

The 70's Biweekly

Social Activism and Alternative Cultural Production in 1970s Hong Kong

Edited by Lu Pan

Hong Kong University Press
The University of Hong Kong
Pok Fu Lam Road
Hong Kong
<https://hkupress.hku.hk>

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ISBN 978-988-8805-70-9 (*Paperback*)

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound by Hang Tai Printing Co., Ltd. in Hong Kong, China

Contents

Foreword by Mok Chiu-yu	vii
Acknowledgments	xvii
1. Introduction	1
<i>Lu Pan</i>	

Part I. Radicalism and Its Discontents

2. The Impossible Decolonization and the Radical Thought of Ng Chung-yin	29
<i>Law Wing-sang</i>	
3. The Formation of Hong Kong's Radical New Left, 1970–1974	51
<i>Yang Yang</i>	
4. The Imaginary of Asia and World Consciousness in 1970s Hong Kong: The Case of <i>The 70's Biweekly</i>	80
<i>Ip Po Yee and Lee Chun Fung</i>	

Part II. Aesthetic and Literary Counterpublics

5. The Making of an Aesthetic Counterpublic in 1970s Hong Kong: A Visual Exploration of <i>The 70's Biweekly</i>	113
<i>Lu Pan</i>	
6. Film Criticism in <i>The 70's Biweekly</i>	141
<i>Tom Cunliffe</i>	
7. A Critical Study of <i>The 70's Biweekly</i> and Its Political Cinematic Practices	169
<i>Emilie Choi Sin-yi</i>	
8. The Erotic, the Avant-Garde, and the Anarchist Arts: The Imaginations and Representations of Radical Politics in <i>The 70's Biweekly</i>	196
<i>Ella Mei Ting Li</i>	

Part III. Interviews with Former Members

John Sham Kin-fun: I Admit We Were Making Trouble!	225
Wat Wai-ching: The Grassroots Member of <i>The 70's</i> with Deep Love and Righteousness	235
Yeung Po-hi: <i>The 70's</i> Was a Free Space	245
Kan Fook-wing: In Retrospect, the Struggles Were Like Sowing Seeds	253
Yuen Che-hung: Accumulating My Ignorance in the Years at <i>The 70's</i>	259
List of Contributors	267
Index	269

Foreword

Mok Chiu-yu

It was a dream.

That day, you suddenly discover that the second-floor bookshop that you frequent, 7+11, had become a cram school.

So, you try to chat up the pretty (tall and handsome) student and you lure him or her to the underground bar/café that is selling lots of red wine, local beer, and Tai Nam Coffee. You are going to discuss love—the free and the repressed life you are experiencing that gives the authoritarian structure to your character.

No, some of these things do not really exist. Not yet.

Inside the café bar, a group of people are sitting around the fire, seeking warmth together. Is it winter? Is it colder then?

Anyway, thinking that they are friends, you wave at them and they turn their heads to look at you. To your horror, they are clowns with no faces. They then seize the eyeballs of the student you were chatting up and laugh viciously at you.

Afraid, you scream and run out the café toward the waterfront in darkness. You jump into the sea and try your best to swim away from the shore. You swim and swim. You try to forge on, forward and upward. As you swim in the cold water, you notice a naked girl floating on the sea and lots of speedboats flying by. You are really worried that the water is infested with sharks, but you encounter squid fighting one another instead. The squid seem to be moving around you, doing a synchronized sea ballet.

Finally, you reach the other shore, a beach of salt, and it is the crime scene of a capitalistic children's game that ended in 456 dead salt fish that can no longer dream. As you are treading on the salt beach, the sound of a song bowl come from nowhere. Isn't that soothing, putting you almost to sleep? You are tired but you drag yourself along. On the ground is a labyrinth and patterns. You walk into the labyrinth and follow the lead of a formidable force. And slowly you reach the chestnut forest in the shade. It is a site of betrayal, but you are not sure who has betrayed who.

You are attracted to go into the big cabaret M101 in the chestnut forest, and without knowing, you become a dancer in the cancan group, performing.

You are enjoying yourself when you discover all the dancers have no body—there are just naked legs and mouths.

You leave sadly, taking with you the last roll of film, a bond certificate, a diploma of your academic achievements, a rusted scalpel, and a laser pen that emits black light.

Before you lose consciousness, a pack of dogs noses around and let out farts that bring you to tears. Immediately, you felt something enter your duodenum and the right side of your brain. You become speechless and helpless.

Then you realize this is a recurring dream, a constant nightmare. A nightmare that tells you the world isn't getting any better.

The emperor wears new clothes.

It was the '60s and '70s.

We were already living in the Animal Farm with the farm owners and the pigs ruling supreme. Or was it already 1984 and Big Brothers were watching?

We (students, graduates, young workers) grew up after the Second World War. We were disenchanted and wanted to act and live authentically. Influenced by the New Left, Paul Goodman, William Domhoff, and Herbert Marcuse, we did not want to grow up absurd. We thought that Western democracy was no real democracy. We did not want to be one dimensional, accepting "what is" and forgetting "what ought to be." We believed that people over thirty were becoming part of the establishment with their compromises until we approached thirty ourselves. Then we said we were born again in 1968 or 1970 and we were to be born again and again—and we said that we would never grow old. We continued to be like children who would forever say fearlessly, "The emperor wears new (no) clothes," or "No Kings; neither Snowball nor Napoleon!"

Continuing as children, we wanted to write our own history, run our own lives, and determine our own destinies. We were inspired by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Rudi Dutschke, and the Zengakuren of Japan. We encountered ex-Colored Guards who braved the dangerous sharks that infested the route across the Deep Bay for a new life in the Fragrant City. We learned from them that they wanted the complete de-bureaucratization of the system they came from.

We sang we were in the streets, in the '60s and '70s

Living passionately and existentially

We did not lie down, in the '80s

Still standing upright and not silently.

The times are not changing

The people are still longing

For the true liberation they find in the

Strawberry statement

Cape Huron statement

The Manifestos and Manifestos.

The liberation and radical changes are about cooking your own food, making your own pasta, eating healthily, about doing your own painting, weaving your own clothes, doing your own theater, dance, writing your own songs, making movies with the people, by the people, for the people. It was a cultural project as much as a political and economic project and very importantly also a psychological project. The enemies of liberation will not be defeated unless we succeed on all fronts. This realization was somewhat gradual. It started off with standing in solidarity with students of a tertiary institution that dismissed twelve of them for confronting the corruption of the administration. We had a sit-in on the stairs to the college. The establishment press went afoul with fake news about the occupation. We decided that we had to have our own voice and our own publication. At the time, we were an amorphous group with an intense dislike of Napoleon and his running dogs and Big Brother. We saw our publication and our role as to awaken and act as a catalyst for change. Publishing was also like doing a theater of cruelty piece, in which the audience were slapped and punched on the face, their teeth knocked out and their noses bloodied. Then they were kicked in the balls, which knocked them unconscious. Icy cold water would be poured on them to wake them up. Well, figuratively.

We were, however, so open in running the paper that anyone who came up and said they would work with us would get a key to the office and could claim to be a member. They would even sleep there. Everyone contributed what they could. We talked, discussed, and learned together, about editing, laying out, writing, translating. We were reading *Animal Farm*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *ABC of Dialectics* . . . in a spirit of peace and love. The newspaper and its organization resembled a free school or an experimental college. We became brothers and sisters and comrades. And there was even an attempt to set it up as a kind of commune. There were no formal admission procedures nor exclusion measures. Then we became too radical for the newspaper distributor, which ceased to handle the distribution of the paper to the newsstands for us. We organized the distribution ourselves. And some of us were happy to be doing manual tasks/labor. Working in pairs; we would take like there was this one pair taking 100 or 150 copies from the printing company to the Wan Chai Ferry Pier stand, depositing 30 copies to replace the 4 or 5 that were unsold and collecting the money for the copies that were sold. Then they took the ferry across the harbor for the Hung Hom Ferry Pier newsstand where the process of putting down new copies and picking up old copies and collecting money from the sales was repeated from one newsstand to the next on Ma Tau Wei Road and then Ma Tau Kok Road . . . then they went back to the newspaper office and settled the account.

Through the paper, more people (mostly young) came together. At the same time, because the paper and its members were action oriented (believing that changing the world means action), the editors (well, almost everyone was an editor) got organized, using the magazine as a point of contact and an organizing tool for

our campaigns. One of the first campaigns was to make Chinese an official language in Hong Kong. (“Chinese” referred to both Putonghua and Cantonese. The movement did not develop any notion of Cantonese supremacy.)

It was in 1970 when the Chinese as Official Language Movement began. There were mass meetings and discussions. There were not really any demonstrations in the streets yet, not until February 1971 when an outdoor demonstration was held—the protests over the Diaoyu Islands had already begun. Like the Chinese as Official Language Movement, the paper organized the Defend Diaoyutai Movement, also known as the Baodiao movement, publishing background information on the issues and printing special leaflets calling for actions.

Some of us identified with the international student revolt of that era and the idea of uniting the oppressed of the world to fight against the oppressors—and so the return of Okinawa (and the Ryukyu Islands, of which the Diaoyu Islands were a part) was a collusion of US and Japanese imperialism, the latter being a little brother of the former. Baodiao was a fight against imperialism in solidarity with the anti-Vietnam War movement/anti-US imperialism movement. And when Big Brother, the British colonial master, suppressed the demonstration from very early on, the movement took on an anti-British colonialism element—a campaign for the right to demonstrate, and so on. People also resorted to civil disobedience as a tactic, with repeated demonstrations deemed to be a violation of the Public Order Ordinance (enacted to control the anti-government, pro-Beijing communist forces in Hong Kong in 1967). Each mass arrest—twenty-one people on April 10, 1971, twelve on May 4, twenty-one on July 7—the police helped *The 70’s* recruit more members: the arrests and jailing at the police station and the subsequent court hearings brought young people together, and soon they joined the newspaper as editors.

Baodiao subsequently developed into a movement with different political tendencies—some took the Gang of Four rhetoric hook, line, and sinker. Most in *The 70’s* (calling themselves the Baodiao United Front and also the Alliance of Workers and Students) were sober enough not to swallow this propaganda and realized that while we were anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, and anti-bureaucratic socialists, socialism came in many brands. Like certain brands of milk powder, some were not fit for children and other living things. The Baodiao movement, an amalgamation of nationalists, socialists of different shades, and liberal democrats, had a kind of populist element and appeal. It fizzled out by the end of 1973, and around that time the young people became more concerned with Hong Kong’s local issues, like the working conditions of the blind, corruption, housing, and so on.

