

Book Review

Po-Shek Fu. *Hong Kong Media and Asia's Cold War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. 256 Pages. ISBN: 9780190073770.

The unique geo-political location of Hong Kong and how the colony became a base for the battle of hearts and minds of Chinese diaspora scattered across Asia during the Cold War, have been written and observed by many scholars over the years. However, in his latest book, Po-Shek Fu offers a refreshing perspective by choosing media as the keyword and draws upon an extensive collection of archival materials, films and oral interviews, in order to examine cultural production in Hong Kong from the 1950s to 1970s as well as how film and print media serve as popular forms of propaganda undertaken by the Communists, Nationalists and the United States. Fu argues that in our current understanding of the cultural Cold War, one needs to move beyond the ideological warfare between the anti-Communist or anti-Capitalist camps and pay attention to local processes and experiences that are equally important in shaping how the competing parties evolve, develop and assert their respective hegemonic influences on Chinese diasporic communities living in different parts of Asia.

With a preface and an epilogue, the book begins from the period of late 1940s with the arrival of refugees and “White Chinese” (Shanghai emigres) in Hong Kong, to the 1960s and 1970s where an emergent local consciousness can be found among the population who grew up in an age of prosperity and stability. Popular media such as films, songs and print materials such as the *Chinese Student Weekly* were carefully examined by Fu in tracing the dynamics and complex meanings of the cultural Cold War in Hong Kong. Being one of the most respected scholars in the field of Chinese-language cinema, the chapters on Asia Pictures (in Chapter Three) and the Shaw Brothers (in Chapter Four) are the most interesting. They allow readers to appreciate how individuals such as Chang Kuo-sin and Run Run Shaw responded with varying strategies during the Cold War and convincingly argue that it was The Asia Foundation and the Federation of Southeast Asian Producers that lend impetus to transforming Hong Kong’s Mandarin film production through fresh rounds of investment on capital and expertise in the 1950s. These had helped in making Hong Kong into “the

regional hub of Chinese-language filmmaking and cultural production” (p. 108) and facilitated the “border-crossing movement of ideas and influences ... [that demonstrated] the ambivalence of film production in Hong Kong” (p. 140).

For those who might be more interested on the historical backdrop, Chapter One offers a succinct overview of the United States intelligence service in Hong Kong, the Communists and the Nationalists’ stance, as well as the British colonial government’s policies on political propaganda, censorship and surveillance. As a result of Cold War, it became crucial for the British colonial government to adopt a neutral policy and by implementing strict censorship and surveillance on any potential subversive individuals or activities across the competing ideological camps, the British colonial government sought to present itself as non-partisan and open-minded.

Chapter Two and the Epilogue can be read together in that the boom and decline of the hugely popular Chinese magazine *Chinese Student Weekly* could help us better appreciate the cultural Cold War in Hong Kong beyond the usual rhetoric of creating a “democratic China”, building a “free world” and criticisms of authoritarian regimes. Fu noted that the magazine consciously remained aloof of local politics, often “inflexibly veered readers from involving themselves in local political activity [and] advised them to focus on schoolwork” (p. 76). He added that such an editorial approach while aligned with United States’ anti-Communist campaign in Asia and their effort to portray *Chinese Student Weekly* as an agency of Cold War enlightenment to overseas readers, it did not sit well with the postwar local generation in Hong Kong. In his Epilogue, Fu proposed that it was precisely because the postwar baby-boomers’ experience of a global youth culture centered on rebellion, calls for justice and equality, coupled with rapid modernisation in the 1960s, it was a generation who did not share the same diasporic experience as their parents nor a strong attachment to the Chinese mainland which somehow “embedded” them in the ongoing Cold War politics. In fact, the change in Hong Kong’s mediascape marked by the birth of the new *City Magazine* by prominent writer Xi Xi, promotion of Cantopop and revival of Cantonese movies, establishment of the City Hall and Hong Kong Arts Festival & etc, all these factors gave rise to different meanings and challenges. Some have argued that it was the new, local-born generation who actively reshaped the Cold War networks of émigré cultural

production in Hong Kong during the 1970s and in turn, Hong Kong's status as a nodal point in Asia's cultural Cold War gradually lost its significance.

All in all, Fu takes effort to provide a clear introduction to his readers on the specific social and geopolitical contexts in his writing. Each chapter is supported by close readings of selected films, newspaper articles and other archival materials which he has meticulously compiled and collected. The book also highlights local agency and sets out to reflect on Hong Kong identity, sense of belonging, media and cultural production, at the "crossing" of various local, regional and global forces. Fu's thorough research makes it accessible for readers who are keen to study Cold War history, business networks and cultural production in Asia, film, media, gender as well as Sinophone studies.

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