Transnational Feminism and Women's Movements in Post-1997 Hong Kong

Solidarity Beyond the State

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1 Introduction

This book is about feminism and women's movements in post-1997 Hong Kong. In 1984, Britain and the People's Republic of China (PRC) signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration to revert Hong Kong's sovereignty from the former to the latter on July 1, 1997. This marked the beginning of the political transition in Hong Kong, which saw women play a more prominent role as participants in collective action for change. However, their subsequent underrepresentation in the primary pillars of government—the Executive Council, the Legislative Council, the judiciary, and the civil service—is as evident in the Special Administration Region (SAR) as when Hong Kong was a British colony.[1] The low proportion of women representatives in this context is due, in part, to the challenges faced by women's groups in relating to institutionalized state power before and after the political transition, and women activists continue to be significantly divided on the strategic implications of their relations to the state.

This book shifts our analyses away from the confines of women's participation in state and interstate structures and institutions, to incorporate women's mobilization of disadvantaged and disaffected women, the majority of whom are culturally and ethnically distinct groups of women from Mainland China as well as South and Southeast Asia. The emphasis on these marginalized communities broadens the location, form, and extent of women's activism and challenges the geographical and ideological binaries—East-West/North-South/First World-Third World—that are prevalent in existing scholarship on the strategies of organizing and representation in women's movements. I illustrate the multiple and contradictory dynamics of power and the interconnecting histories, experiences, and struggles of different groups of women as they seek

1. After the political transition, Hong Kong retained these major institutions of British governance. The Executive Council, headed by the chief executive, serves as the core policy-making body. The Legislative Council is the law-making body with seventy seats, half of which are returned from the geographical constituency direct elections and the other half from the functional constituency indirect elections.

to gain some control over the global political economy that shapes their lives in Hong Kong.

To date, there is no comprehensive study of feminism and women's movements in Hong Kong. This book helps to fill this gap while also contributing to the new strand of transnational feminism. I provide an insight into the current context of women's activism after the political transition, informed by a comprehensive and critical history of women's mobilization during the British colonial period and in the lead up to governance under the PRC. More importantly, I examine the organizational forms, rhetoric, and strategies that allow women activists to incorporate the voices of disadvantaged and disaffected women in Hong Kong. The first part of this introduction provides an overview of social movements in the sociocultural, economic, and political context of Hong Kong. In the second part, I draw on feminist and social movement scholarship to illustrate how the empirical focus on Hong Kong can advance theoretical deliberations on transnational feminism.

Hong Kong

To understand feminism and women's movements in Hong Kong, we need to consider the society as a predominantly Chinese society; previously a British colony (1843–1997) and now a SAR under the PRC (1997–present); and a capitalist economy.[2] Hong Kong is situated on the southern coast of China, enclosed by the Pearl River Delta and South China Sea. It has a population of over 7 million people. The Chinese comprise 95 percent of the population, who mainly originate from the cities of Guangzhou and Taishan in Guangdong province in Mainland China. Indonesians, Filipinos, Caucasians, Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese, Japanese, and Thais form the significant minorities. Chinese and English are the official languages of Hong Kong. English is widely used in the government and in the legal, business, and professional sectors. The majority of the population speaks Cantonese, a Chinese language originating from Guangdong province. Since the political transition, the usage of Mandarin, the official language of the PRC, has also increased, especially in the numerous enterprises trading in Hong Kong or in doing business with Mainland China and Taiwan.[3]

Both during the British colonial period and under the PRC as a SAR, social movements in Hong Kong reflect a history of "organizing from below"

2. For a thorough yet succinct history of Hong Kong, see Lau (1982), Leung (1996), Faure (1997), Ngo (1999), Carroll (2007), and Munn (2009).
3. This reflects the linguistic complexity in Hong Kong that is often obscured by the common Chinese written script. I illustrate this linguistic diversity throughout the book, as manifested in my conversations with my respondents and in the publications that I utilize in my documentary research.

(Lui et al. 2005, 58). This form of organizing serves to fill the gap between a state that avoids direct intervention in local society and an economy that is driven by market forces. While the British and PRC governments have both been wary of the politicization of the public sphere and popular mobilization by oppositional groups, they do not explicitly suppress the freedoms of speech and public assembly. Social movements emerge and develop in a generally open and stable sociopolitical environment and assume different profiles and responsibilities in different historical contexts.

British governance in Hong Kong was characterized by the absence of electoral politics and channels for popular participation. The British colonial administration implemented the governing strategy of what Ambrose King (1972, 129) terms "administrative absorption," in which local Chinese business and professional elites were co-opted into the colonial administration and given privileged access to decision-making channels. In other words, the British colonial administration limited its role in Hong Kong. Its functions included maintaining law and order, providing public infrastructure and sanitation facilities, and promoting entrepreneurial capitalism and free trade. Chinese business and professional elites provided community services and mediated conflicts within the Chinese community, and, in return, they enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy in managing the areas of education, healthcare, and housing.

Because the governing strategy of administrative absorption was highly centralized and based on "old-boys' networks," women's participation and representation in the political arena was essentially nonexistent until the 1960s. The Hong Kong Council of Women was initiated by a small group of elite expatriate and Chinese women in 1947 to advocate for women's rights in the economic, legal, and social arenas. In 1948, members lobbied the colonial administration for the participation of women in the political arena. Instead of increasing women's representation, the colonial administration urged members to encourage women to participate in other spheres of public life, such as the provision of welfare services in the areas of education and health. Major reforms in relation to women's rights and welfare were also the result of constant and resolute demands from members over an extended period of time.

Chinese politics also had wider repercussions on social movements in Hong Kong throughout British governance. Both Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party used Hong Kong as a base from which to acquire material supplies and launch propaganda campaigns. Rather than take sides, the colonial administration adopted a stance of official neutrality in a bid to weather political conflicts. After the Communist faction's victory in 1949 and the Nationalist faction's retreat to Taiwan, however, the hostility and tension between these two political factions continued to have an impact on Hong Kong. Nongovernmental organizing—the

political affiliations and positions of grassroots community groups, university student organizations, and trade unions—was based on the ideological rivalry between Communist China and Nationalist Taiwan. This contention continues to be a critical factor in the structure of social movements in contemporary Hong Kong.

In the 1950s and 1960s, nongovernmental organizing was characterized by the provision of welfare services. After the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation, the colonial administration had to oversee the reconstruction and restoration of Hong Kong. While it continued to depend upon local elites, local and international social service agencies and voluntary charity groups were established to assist in providing welfare services. Local and international women's groups such as the Hong Kong Chinese Women's Club and the Young Women's Christian Association engaged in providing free education, vocational training, and welfare services for the underprivileged. By the 1970s, Hong Kong became capable of supporting its own welfare services through government funding. Local social service agencies and voluntary charity groups developed new programs and moved into new areas of service provision, and they became less dependent upon international expertise and funding. Many international agencies reduced the scope of their programs, became localized, or began to leave Hong Kong.