Most of the young people born in Hong Kong after the Second World War did not identify with the British colonizers or with the Chinese Communist regime. There was genuine dissatisfaction with British colonial rule: 1966 saw the Star Ferry riot, when young people took to the streets in protest of the increase in ferry fare,

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Introduction

Lu Pan

The Forgotten 1970s

The image of Hong Kong of the 1970s is particularly homogeneous compared to the eras before and after. Between the 1950s and the mid-1960s, the tiny British colony was a stage for various political forces in the “two Cold Wars”: the major war between the capitalist West and China/the Soviet Union and the minor one between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (the KMT).¹ After the Nationalist government’s defeat in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, many soldiers and their families followed the KMT to Taiwan, but others, including capitalists, cultural elites, KMT members, and some CCP supporters, as well as a large number of refugees who were simply looking for new opportunities, chose to flee to Hong Kong. Interestingly, even though both supporters of the CCP and the KMT tried but failed to become a major political force in the British colony during the Cold War, Hong Kong became the only platform that could accommodate different versions of Chinese nationalism. In the 1950s and 1960s, the pro-CCP Left in Hong Kong faced a double challenge: on the one hand, they had to contend with the anti-communist ideology of the KMT; on the other hand, they also had to cope with the British colonial state that represented a combination of capitalist and imperialist trends, and the huge cultural influence of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, including Hong Kong.

As a result, mainstream Hong Kong society tended to accept and readily consume cultural products imported from the capitalist West. During the Vietnam War, Hong Kong became one of the R&R (rest and recuperation) centers for US military personnel, giving rise to a booming population of bars, brothels, hotels, and entertainment facilities, a trend that found little resistance among the local

1. Priscilla Roberts and John M. Carroll, eds., *Hong Kong in the Cold War* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016); Christopher Sutton, *Britain’s Cold War in Cyprus and Hong Kong* (Cham: Springer International, 2016).

people, contrasting sharply with the social discontent that the US military presence stirred up in other parts of Asia during the same period.² Leftist newspapers, schools, and department stores that leaned toward China still had a market among certain groups of immigrants from China,³ especially the older generation, but postwar Hong Kong society, in which young migrants and the locally born younger generation predominated, was clearly more inclined to follow and identify with Western goods and values in this cultural war.

Soon after the Cultural Revolution broke out in mainland China in 1966, Hong Kong also had its own “leftists” or “leftist movement,” in which the underclass participated. In the two years of 1966 and 1967, hundreds of Chinese laborers in Hong Kong, mainly poor immigrants from the Mainland, occupied the streets to express their discontent with the colonial government over the rising cost of their daily commute and the deplorable conditions in the factories.⁴ The 1967 social unrest was also marked by violent clashes between the police and the public, and even the exchange of gunfire between the British and Chinese forces at the Sha Tau Kok border crossing between the Mainland and Hong Kong. According to Gary Cheung Ka-wai, “The disturbances claimed 51 lives, with 15 of the deaths caused by bomb attacks, and 832 people were injured. As at December 31, 1967, a total of 1,936 people were convicted during the riots. . . . According to the statistics compiled by the left wing, 26 people were killed from May and December while 4,979 people were arrested.”⁵ As in many other social movements, many of the street protesters were young workers and students.

The Hong Kong Left also joined the strikes and movements in the early days of the agitation by fighting for labor rights, but they soon shifted the discourse of the struggle to an entirely political level, putting the ideological struggle against the colonial government ahead of workers’ rights. In an immigrant society where the political atmosphere was mostly apathetic and mass movements didn’t have a long tradition, the radicalization of the protest movement into terrorism, with many incidents of bomb attacks, eventually created the pretext for the colonial government to delegitimize mass movements. Public skepticism of the purpose and

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2. Mark Chi-Kwan, “Hong Kong as an International Tourism Space: The Politics of American Tourism in the 1960s,” in *Hong Kong in the Cold War*, ed. Priscilla Roberts and John M. Carroll (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 160–82.
 3. Zhou Yi 周奕, *Xianggang zuopai douzheng shi* 香港左派鬥爭史 [The history of the leftist struggle in Hong Kong] (Hong Kong: Lixun, 2009); Law Wing Sang 羅永生, “‘Huohong niandai’ yu Xianggang zuoyijijinzhuoyi sichao” 「火紅年代」與香港左翼激進主義思潮 [The “fiery era” and Hong Kong’s left-wing radicalism], *Ershiyi shiji* 二十一世紀, no. 161 (2017): 71–83.
 4. Gary Ka-wai Cheung, *Hong Kong’s Watershed: The 1967 Riots* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009); Tong Tsz Ming, “The Hong Kong Week of 1967 and the Emergence of Hong Kong Identity through Contradistinction,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*, no. 56 (2016): 40–66.
 5. Cheung, *Hong Kong’s Watershed*, 123.

methods of the movement also grew.⁶ Once the unrest subsided, the leftists in Hong Kong were left with a tarnished image. Cheung notes that the total daily circulation of leftist newspapers “plunged from 454,900 in May 1967, when the disturbances broke out, to 240,500 in November.”⁷ After the riots had been quelled, the colonial government soon began to assuage the people’s discontent with public cultural activities, while social reforms took much longer to realize. In the hope of creating an atmosphere of prosperity and peace, in 1969 the colonial government began to organize the Festival of Hong Kong, a large, colorful open-air carnival. The festival was intended to absorb the excess energy of young people through entertainment and recreation and to get them out on the streets for fun rather than protest.

As the time line progresses, the remembered history of Hong Kong seems to skip a few years to the “golden decade” of the Crawford Murray MacLehose era. The most popular Hong Kong governor in the history of the British administration of Hong Kong, 1971 to 1982 is seen as a decade of redress of the social problems that had led to the upheavals of the late 1960s. The colonial administration did make great strides in improving people’s livelihoods in various aspects: more public resources were invested in improving transportation and housing facilities, labor benefits were instituted and regulations were further introduced, and the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) was established in response to the widespread corruption in the Hong Kong civil service, especially the police force. Compared to the Mainland, which was riven with political turmoil during the Cultural Revolution, Hong Kong society in the 1970s was peaceful and calm. Thereafter, through the 1980s, Hong Kong, as one of the “Four Little Dragons” of Asia, enjoyed an economic takeoff and even worldwide cultural success—mainly in the commercial film industry.

At the same time, the problems of British colonial rule seemed to have been offset by the achievements of this period—or simply forgotten by choice. The myth of Hong Kong also began to take shape during this period: a small fishing village that grew from nothing to an international metropolis with a sound legal system, a wealthy population, and cultural autonomy. The most lingering cliché of the branding of the city since the postwar years is that Hong Kong is a beautiful city where “East meets West.” Coined by Hong Kong Tourism Association in the 1950s to promote the image of Hong Kong, the slogan can be seen as an effort to depoliticize the image of Hong Kong by featuring only an “innocent” simplicity (or complicity) of cultural fusion without hinting at the city’s history as a British colony.⁸

6. Cheung, *Hong Kong’s Watershed*, 131.

7. Cheung, *Hong Kong’s Watershed*, 132.

8. Peter Moss, “Chapter 3: Many-Splendoured Things,” in *GIS through the Years*, Government Information Services (Hong Kong), accessed March 22, 2019, last modified August 1, 2013, <http://www.info.gov.hk/isd/40th/3.html>.

In this context, the 1970s seem to be a transitional period that is neither as turbulent as the 1960s nor as glorious as the 1980s. The decade seems to have existed only as a preparatory stage for the subsequent economic takeoff of Hong Kong. The academic discourse on the 1970s is also scarce compared to other phases of Hong Kong history. In the foreword to his 2012 book *The Déjà Vu 1970s*, Lui Tai-Lok puts it this way:

To a certain extent, “Hong Kong in the 1970s” does have a mythical quality. It can speak to people from all social strata. There is a “Hong Kong in the 1970s” story for people of any social background. This process of creating the Hong Kong story is not unilaterally imposed on the public from the top down, but the general public also actively responds and resonates with it. . . . We need to acknowledge that to the general public in Hong Kong, “Hong Kong in the 1970s” has a special meaning. In their eyes, they are the “golden years” of Hong Kong society and of their personal or family lives.⁹

Although Lui says that everyone has a “1970s” of their own, his implication seems that the decade was remembered as the “golden years” for Hong Kong, and as such, there is nothing much more to say. The current book, however, aims to present a different picture.

I will start with introducing a short 1971 English-language book, *Under the Whitewash*, written by J. Walker, allegedly a British Maoist living in Hong Kong. This book provides a good reference point for our alternative understanding of the sociopolitical background of Hong Kong in the 1970s. Originally written for British nationals who had no knowledge of the real social problems in Hong Kong, the book in its Chinese translation enjoyed tremendous popularity among local readers. Contrary to the myth of the 1970s as a golden period of rapid social development in Hong Kong, J. Walker uses sharp language to condemn the various social injustices, political repression, and livelihood crises that arose in Hong Kong under the colonial government in the 1970s.¹⁰ The book consists of fifteen chapters, each dedicated to one local social problem, including the political use of visa and immigration policy, the suppression of dissent and press censorship, the oppressive education system that sought to subjugate the populace, the inferior position of the Chinese population in Hong Kong, the exclusion of Chinese as an official language, the inefficient curbing of crime, the undemocratic structure of the British Hong Kong government, the dilapidated social welfare system that failed the workers, housing deficiency, police corruption, drug problems, and the maltreatment of

9. Lui Tai-lok 呂大樂, *Na sicengxiangshi de qishi niandai* 那似曾相識的七十年代 [The déjà vu seventies] (Hong Kong: Chunghwa Book, 2012), 6–7. Author’s translation.

10. Similarly, Jon Halliday’s article “Hong Kong: Britain’s Chinese Colony,” *New Left Review*, nos. 87/88 (September–December 1974): 91–112, also harshly criticized British colonial rule in Hong Kong while providing the reader with a concise summary of the colony’s history and social conditions. My thanks to Tom Cunliffe for bringing my attention to this.

cultural spaces in Hong Kong, to show Third World films or art films from around the world.³⁰ In Hong Kong, where the commercial film industry dominated the market and the psyche of the society, the “independent screenings” of *The 70’s* were in themselves an act of carving out alternative spaces. Under the colonial censorship system of the time, it was not always easy to screen films in the City Hall. They had to apply to the police for a public entertainment license. After several screenings of explicitly left-wing films, the police stopped issuing them licenses. The members of *The 70’s* then turned their screenings into roadshows in colleges and universities around Hong Kong. At the same time, they also made their own films, such as a 1971 documentary on the Defend Diaoyutai Movement protest in front of the Japanese Cultural and Economic Office in Central on February 20, 1970 (directed by Law Kar, the film documents the events before and after the protest from the perspective of the editorial board); the 1974 film *The Turbulent 1974* (動盪的一九七四), by Hou Man-wan; and the 1978 film *For Arty Youth in Hong Kong* (給香港的文藝青年), by Mok Chiu-yu and his peers. Mok concluded that these cultural actions were organized with the belief that the public should not only be consumers but also creators of cultural products in an effort to fight against the alienation of human beings under consumerism and capitalism through engaging the audience with provocative images and sound.³¹

Chapter Outline

The fact that this book is the first comprehensive collection of academic writings that focus on *The 70’s* clearly shows that there are many important but neglected topics in the study of Hong Kong’s cultural history, and that it is high time that more scholars addressed these topics from a cross-media and interdisciplinary perspective. With the launching of Hong Kong Baptist University’s digital archive *The 70’s Biweekly and People’s Theatre: A Private Archive of Mok Chiu-yu Augustine and Friends* in 2020, it is hoped that more interested parties will not only learn about the magazine per se but also find new possibilities for exploring Hong Kong’s political, media, visual, and cultural history.³² Although this book cannot exhaust all the topics about *The 70’s* and the era, the authors who contribute to this book offer different perspectives on the various features of *The 70’s*. By performing an “anatomy” of the magazine’s highly diversely layered texts and actions, we aim to provide future researchers with some basic reference points for studying the

30. Jessica Yeung Wai-yee, *Xianggang de disan tiao daolu: Mo Zhaoru de annaqi minzhong xiju* [The third path for Hong Kong: Mok Chiu Yu’s anarchy and people’s theater] (Hong Kong: Typesetter, 2019), 77–78.

