of attrition, lawsuits, and counter-mobilisation to end the occupation in 2014 under a central government mandate to disperse it without bloodshed or compromise. With reference to the experience of protests in Eastern Europe, Eliza Lee warns that the demobilisation efforts of the governing authority may hinder continuance of the civic awareness and social movement momentum triggered by the Umbrella Movement. In her view, a bottom-up approach alone is not enough to sustain a social movement, and she thus urges the development of a united *organisational infrastructure* that incorporates the strengths of both political parties and civil society in the post-Umbrella Movement era. Very few political scientists in Hong Kong have participated in political protests that involve a breach of the law and risk imprisonment and a criminal record. Po-chung Chow is among the exceptions. His chapter, the last in the book, does not analyse the Umbrella Movement from the perspective of a social scientist. Instead, it records Chow's personal experience, thoughts, and emotions as an occupier who interacted both with his fellow protesters and the policemen who arrested him. The chapter also records his sentimental exchanges with his students with whom he was detained. Chow's chapter is thus in no way an objective piece of research, but rather highly detailed, valuable primary source material that I believe future researchers will make ample use of.

Editors Yuen and Cheng should be commended for their efforts in putting together this timely volume comprising the views of both senior professors and post-doctoral researchers and a PhD student, although readers may find the chapters varying in academic approach and quality. One weakness, common to edited volumes in general, is insufficient thematic coherence across the chapters, despite the majority concerning the Umbrella Movement. Putting aside this minor issue, which is unlikely to diminish readers' interest, *An Epoch of Social Movements*, as Tai-lok Lui notes in his preface, raises a very important question: was the Umbrella Movement a *collective movement* or only a *connected moment*? That is a question worthy of future research comparing the Umbrella Movement with similar movements/moments in other parts of the world.

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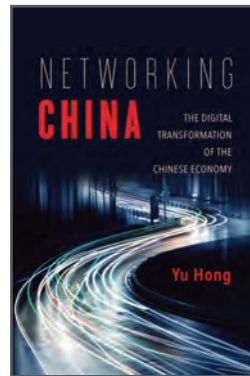
HONG, Yu. 2017.
Networking China: The Digital Transformation of the Chinese Economy.
Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press.

SÉVERINE ARSÈNE

Yu Hong's book, *Networking China*, takes a clear stand in critiquing capitalism, detailing contradictions spawned by China's immersion in globalised production relations. New information technologies have been the "epicentre" of the economic and political transformations of the last 30 years. Hence, it is through the development of infrastructures and digital services since the 1980s that the author gauges these contradictions.

Each chapter considers a specific technological stratum, covering the same periods under different gazes: installation of telecommunication networks, then broadband networks, mobile networks, audio-visual and network convergence, and finally digital. The book draws upon sources from specialised Chinese media, official reports, and statistics, making for a dense and well-documented text that however risks losing the reader in details and chronology. The conclusions at each chapter's end help better understand the author's overall argument.

On the whole, the book narrates a sort of headlong rush of investment in telecommunications, led by the idea of "technological inevitability" (p. 149). Communication technologies are seen as both the ineluctable goal of global economic development and the means through which the economy can breathe anew and shake off capitalism's contradictions.

Thus, the choice of developing telecommunications seemed necessary to facilitate China's economic development in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the transition to high speed and fibre optics after 2008. The conduits were gradually reconceptualised, first as a lever of economic development for national and foreign firms in China, then as a means for diffusion and exchange of cultural content. To ensure that the networks did not block the development of other sectors of the economy, priority was given to data transfers (useful for firms), broadband, and transition to digital.

This invariably went against the objectives of universal access in rural areas and affordable supply nationwide. The author describes the coexistence of new infrastructures' overcapacity alongside vast poorly-connected regions as well as the needs for information and cultural products being unmet or too expensive.

Now, the advent of digital giants in a context of media convergence is touted as a promise to resolve this development model's contradictions by offering new services, content, prospects, and stronger business models. These lucrative offers seem to meet real cultural needs and consumption demand. The government counts greatly on smart cities and on the whole economy's digital transformation, especially through the "Internet+" plan, a priority at the time of the book's writing (2015). More recently the "Made in China 2025" plan stretches and extends this strategy, notably in the artificial intelligence and robotization domains.