As Hong Kong progressed to an industrial economy in the 1970s, the focus of nongovernmental organizing shifted to the facilitation of popular mobilization. A new generation of local Chinese, who had grown up experiencing the governing strategy of administrative absorption, was disgruntled with the restricted space for sociopolitical participation, limited resources, and a weak bargaining position. This led to the formation of pressure groups and the use of collective protest action outside of formal institutional politics as a means to articulate popular grievances and to challenge the colonial administration. Such collective resistance created a tacit understanding and forged communication networks among various pressure groups. They shared nationalist sentiments, grassroots interests, and the ideology of human rights.

The 1980s marked the beginning of the political transition in Hong Kong. Unlike other British colonies, the decolonization of Hong Kong led neither to independence nor to democracy. This period witnessed a situation of political polarization, as Sino-British conflicts over issues of democratization, human rights, and civil liberties destabilized and divided the Hong Kong people. According to Lau Siu-kai (2001, 61), the British government was under pressure by the "Western world" to maintain the continuity of Hong Kong's prosperity, sovereignty, and stability. To the West, the maintenance of the capitalist vibrancy of Hong Kong would contribute to the gradual transition of Mainland China away from socialism and towards incorporation into an international system

constructed in accordance with "Western values and rules." Likewise, a viable Hong Kong was of critical importance to the PRC government, which was in the process of rebuilding its political legitimacy through economic growth. The PRC government, however, envisaged that the continuing success of capitalism in Hong Kong depended on an authoritarian political system combined with a noninterventionist economic doctrine.

Subsequently, the "one country, two systems" framework was established to ease the political transition by acknowledging the difference in the political systems of Hong Kong and Mainland China. Since the political transition, Hong Kong enjoys autonomy except in defense and foreign affairs. The framework also stipulates that the territory maintains its capitalist economic system and guarantees the rights and freedoms of its people for at least fifty years beyond the transfer of sovereignty. Nevertheless, various sectors of society have sought to limit their vulnerability to change, their efforts surging in the years after the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing on June 4, 1989. Several issues have permeated the agenda of pressure groups.

First, there was the discourse on nationalism. Contrary to the exclusionary aspect of European nationalism, the Chinese conceptualization of nationalism tends towards inclusion, as articulated by Aihwa Ong's (1996, 180) view of transnational Chinese solidarity: "this insistence on cultural continuity makes Chinese everywhere the same; if they are not part of the mainland society, they are still an extension of China." The first PRC-appointed chief executive of Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, was forthright in invoking Chineseness, in terms of common ethnic origins and shared values, to propagate patriotic and nationalist passions:

> I believe that we all have a commonality which ties us together: We are Chinese, and we are proud to be Chinese . . . As we move forward, there is a need for us to renew our commitment to the values we hold dear. These values have been with us for thousands of years and are as relevant today as they ever have been: Trust, love and respect for our family and our elders; integrity, honesty and loyalty towards all; commitment to education and a strong desire to strive to improve and advance ourselves; a belief in order and stability; an emphasis on obligations to the community rather than rights of the individual; a preference for consultation rather than open confrontation. These are some of the shared values which make our society more cohesive. Together with a strong identity, they will provide us with clarity of direction and unity of purpose. (Tung 1996, 10)

By appropriating Confucian values of familialism, modesty, harmony, consensus, and collectivism, Tung Chee-hwa endeavored to stitch together the inherently divergent sociopolitical environments of Hong Kong and Mainland China to redefine national identity and instill cultural solidarity in Hong Kong. However, this was a source of alienation for many Hong Kong Chinese and

reinforced oppositional discourses on the real meaning of being Chinese and patriotic, and the proliferation of a Hong Kong Chinese identity that can be opposed to a Mainland Chinese identity. In questioning Chineseness as a feature shared by ethnic Chinese on the basis of discrete traits and traditions, Allen Chun (1996, 121–22) notes that Hong Kong's prior isolation from the PRC allowed for "a peculiar sense of Chineseness to emerge that radically differed from the assumed synonymity of one family, one people, one civilization, and one polity cultivated elsewhere by rejecting any intrinsic relationship between ethnicity and nationality." In other words, the local Chinese questioned the legitimacy of "Chineseness" authorized and institutionalized by the PRC government.

This sense of Hong Kong Chineseness as a distinct identity emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, with a postwar generation that had only known Hong Kong as home. This conception of the Hong Kong Chinese identity was dynamic and multifaceted. It was emphatically Cantonese as schools began to stop teaching in Mandarin and the Chinese media in Hong Kong responded by promoting the use of the vernacular. While the Hong Kong Chinese were at times anticolonial if not anti-British, they were receptive to the rational approaches to governance, the fairness of common law, the ideas of free trade and open markets, scientific values in education, and new standards of professionalism in society. However, nothing reinforced the emergence of the Hong Kong Chinese identity more decisively than the system of governance and the revolutionary violence during the Tiananmen Square massacre. The Hong Kong Chinese could no longer hide their disappointment with what Chinese political values had become, and the contrast between the culture of violence on Mainland China and the way order had been maintained in Hong Kong was perhaps the most distinct motivation in shaping their political values.

Second, the drafting of the Basic Law, which would serve as the constitutional document after the political transition, provided pressure groups with the opportunity to compel the British and PRC governments to democratize Hong Kong. Informal networks facilitated the organizing of popular mobilization in support of the democratization of the Hong Kong electoral system. This pro-democracy movement challenged the legitimacy of the state structures and institutions proposed by the PRC government by appealing to popular fears of communism and asserting that the costs of authoritarian rule would erode civil liberties in Hong Kong. Indeed, involvement in various pressure groups served as the training ground for many local Chinese women activists.

Following the Tiananmen Square massacre, the British government pushed for a more representative administration to meet the aspirations of the Hong Kong people. The PRC government was obligated to placate the Hong Kong people and conceded with the introduction of direct elections

to the Legislative Council in 1991. The prospect of elections encouraged some pressure groups to institutionalize their pro-democracy opposition by forming political parties, such as the United Democrats of Hong Kong and the Meeting Point.[4] In reaction to the emergence of pro-democracy political parties, conservative, pro-PRC, and pro-business elites initiated the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong and the Liberal Party to support the PRC government and, as a sign of political loyalty, espouse protracted democratic reform in Hong Kong. These various political parties were active in preparing their members for elections and articulating their positions on the drafting of the Basic Law and the post-1997 administration.