31. Interview with Mok Chiu-yu, August 16, 2019.

32. The archive is accessible in both Chinese and English. See HKBU Library, “Publication,” “The 70’s Biweekly and People’s Theatre: A Private Archive of Mok Chiu-yu Augustine and Friends,” Digital Services, accessed April 12, 2022, <https://digital.lib.hkbu.edu.hk/mok/home/languages/en/>.

magazine. I will also emphasize that all of the contributors to this volume realize the significance of *The 70's* among other youth publications in 1970s Hong Kong, and all are trying to fill the gap left by its long absence from discussion in Hong Kong studies and its erasure from Hong Kong's public memory. As reflection on this absence largely motivates all of the contributors, their research on *The 70's* may already imply a certain critique of previous studies of this period. As such, one may have the impression that there seems to be an insufficiency (but not a complete lack) of critique toward the magazine itself in the volume. Yet we are not aiming at making *The 70's* a totem for Hong Kong cultural history. The last part of the book, which consists of five firsthand accounts of members of *The 70's*, also shows that we are not ignorant about their diverse and complicated backgrounds, as well as their respective shifts in their later political or life orientations.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, "Radicalism and Its Discontents," consists of three chapters that discuss in depth the relationship between *The 70's*, its members, and radical thought in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s. Chapter 2, "The Impossible Decolonization and the Radical Thought of Ng Chung-Yin," by Law Wing-sang, examines the writings of Ng Chung-Yin, one of the main founders of *The 70's* and a prolific writer who contributed substantially to the development of radicalism in the fiery era (火紅年代). This chapter analyses his political writings published in *The 70's* and other channels. Law highlights Ng's transformation from a liberal to a Trotskyist Marxist as well as his critical debates with the Maoist faction. Ng's innovative radical thoughts are used to illustrate the complex dynamics of local decolonial politics, which, before Ng, were marginalized by the specific Cold War formation under the long shadow of collaborative colonialism in Hong Kong.

Yang Yang's chapter "The Formation of Hong Kong's Radical New Left, 1970–1974" traces how a group of non-Maoist Hong Kong youths, who were inspired by the New Left tendencies of the late 1960s, began to be politically radicalized to address the problems of inequality and injustice in the colony. Yang observes that later these youths gathered in political action by founding radical platforms for political discussion, such as *The 70's*, and getting involved in organizing social-political movements locally. This chapter particularly focuses on how this group of Hong Kong New Leftists of the early 1970s underwent an ideological turn to Trotskyism. Moreover, Yang argues that these young radicals' overseas connections and experiences also helped to shape Hong Kong New Left politics under the British colonial rule.

Chapter 4, "The Imaginary of Asia and World Consciousness in 1970s Hong Kong: The Case of *The 70's Biweekly*," is coauthored by Lee Chun Fung and Ip Po Yee. This chapter captures the imagination of Asia through examining the local practices and discourses of *The 70's* as a significant New Left collective. This chapter proposes that although the collective did not explicitly articulate the political

imaginary of Asia, Hong Kong was embroiled in the Asian political arena, which the collective was compelled to react to as a part of their consciousness of the world politics. Moreover, this chapter argues that the political identity of Hong Kong's New Left was an ideological hybrid. It incorporated dimensions of movements from Asia, the Third World, and around the globe. This chapter brings attention to the interplay among global, regional, and local politics, even at times when only local issues and national identity were at stake. By employing the analytic lens of "Asia as method,"³³ this chapter highlights the geopolitics of the Cold War and the decolonization movement across Asia and the Third World on the one hand and sheds light on the specificities of colonial Hong Kong in Asia on the other. The term "world consciousness" indicates that the multiple strands of universal humanitarianism, internationalism, and Third Worldism were intertwined.

The second part of the book, "Aesthetic and Literary Counterpublics," moves from politics to the cultural activism that *The 70's* was involved in. My own Chapter 5, "The Making of an Aesthetic Counterpublic in 1970s Hong Kong: A Visual Exploration of *The 70's Biweekly*," focuses on visual language of *The 70's* and its role in the making of a "counterpublic."³⁴ I start with the cover (front and back) images of *The 70's* (and its sister publication *The 70's Youth Vanguard*). Second, I compare these cover images with those of *Pan ku*, a contemporaneous youth magazine in Hong Kong, and those of the Western youth magazines of the same period, in particular, *Avant Garde*, *High Times*, and *Oz*. Finally, I concentrate on the iconic image of a clenched fist with a pair of lips superimposed in the middle used in the Chinese as Official Language Movement, in which *The 70's* members played an important role.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the film practice of *The 70's*. Tom Cunliffe's Chapter 6, "Film Criticism in *The 70's Biweekly*," enriches studies on Hong Kong film criticism by discussing the long-neglected writings on film of *The 70's* collective. With their focus on the politics of cinema and exploration of how cinema negotiates contradictions in capitalist society, these writings constitute a lost chapter of 1970s Hong Kong film culture. Whether it was about Hong Kong cinema or international cinema, the film criticism in *The 70's* was always attuned to the radical and political potentialities of cinema and focused especially on ideological criticism related to pressing issues such as capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, women's emancipation, and social injustice. As well as critical reviews of individual films and essays on individual directors and new waves in cinema, there were also Chinese translations of interviews with directors such as Costa-Gavras, and Chinese translations of film criticism from abroad, including the hugely influential article "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" written by Jean-Louis Comolli and Paul Narboni in the wake of the May

33. Chen Kuan-Hsing 陳光興, *Qu diguo: Yazhou zuowei fangfa* 去帝國：亞洲作為方法 [Asia as method: Toward deimperialization] (Taipei: Xingren chubanshe/Flâneur culture, 2011).

34. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

1968 protests, which helped develop a Marxist approach to the critical analysis of cinema. This chapter explores the critical endeavors related to cinema in the pages of *The 70's* to uncover and recuperate the radical position of this pocket of oppositional film culture in Hong Kong film history.

Chapter 7, “A Critical Study of *The 70's Biweekly* and Its Political Cinematic Practices,” by Emily Choi Sin-yi, examines the cinematic practices of *The 70's* and how they articulated the political ideology of the magazine. Here, “cinematic practices” includes two aspects: one is major cinematic creations such as *Letter to the Young Intellectuals of Hong Kong* (1978),³⁵ directed by Mok Chiu-yu, and the other is forms of circulation and reception—for example, how the magazine collaborated with “cine clubs” like Phoenix Cine Club and engaged the public. Therefore, this study explores how the magazine’s cultural reproduction was performed as cultural activism through cinematic practices, drawing on its peculiar ideological imagination. To broaden the vision of a wider picture of cultural production in the 1970s, the author also situates her discussion in the context of coloniality and the “cultural Cold War.”

The last chapter of this part, Chapter 8, “The Erotic, the Avant-Garde, and the Anarchist Arts: The Imaginations and Representations of Radical Politics in *The 70's Biweekly*” by Ella Mei Ting Li, looks at the literary works that were published in the magazine. Li situates her research in the context of the Cold War, when colonial Hong Kong represented an in-between space juggling Britain, the United States, and the PRC. Taking Hong Kong as a strategic Cold War frontier, Li raises questions such as what role this in-betweenness played in the development of Hong Kong literature. How did local writers write back to colonialist Cold War information warfare? This chapter traces the literary works presented in *The 70's*, examining how emerging writers in Hong Kong at that time pursued radical and political imaginary through erotic, avant-garde, and anarchist artistic expression. Li reaches her aim through a close reading of the literary works, including short stories, essays, and poems, published in the magazine. She focuses especially on those strongly marked by eroticism and avant-gardism and authored by famous modernist writers from Hong Kong and Taiwan, such as Chung Ling-ling, Wai Yuen, and Chiu Kang-chien 邱剛健. Li argues that the literary presentations in *The 70's* showcase a radical political imagination and a cultural landscape in Hong Kong literature that went beyond Cold War binarism.

The last part of the book, “Interviews with Former Members,” is given over to the firsthand accounts of five former members of *The 70's*. This section is supported by the *70's Biweekly* Interview Project, by Common Action 集團行動, a video production organization that explores the history, society, and culture of Hong Kong. The project focuses on the formation and dissolution of the magazine

35. Also translated as *For Arty Youth in Hong Kong*.

against the background of social movements in Hong Kong. Members of Common Action hope to tell a story of 1970s Hong Kong—the fiery era of social unrest and the youth culture—as well as to explore the lasting legacy of the magazine for Hong Kong. The five members include John Sham Kin-fun, a leading member of *The 70's* until 1973, when he left because of the split of the Fourth International. Originally a bar musician, he was involved in *The 70's* during the Defend Diaoyutai Movement. In the interview, he talks about planning the actions in 1971 and his and Ng Chung-yin's meetings with Chinese Trotskyists in exile, including Wang Fanxi 王凡西 and Peng Shuzhi 彭述之, in Paris in 1972. Under the influence of Ng, Sham went on to develop a Trotskyist political orientation, which led to the “Fourth International secession” in *The 70's*. Later on, Sham retired from politics and became active in the film and television industry.

A relatively young member, Wat Zai 屈仔 joined *The 70's* in 1971 during the Defend Diaoyutai Movement. Ng Chung-yin and Mok Chiu-yu were big brothers to him, and he learned from them how to organize social movements. During the social movements related to *The 70's*, he was friends with the late Kwan Kam-biu 關錦標, who was another important member of *The 70's* Workers and Students United Front. At that time, he gave up his job to take part in demonstrations. In Wat's eyes, Hong Kong in the 1970s saw the onset of a new economy that lacked awareness of labor rights.