At the same time, the democratization of the Hong Kong electoral system also opened more channels for women to participate in politics. Given that women had long been excluded from both mainstream and alternative political interests, they made themselves an effective force by giving themselves a public collective identity, complete with legal and institutional changes. The colonial administration appointed Christine Loh and Anna Wu to the Legislative Council while Emily Lau, Margaret Ng, and Elizabeth Wong were elected to the Legislative Council. These women politicians were actively involved in struggles over human rights and women's rights and formulated policy positions on issues such as antidiscrimination, equal inheritance rights, and individual freedoms of speech, assembly, and the press. Together with these women politicians, women activists advocated for the reform of marriage law and the abolition of concubinage (1947–1970); equal pay for equal work (1948–1971); legalization of abortion (1969–81); legislation of maternity leave and benefits (1979–present); separate taxation (1981–90); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and a Women's Commission (1989–2001); and land inheritance rights for indigenous women in the New Territories (1994). In her discussion of these women's issues, Lee Ching Kwan (2000) observes that public discourses shifted from a language of maternal/familial needs and welfare to a language of women's rights and gender equality. This enabled, as elsewhere, the emergence of "women as a collective actor."

Since the political transition, the Hong Kong government has been careful in anticipating the interests of the PRC government to ensure the territory's political stability. It reinforced the governing strategy of administrative absorption by building a support base among the conservative, pro-PRC upper-middle classes and in the business and professional community.[5] Business associations and professional organizations make limited attempts to participate in electoral

4. The United Democrats of Hong Kong and the Meeting Point merged to form The Democratic Party in 1994.
5. This is with the exception of legal professionals.

politics yet are able to secure positions on the Executive and Legislative Councils, either through appointment to consultative bodies or the functional constituency within the Legislative Council. Pro-PRC political parties are generally able to gain access to positions in the political establishment, but they, as opposed to business associations and professional organizations, rely more on public support during elections. Social service and welfare organizations are integrated into government administration through government funding. As the Hong Kong government enjoys the support of the majority within the Executive and Legislative Councils, it does not have to lobby for the approval of the pro-democracy movement, which represents the opposition.

Nevertheless, the dynamism of the pro-democracy movement has not been undermined by the conservative, pro-PRC, and pro-business political regime. Pressure groups continue to enjoy their autonomous status and have the freedom to mobilize influence and resources to promote their interests and to articulate demands. Pro-democracy political parties enhance their influence through participation in elections, and are able to gain access to positions in the political establishment. Others remain on the periphery, offering an alternative form of political participation to political parties. Alliances like the Civil Human Rights Front are formed to bring together constituency-based, issue-oriented, and/or grassroots community pressure groups in support of democracy, human rights, and political liberties. These groups are dominated by academics and/or activists who appear to be more interested in maintaining a liberal civil society and organizational autonomy than seeking political power.[6]

The political transition was also the impetus for both collaboration between and polarization among women activists in Hong Kong. Fearing that the transition would lead to anti-PRC activity, the PRC government was active in mobilizing various women's groups, formed on the basis of geographical region, interest, and service provision, under the umbrella of the Hong Kong Federation of Women (HKFW: 香港各界婦女聯合協進會), to realign pro-PRC support among women. Like the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong and the Liberal Party, HKFW supports the PRC government and favors protracted democratic reform in Hong Kong. Members focus primarily on developing "official" links with individuals and organizations in the PRC and are often integrated into the framework of government administration. They also distance themselves from "feminism," associating it with "oppositional" forms of collective action that may compromise their relationships with economic and political elites in Hong Kong and Mainland China. In contrast, the Hong Kong Women's Coalition on Equal Opportunities (HKWCEO: 平等機會婦女聯席) represents the most progressive feminist arena of women's

6. The Civil Human Rights Front was instrumental in organizing the historic July 1 mass rallies in 2003 and 2004.

activism in Hong Kong, albeit with indigenized interpretations of autonomy and nationalism. HKWCEO encompasses rights-based, grassroots-oriented women's groups that believe they can contribute to democratic reform in Hong Kong. Participants have amicable relations with pro-democracy political parties and regularly participate in pro-democracy movement initiatives, but they are wary of direct alignment with these groups in formal institutional politics. They claim that they have consistently been sidelined as social actors within democratic ideas, institutions, and movements. To them, democratic representation encompasses opportunities for the expression of diverse voices. As a form of political opposition, they are also kept distant from the core of the political establishment. Nevertheless, there are concerns that the institutionalization of women's movements will weaken their autonomy and radicalism. Consequently, HKWCEO is ambivalent towards political ambitions and state concessions and, instead, is active in establishing alternative spaces for marginalized communities of women to articulate their interests. This inclination to deconstruct and obscure group boundaries raises questions of feminism and its relationship to women's movements that embrace "the impulse to take apart that identity from within" (Gamson 1995, 391).

In feminist and social movement scholarship, there is the understanding that identity constructions, and in particular that of collective identity, are fundamental to grievance interpretation in all forms of collective action (Melucci 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1992). According to William Gamson (1992a, 56), "Participation in social movements frequently involves enlargement of personal identity for participation and offers fulfillment and realization of self." However, current debates within feminist scholarship reveal that this alignment between identity and mobilization has only been partially addressed. Identities, within these debates, are conceived as extant before movements, which subsequently make them salient by deploying them strategically for political and social change. On the contrary, social movement scholars argue that collective identity is "a continual process of recomposition rather than a given" and "a dynamic, *emergent* aspect of collective action" (Schlesinger 1987, 237, original emphasis). In other words, collective identity is not only necessary for successful collective action, it is often an end in itself, with the reflexive process of "individual pronouncement of affiliation, of connection with others" (Friedman and McAdam 1992, 157).

In exploring this linkage between identity and mobilization, David Snow and Doug McAdam (2000) suggest that collective action framing processes constitute a central mechanism in facilitating this relation. As Scott Hunt et al. (1994, 185) observe, identity constructions are an inherent aspect of framing processes that "proffer, buttress, and embellish identities that range from collaborative to conflictual." With Hong Kong as the empirical focus, I argue

for feminism as a "collective action frame," rather than a "collective identity," so as to facilitate our understanding of how women activists build transnational feminist solidarity. In other words, the meanings of feminism that dominate at any particular moment are not given a priori, but are rather formed out of negotiation and struggle within and across women's movements. This framing process facilitates the extension of personal identity in movement contexts and generates the collective action frame that inspires and legitimizes women's activism. To explicate this suggestion for transnational feminism, I first discuss current social movement scholarship on collective action frames and framing processes.

Collective Action Frames and Framing Processes

According to social movement scholarship, movement actors are not perceived merely as carriers of extant ideas and meanings that emerge perfunctorily out of structural arrangements, unanticipated events, or existing ideologies. Rather, they are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meanings for adherents, constituents, antagonists, and observers (Snow and Benford 1988). This meaning construction is conceptualized as framing, specifying an active, processual phenomenon that involves agency and contention:

> It is active in the sense that something is being done, and processual in the sense of a dynamic, evolving process. It entails agency in the sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organizations and movement activists. And it is contentious in the sense that it involves the generation of interpretative frames that not only differ from existing ones but they may also challenge them. (Benford and Snow 2000, 614)

In the framing process, we are moving beyond the description of feminist ideology and the corresponding tendency to consider its meanings objective to the analysis of how meanings come into existence and are appropriated by women activists. This produces "collective action frames."

This notion of "frame" is based on Erving Goffman's (1974, 21) conceptualization of frames as "schemata of interpretation" that enable individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" occurrences within their life space and the world at large. Collective action frames also abbreviate aspects of the "world out there," but in ways that are "intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow and Benford 1988, 198). More importantly, collective action frames are "not merely aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions but also the outcome of negotiated shared meaning" (Gamson 1992b, 111). It follows that feminism as a collective action frame resides in the interpretive

discussions and debates that women activists engage in among one another and in the framing conflicts that occur between women activists and their constituents, allies, and adversaries. This, in turn, shapes ensuing framing processes, emphasizing the dialectical relation between collective action frames and framing processes. To adopt Medvedev and Bakhtin's (1978, 8) expression, the basis of feminism resides "not within us, but between us." As we turn to the key theoretical debates on transnational feminism, it is useful to see them in light of collective action frames and framing processes. The understanding of how women activists construct meanings that link the individual to the movement and movement networks to one another can advance deliberations on transnational feminism.

Women's Movements and the Politics of Difference and Solidarity

After decades of feminist scholarship and women's activism in a variety of sociocultural, economic, and political contexts, questions of difference—class, gender, and race—remain at the center of feminist politics. In the 1980s and 1990s, feminist analyses were primarily focused on "universalistic politics" and, in particular, the way the "West" colonizes gender. Edited volumes like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres's (1991) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* and Amrita Basu's (1995) *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective* offer critiques of "global feminisms" that have only served to prioritize West/North/First World feminist agendas and homogenize women's interests through their class-based and racial assumptions. Simultaneously, they delineate the genealogies of East/South/Third World feminisms, including their histories, experiences, and identities. The effect of these reconstructions of feminism was to create "identity politics"—discourses and movements organized around questions of gender, cultural, ethnic, national, and/or religious identity and often accompanied by the rhetoric of "difference." However, this, in turn, transpired to be essentialist, generating boundaries between groups by homogenizing and conflating individual and collective identities. Although the pursuit for identity is meant to differentiate one group from another, if all the members of a group are constructed as homogenous, there is no differentiation in terms of sociopolitical identities, positions, and values. Consequently, "identity" functions to inscribe and, at the same time, mystify relationships (Moghadam 1994; Cockburn 1998).

In recent years, the debates have shifted from the specification of East/South/Third World feminism towards a vision of common contexts of struggle. Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, M. Jacqui Alexander, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty were among the first feminist academics to develop a transnational

approach to feminism, so as to address the intellectual and political constraints of universalistic politics and identity politics. In *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, Grewal and Kaplan (1994, 17) observe that the world is currently structured by transnational economic links and cultural asymmetries, and they argue for the need to go beyond the problematic notion of a hegemonizing West to articulate "the relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies such as global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, 'authentic' forms of tradition, local structures of domination, and legal-juridical oppression on multiple levels." Reinforcing this argument in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, Alexander and Mohanty (1997, xvi) assert that feminist theory and praxis in a global context involve "a comparative, relational, and historically based conception of feminism":

> 1) A way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in *different* geographical spaces, rather than as *all* women across the world; 2) an understanding of a set of unequal relationships among and between peoples . . . and 3) a consideration of the term "international" in relation to an analysis of economic, political, and ideological processes which foreground the operations of race and capitalism . . . (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, xix, original emphasis)

Rather than the West/North/First World as a hegemonic symbol of power, this focus on scattered hegemonies and the corresponding comparative, relational way of thinking about feminism allows us to delineate multiple and overlapping privileges and oppressions that simultaneously exist and constitute one another.

Following which, Nancy A. Naples and Manisha Desai's (2002) edited volume *Women's Activism and Globalization: Linking Local Struggles and Transnational Politics* illustrates the scattered hegemonies that reveal themselves in transnational feminist mobilization—these range from the challenges confronted by activists in the East/South/Third World who are dependent on resources from international donor agencies and financial institutions based in the West/North/First World that do not necessarily share their concerns, interests, and needs, to national women's movements that restrict the access of grassroots activists and community organizations to transnational alliances and networks. Drawing attention to the issue of representation in transnational feminist organizing, Nancy A. Naples (2002, 7) questions: "Who gets to define issues to be brought to the transnational political stage; who gets to participate in this form of activism, and whose voices are left out of the dialogue?" With the growing interconnectedness and interdependence of the world, the challenge for women activists is to recognize asymmetrical power structures and link feminist practices within these structures to build transnational solidarity.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (2003) *Feminism without Borders* and Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar's (2010) *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis* are perhaps indicative of things to come. In her collection of essays, Mohanty chronicles her engagement with the vicissitudes of feminist struggles and offers a useful framework of transnational feminist solidarity through the dialectical relationship between "difference" and "commonality":

> In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully. It is this intellectual move that allows for my concern for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities. (Mohanty 2003, 225–26)

This conceptualization of solidarity addresses the connection between difference and commonality and, more importantly, can form the basis of solidarity, although women activists have to struggle to achieve this through both structures of unequal power *and* shared ideas and politics. As Nagar and Swarr (2010, 9) argue, transnational feminist solidarity is not about a simple reversal of hierarchies but an "inherently unstable praxis whose survival and evolution hinge on a continuous commitment to produce self-reflexive and dialogic critiques of its own practices rather than a search for resolutions or closures." Hence, it requires the inclination to learn from the perspectives of one another and demands the interrogation of the ways in which these communities are themselves shaped by implicit and explicit relations of power.

Hong Kong is a place with a certain amount of autonomy as a SAR, yet it is neither independent nor sovereign; it is also highly transnational in both its economic and social conditions. With multiple sets of institutions, laws, and networks, it is a classed, gendered, and racialized space through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed. As I will illustrate in the following chapters, women's activism in Hong Kong involves the mobilization of "other" women and the cultivation of transnational feminist solidarity within and across "scattered hegemonies." This includes women who engage in transnational migration—there has been a trend of marriage between Hong Kong men and mainland Chinese women since the PRC's open-door policy—and those employed in transnational service industries—sex workers from the Mainland and domestic workers from Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, and Thailand. Hong Kong as a transnational space allows for the possibility of women activists to construct transnational identifications and organizations in response. At the same time, it is also when women activists are reflecting upon more extensive and inclusive representations of

feminism to overcome hierarchies of class, gender, ethnicity, and nationality that transnational feminist solidarity poses the greatest challenge. For this reason, women's activism in Hong Kong constitutes a strategic case for the articulation of new conceptions of transnational feminism. Building on the developments in transnational feminist theorizing, it is my contention to consider, not only the historical and experiential specificities of and differences in women's lives, but the historical and experiential connections among women from different class backgrounds as well as ethnic and national communities in Hong Kong. Feminism as a "collective action frame" illustrates how feminism is constituted in, and by, women's relations to one another, not only on the basis of difference, but in terms of concomitance, interaction, and mutuality. This challenges us to articulate agency and contention across and beyond borders of cultures and nations, rather than in terms of discrete and disconnected cultures and nations.