Yeung Po-hi 楊寶熙 met members of *The 70's* and joined them in the sixth grade. Yet she parted way with the collective as she became one of the leaders of the pro-China National Faction (*guocui pai* 國粹派). Elected the fifth president of Chinese University of Hong Kong Students' Union in 1975, she was the first woman to hold this position. In the interview, Yeung shares her view on the influence of *The 70's* on her political attitudes and her departure from them.

Kan Fook-wing 簡福榮 was an editor of the University of Hong Kong student publication *Xue yuan* 學苑 (Undergrad) and a member of SoCO (the Society for Community Organization). He joined *The 70's* in 1971 during the Defend Diaoyutai protests and claimed to be one of the few Greater China Gum (大中華膠) members, a recently invented Cantonese term for Greater China supporters (another was Yu Hong 虞雄, who was injured in the Defend Diaoyutai demonstration on July 7, 1971). He left the magazine in 1974. He believes that *The 70's* was a pioneer in social movements in Hong Kong, which may have inspired participants in social movements from the 1970s onward. These movements brought peaceful demonstrations that exposed the problems of the colonial regime to the youth community, culminating in the Golden Jubilee Secondary School Incident (金禧事件) in 1977–1978, when a group of teachers and pupils of the school protested against their school's mismanagement of financial records, which resulted in the misuse of public funds.

Finally, we hear the story of Yuen Che-hung 阮志雄, who says he missed out on the best times of *The 70's*. When he began his involvement in *The 70's*, many of its earliest members had either joined the local Trotskyist movement after the political split or left social activism to make plans for their own lives. Yuen still sees the mark that his involvement in *The 70's* left on his later life as a storyteller for communities in Hong Kong, which he continues to do to this day.

The five interviewees come from different backgrounds and after a period of convergence at *The 70's*, each took a different path in their life. By listening to them in the present, we may get a glimpse of the intriguing connections between the magazine, the individuals, and the era. This part is also intended to provide future researchers with a brief oral history of the Hong Kong youth activists of the 1970s.

My Encounter with *The 70's*

At this point, I would like to tell the story of my encounter with *The 70's*. At the end of 2016, Japanese social activist Matsumoto Hajime and his good friend Narita Keisuke, the owner of Irregular Rhythm Asylum, an anarchist bookstore (Info Shop) in Tokyo, came to Hong Kong on a return visit to the Hong Kong participants of No Limit, an Asian youth cohort event he organized in Koenji, Tokyo, in September of the same year. As one of the Hong Kong participants, I was invited by another participant, Lee Chun Fung, one of the contributors to this book, to join the gathering. The place where we gathered was close to an art space called Woofert Ten that used to be run by Lee. Woofert Ten was a nonprofit art organization based in the Shanghai Street Artspace in Yau Ma Tei, an aging grassroots community and neighborhood in Kowloon. Just one year before the gathering, in 2015, Woofert Ten closed after six years of operation because of the cessation of financial support from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. What follows is the introduction Woofert Ten gave for itself on its website:

Formed by a group of like-minded artists, curators, critics, researchers, [and] educators, Woofert Ten aims at introducing a lively conception of contemporary art engaging the community. Therefore, instead of attempting an out-of-place white cube arty gallery, Woofert Ten moulds itself more like a community centre, a platform for art projects to explore new approaches in bridging the community and art making. Woofert Ten treasures the participation of our neighboring community and audiences, and see[s] its art programs as creative interventions upon our community and society at large.³⁶

In a city where public space is losing ground to gentrification and the privatization of property, we set up tables and chairs out on the street under an overpass in

36. "About Woofert Ten," accessed March 22, 2019, last modified August 1, 2013, <http://woofert10.blogspot.com/>.

Film Criticism in *The 70's Biweekly*

Tom Cunliffe

Introduction

This chapter will examine the political and ideological perspectives of the film criticism in *The 70's Biweekly* (70年代雙週刊) to locate the ideas and values that motivated this critical practice. Many of the writers in this magazine carved out a relatively unique space for film criticism in 1970s Hong Kong, since their perspectives often paralleled the publication's own countercultural, internationalist left-wing position and concerns, which shared much with the New Left. Its contributors made explicit their personal, political, and ideological perspectives in their focus on how films can negotiate, and at times resist and critique, the ruling ideology and patriarchal capitalism. They sought to explore how film related to larger social and political issues in Hong Kong and the world. This radical pocket of critical film practice in 1970s Hong Kong and the issues it raises in relation to the destructive and dehumanizing aspects of (colonial) capitalism is still extremely relevant to our present moment. For this reason, alongside film criticism playing a considerable role in the endeavors of *The 70's*, and in terms of analyzing how this criticism contributes to reassessments of Hong Kong society and diversifies narratives about Hong Kong history, it is very much worthy of study.

The film criticism in *The 70's* is almost completely unknown; I have not once seen any reference to it. There are several causes for this invisibility. The magazine only ever had a very limited distribution, and until it was digitized and published online by Hong Kong Baptist University in 2020, it was only officially available in specialist libraries. This naturally made it largely inaccessible. Second, although most issues of *The 70's* contain some English-language articles alongside the Chinese-language articles (in each issue roughly 75–80 percent of articles are in Chinese and the rest are in English), almost all of the articles related to film are in Chinese, so lack of translations also closes this film criticism off to anybody who does not read Chinese. One also notices more generally that in discussions of Hong

Kong history there tends to be a repression or marginalization of non-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) affiliated left-wing thought and action, and this could perhaps partially explain why *The 70's* has for so long been neglected. Reading through the issues of *The 70's* gives a vastly different impression of Hong Kong society in the 1970s than one gleans from general histories on Hong Kong that tend to be written from fairly liberal perspectives. Furthermore, some of the film articles I discuss below demonstrate that there was an overtly political form of film criticism practiced in Hong Kong in the 1970s that deserves more recognition.

An anecdote in Issue 10 of *The 70's* reinforces the magazine's whole political approach and attests to Hong Kong's contested political arena: a short note mentions rumors that police officers had bought up all the issues of *The 70's* at newspaper stalls and told the hawkers not to sell them anymore, while newspaper stalls outside (pro-Beijing) left-wing banks also refused to sell the magazine. For *The 70's*, this rejection by forces aligned with the colonial government (the police) and the pro-Beijing leftist establishment was worn as a badge of honor: "To be attacked by the right and the left is surely the highest honour of an independent newspaper."¹ *The 70's* held a left-wing position outside of the established leftist institutions in Hong Kong, and the term *zuopai* that designates the pro-Beijing Left in Hong Kong does not apply to them. The left-wing position of *The 70's* was not unified, split mainly along Trotskyist and social libertarian/anarchist lines, with these two tendencies later causing internal disagreements and splits.² The writing in *The 70's* shared many of the political, hedonistic, and hippie elements of the countercultural movement that inspired the youth in cities in France, the United States, the UK, and elsewhere to revolt against the status quo in the 1960s. However, while many in the West at that time were swept up in the revolutionary rhetoric and romanticization of the Cultural Revolution taking place in China, *The 70's* was deeply critical of the CCP and the Cultural Revolution because its vantage point in Hong Kong gave it clearer insights into what was happening in China. The rehabilitation of *The 70's* at this present moment reflects more generally a desire to reevaluate Hong Kong history, society, and politics during the colonial era from a more critical perspective toward the colonial government than the liberal histories of yesteryear.

Of the thirty-five available issues in *The 70's* online archive digitized and published by Hong Kong Baptist University, twenty-two by my count contain film-related articles that number between one and four per issue. As well as original essays, they included Chinese translations of essays on film written in non-Chinese languages that interested *The 70's* collective. This relatively large number shows that cinema discussions formed a considerable part of the magazine. To be very schematic about it, the film articles that appear in the first and last issues of *The 70's* have

1. Responder, "Attacks, Right and Left," *The 70's*, no. 10 (July 10, 1970): 15.

2. Promise Li, "The Rise and Fall of the 70's Biweekly," *Lau san*, May 15, 2020, <https://lausancollective.com/2020/rise-and-fall-of-70s-biweekly/>.

something to tell us about the overall political focus of the magazine's film criticism. In the first issue the editors published a Chinese translation of an article written by Jim Spiegelman titled "Film as a Tool for Social Action," which was originally published in the *Australian Quarterly* in 1969. This article analyzes the National Board of Film of Canada's experimentation with a new program intended to screen films to facilitate discussion among communities and inspire social action to deal with problems including poverty. The decision to translate this article into Chinese demonstrates the interest at *The 70's* in the possibilities that film could have in instigating social change. The final issue contains the third part of a Chinese translation of the chapter "Godard and Rocha at the Crossroads of *Wind from the East*" from James Roy MacBean's book *Film and Revolution*, originally published in 1976. This chapter focuses on the committedly Marxist *Vent d'est* (*Wind from the East*, 1970) that dealt with class struggle and concerns itself with how a revolutionary film can be made. This focus on the intersection between film and politics marks much of their film criticism and because of this interest in how film connects to larger issues in the world, their writing tilts far more heavily in favor of socio-political and ideological analysis than formal and aesthetic analysis. A strong vein of humanism also guides the film criticism at *The 70's*, but it was not an abstract liberal humanism. Rather, it is what we might call a socialist humanism, from which perspective the writers sought to analyze how cinema and filmmakers dealt with the oppression of humanity within the structures of merciless capitalism, authoritarianism, or the increasing combination of both, but also at how humanity could resist such oppression. Below, I will also situate their film criticism in the broader context of film culture in Hong Kong to demonstrate that while *The 70's* shared certain commonalities with other major venues of film criticism, it also carved out a space that placed ideological critique and politics at the forefront.

Take a Political Position!

We could call the film criticism in *The 70's* "committed" criticism, in the sense Lindsay Anderson used the term, arguing that film critics should be upfront about their political positions.³ Anderson's article was written in the context of debates happening in *Sight and Sound* and British film culture in the 1950s about what a film critic's role precisely was; some believed it was solely to analyze aesthetic qualities and maintain an apolitical position, while Anderson advocated the opposite view. As an example of how this extended to the political position of the film itself, Mattias Frey highlights Gavin Lambert's negative review of Vincente Minnelli's *The Cobweb* (1955) in *Sight and Sound*, which criticizes the film's lack of clarity about where the director stood in relation to his subject, which results in the film

3. Lindsay Anderson, "Stand Up! Stand Up!," *Sight and Sound* 26, no. 2 (1956): 64–71.

The Erotic, the Avant-Garde, and the Anarchist Arts

The Imaginations and Representations of Radical Politics in *The 70's Biweekly*

*Ella Mei Ting Li**

Introduction

The 1970s in Hong Kong are called the fiery era because of the boom in wide-ranging local social movements. Under the shadow of the Cold War and the arrival of the global wave of decolonization, Hong Kong represented an in-between space juggling among Britain, the United States, and both the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Kuomintang (KMT). Despite the common view that Hong Kong was one of the luckiest “survivors” of the Cold War, saved from becoming the “second East Berlin” by Britain's delicate balancing act from the 1950s to the 1960s,¹ Cold War influences in both the political and cultural spheres were drawn out well into the 1970s, resulting in a complex situation of local tensions and frustrations. The fiery era, as Law Wing-sang 羅永生 termed it, should be positioned as part and parcel of the Cold War cultural warfare as refracted through the British colonial presence and power structure in the Asia Pacific, and not be simplified as a replica of the US-Soviet structure or—as Chen Kuan-hsing 陳光興 has suggested—a mere US-oriented collaborative.² Through the lens of the Asia-Pacific colonial

* I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Wayne Yeung for his details reading of the draft of this book chapter and Dr. Jessica Yeung Wai-ye for her encouragement and generous support in letting me access to her ongoing project on Mok Chiu-yu's collection, some items of which were unpublished when I started writing this chapter. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are my own.