Women's Movements and Feminism

With transnational feminism, heterogeneous and multifaceted forms of identification and mobilization have not eclipsed the shared aspiration in seeking a common emancipatory resolution to discrimination and inequality. Nira Yuval-Davis (1994; 1997; 2006) distinguishes this process as "transversal politics." Developed in the specific context of feminist negotiations in situations of ethnic conflict, it has wider implications for transnational feminist solidarity.[7] In transversal politics, the boundaries of groupings are determined "not by an essential notion of difference but by a concrete and material political reality" (Yuval-Davis 1997, 129). It involves, first, a process of "rooting" and "shifting" (Yuval-Davis 1997, 130). This is the acknowledgment that from each positioning the world is perceived differently and any understanding based on just one positioning is incomplete. Consequently, dialogue among women activists of diverse worldviews from different positions ensures a constant flow of communication both horizontally and vertically. Second, transversal politics follows the principle of "encompassment of difference by equality" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 281). On the one hand, differences are important but, on the other hand, notions of difference should be encompassed by, rather than replace, notions of equality. Such notions of difference are not hierarchical and assume recognition of others' positionings, including the differential economic, political, and social power among women activists. Third, transversal politics differentiates—both conceptually and politically—identities, positions, and

7. The Italian Women in Black developed transversal politics in the specific context of feminist negotiations in situations of ethnic conflict between Serbs and Croats as well as Palestinians and Israeli Jews (Eschle 2001). For an extensive discussion of these situations of ethnic conflict, see Cockburn (1998).

values. Women activists who belong to the same movement can actually be positioned very differently in relation to a range of social locations, including age, class, ethnicity, and nationality. At the same time, people who share similar social locations can have very different political values. Finally, Catherine Eschle (2001, 207) adds that transversal politics circumvents the dichotomies of "international/national" and "global/local" and even provides "an imaginative leap beyond the concept of the 'transnational,'" suggesting the potential for feminist politics to transcend state and interstate structures and institutions.

More importantly, Yuval-Davis (2006, 285) questions how such transversal communities can be created. Contextualizing feminism as a collective action frame in the sociopolitical environment of Hong Kong presents us with several propositions. First, there is a distinction between "women's movements" and "feminism," as articulated by Myra Marx Ferree (2006, 6–7; original emphasis): Women's movements involve "naming 'women' as a *constituency* to be mobilized and building a strategy, organization, and politics around issues defined as being particularly 'women's concerns'." Women are organized as a distinctive interest group, although the interests they share may be diverse and may ignore or even accept gender hierarchies. Feminism is activism with the "*goal*" of "challenging and changing women's subordination to men." It can assume different forms, occur in a variety of arenas, and among women and men of diverse class and racial groups. The following chapters will illustrate that women activists in Hong Kong are often members of various political and social groupings. Moreover, women's groups often form coalitions with one another and/or other groupings to address specific issues at particular junctures. Women's mobilization is also taking on more complex forms, with some local groups forging transnational networks through direct contact and information exchange and others linking with organizations elsewhere through transnational coordinating frameworks. While women activists share certain fundamental beliefs, values, and interests, they are engaging in diverse ideologies and discourses to understand and confront the issue at hand. Accordingly, feminism as a collective action frame can be extended to incorporate other frames, whether those are democracy, equality, or justice in other political and social groupings, and adapted to the relationships between women activists and their constituents, allies, and adversaries. New syntheses continually emerge from the combination of frames (Tarrow 1992) and, correspondingly, there is no clear distinction between frames that are within the sphere of women's activism and those outside this sphere.

Second, women's movements and feminism dynamically shape each other. According to Jane Mansbridge (1995, 27), the women's movement is "a set of changing, contested aspirations and understandings that provide conscious goals, cognitive backing, and emotional support for each individual's evolving

feminist identity." In other words, women's activism is inspired by ongoing feminist discourse, and this discourse evolves as women's groups bring women activists together to discuss and debate with one another their various perspectives—what they think can help explain, challenge, and address the multiple inequalities that women confront. This reinforces my view of feminism as a collective action frame that facilitates the link between individual activists and movements and among coalitions in Hong Kong. At a general level, women activists are constituted in, and by, their relations to one another, not just in terms of difference, but in terms of engagement, interaction, and shared aspirations and understandings. At a concrete level, participation and negotiation are a critical part of the process of women activists forming shared feminist beliefs, objectives, and practices, such as preparing promotional materials and making public pronouncements. Consequently, the framing process reveals how feminist beliefs, values, and perspectives are created, communicated, transformed, applied, and given meaning in collaboration with others, rather than individual activists as subjects acting on their own. Nevertheless, there is also the collectively produced significance ascribed to individual women activists, bringing us to the final aspect to consider in transversal collaboration.

In social movement scholarship, the greater the perceived expertise or status of movement leaders and/or the group they represent from the vantage point of adherents and constituents, the more resonant the frames (Benford 1987). Movement leaders are often identified with particular frames and develop forms of organization and strategies around those that are effective in articulating their interests. Ensuing mobilization is dependent on these initial framing processes and their salience with adherents and constituents, along with the allies and adversaries they involve and the political and social changes they achieve. Over time, just as forms of organization and strategies become entrenched, specific frames also become part of "the reservoir of symbols" from which successive movements can employ (Tarrow 1992, 197). I extend this premise to encompass the power asymmetries among individual women activists as well as between women activists and their constituents, allies, and adversaries. Individual women activists occupy different political and social positions and, among them, some have more knowledge and, more importantly, hold more authority to determine such knowledge than others (Assiter 1996). The clout of individual women activists influences the availability of and access to various frames and, in turn, their capacity to shape framing processes. While women activists struggle against hegemonic power structures at various levels, their mobilization is also marked by these very structures. In the following chapters, I will show how transversal collaboration functions to simultaneously reaffirm and reconfigure established relationships of power and privilege. Ultimately, contextualizing feminism as a collective action frame in the sociocultural,

economic, and political context of Hong Kong illuminates the multiple perspectives and positionings of women activists that define and shape the range of possible actions and outcomes in their advocacy for women's rights and gender equality.