1. Steve Tsang, “Strategy for Survival: The Cold War and Hong Kong's Policy towards Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Activities in the 1950s,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25, no. 2 (1997): 294–317; Priscilla Roberts, “Hong Kong as a Global Frontier: Interface of China, Asia, and the World,” in *Hong Kong in the Cold War*, ed. Priscilla Roberts and John M. Carroll (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 26–59.
2. Law Wing-Sang, “Xianggang de zhiminzhuyi (qu)zhengzhi yu wenhua lengzhan” [Colonialist politics of depoliticization and the cultural cold war in Hong Kong], *Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan* [Taiwan: A

power structure, the fiery era distinctly reveals the in-betweenness of Hong Kong, prompting us to consider how cautiously Hong Kong's local consciousness developed while juggling between the colonial government, US "Free Asia" propaganda, the pro-KMT and anti-communist camp,³ and the PRC's official nationalism during the Cultural Revolution.⁴ Although from some British historians' point of view, Hong Kong in the 1970s had already entered a period of social welfare reform to maintain its social stability,⁵ decolonization movements continued to be marked off limits by the British government. Meanwhile, geopolitical tensions influenced the local cultural and literary landscape in Hong Kong, as was the case in other Asian countries as well. The "cultural Cold War"—a term coined by Frances Stonor Saunders to specify the cultural dimension of CIA propaganda⁶—as it played out in Hong Kong was structured on the one hand by the influence of Western capital in Southeast Asian countries via the Asia Foundation, sometimes termed "US dollar culture" (美元／援文化),⁷ which contributed to the US empire of information in the Asia Pacific;⁸ and on the other hand, by the Chinese Communist Party-funded media, such as the Xinhua News Agency (新華社) and the pro-PRC magazine *The Seventies* (七十年代), the latter set up as an adversary of *The 70's Biweekly*, which is the subject of this study. During the cultural Cold War, as is argued by Law Wing-sang, the younger generation in 1960s Hong Kong absorbed radical thought only from the West under the tutelage of the Asia Foundation's strategy of

radical quarterly in social studies], no. 67 (July 2009): 259–77; Chen Kuan-hsing, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

3. Lo Wai-luen, "Xianggang wenxue yanjiu de jige wenti" [Questions on Hong Kong literature research], in *Zhujij Xianggang wenxue* [In search of Hong Kong literature], ed. Wong Kai-Chee, Lo Wai-luen, and William Tay (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1998), 57–75; Xun Lu, "The American Cold War in Hong Kong, 1949–1960: Intelligence and Propaganda," in *Hong Kong in the Cold War*, ed. Priscilla Roberts and John M. Carroll (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 117–41; Shuang Shen, "Empire of Information: The Asia Foundation's Network and Chinese-Language Cultural Production in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (September 2017): 589–610, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2017.0052>; Fu Poshek, "Wenhualengzhan zai Xianggang: Zhongguo xuesheng zhoubao yu Yazhou jijinhui, 1950–1970 (shang)" [The cultural Cold War in Hong Kong: The *Chinese Student Weekly* and the Asia Foundation, Part 1], *Ershiyi Shiji* [Twenty-first century], no. 173 (June 2019): 47–62; Fu Poshek, "Wenhualengzhan zai Xianggang: Zhongguo xuesheng zhoubao yu Yazhou jijinhui, 1950–1970 (xia)" [The cultural Cold War in Hong Kong: The *Chinese Student Weekly* and the Asia Foundation, Part 2], *Ershiyi Shiji* [Twenty-first century], no. 174 (August 2019): 67–82.
4. Shuk Man Leung, "Imagining a National/Local Identity in the Colony: The Cultural Revolution Discourse in Hong Kong Youth and Student Journals, 1966–1977," *Cultural Studies* 34, no. 2 (2020): 317–40.
5. John M. Carroll, "A New Hong Kong," in *A Concise History of Hong Kong* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 160–66.
6. Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2013).
7. Lo, "Xianggang wenxue yanjiu de jige wenti."
8. Shen, "Empire of Information."

depoliticization. He is hence in agreement with Ng Chung-yin's 吳仲賢 comment that the locals in Hong Kong would only revolt at the level of theory, not practice.⁹ If one places Hong Kong within the collaborative framework of Southeast Asian international leftism, one can retrieve a local perspective that helps one understand better the grassroots struggles within Cold War cultural production.

The 70's Biweekly (1970–1978), a local magazine that was run for a few years with a profoundly DIY operation by a group of young intellectuals who embraced radical political thinking, showcases radical political imaginations beyond the Cold War binarism in the Hong Kong cultural and literary landscape. Embracing neither the pro-China nationalist discourse nor the US and British Cold War apparatuses, *The 70's* collective represented local consciousness in a form linked with international leftism by introducing radical thinking and eminent activists from abroad in the service of local sociopolitical movements. Recent research has insightfully viewed *The 70's* through the lens of its translation of imported political theories, mainly anarchism, and historically placed the collective as part of a global wave of decolonization situated in Hong Kong. Scholars have generally focused on the political radicalism of *The 70's* and its collaborative networking with students and workers from local social movements.¹⁰ However, the passion for literature shared by the magazine's founders, Mok Chiu-yu 莫昭如 and Ng Chung-yin, as well as other members, has regrettably receded to a descriptive note given to introduce the magazine in retrospect and is rarely taken into individual consideration. This chapter performs close readings of the literary texts published in *The 70's* to explore how the literary dimensions of the magazine were constitutive of the collective's radical politics: it was through literary means that the collective remarkably reconfigured their complex identities as locals in Hong Kong—on the one hand attached to international leftism and on the other torn between pan-Chinese and local identifications. The complexity of their identities reflects how the Cold War structure influenced Hong Kong from the local perspective. Therefore, this chapter refuses to pin down the collective as merely leftists or anarchists but instead seeks to grasp the complexity and political ambiguity within the so-called radical literary landscape in Hong Kong produced under the Cold War structure. It does so through examining the collective's introduction of international leftism, anarchism, and radical theories into the local context, with their creative writings as sites where theories were brought into practice. Last but not least, this chapter ends with a critical reflection

9. Law Wing-sang, "Huohong niandai' yu Xianggang zuoyi jijinzhuoyi sichao" [The "fiery era" and Hong Kong's left-wing radicalism], *Twenty-First Century*, no. 161 (June 2017): 71–83.

10. Law Wing-sang, "Lengzhan zhong de jiezhì: Xianggang 'zhengqu zhongwen chengwei fading yuwen yundong' pingxi [Decolonization in the Cold War: An analysis of the Hong Kong Chinese as Official Language Movement], *Sixiang Xianggang* [Thinking Hong Kong], no. 6 (March 2015): 23–46; Law, "Huohong niandai' yu Xianggang."

John Sham Kin-fun: I Admit We Were Making Trouble!

Date: October 14, 2020

Interviewee: John Sham Kin-fun (Sham)

Interviewers: Mok Chiu-yu (Mok), Yuen Che-hung, Common Action (Q)

Translation: Lu Pan, Kwok Yuk An

Introduction

John Sham Kin-fun (John Sham) is probably the most well-known former member of *The 70's Biweekly*. He is now a multifaceted member of Hong Kong's arts and cultural scene, hosting radio programs, serving as editor in chief of *City Magazine*, and he is known as the "Lion Head" of the Hong Kong film industry. He also founded D&B Films Co. with Sammo Hung, which flourished in the 1980s.

John Sham is also known for his proactive participation in Hong Kong social movements and his courageous advocacy and public statements. In this interview, he looks back on how he joined *The 70's* as a result of the Defend Diaoyutai Movement (Baodiao), his years at *The 70's*, and his subsequent career as a Trotskyist in France. Sham was one of the core members of *The 70's*, and despite underplaying this during the interview, he was one of the leading lights of the 1970s in Hong Kong.

Interview

Q: Let's talk about your upbringing. Were your parents born in Hong Kong?

Sham: The first thing to mention would be about my grandfather, who was the ninety-seventh appointed police officer in Hong Kong. He fled to Mexico because he was wanted in relation to a failed attack on a county seat during the revolutions that were taking place during the fall of the Qing dynasty. He did not dare to return to his hometown, so he came to Hong Kong and worked as a police officer. Later on, my father was also a police officer, making for more of the same origins. When I was a child, the "Chinese

detectives”¹ Lam Kong² and Lui Lok³ used to come to my house, since my father helped Lam Kong to get promoted. . . . Because of my grandfather’s connections, my father and the then–chief superintendent of police had been playmates since childhood. Many police officers who wanted to get promoted but did not have money for the necessary bribes at that time were helped by my father, so my father was quite well respected among the police. For instance, during the Double Ten Riot in 1956⁴ my father saved a lot of people, he could have someone released with just a phone call.

So, in fact, I was born in a well-off family. We were among the first subscribers to the cable television service Rediffusion [RTV].⁵ My older sister was quite a bit older than I, so I started listening to European and Western pop music like Elvis Presley and rock ’n’ roll at an early age. But I rarely went out to play with other kids on streets.

Q: So, why did you start to care about social issues and participate in social movements?

Sham: My “radicalization” started when I was a musician in 1966–1968. How could I not see the American GIs when working in bars and nightclubs in Wan Chai at that time? Before and after the Tet Offensive in 1968, the GIs were a common sight.

My elementary school classmate Sit Ping-kei, who was arrested at a May 4 [referring to the May 4 Incident] rally in 1971 [interviewee mistakenly said the “April 10 Incident” rally, but it is verified to be the May 4 Incident rally], knew that I was deeply opposed to the Vietnam War, so he introduced me to *The 70’s* group.

I was not with any organization at that time; I carried my own guitar and went to the anti–Vietnam War demonstrations. Many GIs were actually very anti-war, and talking to them had a great impact on me.

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1. There were four famous “Chinese detectives” in total: Lui Lok (1920–2010), Lam Kong (1920–1989), Hon Sum (1917–1999), and Ngan Hong (?–?).
 2. Lam Kong, real name Lam Man-kai, nicknamed “Headless,” was the former chief inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Hong Kong Police Force and later became a wanted criminal for his corruption.
 3. Lui Lok CPM, also known as “The Five-Hundred-Million-Dollar Inspector,” was a former Hong Kong detective staff sergeant. He became notorious for his acts of corruption during the 1960s to 1970s during the British Hong Kong period, and for being wanted by the Independent Commission against Corruption.
 4. Otherwise known as the “1956 Hong Kong riots,” they were the result of escalating provocations between the pro-Kuomintang and pro-Chinese Communist Party camps on Double Ten Day, October 10, 1956. Most of the violence took place in the town of Tsuen Wan, five miles from central Kowloon.
 5. Launched in 1957, Rediffusion was Hong Kong’s first television station; operated on subscription basis, it was affordable only for the wealthy.

Q: Did you participate in any other social movements in your early years, besides the anti-Vietnam War movement?

Sham: I participated in the Kowloon riots in 1966 and the 1967 riots along with the masses. In 1967, the movement broke out in Tai Yau Street near Ng Wah Catholic Secondary School, where I was studying at the time. Even today, when I talk to my teachers about that incident, they still recall that they discouraged me from participating. At that time, of course, I did not like the colonial police and wanted to support the workers.

Q: So how did you first get involved with *The 70's*?

Mok: At that time, Sham was learning flute and came to the office of *The 70's* with his flute. We happened to go out for dinner, and I went back with Ng Chung-yin first, so I got to know him.

Sham: Perhaps it was Ng Chung-yin—I knew a person with that name—but that day Mok is talking about Ng Chung-yin should have been absent, hadn't he have gone to Norway?

Mok: Ng Chung-yin went to Norway after [the] April 10 [demonstration] in 1971.

Sham: Right. I'm sure I came to *The 70's* after [the] May 4 [demonstration] in the same year, because it was after the arrest of Sit Ping-kei . . .

Mok: Twelve people were arrested during May 4, including myself, Sit Ping-kei, Yu Hung, and Hou Man-wan. Other than my brother, Mok Chiu-yu, I didn't know any of those people at the time. But after being arrested together we all came to know one another. Most of them later became members of *The 70's*. But as far as I remember, I met you for the first time with Ng Chung-yin. It was probably between May and July. At that time, he wanted to go to Canada but could not, so he switched to France but also could not get a visa there, and eventually he went to Norway. He wanted to study for his doctorate at the University of Oslo, but the Norwegian government would not grant him a visa to stay, so he went back to Hong Kong on a ship.

Q: Tell us briefly about your experience in *The 70's*.

Sham: I joined *The 70's* in mid-1971 and left Hong Kong for France in 1972, and participated *The 70's* again in April–May 1973 when I was back in Hong Kong. I left *The 70's* again to start up *Zhan Xun* [Combat bulletin] with Ng [Ng Chung-yin].

Q: What do you remember happening between the time you participated in *The 70's* and the time you left Hong Kong for Britain?

Sham: I joined *The 70's* in mid-1971, which I remember clearly, but I forget the exact month and day. What I remember most is [the] August 13 [demonstration], when I did something wrong. I shook hands with the police representatives, and the scene was captured by journalists. It happened at a Baodiao movement demonstration on August 13, right after [the] July 7 [demonstration]. At that time, someone from the *South China Morning Post* came to act as an intermediary, telling us that we could apply [for a rally permit] immediately, and that if we did not apply, we would have to confront the police. So August 13 was our first legal demonstration. Au Yim-cheung, Wong Yu-wai, and I, the three of us applied for it. I don't even remember why I was responsible for it, but as you know, the organization and actions of *The 70's* and the Baodiao United Front⁶ were very loose, and those who were willing to do something did it. But I must have been asked to do it by Mok Chiu-yu, because I didn't really know many people from *The 70's* at that time. Anyway, I was the one who did all the work of corresponding with reporters. I didn't care much; I didn't have a family and was free, but in fact, my boss at my part-time job was very unhappy with that, and I didn't know it at the time, so I went to work as usual. After that, I went on a hunger strike, and of course I could not work, so my boss took the opportunity to fire me—he had wanted to do this for a long time. That was the end of my career as a musician. And if your name was in the newspapers for protesting, you were in trouble. Nobody would dare to hire you. They described us as “troublemakers,” and I would admit that was accurate.

The Baodiao movement fell silent after [the] May 13 [demonstration] in 1972. In 1971 there was the blind workers' labor movement.⁷ I don't remember the details of the labor unrest, but it was probably in October 1971. The blind workers were treated unfairly, so they started a labor movement. We, *The 70's*, went to support, and the Hong Kong Federation of Students supported too. I remember the chairman of the Hong Kong Society for the Blind, Mr. Sales,⁸ and that in the march each blind marcher

6. The full name was the United Front for the Protection of the Diaoyu Islands (保釣運動聯合陣線), which consisted of the Hong Kong Defend Diaoyutai Provisional Action Committee (香港保釣臨時行動委員會), the May Fourth Action Committee (五四行動委員會), and the Secondary School Action Committee (中學生行動委員會).

7. In 1971, the blind workers' labor movement was triggered by blind workers in a factory for the blind. After six months of unsuccessful struggle for a pay raise, the workers went on strike after the factory was turned into a “training center” and the workers were dismissed by stealth. Since the employer was a social welfare organization, the incident soon became a labor and social justice issue and attracted widespread attention.

8. Arnaldo de Oliveira Sales (1920–2020) was a Hong Kong Portuguese president and member of dozens of governmental and public institutions and associations in Hong Kong, serving as chair of the Urban Council (1976–1980) and a member of the Basic Law Consultative Committee. Sales was chief executive of Mission for Hong Kong at all the Olympic Games from 1952 to 1988, and to the

was holding hands with two other people. We were very united during that period of time, acting together with Ko Tak-kit and others. I mainly participated in demonstrations at that time, when *The 70's* or the Baodiao United Front initiated them, and when I had time, I went.

I was also impressed by how we delivered *The 70's* every time it was published. In those days, we had to push our own carts to deliver the newspapers. . . . Those who could built their own wooden carts, or else they would carry the newspapers by hand and deliver them to each newspaper vendor.

The division of labor was regional; for example, if I was responsible for delivering to Hung Hom, Tsim Sha Tsui, and Yau Ma Tei, I would deliver the newspapers to each newsstand and collect some old issues. Sometimes we were really embarrassed. . . . Like sometimes the last issue was published three months ago, and the newspaper vendor didn't know how to find the old ones for us. . . . How could any newspaper stand be expected to keep newspapers from three months ago? So we got a blank stare.

Mok: The reason for self-publishing was that around the time of the seventh or eighth issue of *The 70's*, the police sued us, and the publisher wouldn't publish it for us anymore. They were afraid of any radical publication. So we distributed the newspaper by ourselves. I was responsible for sending them from Wan Chai Pier to Hung Hom, then along Ma Tau Wai Road and Ma Tau Chung Road. Sometimes we sold out, and when we distributed new issues, we settled the bill.

Q: Who were you close to *The 70's*?

Sham: Before I went to Paris, the people I knew best in *The 70's* were Siu Hak [Cheung King-hung]⁹ and Wai Yuen [Kwan Wai-yuen 關懷遠]. The three of us published *Shiri kan* [Ten-day magazine], which was intended to be published once every ten days, but it ended up ceasing publication after three issues because we had no money.

Q: What about the relationship between the National Faction [*guocui pai*] and *The 70's*?¹⁰

Asian and Commonwealth games from 1958 to 1990. He was also a president of the Hong Kong Association for the Blind.

9. Siu Ke/Cheung King-hung was a member of the editorial board and arts editor of *The 70's* and was responsible for the editing and writing of the literature section. He worked as a scene manager, film art director, curator, and produced film stills for Yau Ching's 2002 film *Let's Love Hong Kong (Hao yu)*. He passed away on November 15, 2016, due to illness.

10. The terms National Faction (*guocui pai*) and Social Faction (*shehui pai*), which mark the different sectors in Hong Kong's student movement in the 1970s, first appeared in 1973.

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Index

- 1917 October Revolution, 51
1967 Leftist Riots, 52
1967 Riots, 2, 11, 24, 31, 34, 44, 52, 53,
55–57, 62, 79, 92, 96, 126, 148,
150–52, 154, 155, 167, 171, 172,
175, 178, 179, 183, 184, 194, 227,
236, 240, 248
1968 Revolt, 56, 58, 64, 66
1974 Four-Anti Campaign, 71
70's Biweekly, 1, 3, 5, 6, 12, 17–21, 25,
29, 34, 51, 55, 57, 80, 82, 89, 101,
103, 108, 113, 132, 141, 142, 144,
146, 148, 150, 152, 154, 156, 158,
160, 162, 164, 166–70, 172, 174,
176, 178, 180, 182, 184, 186, 188,
190, 192–94, 196–200, 202, 209,
211, 214, 217, 220, 225, 253, 259,
267
ABDick, 261
action-oriented organizations, 82
Ad Hoc American Committee on
Vietnam, 55
Ah Ying, 162
Aishi, 208–10, 214
Alliance of Workers and Students, x, 83,
211, 246
Amateur Film, 170, 173, 182, 183,
186
anarchism, 5, 11, 13, 55, 58, 59, 64, 66,
69, 106, 124, 169, 171, 172, 185,
187, 190, 198–200, 203–6, 216,
219–21, 242, 252
anarchist arts, v, 21, 196, 198–200, 202,
204, 206, 208, 210, 212, 214, 216,
218, 220
anarchists, 7, 11, 43, 44, 69, 80, 104,
105, 198, 201, 204–6, 257
anarchy, 18, 25, 125, 179, 195, 199,
203–5, 216, 221
Annaqi, 18, 25, 104, 109, 179, 195, 199,
203–5, 221
*An Open Letter to the Literary Youth in
Hong Kong*, 169, 191, 195
anti-capitalism, xii, 16, 102, 165
anti-colonial, 36, 37, 40, 45, 50, 59–66,
73, 76, 78, 82, 93, 95, 98, 99,
101–3, 106, 137, 150, 153, 201,
211, 215, 219
anti-colonialism, 5, 11, 35, 39–41, 50,
60, 84, 89, 93, 96, 99–103, 105,
106, 249, 254
anti-colonialist, x, 35, 41, 58
anti-colonial revolution, 37
anti-communism, 11, 174
anti-communist, 1, 30–32, 52, 197, 201,
218
Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill
Movement, 235, 242, 246
anti-imperialism, 12, 16, 55, 58, 60, 84,
94, 100–102, 105, 106, 189, 212,
250
Anti-Price Increase Action Committee, 73
Antonioni, Michelangelo, 144, 162
April Fifth Action, 48, 49, 78
April 10 Incident, 97, 99, 226