Chapter Outline

Here I present an overview of the chapters that follow and discuss why women's movements in Hong Kong offer important insights into transnational feminism. Chapter 2 outlines the major historical aspects of women's activism during the British colonial period (1843–1997) and the emergence of feminist politics in the lead up to governance under the PRC (1997–present), with an overview of major figures, organizations, campaigns, and strategies. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the milieu of women's mobilization transformed considerably as Hong Kong experienced unprecedented economic, political, and social changes. Chapters 3 to 6 analyzes the diverse feminist organizational forms, rhetoric, and strategies of women's groups in Hong Kong in addressing the feminization of poverty, violence against women, prostitution and sex workers, as well as domestic work and domestic workers.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the feminization of poverty, an issue around which the first local Chinese women's groups have rallied, as they reinforce an enduring organizational base for women's activism in Hong Kong. I discuss their struggles with the issue of representation and their challenges in forging alliances with grassroots women, specifically middle-aged women and "new arrival women." The distinct feminist agendas and organizing processes of these rights-based, grassroots-oriented women's groups illustrate how women activists often have to compromise between their feminist ideals and the realities and demands of their sociopolitical environment. In particular, I emphasize how feminism as a collective action frame allows women activists to engage in debate and negotiation. In this way, women activists can embrace "difference" and, at the same time, develop shared understandings and aspirations. Chapter 4 sheds light on women's mobilization to address violence against women in the context of broader pro-PRC and pro-democracy movements. I compare the economic, political, and social networks, as well as the rhetoric and strategies, of HKFW and HKWCEO. Given the hierarchical, corporatist dimensions of the Hong Kong government and its complex interactions with the PRC government, I illustrate how feminist engagement with state institutions and processes is always combined with efforts to maintain broader transformatory struggle and movement-oriented activism.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I discuss how labor migration is shaping feminism as a collective action frame as women activists introduce new constituencies

and issues through which feminism and feminist engagement can be reinterpreted. Chapter 5 goes beyond advocacy for women's rights, to advocacy for the recognition of prostitution as legitimate work and sex workers as working women. I examine how women activists strive to shift the debate away from the abstract consideration of ethics and morality and to focus on the economic conditions underpinning prostitution, with the aims of subverting popular representation of sex workers as diseased or immoral women, decriminalizing sex work, and extending civil, occupational, and human rights to sex workers. Chapter 6 examines the mobilization of domestic workers from different class backgrounds as well as ethnic and national communities. Globalization is creating the conditions to organize global unions in the service economy and instituting global norms that provide collective action frames to facilitate cohesive activism, as well as international opportunities, symbolic and material resources, and publicity to pressure governments and corporations. The networks and relationships that transpire provide interesting insights into how women activists negotiate the meanings of transnational feminist solidarity across geographical and ideological borders.

In Chapter 7, I reconsider the complexities and contradictions that are associated with transnational feminism. In this book, I utilize Hong Kong—situating it in the global arena in relation to other countries and regions and, simultaneously, grounding it in its local conditions of state and society—to transcend geographical and ideological binaries and to illustrate the multiple and contradictory dynamics of power. I therefore argue for relations among women activists to be constructed not only on the basis of *difference*, but on *shared* understandings and aspirations as well. Hence, we see the possibility of and, certainly, the need for, transnational feminist solidarity through their conceptualization of feminism as a *collective action frame* rather than a *collective identity*. In this way, women activists not only imagine themselves in relation to the social positions of "other" women, but also in other ways through which different kinds of understandings and relationships may be developed. Women activists are not simply negotiating a common political position; solidarity is a process in which all participants are mutually reconstructing themselves and others who are engaged with them. Ultimately, movement engagement with feminism is a context-dependent, meaning-making deliberation in which women activists develop dynamic and explicit conceptualizations of feminist beliefs, objectives, and practices to facilitate collaboration and solidarity.

7 Conclusion

Since its emergence as a social, intellectual, and institutional movement, feminism has had to confront contradictory critiques. First were the voices and writings of women in the East/South/Third World as they drew attention to the ethnocentrism of, and their exclusion from, the rhetoric of a predominantly West/North/First World-centric feminist theory with its emphasis on gender. The response was to acknowledge women's specificity and social location in terms of geography, culture, and embodiment. This fragmentation and multiplication of representations of women subsequently led to the occlusion of a unifying basis so necessary to agency and resistance in feminist politics. This book has endeavored to address and reconcile these disparate dissensions. Through the analysis of the role and significance of feminism in women's movements in Hong Kong, I argued for relations among women activists to be constructed, not only on the basis of *difference*, but on *shared* understandings and aspirations as well. Hence, we see the possibility of and, certainly, the need for transnational feminist solidarity through the conceptualization of feminism as a *collective action frame* rather than a *collective identity*.

Implicit in this analysis is the link between the macropolitics of sociocultural, economic, and political structures and processes and the micropolitics of everyday life. The geographical and ideological binaries of East-West/North-South/First World-Third World have been utilized to distinguish between industrialized and affluent nations and communities and backward and marginalized nations and communities. Hong Kong provides a challenge to these binaries. Through the heritage of its colonial past, its autonomous yet neither independent nor sovereign specificity as a SAR, the opportunities of "the world's freest economy," and its salient urbanism, Hong Kong has emerged as a transnational space in terms of politics, commerce, mass media, and movement. In this book, I drew attention to the interconnecting histories, subjectivities, and struggles of different groups of women as the power and fluidity of neoliberalism and capitalism situate various communities of women as social majorities and minorities in disparate forms.

Feminism in contemporary Hong Kong is part of a long history of women's activism. However, much of the politicization of women's issues has been disregarded by the state and has occurred outside the realm of formal institutional politics. Nevertheless, women activists have neither been emphatically influenced by the state, nor have they required validation by the state. While power was concentrated in the colonial administration during British governance, the sociopolitical environment was open and contested. Consequently, the historical accounts of women's mobilization and the narratives of women activists have suggested the purposeful development of a women-driven and women-centered critique, initiated by elite expatriate and Chinese women and, thereafter, embraced by local Chinese women's groups. Now that Hong Kong is under the PRC government, women activists' interactions with the male-dominated leadership in government institutions, political parties, and social movements have heightened their fears of co-optation and have served to reinforce their distinct analyses of and approaches in addressing women's interests.

However, this discrete space for women's organizing is heterogeneous and fragmented and continually being reconstructed through diffused and decentralized networks and relationships. As Chapter 3 illustrated, feminist politics emerged from a middle-class social base in the early 1980s, although women activists have not been pursuing the interests of their class. Consequently, there have sometimes been debates and disagreements over the definition of a feminist agenda as women activists focus on issues that are not "their" issues. In addressing the issue of the feminization of poverty, there are women's groups highlighting the discrepancies in existing legislation, policies, and services; initiating cultural discourse on gender discrimination and prejudice; and facilitating disaffected and disadvantaged women in organizing themselves in the form of unions and cooperatives. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to view strategic choices of feminist organizational form, rhetoric, and strategy as necessarily incongruous or irreconcilable. For the first local Chinese women's groups, their sense of feminist collectivity was motivated by the need to challenge the institutional structures and processes that produce gender discrimination and prejudice and the sociocultural norms and relations that reinforce gender hierarchies and inequalities. Although they have been organizing around this common agenda, the space created by women activists to initiate projects and programs that support and sustain their organizational beliefs, values, and interests has consolidated the view of feminism as a collective action frame. This is, in part, expected in a sociopolitical environment where no particular group or type of group can easily set the agenda for the entire movement.