- Asia, v, 1–3, 19, 20, 23–25, 44, 50, 52, 53, 72, 75, 80–96, 98–100, 102–9, 116, 117, 140, 147, 168, 173, 174, 196–98, 219–21, 229, 241, 267, 268
- Asia as method, 20, 24, 83, 86, 87, 107, 197, 220
- Asia Foundation, 81, 108, 117, 140, 173, 197, 220, 221
- Asian-African Conference, 81, 84, 85
- Asian Student Conference, 91
- Au, Loong-yu, 68, 233
- Avant Garde*, v, xiii, 13, 17, 20, 117, 132, 133, 202
- Avant Garde Bookstore, 17
- avant-garde, 5, 6, 8, 21, 24, 113, 176, 183, 196, 198–200, 202–6, 208, 210, 212–14, 216–20, 239, 241–43, 247, 248, 262
- avant-gardism, 21, 200, 203, 216, 218, 219
- Baez, Joan, 261
- Ba Jin, 205
- Bai Xing*, 263
- Bandung Conference, 81, 90
- Bangladesh Liberation War, 16
- Bao, Cuoshi, 12, 44, 100, 118
- Baodiao, x, xiii, xiv, 33, 34, 41–44, 59–63, 66, 81–83, 91, 95–106, 108, 109, 225, 228–30, 235, 238, 241, 243, 249–51, 253, 256, 257, 261
- Baodiao movement, x, xii, xiv, 59, 62, 63, 66, 81–83, 91, 95–106, 109, 228, 238, 241, 243, 249, 251, 256, 257
- Bei, Bei, 212, 213
- Biafra, 16, 90, 103, 245, 246
- Blackbird: A Living Song*, 191
- Black Panther Party, 136, 164
- Black Power Movement, 57, 136
- Boberg, Jørgen, 120, 132
- British colonial rule, 3, 4, 10, 14, 19, 48, 81
- Cactus Film Club, 169, 180–82, 184
- Café Brazil, 11, 190
- Catholic Post-secondary*, 113
- Chan, Chi-tak, 116, 199
- Chan, David Yuk-cheung, 233, 251
- Chan, Kiu-ying, 15, 231
- Chan, Kuen-yeung, 12
- Chen, Kuan-hsing, 20, 87, 196, 197
- Cheng, Ji-hua, 263
- Cheung, King-hung, 8, 202, 229
- Chinese anarchism, 205
- Chinese as Official Language Movement, x, xiii, 5, 7, 10, 11, 16, 17, 20, 33, 37, 40, 41, 50, 54, 83, 91, 114, 117, 134, 136, 137, 153, 154, 198, 202, 209, 211–13, 220, 246, 249
- Chinese Civil War, 1, 53, 80, 94, 174
- Chinese Communist Party, 1, 13, 29, 59, 68, 79, 80, 117, 162, 187, 197, 201, 226, 231, 233, 236, 242, 246
- Chinese Language Movement, 37
- Chinese Nationalist Party, 1
- Chinese Student Weekly*, 8, 9, 12, 13, 34, 113, 117, 140, 144, 151, 153, 160, 167, 168, 172, 175, 182, 194, 197, 202, 220, 246, 248
- Chinese University of Hong Kong, 22, 42, 54, 97, 113, 180, 245, 268
- Chiu, Kang-chien, 21, 208, 209, 218
- Chiu, Tak-hak, 170, 183, 186, 188
- Chong Kin Experimental College, 12
- Chong Kin Monthly*, 13
- Chu Hai College, 7, 30, 54, 57, 201, 264
- Chu Hai Incident, 7, 32, 33, 54
- Chung, King-fai, 10
- Chung kuo*, 165
- Chung, Ling-ling, 8, 21, 214, 215, 218
- Chung, Wah-nan, 12
- CIA, 117, 197, 221
- cinematic practices, 21, 169–74, 176, 178–80, 182–86, 188, 190–92, 194, 267
- City District Officer Schemes, 53
- City Magazine*, 15, 115, 132, 139, 140, 176, 225
- civil disobedience, 10, 17, 124

- Cold War, 1, 2, 13, 19–21, 24, 25, 30,
 31, 55, 80–83, 85, 87, 88, 91–93,
 95, 99, 104, 106–9, 117, 140, 152,
 167, 169–86, 192–202, 205, 206,
 208, 212, 217–21
 Cold War cinephilia, 173, 175, 177, 178,
 180, 182, 185
 collaborative colonialism, 49
 College Cine Club, 158, 170, 173, 176,
 183, 184
College Life, 8, 9, 12, 54, 96, 115, 173,
 176–78
 colonialism, 5, 7, 10, 11, 19, 20, 29, 30,
 33–37, 39–42, 49, 50, 58–62, 64,
 75, 84, 85, 87–89, 93, 96, 98–103,
 105–7, 114, 120, 154, 155, 171,
 174, 186, 195, 211, 212, 241, 248,
 249, 254
 Comolli, Jean-Louis, 20, 146
 Costa-Gavras, 144
 counterculture, 38, 132, 169, 171, 260
 counterculture movement, 169, 260
 counterpublics, 5, 20, 25, 111, 116, 139,
 140
 CSW, 144, 148, 151, 152, 160, 172–78,
 182, 183, 190
 cultural China, 174, 178, 192
 cultural Cold War, 30, 31, 81, 107,
 117, 140, 169, 170, 172–78, 180,
 184–86, 192, 196, 197, 199, 200,
 202, 206, 212, 217–21
 Cultural Revolution, 2, 3, 11, 40, 52,
 57, 65, 92, 115, 119, 138, 142,
 166, 180, 197, 206, 231, 236, 238,
 263

 Dai, Kiu, 231
 Dai Tian, 12, 118
Daily Combat Bulletin, 70, 73
 decolonization, 5, 19, 20, 29, 30, 32, 34,
 36–38, 40, 42, 44, 46, 48, 50, 55,
 81, 83, 87, 91, 194, 196–98, 200,
 201, 206, 212, 218–20
 decolonize, 36

 Defend Diaoyutai Movement, 7, 10, 12,
 16, 18, 22, 33, 41, 81, 98, 170, 179,
 186, 253
 de–Cold War, 83
 Diaoyu Islands, 10, 16, 41, 59, 60, 81,
 83, 96–99, 104, 128, 169, 187, 188,
 228, 230, 238, 239, 247, 250, 251,
 253, 256
 Double Ten Riot, 226
 DWARF Film Club, 169, 180, 184,
 263
 Dylan, Bob, 128

 eroticism, 21, 200, 205, 207, 208, 210,
 211, 219
 exile discourse, 32, 33, 42
 experimental cinema, 160, 170, 173
 extraterritoriality, 178

 Fanon, Frantz, 35, 49, 84, 86, 89, 107,
 211, 212
 fatalism of liberation, 42, 45
 fiery era, the, 2, 19, 22, 24, 47, 48, 78,
 80, 196–98, 220, 245
 Fight Corruption, 230, 259, 262
 Fong, Allen, 162
 Foo, Lo-bing, 69, 202, 241, 256, 257,
 262, 263
 Four Non-payments Campaign, 257, 261,
 262
 Frank, Pierre, 65
 free China, 14, 206
 Fu, Qi, 238
 Fung, Kin-chung, 262
 Fung, Yuen-chi, 8, 17, 125

 Gandhi, 12, 13, 39, 90, 124
 global sixties, 80, 91
 Godard, Jean-Luc, 14, 143–45, 180
 Godber, Peter, 7, 71, 126
 Golden Jubilee Secondary School
 Incident, 22
 Greater China Gum, 22
 greenback culture, 13

- Hendrix, Jimi, 128
High Times, 18, 132
 Hitchcock, Alfred, 144
 Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee, 246
 Hong Kong cinema, 12, 20, 148, 152, 153, 155, 158, 162, 166, 167, 175, 178, 184, 194, 195
 Hong Kong City Hall, 176, 180, 183, 190
 Hong Kong Diaoyutai Provisional Action Committee, 96, 97
 Hong Kong Federation of Students, 41, 56, 57, 79, 94, 96, 108, 245
 Hong Kong Independent Short Film Exhibition, 185, 191
 Hong Kong Police, 7, 55, 56, 58–60, 62, 74, 78, 121, 122, 226, 230, 253
 Hou, Man-wan, 9, 10, 15, 18, 227, 249
 Hu, Ju-ren, 8, 12, 13
 identity politics, 82, 91, 103, 219
 internationalism, 16, 20, 41, 82, 83, 87, 95, 98, 101, 103–7, 119, 169, 200, 201, 218
 international leftism, 198
 International Young Socialist Alliance, 70
 Japanese Anpo Movement, 16
 Japanese Cultural Centre, 96, 239, 250
 Japanese Revolutionary Communist League, 69
Juchang, 183, 208
 Kam, Ping-hing, 12, 144, 183, 191
 Kan, Fook-wing, 6, 22, 69, 253, 255, 257, 265
 Kangra painting, 120
 Keep Hong Kong Clean Campaign, 126
 Know China Movement, 62
 Kowloon City, 60
 Kowloon Park, 74, 76
 Ku, Chong-ng, 12, 13
 Kuomintang, 30, 80, 196, 221, 226
 Kwan, Kam-biu, 22
 Kwan, Mung-nan, 199
 Kwan, Wai-yuen, 8, 11, 202, 208, 213, 215, 216, 218, 229
 Lam, Nin-tung, 12
 Lam, Yut-hang, 12
 Lau, Shan-ching, 233
 Law Kar, 12, 18, 151–53, 167, 170, 173, 175–77, 181–83, 185, 186, 188, 191, 193
 Law, Wing-sang, v, 19, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47, 49, 52, 54, 78, 80, 88, 151, 152, 196–98, 267
 Lee, Kam-fung, 8, 240, 247, 251
 Lee, Lilian Pik-wah, 152, 153
 Lee, Tien-ming, 12
 Lee, Wai-ming, 66, 67, 69, 70, 101, 232, 233
 leftists, 2, 3, 11, 19, 34, 40, 43, 46, 52, 62, 63, 74, 80, 103, 148, 150, 151, 198, 254
 Leung, Chong-kwong, 94
 Leung, Kwok-hung, 49, 70, 213, 233
 libertarian communists, 104
Life magazine, 12, 128
Life Monthly, 96, 176–78
 Ligue Communiste, 64
 Lin, Jun, 131
 Liu, Shipei, 205
 Lo, Kwai-cheung, 87, 88, 107
 Lou, Guohua, 67
 Lu, Li, 34, 35, 36
 Lui, Nam, 263
 Lung, King-cheong, 15, 231, 232, 247, 251
 Lung, Kong, 150, 151, 154, 155, 167, 267
 MacLehose, Crawford Murray, 3
 MacLehose era, 3, 170, 171
 Mao, Zedong, 38, 68, 84, 184, 236, 237, 245, 254
 Maoism, 11, 40, 55, 58, 62–65, 68, 97, 217

- Maoist, 4, 9, 13, 19, 40, 42–45, 49, 65, 106, 150
 Maoist nationalism, 45
 Mathews, Gordon, 52
 Mark, Chi-Kwan, 82, 88
Meiri zhancun, 70
Ming Pao Monthly, 60
Ming Pao Weekly, 119
Minus 9-4, 105, 205
 modernist, 21, 175–77, 182, 192, 200, 208
Modern Literature, 268
 Mok, Chiu-yu, 5, 7, 9, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21, 22, 25, 65, 89, 92–95, 98, 99, 101, 103–6, 108, 109, 121–23, 125–27, 129, 133, 135, 137, 138, 149, 152, 155, 159, 163, 169, 170, 173, 179, 186, 187, 191–93, 195, 196, 198, 199, 201, 202, 204, 218, 225, 227, 228, 233, 235, 242, 253, 255, 259
 Morse Park, 74, 262
 Mou, Zongsan, 256

 Narboni, Paul, 20, 146
 national education protests, 235, 245
 National Faction, 22, 100, 187, 229, 230, 233, 245, 247, 253
 nationalism, 1, 5, 12, 16, 30, 40–42, 44–46, 48, 49, 52, 58, 62, 66, 68, 80, 82, 87, 88, 91, 92, 95, 100, 101, 103, 104, 106, 118, 156, 157, 171, 174, 175, 177, 187, 197, 200, 212
 nationalistic, 16, 33, 40, 41, 44, 45, 119, 139
 nationalists, 10, 41
 neo-Confucian, 256
 neo-Maoists, 80
 New Left, 5, 6, 8, 11, 15, 17, 19, 20, 25, 29, 33, 37–40, 43, 44, 49, 51, 52, 54–72, 74, 76–78, 80, 82, 83, 85, 86, 89, 101, 108, 136, 138, 139, 141, 145, 146, 148, 154, 179, 187, 190, 192
 New Left movement, 55–58, 63, 64, 77, 78, 83, 86, 136, 179, 187

 Ng, Chung-yin, v, xv, xvii, 7, 15, 17, 19, 22, 25, 29–36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46–50, 53, 54, 57, 60, 63–67, 69, 70, 73, 74, 76, 77, 79, 80, 86, 89, 90, 96, 99–103, 105, 106, 108, 113, 169, 187, 198, 201, 202, 208, 210, 212–14, 221, 227, 230–33, 235, 242, 243, 247, 251, 253, 255, 256
 Ng, Chun-ming, 12
 Ng, Hao, 12
 Ng, Ka-lun, 67, 231, 247, 251
Nianqing gongren, 261, 263

 Occupy Central, 235, 243, 244
October Review, 48, 65, 70, 72, 73, 232, 233
 Oz, 20, 117, 132, 134

 Pan-Asian Conference, 91
Pan gul Pan ku, 12, 32, 100, 101, 103, 113, 129, 130, 200, 202
 Paris, 11, 12, 15, 22, 58, 64, 67, 69, 201, 229, 231, 232, 257
 participatory cinema, 180
 Peng, Shuzhi, 22, 67, 70, 102, 231, 232
People's Daily, 129, 165
 People Society, 105
 People's Republic of China, 11, 12, 52, 81, 165, 237
 People's Theatre: A Private Archive of Mok Chiu-yu Augustine and Friends, 18, 65, 193
 People's Theatre Society, 105
 Phoenix Cine Club, 21, 185, 186, 191
Pioneer Group, 48, 78
 political cinema, 179, 180, 188–92
 pop art, 10, 114, 117, 120, 128, 129, 136, 138, 140
 Prague Spring, 56
 pro-China student factions, 63
 pro-communism, 11
 Progressive Labor Party, 263
 protection of the Diaoyu Islands, 41, 228, 239, 247, 253

- Qian, Weichang, 254
 Queen Elizabeth, 61, 122
 Queen Elizabeth II, 61
 Queen's Pier, 60

 Red Guards, 230, 242
 Rediffusion, 226
 Republic of China, 11, 12, 16, 52, 53, 81,
 165, 237, 254
 revolution, 2, 3, 7, 11, 36–40, 43–48,
 50–52, 57, 58, 63–65, 67, 82, 86,
 88–90, 92, 93, 99, 100, 102–7, 115,
 119, 124, 129, 138, 140, 142, 143,
 166, 180, 189, 197, 204, 206, 207,
 210–12, 221, 230, 231, 236, 238,
 263, 265
 Revolutionary Communist Party, 67
 revolutionary group, 136
 Revolutionary Internationalist League,
 70
 Revolutionary Marxist League, 43, 77,
 242, 251
 revolutions, 7, 29, 37–40, 124, 138, 225
 rightist, 6, 12, 246
 Ryukyu Islands, 10, 58, 59

 Sakai, Yoshichi, 69
 San Po Kong, 73, 74, 236, 262
 Sato, Eisaku, 128
 Sek Kei, 12, 160, 170
 Sham, John Kin-fun, 6, 14, 22, 65, 67,
 73, 202, 225, 227, 229, 231, 233,
 242, 253, 261
 Shek Kip Mei, 238
 Shi, Hui, 238
Shiyue pinglun, 70, 73, 232
 Shizhiye, 207, 208
 Shum, Yat-fei, 12
 Si, Jie, 98, 214
 Si, Shun-dun, 8
 Si Yun, 98
Sight and Sound, 14, 143, 144, 167
Sing tao jih pao, 74
 situationism, 190
 Siu, Kiu, 231

South China Morning Post, 61, 69, 75
 Special Branch of the Royal Hong Kong
 Police Force, 56
 Star Ferry, 9, 10, 17, 236, 240, 254
 Studio One, 176
 Sugar Street Incident, 240, 241
 Sun, Ge, 87
 Sun, Yat-sen, 33, 38, 123, 249
 Sung, Yun-wing, 17
 Sze, Shun-tun, 231, 242, 253

Ta Kung Pao, 153
 Tang, Junyi, 256
 Tang, Shu-shuen, 155, 157, 168
 Tang, Wai, 241
 The anti-Vietnam War movement, 10,
 91, 95, 106, 227
The Arch, 148, 155–58, 164, 168
 theatre, 5, 10, 14, 17, 18, 25, 49, 65, 101,
 104, 105, 109, 139, 183, 186, 193,
 202, 241, 259
The Battle of Algiers, 147, 189, 195
 The Black Panther Party, 136, 164
 The Chinese as Official Language
 Movement, 7, 10, 11, 16, 17, 37, 40,
 41, 50, 54, 134, 137, 153, 154, 209,
 211, 213, 246, 249
The Communist Manifesto, 255
 The Cultural Revolution, 2, 3, 11, 40, 52,
 92, 115, 119, 138, 142, 166, 180,
 197, 206, 236, 238, 263
 The Gang of Four, 10, 13, 245
 The Hong Kong Festival, 126
 The Hong Kong Left, 2, 211
 The League of Social Democrats, 49
The Seventies, 57, 113, 115, 118, 119,
 140, 197, 211
The 70's Evening Post, 90, 202
*The 70s Youth Avant-Garde / The 70's
 Youth Vanguard*, 8, 13, 20, 117, 125,
 202, 204
The Strawberry Statement, 209, 210
 The Third Revolution, 37, 38, 40, 43, 99,
 100, 212
The Turbulent 1974, 18

- The Vietnam War, 9, 16, 55, 86, 88,
90–94, 120, 226, 248
- Third Cinema, 14, 179, 180, 189, 192,
195
- Third World, 7, 18, 20, 38, 81–91, 95,
99, 103, 105, 107, 109, 114, 115,
185, 201, 211, 219, 255
- Third Worldism, 20, 81–87, 91, 105, 107
- Tiananmen Square, 235
- Tin, Audrey, 64, 67
- Tin, Wai-ching, 231
- To Kwa Wan, 235, 240
- Tong, Si-hong, 105
- Tong, Yuen-tsing, 233
- Trotskyism, 64
- Tsui, Linda Yee-wan, 230
- Umbrella Movement, 235
- Undercurrent*, 105
- Underground Press Syndicate, 114, 134
- Underground Showings, 179, 180
- Understanding China and Concerning
Society, 100, 101
- Union Press, 8, 13, 31–33, 117, 118, 173,
176
- United Secretariat of the Fourth
International, 64
- United States Information Service, 13
- University of Hong Kong, 4, 22, 30, 42,
54–56, 75, 79, 94, 97, 100, 113,
115, 139, 140, 180, 184, 213, 233,
243, 245, 254, 255, 267, 268
- US dollar culture, 174, 175, 182
- US “Free Asia” propaganda, 197
- Van, Lau, 12, 130, 140
- vanguardism, 12
- Victoria Park, 34, 41, 73, 123, 238, 239
- Vietnam War, 7, 9, 10, 16, 55, 56, 81, 83,
86, 88, 90–95, 98, 103, 105, 106,
108, 114, 120, 136, 226, 227, 248
- Village Voice*, 134
- visual guerrilla, 139
- Visual-Programme System, 169, 184
- Wai Yuen, 11, 14, 213, 215, 216, 229
- Wang, Fanxi, 66–68, 232, 233
- Warsaw Pact, 56
- Wat Zai, 22
- Wei, Li, 131
- Wenmei*, 202
- Wenshexian*, 200
- Wen Wei Po*, 76
- Woman’s Right*, 8, 202
- Wong, Hing-wah, 14
- Wong Tai Sin, 74, 262
- Wong, Yan-kwai, 8, 202, 239
- Wong, Yan-tat, 8, 10, 14, 17, 128, 132,
134, 139, 230, 239
- Woo, John, 8, 12, 15, 170, 182
- Wood, Robin, 144, 145
- Woodstock, 114, 128
- Woofer Ten, 23, 24
- working-class literature, 211
- Wu, Fan, 131
- Xi Xi, 154, 155, 173
- Xiang, Qing, 66, 67
- Xinhua News Agency, 150, 197
- Xu, Fuguan, 256
- Xue yuan*, 22, 181
- Yesi, 152
- Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, 148–51, 167,
184
- Yeung, Wai-ye, 18, 179, 196, 199, 202
- Yihequan, 57
- YMCA, 17
- Yu, Hong, 22
- Yu, Sau, 93, 147, 155, 156, 162, 163, 204
- Yuen, Che-hung, 6, 23, 105, 202, 225,
257, 259, 261, 263, 265
- Zabriskie Point*, 144, 162, 164–66
- Zhan Xun*, 227, 233
- Zhongwen fading ge, 230