At the same time, these rights-based, grassroots-oriented women's groups are small, autonomous groups with no mass membership. Coalitions are strategically important to maximize their influence and HKWCEO has been

the most prominent coalition of these women's groups. With the impending handover of Hong Kong to the PRC, the PRC government grew increasingly concerned with the formation of these women's groups. Fearing that their initiatives would lead to anti-PRC activity, the PRC government nurtured the formation of pro-PRC women's groups. The establishment of HKFW in 1993 reinforced, for HKWCEO, feminism as a frame with an oppositional stance towards political sources of power. In Chapter 4, I showed how maintaining a balance between organizational autonomy and political institutionalization has remained a challenge for women's groups. HKFW submits its political loyalty to the PRC government and supports PRC-led initiatives so as to gain access to decision-making procedures, important resources, and public recognition. However diverse their organizational forms, rhetoric, and strategies may appear, HKWCEO has developed a sense of itself as a feminist collective in which member groups organize on the basis of self-activity, set their own goals, and decide their own forms of struggle. HKWCEO regularly participates in pro-democracy movement initiatives, but women activists remain sharply critical of pro-democracy political parties and social movement organizations. Their experiences have shown them that these male-dominated groups rarely have women's interests at heart and are more likely to use them as pawns in their political ambitions. For this reason, they challenge any political position that threatens the advancement of the feminist agenda. Coalitions, then, play an important role in reinforcing solidarity for rights-based, grassroots-oriented women's groups—it is precisely the possibility of making these alliances that they are able to function effectively and independently of government institutions, political parties, and social movements. There is here no disparagement of these groups, simply a denial of their monopolization of political space.

At the same time, coalitions also provide political direction for rights-based, grassroots-oriented women's groups. Focusing on marginalized communities of women is part of the feminist struggle to bring their voices into the public sphere and onto the political agenda. Given its oppositional rhetoric, raucous strategies, and access to the media, HKWCEO is able to represent its views in ways that may not be hegemonic, but that nonetheless have drawn public attention. This challenges us to give credence to women's mobilization outside the realm of formal institutional politics. The mobilization of sex workers and domestic workers, in particular, has created new terms and spaces through which feminism and feminist engagement can be reinterpreted. As illustrated in Chapter 5, AFRO and Zi Teng have been challenging societal perceptions of prostitution and, simultaneously, initiating new approaches and practices to women's activism in Hong Kong. Zi Teng was instrumental in introducing sex workers as 阿姐 in public discourse and engaged local women's groups in the deliberation on "sex work is work." Both AFRO and Zi Teng have also created

a space for sex workers to exercise their agency, whether it is involving sex workers to play an active role in their public education initiatives, outreach programs, and rights advocacy or facilitating sex workers to organize themselves. These forms of mobilization allow for an identification that goes beyond the "otherness" of the sex worker—as woman, prostitute, and migrant—to the context and conditions in which prostitution takes place and the life experiences of sex workers themselves. In Chapter 6, I showed how the mobilization of domestic workers has also expanded the boundaries of women's movements and illuminated the political significance of marginalized communities in the transformation of wider Hong Kong society. The establishment of FADWU, bringing together domestic workers from different class backgrounds as well as ethnic and national communities, is more than the organizing of women or workers; together with other domestic workers' groups and trade unions around the world, FADWU has utilized the space of globalization to build a transversal collaborative network of resistance and support and has lobbied for an ILO Convention that was very much framed in the rhetoric of democracy, human rights, and social justice.

Transnational feminism is envisaged in a world characterized by the historically specific and interdependent structures of imperialism, patriarchy, racism, capitalism, and nationalism, stratifying even women's activism itself. Employing feminism as a collective frame in the analysis of women's movements in Hong Kong points to new directions for transnational feminism. First, it broadens the analyses and agenda of feminism. Facilitating disaffected and disadvantaged women in organizing themselves in the form of unions, cooperatives, and self-help groups has illustrated that feminism not only involves advocating women's rights and gender equality, but also encompasses espousing democracy, human rights, and social justice. This does *not* represent a radical shift or even a rupture in feminism; women activists are already bringing new constituencies and issues into feminist politics. It *does* signify that transversal politics would continue to be important in enabling the participation of diverse political and social groupings, understanding and confronting multifaceted and contradictory forms of discrimination and exploitation, and weaving these into one common thread.[1] Second, it changes the relationship between activists and their constituents. With feminism as a collective action frame, mobilization can span disparate geographical and ideological borders and enable various social actors to relate and combine diverse, context-specific struggles. From the Cleaning Workers' Union to FADWU, I have shown that

1. Feminist scholars employ the metaphors of weaving to illustrate that feminism was never endeavored as a homogenous entity and that deconstruction is part of its evolution. As Shima Das (cited in Miles 1996, 97) asserts, "We believe in the concept of spinning local threads, weaving global feminism . . . The diversity in design and color but woven into a single cloth will make us united and strong."

the various marginalized communities of women are more often than not introspective and perceptive enough to determine their own interests. Again, this does *not* mean that activists are unnecessary. As we understand from transversal politics, all context-specific mobilizations generate partiality of perspectives. This *does* mean that feminist politics will be more meaningful when activists and their constituents have a shared commitment to extend feminist struggles to encompass the contestation of multiple and asymmetrical power structures through open, participatory, and inclusive dialogue.

Ultimately, women's movements in Hong Kong are embedded in a sociopolitical environment characterized by fluidity, heterogeneity, and partiality. On one hand, it allows social movements with diverse concerns, interests, and expertise to coexist. On the other hand, alternative discourses cannot constitute a fully developed, singular ideology. As this environment shifts with the increasing influence of the PRC government, women's activism may well become less effective, since it is not equipped, in its present form, to operate successfully in a more homogenous environment. Hence, transnational feminist solidarity through transversal politics that is emerging in Hong Kong will prove to be increasingly complex and complicated in the long term. However, I do envisage feminism as a collective action frame through which we might try to sort out the interactions and negotiations among women activists in diverse historical periods and sociocultural, economic, and political contexts. As I hope to have made clear, the plurality of sites and sources of struggles along with the pursuit of shared understandings and aspirations of women activists show how feminism evolves over time, emerging from conflicts over who belongs and how best to achieve equal access, opportunities, and resources for women. In any movement, in any sociocultural, economic, and political context, and at any point in time, the definition and agenda of feminism is articulated and expressed in the course of being and doing. Transversal politics—the debates and negotiations over the definition and agenda of feminism—show us how activists with conflicting ideas and interests are talking across their differences and taking collective action and how understandings and interpretations of feminism are unfolding.

Methodological Appendixes

There are over 200 groups in contemporary Hong Kong which are organized around women. An ethnography of women's movements must begin with the recognition that we are discussing "not one discrete organizational movement but rather a political force that even in a single country has broad ideological variety and a range of organizational expressions" (Katzenstein 1987, 4). This "broad ideological variety" and "range of organizational expressions" meant an eclectic methodological approach would be most useful and I drew on various forms of data collection—document analysis, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. In 2005 and, subsequently, from 2011 to 2012, I visited different women's groups, participated in various group and movement initiatives, and became familiar with several enthusiastic and passionate activists.

Appendix 1: Field Research

My understanding of feminism, women's movements, and individual women activists in Hong Kong began with document analysis. Documents offer a source of historical insight into women's activism as women's groups produce annual reports, books, journals, newsletters, pamphlets, and research reports, that extensively document their vision and mission, activities and strategies, as well as speeches and personal reflections. I analyzed these along the following dimensions: which issues women activists focused on and how they were undertaken, what forms of reasoning were used, and what conclusions were reached. Nevertheless, documents can only tell us what activists assert to be true or are willing to admit. Different types of documents must be understood in the context of their conditions of production and consumption. Particular attention was paid to the occasion for which a document was produced and the audience it was intended for.

Participation observation during my field research was to "get a feel" for the major dynamics of women's mobilization and to corroborate information gathered from document analysis. I was involved in campaigns, protest marches, rallies, meetings, and workshops, which allowed me to make detailed observations of the settings women activists work in, and to interact at length with these activists. One salient aspect of ethnography is how sociocultural processes are revealed in language.[1] Language, conversation, and discourse can be means by which histories are constructed, traditions produced, and power relations shaped. Campaigns, protest marches, and rallies are important in illustrating the ways in which women's groups advocate for women's rights and promote gender equality through the banners they display, the slogans they chant, and the speeches they make. On occasions where more than one group was involved in an event, these events allowed me to observe how various women's groups collaborated as a coalition. Meetings gave me the opportunity to observe the interactions among activists, so that I could identify the main issues women activists were concerned with, the specific issues that were more important to some activists as compared to others, and the extent of difference and consensus. This allowed me to observe the processes in which activists formulated particular collective views and the rationale underlying these views. Workshops were valuable in introducing me to the major actors within women's movements. The sharing of their personal experiences and reflections of local women's activism were included in this book where relevant.

While the "collective beliefs" of women's groups and movements are the focus of participant observation, there still remains the question of how individuals become personally committed to such beliefs. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were held with founding members, leaders, staff members, and active participants of women's groups. Altogether I conducted interviews and group discussions with fifty-five women activists from women's groups in Hong Kong. These activists exhibited differing degrees of identification with feminism and participation in women's mobilization. Interviews and group discussions were conducted in English and Cantonese. In Hong Kong, Cantonese is the language of informal conversation, formal meetings, and public mobilization for groups and movements. The majority of women activists, however, can understand English, and were relatively comfortable speaking to me in English during interviews, group discussions, and informal conversations with them. Of course, there were occasions when activists had to translate into English words I did not understand, especially in my group discussions with the various domestic workers' unions. Interviews and group discussions varied in length from one to four hours, and some included several

1. The intent is not to privilege the linguistic aspect of human symbolic capacities but rather to illustrate its potential as a resource for ethnographers.

follow-up meetings. Prior to the interviews and group discussions, some activists requested a set schedule of questions (see Appendix 2). The majority of the actual interviews and group discussions assumed, however, the nature of unstructured conversations. The interviews and group discussions served two purposes. First, they enabled me to understand individual activists' personal motivations behind getting involved in women's activism and their interpretations of "feminism." Second, they provided information on the actual processes that produced collective statements published in documents or asserted during group and movement initiatives, which helped me to assess how representative these collective statements were. Interviews, although susceptible to reinterpretation after the fact, specifically present the advantage of revealing information that was not convenient to mention during group or movement initiatives. It should be noted that I frequently encountered the same faces during many of the initiatives that I participated in, and that many of the activists I interviewed often suggested that I speak to these same activists. This suggested that women's movements in Hong Kong are composed largely of a few committed individuals who are highly respected within these movements.

Moreover, women's groups and movements exist in relation to other groups and movements within a sociopolitical environment and I extended my field research to incorporate relevant groups and movements. The sociopolitical environment in Hong Kong is somewhat complicated due to the political transition, with groups and movements divided on their stance towards pro-PRC and pro-democracy political factions. In addition to women activists, I also interviewed representatives from statutory bodies like the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Women's Commission, pro-democracy political parties like Civic Act Up, The Democratic Party, and The Frontier, the pro-democracy Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, and the international development and humanitarian organization Oxfam, which provides funding to various women's groups in Hong Kong. These interviews allowed me to understand the relationship between women's movements and broader pro-PRC and pro-democracy movements. As I discussed in Chapter 4, rights-based, grassroots-oriented women's groups have amicable relations with pro-democracy political parties and social movement organizations and regularly participate in pro-democracy movement initiatives. Of particular interest to me were the annual pro-democracy protest marches and rallies on June 4, to commemorate the Chinese pro-democracy protestors killed in the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, and July 1, when the PRC resumed sovereignty over Hong Kong. In "taking to the streets," I learned about how rights-based, grassroots-oriented women's groups engage with pro-democracy political parties and social movement organizations and how the feminist agenda corresponds to the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong.

In summary, ethnography, observing the everyday activities and unique events of women's groups and movements and becoming directly involved with several enthusiastic and passionate activists, allowed me to personally observe and experience the explicit and tacit aspects of women's mobilization in Hong Kong. Hence, my field experience provided me with the opportunity to develop locally significant questions and the strategies to interpret them in the context of the research situation described above.

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Personal Background

- How did you learn about _____?
- Why did you decide to join _____?
- What are some of the initiatives you have been involved in?
- What are your roles and responsibilities?

Women's Groups in Hong Kong

- What were the circumstances surrounding the establishment of _____?
- How has _____ changed over time?
- How are issues and strategies chosen?
- How do members deal with differences in choosing issues and strategies?
- Do you consider _____ a "feminist" group?
- How does _____ identify itself publicly?
- Some members consider themselves "feminists" while others do not. How is solidarity created among members?
- What are some of the challenges facing _____?

Relationship among Women's Groups

- What is the relationship between _____ and other women's groups?
- Has _____ collaborated with other women's groups?
- Do you perceive any differences among the different women's groups?
- What are some of the challenges in working together?

Relationship among Individuals and Groups in the Local Sociopolitical Environment

- What is the relationship between _____ and the state?
- How does _____ position itself in relation to the state?
- Has _____ collaborated with government agencies, political parties, and/or social movement organizations?

- What is the relationship between _____ and pro-PRC/pro-democracy political parties and/or social movement organizations?
- Do you think women's interests have been marginalized?

Feminism in Hong Kong

- What do you understand by "feminism"?
- Do you consider yourself a "feminist"?
- Is there a "feminist movement" in Hong Kong?

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